

Framing Analyses of Malaysia's Media Outlets and Editorial Decisions Concerning Frame Preferences after the 2008 General Election

Muhammad Izawan Baharin*, Moniza Waheed, Akmar Hayati Ahmad Ghazali, and Abdul Mua'ti @ Zamri Ahmad

Faculty of Modern Languages & Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to investigate the journalistic practices in Malaysian news outlets post-2008 general elections through a combination of content analysis and interviews. Through a content analysis of news articles of an UMNO-owned media (*Utusan Malaysia*) as well as an independent news portal (*Malaysiakini*), the study identified five different news frames (conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality, and responsibility) employed in the news articles. The study established that the previously government-owned media relied heavily on the morality frame, while the responsibility frame was most dominant in independent news portals. The study revealed that the responsibility frame was written in a positive tone while morality and conflict frames were written in negative tones. The study suggests that there were differences and similarities in terms of framing practices employed by the media. It also found that the tonality of the news strengthened the functions of frames. To further understand the relationship between the frames and journalistic practices, semi-structured interviews with editors from both media

outlets were conducted. The editors noted that their organizations' agendas functioned as guidelines on how political issues were highlighted. The interviews also revealed that although both news outlets received political instructions, the media still strived to promote fair reporting within their scope and capacity.

Keywords: Framing practices, independent news portals, Malaysia's 12th general election, Malaysian politics, pro-government media

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E-mail addresses:

izawan@mediaprima.com.my (Muhammad Izawan Baharin)

moniza@upm.edu.my (Moniza Waheed)

akmar@upm.edu.my (Akmar Hayati Ahmad Ghazali)

abmuati@upm.edu.my (Abdul Mua'ti @ Zamri Ahmad)

* Corresponding author

INTRODUCTION

The results of Malaysia's 14th general election had proven that its citizens were daring enough to vote for a change after 61 years of being under the same political party, Barisan Nasional (National Front or BN). BN's hegemony collapsed on May 9, 2018, after the historic general election. However, early signs of objection and rejection were detected since Malaysia's 12th general election in 2008. The electoral outcomes had shown that the underdog opposition parties, the Pakatan Rakyat (People's Alliance or PR) were able to threaten BN's position in five states (Mokhtar, 2008).

Since the release of the electoral results in 2008, issues revolving better political governance echoed in the media. The manner in how the media portrayed political issues generally influenced people's thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. This notion had become the center of most research on framing (Neuman et al., 1992; Strömbäck & Nord, 2006). Therefore, the aim of the present study is to investigate the frame preferences of Malaysian news outlets after the 2008 general election. The partisanship in the traditional media towards BN before May 2018 was obvious (Anuar, 2005; Steele, 2009; Tapsell, 2013), but in the context of gaining back voters' trust during the non-election period, the framing strategies had changed in efforts to challenge the independent news portals.

In an attempt to achieve the aim of this study, the presence of generic frames in two different media outlets was conducted to evaluate their ideologies and cultural

variations in news stories concerning political manifestos after the 2008 election. In addition, the study conducted interviews with newspaper editors to bridge the theoretical analyses with the reality in media newsrooms. More specifically, the editors interviewed were working in the frontlines during the 2008 general election. Editors' input are known to provide inside information on the policy-making process (Dorussen et al., 2005). By understanding the internal and external factors that play important roles behind the scenes in the frame setting process, this study can enrich the kinds of literature relating to media in Malaysia, which has been largely ignored.

Politics in Malaysia

Malaysia gained independence from the British in 1957 and the movement was attributed to the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), which later managed to form a government with the coalition of 13 political parties (most of which were ethnic-based) under the umbrella name of Barisan Nasional (BN). With the coalition, BN was able to secure two-thirds of parliamentary seats – forming a large majority needed to form a government.

BN's status quo and superiority during elections were said to be associated with electoral, money and media manipulations (Case, 2010; Fee & Appudurai, 2011; Lee, 2007; Moten, 2009). The media became part of BN's machinery and propaganda agent through ownership and legislation. The media systematically projected negativity and hostility towards the opposition to instill

fear among the voters if they support the opposition parties that lack experience in governance (Abbott, 2011; Gomez, 2014b).

Despite the fear tactics employed, BN's dominance began to waiver during the 12th general election in 2008. They lost their two-thirds majority seats in parliament and thus dispelled the notion of the party's invincibility (Mokhtar, 2008). Political observers argued that the loss was attributed to the increasing momentum of the PR coalition consisting of Parti Keadilan Rakyat (People's Justice Party or PKR), Parti Islam SeMalaysia (Malaysian Islamic Party or PAS) and Democratic Action Party (DAP). Other factors that negatively affected BN's support were the economic slowdown, increase in the cost of living and the influence of new media (Baharin et al., 2017; Case, 2010; Moten, 2009). BN suffered even more during the 13th general election in 2013 by losing seven more seats in parliament despite heavy effort used by the government machinery (Azizuddin, 2014).

Due to the dramatic losses, it is important to understand the strategies used by the media to capture public interest during the non-election period. The media needed to use the right frame to tell their stories, not only in creating a link with their audiences but to persuade them in decision-making during elections.

Factors Influencing the News Frames

Editors served as gatekeepers in the news publishing process. They are the decision-makers within news media organizations

who select, shape, and present news content is a systematic process (Schwalbe et al., 2015). Therefore, their insights can clarify the frames employed. In this study, frames refer to the process of constructing complex issues into information that can be easily understood by citizens. Frames can potentially influence citizens' opinion, judgment, and considerations (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Frames function by creating linkages between media frames (how media translate the meaningless into the noticeable event) with individual frames (how the audiences interpret the event) (Scheufele, 1999).

Choosing the right tone for the frame is equally important. de Vreese and Boomgaarden (2003) argued that the nature of the frames was insufficiently examined if the tone that indicated polarization between the good and bad and implicitly carrying positive or negative element, was ignored. The inherent tonality of the frames potentially affected voters to be more critical or less critical towards political parties and their issues.

In Malaysia, however, political parties are able to influence editors' decisions because the media are controlled through ownerships and legislations such as the Printing Press and Publications Act (PPPA) of 1984, the Sedition Act of 1948 and the Official Secret Act (OSA) (Baharin et al., 2017). Using these laws, the government was able to control the flow of information until the Internet was introduced in the late 1990s. The 90s was when Malaysians saw the emergence of independent news portals.

Research Questions

The study aims to understand and answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: To what extent were the five frames presented in both *Utusan Malaysia* and *Malaysiakini*?
- RQ2: What are the tones used in the framing of the political news in *Utusan Malaysia*?
- RQ3: What are the tones used in the framing of the political news in *Malaysiakini*?
- RQ4: What are the perspectives of *Utusan Malaysia* and *Malaysiakini* editors on political news between 2008-2013?

METHODS

To achieve the aim of this study, a mixed-method involving the content analysis and semi-structured interviews were conducted.

Content Analysis

Sample. Two media outlets, *Utusan Malaysia* (representing mainstream government-owned media) and *Malaysiakini* (representing independent news portals) were chosen for content analysis guided by framing theory and the concept of tonality.

The sample was drawn from March 9, 2008, a day after the results of the 12th general election was announced until April 5, 2013. The period was chosen to investigate how media portrayed news related to the progress of the political manifestos after the general election. From a total of 412 news articles collected, 261 (63%) articles were from *Utusan Malaysia* and 151 (37%) were from *Malaysiakini*. The number of articles published according to the year for both news outlets is as shown in Table 1.

Research Instrument. A codebook was developed as a guideline to determine specific information and the presence of the frames' prominence within the news articles. The first part of the codebook described how to extract general information; the name of the media, date of the articles published, the total number of paragraphs in an article and the number of paragraphs that are relevant to the manifestos. The general information was written on a coding sheet.

Operationalization. Only news articles which mentioned manifestos including statements connoting intentions, promises, emphases, policies, pledges or goals to be

Table 1
Frequency (n) of news coverage for each year

Media	Year						Total (n)
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	
<i>Utusan Malaysia</i>	56 (21.5%)	9 (3.4%)	10 (3.8%)	21 (8%)	59 (22.6%)	106 (40.6%)	261
<i>Malaysiakini</i>	14 (9.3%)	4 (2.6%)	18 (11.9%)	24 (15.9%)	36 (23.8%)	55 (36.4%)	151
Total	70 (16.2%)	13 (3%)	28 (6.5%)	45 (10.4%)	95 (22%)	161 (37.3%)	412

activated if the political party managed to secure power (Bara, 2005), were chosen. Eder et al. (2017) argued that manifestos must have at least three functions – streamline the party's campaign, a campaign tool to directly inform voters and provide a compilation of valid party positions. Due to the vital roles of the manifestos, it was important for the political parties to continuously inform voters of their achievement and development of the promises made.

The unit of analysis used for the present study was by paragraph, (those that mentioned or paraphrased the content of manifestos). Each paragraph within a news article served as the mechanism to measure the occurrence of a particular frame. This was based on the suggestion by Fan (1988) and Roberts (1989) where a paragraph count is a solid procedure that elucidates the presence of frames within media content (as cited in Shah et al., 2002).

The key variables in the coding of paragraph comprised of Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) five generic frames (conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality, and responsibility). Conflict frame refers to conflict or disagreement that occurs between individuals, groups or institutions. A conflict frame can impact certain policies negatively or positively by leading citizens to be more informed about the advantages and disadvantages of important political decisions (Bartholomé et al., 2018).

The human-interest frame brings an individual's story to the presentation of an

event, issue or problem. It refers to an effort to personalize, dramatize or emotionalize news to capture and retain the audience's interest (Boukes et al., 2015). The economic consequences frame may describe an issue, event or problem affecting individuals, groups, parties, institutions or the country within the scope of economic consequences. The morality frame emphasizes the moral and religious aspects of an issue, event or problem. The responsibility frame is used to portray an issue or problem in a manner that attributes the entity responsible for causing or solving the problem (see Appendix 3 for the excerpt).

Procedure. After filling in the codes regarding general information, the actual article was coded on a number of variables. Each paragraph within the article was separated into individual paragraphs. The relevant paragraphs that mentioned manifestos, whether in the form of direct quotes, paraphrases or the effect of the political pledges, were identified. Each paragraph needs to be read twice by the coder before filling the code sheets.

The coding was based on the individual paragraph. The frequency of frames occurring in the relevant paragraphs was considered as the dominant one. The coder had to decide which of the frame was presented in each paragraph. The coding decision was based on prior knowledge concerning the event or issues discussed in the paragraph. During this process, the coder referred to the definitions of each frame.

The coder then needed to identify the tone of the viewpoints within each paragraph. As suggested by Guenduez et al. (2016), a positive tone reflects gains, successes, hope, and enthusiasm, while negative tonality deals with frustration, anger, disappointment, skepticism, threat and risk, political failure, crisis, and disaster. A news article with a neutral tone occurs when it reflects neither negative nor positive views. The procedure only involved paragraphs that had already been identified as relevant to the study. The most frequent tone that occurred was considered as the dominant tone. The tone of each paragraph in the news article was decided from the predicate and the source's point of view. A predicate refers to a sentence consisting of a subject. A predicate provides information about the subject such as what the subject is doing or what the subject likes. Data regarding the relevant frame were coded individually with 1 representing 'present' or 0 representing 'not present'.

Inter-Coder Reliability. An inter-coder reliability test was conducted between two coders. As suggested by Lombard et al. (2002) at least 10 percent of a sample can be used as a representative from the full sample to be coded to assess reliability. In the present study, Krippendorff's alpha was used because it allows a simultaneous comparison of more than two coders at a time (Lecheler & De Vreese, 2010). A total of 56 articles or 12 percent from overall samples selected randomly were coded by both coders. Inter-coder reliability was

conducted on the dominant frames and tones present in the news articles. The present study achieved an overall reasonable inter-coder reliability score as shown in Table 2. The average score for five values of frames was Krippendorff's $\alpha = 0.7$, while the average score for the tonality was Krippendorff's $\alpha = 0.8$.

Table 2
Inter coder reliability for each sample

Items	α
Conflict frame	0.6
Human Interest frame	0.7
Economic consequences frame	0.7
Morality frame	0.74
Responsibility frame	0.72
Positive tone	0.76
Negative tone	0.8
*Neutral Tone	-

Note: The neutral tones were not present in the selected sample

Semi-Structured Interviews with Editors

Sample. Two separate interviews were conducted with *Utusan Malaysia's* editor and *Malaysiakini's* editor in *Utusan Malaysia* headquarters in Jalan Chan Sow Lin, Kuala Lumpur and *Malaysiakini* headquarters in Petaling Jaya. Both of the editors were working with the respective media organizations during the 2008 general election. Both editors were senior political reporters that directly involved in the coverage of the general election. *Utusan Malaysia's* editor had been with the media organization for 19 years and serve as journalist and bureau chief in several

states. *Malaysiakini*'s editor had joined the organization for 11 years and currently, he holds the responsibility as a gatekeeper for Bahasa Malaysia news section including the commentary column.

Interview Protocol. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the editors due to the flexibility of the procedure and the opportunities for both interviewer and interviewee to discuss the topics in more detail (Jamil & Ahmad, 2015). Only one editor was chosen to represent *Utusan Malaysia* and *Malaysiakini*. Scholars (Adler & Adler, 2012; Becker, 2012; Denzin, 2012; Meuser & Nagel, 2009) had argued that the number of experts in the qualitative survey was less concerning because the goal of the analysis was not to find the empirical generalization. Therefore, even a small number of cases is enough as long as it provides the analysis with the criteria of unique adequacy and allows the presence of participant-observation.

The interview questions were designed with Semetko and Valkenburg (2000)'s generic frames as a guideline. The duration of the interviews was between 20 to 30 minutes. Before the interviews, the editors were informed that the questions are concerning regarding four main areas: their responsibility, the process of news writing and publishing, challenges, and their extent of influence (refer Appendix 1 for interview guide). The questions that reflected their responsibility were phrased as "your specific goal in editing or portraying political news" and "the balance reporting role in news

reporting". The formulation of these phrases was adapted from Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) definition of the generic frame. The list of the frames was never mentioned before or during the interview to prevent any priming effect that may influence the interviewees' answers on this topic. Interviews were first recorded, and then fully transcribed.

Data Analysis Procedures. Data collected been analyzed thematically by identifying implicit and explicit ideas within the themes (Jamil & Ahmad, 2015). To represent the themes and linked data for analysis, codes were developed according to the coding agenda suggested by Mayring (2000) (see Appendix 2 for the excerpt). The coding agenda are explicit definitions, examples and coding rules for each deductive category.

Some categories and subcategories were created deductively before commencing an in-depth analysis of the transcripts. For instance, the study assumes that the answer to the process of news writing can be an important theme that would be highly relevant to answering the research question. Thus, the study created a category called "the process of news writing" and followed by relevant subcategories such as "steps of news writing", "internal and external factors" that influence the process. In this study, some categories were also created inductively such as "the formation of news framing" and "the tone in the news" through careful reading and re-reading of the data to identify emerging themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Content Analysis

Presence of Five Generic Frames. The first research question intended to investigate the presence of the five generic frames in *Utusan Malaysia* and *Malaysiakini*. The level of presence of the five generic frames in both news outlets showed that the responsibility frame was mostly present ($n=181$, 41.9%) while human-interest ($n=8$, 1.9%) was the least present. The morality frame presented 33.6% ($n=145$) from the overall sample, while the conflict frame was 10% ($n= 43$) and economic consequences frame was 8.1% ($n= 35$, 8.1).

Results from an independent sample *t*-test showed that morality frame was significantly more present in *Utusan Malaysia* ($M=0.47$, $SD=0.50$) compared to *Malaysiakini* ($M=0.15$, $SD=0.36$), $t(390.5) = 7.39$, $p < 0.001$ as shown in Table 3. On the other hand, the independent sample *t*-tests result shows that responsibility frame was significantly higher in *Malaysiakini* ($M = 0.64$, $SD = 0.48$) compared to *Utusan Malaysia* ($M = 0.32$, $SD = 0.47$); $t(410) = -6.63$, $p < 0.001$.

Results from an independent sample *t*-test showed that there were significant differences between *Utusan Malaysia* and *Malaysiakini* for two out of five generic frames, which were morality and responsibility. This is in line with Semetko and Valkenburg’s (2000) conceptual distinction between morality and responsibility frames. *Utusan Malaysia* relies heavily on frames that indicate a religious context or moral prescriptions tenets in the political manifestos. Religion, ethnicities and moral issues are sensitive in Malaysia. Interestingly, they were able to capture the interest of the Malays, the ethnic majority in the country (Moten, 2009). By concentrating on issues that are personal to the Malays, UMNO through *Utusan Malaysia* tried to retain the Malays support to the party based on safeguarding the interests of religion, in particular, Islam.

The dominance of the responsibility frame in *Malaysiakini*’s news coverage suggests that news oftentimes describes issues related to the government, group or individual. In this context, the news portal plays their parts as an independent news provider by providing space for any

Table 3
The presence of five generic frames in media

Generic Frame	<i>Utusan Malaysia</i>		<i>Malaysiakini</i>		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Conflict	0.10	0.30	0.12	0.33	-0.75
Human Interest	0.03	0.16	0.01	0.08	1.7
Economic consequences	0.09	0.28	0.08	0.27	0.30
Morality	0.47	0.50	0.15	0.36	7.39**
Responsibility	0.32	0.47	0.64	0.48	-6.63***

Note: *** $p < 0.001$.

views even against the interest of the ruling party to highlight or to find the solution for a particular problem. The oppositions have also been allowed to criticize or voice out their views on issues involving government policies and actions thus creating an alternative perspective for the citizens (Abbott & Givens, 2015).

Utusan Malaysia News Tone. The second research question enquired about the tone used in the framing of the political manifestos in *Utusan Malaysia*. To answer the research question, Pearson’s correlation analysis between frames and tone was conducted. Results revealed significant moderate positive correlation between responsibility frame and positive tone, $r = 0.40, p < 0.001$ (Table 4). There were also weak positive correlation between conflict frame and negative tone, $r = 0.29, p < 0.001$ and morality frame with negative tone, $r = 0.21, p < 0.01$.

A regression analysis between frames and tone was conducted. Results from a simple linear regression show a significant relationship between responsibility frame and positive tone ($r = 0.40, B = 0.41, SE$

$= 0.46, (p < 0.001), R^2 = 0.15$. This means that the model containing only a positive tone can explain 15% of the variation of responsibility frame. On average, for every responsibility frame present, there is a 41% chance that a positive tone will occur. Multiple regressions were carried out to investigate whether the conflict frame and morality frame could significantly predict the negative tone. Results show a significant relationship between conflict frame with negative tone ($r = 0.29, B = 0.66, SE = 0.46, (p < 0.001), R^2 = 0.18$, and morality frame with negative tone ($r = 0.21, B = 0.33, SE = 0.46, (p < 0.001), R^2 = 0.18$. Results indicated that the model containing only a negative tone explained 18% of the variation of conflict frame and morality frame. On average, for every conflict frame present, there is a 66% chance that a negative tone will occur. There is a 33% chance that a negative tone will occur for every morality frame that present.

The results are predictable as the traditional media during the BN reign is been directed to create the perception that only the party is capable to ensure the country’s future using tone that highlighted

Table 4
The correlation between frames and tone for Utusan Malaysia

Generic Frame	Positive	Negative	Neutral
	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>
Conflict	-0.28***	0.29***	-0.04
Human Interest	-0.03	0.03	-0.02
Economic consequences	0.01	0.00	-0.03
Morality	-0.19**	0.21**	-0.10
Responsibility	0.40***	-0.41***	0.16*

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

gains and successes, hope and enthusiasm (Guenduez et al., 2016). The opposition parties especially the party that control the state legislature have been reflected as politically failed to capture the citizen's interest due to lack of experience in terms of administration.

Malaysiakini News Tone. The third research question enquired about the tone used in the framing of the political manifestos in *Malaysiakini*. Interestingly, the correlation analysis between frames and tone revealed a significant moderate positive correlation between conflict frame and negative tone, $r = 0.50, p < 0.001$ (Table 5). Similarly, significant moderate positive correlation exists between morality frame and negative tone, $r = 0.45, p < 0.001$. The responsibility frame also showed significant moderate positive correlation with positive tone, $r = 0.61, p < 0.001$. The presence of these frames and tone is dependent on one another. This suggests that an increase in these frames subsequently will cause an increase in a particular tone.

Simple linear regression was carried out to investigate the relationship between the responsibility frame and a positive tone.

There was a significant strong positive relationship between the two, $r = 0.61, B = 0.63, SE = 0.40, (p < 0.001), R^2 = 0.38$. The model containing only a positive tone can explain 38% of the variation of responsibility frame and on average, for every responsibility frame present, there is a 63% chance that positive tone will occur. Multiple regression was carried out to investigate whether conflict and morality frames could significantly predict the negative tone. The results of the regression analysis between conflict frame and negative tone was $r = 0.50, B = 0.86, SE = 0.33, (p < 0.001), R^2 = 0.53$, while morality frame with negative tone is $r = 0.45, B = 0.72, SE = 0.33, (p < 0.001), R^2 = 0.53$. Results show that a significant strong positive relationship exists between the two generic frames with a negative tone. This means that the model containing only a negative tone could explain 53% of the variation of conflict and morality frames. On average, for every conflict frame present, there is an 86% chance that a negative tone will occur. While there is a 72% chance that a negative tone will occur for every morality frame that present.

Table 5
The correlation between frames and tone for *Malaysiakini*

Generic Frame	Positive	Negative	Neutral
	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>
Conflict	-0.44***	0.50***	-0.09
Human Interest	0.07	-0.06	-0.02
Economic consequences	-0.004	0.04	-0.07
Morality	-0.43***	0.45***	-0.02
Responsibility	0.61***	-0.68***	0.12

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The results showed that although the types of frames used by pro-government newspaper and independent news portal significantly different, the tone used within the frames were similar. The use of the responsibility frame in a positive tone in the *Malaysiakini* can be explained by the space given to the opposition to share their manifesto achievement especially in the states under their administration. The finding is in line with previous works of literature where the online news portal gave voice to the voiceless and views that were against the ruling party's political interests (Azreen & Mazni, 2017; Steele, 2009). The analysis also reveals that conflict and morality exist in the coverage of news by *Malaysiakini*. The conflict frame provides opposing views for both the government and opposition parties and exposes citizens to different views (Bartholomé et al., 2018). The morality frame in *Malaysiakini* reporting can be associated with the comparison made by the political parties to portray which one was better in terms of personal traits, adherence to religion and political struggle.

In conclusion, the dominance of the morality frame with a negative tone in *Utusan Malaysia* political news coverage possibly was due to the direct or indirect control by UMNO. *Malaysiakini* on the other frequently using responsibility frame with a positive tone and the preferences is comprehensible due to the non-partisan practice that provides alternative views (Gomez, 2014a; Rajaratnam, 2009).

Interviews

The editor from *Utusan Malaysia* was label as Editor 1 and editor from *Malaysiakini* labeled as Editor 2.

Factors Influencing the Editorial Operation.

The fourth research question in the present study enquired on the perspectives of *Utusan Malaysia* and *Malaysiakini* editors on the political news between 2008-2013. To gain a deeper understanding, the researcher asked a question regarding balance reporting and factors that influenced the editorial operational process. There are similarities for both media outlets especially in terms of producing balanced reporting. Editor 1 admitted that the ethics of balance reporting needed to be applied.

“... in reporting, we have been taught about balanced reporting, so if we have a comment from one side, we need to get a comment from the other side but if he refuses to give any comment, we cannot do anything.”

Editor 2 said, balance reporting was their standard operating procedure but they were choosy and did not simply write on any political stories.

“The internal SOP is fair reporting, but we also look at the worthiness of the story. If it is time-consuming, nobody wants to read it and costly, we will not proceed. The second consideration is the news is fair

for both sides and the facts are correct.”

However, in explaining the external factors that could control the news writing, both editors provided different justifications. Editor 1 said his organization needed to follow instructions especially from the owner of the company.

“We admit that we need to follow the instructions from the owner of the company. However, in political reporting, the most important thing is, we need to highlight is the words from politicians that can contribute to our stability because we are a multiracial country.”

Editor 2 also admitted that his organization received instructions and political requests after the 2008 general election, in particular from the opposition parties that gained momentum from voters during that time. Editor 2 said, “Yes, we receive requests because they thought we are their friend but we just ignore it. For example, a politician asks us to write something good about him, it happens. Attempts to give instructions also happen.” Editor 2 stressed that his organization only accepted the request especially to make any correction within the news if the mistakes were proven. Editor 2 explained:

“They claim this story is wrong and ask us to retract it. Normally we ask which part is wrongly reported and

we recheck to ensure his claim is true. If we found no mistakes, the context is right; we will not retract the story. If the context is wrongly interpreted, we just correct. We only retract the stories if it is wrong.”

From the collective answer by both editors, it can be concluded that generally, there are differences in their operations. *Utusan Malaysia* needed to follow instructions from the owner of the company, while *Malaysiakini* leaned towards the worthiness of the news. Interestingly there is little reason to believe that both media organizations value balance reporting.

Formation of News Frame and Tone.

Both editors gave different perspectives on how their news outlets portrayed political news after the 2008 general election. Both editors pointed out that their respective organization’s agenda had become the guideline in portraying political news. Editor 1 said, “Every organization has agendas and the same goes for us. In *Utusan*, we do have our own goals that are *Alif, Ba, Ta*. *Alif* is for Islam, *Ba* is Bangsa (race) and *Ta* for Tanah air (homeland)”. *Alif, Ba, and Ta* is part of *the Jawi* alphabet, which is an Arabic script for writing Malay. The script contains 36 characters that can be classified into a group form an individual form (Razak et al., 2009). Editor 2, however, believed that helping the public to understand certain issues was important to them. He said, “Yes we have own agenda but it is not a personal agenda. It is not an agenda to create hatred.

We lean more towards understanding and highlighting issues. Issues that involve public interest.”

In expressing the tone in their news writing, Editor 1 admitted that due to certain instructions, his newspaper relied on negative tone in portraying news related to the oppositions. He said, “Sometimes we report negatively and sometimes positively. But if there is a ratio, it difficult to say it is a balance. Maybe 60 percent negative and 40 percent positive.” For Editor 2, even though the political landscape after the 2008 election showed changes in voters’ preferences, he said for his news outlet, they just reported as it was as long as it involved public interest. “We don’t specifically report the five states (under PR administration), only the one that has stories. During that time, we don’t have many bureaus. We don’t have many reporters so we focus on news that is ‘sexy’. We rely much on information from the public, from our readings, sources, and politicians.”

Based on the responses, it can be concluded that it is business as usual for both news outlets although the political environment in the phase of changing after the 2008 general election. *Utusan Malaysia* news reporting relies on morality frame and negative tone especially when the news associated with the opposition. This argument was justified by Editor 1, “We need to follow the instructions from the owner of the company”, wherein this case is UMNO. Editor 1 also clearly said that the negative reports are more compared

to positive. On the contrary, based on Editor 2 response, the responsibility frame believed to be more present in *Malaysiakini* reports. The tones present in *Malaysiakini* political news are more positive or neutral. This was supported by Editor 2 argument, “We lean more towards understanding and highlighting issues. Issues that involve public interest.”

CONCLUSION

The present study was undertaken to investigate the frame preferences by Malaysia’s news outlets after the 2008 general election. In terms of the frames employed, the study discovered that there were differences in the news coverage between *Utusan Malaysia* and *Malaysiakini*.

The study did not support Sevenans and Vliegenthart’s (2015) argument that the conflict frame would be dominant in political news coverage, rather, the study shows that *Utusan Malaysia* relied heavily on morality frames. This indicated the issues in the news containing messages related to moral values or religious teachings. Hitlin and Vaisey (2013) defined morality as universal standards of right and wrong linking to concerns about justice, fairness, and harm that differed between persons and social groups. Morality is more important in the Islamic perspective as it involves faith toward God and encompasses both one’s duties to God and one’s fellow human beings (Halstead, 2007). This also became the goal of *Utusan Malaysia*, which is *Alif, Ba, and Ta*.

The morality frame used by *Utusan Malaysia* is associated with negative tonality to describe the oppositions. This rhetorical strategy has been used by BN to create the perception that voting for the opposition will jeopardize the country's future (Pepinsky, 2013). Even the editor admitted that the negative tone was more present in *Utusan Malaysia* because of the 'instruction from the owner of the company'. This strategy associated with UMNO because the party relied heavily on Malays support in rural constituencies (Case, 2010) and morality with negative tone is used to scare the rural Malay voters.

The responsibility frame, on the other hand, dominated news coverage in *Malaysiakini*. The frame present issues in a way that the responsibility for causing and solving problems lies with the government or political party (Yuslinda & Hasmah, 2011). This is in line with *Malaysiakini* editor explanation that stressed their main goal was the public interests and becoming an alternative voice for the public. This is also concurrent with the portal's goal, which is informing citizens on the current affairs and help them hold the government of the day accountable through citizen participation, action and voting decision (*Malaysiakini*, n.d.). The positive and neutral tone that had been highlighted by the editor also indicated that the opposition politician had been provided with the opportunity to express something good about their party, ideology, and achievements.

The tonality embedded with the frames in *Malaysiakini* was significantly stronger

compared to *Utusan Malaysia*. This is an important finding because of the tone able to indicate clear polarization between the good and bad, and implicitly carry positive or negative elements within the nature of frames (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003). One possible reason is the media still plays their roles as usual. The traditional media are used to attack the opposition parties, while the alternative media provides a platform for the opposite views. The realm of political news reporting in Malaysia after the 2008 general election remains unchanged. Both editors have further justified this argument. The editor from *Utusan Malaysia* admitted that while they strived to produce a balanced and fair political reporting, they still abided by following political instruction from the ruling party. Whereas, *Malaysiakini* was only able to focus on the political news that were worthy due to the lack of reporters in many states. This also supports the argument that journalistic routine, culture, organizational pressures and constraints from media's political orientations are the factors that influence the frames used by media (Borah, 2011; Zhang et al., 2015).

The study has contributed to the existing body of knowledge of news framing by combining results from content analysis and interviews. The empirical analysis of both methods enabled a more thorough observation of identifying the type of frames used by media outlets, particularly in the Malaysian context. This enhances the understanding of media organizational agenda, their strength, and their limitation in fulfilling the role in cherishing democracy in Malaysia.

This study has some caveats. First, separating news articles into paragraphs in the coding procedures can lose the context of the sentences. This could not be avoided because it would be too subjective and difficult to define the whole sentences with a single dominant frame and tone. Second, the varied coders' perception is unavoidable due to the subjectivity of the sentences. Third, the interviews allowed the study to qualitatively explore the in-depth perceptions of editors, however, the editors were quite reluctant to give direct answers to some questions. This probably has something to do with their organizations' policies or best interests. Hence, their responses were rather indirect in some instances.

Despite the limitations, this present study found that there were baselines for future research. First, surveys or interviews with readers to understand the effects of public opinion can strengthen the findings in the study. Second, nowadays, the Pakatan Harapan (PH) - a rebranding of PR facing criticism after failing to fulfill their election manifesto after a year of taking over the administration from BN (Anuer, 2018). The government plan to reduce the legal voting age for Malaysians from 21 to 18 in the 15th general election onwards (Manirajan, 2019), provides a new dimension in framing analysis regarding Malaysia political realm. Although there are several weaknesses, the study was able to fulfill its objectives and provide additional information to enhance better political news writing and thus improve the quality of democracy that has begun to show signs of improvement since May 9, 2018.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Interview guide

No.	Theme	Guiding questions
1.0	General questions	
1.1	Self-related	Can you share your background? (e.g., where are you from, family, education background)
1.2	Work-related	How long you have been working with <i>Utusan Malaysia/Malaysiakini</i> ? * What is the nature of your current job? * What are your main responsibilities? * How much control you have in what you do? * Are there any rules you must obey? * What interests you most about <i>Utusan Malaysia/Malaysiakini</i> ? * What is your position in <i>Utusan Malaysia/Malaysiakini</i> in 2008-2013?
1.3	News framing	* Do you have a specific goal in editing or portraying political news? * What is the most important aspect when writing political news? * Do the balanced reporting in political news play a role in your work? * After the 2008 general election, do the political news writing style change especially involving state government under PR? * Do you been instructed to write something in specific or portraying news toward a ruling party or opposition party? * How the news been portray involving PR that manage to take over state government during 2008-2013?
2.0	People involve in news writing	
2.1	Process of news writing and publishing	Could you share something about the process of news writing and publishing? * Who gives out the instruction for you to write political news? * Are there changes after the news been read by editors? * Do you agree with the changes? (yes/no... why?)
2.2	Politician involvement in news writing	* After the 2008 general election, do you get a comment from both BN and PR representatives in your news writing? * Did politicians give feedback to your writing? * Did the politicians ask you to make an amendment of the news if they don't agree with your writing? * If they ask for correction or amendment, do you follow their instructions?

Appendix 2

Excerpt of coding agenda

Categories	Definition	Examples	Coding rules
Background	State of origin, family, education.	'I am from Johol, Negri Sembilan. Married and have three children. I have a degree in Islamic Studies from UKM. I have been working with Utusan Malaysia for 19 years.'	Explicit reference to personal background, experience in media
Process of news writing	The process the reporters go through from writing to publishing the news. From the beginning till the end.	'Reporter normally gets their assignment a day before. But before they get to know their assignment, we have an editorial meeting every evening. The meeting involves editors and reporters.'	Explicit mention of the process. They may not clearly say steps 1, 2 or 3 but in general, a description of how they come to produce news.
Influence of internal factors	Factors, which play a role in news writing. It could be the organization policy, agenda, ethics, target readers, internal instruction, standard operating procedures.	'Internal SOP is fair reporting and whether the story is worth it or not. For instance, investigative reporting needs times, so we look at whether it is worth it or not. Big story or not. If not worth it, time-consuming, nobody wants to read it and involve financial constraint, we will not proceed. This is our first consideration. The second is, fair reporting. If we are fair for both sides and the facts are 'ok', then there will be no problem.'	Explicit references to the internal factors that shape the news
Influence of external factors	Factors, which play a role in news writing. Could be the laws, political instruction or request, political party influence, pressure from a certain group, legal action.	'Yes, we receive request but we just ignore it. For example, a politician asks us to write something good about him, it happens. Attempts to give instructions also happen. They claim this story is wrong and ask us to retract it.'	Explicit references to the external factors that shape the news.
The formation of news framing			
1. Conflict frame	This frame refers to conflict or disagreement between individuals, groups or institutions in order to capture audience interest.	'We do receive warnings and threats when we write something that considers as sensitive to a particular political party. But this is our job to tell what is right and wrong in society.'	Explicit reference to organizational goals, principles and beliefs. This also includes personal and working principles, loyalty factors in the organization.

Appendix 2 (continue)

Categories	Definition	Examples	Coding rules
	<p>Step 1: Locate the response to the question do you guide your reporters on what to ask or write when assign them to cover political news/ Do you have a specific goal in editing or portraying political news/ Do you been instructed to wrote something in specific or portraying news toward a ruling party or opposition party.</p> <p>Step 2: Identify the frames used based on the answer. This frame brings an individual's story to the presentation of an event, issue or problem.</p>		
2. Human interest frame	This frame brings an individual's story to the presentation of an event, issue or problem.	'A big story sometimes comes from an unknown man from the street. News of a struggling nasi lemak seller can be an eye-opener to the society and the first step toward changing in policy or maybe the government.'	Explicit reference to the sources of the news based on organizational goals, principles, and beliefs.
3. Economic consequences frame	Reporting issues in financial or economic consequences manners.	'Political news has a strong connection with the country's economic environment. If we write something that portrays instability in our political environment, this can negatively affect our economy. So we need to be careful.'	Explicit reference to the organizational goals, principles, and beliefs. The focus may involve economic or financial aspects.
4. Morality frame	This frame puts the event, issue or problem in the context of religious tenets or moral prescriptions; emphasizes collaboration and fellowship.	'Every organization has an agenda and the same goes for us. In Utusan, we do have our own goals that are <i>Alif, Ba, Ta</i> .'	Explicit reference to the organizational goals, principles, and beliefs. The focus may involve religious tenets or moral prescriptions.
5. Responsibility frame	This frame presents an issue or problem in a manner that attributes the entity responsible for causing or solving a problem.	'We are more towards understanding and highlighting issues. Issues that involve public interest.'	Explicit reference to the organizational goals, principles, and beliefs. The focus may involve highlighting issues and finding a solution.

Appendix 2 (continue)

Categories	Definition	Examples	Coding rules
The tone in the news			
1. Positive tone	<p>Positive tone describes positive feelings, emotions, portraying good judgments or opinions.</p> <p>The tone should be decided from the interviewee's point of view. Positive tone describes positive feelings, judgments or opinions. The tone also comes from nonverbal cues such as eye contact, head nodding, and body gestures.</p> <p>Step 1: Locate the response to the question after the 2008 general election, do the political news writing style change especially involving state government under PR/ How the news been portray involving PR that manage to take over state government during 2008-2013.</p> <p>Step 2: Identify the tone used based on the answer.</p>	<p>'What I love working here is the freedom of writing. As long as the facts are right and correct, we can write the stories without any instruction to this and to do that from the politician.'</p>	<p>Explicit reference to the positive vibe, emotions, and attitude in describing the situation, providing solutions and portraying something beneficial.</p>
2. Negative tone	<p>Negative tone describes negative feelings, judgments or opinions.</p>	<p>'Stories such as scandal involving politicians, or issues relates to their morals are to key to attract readers' attention. It also can affect their political survival.'</p>	<p>Explicit reference to the negative vibe, emotions, and attitude in describing the situation in negative manners.</p>
3. Neutral tone	<p>Neutral tone describes neither positive nor negative feelings, judgments or opinions.</p>	<p>'We always support the good policy introduced by the government as long as it benefits the people. What we do is providing alternative views on what happens around us that other media pay no attention to.'</p>	<p>Explicit reference to neither positive nor negative vibe, emotions, and attitude in describing the situation.</p>

Appendix 3

Excerpt of coding analysis

A. Present of the frames

Types of frames will be used to indicate the existence of the following frame in the news article;

Conflict frame:

Emphasizes conflict between individuals, groups, parties, or institutions as a means of capturing audience interest; reflects disagreement among and between individuals, groups, parties, or institutions; an individual, group, party, or institutional reproach; dichotomizes or labels the good and bad; news item refers to two sides instead of more than two sides of the issue/problem; news items refer to winners and losers.

Example:

Opposition party PKR has challenged Second Finance Minister Ahmad Husni Hanadzlah to back his criticism of the Pakatan Rakyat manifesto with real figures and calculations, instead of mere allegations and rhetoric.

Human interest frame:

Brings a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue, or problem; refers to an effort to personalize the news, dramatize or emotionalize the news in order to capture and retain audience interest; employs adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion; emphasizes how individuals and groups are affected by the event, issue, or problem; news items go into the private or personal lives of the actors.

Example:

Seorang peniaga, Mohd. Azeem Niaz Mohd. 55, berkata, kekalahan Barisan Nasional (BN) di Pulau Pinang kerana ada segelintir daripada wakil rakyat BN yang tidak menjalankan kerja yang diamanahkan dengan baik.

Economic consequences frame:

Reports the consequences of an event, issue or problem has on individuals, groups, parties, institutions or the country; reports the outcome of a court case; reports the investigation or legal action was taken against any individual, groups, parties or institutions.

Example:

Over the past two years, Najib's government has handed out about US\$2 billion in one-off payments to poorer families, in what the opposition has called thinly disguised vote-buying.

Morality frame:

Puts the event, issue or problem in the context of religious tenets or moral prescriptions; emphasizes collaboration and fellowship.

Example:

At most, the Pakatan manifesto only made references to uphold the constitutional description of Islam as the "religion of the federation" and other honors according to the faith, as already stated in the constitution - a stand that is more in tune with DAP's viewpoint.

Responsibility frame:

Presents an event, issue or problem in such a way as to attribute responsibility for its cause or solution to either the government or to an individual, group, party or institution.

Example:

Public declaration of assets was an election promise that the PR government in Penang has yet to honor although the various state assembly reps claimed that they have revealed their possessions to Lim, who is also DAP national secretary-general.

B. News tone

The way the news or information been presented to reflect a particular idea and viewpoint for the interest of a specific group of readers. It also means that how the news has its story told.

Tone can be positive, negative or neutral. The tone should be decided from the predicate. A predicate provides information about the subject such as what the subject is doing or what the subject is like.

Example 1

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi mengingatkan seluruh wakil rakyat kerajaan supaya sentiasa menunjukkan peribadi yang baik, mesra rakyat serta menjauhi rasuah bagi menghasilkan kerajaan berwibawa yang diterima rakyat.

The predicate of this paragraph is 'sentiasa menunjukkan peribadi yang baik, mesra rakyat serta menjauhi rasuah'. The tone is positive because the Prime Minister wanted the federal government representative to show good personality, friendly to the citizen and avoid corruption.

Example 2

PKR has accused the prime minister of ripping off Pakatan Rakyat's policies and using it to lure taxi drivers into voting for BN in the coming general election.

The predicate of this paragraph is 'ripping off Pakatan Rakyat's policies and using it to lure taxi drivers into voting for BN'. The tone is negative because PKR accused Prime Minister copying their policies.

Example 3

Pengerusi Barisan Nasional (BN) Pahang, Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob berkata, pembangkang yang berjaya membentuk kerajaan di Perak, Kedah, Selangor, Pulau Pinang dan Kelantan perlu menunaikan janji-janji mereka seperti terkandung dalam manifesto Pilihan Raya Umum Ke-12.

The predicate of this paragraph is 'perlu menunaikan janji-janji mereka seperti terkandung dalam manifesto Pilihan Raya Umum Ke-12'. The tone is neutral because the Pahang's BN Chairman wanted the state government under opposition to fulfill their promises in their election manifesto.