Framing International Relationship of US and China in Prominent Malaysian Newspapers

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Abstract

This study examines the framing of the international relationship between the United States and China in two prominent Malaysian English-language newspapers, The Star and New Straits Times. Using content analysis, the research analyzes 330 articles published in the year 2000 to identify the use of five news frames (economic impact, human interest, morality, conflict, and cooperation) and to compare the news valence (positive, negative, or neutral) associated with U.S. and China-related news. The findings reveal that China-related news more frequently emphasizes economic impact and positive valence, while U.S.-related news is often framed around conflict and tends to be more negative or neutral. Statistical tests indicate significant associations between news frames and valence. For instance, cooperation frames were positively correlated with positive news valence, while conflict frames were strongly associated with negative news valence. These results contribute to framing theory by highlighting how media outlets in Malaysia, a geopolitically strategic country in Southeast Asia, portray the global superpowers, and how economic ties with China may influence more favorable coverage. This study provides insights into the role of media framing in shaping public perceptions of international relations.

Keywords: News framing, international relations, United States, China, Malaysian Newspaper.

The rivalry between the United States and China in Asia, particularly in Southeast Asia, has intensified significantly in recent years. Both global powers are striving to expand their influence across various domains, including economic, diplomatic, and military spheres, leveraging their unique strengths to assert dominance. China's growing economic power allows it to exert considerable influence through trade, investment, and infrastructure projects, notably the Belt and Road Initiative. Over the last two decades, China's economic rise has significantly increased its influence in Southeast Asia. At the same period of time, the regional role of the United States in Southeast Asia has diminished, as its security focus has shifted towards the Middle East and Central Asia, alongside challenges posed by the financial and economic crises since 2008. This shift has led to a new strategic reality in Southeast Asia, marked by China's economic ascent and the relative economic decline of the United States. Today, China stands as the second-largest economy in the world, with projections suggesting it could surpass the United States by 2030 (Majid, 2012). It is predicted that if China continues its economic expansion, the United States may take steps to curb China's dominance in Asia,

resulting in heightened security competition (Mearsheimer, 2014).

Newspapers play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions by highlighting specific aspects of international relationships. The way how international relationship of US and China is framed in Malaysian media can influence how the public understands and reacts to these two global powers. This, in turn, can affect societal attitudes and national sentiment towards these countries. According to framing theory, the media doesn't just report facts; it also provides a framework through which these facts are interpreted. By studying how Malaysian newspapers frame the International Relationship of US and China, we can understand how media influence's public opinion and discourse on international issues.

Studying Malaysian newspapers for the comparison of international relationship of US and China is of significant relevance for several key reasons, particularly given Malaysia's geopolitical positioning, economic interests, and its role in regional dynamics in Southeast Asia. Malaysia, as a Southeast Asian nation located at the crossroads of major global trade routes, holds a pivotal position in the region that is highly influenced by both the US and China. The Malacca Strait, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, is critical to global trade, and both superpowers have vested interests in maintaining access and influence over this route. Besides, Malaysia has significant economic ties with both the US and China. China is Malaysia's largest trading partner, while the US is a key partner in terms of investments and technological cooperation. As for historical connections, Malaysia is connected to China through its large ethnic Chinese population, give a unique cultural lens to the coverage of US-China relations. And Malaysia's post-colonial experience and historical ties to Western powers, including the US, play a role in shaping how the media presents these relationships. Studying how Malaysian newspapers balance these cultural and historical narratives can reveal the underlying socio-political complexities in how Malaysia navigates its position between the US and China.

In view of this significance, this study aims to examine the portrayal of the international image of US and China as presented by Malaysia's two prominent English newspapers, the Star and New Strait Times. The main purposes of this this study are as follows:

1. To compare the international news framing of US-related news and China-related news in prominent Malaysian newspapers.

2. To compare the international news valence of US-related news and China-related news in prominent Malaysian newspapers.

3. To examine the correlation of news frames and news valence in international reports in prominent Malaysian newspapers.

Literature Review

News framing refers to the process by which media outlets selectively present information about events or issues, thereby shaping the way audiences interpret and understand these events. Through framing, journalists emphasize certain aspects of a story while downplaying others, which in turn can influence public opinion and perception. For example, common frames include those focusing on conflict, human interest, responsibility, and economic consequences, all of which are used to structure news stories in a way that resonates with the audience's beliefs and values (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). The theory of framing has become a popular and critical tool in media studies, as it underscores the power of the media not just to inform, but also to influence how people think about the world around them. Researchers continue to explore how different frames affect cognitive complexity, recall, and even public policy decisions (Shah et al., 2004; Valkenburg et al., 1999).

News framing in international relationships plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and influencing policy. Media outlets often present international events through specific

lenses, or frames, that emphasize certain aspects of the story over others. For example, a study comparing Aljazeera English and BBC News coverage of China's domestic politics revealed that while Aljazeera framed the news around cooperation, BBC used a confrontation frame, particularly in discussing China's global conflicts (Arif & Hayat, 2018). These frames not only influence how the public perceives foreign nations but also impact political decisions and international relations. Research also suggests that frames can be static, shaped by national interests and journalistic norms, as seen in the coverage of the Kosovo status negotiations, where Western and non-Western media employed conflict-oriented frames consistently over time (Camaj, 2010). Thus, news framing serves as a powerful tool in constructing narratives about international relationships and shaping global political discourse.

News valence refers to the emotional charge or tone of a news story, typically categorized as positive, negative, or neutral. The valence of a news item plays a significant role in shaping public perception, influencing attention, memory retention, and even emotional responses. Studies show that valence plays a pivotal role in the framing process, as negative frames are more likely to generate stronger emotional responses and higher levels of engagement compared to positive frames. For example, negatively framed news about political or social issues tends to be more memorable and leads to more critical public attitudes toward the subject in question (Vreese, Boomgaarden, & Semetko, 2011). Additionally, negatively valenced frames can strengthen public biases or stereotypes, particularly in highly polarized or controversial topics, as seen in studies on race-related media coverage (Liu, 2023). Thus, the interplay between framing and valence significantly influences how news is perceived, processed, and remembered.

Methodology

This research adopts De Vreese's (2005) Integrated Process of Framing as its conceptual basis, emphasizing the frame-building process rather than frame setting. The study focuses on how US-related news and China-related news were framed in two English-language Malaysian newspapers, The Star and New Strait Times. It also seeks to explore the correlation between news frames and news valence in international news report.

3.1. News Frames

The current study employs a deductive, issue-specific approach to examine media frames related to the international involvement of the US and China with other countries by identifying frames through textual analysis of selected news stories. We drew on the framework established by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) as well as Boonlert's (2011) work, which identified five news frames—economic consequences, human interest, morality, conflict, and cooperation.

3.2 News Valence

Based on Wanta, Golan, and Lee's (2004) coding scheme of network newscasts about superpower nations, the current study categorized valence of articles as positive, negative and neutral. Negative news refers to the news which contains negative information about the US or China, such as untrustworthy, unreliability, insecurity, danger, retreat, weakness and inefficiency. Positive news refers to the news which contain mostly positive information such as progress, growth, prosperity, strength, stability, security, and trustworthiness of US or China. Neutral news refers to news containing neither positive nor negative information about a country or which mixes both the positive and the negative mention of a country.

3.3 Content Analysis

The content analysis sample included news stories from two English-language newspapers, the Star and New Strait Times, published in 2000. The search terms "U.S." and "China",

were used in the official websites of the two English newspapers to collect relevant articles, which generated about 1,570 stories. Our sample selected international news stories whose title involved the focus country and the other countries at the same time. For example, the title "Thai rubberwood makers in crisis as Chinese market evaporates" involved China and Thailand, therefore, it was selected. After choosing the international news about US and China from Malaysian newspaper, a random sampling method was applied through the platform of Divorminor. The final sample comprised 330 news articles, including 149 US-related stories and 138 China-related stories.

During the coding process, we accounted for as many frames as were apparent in the coverage, whether they appeared in the headline, lead, or paragraphs, which meant that each story could have multiple frames. News frames was coded as 1=Present or 0=Not present. News valence was firstly coded as 1= negative, 2 = neutral, 3 = positive, but recoded as present or no present for each category in the correlation test.

Three coders were employed to conduct coding through the platform of Divorminor. To ensure accuracy, intercoder reliability was measured by double-coding 10% of the sample, yielding a reliability score of 0.89 for cooperation, 0.89 for conflict, 0.98 for economic impact, 0.82 for human interest frame, and 0.89 for morality frame, and 0.85 for news valence, with a Holsti's Coefficient Reliability Test.

Results of Study

4.1 News Frames in the International Reports of US and China

The data presented in Table 1 showed significant differences in how international reports frame the United States and China across several categories. A Chi-square analysis was conducted to examine these differences.

Table 1 News Frames in the International Reports about US and China.

	US		China		X^2	P
	N	%	N	%		
Conflict	73	48.30%	49	27.20%	15.74	0.000
Cooperation	70	46.40%	97	53.90%	1.863	0.172
Economic impact	79	52.30%	122	67.80%	8.229	0.004
Human Interest	108	71.50%	69	38%	36.357	0.000
Morality frame	46	28.40%	48	26.70%	0.582	0.445

Economic impact. The most frequently recurring frame for the U.S. and China was economic impact. In US-related news, 52.32% of articles included economic frame, while in China-related news, 67.8% of news articles included this frame. The difference is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). There is higher usage of the economic impact frame in China-related news, suggesting a stronger focus on the economic implications or consequences of China's actions or policies. Framing the United States and China within the context of economic impact is not coincidental due to the global economic influence of these two superpowers, with the latter focused specifically on business

partnerships. Articles within economic impact frame typically focused on change on business or market due to something happened in the focus country.

China's economic impact in international relationship is seen through its role in trade, business and market. For example, there are a lot of mention of economic consequence brought by investment or business cooperation, like what was mentioned in "Kelington secures RM64m China's UHP contracts", "Ageson bags massive RM27.5bil contract from China", "Brunei-China joint petrochemical venture to expand into second phase" and "China eyeing Malaysian companies to expand 5G tech". Besides, China

as an important consumer market also greatly influence the economy of its neighing countries, like "Thai rubberwood makers in crisis as Chinese market evaporates", "Thailand exports RM2.56bil of durians to China in Jan-April" and "Rich Chinese snapping up luxury homes from Singapore to Sydney". Besides, there are also mentions of influence of China's policy toward economic development of other countries, like "China allows more import of yellow bananas from Cambodia" and "Bangladesh gets tariff exemption from China".

US's economic impact is mainly portrayed through how its domestic policies affect global markets or stock markets. For example, how the presidential election result influences other countries' economic development is frequently discussed in the news coverage of US-related news, like "Israel's Netanyahu congratulates Biden on U.S. election win, thanks Trump", "Israel's stock market responded positively to Biden's win", "Impact of US election on Asian economies", "Ringgit slightly lower ahead of OPR decision, US elections" and so on. Although direct economic investment and cooperation exists, like "US insurance firms invest RM31bil in Malaysia", the US's economic impact is sometimes indirect rather than direct economic engagement. Besides, "economic sanction" is a tool frequently applied by US to bring about negative economic impact. Examples for US's sanction against other countries include "US bans imports from palm oil company FGV", "Thailand on US watch list for currency manipulation?", "US sanctions: FGV must clear its name", "Fresh US sanctions on Iran endangering civilians" and so on.

In short, the economic impact frame is more prevalent in China-related news compared to US-related news. China's economic impact is characterized by direct trade and business engagements, while the US's influence is more indirect, shaped by domestic policies and economic sanctions.

Conflict frame. Conflict frame usually focuses on disagreements, tensions, or confrontations, was more frequently used in articles about the US (48.30%) compared to China (27.20%). The higher percentage for the US suggests a greater focus on conflictual aspects in its portrayal. A chi-square test result is given, resulting in a Chi-Square statistic (χ^2) of 15.742, with 1 degree of freedom. The associated p-value was 0.001, below the alpha level of 0.05, suggesting a statistically significant association between focus country and conflict frame. Additionally, an effect size was calculated using Cramer's V, which was found to be 0.218. While this effect size is statistically significant, it is moderate in magnitude.

The conflict frame in articles related to China often revolves around territory disputes or concerns, like "Vietnam protests China's laying of undersea cable", "Philippines coast guard chief prefers talks with China", "China releases 10 Indian soldiers after border battle", "Indonesia deploys fighter jets in stand-off with China" and etc. These conflicts typically involve other nations or international organizations and are framed in the context of territory claims of different countries. In US-related articles, the conflict frame frequently addresses US's sanction toward other countries and its discord with Russia or Middle East countries, like "Putin says hopes to resolve discord with US under Biden", "Putin not ready to recognize Biden as US President", "High alert: Iran strikes back at US with missile attack at bases in Iraq", "How US-Iran tensions will impact Southeast Asia" and etc.

In summary, while both China and US-related articles feature a conflict frame, the nature of the conflicts differs. China is often portrayed in conflicts related to territory disputes. In contrast, the US is commonly associated with military conflicts in Middle East and Russia, and its economic sanction toward other countries.

Cooperation Frame. Cooperation Frame emphasizes cooperation, alliances, or partnership aspects. According to Table XX, a Chi-Square test is used to compare the frequency

of the cooperation frame in US and China-related news with a Chi-Square (X2) Value of 1.863. Based on the p-value (p<0.05) , there is no statistically significant difference in the use of the cooperation frame between US and China-related news. While the percentage is higher for China-related news (53.90%) compared to US-related news (46.40%), the difference is not significant enough to conclude that the patterns of reporting on cooperation are different for the two countries. Therefore, the conclusion is that although there appears to be a slightly higher tendency to frame China-related news within the context of cooperation, this difference is not statistically significant. Both countries are similarly likely to be portrayed in the context of international cooperation in the news.

Cooperation Frame is quite salient in both US-related news and China-related news. For US-related news, 46.4% of news articles mentioned cooperation between US and other countries, while for China-related news, 53.9% of the news articles mentioned cooperation between China and other countries. Since these two superpowers have focused on building partnerships globally, it is not by accident that the United States and China are framed within the frame of cooperation.

In many news articles, the journalist explicitly highlights the cooperation aspect of the international relationship. For example, in "To everlasting friendship between China, Malaysia", a Chinese Ambassador to Malaysia is quoted as saying "China and Malaysia shared weal and woe, and conquered the hardship together. Now face masks and clinical gloves are the new tokens of friendship between us", and " Going forward, China will work together with Malaysia and enhance our cooperation in vaccine development and resumption of production."

Similar remarks can also be found in US-related news. In the report entitled "Departing US ambassador hails growing Laos-US relations", in which the US ambassador said that "during her three-year diplomatic mission, she enjoyed good cooperation and support from her Lao partners, which made a significant contribution to improving Laos-US cooperation and relations." The cooperation frame is also applied to US and China's involvement in economic investment, infrastructure building, and technological support, given that many developing countries need in the development process. Besides, external donors and business partner also offer opportunity for cooperation.

Human Interest. Human Interest frame in journalism and media refers to a way of presenting news stories that focus on the human side of events or issues. It's a storytelling technique that aims to evoke empathy, emotion, or a personal connection in the audience. According to Semanko and Valkenburg (2000), this frame brings a human face, an individual's story, or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue or problem. As shown in Table 2, there is a statistically significant difference in the use of the "Human Interest" frame between US and China-related news (p < 0.05). The significantly higher percentage in US-related news (71.50%) compared to China-related news (38%) suggests that the "Human Interest" frame is much more prevalent in US-related news.

Many US-related news involves individuals' stories, like "Daughter of recovered American Covid-19 patient thanks Malaysian medical team", "US publisher commissions new translation of Asterix comic book series", "Ceramic tile maker Kim Hin Industry expands US market", "Two American diplomats down with Covid-19 in Cambodia" and so on. In some news reports which seems to an official topic, citizen sources are involved. For example, in news stories entitled "Japan to go ahead with controversial move of US military base from Okinawa to Henoko" , residents' opinion and interest are reported. Comparatively speaking, individual stores or citizen voices are less presented in China-related news.

Morality Frame. Morality Frame in media and journalism refers to a way of presenting news stories that emphasizes moral and ethical considerations. This frame often involves

interpreting events, issues, or actions through the lens of moral values, ethical standards, and cultural or religious beliefs. Morality frame exists when an issue or an actor is presented in terms of *right and wrong, good and evil,* or *ethical and unethical* behavior. This can involve explicit or implicit moral evaluations of the actions, decisions, or characters of individuals, organizations, or governments. The mention of moral responsibilities of different actors are usually also categorized as moral frame.

Given the p-value of 0.445, there is no statistically significant difference in the use of the morality frame between US and China-related news. The proportions of news articles using the morality frame are quite similar for both countries (28.40% for the US and 26.70% for China). This suggests that news related to both the US and China tends to incorporate moral and ethical considerations to a similar extent. The morality frame, which focuses on ethical, moral, or values-based aspects, is applied nearly equally when reporting on both countries.

A frequent theme in US-related news is social justice, such as coverage of movements like Black Lives Matter or immigration policies. For example, stories entitled "U.S. embassy in Seoul displays Black Lives Matter banner in support of anti-racism protests" criticized the event as "racial injustice and police brutality", while "African refugees see American dream in tatters" reported the unfair treatment to refugees. These stories often frame moral arguments around human rights, equality, and the fight against discrimination. At the same time, US foreign policy, particularly military interventions or diplomatic strategies, is often examined through a moral lens, like what's discussed in "Iranians mass for funeral in hometown of general killed by US" and "Fresh US sanctions on Iran endangering civilians", in which US was criticized for "the violation of human rights". Even for economic sanction imposed by US, the excuse can be related to "human right". For example, FGV in Malaysia is sanctioned for using "child labor" and "forced labor", as

reported in " US sanctions: FGV must clear its name".

China-related news often includes coverage of topics of human rights in Hongkong and Xinjiang, but moral framing is particularly salient in the issue of Covid 19 pandemic. There are some radical events like "Pregnant Chinese national claims she was turned away at Malaysian border", "Delhi hotel body issues ban on Chinese travellers", "Outrage as Singapore ustaz says coronavirus God's punishment on Chinese". Radical moral criticism can be found with people's anger toward expansion of Covid-19 pandemic. At the same time, responsibility as a moral frame is frequently mentioned by Chinese government in cooperation to fight against Covid 19 pandemic. For example, the following is the statement of Chinese ambassador quoted from "To everlasting friendship between China, Malaysia":

2020 is a very special year. At its very beginning, China was first hit by Covid-19. Facing the formidable challenges, the Chinese government and people stood as one and went all out to save every life there was to save.

While we are keeping the pandemic in check within our borders, China never hesitates to cooperate with others in this common fight for all humanity.

We shared information with the WHO as fast as we can, we shared our experience in disease control and treatment as often as we can, and we contributed funds and medical supplies to the international community as much as we can.

In summary, while both countries' news coverage incorporates moral considerations, the focus differs: US-related news often deals with human right, social justice, and foreign policy, whereas China-related news is more centered around moral evaluation, economic ethics, and social responsibility. This reflects the different socio-political contexts and global roles of the two countries.

4.2 News Valence in the International Reports of US and China

A statistical analysis was conducted to compare the valence of international news reports related to the United States and China in Malaysian prominent newspapers. Descriptive statistics from Table 2 reveal that 46 articles (30.9%) covering the US were classified as negative, 78 articles (52.3%) as neutral, and 25 articles (16.8%) as positive. In contrast, 42 articles (23.2%) related to China were negative, 72 articles (39.8%) were neutral, and 67 articles (37.0%) were positive. These figures suggest a more positive tone in China-related news, while US-related news tends to be more neutral or negative.

Table 2 News Valence in the International Reports about US and China.

News Valence	US		China	
	N	%	N	%
Negative	46	30.9	42	23.2
Neutral	78	52.3	72	39.8
Positive	25	16.8	67	37.0
Total	149	100.0	181	100.0

To assess whether these differences were statistically significant, a Chi-square test of independence was conducted. The test yielded a Chi-square value of 16.65 ($p = .00024$), indicating a significant difference in the distribution of news valence between US- and China-related news. With a p-value well below the standard alpha level of .05, the results suggest that the observed variation in news valence between the two countries is unlikely to be due to chance.

The key findings from this analysis show that US-related news is more frequently neutral (52.3%) or negative (30.9%), while China-related news has a higher proportion of positive coverage (37%). The lower percentage of negative reports on China (23.2%) compared to the US suggests that the tone of coverage differs substantially between the two countries.

4.3 Correlation Between News Frames and News Valence

Table 3 presents Pearson correlation coefficients between different news frames (e.g., cooperation, conflict, economic impact) and news valence (negative, neutral, positive), along with their levels of statistical significance. The correlation coefficients range from -1 to 1, indicating the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. A positive correlation suggests that as one variable increases, the other tends to increase, while a negative correlation indicates that as one variable increases, the other tends to decrease. Correlations marked with two asterisks (**) are significant at the 0.01 level ($p < 0.01$), indicating less than a 1% likelihood of the result being due to chance. Correlations marked with one asterisk (*) are significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$), meaning there is less than a 5% likelihood of the result being due to chance.

Table 3 Correlation between News Frames and News Valence

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Cooperation	1	-.198**	.215**	-0.09	.221**	-.240**	0.013	.222**
2. Conflict		1	0.06	.196**	.198**	.319**	0.007	-.322**
3. Economic Impact			1	-.122*	0.107	-0.04	-0.09	.138*
4. Human Interest				1	-0.02	0.093	0.104	-.208**
5. Morality					1	-0.05	0.017	0.027
6. Negative						1	-.550**	-.375**
7. Neutral							1	-.568**
8. Positive								1

The cooperation frame was found to have several significant relationships. It showed a moderate negative correlation with conflict (r = -.198, p < 0.01), indicating that news emphasizing cooperation is less likely to focus on conflict. Additionally, cooperation was positively correlated with economic impact (r = .215, p < 0.01) and morality (r = .221, p < 0.01), suggesting that news stories framed around cooperation often include economic considerations and moral themes. Cooperation was also negatively correlated with negative valence (r = -.240, p < 0.01), indicating that cooperative frames are less likely to be associated with negative news. Conversely, a positive correlation was found between cooperation and positive valence (r = .222, p < 0.01), suggesting that cooperative frames are more likely to be linked with positive news coverage.

The conflict frame demonstrated notable associations with several variables. It was positively correlated with human interest (r = .196, p < 0.01), indicating that conflict-focused stories are often framed with a human-interest angle. Conflict was also positively correlated with morality (r = .198, p < 0.01), suggesting that news framed around conflict frequently incorporates moral issues. Stronger correlations were observed between conflict and both negative (r = .319, p < 0.01) and positive valence (r = -.322, p < 0.01), revealing that conflict frames are significantly associated with negative news and tend to be inversely related to positive news.

For the economic impact frame, a weak negative correlation was found with human interest (r = -.122, p < 0.05), suggesting that news framed around economic impact is slightly less likely to include a human-interest element. A weak positive correlation was observed between economic impact and positive valence (r = .138, p < 0.05), indicating that stories framed around economic issues tend to have a slight association with positive news valence.

The human-interest frame exhibited a moderate negative correlation with positive valence (r = -.208, p < 0.01), indicating that stories framed around human interest are less likely to be positively valenced. Additionally, the analysis of the negative valence category revealed a strong negative correlation with neutral valence (r = -.550, p < 0.01) and a moderate negative correlation with positive valence (r = -.375, p < 0.01), showing that negative news is rarely neutral or positive. Finally, neutral valence exhibited a very strong negative correlation with positive valence (r = -.568, p < 0.01), indicating that neutral news coverage is unlikely to be associated with positive framing.

Lastly, the morality frame did not exhibit any significant correlations with any of the valence categories: negative valence (r=−0.05, p > .05), neutral valence (r=0.017, p > .05), or positive valence (r=0.027, p > .05), suggesting that the morality frame operates independently of news valence.

Overall, the analysis highlights significant relationships between news frames and valence. Conflict frames are strongly associated with negative valence, while cooperation frames are more frequently linked to positive valence. Economic impact frames show a slight tendency toward positive news, and human-interest frames are less likely to be positively valanced.

Conclusion and Discussion

The study's findings offer a comprehensive examination of the differences in how the U.S. and China are framed and portrayed in international news reports, particularly in Malaysian media. The results have important implications for understanding how media coverage reflects and shapes global perceptions of these two superpowers.

5.1 Framing and Media Representation

The study highlights significant differences in the framing of U.S. and China-related news, particularly in the use of the economic impact, conflict, and human-interest frames. These findings align with the broader literature on media framing, which suggests that frames influence public opinion by highlighting certain aspects of an issue while downplaying others (Entman, 1993). By emphasizing China's economic role and downplaying conflict, the media could be contributing to a more favorable global perception of China, particularly in regions with strong economic ties to the country, such as Southeast Asia (Golan, 2008).

The prominence of the economic impact frame in China-related news (67.8%) compared to U.S.-related news (52.3%) is particularly notable. This aligns with China's growing role as a global economic powerhouse, especially in regions where China's economic influence is more direct, such as through infrastructure projects and trade agreements under the Belt and Road Initiative (Zhang, 2021). In contrast, the U.S. is often portrayed as having an indirect economic impact, primarily through domestic policies that ripple through global markets or through sanctions. This difference reflects broader geopolitical trends, where China is increasingly seen as an emerging economic leader, while the U.S. is perceived as using its economic power to maintain global influence through sanctions and policy-driven market shifts (Shambaugh, 2020).

The significant use of the conflict frame in U.S.-related news (48.3%) compared to China (27.2%) suggests that the U.S. is more often portrayed in terms of geopolitical tensions and military confrontations. This may reflect the U.S.'s ongoing involvement in conflicts in the Middle East, tensions with Russia, and the frequent use of economic sanctions as a foreign policy tool (Chomsky & Achcar, 2007). In contrast, China's conflicts, when reported, are often framed around territorial disputes, particularly in the South China Sea, rather than

military interventions or global sanctions. This difference in conflict portrayal may influence international perceptions, potentially positioning China as a more cooperative and economically-driven global actor compared to the U.S., which is often seen as embroiled in conflicts and confrontations (Wang & Lobel, 2021).

The study also finds significant differences in the use of the human-interest frame, with U.S.-related news much more likely to focus on personal stories (71.5%) compared to China (38%). This finding aligns with Western journalism's emphasis on individualism and personal narratives (Iyengar, 1991). In contrast, China's state-controlled media and its emphasis on collective action and national achievements may result in fewer human-interest stories that focus on individual experiences (Zhao, 2013). The significant difference in the use of this frame may also influence audience engagement, as human-interest stories tend to evoke stronger emotional responses and personal connections with the audience (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Thus, the higher prevalence of human-interest frames in U.S. coverage may lead to a more emotionally resonant but potentially more critical portrayal of the U.S., particularly if these stories focus on negative or controversial events.

The morality frame was found to be similarly prevalent in both U.S. and China-related news, though the themes differed. U.S. coverage often focused on social justice and human rights issues, such as the Black Lives Matter movement or immigration policies, whereas China-related news focused more on issues like the COVID-19 pandemic and economic ethics. This difference reflects the distinct political and social contexts of each country, with U.S. media more likely to emphasize individual rights and freedoms, while Chinese media may frame issues through a lens of collective responsibility and state-led ethics (Zhao, 2008). The similar prevalence of morality framing in both countries suggests that ethical considerations play a key role in shaping narratives around both superpowers, though the content of these narratives differs.

5.2 News Valence and Media Bias

The news valence analysis reveals that U.S.-related news is more likely to be neutral (52.3%) or negative (30.9%), whereas China-related news is more likely to be positive (37%) or neutral (39.8%). These findings suggest a more favorable portrayal of China compared to the U.S., at least in the Malaysian media context. This may reflect broader geopolitical alignments or media bias, where the economic benefits of relations with China could lead to more positive coverage (Dunaway et al., 2011). Malaysia's strong economic ties with China, particularly through trade and investment, could influence the tone of media coverage, with more positive reporting on China to align with national interests.

This difference in valence also aligns with research on media bias and international relations. Studies have shown that countries with closer political or economic ties to a nation often portray that nation more positively in the media (Shehata, 2014). In this case, the more positive framing of China could reflect Malaysia's growing economic dependence on China, while the more neutral or negative coverage of the U.S. may reflect waning influence or a more distant relationship.

However, it is important to consider the potential influence of media ownership and governmental control in shaping these narratives. In many Southeast Asian countries, including Malaysia, media outlets are often closely aligned with government interests, and coverage may reflect official foreign policy positions (Hanan & Rahmat, 2020). China's strategic partnerships and investments in the region may influence the media to adopt a more positive tone in reporting on China, while coverage of the U.S. may be more critical or neutral. This suggests that media coverage can serve as a soft power tool, subtly shaping public opinion through strategic framing and valence.

5.3 News Frames and News Valence

The correlation analysis reveals important patterns between news frames and valence.

Conflict frames are strongly associated with negative news, while cooperation frames tend to be linked with positive news. Economic impact frames show a slight tendency toward positive valence, and human interest frames are less likely to be positively framed.

Previous framing studies, such as those by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), have suggested that positive news frames are often associated with themes of cooperation, particularly in diplomatic or international relations contexts. Stories highlighting collaboration between nations or positive socio-economic outcomes tend to present a more optimistic, hopeful tone.This study strengthens the empirical link between cooperation frames and positive news valence, further supporting the notion that cooperative news stories are more likely to portray events in a favorable light.

Similarly, the association between conflict frames and negative news is well-documented. Conflict frames tend to emphasize disputes, struggles, and negative events, which often lead to a more critical or pessimistic tone in media coverage (Entman, 1993; Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992). Consistent with these earlier studies, the conflict frame in this research shows a significant positive correlation with negative valence and a negative correlation with positive valence. These findings highlight how media framing of conflict directly contributes to more negative coverage.

Research on human interest frames has traditionally focused on the emotional engagement they create (Valkenburg, Semetko, & de Vreese, 1999). These frames often focus on individual stories and personal impacts, which can evoke either positive or negative emotions depending on the context. Interestingly, the human-interest frame in this study is negatively correlated with positive valence, suggesting that human-interest stories are more likely to be associated with negative tones rather than positive ones. This diverges somewhat from the traditional view that human interest framing is neutral or emotion-driven without a clear

valence. It suggests that human interest stories, while emotionally engaging, may often lean towards highlighting suffering, tragedy, or personal hardship, contributing to negative news narratives.

Studies on the economic impact frame have often associated it with neutral or mixed valence, as economic news can be complex and context-dependent (de Vreese, 2005). In this study, the economic impact frame shows a weak but significant positive correlation with positive valence, which suggests that news stories framed around economic issues tend to be associated with a slight increase in positive news coverage.

Morality framing, which emphasizes ethical considerations or value judgments, has been found to be highly context-specific. Some studies (e.g., Shah et al., 2002) have suggested that morality frames can vary widely in their valence depending on the nature of the news story. The morality frame in this study did not exhibit any significant correlations with negative, neutral, or positive valence. This indicates that morality frames operate independently of the emotional tone of the news.

In conclusion, this study not only corroborates existing findings in framing literature but also offers fresh insights into how different frames interact with news valence, contributing to the broader understanding of the media's role in shaping public perceptions through framing.

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