Media Framing of Rohingya Muslims: A Comparative Analysis of Western, Middle Eastern, and Southeast Asian Media

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Abstract

The Rohingya, a Muslim minority group in Myanmar, have long suffered systematic discrimination, persecution, and violence that has culminated since 2017. The Myanmar government refuses to grant citizenship to the Rohingya, considering them illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, even though they have lived in Myanmar for generations. To highlight the complex relationship between media, geopolitics, and public opinion formation, this research seeks to analyze potential biases and contrasting narratives between Western, Middle Eastern, and Southeast Asian media opinions on Rohingya Muslims. To examine the portrayal of the Rohingya as "refugees", "victims of violence", and "rejects", this study used NVIVO 14 by analyzing 120 news stories, consisting of 40 stories from Western media (CNN and BBC News), 40 from Middle Eastern media (Al Jazeera and Alarabiya News), and 40 from Southeast Asian media (Kompas and The Star). The results showed that Western media tended to frame the Rohingya as victims of violence, Middle Eastern media highlighted the plight of refugees in some countries, while Southeast Asian media highlighted the theme of resistance to their arrival. The analysis also found that the media tended to use neutral sentiments, although bias was detected in certain narrative and framing choices. This research contributes to discourse studies by emphasising the importance of understanding framing biases in shaping public opinion and suggests further analysis that includes levels of semiotics and critical discourse to reveal the depth of media narratives on the Rohingya.

Keywords: Rohingya, Muslim, Framing, Media, NVIVO 14

Abstrak

Rohingya sebagai kelompok minoritas Muslim di Myanmar telah lama mengalami diskriminasi, penganiayaan, dan kekerasan sistematis yang memuncak sejak tahun 2017. Pemerintah Myanmar menolak memberikan kewarganegaraan kepada Rohingya, menganggap mereka sebagai imigran ilegal dari Bangladesh, meskipun mereka telah tinggal di Myanmar selama beberapa generasi. Untuk menekankan hubungan rumit antara media, geopolitik, dan pembentukan opini publik, penelitian ini berupaya menganalisis potensi bias dan narasi yang kontras antara opini media Barat,

Timur Tengah, dan Asia Tenggara mengenai muslim Rohingya. Untuk mengkaji penggambaran Rohingya sebagai "pengungsi", "korban kekerasan", dan "penolakan" penelitian ini menggunakan NVIVO 14 dengan menganalisis 120 berita, yang terdiri dari 40 berita dari Media Barat (CNN dan BBC News), 40 dari media Timur Tengah (Al Jazeera dan Alarabiya News), dan 40 dari Media Asia Tenggara (Kompas dan The Star). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa media Barat cenderung membingkai Rohingya sebagai korban kekerasan, media Timur Tengah menonjolkan keadaan pengungsi di beberapa negara, sementara media Asia Tenggara lebih menyoroti tema penolakan terhadap kedatangan mereka. Analisis juga menemukan bahwa media secara keseluruhan cenderung menggunakan sentimen netral, meskipun bias tetap terdeteksi dalam pilihan narasi dan framing tertentu. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi bagi studi wacana dengan menekankan pentingnya memahami bias framing dalam membentuk opini publik, serta menyarankan analisis lanjutan yang mencakup level semiotika dan wacana kritis untuk mengungkap kedalaman narasi media tentang Rohingya.

Kata Kunci: Rohingya, Muslim, Framing, Media, NVIVO 14

Introduction

Many vital events occur worldwide and are reported in the news media daily. Usually, people are interested in the news because they like to keep up with the latest developments and engage with controversial issues (Kim, Abdollahi-Guilani, and Ahamad Rusly 2017). In some regions, attention to humanitarian problems continues to increase, such as civil wars (Theron 2020; Bedigen 2020; Reuwer 2019), climate change (Lin et al. 2023; Majeed et al. 2023; Rypdal 2016), energy crisis (Wardana, Gede Aris Gunadi, and Sukajaya 2022; Zhao et al. 2016; Thieblemont et al. 2017; Shahsavari and Akbari 2018), food crisis (Nakat et al. 2023; Polman et al. 2023; O'Hara and Toussaint 2021; Wong et al. 2018; Lasminingrat and Efriza 2020), pandemic (Shafeeq Nimr Al-Maliki, Salehi, and Kardan 2023; Standish 2021; Hidayat et al. 2021; Sabran, Apridar, and Abrar 2023), diplomacy (Adisasmito et al. 2019; Konovalova 2023; Saliu 2020), refugee (Wahab 2018; Rich 2023; Komakech, Atuyambe, and Orach 2019; Khater 2023), and the oppression of minorities (Ugiagbe and Eweka 2014; Omar and Alanazi 2023; Rohde and Woertz 2023; Musisi and Kinyanda 2020).

In many countries around the world, minorities suffer from various social, political, economic, and religious problems even though many of these minorities are indigenous to the countries they inhabit and have grown up in for generations (Mat Dong, Midmore, and Plotnikova 2022; Abdulvaliev 2017). Muslim minorities often face challenges to their beliefs, values, behavior, personality, and knowledge due to the non-Islamic environment in which they live (Kanaker, Abughazlih, and Kasmani 2020). Such is the case for the Rohingya

minority in Myanmar, who live in the southwestern Arakan region (Khurshid and Akram 2023; Sabbir, Al Mahmud, and Bilgin 2022). Currently, the Rohingya minority faces discrimination in Myanmar, with their citizenship status not recognized by the government (Pazli, Feza Pardhana, and Rahmat Kurniawan 2023). This discriminatory attitude has led to the Rohingya minority forcibly migrating to neighboring countries, experiencing human rights violations, marginalization, and falling victim to the crime of genocide (Faisal 2020; Hussain and Hussain 2023).

The term 'Rohingya' is associated with the toponym 'Rohang,' used by Bengali Muslims in the 17th century to refer to the Kingdom of Arakan, now known as Rakhine, where the Rohingya community has deep and ancient roots (Yusuf 2022). According to Mohajan (2018), the Rohingya are a Muslim ethnic minority group in Rakhine and are considered one of the most persecuted, vulnerable, and oppressed minority groups in the world. Recently, the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in the Rakhine state has increased and turned into ethnic cleansing and genocide due to Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar (Shahin and Hasan 2023; Anwary 2020; Debnath, Chatterjee, and Afzal 2022) . According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data (2021), almost all Rohingya people lost their citizenship due to Myanmar's citizenship laws. They considered them as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. This makes them the largest stateless community in the world. Nearly one million Rohingya have been registered by UNHCR, mainly in Bangladesh (860,000), Malaysia (101,000), and India (18,000), as well as a small number in Indonesia, Nepal, Thailand, and other countries. About 600,000 Rohingya still live in Myanmar's Rakhine State, with 142,000 internally displaced (UNHCR Indonesia 2023).

The Rohingya crisis, recognized as a crime of genocide, is often portrayed in the media with limited graphic depictions. This impacts public perception and humanitarian support despite the crisis being one of the most severe today (Grandjean and Bucy 2023). This research has been analyzed by many scholars from various perspectives, such as the media framing of violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar (Brooten 2015; Brooten and Verbruggen 2017; Vu and Lynn 2020; Afzal 2016; Ehmer and Kothari 2021). Then, the research discusses how the Rohingya crisis was framed differently across newspapers in neighboring countries, reflecting diverse political and cultural contexts. These analyses

highlight the dominant themes and visual frames used in media coverage from the United Kingdom, Bangladesh, India, Thailand, and Malaysia (Kader and Choudhury 2019; Isti'anah 2019; Parnini, Othman, and Ghazali 2013; Afzal 2016; Ehmer and Kothari 2021; Vu and Lynn 2020; Kanaker, Abughazlih, and Kasmani 2020).

Furthermore, research discusses the impact on the Rohingya crisis minority, such as resulting in oppression, violence, and sexual violence against children and women (Messner et al. 2019). In addition, the arrival of Rohingya refugees in some countries has also resulted in environmental damage, labor competition, engaging in low-wage work, and lacking legal employment rights (Eyemoon and Zaman 2023; Zahed 2023; Wahab 2018). The lack of formal refugee status for Rohingya complicates their access to rights and services, making them vulnerable to exploitation (Arzura 2012).
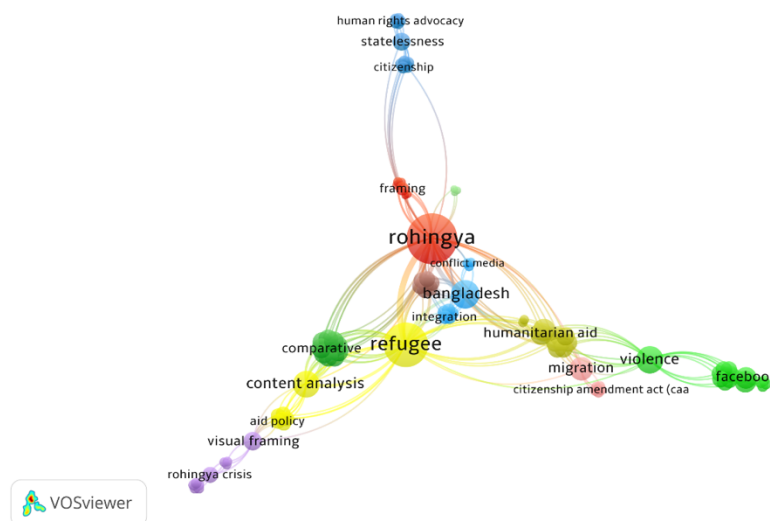

Figure 1. Novelty of Research
Source: Processed Author Data Using VOSviewers (2024)

The illustration above underlines the need for ongoing research on media framing studies. Although news framing has been discussed recently in some literature, there is still a lack of publications that discuss news framing covering Rohingya Muslims. Pertiwi et al. (2024), Hermawan & Hamdani (2023), Irom et al. (2022), and Ehmer & Kothari (2021) recommend the need for further research. Media frames play an important role in shaping perceptions by selectively emphasizing certain aspects of the issue, thus influencing how information is interpreted. This selective simplification is evident across various contexts,

including media, politics, and public discourse (Hart, 2023). Frames in news articles shape perceptions by emphasizing specific aspects of an issue. They simplify and filter information, guiding readers' understanding and influencing their views (Barrio and Gatica-Perez, 2023; Fielding, 2022). Media frames in communication refer to the words, images, phrases, and presentation styles that speakers or media use to convey specific information or messages to audiences. Kanaker et al. (2020) also suggested conducting more research on framing the Rohingya crisis in the media to assess the media's actual performance towards minorities and identify media shortcomings in dealing with this issue.

This research uses the framing model proposed by Robert Entman to analyse international mainstream media coverage. This research uses the framing model proposed by Robert Entman to analyse international mainstream media coverage. According to Erianto's research (Sahide, Misran, and Maksum 2024), framing is how communication texts are presented and how representations are prominently displayed that can influence audiences. Framing involves a process of selecting and emphasising certain meanings, in which the media chooses specific aspects of reality to highlight in communication texts (Entman 1993). Entman's framing analysis includes steps such as defining the problem, identifying causes, providing moral judgements, and offering solutions, which directly influence the way news is structured and received by audiences (Rahayu and Setiawan 2024). However, framing in the text is flexible, and the framing function does not have to be complete and exclusive (Sahide, Misran, and Maksum 2024). Framing has a significant impact on how readers understand an event, because it builds context and emphasises certain information, thus influencing audience attitudes and opinions (Jin 2024). While Eriyanto defines Entman's framing as the selection of issues and emphasis on certain aspects of the reality of media content. Framing analysis can be used from a communication perspective to dissect ways or ideologies considering ways to select, accentuate, and organize facts in the news to make it more meaningful, engaging, significant, or memorable so that audiences can understand it according to their perspective (Leliana, Suratriadi, and Enrieco 2018). According to Kasim et al. (2018), framing is a symbolic expression that uses words or visuals to create patterns or categorizations in the minds of audiences. Providing meaning through selective simplification, framing filters people's perceptions and gives them specific information about certain issues (Cissel 2012).

Entman's model was chosen because it is comprehensive, relevant and flexible to analyse complex media narratives about Rohingya Muslims. Through this model, research can identify the framing elements used by the media and relate them to potential bias, geopolitical context, and their impact on public opinion formation. One of the key elements in this framework is defining the problem, which serves to understand how the media portrays the issues facing Rohingya Muslims.

Framing is a technique used to create a negative public opinion about politicians featured in the media. It impacts public agendas and attitudes based on political frames and post-truth information (Demianchuk and Roshuk 2024). In journalism, media framing involves selecting and shaping socially shared ways of interpretation. Therefore, this study analyses media framing of the Rohingya Muslim crisis using three sources: Western media (CNN and BBC), Middle Eastern media (Al Jazeera and Alarabiya), and Southeast Asian media (The Star and Kompas). This analysis aims to expand our understanding of how the media interpret this phenomenon, concentrating on how media, geopolitics, and public opinion formation relate to news sentiment. Hopefully, this analysis will likely show the different biases and narratives between the media from the three regions regarding this controversial issue.

Method
Data Collection

This study uses a qualitative method with a systematic examination of 120 news articles. These articles comprised 20 narratives from each category: Western, Middle Eastern, and Southeast Asian media. The research involved six mainstream media outlets from the three regions, which were selected because they have a broad audience and are trusted news portals with some of the same news categories. Based on the author's analysis, these six news outlets are the most vocal and frequently cover the Rohingya issue compared to other media in their respective regions. This selection of 20 news articles is more valid, fair and balanced as each region has an equal number of articles. This ensures equal analysis, avoids the dominance of certain regions, and results in more accurate and objective conclusions.

CNN is a subscription-based news television channel from the United States that provides comprehensive international and domestic news coverage. CNN's framing often

reflects a Western perspective, especially in its coverage of global conflicts (El-Nawawy and Hasan 2022). The BBC is recognized for its commitment to impartial framing and comprehensive reporting across various topics (Sambrook and Cushion, 2023). Aljazeera exemplifies transcultural communication, effectively disseminating diverse perspectives that counter Western dominance. It aims to break stereotypes and connect cultures by providing graphic footage and diverse opinions. It offers diverse perspectives and in-depth analyses and highlights under-reported issues, thus reshaping the discourse on Middle Eastern politics (Guo 2022). Alarabiya is recognized for its credibility and neutrality in its reporting. The portal can also attract the audience's emotional attention (Alhammour 2013). Kompas is a national print media that targets the educated and elite. The framing used by this media often influences the policy decisions of the Indonesian government (Sahide, Misran, and Maksum 2024). Finally, The Star is a media outlet whose framing reinforces its ideological stance, contrasting with other portals (Liang and Tiung 2024).

CNN and BBC were chosen as sources from Western media to provide insights based on Western perspectives of the Rohingya Muslim crisis. Middle Eastern media such as Aljazeera and Alarabiya were selected to provide insights from the viewpoint of the Arab and Islamic world. Meanwhile, Southeast Asian media such as The Star and Kompas were chosen to give views from countries geographically and culturally close to Myanmar. The analysis also considers the narratives' sentiments to identify the emerging emotional patterns and how they may influence public perceptions of the Rohingya Muslim crisis. Media reporting from these news outlets is expected to shed light on the global implications, diplomatic stances, and international reactions to the crisis. With such depictions, the researcher gained significant insights into the various portrayals of Rohingya Muslims over a predetermined period, providing a complete knowledge of how the six media outlets produced and presented narratives related to Rohingya Muslims in multiple contexts.

Table 1. Media and Total News

Media	Area	Link	Total
CNN	Western	https://edition.cnn.com/	20
BBC		https://www.bbc.com/	20
Al-Jazeera	Middle East	https://www.aljazeera.com/	20
Alarabiya		https://english.alarabiya.net/	20
Kompas	Southeast Asia	https://www.kompas.com/	20

The Star	https://www.thestar.com.my/	20
Total News		**120**

<center>Source: Processed Author Data (2024)</center>

In addition to qualitative data, this research also uses secondary data. Secondary data is previously collected and reused to answer new research questions (Henarni and Surwandono, 2024). Secondary data sources include books, journal articles, media reports, and government websites related to the Rohingya Muslim crisis. The Scopus database was utilized for a comprehensive analysis of the existing literature related to the topic. This contributed to the enhancement of the theoretical framework of the research and assisted in building a solid foundation based on a comprehensive understanding of previous academic research conducted in the field (Nascimento and Rodrigues 2015).

Data Analysis

Data collection in this study was conducted through three systematic stages. In the first stage, the keyword 'Rohingya 2023' was used to perform searches on search engines. Relevant news articles were retrieved from reputable sources, including CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera, Alarabiya News, Kompas, and The Star, focusing on coverage published between January and December 2023. In this stage, the researcher endeavored to identify the portrayal of Rohingya Muslims in various news narratives. In the second stage, the author utilized NCapture software to save the news articles in PDF format. NCapture stores the article content and relevant metadata, such as publication date and news source, which is crucial for further analysis. The collected data provides a solid basis for assessing media coverage. In the third stage, analysis and visualization were conducted using Nvivo 14. NVivo is software designed to support in-depth qualitative data analysis. It is often used by researchers in social work, education, health, communications, and many other fields that involve processing text, audio, video, or image-based data. NVivo simplifies the process of managing, organising, and analysing data by providing tools for finding patterns, themes, and relationships in qualitative data (Contesa and Sahide 2024).

All files collected through NCapture were imported into Nvivo 14, and then the data was organized and categorized based on the media portrayal. The author thoroughly examined each news article that contained the terms "refugees", "victim of violence", and "rejection" This study analyzed 120 news articles, with a proportion of 20 articles from each

media study. The procedure for conducting this analysis was organized into three stages, as shown in Figure 2.
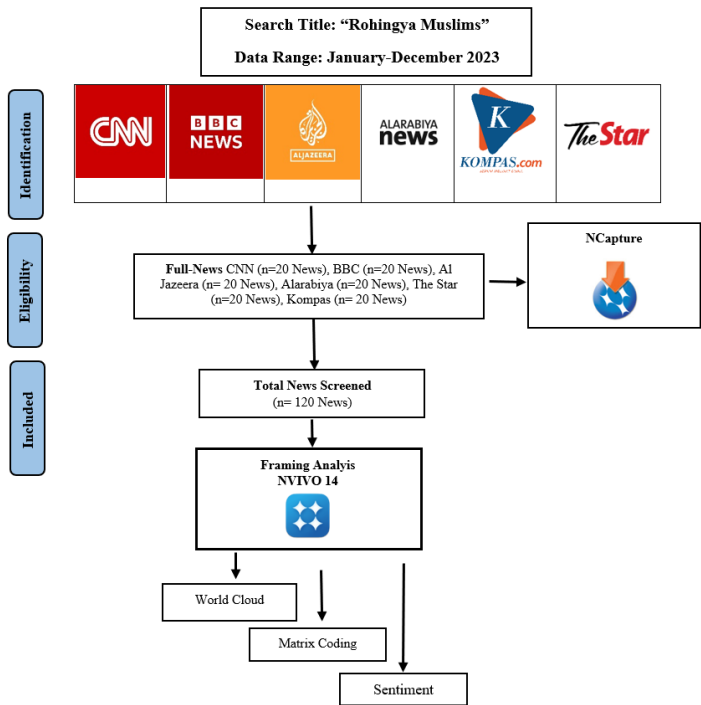
Figure 2. Research Flow
Source: Processed by Author (2024)

Result and Discussion

Western, Middle Eastern, and Southeast Asian Media Portrayal of Rohingya Muslim

Using the powerful analytical capabilities of the Nvivo 14 application, this research conducted a comprehensive examination of 120 news articles. These analyses were undertaken carefully to provide an in-depth understanding of the discourse on the subject matter under investigation. Western, Middle Eastern, and Southeast Asian media were included in the analysis for a fair and thorough comparison. Each press outlet with 40 news articles represents these regional groups. Figure 3 shows the research results and the differences between the three media groups in approach, focus, and news framing. The visualization shows a comparative breakdown of the number of news stories and the way each media covered the topic. This research can provide a more in-depth understanding of

how the media covers a particular issue in different regions worldwide by utilizing the advanced features of Nvivo 14.

Furthermore, this analysis illustrates how different media groups define the problem, identify its causes, provide moral judgement, and offer solutions to the Rohingya problem, based on Entman's framing model.

No	Medias	Framing		
		Refugees	**Rejection**	**Victim of Violence**
1	Western Medias	16.15%	16.7%	35.99%
2	Middle Eastern Medias	42.24%	1.35%	20.89%
3	Southeast Asia Medias	41.62%	81.95%	43.12%
	Total	**100%**		
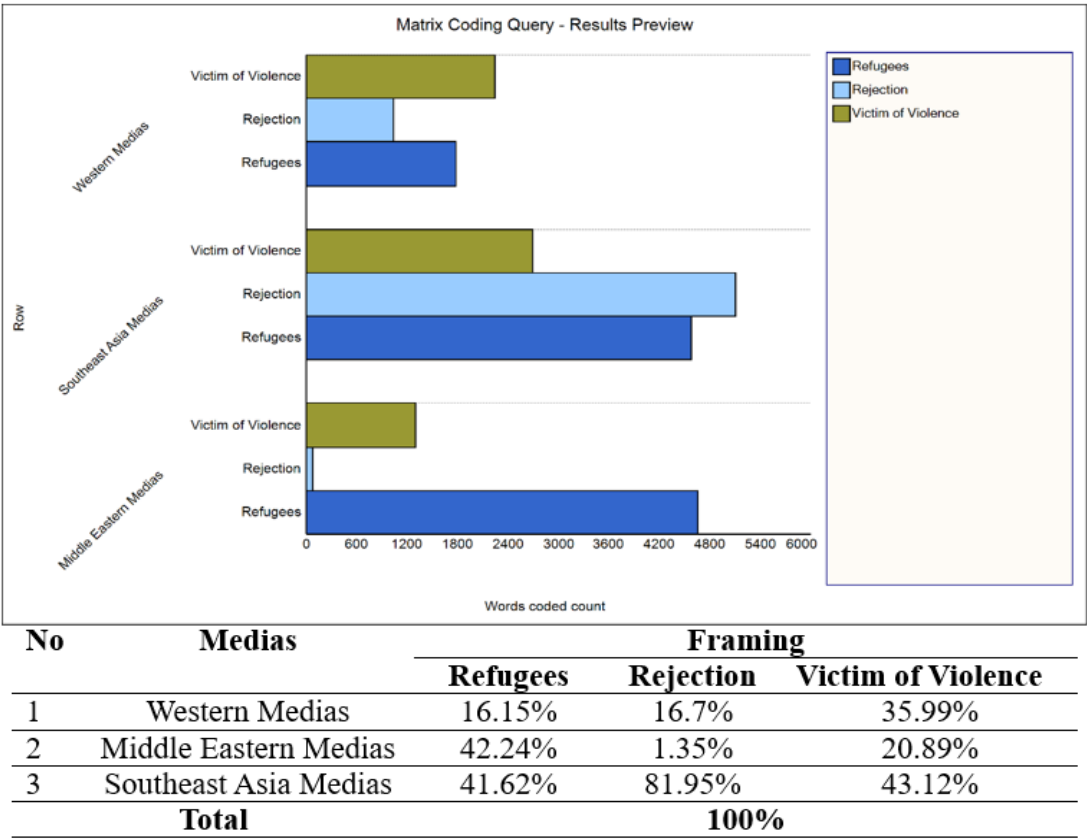
Figure 3. Western, Middle Eastern, and Southeast Asian Media News Framing of Rohingya Muslims
Source: Processed Author Data Using NVIVO 14 (2024)

Figure 4 below provides a clear visual representation of the keywords commonly used by Western media, particularly CNN and BBC News, in explaining the dynamics of the Rohingya crisis. Western media tend to portray the Rohingya as victims of systematic violence. Based on the data, 35.99% of Western media coverage emphasised them as victims of violence, while only 16.15% mentioned the Rohingya as refugees. These reports often include narrative elements that highlight the oppression they experience in Myanmar,

focusing on a humanitarian crisis that requires global attention (Irom et al. 2022). In this context, the cause emphasised is state persecution by the Myanmar government, and Western media often suggest international intervention as a solution, either through diplomatic sanctions or increased humanitarian aid. The moral judgement given by Western media is generally in favour of the Rohingya, viewing them as a group worthy of help. It therefore promotes international solidarity and calls on Western countries to take decisive action to stop the violence against them. Proposed solutions often focus on refugee funding and the creation of protection zones (Grandjean and Bucy 2023). The buzzwords that appear in the reports highlight a deep narrative of suffering and injustice experienced by the Rohingya community, who are caught up in a complex and often brutal history, leading to the recognition of genocide against them.

The reports presented describe how the Myanmar army and police carried out attacks and massacres in a particularly brutal manner against the Rohingya community (Kamal, Kaiser, and Mariano 2024). As a result, thousands were killed, and tens of thousands were forced to flee their homes, seeking refuge in neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia. This portrayal not only reflects a human tragedy, but also encapsulates a broader discourse in Western media, which emphasises the impact of the military junta's actions on minorities, especially women and children who are victims of violence. These portrayals are important because they create global awareness of the crisis facing the Rohingya, encourage international support for humanitarian aid, and trigger calls for justice for those victimised (Faye 2021). By utilising framing that focused on the direct experiences of the victims, Western media managed to evoke empathy and encourage collective action to address one of the most pressing humanitarian crises of modern times. The media's involvement in creating this narrative demonstrates their important role in shaping public opinion and influencing international policies related to the protection of human rights around the world.

Word	Length	Count
Rohingya	8	819
Refugees	7	549
Bangladesh	10	328
Social	6	243
Indonesian	9	225
Malaysia	8	205
Camp	5	149
Violence	6	186
Crisis	6	142
Environmental	10	139
Children	8	115
UNHCR	5	88
Living	6	82
Died	5	80

Figure 4. Word Cloud of Western Media News Framing of Rohingya Muslims
Source: Processed Author Data Using NVIVO 14 (2024)

Figure 5 below highlights the main keywords that appear in Middle Eastern media discourse related to the 'Rohingya Muslim crisis'. Media outlets such as Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya show a clear focus about Rohingya refugees in neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia. A total of 42.24% of articles in Middle Eastern media focused on the Rohingya's status as refugees, and 20.89% highlighted them as victims of violence. Middle Eastern media emphasised the larger social and political impact of this persecution, particularly in relation to the refugee crisis and international obligations to provide protection to refugees (Alarabiya News 2023b). From a Middle Eastern perspective, the cause described is the state persecution perpetrated by Myanmar, but the focus is more on the need to provide protection for the refugees rather than stopping the violence within their home country. The moral judgement here emphasises the obligation of international countries to provide humanitarian protection to the Rohingya, as well as the importance of Muslim countries providing support. In terms of solutions, Middle Eastern media often encouraged increased refugee assistance and acceptance of refugees by receiving countries. It also suggests the establishment of humanitarian corridors to mitigate the impact of the violence in Myanmar (Kanaker, Abughazlih, and Kasmani 2020).

Reports from Middle Eastern media reflect a combination of humanitarian interests, religious solidarity, and geopolitical strategies aimed at strengthening their influence within the Muslim community and on the international stage. In their coverage, Middle Eastern

media often paint a humane and empathetic picture of the Rohingya community, highlighting the difficulties they face. These reports emphasise the inadequate living conditions in refugee camps, including problems with health, sanitation and access to education (Islam and Nuzhath 2018). In addition, they also raise the issue of the rejection that Rohingya experience from local communities in the countries they travel to, which often results in further marginalisation and difficulties in social integration.
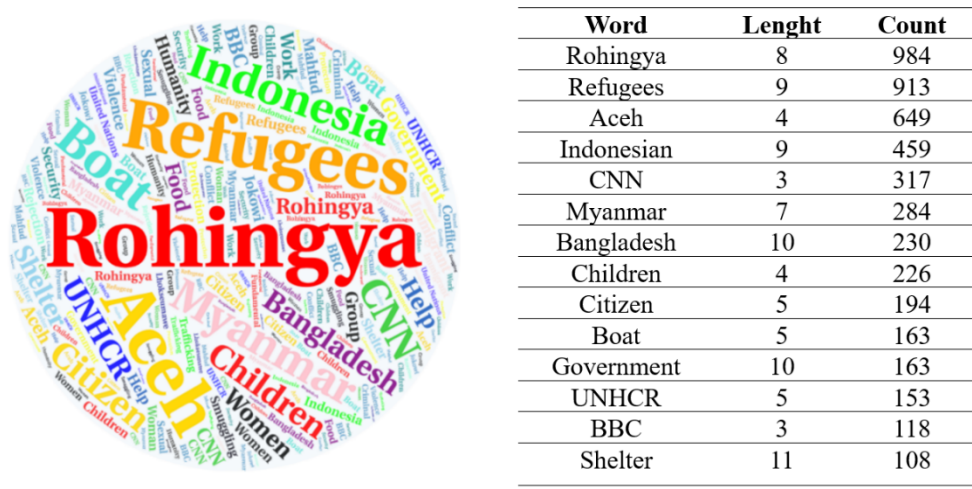

Word	Lenght	Count
Rohingya	8	984
Refugees	9	913
Aceh	4	649
Indonesian	9	459
CNN	3	317
Myanmar	7	284
Bangladesh	10	230
Children	4	226
Citizen	5	194
Boat	5	163
Government	10	163
UNHCR	5	153
BBC	3	118
Shelter	11	108

Figure 5. Word Cloud of Middle Eastern Media News Framing of Rohingya Muslims
Source: Processed Author Data Using NVIVO 14 (2024)

In contrast to Western and Middle Eastern media, Southeast Asian media, such as Kompas and The Star, adopted a different approach in reporting the Rohingya crisis. A total of 81.95% of the coverage in Southeast Asian media centred on opposition to the arrival of Rohingya refugees, while 41.62% highlighted them as refugees and 43.12% saw them as victims of violence. These reports tended to focus on the regional tensions created by the Rohingya refugee influx, especially in relation to neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia (Al Jazeera 2023a). The causes portrayed in Southeast Asian media are Myanmar's internal conflicts and socio-political crises in refugee destination countries. This framing often reflects the inability of neighbouring countries to handle large refugee flows and often suggests closing borders or strengthening immigration policies to address the issue. Moral judgements in Southeast Asian media are more inclined towards disapproval of Rohingya refugees, especially in the context of regional security and stability. It often highlights the social and economic burdens borne by refugee-receiving countries, as well as

the potential for increased ethnic and religious tensions in neighbouring countries. Solutions proposed by Southeast Asian media emphasise border closures or further containment of the refugee flow. There is also a push for a more comprehensive international solution, such as holding an international conference to discuss a long-term solution for Rohingya refugees.

Figure 6 explains that news from Southeast Asian media tends to portray Rohingya refugees as a burden on receiving countries. Emphasis on issues such as refugee rejection, deportation, and strict immigration policies are dominant in these reports (Isti'anah 2019). For example, the articles often reflect how local communities perceive the presence of refugees as a threat to existing jobs, resources, and social stability. Furthermore, Southeast Asian media also often reflect negative public sentiment towards refugees, with narratives highlighting concerns about the impact of the Rohingya presence on the security and well-being of local communities (Munandar et al. 2024). This can lead to stigmatisation and social exclusion of refugee communities and reinforce existing stereotypes. In this way, Southeast Asian media approaches not only report events, but also play a role in shaping public perceptions and policy responses to Rohingya refugees in destination countries. This demonstrates how the media can influence social and political discourse around complex humanitarian issues, with much larger implications for the lives of refugees themselves.

Word	Length	Count
Rohingya	8	927
Refugees	9	732
Indonesian	9	500
Aceh	4	483
Kompas	6	313
Myanmar	7	240
Citizen	5	230
Nations	6	165
Bangladesh	10	128
Hoax	5	124
UNHCR	5	109
Children	4	93
Student	9	53
Women	10	53

Figure 6. Word Cloud of Southeast Asian Media News Framing of Rohingya Muslims
Source: Processed Author Data Using NVIVO 14 (2024)

The Refugee Crisis and How the Media Portray the Rohingya

Violence against the Rohingya has been ongoing since the 1970s, resulting in massive displacement often fuelled by ethnic cleansing (Messner et al. 2019). On 25 August 2017, an insurgency launched attacks on Rohingya villages that triggered mass expulsions, killings, rapes, and burning of Rohingya homes (Biswas 2020). As a result of the insurgency, an increasing wave of refugees fled to Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia to seek refuge (Rahman and Mohajan 2019; Sidhu S and Parnini 2020). Although the Myanmar government vehemently denied the allegations of violence and established a commission of inquiry, the humanitarian crisis remained unresolved, and international organizations condemned the act as a crime of genocide (South 2020). This attracted the attention of various international organizations and actors and global media, which viewed the crisis from different perspectives. Western media emphasized the humanitarian and security concerns faced by the Rohingya (J. Alam 2018; Afzal 2016; Vu and Lynn 2020). Middle Eastern media emphasizes the problems faced by refugees and tends to be neutral. On the other hand, Southeast Asian media highlighted the rejection of the Rohingya refugees (Ehmer and Kothari 2021).

An analysis of 40 news articles from Western media sources, BBC and CNN, revealed a clear pattern of how Rohingya Muslims are portrayed. Western media tend to describe the Rohingya as "victims of violence" 35.99% of the time, focusing on their plight due to oppression in Myanmar (Rodríguez-Pascua et al. 2023). Meanwhile, 16.15% of news coverage addressed the problems faced by refugees in receiving countries, and 16.7% of coverage highlighted different types of rejection of Rohingya refugees. Reports from the BBC highlighted that the Rohingya are a stateless minority and have experienced violence, discrimination, and persecution in Myanmar for decades. The most significant wave of displacement occurred in 2017, with more than 742,000 people, half of them children, forced to flee Myanmar and seek refuge in Bangladesh. However, international aid for them declined as the world's attention turned to the war in Ukraine (BBC News Indonesia, 2023).

Meanwhile, a report from CNN highlighted the conditions of refugees in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, home to one of the world's largest refugee populations, the majority of which are Rohingya Muslims. Refugees face significant challenges related to basic needs such as food, clean water, and shelter, with overcrowded camps and inadequate sanitation facilities

(Truelove et al. 2020; O'Connor and Seager 2021). In 2019, the International Criminal Court (ICC) approved a full investigation into alleged crimes against humanity, including systematic violence, forced deportations, and ethnic and religious persecution of the Rohingya (Pedersen 2019). As reported by CNN, concerns over human smuggling, where Rohingya refugees are often victims of human trafficking, have also been highlighted (CNN 2023). Action needs to be taken to combat this human trafficking and smuggling from the country of origin, Myanmar, the first country of refuge, Bangladesh, as well as transit countries such as India, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Ultimately, the condition of refugees is a complex and controversial issue that varies (E. Alam et al., 2023).

Middle Eastern media more often portrayed the Rohingya as "refugees seeking protection", with 42.24% of coverage concentrating on refugee conditions and emphasizing humanitarian issues such as lack of food, clean water, and medical services in refugee camps. Only 1.35% of coverage featured refugee resistance, suggesting that media in the region did not raise refugee resistance much. In contrast, less coverage portrayed the Rohingya as victims of violence, in proportion to the Western media's focus on their plight, at 20.89%. According to a report from Al Jazeera, Rohingya refugees continue to seek refuge in various countries in the Asian region. They cross the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal in small, overcrowded boats, hoping to reach safer countries, such as Bangladesh, India, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia (Al Jazeera 2023b). However, many of them first landed in Indonesia, which is considered more welcoming to Muslims. In these countries, refugees face significant challenges, including limited access to basic needs, as well as the threat of their exploitation. UNHCR and other international organizations continue to call for a regional response to address this humanitarian issue, including human trafficking, rescue efforts at sea, and support for refugees in their destination countries (Al Jazeera 2023b).

Furthermore, according to Al-Arabiya News, about one million Rohingya are estimated to be living in refugee camps in Bangladesh after fleeing expulsion. With its relatively more prosperous economy, Malaysia is a favorite destination for refugees, although many of them first arrive in Indonesia, which is predominantly Muslim and is considered more welcoming (Alarabiya News 2023a). Meanwhile, the United States announced US$26 million in humanitarian aid for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and other Asian countries (Alarabiya News 2023b).

In contrast, Southeast Asian media such as Kompas and The Star had a different perspective on the Rohingya, with 81.95% of coverage showing "opposition to the arrival of Rohingya refugees". Overall, media in the region emphasized the issue of refugee reception more than stories of violence experienced by the Rohingya in their home countries. In many reports, both media outlets highlighted local community resistance to the arrival of Rohingya refugees, noting the concerns raised among locals regarding the social and economic impact of their arrival. The news articles often reflect the tension between the need for protection for the Rohingya and the negative response from communities that feel threatened by their presence. In addition, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand are not ratifiers of the 1951 Refugee Convention (Maulana and Newman 2022; Moretti 2018).

Kompas highlighted the strong rejection of Rohingya refugees by the local Acehnese community (Kompas.com 2023d). Some of the factors driving this rejection include violating local norms, where the local community feels that the refugees have violated prevailing norms, and concerns over limited resources. Residents are concerned that the arrival of refugees will strain existing resources, given that Indonesia is not a state party to the UN Refugee Convention and has no obligation to host refugees (Kompas.com 2023b). Potential conflicts between locals and refugees are also a concern, with reports suggesting that Acehnese people are refusing to bring refugees because they consider refugees to be troublesome and not complying with village regulations. Several young people held one of the rejection actions on behalf of MPPA or *Mahasiswa Pemuda Peduli Aceh* ((Kompas.com 2023a). According to the Kompas report, many countries refused the Rohingya ships to dock in their territories, such as Thailand and Malaysia, refusing to prevent social problems from the refugees and making uncontrolled waves of refugees entering the country (Kompas.com 2023c). The Kompas report also stated that the Rohingya are not native to Myanmar and came to Indonesia with the aim of colonizing is a hoax.

The Star's report provided a broader context of the Rohingya situation in Bangladesh, including demonstrations by refugees to demand repatriation to Myanmar (The Star 2023b). Reduced humanitarian aid has further exacerbated the problem, prompting refugees to protest and demand repatriation. While reports indicate that the Rohingya often face rejection, it also underscores the discontent of locals, especially in Indonesia, who claim that

the presence of refugees brings social problems, such as drugs and potential criminality (The Star 2023a).

Percentage Comparison of News Sentiment from Western, Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian Media

Based on the results of news analysis from CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera, Alarabiya, Kompas, and The Star, there are significant differences in news sentiment related to Rohingya in 2023. This analysis shows that each media outlet has a different point of view when assessing the event. This difference in perspective affects how each media frames the news before it is delivered to the broader community, influencing public perception of Rohingya refugees. Overall, the media tends to be neutral and show journalistic objectivity.
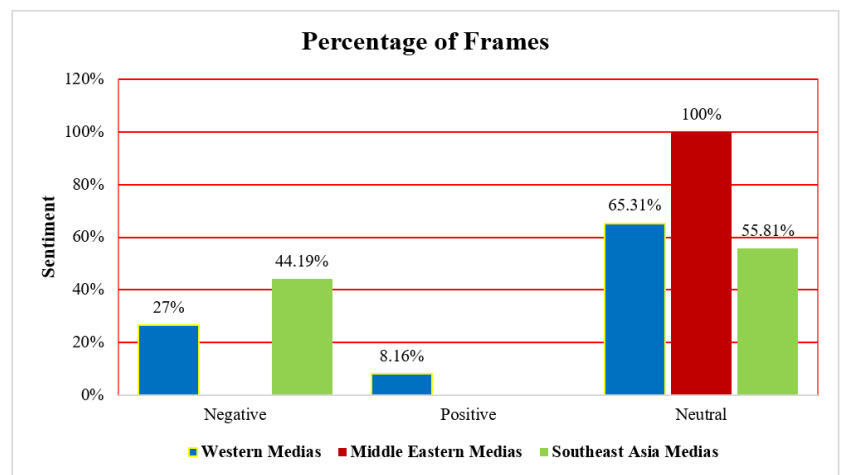
Figure 7. Sentiment of Western, Middle Eastern, and Southeast Asian Media News Framing on Rohingya Muslims
Source: Processed Author Data Using NVIVO 14 (2024)

Based on Figure 7 above, CNN and BBC articles, about 27% of the news were framed negatively, 8.16% positively, and 65.31% neutrally. These negative images were mainly attributed to victims of violence who were forced to leave their homes forcibly. In this regard, only 8.16% of articles featured positive framing that focused on the humanitarian relief efforts undertaken by various organizations and recipient countries, illustrating community solidarity and voluntary actions to support refugees. However, this framing should be more frequently discussed in the news.

Meanwhile, news released by Al Jazeera and Alarabiya showed a different approach to Western media. All articles in the Middle Eastern media are framed neutrally. By

maintaining neutrality in their reporting, these two media contribute to raising global awareness about the situation faced by Rohingya Muslims. They do this without making things worse by disseminating misinformation or opinions that may cause tension. This method demonstrates a commitment to objective journalism, which means that facts are conveyed without considering feelings that could undermine the credibility of the news. In addition, because the information is presented fairly, readers can understand the Rohingya's complex situation without being swayed by a particular perspective.

Finally, articles published by Kompas and The Star were negatively framed at 44.19%, while the other 55.81% were neutrally framed. Most of the negative portrayals are related to the public's rejection of Rohingya refugees and the factors that influence it. The public often perceives refugees as an economic and social burden in the news. This narrative can stigmatize refugees and worsen their situation in receiving countries. In contrast, neutrally framed articles provide factual accounts of the daily lives of Rohingya refugees, including how they seek refuge and adapt to a new society, without including one-sided opinions.

Conclusion

The research article 'Framing Rohingya Muslims: A Comparative Discourse Analysis of Western, Eastern, Central, and Southeast Asian Media' analyses how Rohingya Muslims are portrayed in the West, Middle East, and Southeast Asia by revealing contrasting narratives. This research is essential because it contributes to understanding how media framing influences public perception of geopolitical issues. The study highlights the significant influence of the media in shaping public opinion and the potential for biased portrayal of sensitive topics by comparing the Rohingya condition as portrayed by Western, Middle Eastern, and Southeast Asian media. By using framing theory as an analytical tool, one can better understand the complex portrayal of Rohingya Muslims between global powers in media stories.

Even though research on the Rohingya in Myanmar has been conducted for more than twenty years, the amount of research conducted still needs to be improved. Various issues and problems in the Rohingya Muslim crisis require further investigation and resolution. The author hopes that this research will help scholarly discussions on media dynamics in the realm of international politics. It shows how important it is to have critical

media literacy to see and assess various representations of geopolitical issues. In addition, it is suggested that future researchers use other media from multiple regions to compare narratives and perspectives on Rohingya Muslims.

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