A Closer Look at 1MDB Framing in Malaysian Mainstream English Newspapers Before and After GE-14

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Abstract
An analysis of mainstream Malaysian English newspaper coverage of the 1Malaysia Development Berhad's (1MDB) financial crisis before and after Malaysia's 2018 14th General Election is presented in this study. Content analysis was used to undertake a quantitative analysis of news stories from four mainstream English newspapers, namely The Star, New Straits Times, The Edge, and The Sun. A total of 1,362 articles were analysed for the presence of value frames of Conflict, Economic Consequences, Responsibility, Human Interest and Morality introduced by (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). The findings reveal that there were significant differences in the use of the five generic frames in all of the four English mainstream newspapers following General Election 14. In particular, Conflict frames were found to have declined significantly in the period following the elections. In addition, there were also statistically significant interaction effect between newspaper and main sources indicating that the influence of the political actors is more significant than the effect of the media in determining the framing of the articles. The changes raise questions on the effectiveness of Malaysia's media reform plans which were introduced following the 14th General Election.
Keyword: News Frames, 1MBD, Frame Building, Factors of Framing, News Source, Tone, Political Actors

Introduction
For the first time since Malaysia's independence, the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition party was ousted from power in the 14th Malaysian General Election held on May 9, 2018. One of the major issues of contention by the media during the run up to the elections was the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) financial issue. The state-owned firm which was set up for foreign investment came under the spotlight in early 2015 when it missed a loan

payment of about USD550 million (Raghu & Ngui, 2015). However, media coverage had been carefully selective in light of four legislations governing press freedom in the country. These restrictive laws include the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984; certain sections in the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998; Sedition Act 1948; and Official Secrets Act 1972 (Roslan, 2021). Under the justification of maintaining social peace, political stability, and economic growth, the Malaysian government uses these laws to regulate the media. Such practices have been in place since Malaysia achieved its independence in 1957, and consequently has left its impact on news framing in Malaysia. Over the years, the credibility of Malaysian media has been affected as well, with studies indicating that the belief factor, especially among the young for mainstream media has dwindled (Akmar, 2012)

Problem Statement

Media favours the strong actors (e.g., Entman, 2007; Wolfsfeld, 1997). In Malaysia, it has been postulated that the government's grip on power was so strong that it impacted Malaysia's journalistic freedom. Global Media Freedom Index 2017, Reporters Without Borders, placed Malaysia 144th out of 180 nations. Freedomhouse.org, another press freedom indicator, has scored Malaysia's media freedom index since 1993, giving it a score of 58 and classifying it as 'partially free'. These indicators point out Malaysian media's failure to provide fair and balanced news, creating a necessity to look closely at news framing processes in the Malaysian context and to examine the factors that shape the news. 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) is a case of political corruption in which a state investment fund was investigated for suspected wrongdoing in July 2015, after allegations that investigators tracked about US$700 million transferred into Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak's bank accounts. While both the fund and the Prime Minister denied wrongdoing, the attorney general opened an inquiry into the suspected corruption (Ng, 2015). At the time of the crisis, 1MDB owed USD11 billion (Wright & Brown, 2015). The issue has been a significant feature in Malaysian and international news because of its connection to former Prime Minister and UMNO-ruling party President Najib Razak. There has been a small number of scholarly studies of the 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) issue as well. However, these studies are from political and legal perspectives. Previous scholars have pointed out that attempts to inquire into the subject might result in criminal charges (Moniruzzaman & Farzana, 2018). To date, the Murudi and Ting (2020) study comparing framing of news in The Star and Malaysiakini is the only news framing analysis of the financial scandal.

Scholars have pointed out how the media influences public and international interest in understanding the 1MDB scandal and its serious implications for public trust, the credibility of prominent political figures, and the reputation of national institutions, as well as the financial health of the country. An understanding of framing practices of mainstream English newspapers are important given the agenda setting function of mainstream media (Peng Kee et al), especially English media has been identified while studies indicated that online news in Malaysia are less credible (Akmar, 2016). Investigations into 1MDB began as soon as the Pakatan Harapan government of Mahathir Mohamad took office. Before the 14th election the details of the 1MDB case was controlled by the government with its associate presses. Thus, a question arises of how the 1MDB case will be framed and projected under the new administration, which took over after the 14th general elections. The new government promised sweeping reforms for Malaysian media. In the build up to the elections, the Pakatan Harapan had presented a manifesto outlining 60 promises for reform in Malaysia, including

major legislative reform to encourage and foster press freedom (IFJ, 2018). This study compares the framing of the 1MDB financial scandal by mainstream English newspapers before and after the change in government following GE14. Hence this study has two primary objectives:

1. Determine if there are differences in the use of five generic frames before and after the 14th Malaysian General Election by the mainstream English newspapers.
2. Determine whether the media or political actors where more influential in the creation of the frames, and whether there were significant differences in the influence of media and main source after the 14th Malaysian General Election.

Literature Review

Framing studies in the field of communication examine how media portrayal of current events and topics impact public perceptions of such events and issues via either content or framing effects, with selection and prominence of frames in the text being the focus of content framing research (Matthes, 2009).

Salience may be accomplished by Entman's (1993) conceptualization of framing in which the author chooses and highlighting certain features of a perceived reality for communication in a manner that promotes a certain issue definition, causality, or other desired outcome interpretation, moral judgement, and/or advice for the object described. Examining certain words, metaphors, ideas, and symbols will reveal the frames. The use of visual pictures tied to a key organizing principle that emerge repeatedly throughout the text, one essential meaning is more easily apparent, understandable, and understood" as a result of this the most resonant. It's a social way of presenting the issue. Media frames are a dependent variable (Correa, 2010); the result of the frame building process incorporating organizational demands, journalistic practices and societal norms (de Vreese, 2005).

A frame may gain popularity through connecting with popular culture or a series of events, or by being firmly endorsed by elites (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). The research by Shoemaker and Reese (1996) concluded that five factors of journalistic practice influence how news is framed: entrenched social norms, organizational constraints, authority pressures, journalistic routines, and journalistic bias. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) recognized three major influences on frame-building.

Studies show that framing sponsors' impact may be limited since journalists frequently scrutinize and actively participate (McNair, 2009). Sources must follow media logic, norms, and principles (Stromback & Nord, 2006). Journalists acted as gatekeepers in these experiments, restricting visibility of frame sponsors and bundles (Soroka, 2012). Journalists may choose, reorganize, and build frame packages. Journalists select when to utilize available bundles and when to use them independently.

However, multiple studies have demonstrated that interest groups and policy officials impacted news framing (Andsager, 2000; Nisbet et al., 2003). Elites, government officials, and interest groups actively participate in frame-building to promote their interests. Previous framing studies by scholar have shown that influential actors have preferential access to the media (Danielian & Page, 1994).

According to Bruggemann (2014), journalists are framing situations within a spectrum of passively transmitting (frame sending) interpretations offered by other actors (frame setting). The study shows that national political elites influence media framing. According to Entman's Cascading Network Activation Model, the political establishment, other elites, the media, and the people in general all contribute to the formation of news frames. Entman (2004) claims that most of the cascade involves subjects structured into messages.

These studies emphasize the role of political actors in framing. Previous studies focused on other elements impacting framing. Frames have cultural roots and must link with certain cultures to be valuable. Frame builders like journalists are unconsciously influenced by their society, which has a profound impact on frame building. Journalistic practices and other internal characteristics are usually studied (Gans, 1979; Gitlin, 1980; Tuchman, 1978). As a result, internal factors were assumed to impact media frames more than external variables. However, some external elements are regarded more important. Politicians are frequently the major source of information for the media on policy matters, therefore they frame topics. Government authorities manage information flow and decide whether policy declarations are public (Lim & Seo, 2009). Government-sponsored frames have a greater reach and resources than journalistic frames, according to (Lim and Seo, 2009). Government-created frames may have a big impact on a state or national level if they are widely diffused.

Recent framing studies on elections during the 13th General Election, Azizuddin (2014) found that most mainstream newspapers, with the exception of Sinar Harian and the Chinese-language newspapers, were still biased towards the Barisan Nasional, which is the ruling coalition. However, two Chinese newspapers—China Press and Sin Chew Jit Poh—provided significantly more fair coverage of the government and opposition alliance (Abbott & Givens, 2015). Luan and Lee (2018) observed that in the year preceding the 13th Malaysian General Election, Sin Chew Daily offered equal coverage to the opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR) party and leaders as the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) party. The newspaper's tone was impartial. During the 12th General Election, Baharin et al (2020) observed that the previous state-owned media Utusan Malaysia heavily used morality and conflict frames. Aside from election framing studies, major media framing studies focused on interethnic and religious problems like a widely publicized robbery case in Low Yat Plaza and a cow-head protest on August 28, 2009 in Shah Alam showed varying framing tactics. Fong & Kit (2017); Yang & DeRycker (2020); Mohd-Zaini (2017) discovered that the 2017 Budget utilized the responsibility news frame and the governing government spokespeople as news sources. However, Sinar Harian had a more balanced tone whereas The Star had a more positive tone.

Previous studies conducted in Malaysia show that the neutral valance tend to be predominant in mainstream new platforms while alterative media tend to focus on negative valence. For instance, For the South China Sea dispute, Malaysiakini was critical. However, the valence of The Star articles was mostly neutral (Yang et al., 2020).

Methodology
Data Collection and Study Sample Design
 The aim of this research is to examine the frames that emerged throughout the frame-building process for the 1MDB issue. This research will take the approach of quantifying the clusters of messages known as frames in order to ascertain how the frames are integrated

into their audience' schemata. Quantitative data will be collected though content analysis of the newspapers, which will span a one-year period before and after GE14. The study will examine framing using a deductive approach, in which researchers will be guided by the conventional news frames already identified in previous framing analyses (Linström & Marais, 2012). The generic frame types include conflict frame, economic consequences frame, attribution of responsibility frame, and human interest frames, as well as morality frames (Neuman et al., 1992; Scheufele, 1999; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Two coders familiar with the topic were enlisted to perform the data coding of the listed newspapers.

Survey Instrument

For this research, the online articles from four English mainstream newspapers will be used as the unit of analysis. Only paragraphs that are related to the issue are taken as the unit of analysis. The paragraph can mention the issue directly or paraphrase the content of the key issue. The relevant paragraph will be coded according to the five value frames introduced by (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

Data Analysis Method

For this research, media type (The Star, New Straits Times, The Edge, The Sun) and news sources (eg. Pakatan Harapan political leaders, Barisan Nasional political leaders, Government, Civil society) will act as independent variables in the quantitative segment of the study. The dependent variables will consist of the value frames of Conflict, Economic Consequences, Responsibility, Human Interest and Morality. The SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) is used to perform descriptive statistical analysis on the quantitative data collected in the coding sheet. Data analysis would include both descriptive and inferential statistics, which were used to test hypotheses that required a level of statistical significance before they could be generalized to a larger population (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Through content analysis, this study seeks data on the framing factors that influence how news is framed in general, as well as on the factors that influence how 1MDB's issues are framed specifically.

Data Analysis

A total of 1,362 articles were analysed. From these, the Star published a total of 506 articles (37.2%) of the total population, followed by The Edge with 418 articles (30.69%), The Sun with 263 articles (19.3%) and NST with 175 articles (12.85%). The Main Sources for these articles consist of 10 political actors which are Government 425 (31.2%), Editorial 323 (23.72%), PH Politician 266 (19.53%), BN Politician 155 (11.38%), 1MDB 86 (6.31%), Finance 37 (2.71%), Public 30 (2.2%), NGO 18 (1.32%), Third Party Finance 11 (0.808%) and others 11 (0.808%).

Results

Table 1

Differences in use of frames before and after GE14

Newspaper	Period		N	Mean	SD	t	df	sig.
The Edge	Conflict	Before 9May2018	68	5.47	4.925	5.149	79.761	0.000
		After 9May2018	150	2.26	3.388			
	Human_Interest	Before 9May2018	68	2.62	3.632	1.331	85.268	0.187
		After 9May2018	150	1.99	2.971			
	Economic_Consequences	Before 9May2018	68	3.44	3.479	-1.743	117.159	0.084
		After 9May2018	150	4.29	4.579			
	Responsibilities	Before 9May2018	68	2.94	2.406	3.934	416	0.000
		After 9May2018	150	1.73	2.317			
	Morality	Before 9May2018	68	2.46	2.995	4.005	74.941	0.000
		After 9May2018	150	0.96	1.635			
NST	Conflict	Before 9May2018	22	4.50	4.657	2.773	22.681	0.011
		After 9May2018	153	1.69	2.437			
	Human_Interest	Before 9May2018	22	1.00	1.690	-1.677	173	0.323
		After 9May2018	153	1.73	1.924			
	Economic_Consequences	Before 9May2018	22	1.77	2.329	-0.990	173	0.323
		After 9May2018	153	2.39	2.796			
	Responsibilities	Before 9May2018	22	1.45	2.890	0.630	22.626	0.535
		After 9May2018	153	1.06	1.488			
	Morality	Before 9May2018	22	0.14	0.640	-1.156	173	0.249
		After 9May2018	153	0.40	1.035			
The Sun	Conflict	Before 9May2018	31	2.74	2.744	2.941	241	0.004
		After 9May2018	212	1.42	2.275			
	Human_Interest	Before 9May2018	31	1.35	1.330	-0.694	246	0.489
		After 9May2018	212	1.60	1.932			
	Economic_Consequences	Before 9May2018	31	1.97	2.714	0.132	242	0.895

		After 9May2018	212	1.91	2.165			
	Responsibilities	Before 9May2018	31	0.97	1.169	0.955	241	0.340
		After 9May2018	212	0.75	1.188			
	Morality	Before 9May2018	31	0.39	0.615	2.089	35.098	0.044
		After 9May2018	212	0.15	0.460			
The Star	Conflict	Before 9May2018	51	2.92	2.357	4.317	450	0.000
		After 9May2018	401	1.47	2.256			
	Human_Interest	Before 9May2018	51	1.27	1.537	-7.058	113.331	0.000
		After 9May2018	401	3.15	3.221			
	Economic_Consequences	Before 9May2018	51	2.18	2.304	-0.661	467	0.509
		After 9May2018	401	2.46	2.946			
	Responsibilities	Before 9May2018	51	0.80	1.149	-0.306	455	0.760
		After 9May2018	401	0.85	1.114			
	Morality	Before 9May2018	51	0.04	0.196	-2.895	128.464	0.004
		After 9May2018	401	0.14	0.443			

Table 1 shows the results of the contents analysis based on the assessment of news framing for the English newspapers before and after the elections. To determine if there were significant differences in the used of news frames, a t-test was conducted for each newspaper. The results are summarised as following;

The Edge
From Table 1, significant differences were observed in the Edge newspaper for Conflict (df=79.761, p<0.05), Responsibility (df=416, p<0.05) and Morality (df=74.94, p<0.05) frames. In the period before the election, the Edge showed the highest use of Conflict (5.47±4.925), Human Interest (2.62±3.632), Economic Consequences (3.44±3.479) and Responsibility (2.94±2.406) frames. Post-election, Conflict frame usage for The Edge reduced to (2.26±3.388), Responsibility to (1.99±2.971) and Morality to (0.96±1.635). There was no significant difference for the use of Human Interest and Economic Consequences frames.

New Straits Times
For the New Straits Times, there was a significant mean difference in the use of Conflict framing, while the differences for the other four frames were not significant. New Straits Times had the second highest mean of Conflict frames before election (4.50±4.657). This reduced significantly to 1.67±2.437 following the elections. There was no significant mean difference in framing in the context of Human Interest, Responsibility and Morality before and after the elections were held.

The Sun

For the Sun, the results of the independent t-test showed significant differences in the use of Conflict (Df=241, p<0.05) and Morality (Df=0.044, p<0.05) frames. Similar to the previous two newspapers, there was a reduction in the use of Conflict framing with a mean attained before and after the election of 2.74±2.744 and 1.42±2.275 respectively. The Sun's use of the frames of Human Interest (before 1.35±1.330; after 1.60±1.932), Economic Consequences (1.97±2.1714; 1.91±2.165), Responsibility (0.97±1.169; 0.75±1.188), and Morality (0.39±0.615; 0.15±0.460) showed no significant mean difference before and after the election.

The Star

The results of the analysis indicate that there was a significant difference in the use of Conflict frames as indicated by the mean of 2.92±2.357 (before) and 1.47±2.256 (after). The Star was consistent with the other newspapers in showing reduced levels of Conflict framing in the period following the election. Conversely, The Star newspaper began to show the highest level of Human Interest framing in the period following the elections. There was a significant mean difference on how The Star utilised human interest frames, which increased from 1.27±1.537 before and 3.15±3.2256 after the election. However, for the other frames, it can be observed that The Star's use of frames of Economic Consequences (2.18±2.302; 2.46±2.946), Responsibility (0.80±1.149; 0.85±1.114), and Morality (0.39±0.615; 0.15±0.460) had no significant mean difference before and after the elections on the 1MDB issue.

In summary, the results indicate that there were significant differences in the use of the five generic frames in all the four English mainstream newspapers following General Election 14. The Edge showed significant differences in the use of three frames, namely Conflict, Responsibility and Morality. The New Straits Times showed differences in only Conflict framing while The Sun showed differences in both Conflict and Morality frames. From the analysis, it was also discovered that The Edge led with the use of Conflict framing for the 1MDB issue, followed by The New Straits Times. However, the use of Conflict frames diminished greatly for all the English mainstream newspapers following the period after the General Election. The Star was also found to significantly utilise Human Interest frames in the period following the elections.

Newspaper & Main Source influence

For the next objective, a Wilks' Lambda test was performed to determine whether there was statistically significant interaction effect between Newspaper and Main Source F $(1,6113)=1.480$ P=0.001 Wilks' $\Lambda=0.879$. According to effect size, the influence of main source (0.038) is significantly higher than the effect of the Newspaper (0.033). Having ascertained for the overall time period, the next investigation determines whether there were significant differences between the two time periods.

Table 2
(Combined period: before and after 9th May 2018)

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Newspaper * Main Source	Wilks' Lambda	0.879	1.480	110.000	6113.815	0.001
a. Design: Intercept + Newspaper + MAIN_SOURCE + Newspaper * MAIN_SOURCE						
b. Exact statistic						
c. The statistic is an upper bound on F that yields a lower bound on the significance level.						
Effect size newspaper:0.033 Effect size Main source:0.038						

Before General Election 14

There was no statistically significant interaction effect between newspaper and main source $F(80, 673)=0.843$ $P=0.001$ Wilks' $\Lambda=0.632$. According to effect size, the influence of main source (0.063) is significantly higher than newspaper (0.102).

Table 3
Before General Election 14

Multivariate Tests[a,b]						
Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Newspaper * MAIN_SOURCE	Wilks' Lambda	0.632	0.843	80.000	673.462	0.830
a. Period = Before 9 May 2018						
b. Design: Intercept + Newspaper + MAIN_SOURCE + Newspaper * MAIN_SOURCE						
c. Exact statistic						
d. The statistic is an upper bound on F that yields a lower bound on the significance level.						
Effect size newspaper:0.063 Effect size Main source:0.102						

After General Election 14

There was statistically significant interaction effect between newspaper and main source $F(100, 5258)=1.371$ $P=0.001$ Wilks' $\Lambda=0.882$. According to effect size, the influence of main source (0.042) is significantly higher than newspaper (0.029).

Table 4
After General Election 14

Multivariate Tests[a,b]						
Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Newspaper * MAIN_SOURCE	Wilks' Lambda	0.882	1.371	100.000	5258.835	0.009
a. Period = After 9 May 2018						
b. Design: Intercept + Newspaper + MAIN_SOURCE + Newspaper * MAIN_SOURCE						
c. Exact statistic						
d. The statistic is an upper bound on F that yields a lower bound on the significance level.						
Effect size newspaper:0.029 Effect size Main source:0.042						

In summarising the findings, from the tests it was determined that overall, the effect of main sources is more significant than the newspaper. Looking closely at the results between the periods, this effect was not statistically significant in the period before GE14, but become significant after the elections, indicating the framing by political actors became more prominent following the elections.

Discussion and Conclusion
The first objective aimed to examine if there are observable and significant differences in the frames used by the four English mainstream newspapers to address the 1MDB topic in their news coverage. From the results, there were observable significant differences in some of the frames for every newspaper. The frame of Conflict was the most notable frame that showed significant differences before and after GE14 in respect to reporting of the 1MDB financial scandal. The four English newspapers have a significant mean difference in the use of Conflict frames in the reporting of the 1MDB topic before and after the elections. Across all newspapers, the use of Conflict framing reduced significantly, and this was significant for all four newspapers.

The findings have repercussions that may indicate the state of democracy in the media and how free and balanced it is as the presence of conflict frames have been associated with a more democratic media. Firstly, conflict frames are highlighted in political news through criticism or attacks from and against political actors, as well as the media's prominence of divergent political viewpoints. The act of the journalists contrasting political actors' views and viewpoints provide a balanced and objective representation of a story (McManus, 1994). For example, in Western media, the prominence of conflict frames may be explained by the fact that objective reporting is held in high regard by Western journalists (Schudson, 2001). However, this would not be the case for countries that have historically employed development model journalism such as in Malaysia. The routine of balancing competing perspectives is a part of the objectivity standard (Neuman et al., 1992). Secondly, Conflict framing may reveal the extent to which journalists intervene during the news production process, and consequently the framing process. A low level of conflict framing may indicate that journalists are not intervening in the framing process, but merely acting as passive conveyor belts. According to previous studies, journalists are known to intervene in the case of Conflict frame-building process (Bartholome et al., 2015).

The low level of influence of the Malaysian media in determining the frames that are produced in the news are also indicated by the findings for the second research objective, which indicate that overall, the effect of main sources is more significant than the effect of the newspaper. Looking closely at the results between the periods, this effect was not statistically significant in the period before GE14, but become significant after the elections, indicating the framing by political actors became more prominent following the elections.

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