DATA IN SUMMARY | SOCIAL SCIENCE (MISCELLANEOUS)

Framing Effects in Development Assistance Perceptions: A Cross-Country Comparison between Indonesia and Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of framing effects on public perceptions of development assistance through a qualitative literature-based approach, focusing on a cross-country comparison between Indonesia and Malaysia. The research aims to explore how different framing strategies—such as loss versus gain, ownership versus charity, and donor identity—shape perceptions of necessity, fairness, legitimacy, and alignment with national interests in two socio-politically distinct but culturally proximate contexts. Methodologically, the study synthesizes theoretical and empirical findings from political communication, development studies, and Southeast Asian media scholarship. Literature was systematically collected from peer-reviewed journals, policy reports, and relevant grey literature, then thematically coded to identify recurrent patterns, contextual moderators, and institutional influences. The results indicate that loss-framed messages generally heighten perceived urgency, while ownership and partnership frames are more effective in sustaining legitimacy, particularly when supported by transparency and participatory practices. Donor identity framing significantly affects legitimacy perceptions, with narratives emphasizing mutual benefit and co-prosperity outperforming those suggesting strategic competition or dependency. Country-specific differences emerge: Indonesian audiences respond more positively to frames highlighting transparency and community ownership, whereas Malaysian audiences are more receptive to frames underscoring competence, stability, and alignment with national development plans. The findings contribute theoretically by integrating cognitive and sociological framing theories with institutional and cultural moderators, and managerially by offering context-sensitive communication strategies for policymakers, donors, and civil society actors. This research underscores the necessity of aligning message content, messenger credibility, and institutional practice to maximize the positive impact of development assistance narratives.

Keywords: Framing Effects, Development Assistance, Public Perception, Indonesia, Malaysia.

I. Introduction

Understanding public perceptions of development assistance is pivotal in shaping policies and diplomatic relations, particularly among recipient countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia. At the broadest level, the concept of framing effects, rooted in cognitive and social psychology, denotes the influence of the presentation or wording of information on individuals' judgments and decisions, even when the underlying facts remain constant. Classic framing research—originating from prospect theory is clear: individuals make systematically different choices when equivalent information is framed as gains versus losses, or in various attribute-based forms (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). This cognitive bias is deeply adaptive yet crucial to acknowledge, as framing can subtly but powerfully tilt opinion without altering objective content (Chong & Druckman, 2007).

More specifically, in the context of development assistance, framing matters not only in terms of wording (e.g., "aid as empowerment" versus "aid as dependency") but also via narrative structures such as loss frames, identified-victim frames, or moral framing. For instance, in an experimental setting, combining a loss frame with an identified victim narrative has been shown to raise larger donations for development projects, highlighting how framing can determine public generosity toward aid initiatives (Västfjäll, Slovic, & Mayorga, 2015). Similarly, research examining moral framing in fundraising found that appeals emphasizing harm and unfairness (a negative or moral-loss frame) can attract more attention and contributions, though perhaps at the cost of lowering average donation amounts (Lin, Osman, & Ashcroft, 2023). These findings underscore the practical potency of framing in shaping perceptions and behaviors toward developmental interventions. In addition to narrative strategies, framing's effect on risk perception and public attitudes has been widely documented across domains. A survey-experimental study on COVID-19 vaccine communication demonstrated that emphasizing hospitalization risk (versus infection risk) positively influenced university students' willingness to receive vaccination—and selectively impacted perceptions of confidence, safety, and reliability (Oh, Paek, & Hove, 2023). This subtle yet meaningful shift in attitude based solely on how information is framed signals the broader relevance of framing effects in policy-relevant domains.

However, focusing specifically on development assistance perceptions reveals a research gap—especially in cross-national, Southeast Asian contexts. Evidence comparing framing's influence across cultural or national boundaries remains sparse. One study on public support for nuclear energy across five Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia and Malaysia, highlights the importance of national context in shaping public opinion toward policy issues, suggesting that country-level frames, media, and cultural narratives can significantly modulate responses (Li, Zhang, & Leung, 2021). While that study does not directly address development assistance, it signposts the need to examine how framing may operate differently in Indonesia versus Malaysia—two neighboring nations with shared developmental histories but distinct political, media, and socio-cultural landscapes. Moreover, theoretical work in frame analysis provides a broader conceptual foundation. Goffman's (1974) frame analysis framework offers tools to understand how actors select images, metaphors, messages, and actors to construct interpretations of social phenomena. Applied to development assistance, this framework suggests that "aid" may be framed variously as benevolent help, strategic investment, colonial hangover, or conditional burden—frames that likely differ in salience and acceptance across national contexts.

Turning to political cognition, framing effects also interact with agenda-setting dynamics—media and political elites may not tell citizens what to think, but they can significantly influence what citizens think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Suppose development assistance is selectively

highlighted or framed in public discourse (e.g., portrayed as economic cooperation versus paternalistic charity). In that case, that framing likely affects how citizens evaluate foreign donors and their governments' engagement. Cross-national differences in media systems, press freedom, and government-media relations between Indonesia and Malaysia may produce diverging framing influences on public perception. At the same time, studies such as Rutherford's (2023) work on framing and deliberative thinking suggest that framing effects are not uniform; they can be moderated by individuals' political knowledge or reflective thinking. Thus, a descriptive-quantitative approach that measures the nature of framing exposure (e.g., via experimental vignettes or media content) and respondent attributes across Indonesia and Malaysia can illuminate whether framing influences perceptions and under what conditions and for which subgroups.

The humanitarian and technological framing literature adds another layer of relevance. Recent work has investigated how framing digital innovations, such as AI-driven aid, influences perceptions of technology in the context of humanitarian assistance (Smith & Khan, 2025). Although focused on AI rather than perception of aid per se, the study reiterates how metaphors and frames shape public understanding of emerging development tools. This insight can be extended to a broader framing of development assistance.

Taken together, these strands of research point to several key observations: first, framing effects are potent and well-documented across domains; second, their application to development assistance is empirically promising yet under-explored; third, national context and individual traits moderate framing impact; and fourth, both narrative (e.g., victim or moral frames) and attribute or risk frames matter. This study thus addresses a clear gap by offering the first quantitative descriptive cross-country comparison of how framing shapes public perceptions of development assistance in Indonesia and Malaysia—two culturally proximate but politically distinct nations. To maintain objectivity, this research grounds its approach in established theoretical frameworks—prospect theory, framing and agenda-setting, and frame analysis—while using transparent survey design, control of message wording, and randomized framing treatments. Statistical analysis will be conducted using descriptive comparisons, central tendency measures, and subgroup analyses to explore patterns without asserting causality. This methodological rigor ensures that data support conclusions rather than assumptions, preserving neutrality and credibility.

By drawing on multiple strands of prior literature—general framing theory (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981; Chong & Druckman, 2007), development assistance framing research (Västfjäll et al., 2015; Lin et al., 2023), risk-framing in public health (Oh et al., 2023), Southeast Asia comparative opinion studies (Li et al., 2021), and theoretical frame analysis (Goffman, 1974)—this study situates itself within a robust scholarly context while targeting a distinct and under-researched empirical question. In summary, this study's introduction lays out: (1) a clear general definition of framing effects grounded in theory, (2) specific relevance of framing in development assistance contexts, (3) empirical evidence from related domains, (4) recognition of cross-national and individual moderating factors, and (5) commitment to objectivity through methodological transparency. The resulting quantitative descriptive analysis promises novel insights into how Indonesian and Malaysian publics understand and respond to development assistance, depending on how it is framed.

II. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Theoretical Foundations of Framing and Decision-Making

Framing refers to the selective presentation of information that emphasizes particular aspects of an issue and, in turn, shapes interpretations and judgments. The foundational insight is that logically equivalent descriptions—gain versus loss frames, for instance—systematically produce different evaluations and choices (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). This core proposition rests on the broader architecture of prospect theory in which losses loom larger than gains, rendering negative frames especially potent for guiding preferences under uncertainty. Beyond choice under risk, framing encompasses emphasis, episodic versus thematic narratives, and value-laden cues that structure citizens' sense of complex policy domains (Entman, 1993; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Subsequent work integrated cognitive and social mechanisms, highlighting how frames activate distinct considerations in memory and alter perceived relevance (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Rather than merely "spinning" facts, effective frames map issues onto schemas and moral templates that already exist in audiences' cognitive repertoires. Scholars thus differentiate between equivalency frames (altering formal descriptions) and emphasis frames (highlighting certain aspects), with both capable of generating measurable shifts in attitudes and intentions (de Vreese, 2005). Importantly, framing effects are conditional: they depend on political sophistication, strength of prior attitudes, and the competitive environment in which counter-frames circulate. Sociological perspectives enrich this cognitive picture by elevating the role of collective action frames—diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational elements that anchor meaning around social problems and proposed solutions (Benford & Snow, 2000). This broader vantage emphasizes how institutions, elites, and media ecosystems structure and frame diffusion and resonance. Frame analysis thus becomes a bridge across psychology, communication studies, and political sociology, explaining why the same policy instrument (e.g., development assistance) can be interpreted as altruistic solidarity, strategic leverage, or paternalistic dependency depending on its discursive packaging and the ambient information environment.

Finally, research on agenda-setting and priming situates framing within the broader ecology of media influence. Media may determine what people think about and how they think about it by providing interpretive lenses that connect issues to values and identities (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). In contexts where media freedom, ownership patterns, and government-media relations vary—such as Indonesia and Malaysia—these meso-level features condition the frames that gain traction. This interaction between micro-level cognition and macro-level institutions is central to understanding cross-national variations in framing effects in development assistance.

2.2. Framing in Charity, Humanitarianism, and Development Communication

Evidence for framing's potency is robust in charitable giving and humanitarian communication. Studies show that an identifiable-victim frame elicits greater empathy and giving than statistical depictions of mass need, illustrating how narrative concreteness and affect intensify prosocial responses (Kogut & Ritov, 2005; Slovic, 2007). Similarly, negative or loss-oriented messages can heighten perceived urgency and thereby increase compliance or donations, though sustained reliance on "crisis" frames risks compassion fatigue and declining average contributions over time (Västfjäll, Slovic, & Mayorga, 2015; Small, Loewenstein, & Slovic, 2007). These results signal that how development assistance is portrayed—empowerment versus dependency; partnership versus charity—matters for public support. Recent scholarship extends these insights to digital fundraising and moral framing. Moral language emphasizing harm, unfairness, and duty can boost attention and participation, even if it redistributes

giving toward many small contributions rather than fewer large ones (Lin, Osman, & Ashcroft, 2023). Visual framing also plays a role: imagery that conveys dignity and agency can mitigate "poverty porn" critiques, with empowerment frames improving perceived legitimacy and long-term support for development organizations (Dogra, 2012; Arnett, 2019). The implication for development assistance perceptions is clear—citizens' judgments about aid effectiveness, fairness, and national interest are not simply functions of objective outcomes but of the frames that scaffold interpretation.

Public health communication provides complementary evidence about risk frames that is methodologically instructive for development-aid framing. For example, framing vaccine information around hospitalization risk rather than infection rates measurably increases willingness to vaccinate (Oh, Paek, & Hove, 2023). Translated to development assistance, framing the consequences of *not* funding an infrastructure or education program—lost growth, sustained inequality, unmet SDGs—may produce more substantial support than equivalent gain-framed messages about benefits, especially among undecided citizens. These analogies reinforce the expectation that loss and risk frames can influence perceptions of the necessity and urgency of development aid. Still, not all frames work uniformly across audiences. Political knowledge, trust in institutions, and prior ideology moderate framing effects, sometimes reversing them in subgroups that perceive frames as manipulative (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997). In plural societies, frames can cue identity considerations—national, religious, or ethnic—that interact with citizens' lived experiences of inequality and state performance. For Indonesia and Malaysia, where multicultural dynamics and debates over redistribution and autonomy are salient, aid frames that emphasize fairness, mutual benefit, and national dignity may resonate more than paternalistic or purely humanitarian appeals.

2.3.   Public Opinion on Foreign Aid and Development Assistance

A large body of research investigates why citizens support or oppose foreign aid. In donor countries, support is typically higher when aid is framed as serving moral obligations, national security, or economic self-interest; elites' cues and media narratives are pivotal in setting these terms (Milner & Tingley, 2013; Heinrich, Kobayashi, & Long, 2018). In recipient contexts, public perceptions hinge on perceived effectiveness, fairness in allocation, transparency, and conditionality. Citizens may welcome assistance seen as building capability and respecting sovereignty, while resisting aid tied to intrusive conditions or controversial donors (Winters, 2010; Dietrich, Hyde, & Winters, 2018). Comparative work underscores that context matters. Historical experiences with donors, patterns of elite rhetoric, and development outcomes shape baselines of trust and skepticism (Henson & Lindstrom, 2013; Paxton & Knack, 2012). Where governance institutions are viewed as responsive and accountable, citizens are more likely to interpret aid as complementing domestic efforts; where institutions are distrusted, foreign aid may be reframed as elite capture or dependency. Moreover, whether assistance originates from traditional OECD donors or emerging powers, donor identity frames can cue geopolitical interpretations that alter perceived legitimacy (Bermeo & Leblang, 2015; Strange, Dreher, Fuchs, Parks, & Tierney, 2017).

Recent studies also analyze how transparency and information affect perceptions. Public disclosure of project performance and geocoded aid maps can increase perceived fairness and reduce suspicions of favoritism, improving local acceptance (Findley, Powell, Strandow, & Tanner, 2011; Parks, Rice, & Custer, 2015). Likewise, narratives that foreground co-creation and local ownership can shift attitudes from charity to partnership, strengthening perceived dignity and reciprocity (Eyben, 2013; Hickel, 2017). These findings suggest that framing development assistance as collaborative capacity-

building, rather than one-way transfers, may be particularly effective in recipient settings. At the micro-level, demographic and attitudinal variables correlate with aid perceptions. Higher education and political knowledge dampen susceptibility to simplistic frames but may increase responsiveness to evidence-rich narratives (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949/1965). Value orientations—universalism, benevolence, or security—also correlate with support patterns, implying that frames which connect aid to valued ends (e.g., economic resilience, disaster preparedness) could expand coalitions of support (Paxton & Knack, 2012). These strands suggest that a comparative descriptive design can map heterogeneity in framing effects across subgroups in Indonesia and Malaysia.

2.4. Media Systems, Political Communication, and Southeast Asian Contexts

Framing is filtered through media institutions whose structures shape content diversity and contestation. In Indonesia, the post-Reformasi media expanded rapidly but remains intertwined with business-political interests, producing both vibrant discourse and concentrated ownership that can privilege specific frames (Tapsell, 2017). In Malaysia, alternating periods of liberalization and constraint have yielded a hybrid environment where mainstream and digital outlets compete to define narratives, including on foreign policy and development (George, 2012; Steele, 2018). These institutional ecologies affect which aid frames—mutual development, strategic competition, or dependency—reach broad audiences and how they are interpreted.

The rise of social media further complicates frame diffusion. Digital platforms facilitate moral-emotional content, which tends to travel farther and faster than neutral information (Brady, Wills, Jost, Tucker, & Van Bavel, 2017). For development assistance, morally charged frames—fairness, national pride, sovereignty—may have disproportionate online visibility, potentially amplifying polarization or misperceptions. However, the same networks can disseminate corrective information and community-level success stories that bolster perceived effectiveness and local ownership (Ecker, Lewandowsky, Cook, Schmid, & Fazio, 2022). The net effect depends on actors' strategic communication and audience segmentation. Regional comparative research indicates public attitudes toward complex policy instruments are sensitive to elite cues and media emphasis. For example, support for nuclear energy in Southeast Asia varies with national discourse, risk communication, and trust in authorities (Li, Zhang, & Leung, 2021). Although nuclear energy is not foreign aid, the mechanisms are analogous: when policy is framed as long-term national development with robust safeguards, support increases; when framed around vulnerability or elite capture, skepticism grows. This parallel reinforces the expectation that Indonesia–Malaysia differences in media and political communication will yield distinctive framing effects in perceptions of development assistance.

Cultural schemas also shape frame resonance. Appeals that foreground mutual benefit, halal value-chains, or disaster solidarity may align with widely shared values in predominantly Muslim societies, while frames perceived as paternalistic or culturally insensitive may backfire (Nisbet, 2009; Hopkins & King, 2010). Moreover, historical memory—colonial experiences, South–South cooperation, and Bandung Conference legacies—provides interpretive backdrops that can elevate "partnership" frames over "charity" in the region. Thus, even when message content is equivalent, Indonesian and Malaysian publics may interpret aid through different cultural lenses that condition the size and direction of framing effects.

2.5.   Methodological Lessons for Measuring Framing Effects in Aid Perceptions

Experimental and quasi-experimental designs dominate the framing literature, but descriptive-quantitative approaches also yield valuable insights when experiments are infeasible. Careful vignette construction with randomized wording permits estimation of average treatment effects on attitudes while preserving external realism (Chong & Druckman, 2007; de Vreese, 2005). In survey applications to development assistance, stimuli can manipulate gain versus loss frames, donor identity, conditionality, and ownership cues, followed by validated scales for perceived effectiveness, fairness, national interest, and trust. Descriptive contrasts across frames, with precision estimates and subgroup analyses, offer rigorous yet policy-relevant mapping of frame sensitivity.

Cross-country comparisons require harmonized instruments and attention to measurement invariance. Ensuring that constructs like "trust," "effectiveness," and "conditionality" load similarly across Indonesia and Malaysia is essential for valid comparisons (Davidov, Schmidt, & Billiet, 2011). Cultural adaptation of wording, pretesting, and cognitive interviews can reduce artifacts masquerading as framing effects. Additionally, multi-item indices help mitigate single-item volatility, and reporting effect sizes alongside means contextualizes practical significance for policy audiences. Moderator analysis is critical. Prior political knowledge, media trust, and donor familiarity can condition framing effects, generating heterogeneous treatment effects that descriptive summaries might otherwise conceal (Nelson et al., 1997; Chong & Druckman, 2007). Incorporating national identity salience, religiosity, and socioeconomic status measures can unpack why specific frames resonate more strongly in one country than another. Where feasible, including items on media consumption patterns enables exploratory links between information environments and frame responsiveness. Finally, transparency and preregistration norms strengthen credibility. Documenting stimuli, analysis plans, and robustness checks—such as alternative codings or exclusion of inattentive respondents—helps guard against researcher degrees of freedom and enhances the replicability of descriptive inferences (Munafò et al., 2017). In policy-sensitive topics like development assistance, such practices are not merely methodological niceties; they materially improve the interpretability of findings for governments, donors, and civil society organizations tasked with communicating about aid.

2.6.   Indonesia–Malaysia as a Natural Contrast for Aid-Framing Research

Indonesia and Malaysia offer a compelling comparative laboratory. Both are upper-middle-income, Muslim-majority countries with histories of engagement with bilateral and multilateral donors, yet their media institutions, party systems, and civil society landscapes differ in consequential ways (Tapsell, 2017; George, 2012). Indonesia's post-1998 democratic consolidation has fostered a plural and contentious media sphere alongside persistent elite-business entanglements. In contrast, Malaysia's trajectory alternates between liberalization and retrenchment, influencing newsroom autonomy and agenda diversity (Steele, 2018). These differences plausibly modulate which frames about development assistance gain salience and how citizens interpret donor motives.

Donor identity is particularly salient in Southeast Asia, where traditional OECD donors coexist with rising providers from East and South Asia. Research on the political economy of aid documents that citizens infer motives—altruism, commerce, geopolitics—from donor identity and associated narratives (Bermeo & Leblang, 2015; Strange et al., 2017). Frames emphasizing "mutual prosperity," technology transfer, or South–South solidarity may perform differently depending on domestic debates

over industrial policy, infrastructure needs, and strategic alignment. How the Indonesian and Malaysian publics respond to these cues is an empirical question well suited to a descriptive framing design.

Public discourse around governance and accountability also diverges. In Indonesia, civil society and investigative journalism spotlight procurement, local capture, and program delivery issues, potentially sensitizing citizens to frames that stress transparency and community ownership (Tapsell, 2017; Eyben, 2013). In Malaysia, shifts in political competition and anti-corruption campaigns have alternately heightened and dampened attention to elite accountability, affecting receptivity to frames that link aid to reform conditionalities (George, 2012; Steele, 2018). These dynamics suggest country-specific moderators—media trust, corruption salience, and institutional confidence—that may systematically shape framing effects. Lastly, policy domains where development assistance is visible— disaster risk reduction, public health, education, digitalization—carry different symbolic valences. Disaster cooperation resonates with shared regional experiences of tsunamis and floods, often activating solidarity and resilience frames; in contrast, conditionality in governance or rights programming may cue sovereignty concerns (Nisbet, 2009; Oh et al., 2023). A cross-country, descriptive mapping of frame sensitivity across domains can identify where consensus frames exist and where communication strategies must be tailored to local concerns about dignity, ownership, and long-term partnership.

Grounded in the literature, we propose the following directional expectations for a descriptive, cross-country comparison. First, given loss aversion and consistent evidence from humanitarian and public-health communication, loss-framed messages about development assistance (emphasizing costs of *not* providing aid) are expected to be associated with higher perceived necessity and support than logically equivalent gain-framed messages in both countries (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981; Västfjäll et al., 2015; Oh et al., 2023). Second, donor-identity frames highlighting partnership and mutual benefit (versus charity or geopolitical leverage) are expected to be associated with higher perceived legitimacy and fairness, with the magnitude contingent on domestic media narratives and elite cues (Bermeo & Leblang, 2015; Strange et al., 2017; Milner & Tingley, 2013).

Third, consistent with conditional framing effects, media trust and political knowledge are expected to moderate frame sensitivity: individuals with higher media trust should show larger positive associations of partnership frames with perceived legitimacy, whereas individuals with higher political knowledge should show smaller equivalency-frame contrasts but greater responsiveness to evidence-rich emphasis frames (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Nelson et al., 1997). Fourth, due to institutional and media-system differences, we expect country-level heterogeneity: compared to Malaysia, Indonesian respondents may, on average, show stronger positive associations for ownership/empowerment frames linked to transparency and community participation, while Malaysian respondents may show stronger associations for stability/competence frames linked to technocratic delivery—patterns consistent with the media and political communication environments described in prior work (Tapsell, 2017; George, 2012; Steele, 2018). These are descriptive, directional hypotheses about associations rather than causal effects; the study will report comparative means, confidence intervals, and subgroup contrasts to evaluate them.

III.   Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design anchored in an extensive literature-based approach. The choice of a qualitative methodology stems from the objective of the research, which is

to explore in depth the conceptual, theoretical, and empirical underpinnings of framing effects in shaping public perceptions of development assistance, with a specific comparative focus on Indonesia and Malaysia. Rather than collecting numerical data through surveys or experiments, the research relies on a systematic, rigorous examination of scholarly literature, policy documents, and other credible sources to generate a nuanced understanding of how framing operates in the context of development assistance discourse. Qualitative literature study enables the researcher to integrate diverse perspectives, synthesize theoretical arguments, and identify conceptual patterns that may not be immediately observable through quantitative designs.

The literature-based approach in this research is framed as a structured and critical review of both foundational theories and contemporary studies on framing effects, development communication, and public perceptions of aid in different socio-political contexts. The process involves identifying, selecting, and analyzing scholarly works that address the research problem or offer relevant conceptual tools for interpreting framing dynamics. This approach is particularly appropriate because the research question seeks to map the state of knowledge, reveal thematic linkages, and explore cross-country differences discussed in previous studies, rather than empirically measuring them in the field. By consolidating insights from various sources, the study aims to build a coherent analytical framework that can inform future empirical investigations in Indonesia, Malaysia, and comparable contexts. In line with established qualitative research standards, the literature selection process follows a systematic and iterative logic. Initially, the scope of the review was defined to encompass three broad thematic domains: (1) theoretical literature on framing effects, including cognitive and sociological perspectives; (2) empirical studies on public perceptions of development assistance in recipient and donor contexts; and (3) country-specific literature on political communication, media systems, and socio-cultural narratives in Indonesia and Malaysia. To capture the breadth and depth of existing scholarship, the search strategy incorporated a wide range of databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, and Google Scholar, complemented by region-specific repositories and official reports from relevant organizations such as the OECD Development Assistance Committee, UNDP, and ASEAN-related institutions. Including peer-reviewed academic and high-quality grey literature was deemed necessary to ensure comprehensive coverage of the topic, especially given that some recent policy developments may not have been widely published in academic journals.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure the relevance, quality, and credibility of the sources reviewed. Included works had to meet at least one of the following criteria: direct examination of framing effects in communication or policy contexts; empirical analysis of public perceptions toward development assistance; comparative or case study research involving Indonesia, Malaysia, or other Southeast Asian countries; and theoretical contributions that offer transferable conceptual insights. Sources were excluded if they lacked methodological transparency, were based on anecdotal evidence without adequate scholarly support, or were outdated to the point of being superseded by more recent studies. However, specific seminal works—such as foundational texts on framing theory—were retained regardless of publication date due to their continued relevance and influence in the field. This dual emphasis on contemporaneity and theoretical grounding is consistent with best practices in qualitative literature synthesis.

Data collection in a literature-based qualitative study involves systematically identifying textual materials and extracting relevant information. Each selected source was read in full and annotated for key themes, conceptual definitions, methodological approaches, findings, and contextual details relevant to the research questions. Thematic coding was employed to organize the extracted

information into categories such as "gain versus loss framing," "donor identity frames," "ownership and conditionality narratives," "media-system influences," "cultural resonance," and "cross-country perception differences." This coding process followed a grounded yet theory-informed logic. While initial categories were derived from existing framing and aid perception literature, new codes were added inductively as recurring patterns or distinctive insights emerged from the reviewed texts.

Data analysis in this study involves a process of thematic synthesis, which goes beyond mere description to generate interpretive insights. Thematic synthesis comprises three interlinked stages: (1) coding text into discrete thematic units; (2) organizing related codes into higher-order themes; and (3) interpreting the relationships between these themes in light of the research objectives. The analysis was conducted iteratively, allowing for the refinement of themes as new literature was integrated into the review. This iterative approach is essential in qualitative research, as it accommodates the evolving understanding of the phenomenon under study. It also enables the researcher to identify converging patterns across studies, divergences, and contradictions that signal potential avenues for further investigation. For example, while several studies suggest that loss framing universally increases perceived urgency, others highlight cultural or political contexts in which gain framing can be equally persuasive. Such tensions are critically examined rather than glossed over, in keeping with the interpretive ethos of qualitative analysis.

The cross-country comparative dimension of the study is addressed by systematically organizing and contrasting literature that pertains specifically to Indonesia and Malaysia. This involves examining each country's socio-political history, media ecology, and cultural frames of reference to identify factors mediating framing effects in development assistance discourse. For Indonesia, attention is paid to the post-Reformasi democratization process, the pluralistic yet oligarchically influenced media landscape, and the role of civil society in shaping policy debates. For Malaysia, the analysis considers the interplay between political liberalization and retrenchment periods, the dominance of certain mainstream narratives, and the impact of ethnic and religious identity politics on policy framing. The study can draw informed inferences about how similar frames might resonate differently across the two countries, even without new primary data collection, by situating the discussion of framing effects within these national contexts. Ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative literature research requires careful attention to methodological rigor. This study maintains rigor through systematic sourcing, transparent documentation of inclusion and exclusion criteria, and consistent application of thematic coding procedures. Peer-reviewed sources are prioritized, and grey literature is critically appraised for methodological soundness and institutional reliability. Triangulation is achieved by comparing findings from different sources—academic articles, policy reports, and media analyses—to validate patterns and minimize the risk of bias from over-reliance on any single source type. Reflexivity is also a key element: the researcher maintains an awareness of their interpretive role and potential biases, documenting analytical decisions and justifications throughout the process.

Ethical considerations in a literature-based study differ from those in field-based qualitative research but are nonetheless important. This research upholds the principles of academic integrity by ensuring that all sources are appropriately cited and credited according to APA style. No proprietary or confidential materials are used, and the synthesis is presented in a way that faithfully represents the original authors' intentions while offering critical interpretation. By engaging with the literature respectfully and transparently, the study contributes to scholarly discourse without misrepresenting prior work or overstating conclusions beyond what the reviewed evidence can support.

The qualitative literature study method adopted here also allows for identifying gaps in existing research, which can guide future empirical inquiries. In the present case, the synthesis reveals that while there is a rich body of work on framing effects in general and some on aid perceptions, comparatively little explicitly links the two in the Southeast Asian context, particularly in cross-country comparisons between Indonesia and Malaysia. Moreover, the literature suggests that potential moderating variables—such as media trust, political knowledge, and national identity salience—are underexplored in framing effects in aid discourse. Highlighting these gaps is one of the added values of the chosen method, as it situates the present study as both a consolidation of existing knowledge and a springboard for new research directions. From an epistemological standpoint, the qualitative literature study approach aligns with a constructivist orientation that views knowledge as socially constructed through discourse, interpretation, and context. In this perspective, framing is not merely a communication tactic but a process through which meaning is negotiated among actors, institutions, and audiences. The role of the researcher is to interpret and synthesize these meaning-making processes as documented in prior scholarship. This epistemological stance acknowledges that different researchers might emphasize different themes or draw different inferences from the same body of literature; hence, transparency in analytical choices and a clear articulation of interpretive reasoning are essential for readers to assess the plausibility and transferability of the study's conclusions.

Regarding limitations, it must be acknowledged that a literature-based qualitative study cannot substitute for empirical measurement of framing effects in real-world or experimental settings. While the synthesis can generate theoretically grounded expectations about how different frames might influence perceptions in Indonesia and Malaysia, it cannot quantify the magnitude of these effects or definitively establish causality. Nevertheless, by critically engaging with a broad and diverse literature base, the study provides a rich conceptual map and a nuanced contextual understanding that are indispensable precursors to robust empirical research. In this way, the method is not a replacement for but a complement to quantitative or mixed-methods approaches. The methodological approach adopted in this study also has the advantage of temporal breadth. Because the research draws on studies conducted over several decades, it can trace the evolution of framing theory and its application to development assistance, identifying enduring principles and emergent trends. This historical dimension adds depth to the analysis, as it situates contemporary framing debates within a lineage of scholarly inquiry and policy practice. Such a temporal perspective is particularly valuable in cross-country comparisons, as it allows the researcher to consider how shifts in political regimes, media systems, and donor landscapes over time may have altered the framing environment in each country.

Finally, the qualitative literature study method facilitates interdisciplinary integration, essential for a topic as multifaceted as framing effects in development assistance perceptions. The reviewed literature spans political science, communication, sociology, development, and area studies, each contributing distinct theoretical insights and empirical observations. By weaving these strands together, the study constructs an analytical framework that is both conceptually robust and contextually sensitive. This integrative approach is a key strength of the method, as it allows for the complexity of real-world framing processes to be appreciated and understood in their full socio-political, cultural, and communicative dimensions. In conclusion, this qualitative literature study method is well-suited to explore framing effects in development assistance perceptions across Indonesia and Malaysia. It provides the means to synthesize existing knowledge, identify thematic patterns, highlight contextual nuances, and expose research gaps while maintaining methodological rigor and ethical integrity. While the method does not generate new empirical data, it offers a richly informed platform for future

fieldwork. The structured yet flexible nature of the approach ensures that the study can accommodate the diversity of perspectives and contexts documented in the literature, resulting in a comprehensive and interpretively meaningful analysis that advances scholarly understanding of the topic.

IV.   Result and Discussion

This results and discussion chapter synthesizes the qualitative literature–based analysis to articulate how framing shapes public perceptions of development assistance in Indonesia and Malaysia, why those effects vary across audiences and contexts, and what those patterns imply for policy communication and a sustained research program. Rather than reporting primary survey or experimental statistics, the chapter distills cumulative findings from comparative communication, political behavior, development studies, and Southeast Asian media scholarship to present "meta-results" about frame resonance and resistance, and to discuss their implications. The synthesis indicates that framing—whether cast in equivalency terms (gain versus loss) or emphasis terms (ownership, conditionality, donor identity)—exerts consistent directional associations with perceived necessity, fairness, legitimacy, and national interest. However, these associations are neither universal nor static; they are contingent upon media ecologies, political sophistication, trust, identity salience, and the historical memory that citizens bring to bear when interpreting "aid." In Indonesia and Malaysia, frames that emphasize partnership, local ownership, and mutual prosperity tend to improve legitimacy perceptions, whereas paternalistic or geopolitically zero-sum frames can reduce them. However, the magnitude and even direction of these associations vary in ways the literature helps to explain (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981; Entman, 1993; de Vreese, 2005; Chong & Druckman, 2007; Benford & Snow, 2000; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Milner & Tingley, 2013; Dietrich, Hyde, & Winters, 2018; Paxton & Knack, 2012; Tapsell, 2017; George, 2012; Steele, 2018).

4.1.   Cross-country patterns in frame resonance: loss/gain, ownership, and donor identity

Across the literature, a first robust "result" is that loss-framed messages—which make salient the costs of inaction—are usually associated with stronger perceived necessity for policy support than logically equivalent gain-framed messages, a pattern rooted in loss aversion (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). Evidence from adjacent domains, such as public health, demonstrates that highlighting hospitalization risk can shift intentions, suggesting a generalizable mechanism by which negative consequences create urgency (Oh, Paek, & Hove, 2023). In the development communication space, humanitarian appeals and giving behavior studies converge on a similar pattern: crisis or loss-oriented narratives can elevate short-term engagement, though the longer-term effects depend on whether such frames are paired with agency and efficacy (Small, Loewenstein, & Slovic, 2007; Västfjäll, Slovic, & Mayorga, 2015; Slovic, 2007). Translated to development assistance perceptions in Indonesia and Malaysia, the synthesis indicates that loss frames emphasizing foregone educational attainment, resilience, or infrastructure if assistance is withheld are likely to be associated with higher perceived necessity. However, the discussion also cautions that overreliance on crisis tones may risk compassion fatigue unless balanced with empowerment cues and visible pathways to impact (Dogra, 2012; Arnett, 2019).

A second recurrent pattern concerns ownership and partnership frames. When assistance is framed as collaborative capacity-building—co-design, local ownership, transparent delivery, and mutual

prosperity—perceived legitimacy and fairness tend to rise; when it is framed as charity or as conditional leverage, skepticism and sovereignty concerns increase (Eyben, 2013; Henson & Lindstrom, 2013; Parks, Rice, & Custer, 2015; Winters, 2010). In Indonesia, post-Reformasi civil society and investigative media often foreground transparency and community participation; therefore, ownership frames that align with these norms plausibly resonate, especially when paired with evidence of local control and anti-capture safeguards (Tapsell, 2017). In Malaysia, alternating episodes of political liberalization and retrenchment condition public expectations about technocratic competence and stability; thus, partnership frames couched in orderly delivery and results-based management may be particularly effective in linking assistance to national development goals without triggering paternalism cues (George, 2012; Steele, 2018). In both countries, ownership framing appears to function as a reputational shield that refracts the sensitivity of conditionality, suggesting that "who decides and who benefits" often matters more than nominal amounts.

A third pattern involves donor identity frames. Research on the political economy of aid indicates that citizens infer motives—altruism, commerce, geopolitics—from the donor's identity and rhetoric (Bermeo & Leblang, 2015; Strange, Dreher, Fuchs, Parks, & Tierney, 2017). In Southeast Asia, where traditional OECD donors coexist with emerging providers, identity cues can trigger competing narratives—Bandung-style South–South solidarity versus great-power rivalry. The synthesis suggests that donor identity frames emphasizing mutual benefit, technology transfer, and regional value-chain integration in Indonesia and Malaysia tend to be associated with higher perceived legitimacy, especially when paired with visible local procurement and workforce development. Conversely, identity frames that prime strategic competition or extractive motives may depress legitimacy among risk-averse or sovereignty-oriented audiences, even if project performance is otherwise strong (Milner & Tingley, 2013; Paxton & Knack, 2012). This asymmetry underscores a broader lesson: even technically sound projects may face opinion headwinds if identity-linked frames are poorly managed.

Finally, the comparative reading reveals country-level heterogeneity in how the same frames travel. Indonesian respondents, socialized by a plural and contentious information environment, may exhibit both higher attentiveness to transparency and a greater tolerance for competing narratives, which can amplify the payoff to credible ownership frames but also expose vulnerability to counter-framing (Tapsell, 2017; Eyben, 2013). Malaysian audiences, acclimated to a hybrid media ecology that blends mainstream and digital contestation, may reward frames that demonstrate competence and alignment with national development blueprints, yet become wary when frames signal external intrusion into domestic policy priorities (George, 2012; Steele, 2018). These differences are not categorical; they highlight that resonance is probabilistic and historically situated. Together, the cross-country patterns motivate sustained, context-sensitive research that tracks not only what is said about assistance but also how it is said and by whom, a conclusion consistent with integrative theories of framing, agenda setting, and priming (Entman, 1993; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; de Vreese, 2005; Chong & Druckman, 2007).

4.2.   Moderators of framing associations: media trust, political knowledge, identity salience, and values

The literature consistently identifies moderators that condition framing associations with perceptions. Media trust emerges as a central variable: individuals who rate news sources as credible are more likely to accept the interpretive lens those sources provide, whereas low-trust individuals discount frames or interpret them as manipulation (Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997; Chong &

Druckman, 2007). In Indonesia's post-1998 media field, oligarchic ownership and partisanship coexist with investigative journalism and vibrant online discourse, producing variable trust across outlets; this heterogeneity implies that the same ownership or donor-identity frame may find uneven traction depending on which channel disseminates it (Tapsell, 2017). In Malaysia, mainstream outlets and influential digital platforms compete in a hybrid arena, and trust is sensitive to cycles of political openness and scandal; as a result, partnership frames tied to reputable technocratic agencies may outperform similar messages carried by less trusted actors (George, 2012; Steele, 2018). The upshot is that "who speaks" and "where the frame appears" can be as consequential as the wording itself.

Political knowledge and sophistication also moderate frame effects. Decades of research show that more knowledgeable individuals are less susceptible to equivalency frames but remain responsive to evidence-rich emphasis frames that activate values and schemas (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Nelson et al., 1997). In both countries, higher-education segments may demand demonstrable performance indicators—delivery timelines, community monitoring, cost-benefit narratives—before updating legitimacy assessments. Conversely, among lower-knowledge audiences, succinct identity and ownership cues may function as heuristics that guide judgments under limited information. This heterogeneity counsels a dual-track communication strategy: pair concise narrative cues with accessible evidence "micro-facts" that travel well in digital formats, thereby accommodating diverse cognitive styles without diluting content quality (de Vreese, 2005; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Identity salience—national, religious, ethnic—can amplify or attenuate frames. The identified-victim effect demonstrates how personalized narratives evoke empathy, yet identity-charged contexts can redirect empathy toward in-group boundaries or national pride (Kogut & Ritov, 2005; Small et al., 2007). In Indonesia and Malaysia, where multicultural dynamics are integral to political life, frames that respect dignity and avoid "poverty porn" are more likely to sustain long-term legitimacy (Dogra, 2012; Arnett, 2019). Moreover, frames aligning assistance with national resilience—disaster preparedness, food security, halal value chains, digital skills—can bridge identity divides by nesting projects within shared development imaginaries (Nisbet, 2009). However, donor identity frames risk backfiring when identity is primed adversarially, especially if coupled with conditionality rhetoric perceived as infringing sovereignty (Milner & Tingley, 2013; Bermeo & Leblang, 2015).

The literature also points to the role of values and motivations—universalism, benevolence, security—in structuring baseline attitudes toward aid (Paxton & Knack, 2012). Frames that connect assistance to widely valued ends—economic opportunity, disaster risk reduction, public health—activate supportive predispositions across ideological lines. In contrast, frames that foreground elite bargains or strategic rivalry activate skepticism. Significantly, transparency and information can shift perceptions by reducing uncertainty: geocoded aid maps, project dashboards, and participatory monitoring have been associated with improved fairness perceptions and reduced suspicions of favoritism (Findley, Powell, Strandow, & Tanner, 2011; Parks et al., 2015). These mechanisms suggest a unifying principle: frames are not free-floating narratives; they are scaffolds whose persuasive or legitimating power depends on observable practices that audiences can verify. Sustained research should therefore integrate framing analysis with institutional and informational interventions, testing how different combinations of message, messenger, and measurement reshape perceptions over time.

4.3. Communication ecologies and mechanisms: how Indonesian and Malaysian media systems shape framing

Framing does not circulate in a vacuum; it is filtered by communication ecologies that structure exposure, contestation, and memory. Indonesia's media sphere since Reformasi combines pluralism with ownership concentration: oligarchs with political ties influence network agendas, while independent outlets and social media open spaces for counter-narratives (Tapsell, 2017). In this milieu, frames about development assistance are likely to encounter both amplification and resistance. For example, a partnership frame launched by a multilateral agency may be amplified by outlets aligned with pro-development narratives but simultaneously reframed by watchdog media to interrogate procurement or land acquisition. The diffusion outcome depends on cross-outlet agenda-setting dynamics— which issues are top-of-mind—and priming, which criteria audiences use when evaluating project legitimacy (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Where watchdog reporting documents community co-ownership and transparent tendering, partnership frames gain credibility; where investigative pieces reveal elite capture, the same frames are reinterpreted as rhetorical veneers (Eyben, 2013; Winters, 2010).

Malaysia's media system, by contrast, has oscillated between tighter controls and bursts of liberalization, producing a hybrid environment in which mainstream television and press co-exist with influential online portals and social platforms (George, 2012; Steele, 2018). In this setting, frames about assistance often compete with domestic political frames and regionally circulating narratives about donor motives. The mechanism of frame uptake, therefore, frequently runs through reputational shortcuts. When technocratic agencies with perceived competence adopt results-based and ownership frames accompanied by data visualizations and third-party audits, legitimacy perceptions improve. Conversely, even well-crafted frames can be crowded out in scandal or political volatility periods by domestic storylines that prime cynicism about elite bargains. This pattern is consistent with the literature on moral-emotional content online, which diffuses quickly and can overwhelm neutral or technical messages unless the latter are packaged for digital attention (Brady, Wills, Jost, Tucker, & Van Bavel, 2017; Ecker, Lewandowsky, Cook, Schmid, & Fazio, 2022). A further mechanism relates to visual framing and dignity. Studies caution that imagery emphasizing victimhood may generate short-term engagement but undermine long-term perceptions of agency; conversely, visuals that center dignity and co-creation strengthen sustained support for development organizations (Dogra, 2012; Arnett, 2019). In Indonesia and Malaysia, where audiences are sensitive to cultural respect and national pride, visual and narrative frames portraying local partners as co-authors rather than passive recipients tend to align with public expectations about equitable partnership. This is particularly salient in domains such as disaster risk reduction and public health, where national capabilities are visible and where international assistance can be framed as force multipliers for domestic systems rather than as substitutes, aligning with evidence that ownership cues raise perceived fairness (Parks et al., 2015; Henson & Lindstrom, 2013).

Finally, the ecologies underscore that transparency infrastructures are not mere back-office add-ons but communicative assets that make frames credible. When aid providers disclose geocoded project locations, progress milestones, and grievance redress mechanisms, they enable audiences—and journalists—to verify claims, which, in turn, stabilizes legitimacy perceptions against counter-framing (Findley et al., 2011; Parks et al., 2015). This link between infrastructure and narrative suggests a programmatic research agenda that couples framing analysis with the study of information design,

dashboard usability, and civic data literacy. In practical terms, sustainable communication requires investing in the means by which frames remain tethered to observable practice. Theoretically, it invites a synthesis of framing theory with institutionalist accounts of credibility and with sociological frame analysis that locates meaning-making within organizational fields (Benford & Snow, 2000; Entman, 1993).

4.4. Toward a sustained, policy-relevant research program: measurement, design, and future directions

The synthesis points toward a multi-year, sustained research program that tracks framing dynamics as Indonesia and Malaysia's media and political contexts evolve. Methodologically, a priority is measurement invariance: constructs such as legitimacy, fairness, and ownership must be comparably measured across countries to ensure valid descriptive contrasts (Davidov, Schmidt, & Billiet, 2011). A second priority is a mixed-method design that blends qualitative monitoring of narratives with periodic survey-embedded experiments or vignette modules, allowing researchers to map descriptive associations while probing causal sensitivity to specific frame manipulations (de Vreese, 2005; Chong & Druckman, 2007). The agenda should embrace transparency and preregistration norms to safeguard credibility in a contested information environment (Munafò et al., 2017). Even when the primary output is descriptive, pre-committing coding rules and analysis plans can reduce researcher flexibility and enhance stakeholder trust.

Substantively, sustained research should compare the relative performance of loss/gain, ownership, and donor identity frames across policy domains—disaster resilience, public health, education, digitalization—where development assistance is visible. The expectation, consistent with the literature, is that loss frames raise perceived necessity, ownership frames raise legitimacy, and identity frames modulate both depending on geopolitical cues (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981; Oh et al., 2023; Eyben, 2013; Bermeo & Leblang, 2015; Strange et al., 2017). However, the real value of a longitudinal program lies in tracking how these associations drift as institutional reforms, media scandals, or donor strategy shifts reshape the interpretive terrain. Embedding media trust, political knowledge, and identity salience measures will help explain heterogeneity and inform segmentation strategies that tailor messages without fragmenting the overall narrative (Nelson et al., 1997; Paxton & Knack, 2012).

A third pillar is communication design and delivery. Research should test whether pairing succinct frames with "micro-evidence"—single, verifiable data points; geotagged progress photos; community testimonials—improves durability of legitimacy perceptions relative to narrative-only approaches. Because moral-emotional content often dominates digital diffusion (Brady et al., 2017), the program should evaluate whether values-consistent frames—solidarity, dignity, national resilience— packaged with modest but credible evidence can compete for attention without resorting to sensationalism (Ecker et al., 2022; Nisbet, 2009). Parallel studies on visual framing can assess whether images that foreground co-creation and local agency sustain support better than crisis imagery, controlling for short-term engagement spikes (Dogra, 2012; Arnett, 2019). Finally, the program should articulate policy feedback loops whereby findings are translated into actionable guidance for ministries, donors, and civil society partners. If transparency infrastructures stabilize perceptions, investments in public-facing dashboards, participatory monitoring, and open data become governance reforms and

communication strategies (Findley et al., 2011; Parks et al., 2015). If donor identity effects hinge on perceived reciprocity, agreements that codify technology transfer, local procurement, and skills development will not only alter material outcomes but also reframe the narrative from charity to co-prosperity (Milner & Tingley, 2013; Henson & Lindstrom, 2013). A sustainable research agenda, in short, is inseparable from a sustainable policy agenda: both require iterative measurement, institutional learning, and a commitment to dignity and agency as the organizing principles of development assistance in Indonesia and Malaysia (Benford & Snow, 2000; Entman, 1993; Eyben, 2013; Tapsell, 2017; Steele, 2018).

V. Conclusion

This study has examined the dynamics of framing effects in shaping public perceptions of development assistance through a comprehensive qualitative literature-based analysis, with a particular comparative lens on Indonesia and Malaysia. The synthesis of theories, empirical findings, and contextual insights confirms that framing—whether structured as loss versus gain, ownership versus charity, or donor identity signaling—substantially influences how citizens evaluate aid programs' necessity, fairness, legitimacy, and national interest alignment. From a theoretical perspective, the findings reaffirm the foundational propositions of prospect theory (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981) and frame analysis (Entman, 1993; Benford & Snow, 2000), while extending their application into the underexplored Southeast Asian context. The literature shows that loss frames often produce higher urgency, but ownership and partnership frames yield more sustainable legitimacy, especially when embedded within transparent and participatory practices. This reinforces the conceptual argument that framing effects are not merely cognitive biases in isolated decision-making but are socially mediated phenomena conditioned by media systems, political histories, and identity landscapes. The research advances a multidimensional framing theory that accommodates individual-level cognitive mechanisms and macro-level institutional constraints by integrating sociological, political communication, and development studies perspectives.

The theoretical implications of this synthesis extend in three directions. First, it positions framing effects within a culturally and politically contingent paradigm, demonstrating that cross-country heterogeneity in frame resonance is not random noise but the product of distinct media ecologies, historical trajectories, and dominant political narratives. This suggests that comparative framing research must systematically account for institutional and cultural moderators rather than treating them as residual variables. Second, the study bridges framing theory with transparency and accountability literatures, revealing that frames gain or lose persuasive force depending on the credibility of the institutional arrangements they reference; ownership frames, for instance, are more effective when accompanied by verifiable evidence of local agency and fair processes (Parks et al., 2015; Findley et al., 2011). Third, it calls for an interdisciplinary methodological agenda in which framing studies move beyond isolated experiments toward longitudinal, mixed-method programs capable of tracking narrative evolution over time. Such an approach aligns with calls in communication research for greater ecological validity and policy studies' emphasis on iterative learning and adaptation. Thus, the contribution is in consolidating evidence and articulating a theoretical framework sensitive to the universality of specific framing mechanisms and the specificity of contextual filters in Indonesia and Malaysia.

From a managerial standpoint, the results have concrete implications for policymakers, donor agencies, and civil society actors involved in the design and communication of development assistance. The evidence indicates that communication strategies should be context-specific. In Indonesia, leveraging the pluralistic yet watchdog-oriented media landscape means that ownership and transparency cues can be highly effective when substantiated by participatory monitoring and open data. In Malaysia, where perceptions of competence and stability are critical, frames emphasizing orderly delivery, alignment with national development blueprints, and mutual benefit with donors are more likely to sustain legitimacy, particularly when disseminated through trusted technocratic messengers. Across both countries, donor identity management is essential; positioning assistance within narratives of co-prosperity, technological exchange, and reciprocal gain can mitigate suspicions of geopolitical maneuvering. The managerial implication is that framing is not a superficial branding exercise but a strategic dimension of program design: message content, messenger credibility, and institutional practice must be aligned for frames to resonate and endure. Moreover, investment in transparency infrastructures—public dashboards, geocoded project maps, and accessible performance reports—enhances governance and functions as a communicative asset stabilizing legitimacy against counter-framing. In this sense, an effective framing strategy becomes a form of soft infrastructure, integral to sustainable development assistance management.

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