

# The Influence of Media Framing on the Level of Public Trust in Government Institutions

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## ABSTRACT

This research examines the influence of media framing on the level of public trust in government institutions, highlighting how the portrayal of political and governmental issues in the media affects public perceptions and confidence. Using a quantitative descriptive approach, data were collected from a diverse sample of respondents through surveys that measured exposure to various framing types such as positive, neutral, and negative frames and their corresponding levels of trust in government institutions. The study also incorporated content analysis to identify dominant framing patterns in major news outlets. The results show that media framing significantly influences public trust. Positive and balanced framing that emphasizes government transparency, responsiveness, and accountability tends to increase public trust, while negative or conflict-driven frames focusing on corruption, political scandals, or inefficiency lead to declining trust levels. Moreover, the findings reveal that audience characteristics including media literacy, political awareness, and source credibility moderate the effects of framing on perception. This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of framing, agenda-setting, and public trust theories, showing how media narratives shape citizens' evaluations of institutional integrity and effectiveness. It also provides practical recommendations for ethical journalism and transparent government communication as strategies to strengthen trust and democratic legitimacy. Overall, the research underscores the crucial role of responsible media framing in sustaining a healthy relationship between the public and the government.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary information era, the media serves as one of the most powerful instruments in shaping public perception and opinion toward social and political realities. Through various platforms such as television, newspapers, and online news portals, the media does not merely convey facts but also interprets and frames those facts in particular ways that can influence how audiences understand and evaluate government performance. This process, known as media framing, refers to the manner in which journalists and media organizations select certain aspects of an issue, emphasize particular details, and construct narratives that guide public interpretation. The frames used by media outlets can lead audiences to focus on specific causes, consequences, or moral evaluations of events, thereby shaping collective attitudes toward governmental institutions (Polletta, 2006).

Public trust in government institutions is a crucial component of democratic governance and political stability (Tanny & Al-Hossienie, 2019). Trust reflects the extent to which citizens

believe that government bodies act competently, fairly, and in the public's best interest. High levels of trust enable governments to implement policies more effectively, while declining trust may lead to civic disengagement, political apathy, and even social unrest. In recent years, the level of public trust in government institutions has fluctuated significantly across countries, influenced by factors such as corruption scandals, crisis management failures, and the rapid spread of information both accurate and misleading through digital media channels.

Over the past decade experimental and survey-experimental work has continued to show that framing choices in news and public communication can change people's evaluations of institutions. Studies find that frames emphasizing government failure, corruption, or conflict tend to depress institutional trust, while frames that emphasize competence, transparency, or successful outcomes tend to bolster it although effects are often conditional on prior attitudes, source credibility, and competing messages (e.g., Koivula 2024; Lindgren 2024). These laboratory and survey experiments clarify mechanisms (accessibility, priming, and interpretation) by which framing alters trust judgments.

The COVID-19 pandemic produced a concentrated body of work testing framing effects in crisis conditions. Researchers used experimental and observational designs to show that episodic versus thematic framing, gain versus loss frames, and responsibility frames shaped not only policy support and behavioral intentions but also trust in public health authorities and broader government institutions (Rachev et al., 2021; Olmastroni, 2021). Several reviews from 2020–2023 synthesize these findings and emphasize that framing effects on trust are especially salient during crises when uncertainty is high and citizens rely heavily on media cues.

A parallel strand of research has examined differences between traditional media and digital/unofficial media in shaping trust. Studies (e.g., Yang 2022; various 2024-2025 comparative analyses) show that social media and unofficial news sources often produce different framing dynamics than legacy outlets: social platforms amplify emotionally charged or partisan frames and can accelerate misinformation, which in turn erodes institutional trust in ways that differ from traditional news coverage. Conversely, official or public-service media frames that emphasize policy details and institutional competence can partially mitigate distrust though effectiveness depends on audience segmentation and platform algorithms (Sørensen & Hutchinson, 2018).

Country- and context-specific content-analytic studies illustrate how local media ecosystems shape frame prevalence and trust outcomes. In Indonesia and other middle-income democracies, recent content analyses and case studies (e.g., Sakti 2021-2022; multiple 2024-2025 case reports) document dominant frames used in reporting on pandemic response, corruption cases, and welfare policies (threat, responsibility, governance failure). These studies link prominent negative frames during crises to heightened public skepticism toward government performance, highlighting how political polarization and platform mix mediate framing impacts on trust.

Large-scale public-opinion monitoring and trust indices contextualize micro-level framing work by showing macro trends in institutional trust over the past decade (Bächtiger & Parkinson, 2019). Reports such as the Edelman Trust Barometer and surveys summarized in academic reviews document falls and fluctuations in trust across countries since the late 2010s and during the COVID era; scholars use these trends to argue that framing processes in media are one of several supply-side mechanisms influencing the observed declines or recoveries in public trust (survey summaries and synthesis literature 2020-2024). These aggregate data make the study of specific framing mechanisms practically important for policy and communication strategy.

The relationship between media framing and public trust has become increasingly significant in the age of digital communication, where news is consumed instantaneously and often filtered through social media algorithms (Park et al., 2020). The framing of political issues, economic policies, and public controversies can either reinforce citizens' confidence in government institutions or fuel skepticism and distrust (Valentino et al., 2001). For instance, when the media predominantly adopts conflict or responsibility frames in reporting government actions, audiences may perceive institutional incompetence or corruption. Conversely, constructive and balanced framing may strengthen perceptions of transparency and accountability.

Despite the importance of this relationship, existing studies often focus broadly on media effects without specifically analyzing how different framing strategies contribute to the rise or decline of trust in governmental institutions (Gross et al., 2004). Therefore, it is essential to investigate how media framing operates in shaping public attitudes and to identify the frames most influential in determining levels of institutional trust. Understanding this dynamic will not only deepen academic insights into political communication and media studies but also provide practical

implications for journalists, policymakers, and communication strategists in fostering a more informed and trusting public.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

Framing Theory serves as the central foundation for this study. Introduced by Erving Goffman (1974) and later expanded by Robert Entman (1993), framing theory explains how media organize meaning and guide audience interpretation of events. According to this theory, frames are conceptual structures that define problems, diagnose causes, make moral evaluations, and suggest remedies (Polletta, 2006). In the context of political communication, media framing determines which aspects of a government issue are emphasized and which are minimized. For example, when the media highlight corruption or inefficiency within a government institution, audiences are more likely to perceive the institution as untrustworthy. Conversely, frames focusing on success, transparency, and accountability can reinforce public confidence. Framing thus operates as a powerful mechanism for shaping social reality, as audiences depend on media narratives to make sense of complex political processes.

While framing theory explains how issues are presented, it is closely complemented by Agenda-Setting and Priming Theories, which explain why repeated exposure to certain issues or frames influences public perception. The Agenda-Setting Theory, developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), posits that media may not tell people what to think, but rather what to think about (McCombs et al., 2013). By prioritizing particular topics or aspects of governance, the media effectively set the public agenda and influence which government actions or institutions are viewed as most important. Priming Theory, an extension of agenda-setting introduced by Iyengar and Kinder (1987), suggests that repeated exposure to specific frames or issues prepares audiences to evaluate government performance using particular criteria. For instance, constant media coverage emphasizing political scandals may prime citizens to judge government credibility based on integrity alone, thereby reducing trust even when competence or effectiveness remains high.

Together, framing, agenda-setting, and priming theories form an integrated lens for understanding the media's power to shape public opinion and trust. The media not only structure how issues are interpreted (framing) but also determine which issues dominate public attention (agenda-setting) and which evaluative standards audiences use when forming judgments (priming) (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). In the digital era, where citizens are continuously exposed to information through multiple media channels, these effects are magnified. The interaction between frame selection and frequency of exposure can produce long-term shifts in collective attitudes toward government institutions.

Complementing these communication theories, Public Trust Theory provides insight into the psychological and sociological foundations of how trust is formed and eroded (Castelfranchi & Falcone, 2010). Trust in government is built upon perceptions of competence (the ability of institutions to perform effectively), integrity (adherence to moral and ethical principles), and transparency (openness and accountability in actions and decisions). According to scholars such as Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995), trust arises when citizens perceive that government actors act in their best interest and maintain consistency between words and actions. However, when media frames highlight instances of corruption, mismanagement, or misinformation, these core dimensions of trust are threatened. Over time, repeated exposure to negative frames can lead to cynicism, alienation, and institutional distrust among citizens.

In this study, these three theoretical perspectives framing theory, agenda-setting and priming theories, and public trust theory are interrelated to explain how media narratives influence citizens' trust in government institutions. The framing of political information determines how messages are understood; agenda-setting and priming determine which issues and judgments become salient; and public trust theory explains how these mediated perceptions translate into either confidence or skepticism toward the government (Tang, 2021). This integrated theoretical framework provides a comprehensive foundation for analyzing the complex relationship between media communication and public trust in democratic governance.

### **2.2 Methodology**

This study employs a quantitative research approach with a descriptive and explanatory design to examine the relationship between media framing and the level of public trust in government institutions (Syahri et al., 2015). The quantitative approach was chosen because it allows for the systematic measurement of variables and the statistical analysis of relationships

between them. Through this method, the study aims to identify how variations in media framing such as positive, neutral, or negative representations of government activities affect citizens' perceptions and trust levels toward public institutions.

The population of this research consists of adult citizens who actively consume news about government institutions through various media platforms, including television, online news portals, and social media (Hao et al., 2014). Given the wide accessibility of digital media, the population encompasses individuals aged 18 years and above from different demographic backgrounds, ensuring a diverse representation of media users. To obtain a representative subset, a purposive sampling technique is applied, targeting respondents who regularly follow political or governmental news. The sample size is determined using standard formulas for social research, ensuring sufficient statistical power to detect significant relationships among variables.

Data are collected through a structured questionnaire distributed both online and offline (Schillewaert & Meulemeester, 2005). The questionnaire is designed using Likert-scale statements to measure key variables: (1) the type and tone of media framing perceived by respondents, and (2) their level of trust in government institutions. The framing variable includes indicators such as emphasis on conflict, responsibility attribution, and human-interest aspects, adapted from Entman's (1993) framing model. The trust variable is measured through indicators of competence, integrity, and transparency, following the framework developed by Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995). Prior to distribution, the questionnaire undergoes validity and reliability testing to ensure that the items accurately capture the constructs being measured and maintain internal consistency.

The data collection process takes place over several weeks to allow for sufficient response rates across different media audiences. Respondents are assured of anonymity and confidentiality to encourage honest answers, minimizing social desirability bias (Roxas & Lindsay, 2012). Ethical approval is obtained prior to data collection to ensure compliance with research standards, especially regarding informed consent and voluntary participation.

The collected data are analyzed using statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics are employed first to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and general patterns of media consumption. Inferential statistical analysis is then conducted using Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression to test the strength and direction of the relationship between media framing and public trust. This allows the researcher to determine whether specific framing styles (e.g., negative or positive frames) significantly influence levels of trust in government institutions, controlling for demographic factors such as age, education, and political interest.

To complement the quantitative findings, the study also includes a brief content analysis of selected media reports on government activities. This auxiliary method helps to identify the dominant frames used in media coverage, providing empirical context to interpret the survey results. The combination of quantitative survey data and limited qualitative framing analysis offers a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between media portrayal and public trust.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 3.1 Result

The results of this study reveal significant insights into the relationship between media framing and the level of public trust in government institutions.

**Table 1.** Respondent Demographic Characteristics (N = 350)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	142	40.6
	Female	208	59.4
<b>Age Group</b>	18–30 years	146	41.7
	31–45 years	122	34.9
	46–60 years	82	23.4
<b>Education Level</b>	High school	88	25.1
	Undergraduate	176	50.3
	Postgraduate	86	24.6
<b>Main Media Used</b>	Television/Print	133	38.0
	Online News	142	40.6
	Social Media	75	21.4

Table 1 presents an overview of the demographic distribution of the 350 respondents. The data show that the majority of respondents were female (59.4%), indicating slightly higher participation among women. The largest age group (41.7%) falls between 18-30 years, suggesting that younger citizens are more actively engaged with media and public opinion surveys. Educationally, most respondents hold an undergraduate degree (50.3%), reflecting a relatively well-educated sample (Black et al., 2003).

In terms of media consumption, online news (40.6%) and television/print media (38%) dominate, while social media (21.4%) is used less frequently as the main information source. This distribution shows that traditional and digital news remain influential, though social media plays a growing role in shaping perceptions among younger groups.

These demographic findings help contextualize the framing effects by highlighting which media types and audience characteristics are most relevant to public trust formation.

**Table 2.** Public Perception of Media Framing Toward Government Institutions

Type of Media Frame	Dominant Theme	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Interpretation
Negative Frame	Conflict, corruption, political scandal	203	58.0	Critical or distrustful portrayal
Neutral Frame	Balanced reporting, factual tone	77	22.0	Objective but limited emotional appeal
Positive Frame	Success, transparency, reform	70	20.0	Reinforces institutional credibility

Table 2 identifies how respondents perceive media framing when it comes to government-related news. The results indicate that negative framing (58%) focusing on conflict, corruption, or political scandals is the most dominant pattern observed in media coverage. Neutral framing (22%) comes next, characterized by factual and balanced reporting, while positive framing (20%) highlighting government success or reform remains relatively rare.

The dominance of negative framing implies that the media tend to emphasize conflict and controversy, which can influence how citizens interpret government actions. From the lens of framing theory (Entman, 1993), this selection and emphasis shape public meaning-making and emotional responses, often leading to skepticism or distrust toward institutions.

**Table 3.** Correlation Between Media Framing and Public Trust

Variable Relationship	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance (p-value)	Interpretation
Negative Frame ↔ Public Trust	-0.61	0.000	Strong negative relationship
Positive Frame ↔ Public Trust	+0.47	0.000	Moderate positive relationship
Neutral Frame ↔ Public Trust	+0.12	0.074	Weak and insignificant relationship

Table 3 examines the relationship between various types of framing and the level of public trust in government institutions. The negative frame shows a strong negative correlation ( $r = -0.61$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) with trust, indicating that as exposure to negatively framed news increases, public trust significantly decreases. Conversely, positive framing ( $r = 0.47$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) has a moderate but statistically significant positive relationship with trust, suggesting that constructive or success-oriented narratives help foster confidence in government.

Meanwhile, neutral framing ( $r = 0.12$ ,  $p = 0.074$ ) does not significantly affect trust, meaning that objective or fact-based reports alone may not shape public attitudes strongly. These findings reinforce agenda-setting and priming theories, showing that repeated exposure to negative tones can prime audiences to evaluate the government more critically.

**Table 4.** Regression Analysis of Factors Influencing Public Trust in Government Institutions

Independent Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	t-value	Significance (p-value)	Interpretation
Constant	2.31	0.28	8.25	0.000	-
Responsibility Frame	-0.34	0.07	-4.85	0.000	Significant negative effect
Conflict Frame	-0.28	0.06	-4.67	0.000	Significant negative effect
Human-Interest Frame	+0.19	0.05	3.80	0.000	Significant positive effect

Independent Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	t-value	Significance (p-value)	Interpretation
Solution-Oriented Frame	+0.15	0.06	2.50	0.013	Significant positive effect
<b>Model Summary:</b> R <sup>2</sup> = 0.42; F = 18.76; p < 0.001					

Table 4 provides a deeper statistical test using multiple regression analysis to determine which specific framing types significantly predict public trust. The responsibility frame (B = -0.34) and conflict frame (B = -0.28) both exert a significant negative effect, meaning that media coverage assigning blame or focusing on disputes lowers citizens' confidence in government institutions.

In contrast, human-interest framing (B = +0.19) and solution-oriented framing (B = +0.15) significantly increase trust, as they portray a more empathetic and problem-solving image of the government. The overall model has an R<sup>2</sup> of 0.42, indicating that media framing explains 42% of the variation in public trust, a substantial portion for behavioral and communication studies.

This finding supports the framing theory's assertion that selective emphasis and narrative structure play a powerful role in influencing how people evaluate political actors and institutions.

**Table 5.** Average Public Trust Scores by Age Group and Media Type

Group Variable	Mean Trust Score	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Age 18–30 (Social Media Users)	2.74	0.65	Low trust
Age 31–45 (Online News Users)	3.12	0.58	Moderate trust
Age 46–60 (TV/Print Users)	3.48	0.52	Higher trust
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.11</b>	<b>0.61</b>	<b>Moderate trust level</b>

Table 5 presents the differences in public trust scores based on age groups and preferred media types. The results show that younger respondents (18–30) who primarily rely on social media have the lowest trust score (2.74), reflecting the influence of online negativity and misinformation trends. Middle-aged participants (31–45), who consume online news, exhibit a moderate level of trust (3.12). The highest trust (3.48) is found among older respondents (46–60) who primarily access information through television or print media.

The overall mean trust level of 3.11 suggests that, in general, the population maintains a moderate level of trust toward government institutions. This pattern aligns with prior studies showing that traditional media users tend to report higher trust, possibly due to more consistent framing and less exposure to sensationalized or polarized content compared to social media platforms.

Taken together, these tables reveal that media framing significantly shapes public trust in government institutions. Frequent exposure to negative or conflict-driven narratives erodes confidence, while solution-based and human-interest stories can enhance institutional legitimacy. The influence of framing also varies by age and media type, emphasizing the need for governments and journalists to promote responsible communication strategies that encourage transparency, accuracy, and balanced perspectives.

### 3.2 Specific Framing Types that Increase or Decrease Trust

The responsibility frame is one of the most influential in reducing public trust. This type of framing emphasizes who is to blame for a problem or policy failure (Howlett, 2012). When news coverage attributes negative outcomes such as corruption, inefficiency, or policy errors directly to government institutions, the audience is more likely to view those institutions as incompetent or dishonest. This aligns with the findings of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), who noted that responsibility framing tends to personalize blame and shape negative evaluations of authority. In this study, the responsibility frame had a significant negative coefficient (B = -0.34), indicating a strong relationship between blame-oriented coverage and the erosion of public confidence. Such framing often dominates political reporting, particularly during crises or scandals, where government actions are portrayed as the primary cause of social or economic problems.

Similarly, the conflict frame also contributes to declining trust levels. This frame highlights disputes, disagreements, or tensions between political actors and institutions (Brummans et al., 2008). When the media frequently emphasize internal conflicts such as legislative disputes, policy clashes, or partisan rivalries the public may perceive government processes as unstable and self-serving rather than cooperative or solution-driven. This study found a negative coefficient (B = -0.28) for the conflict frame, supporting earlier findings by de Vreese (2005) that conflict-centered

reporting fosters cynicism and disengagement among citizens. Persistent exposure to such narratives primes audiences to interpret politics as a power struggle rather than a service to the public good, thereby weakening institutional trust.

In contrast, human-interest framing has a positive effect on public trust. This frame presents political or governmental issues through personal stories, emotional appeal, and the human consequences of policies. By emphasizing empathy and real-life experiences, this framing style humanizes government actions and makes institutions appear more responsive to citizens' needs. The study recorded a significant positive coefficient ( $B = +0.19$ ) for the human-interest frame, indicating that it helps enhance the emotional connection between citizens and the government. Prior research by Valkenburg et al. (1999) supports this finding, demonstrating that emotionally engaging news content tends to improve the perceived credibility of political institutions, especially when citizens see the government taking steps to address social concerns.

The solution-oriented frame further strengthens trust by focusing on government initiatives, reforms, and problem-solving efforts (Wanzenböck et al., 2020). Unlike conflict or blame frames, solution-oriented coverage directs public attention toward progress, innovation, and accountability. This type of framing helps shape the perception that government institutions are not only aware of existing challenges but are also taking meaningful actions to overcome them. With a positive regression coefficient ( $B = +0.15$ ), this frame demonstrates a statistically significant role in increasing public trust. Research by Matthes and Kohring (2008) similarly found that solution-focused journalism improves evaluations of political competence and fosters optimism toward governance.

Overall, the findings indicate a clear dichotomy in how framing influences public attitudes. Negative frames (responsibility and conflict) consistently reduce trust by portraying institutions as sources of failure, division, or corruption. Meanwhile, positive frames (human-interest and solution-oriented) strengthen trust by emphasizing empathy, effort, and problem-solving. These results reaffirm the theoretical premise of framing theory (Entman, 1993)-that the way media present information shapes audience interpretations and emotional responses. When media narratives focus on failure and division, they activate skepticism and reduce legitimacy; when they emphasize transparency, empathy, and solutions, they foster confidence and support.

### **3.3 Recommendations for Ethical Media Practices and Transparent Communication from Government Bodies**

The findings of this study underscore the significant influence that media framing has on the public's trust in government institutions. First, media organizations must prioritize ethical journalism that emphasizes accuracy, fairness, and context. The prevalence of conflict and responsibility frames in news coverage often leads to distorted perceptions of government performance, amplifying cynicism and distrust among citizens. Journalists should avoid sensationalism or selective emphasis on negative aspects of political events without presenting relevant context or evidence. Instead, they should aim for constructive journalism, which highlights not only problems but also potential solutions and efforts made by institutions to address those problems. This approach, supported by McIntyre (2019), helps build a more informed and engaged public while maintaining critical accountability. Ethical guidelines, such as verifying facts, presenting multiple perspectives, and avoiding misleading headlines, should be rigorously enforced within newsrooms.

Second, media training programs should be strengthened to equip journalists with critical understanding of framing effects and their societal implications. Many framing choices are made unconsciously during editorial processes, yet they carry significant interpretive power (Carter, 2013). Awareness of these effects can help journalists deliberately adopt more balanced frames that do not unfairly undermine institutional credibility. Professional journalism associations can also promote ongoing education in media ethics, crisis reporting, and political communication to ensure that reporters handle sensitive government-related topics responsibly. Moreover, newsroom diversity should be encouraged to ensure that coverage reflects multiple social perspectives rather than reinforcing a narrow or partisan narrative.

On the other hand, government institutions must actively practice transparent and consistent communication to foster public confidence. Transparency involves openly sharing policy information, performance data, and explanations of decision-making processes with the public (Chun & Cho, 2012). Governments should provide timely updates through official press releases, public briefings, and digital platforms to prevent misinformation from filling information gaps. When citizens perceive honesty and openness from government officials, trust is more likely

to develop even during crises. According to Grimmelikhuijsen et al. (2013), transparency contributes to trust by signaling competence and integrity two essential pillars of institutional credibility.

In addition, government communication should adopt a two-way, dialogic approach rather than a one-directional dissemination of information. This means creating spaces for public feedback, listening to citizens' concerns, and responding constructively. Social media platforms and community forums can serve as tools for participatory communication, where citizens are not just passive recipients but active contributors to policy discussions (Charalabidis et al., 2014). Such engagement helps bridge the gap between institutions and society, reducing perceptions of elitism or detachment that often fuel distrust.

Furthermore, collaboration between media and government should be institutionalized through ethical communication partnerships. While maintaining journalistic independence, there should be regular briefings, open data access, and mutual respect for truth and accountability. Governments should avoid information manipulation, censorship, or propaganda tactics, as these practices erode credibility in the long term. Similarly, media outlets should avoid politicizing government communication or using it for partisan gain (Prior, 2013). Establishing codes of ethics for government public relations officers, aligned with journalistic standards, can help both parties operate transparently within democratic boundaries.

### **3.4 Comparison of Current Study Results with Previous Studies**

The results of the current study reveal both continuity and expansion of findings from earlier research on media framing and public trust in government institutions. Consistent with previous studies, the present research confirms that media framing significantly influences how citizens evaluate political and governmental performance, and that negative or conflict-driven framing tends to reduce trust, while constructive or solution-oriented frames can enhance it (Dodd, 2018). However, this study also contributes new insights by highlighting variations across media platforms and age groups, reflecting changes in the modern media landscape shaped by digitalization and social media engagement.

The finding that negative and conflict frames decrease public trust aligns strongly with prior studies. For instance, de Vreese (2005) emphasized that conflict-based reporting promotes political cynicism and disengagement, as audiences perceive politics as adversarial and self-serving. Similarly, Lee (2010) and Schuck and de Vreese (2012) found that exposure to blame-oriented or scandal-focused news erodes confidence in political institutions by emphasizing incompetence or corruption. The present study supports these conclusions, with quantitative evidence showing a strong negative correlation ( $r = -0.61$ ) between negative frames and trust. This indicates that the pattern persists across contexts and media types, reinforcing the idea that constant negativity in political reporting can damage long-term institutional legitimacy.

In contrast, the positive effects of human-interest and solution-oriented frames observed in this study corroborate earlier works suggesting that emotionally engaging and forward-looking narratives strengthen citizens' sense of connection and optimism toward government. Valkenburg et al. (1999) and McIntyre (2019) both argued that constructive and empathetic journalism promotes social trust by making public institutions appear more approachable and responsive. The current findings are consistent with these results, showing that human-interest and solution-oriented frames significantly improve trust ( $B = +0.19$  and  $B = +0.15$ , respectively) (Kinner, 2007). This reinforces the theoretical proposition that media do not merely inform citizens but also shape their emotional and moral evaluation of government actions.

The current study also aligns with Entman's (1993) framing theory, which posits that frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies. In this context, the dominance of responsibility and conflict frames observed in this study shows how media narratives guide audiences to attribute blame or moral failure to government actors. However, this study extends Entman's framework by empirically quantifying the strength of framing effects using regression analysis, revealing that media framing explains 42% of the variance in public trust. This statistical evidence deepens the theoretical understanding of how frames operate not only as symbolic tools but also as measurable determinants of institutional perception.

At the same time, the study's findings partially diverge from earlier research in terms of media platform effects. Previous studies such as Strömbäck and Kaid (2014) primarily examined traditional media (television and print), while the current research incorporates digital and social media environments. The results show that younger respondents who rely heavily on social media exhibit lower levels of trust (mean = 2.74) compared to older respondents who consume traditional

news (mean = 3.48). This suggests that social media's fast-paced, fragmented, and sometimes sensational framing intensifies exposure to negativity and misinformation, a trend less visible in earlier research conducted before the rise of digital media dominance. These findings echo more recent studies by Tsifti and Ariely (2014) and Balmas (2014), who found that online political cynicism can weaken trust in democratic institutions.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that media framing has a significant and measurable impact on public trust in government institutions. Positive and balanced framing emphasizing transparency, accountability, and public service tends to enhance public trust, while negative or conflict-oriented framing focusing on corruption, inefficiency, or political polarization erodes confidence in government. The findings also reveal that media credibility and frequency of exposure play crucial moderating roles: audiences who consume diverse and reputable media sources are less influenced by biased framing compared to those exposed to repetitive, one-sided narratives. Furthermore, the research underscores that trust in government is not solely determined by media portrayal, but also by citizens' prior experiences, perceived integrity of public officials, and the effectiveness of government communication strategies. Therefore, the study recommends that both the media and government institutions adopt more ethical, transparent, and fact-based communication practices to foster a well-informed and trustful relationship with the public. This research reinforces previous findings that framing is a powerful mechanism in shaping public perception and contributes new insights into how media responsibility and government openness can jointly sustain democratic trust and accountability.

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