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Framing Analysis of the South China Sea News Conflict in the Malay Media

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Abstract - This study examines the South China Sea conflict involving countries in the region. However, it is not limited to those bordering the South China Sea because other superpower countries are also involved, such as the US, Britain, Germany, Canada, Australia, India. The conflict garnered serious attention from Malay media such as *kompas.com* (Indonesia), *bharian.com.my* (Malaysia) and *mediapermata.com* (Brunei). This study sought to inspect how Malay media frame the South China Sea conflict using a qualitative-descriptive approach. Using Entman's model, it focused on root causes, problem causes, moral judgments, and recommendations. As a result, the three Malay media saw China's claims to the South Sea and its abundant natural resources as the root of the problem. *Bharian.com.my* added that another root of the problem is China's hegemony in the South Seas. For causes of the problem, they agreed on China's over-aggression and their patrol warships in the South China Sea. In addition, *kompas.com* and *bharian.com* added China's policy requiring foreign ships to report if they pass into the South China Sea. Furthermore, *kompas.com* also saw the different interests of ASEAN countries and the formation of the AUKUS alliance as the cause of the problem. In terms of moral judgments, they agreed on the need to maintain peace, order and security in the South China Sea. As for the recommendation aspect, they encourage compliance with UN conventions. Then, *kompas.com* and *bharian.com.my* also considered the importance of diplomacy at the negotiating table.

Keywords: Framing Analysis; News Conflict; Online Media; South China Sea

Introduction

The South China Sea (SCS) is the edge of the Pacific Ocean which stretches from the Karimata Strait in the south to the Taiwan Strait in the north. This strategic position makes SCS a world sea trade route. Its natural resources are also considered to be abundant, such as the wealth of marine biota, oil reserves, and natural gas. As an international trade route, many ships from various countries traverse it to and from the surrounding countries.

Since long time ago, SCS has been contested by several countries bordering the open waters. China self-proclaims to be its ruler and asserts the SCS as part of its territory when it was still a

kingdom. Maksum (2017) noted that China had dominated SCS in the Han Dynasty until the 12th century through Commander Chen Ho. In fact, geographically SCS is surrounded by Southeast Asian and East Asian countries such as Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and Indonesia. Each of them also claims territorial ownership over the SCS through islands in the high seas.

Then, in 1947, China published a map which is popularly known as the "nine-dash line". Unilaterally, the nine-dash line claims that almost all of the SCS waters are Chinese territory. However, in the last few years, Chine has become increasingly aggressive over its claim on the SCS. The Chinese government has even built artificial islands equipped with airports and seaports Kreuzer (2016). Although the international treaty at The Hague identified SCS as an international shipping lane, China insists on being the rightful owner. The proof is that China has issued a policy that foreign ships sailing in the SCS must report to the Chinese government. As a result, the international community criticized China's unilateral policy of banning ships in the region.

Interests between countries have colored the conflict. Jalil et al., (2020) stated that during 2009-2016, there were 12 SCS conflicts involving China and other countries. Among them are the US-China accusing each other of attacking patrol boats, Malaysia-China regarding the annexation of the Serupat and Patinggi Shelf, China-Vietnam regarding oil exploration in the Paracel Islands, and China-Philippines regarding the Thomas Reef incident and the Hainan Fishing Law.

Until now China is still often at odds with other countries because of the actions taken in the South China Sea. China expelled Philippine fishing boats, crosses disputed border lines, intimidated Filipino vessels, fish stolen by Chinese-flagged fishermen in Vietnamese territory, or cut wire incidents in oil exploration in Vietnamese waters (Junef, 2018).

In addition, the SCS has a very high economic value because of its natural potential. Data US' Energy Information Administration reported that the natural resource potential of the SCS is oil content which reaches 11 billion barrels and natural gas as much as 190 trillion cubic feet plus hydrocarbon reserves that function as energy sources. Ma (2006) stated that the potential of SCS oil exceeds that of Kuwait. If Kuwait has oil potential of 13 billion tons, then the SCS contains a potential of 17 billion tons or four tons more than the country in the Arabian Peninsula.

International media reacted to the instability resulting from the SCS. They regard the SCS as a prolonged conflict involving many countries. To the media, the SCS conflict is an event that has very high news value both in terms of conflict, issue, character, significance, impact, and so on. World news agencies such as *Reuters, CNN, AFP* took turns broadcasting developments in the SCS conflict. In addition, the internal media of the warring countries also disseminate the latest information about the SCS, especially online media. With different characteristics from the mainstream media, online media presents the events of the SCS. Everything is accessed more quickly and easily than television, newspapers, or radio. The researchers chose three online media as news sources that report on the SCS conflict. The three are Malay media representing three ASEAN countries, namely *kompas.com* (Indonesia), *bharian.com.my* (Malaysia), and *mediapermata.com* (Brunei). Being located directly adjacent to the SCS certainly encourages the three online media to participate in reporting on the development of the SCS.

The media in these countries are mainstream media that have their dedicated readers. Their ability to build opinions is very potent in influencing readers. Kasim et al., (2018) said that the media has the power to influence a decision. In fact, with their very strong influence, the media is able to initiate or cancel decisions. They also act as a social reality speaker on important issues such as climate change, as an agent that has a big influence in evaluating and interpreting issues in the media (Scheufele, 1999). To a democratic country, according to Jr & Peters (2015) the task of journalists is to inform events related to the public interest accurately and completely.

The three online media carry out journalistic activities with news presentations tailored to the respective media agendas. Editors present news based on their interests, especially those related to the sovereignty of their country. They will defend their country in conflict with other countries. Ramli et al., (2015) said that nationalism is carried out by media managers when it is related to the sovereignty of their country. According to the researchers' observations, there are similarities and differences between *kompas.com, bharian.com.my* and *mediapermata.com* in presenting news on the South China Sea conflict. Each media builds an opinion that defends or discredits a particular country. *Bharian.com* published news headlines "Britain Gives Warning to China", "China Rejects Canadian

Interference in the South China Sea". *Kompas.com* broadcast news headlines "Philippines Expel Beijing's Warships in the South China Sea", "US Threatens Beijing", "China Uses Intimidation to Claim South China Sea." Then, *mediapermata.com* featured news headlines "China Reminds US Not to Interfere with Internal Affairs", "Australia Doesn't Care about China's Anger".

These Malay media constructed a view on China's stern ambition to control the SCS. Then, superpower countries also seek to withstand the provocation of China who wants to take full control of the region. In communication, what they do is known as framing. The editors have framed the SCS as a conflict involving countries bordering the waters and the involvement of major powers. How are *kompas.com, bharian.com.my* and *mediapermata.com* part of the framing? All three see the SCS as a territory full of conflicts involving various countries. The three tend to frame China as the overlord of the SCS while other countries are powerless to stand up to it.

Kompas.com, bharian.com.my and *mediapermata.com* choose which events to highlight and which to exclude. What events are emphasized and what events are ignored. The three cherry-picked issues that occurred in the SCS. Should the SCS be a common conflict as border conflicts on the mainland? Does the SCS highlight political disputes due to the entry of superpowers? The SCS could also become a conflict due to economic factors. The area has abundant natural potential such as fisheries, natural gas, oil, and so on.

Bateson (1972:191) defines framing as a psychological frame, a "spatial and temporary bounding of a set of interactive messages" that operates as a form of meta-communication. Eriyanto (2012:3) says framing is an analysis to reveal how reality is framed by the media While Goffman (1974:21) states that frame is a "schemata of interpretation" that provides a context for understanding information that enables individual to "locate, perceive, identify and label". Gittlin (1980) defines frame as a continuous pattern of thinking, interpretation, and exposure of selection, emphasis, and output through symbols whose discourse is regularly regulated. Usman et al., (2023) stated frame as a director of news thought which will be highlighted to be disseminated in the media.

They display similarities and differences in presenting news on the SCS conflict. On the one hand, opinion constructions that are developed both discredit certain countries and highlight the interests of their respective countries. On the other hand, they differ in highlighting the issue of the same event. Thus, the researcher assumes that the three have played a framing of the SCS conflict. Based on the above description, this study examines how the SCS conflict is presented by *kompas.com, bharian.com.my* and *mediapermata.com*. This study sought to determine how the three online media frame the SCS conflict.

Theoretical Framework

The study on the SCS conducted by Junef (2018) showed that the conflict was caused by a prolonged dispute involving many countries in these waters. The study used qualitative data with a case study method that utilized library sources as primary data. The issue raised was the background of the SCS dispute and the role of the disputing parties. While the objective of the study was to determine the background and role of the parties involved in the dispute in the SCS.

The results showed that the SCS conflict is caused by China's past history of claiming the SCS as its own. Since 2000 BC, Chinese fishermen have sailed to the Spratly and Paracel Islands and settled in these islands. In fact, many ancient relics were found there thus strengthening China's claim as the owner of sovereignty there. In addition, the name of the SCS further confirms China as the owner of these waters. The change in the form of government from a kingdom to a communist-leaning People's Republic of China did not change the ownership status of the SCS.

Meanwhile, the roles of the disputants in the SCS vary. There is a non-government role that views the SCS as a very high economic potential. Companies from the United States, France and India are working with countries in the waters to explore the oil and natural gas potential of the SCS. Next, the role of ASEAN countries in building cooperation with the United States. This cooperation is designed to balance the power of China, which is very ambitious to control the SCS. ASEAN involves the world's major political powers with the aim of creating a dynamic balance. It is also an attempt to build a code of conduct as a way out in the form of negotiations between the countries involved in the SCS. A study on the SCS conflict was also conducted by Maksum (2017), highlighting the complexity around the waters. The main purpose of his writing was to understand the conflict, background and impact of the SCS dispute in the countries of the region.

Historical factors in royal dynasties prompted China to claim the SCS following its position as a world trade route. Then, European countries sailing around the world add to the excitement in the strategic waters. Spain, Holland, Portugal, England, France sailed to the East supported by military power. They also colonized countries around the SCS. When World War II ended, many countries became independent. As a result, these countries have sovereignty covering areas on land and sea. Since then, the SCS has never been devoid of conflict. All forms of agreements, documents, treaty and so on as legal umbrellas compete with each other to ensure legal ownership of the territory.

Ramli et al., (2015) studied the conflict between Indonesia and Malaysia in Kalimantan. Using qualitative data, the study took a closer look on how *Kompas* and *Utusan* online framed border news in Tanjung Datu and Camar Bulan. His study investigated how these two media frame the border news and aimed to reveal the editorial work in framing the border news of two neighboring countries.

As a result, *Kompas* saw that there were two root causes of the conflict namely the annexation of the Camar Bulan and Tanjung Datu areas by Malaysia against Indonesia and the shifting of border stakes. While *Utusan* considers the absence of rejection of annexation and territorial shifts against Indonesia by Malaysia as the root problem. Then the cause of the problem, *Kompas* mentioned the experience of Indonesia which lost Sipadan Ligitan Island and the difference in the agreement data used by the two parties. Meanwhile, *Utusan Online* mentioned misunderstandings and propaganda in the domestic media. For moral judgement, both hope to maintain peace in the two regions. While the recommendation is that the two governments hold diplomacy and negotiations.

Ramli et al., (2021) also studied for the conflict between Malaysia and Indonesia with content analysis method in *Kompas Daily* and *Utusan Malaysia Newspapers*. This focuses on the news tendency of the two newspapers with indicators such as news sources, position of news, news writing style, and the news frequency. The objectives are find out the news slant in *Kompas* and *Utusan* on news of the border conflict and to find out they both to frame in publishing news of the border conflict.

Material and Methodology

Cresswell (2013) stated that a qualitative approach is a set of scientific material interpretation practice that makes the world visible through fieldwork, interviews, conversations, photos/videos, recordings, and personal notes. The type of research developed aimed to describe and understand how and why a communication phenomenon occurs.

This study analyzed media texts through news broadcast by online media from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam. The study used framing analysis with a constructionist perspective that did not look at objective reality, but rather a construction process known as framing. Therefore, this study described the process of framing by *kompas.com, bharian.com.my,* and *mediapermata.com* on the news of the South China Sea (SCS) conflict through Entman's model. It offered four elements, namely definition of root of the problem, interpretation of the causes of the problem, moral considerations, and problem-solving recommendations.

Entman (1993) divided framing into two categories, namely the selection of issues and highlighting certain aspects of a reality. Pan & Kosicki (1993) divided framing into two concepts. First, the psychological concept that focused on how a person was able to process information within himself. Second, the sociological concept that emphasized how social construction was formed from a reality. Then, D'Angelo & Kuypers (2010) said framing analysis is news that constructs reality through public life.

The four elements were used to determine how *kompas.com, bharian.com.my*, and *mediapermata.com* framed the news of the SCS conflict. First, defining the root cause of the initial source of conflict in the SCS. Second, the interpretation of the causes of the problem regarding the factors that lead to the escalation the China Sea conflict. Third, moral assessment of important messages and values related to the handling of the SCS case. Fourth, recommendations needed to resolve the SCS conflict.

The research subjects were *kompas.com, bharian.com.my* and *mediapermata.com* as Malay media representing the following ASEAN countries; Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei. Then, the object of the study was the SCS news broadcast or published by the three online media. The reporting period was five months, namely June-October 2021. This study began with the identification and collection of news about the SCS published on them. For five months, 66 news items were gathered, consisting

of 28 stories on *kompas.com,* 29 on *bharian.com.my,* and 9 on *mediapermata.com.* After collecting the news, the next step was coding which processed the data according to the rules. To maintain reliability coders who understand framing analysis were involved. The coders were graduates of communication science who understands coding procedures.

Result and Discussion

This study used qualitative-descriptive data on the news of the South China Sea (SCS) case. The news was published by *kompas.com, bharian.com.my,* and *mediapermata.com*. With 66 news obtained, this study used Entman's model through the definition the root of the problem, interpretation of the causes of the problem, moral considerations, and problem-solving recommendations.

Framing by Kompas.com

Kompas.com presented two fundamental issues that are the root of the conflict in the South China Sea (SCS). First, China's claim to SCS as part of its territory. Second, economic interests.

First, *kompas.com* framed that for centuries China had played an important role in the SCS. During the imperial period, China was so influential that it considered SCS as part of its territory. This is evidenced in the following news quotes.

> "China claims most of the South China Sea and has set up military outposts on its man-made islands that contain gas fields and are rich in fish." (August 3, 2021)

> Then,
> "The German side has made it clear that its mission is to emphasize the fact that Germany does not accept China's territorial claims in the South China Sea" (August 3, 2021).
> "China claims sovereignty over most of the territorial waters of the South China Sea" (October 24, 2021).

Second, *kompas.com* framed economic interests as China's main motive because the South China Sea contains the potential of abundant natural resources. This can be seen in the following news excerpts.

> "The HMS Queen Elizabeth mission has also revived the debate about China's claims to the resource-rich waters" (July 28, 2021).
> "China claims almost all of the energy-rich seas as part of a broad "nine-dash line" (July 28, 2021).

> Next,
> "China claims most of the South China Sea and has set up military outposts on its man-made islands that contain gas fields and are rich in fish" (August 3, 2021).

For the elements of problem causes, *kompas.com* looked at two triggers for the SCS conflict. First, military interests that raise the issue of war. Second, international political intervention involving the superpowers. The third is the rivalry between the US and China. Fourth, different interests of ASEAN members have. Fifth, China's maneuvers in the South China Sea.

First, *kompas.com* viewed military interests as a trigger for SCS tensions. The delivery of warships, weapons equipment and military exercises around the South China Sea proves the existence of army activities in these waters. This is evidenced in the following news quotes.

> "We also reaffirm that armed attacks against Philippine armed forces, general ships, or aircraft in the South China Sea will activate the United States' joint defense commitments under Article IV of the 1951 US-Philippine Mutual Defense Treaty," (July 17, 2021)

> Then,
> "China is claimed to have secretly built a new "Great Wall" in the South China Sea. Beijing has opened a large military base on a "fortress island" in the disputed strategic South China Sea, as the conflict escalates" (July 20, 2021).

China's Defense Ministry Spokesman Tan Kefei told the South China Morning Post that the SCS should not be a hotbed of great power struggle dominated by weapons and warships.

> "The Chinese military will take necessary steps to safeguard the sovereignty, security and development interests as well as peace and stability in the South China Sea" (July 28, 2021).

Then,
> "If the two countries are, say, in a 'cold war' mode, then don't let it break out into a real war" (July 22, 2021).

Furthermore,
> "Four ships including guided missile destroyers and missile frigates will be deployed for a two-month period to Southeast Asia, the South China Sea and the western Pacific," (August 4, 2021)

Second, *kompas.com* considers international political intervention to have contributed to clouding the SCS atmosphere. The superpowers took part in the maneuver by making the SCS a world problem so that it had to be resolved through lobbying and international politics. This is evidenced in the following news quotes.

> "China's attitude is one of the main topics discussed by the seven developed countries that are members of the G7 group. In the document on the results of the meeting or communique released after the meeting, the G7 countries said that China had many problems. Starting from the human rights issue of the Uighur ethnic group in Xinjiang, Hong Kong's autonomy, the coronavirus pandemic, to the South China Sea. Therefore, regarding the Xinjiang issue, the G7 countries call on China to respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the people of Xinjiang" (June 15, 2021).

Philippine Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana promised Manila would ignore China's amended maritime law, which now requires foreign vessels sailing in the South China Sea to report their information to Chinese authorities.

> "Our stance is that we do not respect China's laws in the West Philippine Sea because we have sovereign rights in these waters. So, we will not recognize this Chinese law," Lorenzana said at the event marking the Philippines' Mutual Defense Agreement (MDT) with the United States (US) (September 11, 2021).

The partnership, dubbed AUKUS, was announced at a virtual conference between US President Joe Biden, British PM Boris Johnson and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison. Although Beijing was not named, the three leaders cited worrying regional developments as the reason they made the pact.

> "This is a historic opportunity for three countries, with like-minded allies, to protect value, security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific." (September 17, 2021)

Then,
> "The partnership, dubbed AUKUS, was announced at a virtual conference between US President Joe Biden, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison. Although Beijing was not named, the three leaders cited worrying regional developments as the reason they made the pact" (September 17, 2021).

Third, *kompas.com* sees the SCS conflict as inseparable from the competition between the US and China. The two countries are fighting for influence for other countries for their respective interests. This can be seen in the following news excerpts.

> "China claims to have expelled a destroyer belonging to the United States (US) near the Paracel Islands, South China Sea, on Monday (12/7/2021). Beijing claims the destroyer USS Benfold entered the waters of the Paracel Islands without the Chinese government's approval" (July 12, 2021).

> "The US government calls competition with China the "biggest geopolitical test" of the century" (August 24, 2021).

Fourth, *kompas.com* found that there were differences in the interests of ASEAN countries in responding to SCS conflicts. ASEAN members do not share the same vision in building relations with China. This can be seen in the following news excerpts.

> "Meanwhile, Laos and Cambodia have close relations with China. So, given the situation, it is very difficult for ASEAN to agree on one vote" (July 22, 2021).

Fifth, *kompas.com* considers the cause of the problem is China's aggressive maneuvers in the region. China builds on islands and across borders between countries. This can be seen in the following news excerpts.

> "The Philippines has previously protested the presence of hundreds of Chinese ships in the Spratly islands this May. Meanwhile, the Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) said it had deployed fighter jets to intercept the 16 military aircraft on Monday (31/5/2021). The "Panda Country" plane flew as close as 60 nautical miles from Beting Patinggi Ali" (June 29, 2021).

> "The place, also known as Luconia Shoals, is also claimed by Beijing as part of its territory. The 16 Chinese planes refused to communicate with local air traffic controllers. According to the "Neighbor Country" statement, the actions carried out by the Chinese aircraft were considered a threat to national sovereignty and aviation safety" (June 29, 2021).

As for the element of moral considerations, *kompas.com* frames a commitment to maintain security stability in the SCS. ASEAN countries, China, and other countries involved in the SCS conflict need to maintain stability in these waters. This can be seen in the following news excerpts.

> "Prabowo hopes that ASEAN and China will immediately continue discussing an effective and substantive Code of the Conduct , including encouraging compliance with the Declaration of Conduct (DoC). The DoC contains commitments from ASEAN member countries and China to comply with the principles of international law, respect the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, resolve disputes peacefully, and refrain from actions that can escalate conflict escalation" (15 June 15, 2021).

> Then,
> "Beijing and Hanoi must respect the hard-won peace and stability in the South China Sea" (September 11, 2021)

Then, for problem-solving recommendations, *kompas.com* frames diplomacy between countries as a solution in resolving SCS conflicts and an attitude of respecting the applicable law. Every country leader needs to build good communication through formal meetings held bilaterally, multilaterally, or with other world organizations. This can be seen in the following news excerpts.

> "Dialogue and consultation with mutual trust and confidence can solve all problems in the region including the South China Sea issue" (June 15, 2021).

> Then,
> "Both sides agreed on the importance of keeping communication channels open between the two militaries" (August 28, 2021).

Framing by Bharian.com

Bharian.com suggested three root causes of the South China Sea (SCS) conflict. First, China's claim of the SCS as part of its territory. Second, state sovereignty. Third, China's hegemony in the Asia Pacific. First, China's claim of the SCS as part of its territory. China's dominance in the South China Sea region has been going on since the imperial era. Royal soldiers controlled the waters from

generation to generation until China had republican status. This is evidenced in the following news quotes.

> "China demands a large part of the waters in the South China Sea called the Nine-Dash Line, which Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also claim" (July 12, 2021).

> "China claims sovereignty over almost the entire South China Sea, at the same time provoking the anger of its neighbors and inviting external objections including from the United States (US) government" (July 20, 2021).

Second, state sovereignty. Malaysia considers the territorial dispute in the SCS as an issue of defending the sovereignty. This can be seen in the following news excerpts.

> "Regarding the issue of South China Sea aggression, he said, Malaysia has consistently submitted a Diplomatic Objection Note to the country of origin of foreign ships that carry out the activities involved. He explained that the action was in line with international law and Malaysia's stance in defending national sovereignty" (September 23, 2021).

> "The fact is, the issue of sovereignty in the South China Sea is not a political issue, but rather an issue that all Malaysians share and will defend. This is referred to as a core value as the basis for the formation of a nation, especially a sovereign Malaysia" (October 8, 2021).

Meanwhile, for the elements of problem causes, bharian.com.my considers several things that trigger the rise in SCS tension. First, international politics involving big countries. Both military interests. Third, China's hegemony in the Asia Pacific.

First, international politics. The superpowers play their politics in order to enter into the SCS conflict. Formal relations and agreements that have been established with countries bordering the South China Sea have contributed to the presence of the US, UK, Australia in the SCS conflict. This is evidenced in the following news excerpts.

> "The US is seen to be taking advantage of the opportunity to strengthen its presence in the Asia-Pacific region when tensions with China are escalating in the waters of the South China Sea. Despite having strong ties with Washington, Indonesia is also seen trying to balance relations with the US and China, both of which are important economic partners" (August 4, 2021).

> "This strong and resilient US-Philippines alliance is important for the security, stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific, especially the South China Sea where China's threat is seen to be escalating" (July 30, 2021).

However, Senior Minister of Defense, Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein said, although ASEAN's joint role is important in dealing with the situation, it does not mean that Malaysia cannot continue to support the AUKUS alliance or other major powers.

> "It happened yesterday that I was able to get in touch with the Minister of Defense of Indonesia, Prabowo Subiyanto, and he stated how important it is that we 10 countries (ASEAN) can interact closely, especially in the latest developments, namely AUKUS. But this does not mean that we cannot continue to support the forces involved."

> "It just so happens that a special envoy from Australia will meet me today and what we are doing through this diplomacy is not to say that we are great, but at least we have a position as a sovereign country," he said when wrapping up the debate on the 12th Malaysia Plan at the ministerial level in the Dewan Rakyat, today" (October 5, 2021).

Second, military interests. Countries involved in SCS conflicts present their militaries through war infrastructure. Military exercises, deployment of warships, procurement of weapons show a militaristic scent in the dispute in these waters. This is evidenced in the following news quotes.

> "Junli claimed that the incident is strong evidence of US aggressive navigational and military actions in the South China Sea. We urge the US to immediately stop its provocative actions and strictly control its maritime and air military operations. Otherwise, they will bear all the consequences" (July 13, 2021).

> "Although there are intensive exercises between the US and its allies in this region, I do not believe it is a preparation to face a war in the South China Sea but if it has to, the reasons have to be strong" (July 25, 2021).

Third, China's hegemony in the Asia Pacific. As a super country, China wants to play a strategic role in the Asia Pacific. This is proven in the following news excerpts.

> "Currently Beijing has 20 outposts established in the Paracel Islands." (July 13, 2021)
> "With the tension of territorial disputes in the South China Sea, Beijing's actions are seen as an attempt to expand its 'colony' in the waters of the South China Sea as the world is hit by the COVID-19 pandemic" (July 20, 2021).

> Then,
> "China after 2010 appears to rise as a hegemonic power in the Asia Pacific region. His actions in the South China Sea and the North China Sea lately have become increasingly clear and offensive" (July 20, 2021).

For the moral consideration elements, bharian.com.my considers it important to maintain stability and peace in the SCS. Although these waters are often turbulent, each country needs to maintain stability for the sake of common interests. This can be seen in the following news.

> "All parties must continue to work together to ensure that the South China Sea remains a peaceful and stable body of water" (August 4, 2021).

> Then,
> "Malaysia emphasized the importance of regional cooperation to ensure that the South China Sea remains a safe and stable body of water" (August 4, 2021).

Next, for the problem-solving recommendations, *bharian.com.my* frames diplomacy between countries as a solution in resolving the SCS conflict. Official meetings between countries are very important to reduce and avoid tension. In addition, the attitude of respecting and obeying the applicable law.

> "…. regarding the South China Sea and committed to complying with the Declaration of Conduct in the South China Sea in addition to emphasizing the peaceful resolution of disputes through negotiations" (August 4, 2021).

> "Malaysia reiterates its position that all matters related to the South China Sea must be resolved peacefully and constructively, in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law, including KUUL 1982" (October 5, 2021).

> While the attitude of respecting and obeying the existing rules can be seen below.
> "He also touched on the South China Sea and committed to complying with the Declaration of Conduct in the South China Sea in addition to emphasizing the peaceful resolution of disputes through negotiations" (August 4, 2021).

> "We want existing laws to be respected, sea lanes to be navigated freely, communities to be protected and trade to be conducted fairly according to the rules" (August 4, 2021).

Framing by Mediapermata.com

Mediapermata.com considers maneuvers performed by China in the region as the root of the problem of conflict in the SCS. The Chinese government often carries out resistant activities in a gray area. This can be seen in the following news excerpts.

> "We will speak out when there are actions taken by Beijing that threaten international rules based on law such as activities in the South China Sea. Freedom of navigation is an important issue for this region" (August 27, 2021).

Then,

> "China today showcased the sophistication and strength of its air force, including surveillance drones and jets that can jam enemy electronic equipment to monitor disputed territory from Taiwan to the South China Sea and its rival, the United States" (September 29, 2021).

> "Tensions between Manila and Beijing over the issue—which China claims almost entirely—erupted in March after hundreds of Chinese ships were found in the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone" (May 19, 2021).

Meanwhile, *mediapermata.com* sees two causes of the SCS conflict problem. First, the intervention of foreign parties, especially the US. This can be seen in the following news excerpts.

> "China reiterates its position that the US military presence in the South China Sea, East China Sea and Taiwan Strait is a major factor of instability in the region" (May 1, 2021).

Then,

> "China's Shandong air transport group recently conducted routine annual exercises in the South China Sea" and "US spy planes and warships have become more active around China since President Biden took office" (May 3, 2021).

Second, the extent of military interests in the SCS which can be seen in the following news excerpts.

> "China's Shandong air transport group recently conducted a routine annual exercise in the South China Sea, the People's Liberation Army said today, after Beijing criticized the United States for sending naval ships to the strategic area. China's Ministry of Defense last week urged the US to stop its front-line forces in the air and at sea near China" (May 3, 2021).

For moral considerations, *mediapermata.com* emphasizes the importance of maintaining stability and security in the SCS that can be seen below.

> "Morrison said, this new defense alliance is permanent after going through an 18-month negotiation session with the US and Britain, thus involving an intact commitment to this long-term relationship that will see Australia remain safe in the future" (September 18, 2021).

For problem-solving recommendations, *mediapermata.com* prioritizes diplomacy can be seen below.

> "Finalize the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea as soon as possible. China is ready to intensify dialogue and negotiations with stakeholders to handle disagreements well and strengthen mutual trust" (June 9, 2021).
> "Morrison said, this new defense alliance is permanent after going through an 18-month negotiation session with the US and Britain, thus involving an intact commitment to this long-term relationship that will see Australia remain safe in the future" (September 8, 2021).

Table 1. Entman's Model Results

Element	***Kompas*** **(Indonesia)**	***Berita Harian*** **(Malaysia)**	***Media Permata*** **(Brunei Darussalam)**
Roots of the Problem	China's claim of the SCS as part of its territory	China's claim of the SCS as part of its territory	China's maneuvers in the SCS
	Economic interests	State sovereignty	

Causes of the Problem	Military interests	International political interventions	International political interventions
	China's maneuvers in the SCS	Military interests	Military interests
	Different interests among ASEAN countries	China's hegemony in the Asia Pacific	
	International political interventions		
	AS-China rivalry		
Moral Considerations	Maintain security and stability, create peace	Maintain security and stability	Maintain security and stability, create peace
Recommendations	Diplomacy	Diplomacy	Diplomacy
	Respect and comply with applicable laws	Respect and comply with applicable laws	

Source: Processed by researcher

The Malay media frame the South China Sea (SCS) conflict in their own perspectives. Among the three, Kompas.com and bharian.com.my consider China's unilateral claim to the SCS as the root of the conflict. China bases their claim over the SCS on the history.

These two media present the opinion that past history should not be the basis for determining a region. *Kompas.com* and *bharian.com.my* want to inform the public that the principle of Chinese domination based on historical experience is wrong. A claim to a territory must have a legal, official basis, and receive recognition from other countries and official international institutions. The legitimacy is in writing and is agreed upon by the relevant and interested parties.

Other root causes are framed differently by *kompas.com, bharian.com.my,* and *mediapermata.com*. *Kompas.com* views economic interests as a source of conflict. For them, the SCS is a water that has a very strategic economic value. It contains abundant natural resources other than fish, such as oil or natural gas that is needed by the global community.

Kompas.com wants to construct an opinion that the SCS conflict is driven by an economic motive. The US, UK, Australia, Germany, Japan, Canada, India want to be involved further because of the desire to explore or exploit the potential of the SCS natural resources. This idea is in line with (Zhang, 2017) who said that there are two purposes for the SCS. One of them is hydrocarbons and fishery sources. These results are in line with the results of Zhang (2017) study which states that China is present in the South China Sea to maintain its sovereignty and maritime rights.

Meanwhile, *bharian.com.my* considers the SCS conflict as a matter of state sovereignty. For them, Malaysia has a legitimate territory that must be defended in the region. Malaysia does not want an inch of its territory to be taken by foreign parties. *Bharian.com.my* wants to construct an opinion that the honor of the state and the dignity of the nation must be shown by defending the smallest islands of Malaysia in the SCS.

The framing by *bharian.com.my* is in line with the Malaysian government's strategic policy regarding the SCS. The most important point is that the neighboring country asserts and maintains its sovereignty and sovereign rights in the SCS, besides wanting to protect economic relations and support the conflict management process in the SCS (Sobarini et al., 2021:32).

Furthermore, *mediapermata.com* frames China's maneuvers in the SCS as the source of the problem. For them, China's aggressive actions in the SCS are too much because it implies that the SCS is theirs. Regulating foreign ships passing through the SCS or displaying fighter aircraft in the SCS is evidence of China's aggressiveness in these waters, even though the small island in the SCS is part of Brunei Darussalam.

For problem causes, these Malay media presents a number of identical views. For the three of them, international politics played by the superpowers and military interests are the cause of the problem. They construct an opinion for the public that The SCS continues to be in conflict because of the interference of the US, UK, Australia, Germany, Japan, Canada, India in the region. They use binding relationships and agreements with countries bordering the SCS as an excuse to get involved.

The US, for example, has an agreement with the Philippines. If anyone attacks the Philippines, the US will come to their aid. Then Britain, Australia and Malaysia which have relations as commonwealth countries so that they back up each other. Then Vietnam which also has good relations with India. Indonesia is very friendly with China and the US. Each country has dependencies and attachments so that these superpowers can get involved in SCS conflicts.

Another problem cause is military interests. Under the pretext of joint military exercises, warring countries in the SCS have the opportunity to show their military sophistication. These three media framed that the military is very interested in the SCS conflict through the sale of weapons such as fighter planes, submarines, warships and so on.

Another opinion frame is continued by *bharian.com.my* who mentions China's hegemony in the SCS as another problem cause. This media sees that China's aggressive actions are very dominant in the SCS, especially politically and militarily. Politically, China has enacted rules that prohibit foreign ships from crossing the SCS without its consent. Chinese warships also intimidate other flagged ships, enter the waters of other countries, built bases in the gray area. *Bharian.com.my* frames China as being very superior in the SCS compared to other countries.

Meanwhile, *kompas.com* considers the rivalry between A.S. and China as another problem cause. For them, for them, currently the US and China are two competing world powers. Not only in trade and economics, but also in politics, defense, and the military. The US and China are fighting for influence on the global stage and want to be number one in the world. For Sobarini et al., (2021;31), the US and China hold a strong hegemony in the world with the role of balancing power.

Another framing by *kompas.com* is that ASEAN present different interests. Each ASEAN member has strong bilateral relations with China. Indonesia, for example, has an intimate relationship with China and the US. It is difficult for Indonesia to be assertive or oppose China because both of them have a good relationship. Vietnam are not getting along with China, but Cambodia and Laos, on the other hand, are very close to China.

Furthermore, for moral considerations, the three media frame the importance of stability and security in the SCS. *Kompas.com, bharian.com.my,* and *mediapermata.*com both encourage each warring country to prioritize peace. These Malay media want to inform the public that politically they are allowed to conflict, but order and safety in SCS waters is very important. Making SCS a safe and peaceful waters is the hope of all parties. Maintained stability was also expressed by Zhang (2017) who stated that China's goal in the South China Sea is economic in nature.

For problem-solving of conflict resolution recommendations, these Malay media construct the importance of diplomacy between countries. For *kompas.com, bharian.com.my,* and *mediapermata.com,* every country involved in the SCS conflict can arrive at an agreement at the negotiating table. All three want to convey their opinion to the public that formal lobbying and negotiation are the best steps for a conflict.

The relationship is not only bilateral but multilateral in nature because the SCS conflict is a problem for various countries in the surrounding waters. International institutions such as the United Nations or ASEAN can act as mediators who mediate over the possibility of tough negotiations. This view is in line with the research results of Jalil et al., (2020) who said that consultations and multilaterals are efforts to resolve SCS conflicts.

In particular, for *kompas.com and bharian.com.my,* the two also framed an attitude of respect for the applicable law as a recommendation for settlement. For them, the SCS issue has laws and regulations that are under the auspices of the United Nations. In addition to the laws and regulations that each country has through previous agreements.

Conclusion

This study concludes that *kompas.com, bharian.com.my and mediapermata.com* display similarities and differences in how they frame the South China Sea (SCS) conflict. Each construct the water area with their own ideology and media agenda. They agree on the argument that China's claim over the SCS and economic factors as the root of the problem. But they have nationality to defend their own country.

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