Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH) (e-ISSN : 2504-8562)
2022, Volume 7, Issue4, e001411
DOI: https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v7i4.1411

Framing COVID-19 and the Movement Control Order: Between Social Responsibility and Editorial Ideology

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KEYWORDS:
COVID-19
Malaysia
News Framing
Health Crisis
Online Newspaper
Coronavirus

CITATION:
Shafizan Mohamed & Syed Arabi Syed Abdullah Idid. (2022). Framing COVID-19 and the Movement Control Order: Between Social Responsibility and Editorial Ideology. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH), 7*(4), e001411. https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v7i4.1411

ABSTRACT

Pandemics pose significant global risks. If the aftermath of a large-scale health crisis is not carefully contained, it can be catastrophic. In times like this, the media plays an important role in educating the public and upholding social order by covering news that is both insightful and positive. This study examines media coverage of the COVID-19 health crisis in Malaysia during the country's Minimal Control Order (MCO) period using a framing theory perspective. According to the results of a content analysis of The Star Online (N=870) and Malaysiakini Bahasa (N=870), issues concerning the technical implementation of the Movemenet Control Order (MCO) and the economy dominated the news. Despite the parallels in the topics covered, the study also discovered that when it came to framing the news, The Star was more optimistic about how the crisis is progressing than Malaysiakini, suggesting that even during a pandemic, local newspapers couldn't wander too far from their political and ideological positions.

Contribution/Originality: This study adds to our understanding of the news media's function during times of crisis. More precisely, it examined how Malaysian newspapers covered and framed the COVID-19 pandemic during the Movement Control Order's early stages (MCO). The findings corroborated the widely held belief that news organisations are frequently molded by political ideologies that influence how they structure and interpret news. While the two newspapers investigated upheld their social responsibility function of educating the public, the manner they framed the news indicated bias stemming from the newspapers' editorial ideology.

1. Introduction

The media has a significant impact on public understanding and response to health issues and crises. As a communication mechanism, the mass media - print, television, radio, and

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the internet - has unrivaled reach. It wields considerable power in setting agendas, that is, determining what we should be concerned about and act on, as well as framing issues, that is, determining how we should think about them (Leask, Hooker & King, 2010). More specifically, news media play an important role in publicizing and giving meaning to numerous health crises of global suffering because people all over the world can perceive health crises through news coverage, given that news frames lead to various interpretations of health crises by emphasizing certain features while ignoring others (Pan & Meng, 2016). Similarly, news media is primarily used to inform the public about what health-care institutions are doing and how they are dealing with and resolving situational crises. As a result, it is critical to understand the dynamic role of news media in delivering health and risk information about a health crisis by examining various themes, frames, source attributes, and responding strategies in health crisis news coverage.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which shocked the world in December 2019, provided an excellent case study of how the news media frames health crises. COVID-19, also known as severe acute respiratory syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) is a virus that causes a variety of symptoms including fever, cough, sore throat, muscle pain, and diarrhea. While the majority of infections resulted in mild symptoms, some developed into serious, life-threatening diseases such as pneumonia and multi-organ failure. The virus was first discovered in Wuhan, China. The outbreak began to affect other countries by January 2020, prompting the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare it a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, 2020. The virus infection rate was so rapid and widespread that the World Health Organization declared it a global pandemic on March 11th, 2020. Almost every country in the world was affected, resulting in severe socioeconomic disruptions. The global economy was brought to a halt, precipitating one of the worst global recessions in history. Schools and businesses were forced to close, and major events such as the 2020 Tokyo Olympics were postponed.

Malaysia, like the rest of the world, was affected by the pandemic. On January 25th, 2020, Malaysia detected its first COVID-19 case through a Chinese traveler arriving via Singapore. The number of cases remained low and under control until March, when a localized cluster was identified. The largest cluster was linked to a religious Tabligh gathering attended by over 15000 people. Within a few weeks, the number of COVID-19 cases in Malaysia skyrocketed, making Malaysia the worst-affected country in Southeast Asia. COVID-19 cases had already been reported in each of the country's 14 states by March 16th, 2020. Because of the severity of the outbreak, the Malaysian government imposed a nationwide 'Movement Control Order' (MCO) to prevent infection spread. The MCO, which was supposed to last from March 18th to March 31st, 2020, was primarily intended to make social distancing mandatory by restricting social activities and travels. However, due to the ever-increasing number of infections, the MCO was twice extended. The MCO's second phase lasted from March 31st to April 14th, and the third phase ran from April 14th to April 28th. The MCO was legally gazetted, making it legally binding on all Malaysians. The prohibition of any form of mass gathering, including religious and cultural activities, border control, and the closure of schools, universities, government, and private offices are among the restrictions imposed.

At first, Malaysian news outlets were wary of the virus, treating it as international news, but as the threat became clearer, news about the virus became more abundant and prominent. The pandemic was then covered in the news as a local and national issue. As a result, it provides a unique look at how local news media frame a global pandemic. Two

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Malaysian online newspapers, The Star and Malaysiakini, were content analyzed using framing as the theoretical framework to understand how news media covered and framed the global pandemic within a local context.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Role of Media in Communicating a Health Crisis

Traditional and online media both have a duty to keep an eye on disease outbreaks and to advise and educate the public about health threats and general wellbeing. Accuracy and honesty are espoused principles in this pursuit, and viewers, listeners, and readers of media output treat their products with confidence. The public has a reasonable expectation that health reports are free of sensationalism. People will want guidance about how to avoid infection and what activities can be pursued during a health crisis. Nonetheless, the media can be an effective tool for disseminating health messages and influencing behavior change.

Furthermore, the media plays an important role in not only offering solutions to health issues, but also in providing additional resources about where to seek help. Health professionals, according to Smith and Titteah (2017), rely on the media to communicate preventive health messages to the general public. People may also be discouraged from engaging in health-risky activities by using the media. Pan and Meng (2016) indicated that media coverage of health issues affects the public's compliance with safety measures, in addition to alerting the public about preventive measures. Collinson et al. (2015) investigated the impact of media coverage on disease containment. The researchers concluded that mass media efforts can help prevent disease transmission and that the media plays an important role in supporting disease prevention initiatives.

Other researchers, on the other hand, suggest that media coverage is less effective in informing the public about disease epidemic prevention because journalists have their own conventions for reporting information from health experts or sources and therefore do not have the requisite scope of reporting. Furthermore, journalists prefer to concentrate on exceptional events, or the number of people killed as a result of disease outbreaks (Carducci et al., 2011). Kline (2006) acknowledged that media attention can be problematic because it frequently focuses on fatalities and inaccurate framing of problems. He also stated that journalists face a challenging task when reporting on health problems because they must describe technical details and medical terminology in a way that the public will understand. If journalists do not correctly comprehend and translate medical information, the public would be given incorrect information. Though news organizations respect accuracy, health-related news reports often contain errors or misinformation (Kline, 2006). Interviewing expert sources and devoting more time and space to complex health-related issues are two ways journalists should try to assist with their learning curve (Smith & Titteah, 2017). Online news websites have become especially useful sources for generating, updating, and exchanging health and disease outbreak information in this regard. This is not surprising given that, according to the literature (Leask, Hooker, & King, 2010), viewers are increasingly turning to online media as alternatives to conventional news outlets in the modern digital and internet-enabled technologies age.

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2.2. The Impact of Media Coverage of Health Crisis

The role of media coverage in public response to infectious disease outbreaks is contentious in the literature. Some of the findings reflect the media's surveillance position in alerting and arming viewers with information and expertise in order to prevent or mitigate the spread of infectious diseases. For example, a study by Collinson et al. (2015) on the impact of media coverage on the spread of diseases found that mass media advertisements can help the public follow prescribed treatments and stem the spread of diseases. Other research suggests that when news reports propagate speculation, myth, and disinformation, it may be counterproductive to the objective and prospect of disease prevention (Hu & Sundar, 2010).

Much research looked at how health crises are reported in the news from various viewpoints all over the world. Numerous articles focused on the swine flu specifically. Cortinas-Rovira et al. (2014), for example, investigated how front pages and editorials work in news coverage of the swine flu in Spain. They discovered that front pages portray an unsettling situation that is likely to trigger mass hysteria, while editorials are more likely to mediate the flu epidemic and stick to strict ethical and social responsibility principles. Angeli (2012) took a rhetorical approach to understanding the role of metaphor in swine flu coverage in the electronic media and discovered that advertising themes contribute to swine flu rhetoric that helps health care recipients understand how metaphors in social media add to the context of health issues. The interaction between traditional and digital media, as well as the interaction between swine flu alerts and previous warnings about other epidemics, according to Nerlich and Koteyko (2012), leads not only to a heightened discourse of allegations and counteraccusations, but also to self-accusations and reflections about the media's role in transmitting swine flu messages. Gao, Zhang, and Sadri (2011) compared news coverage of the swine flu outbreak and related issues to flu reporting on a blog. They discovered that newspapers reference sources more frequently than blogs, and that newspapers mention the economic effects of the swine flu more frequently than blogs.

In their theoretical analysis of media's coverage of epidemics in general, Tsung, Wijaya and Brossard (2015) found that media concerns and journalists' narrative considerations regarding epidemics change across different phases of development and across diseases depending on the specificity of each disease. In Smith and Tietaah's (2017) exploration of reportage on meningitis outbreaks in Ghana by two online media outlets, it was found that online meningitis stories featured mostly government representatives and health officials and did little to engage residents and communities affected. They also claimed that the online media failed to fulfill their surveillance function of reporting on trends and alerting the public of severity of the outbreak in Ghana.

Thus the literatures indicate that the media have differing ways and goals when covering a particular health crisis. News media that sends out contradictory and vague messages about a crisis, could lead to public uncertainty about its efficacy during a health crisis and this can be very dangerous.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

Although agenda setting has been commonly employed to explain and explore political situations, the theory is useful to illustrate how mass media make certain issues significant to the public health. According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), the media can

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shape the public agenda by deciding what to think about. McCombs (2002) further explained that the public learns about an issue through its positioning and exposure. The power of the media is described at two important levels; the first level, that is the agenda-setting, examines the relative salience or importance of issues or subjects where issues will be selected by the media to be exposed to the public. In the second level, the relative salience or importance of the attributes of the issues or subjects is given attention to. Weaver (2007) called the first level as priming and the second level as framing.

This study drew upon framing as the theoretical framework. Many works on framing have been done that contribute to understanding the framing concept (Entman, 1993; Matthes & Kohring, 2008). Framing according to Entman (1993) is "to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, and moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p. 52). This definition provides readers with more detailed information on issues being covered by the media. Matthes and Kohring (2008) described framing as the process of calling attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring others, which might lead to different reactions; and Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) refer framing as the selection of a restricted number of thematically related attributes for inclusion in the media agenda when a particular object is discussed.

Framing has been commonly used in health communication studies. A study by Ghazali, Mohamed, Nasir and Yusoh (2020) for example used framing to explore how Malay newspapers portray and depict vaccination in Malaysia. Their research uncovered those newspapers used neutral tone in their headlines and only informs about vaccination without offering strong case and support for the importance of vaccination. The study recommended that newspapers should take a stand when covering about vaccination especially when there is a rise in the anti-vaccination movement. Another study by Adekunle and Adnan (2016), used framing to investigate how Nigerian newspapers framed the 2014 Ebola outbreak. Their study disclosed that compared to the sensationalized coverage of political, economic and social issues, the Nigerian newspapers practiced decency and caution when covering about the outbreak. It was found that when it comes to a health crisis, the media is able to put its social responsibility above the demand for profits. Similarly, Pieri (2019) also studied the outbreak of the Ebola virus but from the framing perspectives of newspapers in the United Kingdom. In their study of media framing of the H1-N1 outbreak in European countries, Rossmann, Meyer and Schulz (2017) compared news reportage between quality newspapers and tabloids. They found that the quality and tabloid press differed in how risk information was presented. While tabloid press articles seemed to follow the leading quality press with regards to content and framing of health crisis coverage, they exhibited a stronger emphasis on drama and emotion in the way they presented information. Based on the discussions above and the results of previous researches, this study identified several problems that need exploration through the following questions:

i. RQ1: What are the main issues discussed by the newspapers during the early MCO periods?
ii. RQ2: How did the newspapers frame COVID-19 issues during the during the early MCO periods?

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4. Methodology

4.1. Sampling

For this report, quantitative content analysis was used as the research tool. The news articles used in the study were gathered between March 17th, 2020, and April 14th, 2020, during the early stages of the Movement Control Order. The news articles were drawn from two well-known online newspapers, TheStar and Malaysiakini (BM) These newspapers were chosen for their high readership ratings, effective online archives, and diverse editorial perspectives (See Table 1). Even though both newspapers are popular and have large circulations, their editorial, ideological, and political leanings are quite different. The Star is published by The Star Media Group Bhd, which is partly owned by the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), a member of the government coalition, whereas Malaysiakini is published by Mkini Group Sdn Bhd, which is owned by Steve Gan and Premesh Chandran and claims to be free of political influence. The editorial styles of the newspapers differ. Both newspapers appear to be more liberal and open in their coverage since the political tsunami that resulted in a change in Malaysian government in 2018 (Mohamed & Idid, 2019). Another change in government in early 2020 resulted in a shift in sentiment in both newspapers because of MCA's return to power. The Star became more apologetic for the status quo, whereas Malaysiakini became more vocal and appeared to be more supportive of the ousted political coalition, Pakatan Harapan. This significant difference in political leanings may provide useful insights into how the two newspapers cover the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1: Descriptions of the sampled newspapers

Newspaper	Ownership	FB followers	Total News sampled
The Star	The Star Media Group Bhd.	1.28 million	870
Malaysiakini (BM)	Mkini Group Sdn. Bhd.	2.36 Million	870

The amount of news shared by both newspapers was substantial. The Star published 120 news stories per day on average, while Malaysiakini published at least 70 stories per day. The news articles, on the other hand, cover both the local and international contexts, as well as continuous updates on the number of fatalities. The purpose of this study is to examine how Malaysian newspapers covered the Malaysian experience. As a result, only news from or about Malaysia was sampled. Every day during the sampling period, 30 relevant news items were content analyzed. In total, 1740 articles were selected from both newspapers. The unit of analysis was all articles available in the newspapers' online database that included keywords such as, but not limited to, 'COVID-19,' 'coronavirus,' and 'pandemic' in their headlines and text.

4.2. Coding Procedures

Two coders were appointed to analyze the news articles. Training was given to all coders for them to familiarize with a coding book and coding sheet before data collection. During the training session, all coders were briefed face-to-face about the nature of the research, the research objectives and the research questions. Next, they were briefed about the codebook and the importance of the coding exercise. The main function of the codebook is to lay down specific guidelines and describe each code with a concrete definition for

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researchers and coders to follow to accomplish the study (Creswell, 2013). The coding book comprises key concepts of the news items and instructions on how to code them. This study employed inter-rater reliability to help researchers to assess the degree of agreement among coders on the data set. Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, and Pedersen (2013) and MacPhail, Khoza, Able, and Ranganathan (2016) described inter-rater reliability refers to the situation where coders are requested to relate predefined codes to related pieces of data and the level of agreement is measured. As for rules of thumb in ensuring the inter-rater reliability, Miles and Hubberman (1994) suggested 80 per cent agreement is needed between the coders. The study managed to reach 84 percent measurement agreement in the pilot analysis.

4.3. Coding categories

There are two methods to analyzing frames in the news that are commonly used: inductive and deductive (Matthes & Kohring, 2008; Mohamed, Yusoh & Ghazali, 2020). The inductive approach includes examining a news story with an open mind to discover the full spectrum of potential frames, starting with very loosely specified preconceptions of these themes. This method can detect all the possible ways a problem can be framed, but it is time-consuming, often focused on small samples, and can be difficult to reproduce. A deductive approach entails predefining frames as content analytic variables in order to validate the frequency in which these frames appear in the news. Since frames that are not established a priori may be ignored, this approach necessitates that the researcher has a good understanding of the likely types of frames. This method is easy to reproduce, can accommodate large samples, and can easily identify variations in framing between media (e.g., television vs. press) and within media (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

Similarly, Wimmer and Dominick (2014) suggested two methods for designing coding categories for content analysis. The first method is known as priori coding, in which the researcher creates categories prior to collecting data, based on some theoretical or logical rationale. The second approach is known as emergent coding, and it involves the researcher developing categories after a preliminary review of the data. For both research questions, the deductive or priori coding method was used in this analysis. The list of references and frames was collected using literature reviews and an analysis of local pandemic news. To ensure that all problems and frames were protected, the coders were required to keep an eye out for issues that did not fit into any of the predetermined categories so that new categories could be added. Table 2 and Table 3 lists the operational definitions of the issues and frames used to analyze the news articles.

Table 2: Operational definitions for coding – Issues covered

Main Issue	Definition
MCO Enforcement	News articles that detail the government's daily updates and reports on MCO related standard operating procedures. Throughout the MCO, the government continuously updated the rules and regulations to accommodate the development in the number of local infections
Stimulus Package	News articles that articulate the government's economic initiatives to support the many individuals and communities that are affected by the MCO.
Economic Implication	News articles that describe the economic implications of the MCO such as unemployment, the closure of businesses and the expected long-term recession

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Specific individuals/ group infected	News articles that detail out stories of how specific individuals, groups or communities that got infected and their experiences
State action/ aid	News articles that focus on individual state's action to support its citizen. For example, some states had its own economic initiatives
MCO violation	News articles that highlight MCO violations that occurred, and the subsequent actions taken against them
Updated Cases	News articles that detail out the statistics of daily cases including the locality and origins of the cases. These articles are mostly sourced from the daily press briefings given by the Health Director General
Death	News articles that describe about the mortality rate of the cases as well as news that relate the pandemic to death.
Industries affected by crisis	News articles that highlight specific industries affected by the pandemic such as the travel, aviation, and entertainment industries
Mask/ Sanitizer/ Medical Supply	News articles that focus on the availability of health-related supplies.

Table 3: Operational definitions for coding – News Frames

News Frame	Definition
Informational	A news frame that provides information and data about the crisis using facts, evidence, as well as scientific data without asserting opinion or sentiment.
Warning/ uncertainty	News frame that emphasizes the risk and danger that will be inflicted on individuals, a group of people, society, and the nation on issues pertaining to the pandemic.
Debate/ discussion	Highlights disagreements among individuals, groups, organizations, or countries. Political discussion about government's decisions
Human interest	News frame that depicts the human face or an emotional angle to the crisis such as stories of personal survival
Consolation/ Reassurance	News frame that offers positive consolation and motivation in facing the pandemic such as stories of vaccines and cures
Action/Policy	News frame that focuses on the policy measures taken by the government or any responsible parties to deal and tackle the issue at hand.
Effects	News frame that highlights the long term implication of the crisis.
Fear and Death	News frame that creates fear and tension revolving around the negative implications of the pandemic specifically death.
Morality	News frame that situates the event within the context of moral. spiritual or religious values and/or social prescriptions.

5. Findings and Discussions

Content analysis conducted on the selected Malay newspapers reeled the following results and answered the research questions.

5.1. RQ1: What are the main issues discussed by the newspapers during the MCO period of March 17th, 2020 to April 14th, 2020?

Several issues were discussed in the newspapers during the data collection period. However, the study only looked at the top ten most discussed issues. Table 4 and Figure 1 list the distribution of these issues. All these issues were local in the sense that they were presented through the lens of Malaysian experience. Both newspapers sampled, The

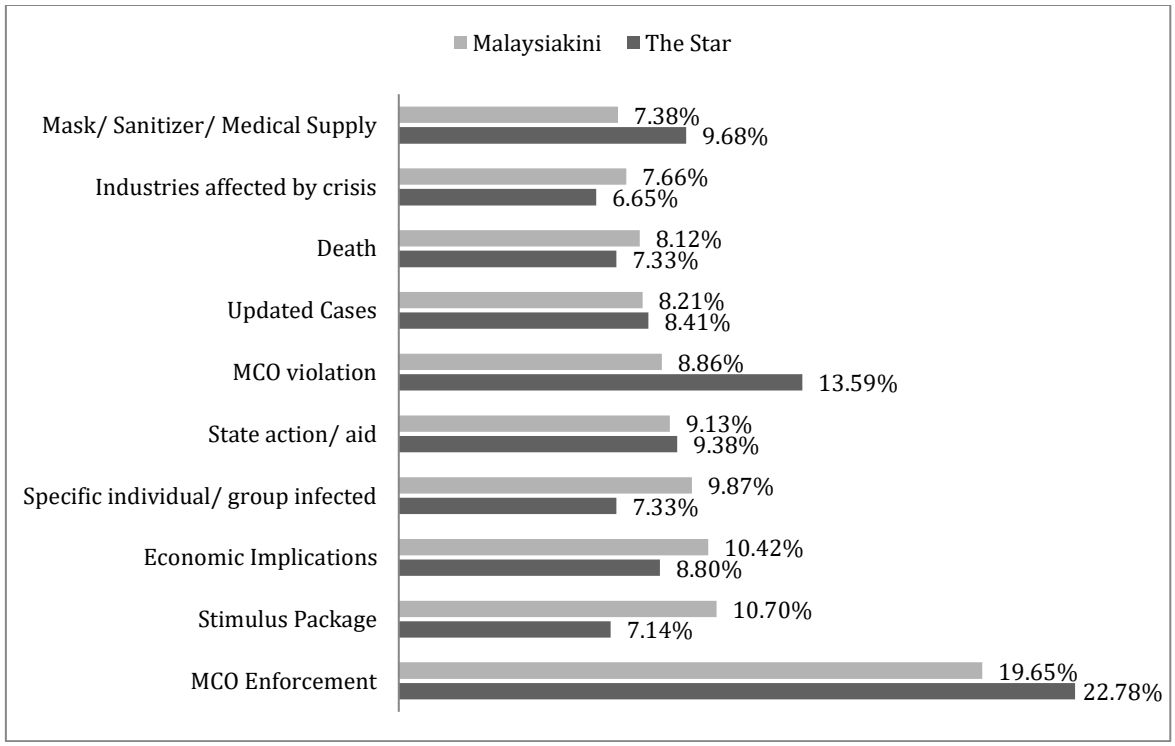
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Star and Malaysiakini, covered similar issues, because these were the main concerns that arose in Malaysia during the early stages of the pandemic. The only difference between them is the amount of weight given to each issue. The weight or amount of attention given to a particular issue is referred to as priming in the context of agenda setting, where the media may choose to leave some issues out of coverage while bringing others to the forefront. While the concept of priming is more common in the framing of political issues, it could also be applied in the coverage of health issues because editorial decisions to highlight certain issues over others are ultimately supported by the newspaper's own stand and policies. However, based on the minor differences in the weight given by both newspapers, it could be argued that when it comes to covering the pandemic, both newspapers have similar ideals, with both appearing to be more driven by the need to spread relevant information about the pandemic rather than highlighting insignificant issues such as politicizing the crisis.

Table 4: List of Main Issues Covered by the newspapers in during the MCO

Issues	The Star Frequency	Percentage	Malaysiakini Frequency	Percentage
MCO Enforcement	233	22.78%	213	19.65%
Stimulus Package	73	7.14%	116	10.70%
Economic Implications	90	8.80%	113	10.42%
Specific individual/ group infected	75	7.33%	107	9.87%
State action/ aid	96	9.38%	99	9.13%
MCO violation	139	13.59%	96	8.86%
Updated Cases	86	8.41%	89	8.21%
Death	75	7.33%	88	8.12%
Industries affected by crisis	68	6.65%	83	7.66%
Mask/ Sanitizer/ Medical Supply	99	9.68%	80	7.38%
Total:	1034	100%	1084	100%

Figure 1: Main Issues Covered by the newspapers in during the MCO



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Issues concerning the technical implementation of the Movement Control Order (MCO) and the economy dominated the news. Both newspapers (The Star 22.78 percent, Malaysiakini 19.65 percent) focused heavily on the MCO's enforcement. This meant that the media agreed that it was critical to pay attention to news that would inform the public about the steps to take during an uncertain time. A pandemic of this magnitude has never occurred before, and the public is expected to live in a new normal governed by new rules and regulations. In addition, The Star covered MCO violation news heavily (13.59 percent), indicating that the newspaper was focused on educating the public about the importance of adhering to the new standard operating procedures that guide public life during the initial stage of the pandemic. The 'Mask/Sanitizer/Medical Supply' issue is The Star's third most covered topic (9.68 percent). The Star chose to focus on the technical aspects of the crisis once more. During the time period in question, there was a concern about a lack of supply of face masks and PPE suits for the frontliners. In response to the coverage of this issue, there were citizen-led initiatives to produce PPE suits and masks to make up for the reported lack of supply. There was also a significant amount of news written about how various states in Malaysia (state action/aid: 9.38 percent) responded to the pandemic by launching aids and funds to assist those affected.

Malaysiakini, on the other hand, appeared to emphasize economic issues more than The Star. Issues such as the Stimulus Package (10.7 percent), Economic Implications (10.42 percent), and State Action/Aid (91.3 percent) received the most attention. Malaysiakini also appears to be more concerned with the negative consequences of the pandemic and the subsequent MCO than The Star. It reported significantly on affected groups and individuals (9.87 percent), whereas The Star reported only 7.33 percent on the same issue. Malaysiakini also placed a high value on death (8.12 percent) and industries affected (7.66 percent). In short, when it came to main issues coverage, both newspapers focused primarily on the economic implications as well as the technical aspects of MCO implementation. While not remarkable, it is worth noting that The Star focused on the MCO's implementations, whereas Malaysiakini addressed economic issues and the negative consequences for industries, groups, and individuals.

5.2. RQ2: How did the newspapers frame COVID-19 issues during the 4 MCO period of March 17th, 2020 to April 14th, 2020?

Newspapers frame news items differently depending on the type of news story, the target audience, the time of report, the central issue or key subject around which the stories revolve, and the interests that need to be protected in the story (Adenkunle & Adnan, 2016). All of these factors influence how a media report is framed, and ten main frames were identified in Malaysian newspapers' coverage of the pandemic and the MCO. The distribution of these frames is detailed in Table 5 and Figure 2. Newspapers primarily used two frames: action and informational. Malaysiakini and The Star both presented their news in ways that can assist the public in navigating the overwhelming crisis that has befallen them. The newspapers are able to help the public be objective about the crisis and not be blinded by unnecessary beliefs and ideas that can further accelerate the crisis by focusing on informing the public through facts that are not laden with emotional and political sentiments. Malaysiakini uses the Informational frame the most (24.15 percent), while The Star's coverage is more Action (28.27 percent). This meant that, rather than simply informing, The Star focused on the behavioral aspect, emphasizing the numerous actions taken by all relevant parties to mitigate and minimize the impact of the crisis. Using the Action frame, The Star highlighted the government's initiatives and policies that

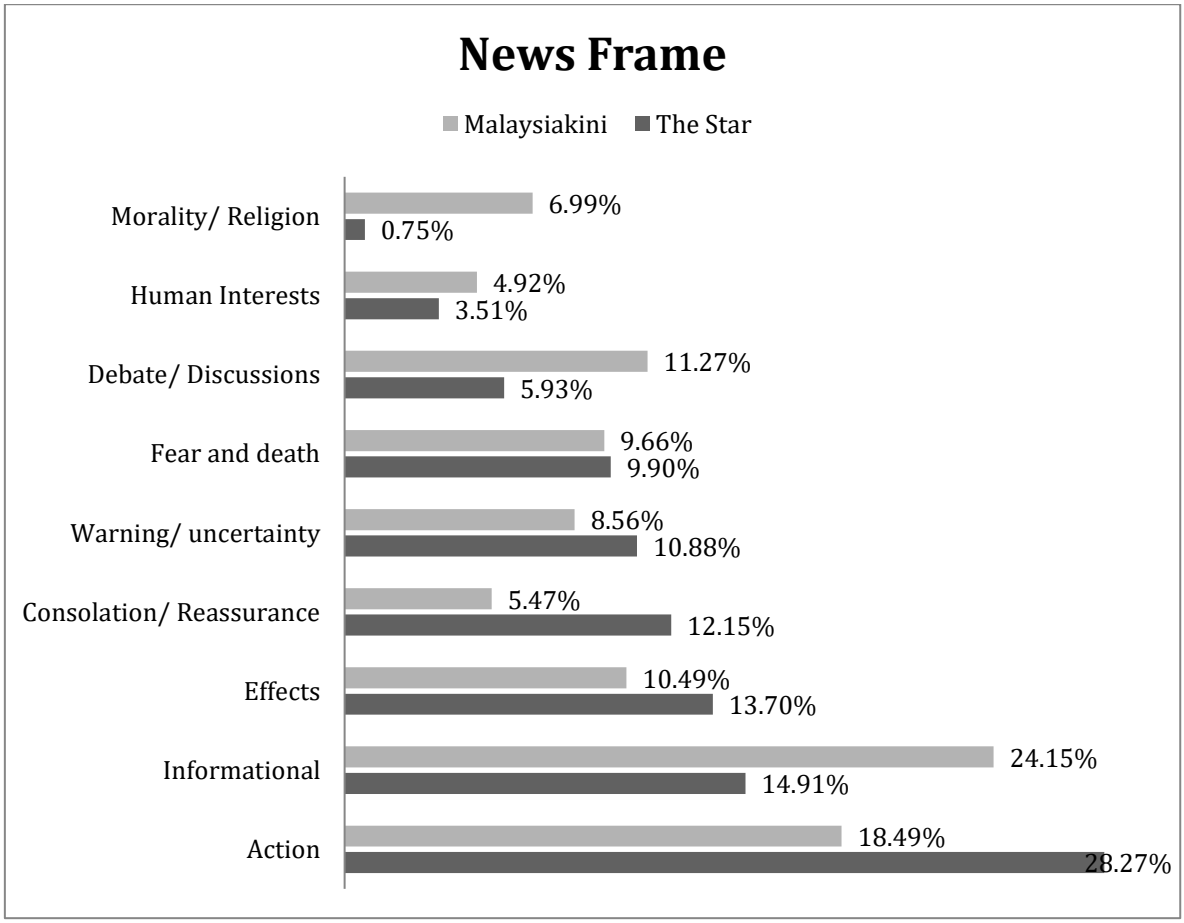
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provide a sense of security in a time of uncertainty. As a result, this is closely related to The Star's use of the consolation/reassurance frame (12.15 percent).

Table 5: List of Main Issues Covered by the newspapers in during the MCO

News Framing	The Star Frequency	Percentage	Malaysiakini Frequency	Percentage
Action	491	28.27%	402	18.49%
Informational	259	14.91%	525	24.15%
Effects	238	13.70%	228	10.49%
Consolation/ Reassurance	211	12.15%	119	5.47%
Warning/ uncertainty	189	10.88%	186	8.56%
Fear and death	172	9.90%	210	9.66%
Debate/ Discussions	103	5.93%	245	11.27%
Human Interests	61	3.51%	107	4.92%
Morality/ Religion	13	0.75%	152	6.99%
Total:	1737	100%	2174	100%

Figure 2: News Framed Used by the Newspapers in during the MCO



Malaysiakini, on the other hand, makes limited use of the consolation/reassurance frame (5.47 percent). Rather, it frames news in terms of debates/discussions (11.27 percent). The background of the newspapers may explain the notable difference in how Malaysiakini is more daring than The Star. The Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), a political party in the ruling coalition, owns a portion of TheStar, whereas Malaysiakini is a liberal news publication that frequently criticizes the ruling establishment (Mohamed & Idid, 2019). While Malaysiakini's coverage was not directly political, its more radical

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approach may be because it has always been vocal and would frequently cover issues in ways that were not always apologetic to the authorities. On the other hand, as a close to the status quo publication, the Star appears to openly support the many government initiatives that were introduced at the time. While both newspapers were generally focused on informing the public and maintaining social order, writing mostly on issues pertaining to the MCO and the economy, there was a distinction in how the issues were framed. The Star was more upbeat, reassuring, and accommodating while Malaysiakini was more critical in that its news was more informative and frequently included debates and discussions. Malaysiakini was also framing news in morality/religion (6.99 percent) and human interest (4.92 percent) frames, providing readers with additional interpretations of the ongoing crisis. Both newspapers used frames that depicted the reality of the pandemic, which was mostly negative. Fear frames (The Star=9.9 percent, Malaysiakini=9.66 percent) and warning/uncertainty frames (The Star=10.88 percent, Malaysiakini=8.56 percent) were also prominently used by the newspapers. Such frames, however, are not necessarily pessimistic; rather, they are useful in instilling a sense of seriousness about the nature of the crisis and how critical it is for readers to be aware of and prepared to face the uncertainty ahead.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how two Malaysian newspapers, The Star and Malaysiakini, covered and framed the COVID-19 crisis and subsequent lockdown during the early period of the Movement Control Order, which ran from March 17th, 2020 to April 14th, 2020. The study came to two major conclusions. First, during the crisis, both newspapers were extremely responsible in terms of reporting news and highlighting issues that can help the public better understand the situation and support any steps, regulations, or initiatives that can help minimize the impact of the crisis. Both newspapers were responsible for media surveillance and watchdog roles (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014) by covering issues centered on MCO implementations as well as economic effects and initiatives. In this sense, both newspapers fulfilled their social responsibility roles by covering issues that focused on highlighting the crisis's progression (Pan & Meng, 2016; Adekunle & Adnan, 2016). News about MCO implementations and violations keep the public up to date on the ever-changing adjustments in their daily routines, as they are now required to adjust to new SOPs and ways of life. News about the effects of the crisis on the economy, industries, groups, and individuals prepare the public for what is unavoidable, whereas news about efforts to mitigate the impact, such as economic stimulus and state actions, provide a positive and optimistic outlook on the future despite the crisis. Thus, during times of crisis and uncertainty, local newspapers practiced balanced coverage, focusing on issues addressing the problem while also offering stories highlighting resolutions to the problem.

Second, despite the similarity in the issues covered, the study discovered that local newspapers couldn't deviate too far from their political and ideological positions. The framing of the news reveals differences in how the newspapers interpret the issues. The use of action and assurance frames in The Star's news coverage led to a straightforward understanding of the crisis, establishing that the country is in a crisis, but it is still under control. Malaysiakini, on the other hand, tended to use the information and debate/discussion frames. Although Malaysiakini was not overly critical of the authorities when covering the crisis, using such frames allowed for different interpretations of the crisis and how it is being handled, opening the door to a more contested understanding of the crisis. As a result, the study agrees with previous studies that found that when it comes

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to health crises, the media is mostly aligned and will uphold its social responsibility to inform and educate the public about the true state of affairs and how to survive them (Adekunle & Adnan, 2016; Pan & Meng, 2016). In contrast to other types of crises, such as political, economic, or sociocultural crises, there is less to gain or profit from sensationalizing a pandemic that has non-political causes and can affect everyone. However, the ideologies promoted by a particular media, which are heavily influenced by its ownership, stakeholders, reader demographics, political leanings, and a variety of other factors, will continue to shape how news is presented. Even if everyone agrees on the main issues, different media platforms will present and interpret the news in different ways, giving different meanings to the same issue.

6.1. Limitations and Future Research

The nature of this research is exploratory and descriptive. As a result, there is a limit to what the data can infer. A more systematic examination of the data would most likely provide a more in-depth understanding of how newspapers frame specific issues. For example, the study could determine what types of issues received positive and negative frames. By identifying this, a more focused analysis can be performed to determine the relationship between issue coverage and issue framing. Furthermore, it would be more effective if more newspapers with diverse backgrounds and readerships were sampled, allowing for more refined interpretations of news coverage. Future research on news media coverage of health crises could consider conducting a full agenda setting research by matching the issues covered by media with public perceptions of those issues, so that a larger picture of the effects of media on public opinion during a health crisis can be painted.

Funding

This study is funded by the International Institute of Islamic Taught (IIIT) - SPI21-088-0088.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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