



Framing the Conflict: A Comparative Analysis of Tempo.co And Kompas .com's Construction of the Susi Air Pilot Hostage Crisis in Papua

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Abstract

This research conducts a comparative framing analysis of how two leading Indonesian online media outlets, Tempo.co and Kompas.com, constructed the narrative of the Susi Air pilot hostage crisis involving the Armed Criminal Group (KKB) in Papua. Utilizing Zhongdang Pan and Gerald M. Kosicki's comprehensive framing model, this study examines 22 news articles published between February and July 2023 across four analytical structures: syntactical, script, thematic, and rhetorical. The findings reveal distinct editorial positioning: Tempo.co consistently employs a conflict-centric frame, emphasizing dramatic actions, explicit KKB demands, and critical discourse with negatively connotated lexicon. In contrast, Kompas.com adopts a state-procedural frame, focusing on institutional handling, security protocols, and official statements while maintaining formal neutrality. This divergence demonstrates how competing media ideologies produce alternative realities of the same event, with Tempo.co positioning as a "watchdog" critical of state authority and Kompas.com aligning with state narratives to project stability. The research contributes to media studies by applying established framing theory to the underexplored context of Papuan conflict reporting and provides insights into journalistic ethics in covering sensitive national security issues.

Keyword: framing analysis, media construction, Papua conflict, Susi Air hostage, Tempo.co, Kompas.com, Pan and Kosicki model.

1. Introduction

The contemporary Indonesian media landscape presents a paradox: while access to information and platforms for public discourse has never been greater, the potential for divergent and ideologically charged narratives about national issues is acutely high. This tension is particularly evident in the coverage of complex, sensitive conflicts in regions like Papua, where events are filtered through competing editorial lenses before reaching the public. Two of Indonesia's most influential digital news portals, Tempo.co and Kompas.com, serve as primary architects of this mediated reality. Their coverage of the hostage-taking of Susi Air pilot Captain Philip Mark Mehrrens by the Armed Criminal Group (KKB) in early 2023 provides a critical case study of how the same factual event can be constructed into vastly different public narratives.

News framing—the process by which media select, emphasize, and organize aspects of a perceived reality—has long been recognized as a powerful force in shaping public perception and political discourse (Entman, 1993). Not all frames are neutral, however. Those that simplify conflicts into binaries of "terrorist" versus "state," or that obscure historical and socio-political context, can fuel polarization and hinder understanding. Conversely, framing that provides depth, highlights multiple perspectives, and scrutinizes the actions of all parties can foster a more informed and nuanced public debate (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). The starkly different initial reports from Tempo.co and Kompas.com regarding the demands and identity of the captors (Initial Article Comparison, February 2023) suggested a fundamental divergence in how this crisis was being framed for the Indonesian public, pointing to a significant gap between the complex reality on the ground and its simplified media representations.

Conducting this research is critical for three interrelated reasons. First, from a practical media studies standpoint, understanding how major news outlets frame the Papua conflict is essential for media literacy. For the public, recognizing these framing mechanisms is key to consuming news critically. For journalists and editors, this analysis offers a mirror to reflect on their own practices and ethical responsibilities when reporting on issues of national integrity and human security. Second, academically, while framing theory and the Pan & Kosicki model have been applied to various Indonesian media studies, their focused application to the live, evolving coverage of an armed hostage crisis in Papua remains limited. This research seeks to bridge the theoretical framework of media framing with the specific, high-stakes context of conflict journalism. Third, contextually, a comparative case study of these two specific outlets during a defined crisis period allows for a controlled, in-depth analysis of editorial decision-making. A deep exploration of the syntactical, narrative, thematic, and rhetorical choices made by Tempo.co and Kompas.com can generate precise, actionable insights into their institutional ideologies and their role in constructing political reality.

Against this backdrop, the present study is designed to investigate how the Susi Air pilot hostage crisis was framed differently by Tempo.co and Kompas.com . It further seeks to identify the specific techniques (in headlines, sourcing, story structure, and language) that characterize each outlet's approach and to examine what these divergent frames reveal about their respective positions within Indonesia's media ecosystem.



2. The Art of Research

Based on the identified research gaps, this study offers four significant dimensions of novelty that advance the scholarly understanding of media framing in conflict reporting:

1. Contextual Novelty: Framing Analysis in the Underexplored Arena of Papuan Conflict Journalism While framing studies in Indonesia have proliferated, they have predominantly focused on political elections, government policy, or social issues in Java-centric contexts. This research breaks new ground by applying systematic framing analysis to media coverage of a live armed conflict and hostage crisis in Papua. Papua represents a uniquely complex journalistic terrain involving issues of separatism, military operations, human rights, and national identity—a context that remains critically understudied in Indonesian communication research. By examining how two major national outlets frame this sensitive issue, the study provides much-needed insights into the mediation of Indonesia's most protracted regional conflict, offering a contextual contribution that moves beyond the well-trodden paths of political and electoral framing studies.

2. Analytical Novelty: A Comprehensive Four-Structure Application of the Pan & Kosicki Model Many applications of the Pan & Kosicki model tend to emphasize one or two of its structures, often the syntactical or rhetorical. The novelty of this research lies in its holistic and rigorous application of all four analytical structures—syntactical, script, thematic, and rhetorical—in a tightly controlled comparative design. By analyzing identical events reported by two different media outlets across this complete framework, the study moves beyond surface-level comparison of headlines or word choice. It traces how narrative construction operates at multiple, interconnected levels: from the macro-organization of a story to the micro-choices of lexicon and metaphor. This comprehensive approach yields a more nuanced and robust understanding of how framing coherence is built and how different “realities” of the same event are systematically manufactured.

3. Thematic Novelty: From “Neutral Reporting” to “Ideological Positioning”

A common thematic focus in media analysis is measuring “objectivity” or “balance.” This research shifts the thematic lens toward “ideological positioning” by asking not which outlet is more neutral, but what distinct ideological position each framing strategy serves. It reframes the difference between Tempo.co and Kompas.com not as a deviation from a mythical journalistic standard, but as a deliberate construction aligned with specific institutional identities: the critical watchdog versus the state-aligned proceduralist. This thematic shift acknowledges that all reporting is positioned and interprets framing choices as strategic expressions of media ideology within a specific socio-political landscape, offering a more politically astute and theoretically grounded analysis.

4. Methodological Novelty: Dynamic Analysis of Framing in an Unfolding Crisis Methodologically, this study introduces novelty by capturing and analyzing framing in medias res—as the crisis was actively unfolding over a five-month period (February–July 2023). Unlike studies that examine concluded events, this approach allows for the observation of framing dynamics and adaptation. It can track whether and how media frames shifted in response to new developments (e.g., failed negotiations, military mobilizations, international reactions). This longitudinal, event-sensitive design provides a more dynamic and process-oriented understanding of framing as a strategic, responsive practice rather than a static textual feature, a perspective often missed in synchronic analyses.

Building on prior research, this study addresses contextual, analytical, thematic, and methodological gaps. Its contribution lies in offering a fourfold novelty: (1) applying framing analysis to the critical yet underexplored context of Papuan conflict reporting, (2) executing a holistic, four-structure comparative analysis, (3) thematically refocusing the discussion from neutrality to ideological positioning, and (4) methodologically capturing framing dynamics during an unfolding live crisis. Thus, this research does not merely add another comparative case study but enriches the theoretical and methodological toolkit for analyzing how media construct politically charged realities in Indonesia’s complex information ecosystem

3. Method

This research employs a qualitative paradigm with a comparative case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is ideally suited to exploring the in-depth meaning, nuanced construction, and ideological underpinnings of media texts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The comparative case study design between Tempo.co and Kompas.com allows for a focused, systematic examination of how the same event—the Susi Air pilot hostage crisis—is framed differently by two influential media outlets, enabling a rich exploration of divergent narrative strategies and editorial positions.

The selection of this methodology is based on several fundamental considerations that strengthen its suitability for the research problem:

The research question—how do Tempo.co and Kompas.com differentially frame the hostage crisis?—is inherently interpretive and analytical. It seeks to uncover the subtle mechanisms of text construction, not to measure the frequency of certain words or themes in isolation. Qualitative methodology is essential for dissecting the interplay of syntactical structures, narrative logic, thematic coherence, and rhetorical choices that collectively produce meaning (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

The phenomenon under study is fundamentally about meaning-making in a specific socio-political context. The framing of the Papua conflict cannot be divorced from Indonesia's media history, the political sensitivities surrounding regional sovereignty, and the distinct institutional identities of each news outlet. A qualitative case study allows the researcher to bound this complex context and analyze the texts as situated cultural products, which is crucial for understanding how media narratives interact with broader power dynamics (Eriyanto, 2002).

To understand framing as an active construction process, data is required that reveals not only the manifest content of news articles but, more importantly, the latent patterns of emphasis, omission, and connection. Such analysis requires close reading and interpretative engagement with the text—its structure, sequencing, language, and visuals—to uncover the strategic selection and salience that define a frame. This depth of textual analysis is the hallmark of qualitative inquiry.

Philosophically, this research is grounded in a social constructivist paradigm, which views news not as a mirror of reality but as a version of reality constructed through specific discursive practices (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The "reality" of the hostage crisis presented to the public is understood as a mediated product, actively shaped by the framing choices of journalists and editors within their respective organizational cultures.

To ensure depth, rigor, and validity in data analysis, this research employed a structured analytical framework guided by a single, coherent data collection technique:

Data Collection Technique: Document Analysis The primary data consists of news texts (articles) published by Tempo.co and Kompas.com Data was collected through purposive sampling with the following criteria:

1. **Publication Period:** February 7 to July 5, 2023, covering the key phases of the crisis from the initial hostage-taking through ongoing negotiation and resolution efforts.
2. **Relevance:** Articles whose central theme was the development of the Susi Air pilot hostage case involving the KKB in Papua.
3. **Comparative Parity:** To enable precise comparison, articles were selected in thematically and temporally matched pairs (e.g., articles published on the same day reporting on the same development). A total of 22 articles were selected, comprising 11 matched pairs (one from each outlet).

Analytical Framework and Procedure: Pan & Kosicki's Framing Analysis Model The collected news texts were analyzed using the four-structure framing model developed by Zhongdang Pan and Gerald M. Kosicki (1993). This model provides a systematic, multi-level tool for deconstructing news discourse. The analysis procedure was executed as follows for each article and then comparatively across each matched pair:

1. **Analysis of Syntactical Structure:** Examining the formal organization of the news text. This involved analyzing:
Headline & Lead: How the main issue is initially defined and what is given primary prominence. **Source Hierarchy:** Which actors are quoted, in what order, and how their credibility is established. **Narrative Flow:** The sequence of information and how the story is organized (e.g., problem-cause-solution, episodic escalation).
2. **Analysis of Script Structure:** Assessing the narrative packaging of information based on the 5W+1H (Who, What, When, Where, Why, How). This step identified which elements were emphasized, detailed, or marginalized, revealing the narrative priorities of each outlet.
3. **Analysis of Thematic Structure:** Mapping the conceptual and propositional coherence of the text. This involved identifying: The central theme or "big picture" the article constructs. How different facts and statements are linked to support this overarching theme. The implied relationships between actors (e.g., causal, oppositional).
4. **Analysis of Rhetorical Structure:** Decoding the persuasive and stylistic devices used to reinforce the frame. This included examining: **Lexicon:** The choice of words with particular connotations (e.g., "terrorist" vs. "separatist," "hostage" vs. "detainee").

Metaphors & Analogies: Figurative language used to describe the situation or actors. **Visuals (if applicable):** The choice and framing of photographs or graphics accompanying the text. **Data Analysis and Validity** The analysis was iterative and comparative. Findings from each structure for a Tempo.co article were directly contrasted with those from its Kompas.com pair. Patterns were identified within each outlet across all analyzed articles to establish consistent framing tendencies. Analytical validity was ensured through:

Systematic Application: Consistently applying the same four-structure model to every article.

Peer Debriefing: Discussing interpretive findings with colleagues to check for consistency and guard against analyst bias.

Referential Adequacy: Constantly returning to the original text to ensure all interpretations were firmly grounded in the textual evidence, using direct quotations as illustrative anchors in the reporting of findings.



This methodological design ensures that the conclusions drawn are not impressionistic but are the result of a transparent, systematic, and theoretically guided dissection of media texts, providing credible insight into the framing contest over a critical national issue.

4. Result

Based on the comparative framing analysis, this research reveals three central, interconnected findings regarding how Tempo.co and Kompas.com constructed the reality of the Susi Air pilot hostage crisis. The findings demonstrate two coherent yet competing ideological positions that are systematically enacted through distinct framing choices across textual structures.

1. The Dominant Frames: Conflict-Centric vs. State-Procedural Constructions

The most significant finding is the identification of two overarching and consistent frames that define each outlet's coverage. Tempo.co's "Conflict-Centric" Frame: Tempo.co consistently constructed the event as an active, escalating conflict. The frame foregrounds the KKB as a primary agent of action, dramatizes confrontations, and emphasizes unresolved tensions. Syntactically, headlines and leads prioritized KKB statements and demands (e.g., "OPM Demands Weapons and Money for Release"). Thematically, articles wove the hostage incident into a broader narrative of persistent conflict and political struggle in Papua, linking it to historical grievances and framing it as a symptom of systemic failure. Kompas.com's "State-Procedural" Frame: In contrast, Kompas.com systematically constructed the event as a contained security incident under state management. The frame centers the Indonesian state and its institutions as the primary agents working through established protocols. Syntactically, headlines and leads highlighted official processes and statements (e.g., "TNI: Negotiation for Pilot's Release Needs Time"). Thematically, coverage focused on the "how" of government response—coordinating agencies, following procedure, and pursuing diplomatic channels—presenting the crisis as a complex but manageable operational challenge. This fundamental divergence shows that while reporting on the same facts, the two portals offered the public two different primary definitions of the situation: one of volatile conflict, the other of controlled crisis management.

2. Framing Mechanisms: Divergent Techniques Across Syntactical, Script, and Rhetorical Structures

The competing frames were realized through specific, patterned choices in each of Pan & Kosicki's analytical structures. Syntactical & Script Structures (The "How" of Storytelling):

Tempo.co's narrative script emphasized the Why (KKB motives, political context) and the What (specific demands, dramatic actions). Stories often followed a conflict-development arc, moving from provocation to response to stalemate.

Kompas.com's narrative script emphasized the How (negotiation steps, security measures) and the Who (institutional actors like TNI, POLRI, BNPT). Stories followed a problem-management arc, moving from incident assessment to coordinated action to ongoing effort.

Rhetorical Structure (The "Tone" and Persuasion):

Tempo.co employed a lexicon with clear negative connotations and agency attribution to the KKB. Consistent use of terms like "kelompok kriminal bersenjata (KKB)" and "penyanderaan" (hostage-taking), coupled with direct quotes from KKB spokespersons, reinforced a frame of threat and criminality.

Kompas.com utilized more formal, bureaucratic, and at times euphemistic language. While also using "KKB," it frequently paired it with the context of state handling (e.g., "penanganan KKB"). Terms like "proses negosiasi" and "penyelesaian" dominated, constructing a tone of procedural calm and institutional control. Visuals, when present, more often showed government officials in meetings rather than dramatic field imagery.

These mechanistic differences were not random but formed a cohesive framing package for each outlet, where syntax, script, and rhetoric worked in concert to reinforce the core conflict-centric or state-procedural narrative.

3. The Ideological Underpinnings: Watchdog Journalism vs. State-Aligned Institutionalism

Beyond descriptive differences, the analysis reveals that these framing patterns reflect deeper, institutionalized ideological positions within the Indonesian media landscape.

Tempo.co as the "Critical Watchdog": Its conflict-centric frame serves a journalistic ideology of skepticism toward power and amplification of marginalized narratives. By highlighting state vulnerability, giving space to non-state actor voices (even if critically), and focusing on crisis escalation, Tempo.co positions itself as an independent monitor challenging the official narrative. This frame implicitly asks critical questions about state efficacy and policy in Papua.

Kompas.com as the "State-Aligned Proceduralist": Its state-procedural frame aligns with a journalistic ideology of institutional stability and national unity. By focusing on government coordination, legitimizing official sources, and narrating the event as a managed process, Kompas.com reinforces state authority and projects an image of competent control. This frame serves a social function of assuring the public and maintaining discursive order during a national security crisis.

Conclusion of Findings: The research concludes that Tempo.co and Kompas.com did not merely "report differently" on the Susi Air crisis; they engaged in distinct projects of reality construction. Through systematic choices in framing mechanisms—from headline writing to word selection—each outlet crafted a narrative that reflected and reinforced its enduring

institutional identity: the critical outsider versus the establishment insider. This resulted in two parallel, ideologically charged mediascapes of the same event being offered to the Indonesian public.

5. Discussion

The integrated comparative analysis demonstrates that Tempo.co and Kompas.com are not passive conduits of information but active architects of political reality, each deploying a coherent yet distinct framing strategy. This research moves beyond cataloging differences to argue that these framing patterns constitute a form of ideological practice, where journalistic choices systematically produce narratives aligned with specific institutional identities and visions of the Indonesian state.

1. **Theoretical Implications: Framing as Ideological Positioning** The core theoretical contribution of this research is its demonstration of how Pan & Kosicki's model can be used to expose enduring ideological positions within a media system. The identified frames—Conflict-Centric and State-Procedural—are not accidental but reflect deep-seated institutional logics.

Extending Framing Theory: This study moves framing analysis from a focus on how an event is packaged to a deeper question of why these specific packages are deployed. It shows that framing is not merely a tactical choice for a single story but a strategic expression of media identity. Tempo.co's frame aligns with a liberal-pluralist model of the press as a "watchdog," while Kompas.com's frame reflects a more developmental or state-aligned model of journalism focused on stability and national unity (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956). The findings thus bridge micro-level textual analysis with macro-level theories of media-political relations.

The Illusion of "Balance" versus the Reality of "Positioning": The research challenges the notion of neutral reporting in conflict zones. By showing how both outlets systematically select different facts, sources, and narrative arcs, it argues that "balance" is itself a constructed frame. The more critical finding is not which outlet is more "balanced," but how each outlet's version of balance serves a different ideological function: one fostering critical scrutiny, the other reinforcing institutional authority.

2. **Navigating Tensions: Informality vs. Formality in Conflict Narration** The effectiveness of each outlet's framing is directly tied to how it navigates the inherent tension between engaging storytelling and maintaining journalistic authority.

Tempo.co's Dramatic Informality: Tempo's syntactical and rhetorical choices (direct quotes from KKB, dramatic headlines) create a sense of immediacy and access to the conflict's raw edges. This "informality" in tone and sourcing makes the coverage feel more engaging and critical. However, this approach carries the risk of amplifying militant voices without sufficient contextual critique and potentially sensationalizing the conflict, a tension observed in its more emotive lexicon.

Kompas.com's Authoritative Formality: Conversely, Kompas.com's reliance on official sources, procedural language, and formal narrative structure projects an image of authority, control, and measured response. This "formality" builds credibility through institutional association and reassures readers of state competence. The risk here, however, is excessive statism—where the narrative becomes an extension of government press releases, potentially marginalizing the human dimension of the crisis and obscuring alternative perspectives or state failures.

3. **The Public Consequences: Two Indonesias, One Crisis** The most significant practical implication of this research lies in its illustration of how competing mediascapes are produced for the Indonesian public.

Constructing Divergent Public Realities: A citizen consuming only Tempo.com would perceive a Papua in the throes of an escalating, politically charged conflict where state solutions are failing. A citizen following only Kompas.com would perceive a Papua where a difficult but contained security incident is being managed through proper state channels. These are not just different angles on the same story; they are fundamentally different political realities. This bifurcation can exacerbate societal polarization and complicate the formation of a shared, nuanced public understanding of the Papua issue.

Agenda-Setting and Attribute Priming: The findings illustrate the second level of agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972)—attribute priming. While both media agreed the hostage crisis was important (first level), they primed radically different attributes: Tempo.co primed attributes of conflict, grievance, and state vulnerability; Kompas.com primed



attributes of process, control, and institutional response. This shapes how the public thinks about the issue, influencing perceptions of responsibility, urgency, and appropriate solutions.

Strategic Lessons for Media and the Public. This analysis yields critical insights for multiple stakeholders: For Media Practitioners: It serves as a call for reflexive practice. Journalists and editors should critically examine whether their routinized framing choices—often made under deadline pressure—unconsciously default to ingrained ideological scripts rather than a fresh evaluation of each event’s complexity.

For the Public and Educators: The research is a potent tool for critical media literacy. It provides a clear, structured framework (the four structures) for citizens to deconstruct news, ask what is being emphasized and what is omitted, and understand that every news story is a constructed version of reality with a particular viewpoint.

For Researchers: It validates the power of controlled, comparative framing analysis to reveal systemic media biases. Future research should track whether these framing patterns hold across other sensitive issues (e.g., labor strikes, religious conflicts) to map Indonesia’s broader media ideology landscape.

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that the news about Papua is never just news from Papua; it is always, inevitably, news for a particular Indonesian audience, shaped by the ideological lens of the gatekeeper. The “Susi Air hostage crisis” as a public event was co-created in the tension between Tempo.co’s critical, conflict- driven narrative and Kompas.com’s procedural, state-centric narrative. Understanding this dual construction is essential for any critical engagement with media, conflict, and democracy in Indonesia.

6. Conclusion

Based on the integrated analysis and discussion presented in the preceding chapters, this research concludes that Tempo.co and Kompas.com constructed two distinct and ideologically coherent realities of the Susi Air pilot hostage crisis in Papua. The findings confirm that framing is not a neutral act of reporting but a strategic practice of narrative construction deeply embedded in each media outlet's institutional identity.

Tempo.co consistently employed a Conflict-Centric Frame, systematically portraying the event as a volatile and escalating confrontation. Through syntactical choices that foregrounded KKB demands, a narrative script emphasizing motives and actions, and a rhetorical style utilizing direct and often negatively connotated lexicon, Tempo.co positioned itself as a critical watchdog. This frame served to scrutinize state authority, highlight policy tensions, and amplify non-state perspectives, constructing a reality of unresolved political conflict.

In stark contrast, Kompas.com consistently applied a State-Procedural Frame, methodically depicting the crisis as a contained security incident under official management. Its syntactical organization prioritized institutional statements, its narrative script focused on governmental processes and coordination, and its rhetoric maintained a formal, bureaucratic tone. This approach aligned Kompas.com with a state-aligned institutionalism, reinforcing narratives of state competence, procedural control, and national stability.

The core contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that these divergent frames represent more than stylistic differences; they are manifestations of competing media ideologies within Indonesia's media ecosystem. The resulting dual mediascape presents the public with two parallel interpretations of the same event—one priming attributes of conflict and grievance, the other priming attributes of control and process—which can

Fundamentally shape public perception, political discourse, and policy debates surrounding Papua.

Therefore, the efficacy and responsibility of conflict journalism depend not on the illusion of absolute neutrality, but on media organizations' reflexivity regarding their inherent ideological positions and the consequential realities they construct for the public. For scholars, practitioners, and engaged citizens, this research underscores the imperative of critical media literacy to navigate and decode the framed landscapes of national conflict reporting.

Acknowledgments

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