

LESSON LEARNT FROM THE FRAMING AND PRIMING OF THE PENANG SOUTH RECLAMATION (PSR) PROJECT IN *SIN CHEW DAILY* AND *SINAR HARIAN*

Christina Yong Zi Xin¹ & Nik Norma Nik Hasan^{2*}

School of Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Jalan Universiti, 11700 Gelugor,
Pulau Pinang

*Corresponding Author: niknorma@usm.my

ABSTRACT

This study examines how the Penang South Reclamation (PSR) project is framed and primed in *Sin Chew Daily* and *Sinar Harian*. PSR creates highly polarised public discourse where media coverage often shapes public perceptions of environmental, socio-economic and political consequences. Thus, the study aims to compare the selected and salient aspects of land reclamation issues among the newspapers. News articles sampled from 1 January 2016 to 31 October 2018. Anchored by framing and priming theories, the content analysis reveals that *Sin Chew Daily* predominantly frames the PSR project in terms of development progress, economic benefits and modernization, priming readers to view it as a catalyst for regional growth. In contrast, *Sinar Harian* frequently highlights environmental risks, fishermen's livelihoods and community concerns, thus priming readers to prioritise socio-environmental impacts. Nevertheless, some similarities were also found, particularly in how both media saliently framed the PSR as a political agenda, which reflects an agenda-setting effect. This can be explained by their patterns of source usage and the influence of media ownership. The study contributes to framing and priming theory by demonstrating how linguistic, cultural and audience-oriented editorial practices shape divergent issue salience, offering insights into how Malaysian media construct contested environmental developments.

Keywords: *environmental issue, agenda setting, news salience, content analysis, Chinese newspaper, Malay newspaper*

INTRODUCTION

The Penang South Reclamation (PSR) project proposed in 2015 aims improve public transport and access roads with a projected cost of RM50 billion. It comprises of three manmade reclaimed islands namely Island A (2300-acres), Island B (1400-acres) and

Island C (800-acres). The reclamation project is part of the Penang Transportation Masterplan (PTMP), aligned to the Penang's 2030 town planning vision. The Project site is located across the southern coastline of Penang Island between the headlands of Tanjung Teluk Tempoyak (east) and Tanjung Gertak Sanggul (west) (Osman & Muhamad Nor, 2024; Zheng, 2020).

Despite rejections made by several parties, particularly environmentalists, the fishing community and the federal government, who argue that the reclamation will negatively affect health, environmental conditions and economic wellbeing, especially for fishermen, the project commenced on 1 July 2023. Most debates on the issue have taken place in the media and on social media (Salmen et. al., 2025; De Giosa, 2024; Su et. al., 2017).

Media is important in triggering the importance of manifesting environmental awareness and behaviour performance among Malaysians (Hassan et. al., 2024). Similarly, Hansen (2018) argues that mass media is a platform or medium for informing environmental issues and competing claims, dissension and judgement about the use or preservation of the environment. Public depends on the media for information of inconspicuous issues such as environmental issue beyond their immediate surroundings.

In Malaysia, the characteristic of multilingual societies influences the newspapers' structure of the country. The significant roles played by the Chinese language newspapers are believed to change rapidly over time (Lee & Mohd Safar, 2015). Many Malaysian Chinese language newspapers including *Sin Chew Daily*, is owned by Media Chinese International Limited (Annual Report and CG Report: Media Chinese International Limited, 2018). This organization is closely linked to the Barisan Nasional (BN) component party Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) (Soadah & Shafizan, 2017). Although these mainstream Chinese language newspapers are inseparably connected with political parties, they are giving balanced space to the Chinese association and political parties with distinct ideologies if their agendas concern over Chinese community's interests (Lee & Mohd Safar, 2015).

Similarly, Yang and Md. Sidin (2015) claim that many Malay language newspapers are owned by the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) and they are less independent when compared to Chinese language newspapers. However, *Sinar Harian*, owned by an individual businessman that is said to practice unbiased reporting and more inclusive of grassroots politics (Mohammad Noorhusni & Abd Rasid, 2017). Nevertheless, it is not known to what extent the journalism practice of *Sinar Harian* has an impact on the environmental coverage.

This study argues that media outlets, depending on their ownership and ideological orientation, set their agendas based on their targeted audiences, as reader demand

influences how news content is shaped. The Malay- and Chinese-language newspapers were selected for this study partly because Penang has a predominantly Malay (42.25%) and Chinese (39.42%) population (Department of Statistics, 2018) and the PSR project directly affects the local communities, particularly Malay and Chinese fishermen. *Sin Chew* and *Sinar Harian* were also chosen because they are among the most widely read newspapers in the state.

In this context, the Chinese and Malay language newspapers play a role in spreading information to their respective communities in Penang. The newspapers' frames and the agenda of the news is worth studying as they could influence the perception of targeted readers toward the reclamation project. Hence, this study is aimed to investigate how Malaysian Malay and Chinese language newspapers frame and prime the Penang South Reclamation-related news stories for their respective community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Penang Reclamation Project

Penang state government proposed the PSR Scheme which is a large-scale project to reclaim three islands totalling 1800ha off the southern-west coast of Penang to fund the Penang Transport Masterplan (PTMP) (Hoe & Abdullah, 2025; Osman & Muhamad Nor, 2024; Zheng, 2020).

Under Section 2A(2)(b) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172), any mega project must obtain approval from the federal government. In 2015, Lim Guan Eng, the Chief Minister of Penang, submitted an application to the federal government for planning approval and to conduct environmental impact studies for the National Physical Planning Council (MPFN). However, this submission would only be approved if it could be demonstrated that it would not have adverse impacts on the public (Audrey & Balvin, 2017). This response was not in favour of the Penang government, which argued that the PSR had already received approvals from two technical assessments (Audrey, 2018).

The PSR project also been protested by public when it was first announced. Penang fishermen, environmentalists and NGOs staged many protests against the proposed land reclamation project as they feared that such project would badly affect the quality of water and the marine environment in the area. The analysis done by Nadzhirah, Mansor and Mazlina (2014) proved that there was a significant correlation between quality of life with business outlets, awareness of harmful effect, flash flood, environmental pollution, traffic congestion, health and development. It found that community of Tanjung Tokong were aware of the harmful effect of coastal reclamation such as noise pollution, flash flood and air pollution.

Studies on the PSR project consistently highlight environmental, social and governance concerns, including potential ecological degradation, threats to fishermen's livelihoods and public health risks (Salmen et. al., 2025; Hoe & Abdullah, 2025). These studies collectively underscore the tension between developmental ambitions and community/environmental advocacy, emphasizing the need for more inclusive stakeholder engagement and transparent governance in mega reclamation projects. Despite this, work on the PSR project began on 1 July 2023.

Environmental News Coverage

Media and public discourse analyses reveal that coverage of PSR is highly contested, with newspapers and social media framing the project in terms of economic development or socio-environmental risk, influencing public perception and debate (De Giosa, 2024; Su et al., 2017).

Media professionals play an important role in changing the public's perception on environmental issues while the media coverage of environmental issues helps the reader to understand the concepts that shape their beliefs and perspectives (Thirumalaiah & Aram, 2017). However, there are some constraints in the field of environmental journalism in delivering a holistic news stories to the public. Not all environmental problems are patently recognised as problems unless they have received either social, political or legislative attention (Hansen, 2018). In Malaysia, the environmental issue is often affiliated with a wider range of dialogue including legal, ethical and economic issues. Journalists too are more interested to focus on drama and conflict of an issue (Sualman, Jaafar, & Salbiah, 2017).

Study done by Sualman, Jaafar and Salbiah (2017) in examining the coverage of Lynas Plant Project in five Malaysian newspapers has shown that five newspapers in Malaysia focused more on the political discourse rather than the environmental safety and new technology. Environmental reporters were keener on positive reporting about environmental groups than business, general and political news. Furthermore, most of the news were published in the form of straight news but not debating on.

In Malaysia, the representation of environmental news is often limited to topical, small-scale and event-driven stories (Dauda & Hasan, 2018; Sualman, Jaafar, & Salbiah, 2017; Jamilah & Habibah, 2016). Coverage of issues such as the Lynas plant and landslides by these scholars revealed that newspapers exhibit similarities in their reporting, despite differing editorial principles and ideologies. They rely heavily on government officials as news sources and environmental news is frequently presented as straightforward news. As a result, the media often fail to disseminate environmental information equitably to the audience. This pattern may be closely related to ownership structures and ideological orientations, which influence the content of environmental reporting.

Malay & Chinese Newspapers in Malaysia

Due to the characteristic of Malaysia as a multi-ethnic society, the ethnic group interest newspapers usually pander to the communal interest. Vernacular newspapers in Malaysia are published in their own languages to represent their respective ethnic groups. They are also very keen to concentrate on events which are more important to their respective communities (Lee & Wong, 2022). For example, Chinese-language media is irreplaceable in disseminating information, shaping public opinion, fostering social consensus and conveying the Chinese perspective (Kuik, 2024).

Also, preserving Chinese culture such as Chinese education and language and defending communal rights of the Chinese community are the roles that played by the local Chinese press (Shao & Nik Norma, 2017). Therefore, the coverage from Chinese language newspapers is tended to give space to the political parties regardless of their different ideologies, if their agendas are concerned about Chinese community's interests (Lee & Mohd Safar, 2015).

However, Lee and Mohd Safar (2015) argue that Chinese language mainstream newspapers cannot be separated from political party as they are often affiliated with ruling party to promote the government policies such as nation building. Due to the legislation constraint, it is also challenging for the Chinese language newspapers to defend the communal interests and at the same time propagate the government policies on another (Yang & Md Sidin, 2011).

On the other hand, Yang & Md. Sidin (2015) claimed that Malay newspapers, has been that owned by pro-government political party- UMNO- is influenced by the ownership in their journalism practices. A significant majority of news reporting in *Utusan Malaysia* shows a prominent absence of any response by non-UMNO spokespersons or representatives (*ibid*, 2015).

Differently, Wan Rohila Ganti et al. (2013) found that *Sinar Harian* presents a balanced reporting by giving opportunity to both parties to speak out and defend their stance. The findings of the study that done by Mohammad Noorhusni & Abd Rasid (2017) also found that coverage of the *Sinar Harian* on 2017 budget was comprehensive in presenting the whole aspects of budgeting as compared to *The Star*. Small conclusion can be made is that media ownership is able to influence news contents, selection of sources and how issues are framed.

Framing & Priming Theory

According to Tankard et al. (1991), a news frame is a central organizing idea that caters for audience with a context of an issue using selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration. To add on, Diana (2018) contends that journalists use framing to process and distribute information to audience effectively and regularly as they need to take quick decision on what is worth to be reported in their surroundings.

For example, Patterson's (1989) framing analysis of American and other Western news coverage of the Chernobyl nuclear accident found that the accident was framed saliently in terms of the hazarded technological inadequacy of the Soviet Union by devoting to the issue of incompetence of Soviet nuclear industry while explicitly diverting attention away from Western nuclear technology and the dangerous of nuclear power.

Framing is a concept and methodology which address the interaction of contexts and media reporting. It is possible to tell different stories in the same issue and the role of the news media is to decide how people should think and talk about public discourse through framing devices. In the field of framing analysis, Entman (1993) in Hamidah & Chu (2010) is well known for his influential definition of framing, "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral judgments, and treatment recommendation".

Priming theory posits that media exposure influences the criteria audiences use to evaluate issues, making certain attributes more cognitively accessible when forming judgments (Iyengar, 1990). Closely related is framing theory, which emphasizes how media select and highlight certain aspects of an issue, thereby shaping the interpretation of information (Entman, 1993 in Hamidah & Chu, 2010).

In environmental journalism, framing and priming interact: for example, when media repeatedly frame climate change as a crisis, emphasizing extreme weather events and ecological risks, they prime audiences to perceive environmental issues as urgent and salient, influencing public opinion and policy support (Detjen, 2000). Thus, framing not only structures the presentation of environmental news but also primes the audience to prioritize specific concerns, demonstrating how media can guide attention, interpretation, and evaluation in environmental discourse (Carroll & McCombs, 2003). This study seeks to answer how the Penang reclamation project is presented by *Sin Chew Daily* and *Sinar Harian* in the aspects of problem definition, causal analysis, remedy and moral judgments that can be identified in the news content.

METHODOLOGY

According to Entman (1993) in Hamidah & Chu (2010), some aspects of a perceived reality are saliently selected and others are excluded to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral judgments, and/or treatment recommendations. In order to answer the research questions outlined above, this study will use framing analysis from Entman (1993) in Hamidah & Chu (2010) works to find the specific media frames of Penang South Reclamation that used in reporting by the four selected newspapers.

Table 1: Framing Analysis Method

Defining The Problem	Problem definition of the Penang reclamation project is usually found in earlier construction of the story although sometimes they may be found in any other construction of the story. Basically, definition refers to phrases used to describe the land reclamation as an introduction to the story.
Diagnose Causes	Causes are factors or reasons or actor that are responsible for risks and benefits of the land reclamation issue.
Make Moral Judgement	This refers to the emphasis on precautions and the awareness of the probability effects that comes from the land reclamation issue. It is an assessment of the moral values used to legitimize or argue for an action or idea being made. They may come in the form of opinion or decision.
Treatment Recommendation	Remedies or treatment are solutions to the land reclamation issue. It usually comes in the form of suggestion to outcome the problem arose for the better living of the people today and tomorrow.
Consequence statement	To state consequences. Consequences are the impacts or effects of the land reclaiming projects. Consequences may be reported in the form of predicting or foretelling the probability outcome due to pollution and the unsustainable development.

Source: Entman (1993) in Hamidah & Chu (2010).

This study examined news articles on the PSR project from *Sin Chew Daily* and *Sinar Harian* over a two-year period (2016–2018) to map early framing and priming patterns before the project commenced. Although the dataset predates later developments, analysing earlier coverage is academically important because initial media frames often shape long-term public understanding and establish the dominant narratives that persist as an issue evolves. *Sin Chew Daily*, the most widely read Chinese-language newspaper in Malaysia and the online version of *Sinar Harian*, ranked the 34th most visited website nationally and the third most visited news site after *Malaysiakini* and *The Star* (Ng & Lee, 2018; ABCM, 2018), were selected due to their strong audience reach. *Sin Chew Daily* is the leading Chinese language newspaper in Malaysia. According to the report from the Audit Bureau of Circulation from January to June 2018, the circulation figures for Chinese newspapers combine both day and night editions *Sin Chew Daily* has the highest daily circulation of 293,804. On the other hand, *Sinar Harian* internet version, was ranked as 34th most visited sites in Malaysia and also the third most visited site after *Malaysiakini.com* and *The Star* (ABC, 2008). The number of its visitors has increased from time to time and *Sinar Harian* was the first newspapers to be sold out during Malaysia’s 2013 General Election (Wan Rohila Ganti, Nurul Saadatun Nadiyah, & Ilyas, 2013).

The sample for this study covers 1 January 2016 to 31 October 2018, using systematic sampling that focused on news published on Mondays. News articles were collected from archival sources using the following search terms: “PSR,” “three artificial islands,”

“Bayan Lepas LRT,” and “Penang Transport Master Plan.” There were 16 news articles from *Sin Chew* and 19 from *Sinar Harian*. The unit of analysis was the news content, excluding the headlines. A pre-test of the framing coding sheet was conducted prior to the actual coding to assess the coder’s understanding and the reliability of the coding instrument.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Synthesis of the findings can be described as in Table 2 below.

Table 2: A comparison of framing on PSR between *Sin Chew Daily* and *Sinar Harian*

Framing Element	<i>Sin Chew Daily</i>	<i>Sinar Harian</i>
Defines problem	PSR is framed as the problem that related to socioeconomic of fishermen and political conflict.	PSR is framed as the problem that related to socioeconomic of fishermen, political conflict and environmental sustainability.
Diagnose causes	Political contest of state-federal governments is framed as the cause of the PSR issue.	Poor handling of PSR by the governance of state government is saliently framed as cause of the PSR issue.
Make moral judgement	Accountability of state-federal governments is framed as the moral judgement.	Accountability of state-federal governments is framed as the moral judgement.
Treatment recommendation	Responsibility of the stakeholders and unity of fishermen in rejecting the reclamation are framed as the problem-solving.	Responsibility of the stakeholders such as state and federal government and unity of the fishermen is framed as the problem-solving for the problem.
Consequence statement	PSR can cause the destruction of socioeconomic of fishermen but providing job opportunities.	PSR may cause the destruction of socioeconomic of fishermen and marine environment but providing job opportunities.

Problem Definition

According to Entman (1993) in Hamidah & Chu (2010), problem definition is concerned with explaining how an issue is problematized. Findings show that both newspapers problematize the reclamation issue from the aspect of socioeconomic of the fishermen and political conflict. Sualman, Jaafar & Salbiah (2017) explained the journalist incline to frame the environmental issue into drama and conflict. From the aspect of socioeconomic of the fishermen, the selected newspapers saliently do coverage on the protest of the marine fisheries operator especially fishermen community towards the PSR project. The newspapers saliently frame the PSR project as a problem that victimise the fishermen and disrupt their livelihood. This is in line with Nik Norma’s (2008) findings about environmental news is represented as conflict or from a sensational stories approach to increase circulation and profits as required by the newspaper’s owners.

Sin Chew Daily frames the issue of Penang South Reclamation (PSR) project into (i) socioeconomic of fishermen and (ii) political conflict. It frames PSR project as a problem that will affect the livelihood and income of fishermen living surrounding affected areas. That is the main reason why fishermen stand firm on their decision to reject the reclamation project. It reflects that *Sin Chew Daily* pays attention in the welfare of the fishermen. A statement that made by the Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) officer Zulkifli Ahmad in *Sin Chew Daily* is quoted as below:

"Zulkifli said the reclamation already affected fishermen community; Prime Minister should halt the project...SAM has received complaints from the fishermen in the state. They complained that the reclamation project has affected their catches and income." (Sin Chew Daily, 6 October 2017).

Sin Chew Daily also framed PSR project as a political contentious problem between federal government and Penang state government especially in the approval of PSR Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report. Penang state government is not satisfied with the federal government for politicising the PSR issue. Therefore, the local government, traffic management and flood mitigation committee chairman, Chow Kon Yeow criticised Dr Wan Junaidi, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment for being bias and reject the reclamation project without reasonable judgement.

Besides, the PSR project is framed as a political contentious problem between federal government and Penang state government especially in the approval of PSR EIA report. Federal government which is led by Barisan Nasional (BN) inclines to reject the PSR project by giving reason that it will cause destruction to marine environment and livelihood of the marine fisheries operators.

In response, Penang state government has criticised federal government for politicising the PSR issue. The attribution of political conflict frame can be explained by Griffin and Dunwoody (1997) who claimed that conflict is part of daily routine in pluralistic community because the community leaders and interest groups are vying to speak out with their opinions. Therefore, the media in pluralistic community is more likely to relect conflicting points of view about the issue.

Sinar Harian also has conceptualised PSR issue as an environmental sustainability problem. This frame argues that PSR project is an environmental problem that will cause destruction to the marine environment and marine life. However, the destruction of livelihood of the fishermen overweighs the destruction of marine ecology in the coverage. This is because the socioeconomic of fishermen is emphasized as the effect of the destruction of marine ecology. In sum, the two newspapers have selected the aspects of political conflict and socioeconomic of fishermen and make them salient to problematize the PSR issue. One excerpt stated as follows.

"Kami tak akan berhenti membantah projek ini sehingga kami terpaksa masuk lokap ataupun penjara, kami tak kisah." (Sinar Harian, 28 December 2017).

Causal Interpretation

Findings show that poor governance by the Penang state government is central to the coverage in *Sinar Harian*. Based on the framing analysis, *Sinar Harian* portrays the Penang state government as irresponsible for failing to consider the well-being and interests of fishermen in their development planning. Coverage of the federal government and the public, who may be affected by the project, is minimal. Although Wan Rohila et al. (2013) found that *Sinar Harian* generally provides fair and unbiased coverage, its reporting on the PSR project suggests otherwise. Quote by *Sinar Harian* is shown below.

Jika kepentingan rakyat menjadi keutamaan DAP, tentu sekali mereka langsung tidak akan menimbangkan cadangan ini..."(Sinar Harian, 27 August 2017).

On the other hand, *Sin Chew Daily* has framed the political contest between the Penang state government and the federal government as central to the issue. It criticizes the state government for lacking the authority to carry out reclamation in Penang, while also highlighting the federal government's biases as contributing to the PSR project. It is quoted as below.

"Asked why not borrow money from the federal government, he (Lim Guan Eng) explained, it is already very difficult for federal government to approve PTMP, not to mention borrow money." (Sin Chew Daily, 31 May 2017).

However, Xie (2015) argues that the definition of balanced reporting in environmental issues is problematic, criticizing the practice as a misleading self-fulfilling vision that prioritizes the perspectives of political powers rather than the scientific community. In short, balanced reporting in environmental coverage is not equivalent to that in political coverage. Therefore, it cannot be conclusively stated that *Sinar Harian* presents imbalanced and *Sin Chew Daily* is fair in reporting on PSR.

Moral Judgement

Although the two newspapers have stressed on the accountability of state-federal governments to protect the well-being and interest of their people, the accountability frame is presented in a pro and con way. Positive moral judgements sounded

suggesting and in hopeful tone. For example, *Sinar Harian* frames Penang state government is accountable for protecting the marine environment and the interest of people in a balanced development planning. On the other hand, negative moral judgements are presented in the form of putting Penang and fishermen at stake for the lack of concerns shown by the state government. The government is said digressing from the objective of development as they failed to balance up the between economic, nature and welfare of people. An example of the coverage is as below.

"Pembangunan yang seimbang adalah sangat penting bagi memastikan tiada rakyat ketinggalan dan tenggelam dalam arus pemodenan dan pembangunan yang pesat," (Sinar Harian, 16 February 2017).

Sinar Harian also has presented positive accountability frame when portraying the federal government in handling the PSR project fairly. Meanwhile, *Sin Chew Daily* criticises federal government for rejecting the PSR project unreasonably and emphasised they should behave fairly in deciding whether to approve the EIA report of PSR project. For example, one of the statements made as follows.

"He (Lim) asked if the federal government oppose the Penang South Reclamation plan, why other states such as Johor, Malacca and Kedah can be carried out the reclamation since their reclaimed area is four times larger than that of the island of Penang, and some have not given the fisherman enough compensation." (Sin Chew Daily, 27 August 2017)

Treatment Recommendation

In the treatment recommendation element, both Penang state government and federal government are framed as the responsible entities who should work together for the welfare and well-being of the fishermen. The state government is advised to follow the rules by submitting the EIA report in accordance with the procedure and consider other alternatives to fund PTMP. Since the reclamation is necessary for funding PTMP, Penang state government is advised by federal government to think of other alternatives to replace PSR project.

Sinar Harian conceptualises Barisan Nasional (BN) is responsible as the problem-solver for the PSR issue. This frame thus reflects Barisan Nasional would be of help to the fishermen community. On the other hand, *Sin Chew Daily* has framed the responsibility of federal government in different way by urging federal government to handle the PSR project with same standard as other states' reclamation project.

"Kerajaan Negeri Pulau Pinang seharusnya mencari kaedah alternatif bagi menambah pendapatan untuk menampung kos projek tersebut" (Sinar Harian, 16 January 2016).

Interestingly, *Sin Chew Daily* and *Sinar Harian* also frame the unity of fishermen in opposing reclamation and the idea of changing the state government as a potential solution to the PSR issue. In short, both newspapers highlight the need for a change in the state government and emphasize the responsibilities of the state and federal governments as their primary recommendations. Based on these findings, it can be argued that the role of the two newspapers as educators, aimed at raising public awareness on environmental issues, is compromised, as they appear to reinforce specific political stances in their reporting.

Consequence Statement

Basically, *Sin Chew Daily* and *Sinar Harian* have presented the consequence of the PSR project by giving the pros and cons of the reclamation project. For example, PSR could cause negative effect to the marine environment and socioeconomic of fishermen, at the same time, it is providing or creating job opportunity to the people. However, the effect of PSR project to human activities is more saliently framed. This is resonated with the statement by Tong (2014) about environmental problem are seen exclusively as anthropogenic problems associated with economic activities. One excerpt from *Sin Chew Daily* says:

"...the reclaimed sea area is rich in ikan kembung so the reclamation will cause fish stock diminish." (Sin Chew Daily, 31 December 2017).

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the socioeconomic of the people is saliently framed by the newspapers. The low level of environmental awareness among the Malaysians influence the attitude of the public towards the environment issue. People only interest in caring about the environment only if the environmental problem affects their livelihood and well-being.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, both *Sin Chew Daily* and *Sinar Harian* have politicised the PSR issue by publishing heavy coverage of the political dimension of the PSR issue. The newspapers have somewhat failed to serve as an educator to increase public awareness on environmental issue but reinforce what political powers should the reader take side. In fact, the newspapers relied heavily on politicians as their news sources also lent to this assertion. The environmental journalism has not managed to provide relevant information to the audience and increase the awareness of the audience on the risk of unsustainable development but dichotomized the good and bad of the political parties on this issue. Therefore, the politicization of environmental issue in Malaysia also finds support in this study.

As reviewed earlier, newspapers in Malaysia are keener on political debate than environmental safety precaution, while employing politician and government official as the main source of the news reporting at the same time (Sualman, Jaafar, & Salbiah,

2017). The stance can be seen in (1) the newspapers' focus on political debate among Penang state government and federal government regarding the approval of EIA report, (2) heavy responsibility attributed to state-federal governments, and (3) changing of state government is recommended and (4) Barisan Nasional (BN) is suggested as the problem-solver.

Media set the agenda through media framing which the specific aspects of events and issues are selected and well-organized in order to help the public to make sense of the issues. Molek-Kozakowska (2017) also argues that media agenda is a selected story that fit the news organization's own political or commercial interests.

Although *Sinar Harian* and *Sin Chew Daily* are private-oriented newspapers, the two newspapers are still exhibiting different frame usage as well. However, *Sin Chew Daily* has omitted the environmental agenda in the news framing. On the other hand, framing of *Sinar Harian* has given more prominence on supporting the federal government or BN politicians. Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate why newspapers in the same category can differ in their use of news frames and how market demands affect their journalism practice.

Based on the findings, the two newspapers prime the audience to prioritize political stance and power in the PSR issue. This is reflected across the framing elements, including problem identification (political conflict), causal interpretation (conflict between the federal and state governments), moral judgment (accountability of the state and federal governments), and treatment recommendation (framing the Penang state government and the federal government as the responsible entities). The only exception is the consequence statement, which focuses on the marine environment and the fishermen's socioeconomic conditions. Overall, *Sin Chew Daily* primes the PSR issue as a conflict while also presenting it as a catalyst for regional growth, whereas *Sinar Harian* primes readers to prioritize the socio-environmental impacts. As Iyengar (1990) argued in his discussion of priming, the PSR issue primes the state-federal political conflict, as well as its effects on the environment and fishermen's livelihoods, thereby influencing how the audience evaluates the issue.

In future, researchers are suggested to study the comments that made by the audience in social media regarding the environmental issue. It will be interesting to juxtapose the salient reality that constructed by the framing of media with public opinion data in order to investigate the perception of public toward the environmental issue. Besides, it is recommended that future researchers to study the similarities and differences of framing of environmental issue between the alternative newspapers or market-oriented newspapers. This includes conducting in-depth interview which can be done to investigate how market demand affects their journalism practice.

In term of methodology, it is also recommended to further analysis the issue using critical discourse analysis as this research found it is mostly framed as political conflict. The findings suggest that there is a power negotiation in the issue which can be further studied using critical discourse analysis.

REFERENCES

- ABCM. (2018). Retrieved from Audit Bureau of Circulations Malaysia: <http://abcm.org.my/report/latest-audit-reports-january-to-june-2018/>
- Audrey, D. (2018, January 3). *Penang receives approvals for two reports on sea reclamation project, says ex co man*. Retrieved from New Starits Times: <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2018/01/321192/penang-receives-approvals-two-reports-sea-reclamation-project-says-ex-co>
- Audrey, D., & Balvin, K. (2017, August 26). *No approval for Penang South Reclamation project if people are adversely affected - PM Najib*. Retrieved from New Straits Times: <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2017/08/272906/no-approval-penang-south-reclamation-project-if-people-are-adversely>
- Carroll, C., & McCombs, M. (2003). Agenda-setting effects of business news on the public's images about major cooperation. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 6(1), 36-46.
- Dauda, S. & Hasan, N. (2018). Framing the Sustainable Development Goals in Malaysian online news. *SEARCH Journal of Media and Communication Research*, 10(1), 1–24.
- De Giosa, P. (2024). From Transport Development to Land Reclamation: Contested Spatio-Temporalities along Penang's Littoral, Malaysia. *Island Studies Journal*, Earlyaccess. <https://doi.org/10.24043/001c.125847>
- Department of Statistics. (2018). *Current Population Estimates by Ethnic Group 2018*. Retrieved from Department of Statistics Malaysia: <http://pqi.stats.gov.my/result.php?token=2701b0e5d90fb4d736472a51bd0acc5a>
- Detjen, J. F. (2000). Changing work environment of environmental. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 21(1), 2-12.
- Diana, A. (2018). Entman Framing Analysis of Food Governance in Online Media. *Jurnal The Messenger*, 10(1), 113-123.
- Entman, R. (1993). Framing: toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51-58.
- Freeman, B. (2017). Claims, frames, and blame: Coverage of climate changes in ASEAN's English language newspapers, 2002-2012. *Sage Open*, 1-12.
- Griffin, R., & Dunwoody, S. (1997). Community Structure and Science Framing of News about Local Environmental Risks. *Science Communication*, 18(4), 362-384.
- Hamidah, A., & Chu, V. S. (2010). Media framing of waste issues in selected Malaysian newspapers. *Journal of Human Capital Development*, 3(1), 41-54.

- Hansen, A. (2018). *Environment, Media and Communication (2nd Ed)*. New York: Routledge.
- Hassan, I., Musa, R. M., Abdullah, M. R., Latiff Azmi, M. N., & Abdullah, A. T. H. (2024). Evaluation of climate change coverage across news sources in selected Malaysian electronic newspapers. *Information Development*
<https://doi.org/10.1177/02666669241284992>
- Hoe, Y. F. & Abdullah, A. R. (2025). Impacts on Coastal Land Reclamation and Sand Mining Activities: Perspectives from Coastal Fishing Communities and Ecotourism Providers. *Malaysian Journal of Qualitative Research*, 99(1), 128-140.
<https://doi.org/10.61211/mjqr110110>
- Iyengar, S. (1990). The accessibility bias in politics: Television news and public opinion. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 2(1), 1-15.
- Jamilah, A., & Habibah, L. (2016). Media and the environment in Malaysia: An analysis of news coverage of landslide disaster in Kuala Lumpur. *Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 32(2), 525-544.
- Kuik, C. K. (2024, March 20). If the Chinese newspaper ink dries up as well. *Sin Chew Daily*. <https://www.sinchew.com.my/news/20240320/yl/5475646>
- Lee, K., & Mohd Safar, H. (2015). Peranan Akhbar Cina dalam Artikulasi Isu-isu Sejarah dan Pembentukan Negara-Bangsa. *Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 31(1), 257-280.
- Lee, K. T. W., & Wong, W. W. (2022). Framing Jawi-Khat move: A comparative analysis of Chinese, English and Malay-language newspapers in Malaysia. *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 36(4), 194–210.
- Mohammad Noorhusni, M., & Abd Rasid, A. (2017). Frame Contention in Different Types of Media Ownership- A Comparison between The Star Online and Sinar Online's Media Coverage on 2017 Budget. *Journal of Media and Information Warfare*, 9, 137-176,.
- Nadzhirah, M., Mansor, I., & Mazlina, M. (2014, 3 29). Impacts of Coastal Reclamation to the Quality of Life: Tanjung Tokong community, Penang. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 153, 159-168. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.10.050
- Ng, M., & Lee, Y. (2018). Malaysian Chinese Language Newspapers and National Identity: A Study of the Roles of Sin Chew Daily in Chinese Cultural Preservation and Nation Building. *Kajian Malaysia*, 36(1), 63-103.
- Osman, Muhamad & Mohd Nor, Radieah. (2024). Impact of Penang South Reclamation Project on Fisherman Socio-economic Case Study: Southwest Penang. *Journal of Sustainable Development Practice*. 1. 21-33. 10.59953/jsdp.v1i1.5.
- Patterson, P. (1989). Reporting Chernobyl: cutting the government fog to cover the nuclear cloud. In L. W. L.M. Walters (Ed.), *Bad Tidings: Communication and Catastrophe* (pp. 131-147). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Salmen A. Bamasood, Khalid Sayed, M.I. Syakir, Mohd Hafiidz Jaafar, Mark Zuknik (2025). Impacts of coastal reclamation on small-scale Fishers in Penang, Malaysia, *Ocean & Coastal Management*, Volume 270, 107903, ISSN 0964-5691,
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2025.107903>.

- Shao, B., & Nik Norma, N. (2014). Journalistic Roles among Chinese-Language Press Journalists in China and Malaysia. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 277-282.
- Soadah, W., & Shafizan, M. (2017). Internet and social media in Malaysia: Development, challenges and potentials. *The Evolution of Media Communication* (pp. 45-64). InTechOpen. doi: 10.5772/intechopen.68848
- Su, Y., Othman, A., Yee, K. S., Amni Nabilah, M., & Louise B., F. (2017). Land reclamation and artificial islands: Walking the tightrope between development and conservation. *Global Ecology and Conservation*, 12, 80-95.
- Sualman, I., Jaafar, R., & Salbiah, L. (2017). News Framing Lynas Plant Project: A Study of Five Malaysian Newspapers. *Advanced Science Letter*, 23(1), 304-307.
- Tankard, J. H. (1991). *Media frames: Approaches to conceptualization and measurement*. Paper presented to the Association for education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Boston.
- Thirumalaiah, N., & Aram, A. (2017). Framing of environment in English and Tamil newspapers in India. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 9(1), 1-9.
- Tong, J. R. (2014). Environmental risks in newspaper coverage: A framing analysis of investigative reports on environmental problems in ten Chinese newspapers. *Environmental Communication*, 8(3), 345-367.
- Wan Rohila Ganti, W., Nurul Saadatun Nadiyah, M., & Ilyas, A. (2013). The Neutrality of Sinar Harian Newspaper in Malaysian Politics. *World Applied Sciences Journal*, 28(11), 1481-1487.
- Xie, L. (2015). The story of two big Chimneys: A frame analysis of climate changes in US and Chinese newspapers. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 44(2), 151-177.
- Yang, L., & Md. Sidin, A. (2015). Gatekeeping in the Coverage of Interethnic Conflicts: An Analysis of Mainstream and Alternative Newspapers in Malaysia. *The Journal of the South East Asia Research centre for Communications and Humanities*, 7(1), 23-51.
- Zeng, J. W. S., (9 May 2020). Evaluating the Penang South Reclamation (PSR) Project According to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. *Penang Institute*, <https://penanginstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Evaluating-the-Penang-South-Reclamation-Project.pdf>