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When the Waters Rise: How the Star Frames Floods in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Flooding is an annual occurrence in Malaysia and the public are inundated with news on floods, reporting the areas affected, damage, fatalities, rescue efforts and other flood mitigation measures. Television, radio and newspapers bring news of flooding to the public but what messages are conveyed by the articles? The study examined the framing of flood in The Star, a mainstream newspaper circulated throughout Malaysia. News articles on flood were searched in the The Star online archive using the search word "flood" and 165 articles were found from 1 January to 31 December 2023. Analysis of the newspaper articles was conducted for episodic versus thematic framing, frame dimensions, and valence. The results show that almost all the flood news articles were incident-based and there were few thematic articles offering contextual background information and analysis of the flood situation. The results on frame dimensions show an overwhelming focus on attributions of responsibility (64%), followed by economic consequences but there were few articles with the human interest and conflict dimensions, and none with the morality dimension. Although flood is a disaster and brings financial losses, damage to property, loss of life and inconvenience, surprisingly, the flood news articles were mostly written in a positive tone (79.6%) and only 17.8% of the articles were in a negative tone and 2.6% were in a neutral tone. The findings suggest that a predominance of a positive framing emphasizing official responses may foster public complacency, undermining the perceived urgency for personal preparedness and long-term policy engagement in the face of recurring climate-related disasters.

1. Introduction

Floods are the most frequent and destructive natural disasters worldwide [1], with multifaceted and far-reaching impacts. In Malaysia, the rainy season at the end of the year often brings floods to certain areas, such as the East Coast of Malaysia, every year. Floods cause substantial economic damage to Malaysia, with 2021 losses estimated at RM 6.1 billion (USD 1.46 billion) [2]. Cumulatively,

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from 2021 to 2023, the total flood-related economic losses amounted to RM7.9 billion in 2021 and 2023, with nearly 900,000 people displaced [3-5]. Public awareness and community engagement in flood preparedness are challenges, as inadequate awareness often leads to unsafe behaviors during floods, like children playing in flood waters [6]. News of floods is brought to people by the newspapers and television news channels. The media acts as a "vital arm of government" in times of disaster [7] to disseminate the latest updates and garner support for government efforts in disaster relief. The government may conduct press conferences, which are broadcast on radio and television, shared on social media (e.g., Facebook), and published in newspapers for the consumption of the public. "In the context of flood management, the media occupy an intermediate position between decision-makers and the population" because the media select what issues to promote to the audience and how to frame them, which shapes what the audience perceives as a priority [8].

Even in the digital age, traditional newspapers are still trusted for thorough fact-checking, making them indispensable during crises where misinformation can easily spread [9]. Newspapers are believed to provide more in-depth coverage and contextual analysis than other media forms [10]. Reveilhac and Boomgaarden [11] stated that legacy news media are known for their credibility and editorial rigor and are sought as news sources during public crises. In other words, newspapers play an important role despite the frequent use of social media to obtain updates during a crisis [12-14].

As for episodic and thematic framing of disasters, in the United Kingdom, Albrecht [15] found that coverage of the 2015 floods used mainly thematic frames to critique institutional failures and advocate for long-term policy changes. Similarly, the Irish media adopted thematic approaches to highlight structural inadequacies in flood risk governance [16]. In contrast, more episodic framing, focusing on individual events and immediate suffering, is prominent in countries like Pakistan and Nigeria, where the media tends to avoid politically sensitive critiques [17]. In Indian, Giri and Vats [18] applied Iyengar's (1991) episodic-thematic distinction to examine how newspapers framed major flood events. Giri and Vats [16] revealed a strong bias toward episodic framing, with 67% to 71% of the articles adopted a episodic approach, while only 29% to 33% adopted a thematic approach. This suggests that disaster reporting in India remains heavily centered on event-driven narratives, potentially limiting public understanding of the systemic and long-term factors underlying natural disasters.

As for valence, the current state of knowledge on newspaper coverage of flooding in Europe, Roney *et al*., [19] noted that coverage of the Florence floods largely emphasized chaos and political accountability, while Devitt and O'Neill [16] found that Irish media employed negative framing to expose systemic failures. In India, Giri and Vats's [18] analysis also showed a dominance of flood news articles in neutral valence. Giri and Vats [18] reported that 85% of articles covering the 2013 Uttarakhand floods were neutral, focusing on factual updates and rescue operations, negative-toned pieces, mostly criticizing governmental delays, constituted 9.3%, and only 5.2% showed a positive tone.

As for frame dimensions, studies further show specific frame dimensions vary across regions where the media has more freedom (e.g., in the United Kingdom and Ireland) and less freedom (e.g., China). In countries like the United Kingdom, media reports highlight the economic consequences of flooding, particularly regarding flood prevention and recovery investments [20]. Economic impacts of floods include the financial losses due to infrastructure, agriculture, and businesses. Devitt and O'Neill [16] noted that Irish media emphasized governmental responsibility and political shortcomings. Media often politicize flood coverage by critiquing the government's response to the disaster. For example, in the United Kingdom, the 2005 and 2015 floods were framed with varying degrees of politicization, with 2015 seeing a sharp increase in negative coverage of the government's disaster management [21]. This politicized coverage can influence the public's perception of the

government's effectiveness and prompt calls for more proactive policies. Bohensky and Leitch [22] [22] documented a shift in Australian coverage from isolated disaster incidents to broader, climate-related economic consequences, signaling increasing adoption of the economic consequences frame. On the other hand, in Pakistan and Nigeria, coverage of floods commonly adopts human interest, relief, and recovery frames, with minimal attention to political accountability [23]. Chacowry [24] found that in Mauritius, media coverage still largely ignored structural vulnerabilities or economic policy links, focusing instead on immediate flood impacts. In many of these contexts, limited media freedom and political pressures constrain the ability of journalists to investigate or critique underlying governance failures related to disaster preparedness and response. Ihediwa and Ishak [25] compared the flood reporting of Malaysian newspapers (New Straits Times and The Star) and Nigerian newspapers (The Sun and The Nation) from 2007 to 2009. The Star focused more on the consequences and losses caused by floods, while New Straits Times concentrated on government efforts to manage the crisis [25]. This difference highlights how editorial priorities shape media framing: one emphasizes the human impact, while the other focuses on government responses. This distinction is important because it may lead readers to interpret the story differently, with emotional empathy for the victims versus trust in the state's capabilities. Hashim [26] demonstrated that the scale of disaster significantly shaped the framing strategies used by national and regional newspapers in covering landslides, with national outlets emphasizing macro-level impacts and regional media focusing on human-centered narratives. Hashim [26] analyzed 200 news articles about how disaster scale influences media framing across coverage of multiple landslide events and found that the scale of the disaster significantly influenced the choice of media frameworks: reports on large-scale disasters (such as the Pettimudi landslide that killed 70 people) tended to adopt the responsibility framework (37%) and economic consequences framework (26%), emphasizing government responses and systemic impacts; while smaller-scale events (such as the Kudayathoor landslide, which resulted in five deaths) were more likely to use the human interest framework (9%) and conflict framework (5%), focusing on individual experiences and local conflicts.

Television, radio, and newspapers bring news of flooding to the public, but what messages are conveyed by the articles? The study examined the framing of floods in The Star, a mainstream newspaper circulated throughout Malaysia.

Specific objectives of the study:
1) Frequency of episodic versus thematic framing
2) Frequency of frame dimensions
3) Frequency of positive, negative, and neutral valence

2. Methodology
2.1 Texts and Selection Criteria

The descriptive study involved a framing analysis of articles on floods published in The Star. Newspaper articles on flood selected were those published in 2023 (January 1 – December 31) and had the keyword "flood". The year-long data collection period was chosen to cover the whole cycle of floods in a year. The thematic focus of the articles and the type of articles.

Firstly, for the topic, the selection criteria were articles where flood is the central theme, such as discussions on flood management or impacts, even if flood is not explicitly mentioned in the headline. Also included were articles where floods are an important factor, even if not directly related, such as those discussing the broader consequences of climate change. The articles excluded were articles where the primary focus is not on floods, even if floods or related terms are mentioned briefly. This included articles about unrelated political events or charity initiatives that only reference floods in

passing, articles with isolated words like "water" or "influx" framed as flood-related but not focusing on flooding, and articles about climate change that do not explicitly mention floods, and stories about incidents like "near-drowning" or "sea safety" when they were not linked to floods. Additionally, articles discussing broader water issues, such as "Much Ado About Malaysia's Water Woes" by Datin Daria Mathew and Norlaili Ismail (The Star, May 2, 2023), were not included in the analysis, as they did not specifically focus on flood events.

Secondly, only news reports were selected. Articles excluded were opinion pieces, business news, videos, and some news composed only of a headline and photographs, without any accompanying textual information regarding the flood. This decision was made to ensure consistency and comparability in content and format, as the study focused on how factual news reports frame flood events. Video content and hard-copy newspapers were excluded as these were not within the scope of the study, but this is an area for future investigation.

2.2 Analysis Framework

In this section, three analysis frameworks are described, namely, the framework for analyzing episodic and thematic framing, frame dimensions, and valence. These frameworks were adapted from established literature in media framing studies, particularly from Iyengar (1991) for episodic and thematic framing, and Semetko and Valkenburg [27] for frame dimensions. The valence framework used in this study follows the conceptualization of valenced news frames proposed by de Vreese and Boomgaarden [28], in which news content is categorized as positive, negative, or neutral based on the emotional tone conveyed and its potential influence on public perception.

For the analysis of thematic and episodic framing, the unit of analysis is the news article. The analysis focused on the dominant frame. An article is categorized as episodic if it accentuates individual events and personal narratives (Iyengar, 1991) although it may contain a minimal amount of background information such as history, analysis of facts, and expert opinions. An article is categorized as thematic if it promotes a macro perspective by situating issues within a broader societal (Iyengar, 1991).

The frame dimensions in the newspaper articles were analyzed based on Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) deductive approach. They specifically investigated five dimensions of news frames as follows:

1) Conflict, emphasizing conflicts for audience engagement;
2) Human Interest, showcasing the human or emotional perspective of events;
3) Economic Consequences, reporting on events with economic impacts;
4) Morality, contextualizing events within religious and moral values; and
5) Responsibility, describing issues attributed to the responsibility of government, individuals, or groups

As for valence, the analysis framework in Table 1 was used for analysing the tone of the whole newspaper article on flood. An article is categorized as having positive valence if there are descriptions of actions to handle flood and preserve the good image of the government. An article is categorized as having negative valence if there are messages of blame, criticism, suits, allegations, investigations of individuals and mismanagement of flood.

Table 1

Analysis framework for valence of flood news articles

Valence	Definition
Positive	Actions to handle flood and preserve the good image of the government
Negative	Blame, criticism, suits, allegations, investigations of individuals and poor/ mismanagement of flood
Neutral	No emotional over valence
	Balance of positive and negative valence

Neutral valence was more difficult to analyze. There are two possibilities of newspaper articles with neutral valence. Firstly, an article is categorized as having a neutral valence if there is a balance of positive and negative valence. An example of an article with a neutral valence is The Star article headlined "Stay away from flood water to prevent health risks, says expert". It is very factual, like a science lesson.

Secondly, an article is categorized as having a neutral valence if there is a balance of positive and negative valence. The negative valence is due to the people affected by the flood like "Toddler first fatality in Kelantan monsoon floods" but there is also a positive side of the news such as the help to the family given by the community and non-governmental organizations. Since the positive and negative segments were of similar length and prominence, the overall emotional valence of the article was considered balanced, and therefore coded as neutral.

2.3 Procedures for Collecting Newspaper Articles

All the articles with the word "flood" were read to check whether the article was relevant to be included in the study, based on the selection criteria described earlier. One particular newspaper provided information on the total number of articles with the word "flood" in it, and that is The Star. There are altogether 3,778 news articles with the word "flood" and 424 were articles published in the year 2023.

The data cleaning was conducted by the researcher, who applied the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined earlier to identify and refine the dataset. The 424 articles were copied and pasted into a word document. Then the articles were read, and repeated articles were deleted, leaving 378 news articles. These repetitions occurred because some articles were cross-posted under multiple sections or republished with only minor edits such as headline changes or brief content updates. During the data cleaning process, these repeated articles were identified and removed to ensure that each article in the final dataset represented unique content. When articles were nearly identical but had slight modifications, only the most complete or most prominently placed version was retained. However, some of the articles were not about flood and the word "flood" was picked up in the search because it appeared in their "also read" section. After eliminating these articles, only 165 news articles remained for The Star to analyze.

2.4 Procedures for Analyzing Newspaper Articles on Flooding

Three types of analysis were manually carried out for the newspaper articles, namely, analysis of episodic and thematic framing, frame dimensions, and valence. The analyses followed the frameworks described in the Instrument section. For episodic and thematic framing, an article was categorized as episodic if event-specific, and thematic if it promoted a macro perspective by situating issues within a broader societal context (Iyengar, 1991). For frame dimensions, Smetko and Valkenburg's (2000) framework was referred to, with adjustments for local context. For example, the responsibility frame in Malaysian newspapers often portrayed authorities positively. An article in The

Star, "Anwar announces additional RM50mil allocation for T'ganu flood victims" (13 May 2023), was categorized as economic consequences because it focused on financial support. The conflict dimension required disagreement, as in "Residents in Manong say land clearing activities at Bubu Forest Reserve puts them at risk" (24 November 2023). For valence, articles were positive if they portrayed good governance or effective flood management, such as The Star article, "Nadma must ensure disaster management agencies ready for monsoon season, says Zahid" (17 October 2023). Neutral valence applied to articles presenting balanced positive and negative aspects, such as "China ramps up efforts against floods as heavy rains kill at least 15" (6 July 2023), while negative valence highlighted severe consequences without mitigation.

Manual analysis was preferred over software to capture subtle framing patterns and tone. A pilot coding phase refined the coding scheme: episodic (episs), thematic (themm), responsibility (respp), human interest (humm), economic consequences (ecoo), conflict (conff), morality (morr), positive (posii), negative (negii), and neutral (neutt). Each article was tagged with unique codes to avoid search errors. Intercoder reliability testing showed perfect agreement (100%) for episodic vs thematic framing, 92% for valence, and 90% for frame dimensions. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion using the frameworks.

The percentages of frames were calculated using the formula:

$$\frac{\text{Number of articles in XX frame}}{\text{Total number of coded articles}} \times 100$$

3. Results

3.1 Thematic and Episodic Framing of Flood Events in The Star

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of type of frame in The Star. The results indicate a clear dominance of episodic framing, with 99.4% (164 of 165) of the articles using an episodic frame, and only one article (0.6%) using a thematic frame.

Table 2

Frequency and percentage of type of frame in The Star (N=165)

Type of frame	Frequency	%
Episodic	164	99.4
Thematic	1	0.6
Total	165	100

Episodic articles report the government's care for victims. The article reported the call by the Selangor Ruler to the government to make short-term, medium-term, and long-term plans to overcome floods. An example article in The Star (22 August 2023) titled "Selangor Ruler: People's basic needs must be met effectively.

> Selangor Ruler Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah has directed the state government to look into the flood problem that often occurs and causes much inconvenience to the people. The Ruler said short-, medium-, and long-term plans have to be immediately implemented."What is the point of taking pride in economic achievements and status as a rich state with the highest gross domestic product in Malaysia when the basic needs of the people cannot be met effectively?" said the Ruler. Sultan Sharafuddin also advised the state's elected representatives to always practise integrity and serve the people well. The Ruler said the newly formed state government has to immediately overcome all

shortcomings affecting the lives of Selangor residents, especially in regard to infrastructure and development.

(Source: The Star, 22 August 2023, https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2023/08/22/selangor-ruler-peoples-basic-needs-must-be-met-effectively)

The Star had one thematically framed article that provides scientific insights on the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) phenomenon and other climatological concepts using expert opinions. article in The Star (5 December 2023) titled "Arctic warming impacting weather in Malaysia, says expert" provides a broader, science-based perspective on flooding. This article explains the El Niño‑Southern Oscillation phenomenon and its connection to flooding, helping readers understand the broader climatic causes of flood events and their potential future development. Thematic coverage such as this enhances the newspaper's credibility by offering in-depth analysis beyond immediate events.

Enso (El Nino‑Southern Oscillation) reflects the changes in winds and sea surface temperatures over the tropical eastern Pacific Ocean, which then impacts the climate of much of the tropics and subtropics. The warming phase of the sea temperature is known as El Nino and the cooling phase as La Nina. Prof Azizan said based on the climatological influence of El Nino, most would forecast some flooding from the cold surges within the maximum rainbelt on the coast or just offshore of the East Coast, Sabah and Sarawak.

(Source: The Star, 5 December 2023, https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/

3.2 Frequency and Percentage of Frame Dimensions in The Star

Table 3 shows the frequency and percentage of frame dimensions in The Star. The results indicate that the most frequently used frame in its flood news coverage is the attributing responsibility frame (63.6%). The second most common is the economic consequences frame (12.7%), followed by the human interest frame (10.3%). Other frames, such as the conflict frame, are used infrequently, accounting for less than 2% of the coverage. The moral frame appears only once. The following section includes excerpts to illustrate the characteristics of these framing dimensions, showing how public attention is drawn to certain aspects of the flood news.

Table 3

Frequency and percentage of type of frame dimensions in The Star (N=165)

Type of frame Dimensions	Frequency	%
Attributions of responsibility	105	63.6
Economic consequences	34	20.6
Human interest	17	10.3
Not classifiable	6	3.6
Conflict frame	2	1.2
Mortality frame	1	0.6
Total	165	99.9*

Note: * Less than 100.0% due to rounding off

Attribution of Responsibility. In The Star, responsibility is framed through the lens of national preparedness and long-term strategy. For instance, the article "Bomba identifies almost 4,800 flood-prone areas nationwide" (26 September 2023) highlights the Fire and Rescue Department's proactive identification of flood-prone areas, portraying the government as forward-thinking and responsible.

This centralized narrative, characteristic of a national newspaper, underscores the government's strategic oversight and strengthens public trust in its ability to manage disasters effectively.

> The Department said all its personnel, assets and standard operating procedures are ready to face any potential disaster. "We will collaborate with the Malaysian Meteorological Department to monitor and assess the weather every three hours. "Weather forecasts, rainfall and wind condition data will be gathered by the operations management centre at headquarters as well as in each state to facilitate the necessary implementation or precautionary measures," he told reporters after the Governance, Integrity, and Anti-Corruption Talk (BiGIAR) 2023 for the Eastern Zone held here on Tuesday (Sept 26). A total of 500 participants, including firemen, government agency employees and corporate sector staff from Pahang, Kelantan and Terengganu, took part. Ahmad Izram added that 7,920 volunteer firefighters nationwide would support flood relief efforts, in addition to the 14,000 permanent officers and personnel.
> (Source: The Star, 26 September 2023, https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation /2023/09/26/bomba-identifies-almost-4800-flood-prone-areas-nationwide)

Economic Consequences. In The Star, the financial aspect is framed broadly, incorporating both government and corporate contributions. Table 3 shows that 34 (or 20.6% of 165 articles) had a economic consequences frame. The Star does not shy away from addressing the negative financial impacts, as as shown in an article headlined "RM232mil needed to fix flood damage" (13 January 2023). Excerpts 9 highlights the economic consequences frame by focusing on the significant financial costs of flood repairs and the government's commitment to addressing the damage. The Star, as a national newspaper, offers a more balanced perspective by acknowledging both the financial relief efforts and the economic losses caused by floods. It highlights the contributions of both the government and the private sector, giving a broader view of the economic impact.

> Works Minister Datuk Seri Alexander Nanta Linggi (pic) said most of the damages occurred in the East Coast states, with repairs costing RM196mil. "A lot of them involve collapsed slopes and broken pavements. Repairs are underway, and the duration of work depends on the extent of damage."
> (Source: The Star, 13 January 2023, https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2023/01/13/rm232mil-needed-to-fix-flood-damage)

Human Interest frame. In The Star, human interest articles offer emotional appeal through personal stories, though they are relatively rare, that is, 17 (or 10.3% of 165 articles) had an economic consequences frame. An example is the article "Civil Defense Force helps groom and guests in flooded village" (24 January 2023). This story connects with readers on an emotional level by focusing on a significant life event and the human impact of the flood. Such human interest coverage provides an alternative to the usual factual reports and government-focused narratives, highlighting the personal struggles and resilience of individuals affected by natural disasters.

> A groom had to take a boat to his bride's house on Sunday due to floods, Harian Metro reported. The groom, known only as Asyraf, and his family were helped by the Civil Defense Force (APM) after Jalan Sungai Relai 8 in Kampung Sempadan in Jerantut, Pahang, was submerged in 1.5m of water."

(Source: The Star, 24 January 2023, https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2023/01/24/civil-defence-force-helps-groom-and-guests-in-flooded-village)

Conflict Frame. Conflict frames in The Star are relatively rare, appearing in only two articles (1.2% of 165 articles), both of which centre on disputes linked to flood management. For instance, "Residents in Manong say land clearing activities at Bubu Forest Reserve puts them at risk" (24 November 2023) reports tensions between residents and authorities over environmental and safety concerns. The article notes the absence of a public hearing with the affected community, raising questions about transparency and the adequacy of consultation processes. Similarly, the article "Hard to repeat GE15 performance" (30 November 2023) frames conflict in the political arena, highlighting Perikatan Nasional's ambition for a decisive victory in the Kemaman by-election and the obstacles posed by heavy rainfall on polling day. The article highlights how severe weather conditions disrupted voter turnout, illustrating the intersection of environmental factors and electoral outcomes.

Low turnout due to heavy rains will hamper Perikatan Nasional's chances of winning the Kemaman by-election with a repeat of the 27,000-vote majority it received in the 15th General Election (GE15) last year, say analysts. However, they said Perikatan still has a high chance of retaining the seat even with the expected lower voter turnout because of the year-end monsoon season."It will be very hard for PAS to retain its GE15 record of winning by more than 27,000 votes as some voters may not go out due to the heavy rain while outstation voters may feel that there is no use returning to vote," said Nusantara Academy for Strategic Research senior fellow Azmi Hassan.
 (Source: The Star, 30 November 2023, https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation /2023/11/30/hard-to-repeat-ge15-performance)

Morality Frame. There is only one morality frame in The Star (or 0.6% of 165 articles)—the article "Jakim to hold 'solat hajat' for people of Morocco, Libya" (17 September 2023). This article emphasizes the moral responsibility of the Malaysian government to offer support and solidarity in times of international crisis. It reports on Jakim's initiative to hold special prayers for the victims of natural disasters in Morocco and Libya, as well as for reconciliation in Sudan. The article deals with the moral responsibility of individuals and communities to offer assistance and seek divine intervention for the well-being and reconciliation of affected populations.

"On behalf of all staff at the Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs) I convey our deepest sympathies to all victims and their family members and may Allah ease the search and rescue of victims, especially in Morocco and Libya," he said in a statement Sunday (Sept 17). Mohd Na'im called on Muslims to stand together to pray for the well-being of everyone in Morocco and Libya and to extend any form of assistance to the victims who are being tested following the natural disasters. "In addition, we also pray that all peace efforts will succeed in resolving the conflict in Sudan," he said. - Bernama
(Source: The Star, 17 September 2023 https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2023/09/17/jakim-to-hold-039solat-hajat039-for-people-of-morocco-lybia)

3.3 Valence

The analysis of valence in flood news article headlines from The Star shows that over half have positive headlines (52.7%), while a substantial proportion carry negative valence (38.2%). Neutral headlines are rare, accounting for only 9.1% of the coverage.

Table 4
Frequency and percentage of Valence in The Star (N=165)

Type of valence	Frequency	%
Positive	87	52.7
Negative	63	38.2
Neutral	15	9.1
Total	165	100

Articles with a positive valence project a feel-good perception of floods, potentially influencing readers' satisfaction with the effectiveness and responsiveness of government policies and actions. For example, "Floods: RM300 worth of vouchers for victims to buy electrical goods under the Payung Rahmah initiative" (The Star, 18 March) emphasizes the economic assistance provided by the government to flood victims, highlighting efforts to mitigate the impact of the disaster. Such reporting often frames the authorities as responsible and capable in handling the situation.

Articles with a negative valence direct criticism towards the government, urging it to take more responsible actions. For instance, "Residents in Manong say land clearing activities at Bubu Forest Reserve puts them at risk" (The Star, 24 November) raises concerns about land-clearing projects and their potential impacts on local communities. The coverage implies skepticism towards the government's decision-making process and underscores public concerns about transparency and accountability.

Articles with a neutral valence are relatively rare, as floods inherently causing destruction and losses. These reports tend to present both positive and negative aspects or focus solely on factual information without emotional engagement. For example, "Stay away from flood water to prevent health risks, says expert" (The Star, 18 November) provides technical advice on health precautions during floods, maintaining an objective tone and avoiding political or emotional framing.

The Star primarily utilized episodic framing in flood coverage. In Giri and Vats' [18] study, the proportion of episodic reports on floods in the four newspapers in India is in the range of 67%-71%. Whether or not by design, the high percentage of episodic articles actually draws attention away from the much-needed awareness that flood is a recurring problem and long-term flood management initiatives are crucial in these two countries. Episodic framing leads readers to see the event as disconnected from past events, and invariably reduces the attribution of responsibility to individuals [28]. Gross [29] states that episodic framing elicits a more profound emotional response than thematic framing but this is not the case with the four newspapers which hardly utilized the human interest frame to personalise a hard news article. Most of the flood news articles were about statistics of the water level, number of people evacuated and so on.

The Star primarily employed the responsibility frame in its coverage of floods, portraying the government as proactive and well-prepared to address disasters. The conflict frame appeared infrequently, with limited emphasis on slow or inadequate government assistance. This contrasts with findings from other contexts. For example, in Australia, media coverage of the unexpected Queensland floods (2010‑2011) in both The Australian (national) and The Courier-Mail (regional) prominently assigned blame to the government for its handling of the crisis. Similarly, studies of Chinese newspapers reveal a distinct tendency to depict the central government as responsible and

attentive to the public's needs, often relying on official voices to convey reassurance and authority [30]. These cross-national comparisons suggest that national political culture and media systems shape the salience of responsibility versus conflict frames in flood reporting.

Despite floods being inherently disastrous events, The Star demonstrated a predominant focus on positive valence in its coverage, with 52.7% of articles adopting this tone. This is notable given the status of The Star as a mainstream newspaper that has historically been known to offer critical perspectives on government actions [31]. The tendency toward positive portrayals aligns with findings from other media contexts where state or national outlets highlight government competence. For instance, Wu and Pan [32] found that rmrbwx (People's Daily WeChat edition) frequently employed exclamatory statements praising authorities, such as "Thanks to the guardians!" In contrast, the Indian case reveals a different pattern: The Telegraph, a regional newspaper, published fewer positive flood news articles than three national newspapers [18]. These comparisons suggest that both national orientation and institutional affiliations of media outlets influence the degree of positivity in disaster reporting.

4. Conclusions

This study offers two key recommendations for journalists covering floods and, more broadly, other natural disasters and crises. First, in situations such as floods, newspapers can leverage social media platforms to quickly capture public attention and disseminate timely, reliable updates to affected communities. Second, newspapers with government affiliations should strive for balanced reporting by incorporating diverse perspectives, rather than relying solely on statements from government agencies. Such practices can enhance public trust, foster informed decision-making, and ensure that disaster coverage serves both accountability and community needs.

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