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Framing of Indonesia's New Capital: Cultural Narratives in Online News Coverage

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study examines how Indonesian online news media frame the development of the new capital city, Nusantara, and embed cultural narratives, national identity, and political legitimacy within their coverage. **Methodology –** Using a qualitative framing analysis based on Pan and Kosicki's model, the study analyzes five purposively selected articles from DetikNews and DetikJatim published during the 2022 ceremonial inauguration. The analysis focuses on syntactic, script, thematic, and rhetorical structures. **Findings –** The coverage constructs Nusantara as a symbolic national project rather than a purely administrative or infrastructural policy. Four dominant frames emerge: nation-building, cultural symbolism, political legitimacy, and developmentalism. Rituals involving soil and water, the Kendi Nusantara, presidential leadership, and references to Majapahit connect capital relocation with territorial unity, historical continuity, and modernization. **Conclusion –** Online journalism transforms policy communication into culturally resonant narratives that shape public interpretations of national identity, authority, and development. **Novelty –** The study extends digital framing research by demonstrating how textual structures and symbolic storytelling jointly legitimize a large-scale development initiative, offering a conceptual explanation of how cultural meaning, political power, and developmental aspirations converge in online news discourse within Indonesia's digital sphere and contemporary state-led modernization agendas.

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INTRODUCTION

The relocation of Indonesia's capital city (IKN) from Jakarta to Kutai Regency in East Kalimantan Province represents one of the most significant political and infrastructural transformations in Southeast Asia in the 21st century (Perwira et al., 2024; Nainggolan et al., 2025). The development of the IKN is widely understood as a symbolic national project linked to modernization, regional balance, and national identity (Ismail et al., 2024; Anirwan et al., 2024). As a large-scale state initiative, the project has generated widespread public attention and media coverage, positioning the news media as a central arena for interpreting the meaning, legitimacy, and policy implications of the capital relocation. Previous research has shown that media narratives surrounding major infrastructure projects can influence public perceptions of development priorities, environmental risks, and the political motivations behind policy decisions (Ninan, 2022; Singh et al, 2025).

The rapid expansion of digital journalism has transformed the production, circulation, and interpretation

of news narratives across societies (Roslyng & Dindler, 2023; Lim, 2025; Young, 2025). Digital platforms allow information to circulate rapidly, intensifying competition among media organizations to produce narratives that capture public attention. In this evolving media landscape, journalists increasingly construct interpretive narratives that simplify complex political and social issues and steer audiences toward particular interpretations (Aksar et al., 2025). At the same time, the digital communications ecosystem is reshaping cultural engagement and audience participation, as mediated content circulates across interconnected online communities and influences public discourse (Hisham et al., 2025).

Media framing theory provides an important framework for understanding how news organizations construct meaning in reporting political events and policy initiatives (Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Chong & Druckman, 2007; Iacob, 2022; López-Rabadán, 2022; Song, 2024). Frames function as cognitive structures that help audiences interpret complex social realities by emphasizing specific actors, themes, and problem definitions (Otmakhova et al., 2024; Lindgren et al., 2024). In political communication, framing processes influence public opinion, shape policy debates, and contribute to the legitimacy or opposition of government initiatives (Bangun, 2024; Chan & Yi, 2024; Rambe et al, 2025). Visual and symbolic media representations can also function as powerful framing devices that influence how political and social issues are interpreted in public discourse (Chandam & Hui-Wen, 2025).

Studies on media framing show that coverage of large-scale development projects often reflects competing narratives related to economic progress, environmental sustainability, and political interests. Research on infrastructure development in Asia shows that media often frame these initiatives as symbols of technological progress and economic growth or as sources of environmental and social controversy (Song, 2024). These contrasting narratives shape how audiences interpret development policies, with some seen as national achievements and others as contentious political decisions. Media narratives can also reflect broader ideological orientations and institutional interests that shape how development issues are reported and interpreted (Bandelow et al , 2025; Marsun et al., 2023; Sidharta et al., 2024). Furthermore, media texts, including visual and satirical forms such as political cartoons, can shape public attitudes toward political and social issues through framing mechanisms embedded in media content (Nwachukwu et al., 2025).

The development of the new capital city (IKN) has become a significant subject of media framing and narrative construction in Indonesia (Dwinarko et al., 2023; Permadi et al., 2024; Santang et al., 2024; Rahayu et al., 2025). As one of the world's most ambitious capital city relocation projects, the IKN is often framed within broader narratives of national transformation, regional equity, and sustainable development. Government officials frequently present the project as a strategic solution to the demographic and environmental pressures facing Jakarta while simultaneously promoting economic growth in eastern Indonesia (Kalalinggi et al., 2023; Hotsawadia et al., 2025).

At the same time, the development of the IKN has generated critical perspectives highlighting environmental concerns, financial risks, and socio-cultural consequences for local communities in Kalimantan (Fitriyah et al., 2025). These competing perspectives illustrate that media coverage of the new capital serves as a discursive arena in which political actors, journalists, and citizens negotiate the meaning and legitimacy of development policies (Sari, 2023).
Media discourse surrounding the new capital also incorporates cultural narratives related to national identity and historical symbolism. One widely reported symbolic event involves the ritual gathering of

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soil and water from various Indonesian provinces, which are then united at the new capital site. Media narratives depicting this ritual demonstrate how development policies can be framed through symbolic storytelling that emphasizes national unity and collective identity. Narrative framing theory suggests that journalists often use symbolic narratives to transform complex policy decisions into stories that resonate culturally and connect with shared social values (Zaklama, 2025; Otmakhova & Frermann, 2025).

In societies where cultural symbolism plays a central role in political communication, symbolic narratives in news coverage can transform policy debates into stories that emphasize shared history, collective values, and national aspirations (Lim, 2025). Visual rhetoric and symbolic imagery in media communications further reinforce this narrative construction by shaping how audiences interpret the cultural meanings embedded in public discourse (Zuhudi et al., 2025).Another important dimension of media framing in the digital age involves the interaction between media narratives and public discourse. Online news platforms allow audiences to comment on, share, and reinterpret news content, creating a communication environment where media frames interact with public responses (Putra & Sidharta, 2025; Subiakto et al., 2026). Research in digital journalism indicates that framing processes are increasingly influenced by audience engagement metrics, algorithmic visibility, and social media amplification (Young, 2025; Han, 2024). These dynamics can reinforce dominant narratives while allowing alternative interpretations to emerge in digital public discourse.

Despite growing academic attention to framing in digital journalism, research examining cultural narratives embedded in media coverage of large-scale national development initiatives remains limited. Many framing studies focus primarily on political campaigns, elections, or conflict reporting, paying relatively little attention to symbolic narratives surrounding state-led development projects. In the Indonesian context, existing studies on the new capital city (IKN) have largely focused on policy debates, governance challenges, environmental sustainability, and economic implications. In contrast, the discursive construction of the IKN in media narratives has received relatively little academic attention. This research gap highlights the importance of examining how online news media frame the development of the IKN and how cultural narratives are embedded within these frameworks.

Based on this gap, the present study examines how online news media construct narratives surrounding the development of Indonesia's new capital city (IKN). As a major national policy initiative with political, economic, and cultural implications, the capital relocation project has become a prominent topic of public discourse on digital media. Online news coverage does not merely report on the project's progress but also constructs interpretive frameworks that shape public understanding of its meaning and significance.

This study aims to analyze how online news media frame the development of IKN and how cultural narratives are embedded within these frames. Specifically, the research addresses three questions: (1) What dominant frames do Online news media use in reporting the development of IKN? (2) How are cultural narratives, symbols, and representations of national identity incorporated within these frames? (3) How do structural elements of news discourse, such as syntactic, script, thematic, and rhetorical structures, contribute to the construction of these frames?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Framing Theory in Digital News Media

Framing theory has become one of the most influential theoretical approaches in communication and media studies for understanding how news media construct social reality. The concept of framing explains how media organizations select certain aspects of reality and emphasize them to promote particular interpretations of events, issues, or policies. In contemporary media research, framing is understood as a process through which journalists organize information and present narratives that guide audience interpretation of public issues (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2017; Trudel & De Maeyer, 2022). Through this process, media frames shape the cognitive structures that audiences use to interpret complex social and political phenomena. The origins of framing theory can be traced to sociological and cognitive traditions. Early conceptualizations of framing emerged from Erving Goffman's work on frame analysis, which describes frames as interpretive schemas that individuals use to organize experience and make sense of reality.

In media studies, framing emerged as a theoretical framework for analyzing how journalists structure news narratives and construct meaning in public discourse. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that framing is not merely a textual feature but a dynamic communication process involving journalists, political actors, and audiences (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2020; Brugman & Burgers, 2018). In recent years, framing research has expanded significantly within the field of political communication and digital journalism. Scholars have highlighted how media frames influence public understanding of political events, policy debates, and social issues by shaping the salience and interpretation of information (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2018; Matthes & Kohring, 2008). The rise of digital media ecosystems has further intensified the relevance of framing theory, as online news platforms increasingly compete to produce narratives that attract attention and engagement. In this context, framing processes often interact with algorithmic distribution systems and audience feedback mechanisms, thereby amplifying certain narratives while marginalizing others (Valencia-Forrester, 2020; Ells, 2022).

Framing also plays a crucial role in shaping political and policy discourse. Research shows that media frames influence how audiences attribute responsibility, evaluate policy options, and form opinions about government initiatives. When news organizations emphasize specific aspects of an issue, such as economic benefits, environmental risks, or political conflicts, they guide audiences toward particular interpretations and policy preferences (Matthes & Kohring, 2008). In this sense, framing functions not only as a descriptive tool for analyzing media texts but also as an explanatory framework for understanding how communication processes shape public discourse. By highlighting certain elements while omitting others, the media constructs interpretive patterns that influence how social realities are perceived and debated within the public sphere. Within the broader landscape of digital journalism, the role of framing becomes increasingly important as audiences rely heavily on online media platforms for political information and public policy discussions. Digital news environments enable rapid circulation of information while also intensifying competition among media organizations to produce engaging narratives. Consequently, journalists often employ framing strategies to simplify complex issues and present them in ways that resonate with audience expectations and cultural contexts. This process illustrates how media discourse is shaped not only by editorial routines but also by technological infrastructures and audience engagement dynamics.

Furthermore, framing in digital news media reflects the interaction between journalistic practices and broader political communication processes. News narratives about large-scale national projects frequently incorporate interpretive frames that connect policy decisions with broader societal meanings such as development, governance, identity, and legitimacy. In such contexts, framing theory provides

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an analytical perspective for examining how media narratives shape public understanding of complex national issues. By examining framing practices, researchers can better understand how media discourse influences the interpretation of public policies and shapes the symbolic meanings attached to development initiatives.

The Pan and Kosicki Model of News Framing

One of the most widely used analytical models in framing research is the framework developed by Zhongdang Pan and Gerald Kosicki. Their model conceptualizes news discourse as a structured system of signifying elements that organize meaning within media texts. According to Pan and Kosicki, news discourse is constructed through a series of structural devices that guide audience interpretation of events and issues. They propose that framing can be analyzed along four structural dimensions: syntactic, script, thematic, and rhetorical structures (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). The syntactic structure refers to the formal organization of news elements such as headlines, leads, quotations, and background information. These elements function as framing devices that highlight certain aspects of a story while downplaying others. By arranging headlines, introductory paragraphs, and quoted sources, journalists can emphasize specific perspectives and actors within the news narrative. In this way, syntactic elements shape the initial interpretation of a news story by directing audience attention toward particular aspects of an issue.

The script structure focuses on the narrative sequencing of events in the news story, typically organized according to journalistic conventions such as the 5W+1H format. Through this structure, journalists construct the storyline of an event and identify its key actors. The script dimension, therefore, determines how events are presented chronologically and how causal relationships between actors and actions are described. By structuring news stories in this narrative format, journalists provide audiences with a coherent storyline that facilitates understanding of complex social events. The thematic structure examines how ideas and propositions are logically connected within the news text to form coherent themes or arguments. This dimension focuses on the internal logic of the news narrative, including how paragraphs and sentences are organized to construct broader interpretive patterns. Through thematic structures, journalists link different elements of a story to emphasize particular issues, explanations, or moral interpretations. As a result, thematic organization plays a key role in shaping the overall meaning conveyed by a news article.

Finally, the rhetorical structure refers to stylistic devices such as word choice, metaphors, visual imagery, and symbolic expressions that reinforce particular interpretations of an issue. Rhetorical elements function as persuasive tools that influence how audiences emotionally and cognitively respond to news narratives. The use of symbolic language, descriptive terminology, and visual emphasis can strengthen particular frames and shape how audiences evaluate the significance of an event. The Pan and Kosicki model remains highly relevant in contemporary media research because it provides a systematic framework for analyzing both the textual and symbolic dimensions of news discourse. Recent studies have applied this model to examine how media organizations frame political controversies, environmental issues, and development policies in digital news environments. By analyzing structural elements of news texts, researchers can identify the dominant frames that shape public discourse and reveal the underlying narratives embedded in media coverage.

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In the context of national development discourse, framing analysis offers an important analytical lens for understanding how media construct narratives about large-scale policy initiatives. News coverage of development projects often involves competing frames that emphasize economic growth, environmental sustainability, political legitimacy, or cultural identity. These frames influence how audiences interpret the significance of development policies and how they evaluate their potential consequences for society. Therefore, framing theory provides a valuable conceptual framework for analyzing how media narratives shape public understanding of complex national projects such as the development of IKN.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design using framing analysis to examine how online news media construct narratives about the development of Indonesia's new capital city (IKN). Qualitative approaches are suitable for investigating meaning, interpretation, and symbolic representation within media discourse (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the context of digital journalism, news texts are not treated as neutral reflections of reality but as socially constructed representations shaped by editorial practices, institutional routines, and broader socio-political contexts. Framing analysis is widely used in communication research to investigate how media organizations select and emphasize particular aspects of reality when reporting political and social issues (Reese, 2007). Through framing processes, journalists highlight specific actors, themes, and interpretations that influence how audiences understand public events and policy debates. By applying framing analysis to online news coverage of IKN, this study aims to identify interpretive patterns through which media narratives construct meanings related to national development, political legitimacy, and cultural symbolism.

Data Source and Sampling

The data for this study consisted of five online news articles discussing symbolic events related to the construction of Indonesia's new capital city (IKN). These articles were selected from the Indonesian digital news platforms DetikNews and DetikJatim, published during the early stages of the symbolic inauguration of the new capital city in 2022. They specifically focused on the widely reported ritual of uniting land and water from various Indonesian provinces in a ceremonial vessel known as the Kendi Nusantara. News articles were selected using purposive sampling, a qualitative sampling strategy that identifies information-rich cases relevant to the research objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). The selected articles that make up this research dataset are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Corpus of Online News Articles on IKN Development

Media & News Title	Narrative Focus	Dominant Frame
DetikNews: Air-Tanah dari 33 Gubernur Akan Digabung dalam Kendi Nusantara di IKN	Ritual unification of soil and water from provinces	Nation-building
DetikNews: Tentang Air-Tanah 33 Daerah ke Nusantara dan Ajakan Jokowi Berkemah	Philosophical explanation of Tanah Air symbolism	Cultural symbolism
DetikNews: Jokowi dan Seluruh Gubernur Satukan Tanah-Air di IKN Nusantara	National ceremony led by the President	Political legitimacy
DetikNews: Jokowi ke IKN: Penyatuan Tanah-Air hingga Berkemah di Nusantara	Presidential activities at the IKN site	Political legitimacy
DetikJatim: Khofifah Ambil Tanah-Air dari Situs Sumur Upas untuk IKN Nusantara	Historical symbolism of Majapahit heritage	Cultural symbolism

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Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in this study is the individual online news article discussing the development of IKN. Each article is treated as a discrete unit of media discourse containing structural elements suitable for framing analysis. Within each article, the analysis focuses on textual components that contribute to the construction of media frames, including headlines, leads, quotations, background information, and narrative descriptions of events. These textual elements enable the researcher to examine how news discourse organizes information and emphasizes particular interpretations of the capital relocation project. The analysis specifically examines framing elements corresponding to the four structural dimensions proposed by Pan and Kosicki (1993): syntactic structure, script structure, thematic structure, and rhetorical structure. These dimensions provide a systematic framework for identifying how news narratives organize events, emphasize themes, and employ symbolic language to guide audience interpretation.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

Data collection was conducted through a systematic search of online news platforms using keywords related to IKN development. The search process included terms such as "IKN development," "IKN relocation," "IKN policy," and "IKN infrastructure." Keyword-based searches are commonly used in digital media research to identify relevant news content across online platforms (Neuendorf, 2019). Following the initial search, identified articles were screened according to the sampling criteria described above. Articles meeting the criteria were compiled into a dataset for qualitative analysis. The collected texts were then organized based on their thematic relevance to political narratives, cultural symbolism, and national development discourse. This preliminary categorization facilitated the identification of recurring narrative patterns in media coverage (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

This analysis follows the framing model developed by Pan and Kosicki (1993). According to this model, framing operates through four structural dimensions. First, syntactic structure examines the formal organization of news elements such as headlines, opening paragraphs, quotes, and background information, which shape how issues are introduced and which actors are emphasized. Second, script structure focuses on the narrative sequence of events, typically organized through journalistic conventions such as the 5Ws+1H structure. Third, thematic structure analyzes how ideas and propositions logically connect within the text to construct broader interpretive themes such as national unity, leadership, or development. Fourth, rhetorical structure examines stylistic elements, including word choice, metaphors, and symbolic expressions that reinforce particular interpretations of the issue. The analytical procedure was conducted in three stages. First, all selected news articles were carefully read to identify key actors, narrative elements, and symbolic references related to the development of the new capital. Second, each article was coded according to the four structural dimensions of Pan and Kosicki's model. Third, the results from each structural dimension were compared across the dataset to identify recurring narrative patterns and dominant frames in media coverage (Krippendorff, 2019).

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RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Media Narratives of IKN Development in Online News

The analysis of online news coverage of Indonesia's new capital city (IKN) indicates that media narratives frame the relocation project not merely as an administrative or infrastructural policy but as a symbolic national initiative. Across the five news articles analyzed in this study, journalists consistently emphasize ceremonial activities, political participation, and cultural symbolism associated with the early stages of the IKN project. Rather than focusing primarily on technical aspects such as urban planning, financing, or institutional arrangements, the articles highlight symbolic events that connect the capital relocation project with broader narratives of national unity, political leadership, and historical continuity.

A central narrative element across the dataset is the ritual of collecting soil and water from provinces across Indonesia and uniting them in a ceremonial container known as Kendi Nusantara. In the analyzed news coverage, this ritual is presented as a symbolic act representing territorial unity across the Indonesian archipelago. Through this narrative, the relocation of the capital city is framed as a collective national undertaking that symbolically integrates diverse regions into a shared political center.

Several articles explicitly connect the ritual to the Indonesian concept of Tanah Air, which refers to the symbolic unity of land and water across the archipelago. In these narratives, the act of bringing soil and water from different provinces functions as a metaphor for national integration. By foregrounding this symbolic act, journalists transform a complex state policy into a culturally resonant narrative that emphasizes shared identity and territorial unity.

Political leadership also plays a prominent role in media narratives. The presence of President Joko Widodo and regional governors is repeatedly highlighted during the IKN project's ceremonial activities. This narrative positioning reinforces the perception that the capital relocation project represents a coordinated national initiative supported by political leadership at both central and regional levels.

In addition to political narratives, several articles incorporate cultural and historical symbolism to contextualize the project. References to the Majapahit kingdom and the Sumpah Palapa illustrate how journalists connect the IKN project with historical narratives of territorial unity across the Indonesian archipelago. Through these references, the capital relocation project is framed not only as a contemporary development initiative but also as part of a longer historical narrative of national integration. Taken together, these narrative elements demonstrate that online news coverage frames IKN's development as a symbolic national project embedded in political leadership, cultural heritage, and national identity. The media narratives examined in this study, therefore, illustrate how development policies can be transformed into culturally meaningful stories through journalistic framing.

Structural Framing of IKN News Coverage

To examine how these narratives are constructed within news discourse, this study analyzes the structural organization of the news texts using the four framing dimensions proposed by Pan and Kosicki (1993): syntactic, script, thematic, and rhetorical structures. These dimensions provide a systematic framework for identifying how journalists organize information and emphasize particular interpretations of events. At the syntactic level, headlines and leads play a crucial role in directing audience attention to symbolic elements of the story.

As shown in Table 2, several headlines foreground ceremonial activities associated with the development of IKN, particularly the ritual of uniting soil and water collected from provinces across

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Indonesia. By highlighting these symbolic events at the beginning of the news narrative, journalists frame the capital relocation as a meaningful national moment rather than merely an administrative policy decision. At the script level, the narrative sequencing of events emphasizes ceremonial participation and political leadership. The analyzed articles frequently position President Joko Widodo and regional governors as central actors responsible for carrying out the ritual of national unification.

Table 2. Structure Analysis of IKN News Coverage (Pan & Kosicki Model)

News Article	Syntactic Structure	Script Structure	Thematic Structure	Rhetorical Structure	Resulting Frame
Air-Tanah dari 33 Gubernur Akan Digabung dalam Kendi Nusantara di IKN	Headline foregrounds ritual action.	The narrative describes governors bringing soil and water from the provinces to the IKN site.	Territorial unity across the Indonesian archipelago	Symbolic reference to Tanah Air as a unity of land and water	Nation-building
Tentang Air-Tanah 33 Daerah ke Nusantara dan Ajakan Jokowi Berkemah	Lead explains the philosophical meaning of the ritual	Narrative emphasizes the gathering of national leaders and provinces	Cultural interpretation of unity and national identity	Symbolism of Nusantara as a collective national space	Cultural symbolism
Jokowi dan Seluruh Gubernur Satukan Tanah-Air di IKN Nusantara	Headline highlights presidential leadership	The story focuses on the President leading the national ceremony	Political coordination between central and regional leaders	Leadership imagery emphasizing authority	Political legitimacy
Jokowi ke IKN: Penyatuan Tanah-Air hingga Berkemah di Nusantara	Lead highlights presidential participation in ceremonial activities	Narrative centers on presidential actions at the IKN site	Authority of political leadership in guiding development	Symbolic representation of a national ceremony	Political legitimacy
Khofifah Ambil Tanah-Air dari Situs Sumur Upas untuk IKN Nusantara	Headline emphasizes historical heritage site.	The narrative describes the collection of soil and water from the Majapahit heritage site.	Historical continuity of Indonesian territorial unity	Reference to the Majapahit legacy as a cultural symbol	Cultural symbolism

This narrative structure constructs a storyline in which the development of IKN is presented as a coordinated national initiative supported by both central and regional political authorities. Thematic structures further reinforce this interpretation by connecting individual ceremonial actions with broader narratives of territorial unity and national identity. Across the analyzed articles, the symbolic concept of Tanah Air repeatedly appears as a thematic reference linking the ritual of soil and water collection with the idea of Indonesian nationhood. In this way, the thematic organization of the news texts situates the IKN project within a broader discourse of national integration.

Finally, rhetorical structures strengthen these frames through symbolic language and cultural references. Expressions such as Kendi Nusantara and Tanah Air, and references to historical symbols such as Majapahit, evoke cultural meanings associated with unity and historical continuity. These rhetorical devices transform policy-related reporting into narratives that resonate with shared cultural values. Taken together, the interaction of syntactic, script, thematic, and rhetorical structures produces a consistent framing pattern in which the development of IKN is represented as a symbolic national project grounded in political leadership, cultural heritage, and narratives of national unity.

Dominant Frames in IKN Media Coverage

Based on a comparative analysis of five news articles, four dominant interpretive frames emerged in media coverage of the new capital city: nation-building, political legitimacy, cultural symbolism, and development. The nation-building frame was prominent in narratives depicting rituals that unite land and water, drawn from various provinces across the Indonesian archipelago. Within this framework, the symbolic act combined elements from various regions to represent territorial unity and national integration.

By emphasizing the participation of governors representing various provinces, the news narratives constructed the new capital city project as a collective national endeavor. The symbolic concept of Tanah Air (Homeland), which refers to the unity of land and water, served as a key cultural reference that reinforced this interpretation. Through this framework, the capital city relocation was presented not only as a policy initiative but also as a symbolic affirmation of Indonesian national identity. The political legitimacy frame highlighted the role of political leadership in directing and legitimizing the development of the new capital city.

By positioning the president and regional leaders as central actors in the symbolic ritual, the media narratives constructed a storyline in which political leadership served as the primary driver of national development. This framing reinforced the perception that the capital city relocation project was a coordinated state initiative supported by the political elite. The cultural symbolism framework emerges through references to traditional rituals, historical heritage, and symbolic artifacts associated with Indonesian identity. Media narratives depicting the Kendi Nusantara ritual and the collection of soil and water from historically significant sites illustrate how journalists embedded the development project within a broader cultural narrative.

References to historical symbols such as the Majapahit kingdom further reinforce the notion that the capital relocation project represents a continuation of Indonesia's historical trajectory of territorial unity. Finally, the development framework positions the capital city project within a broader narrative of national modernization and economic transformation. Within this framework, the capital city relocation is interpreted as part of Indonesia's long-term development strategy to create a more balanced and sustainable national growth structure. Together, these four frameworks demonstrate that media coverage constructed the capital city project through a combination of symbolic, political, cultural, and development narratives, rather than solely through administrative discourse.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study illustrate how online news media construct interpretive narratives about Indonesia's capital relocation project through systematic framing. Consistent with the framing theory proposed by Pan and Kosicki (1993), the analysis demonstrates that news discourse is structured

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through the interaction of syntactic, script, thematic, and rhetorical elements that guide audience interpretation of complex policy issues. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model derived from this study, showing how media framing processes operate within the digital journalism environment. At the first level, online news media function as a discursive arena in which policy issues are interpreted and communicated to the public. Within this environment, journalists construct narratives through framing mechanisms that organize news discourse according to specific textual structures.

The second level of the model represents the framing construction process, which follows the four structural dimensions proposed by Pan and Kosicki. The syntactic structure directs audience attention through headlines, leads, and quotations that highlight specific aspects of an event. The script structure organizes the narrative sequence of events, often emphasizing political actors and ceremonial activities. The thematic structure connects individual events to broader interpretive themes such as national unity and development. Finally, the rhetorical structure reinforces these interpretations through symbolic language, cultural references, and historical imagery. Through the interaction of these structural elements, news narratives construct a representation of IKN development as a significant national project. As illustrated in Figure 1, these framing processes generate four dominant interpretive frames: nation-building, cultural symbolism, political legitimacy, and developmentalism. Each frame highlights different dimensions of the capital relocation project, ranging from territorial unity and cultural heritage to political authority and national development agendas.

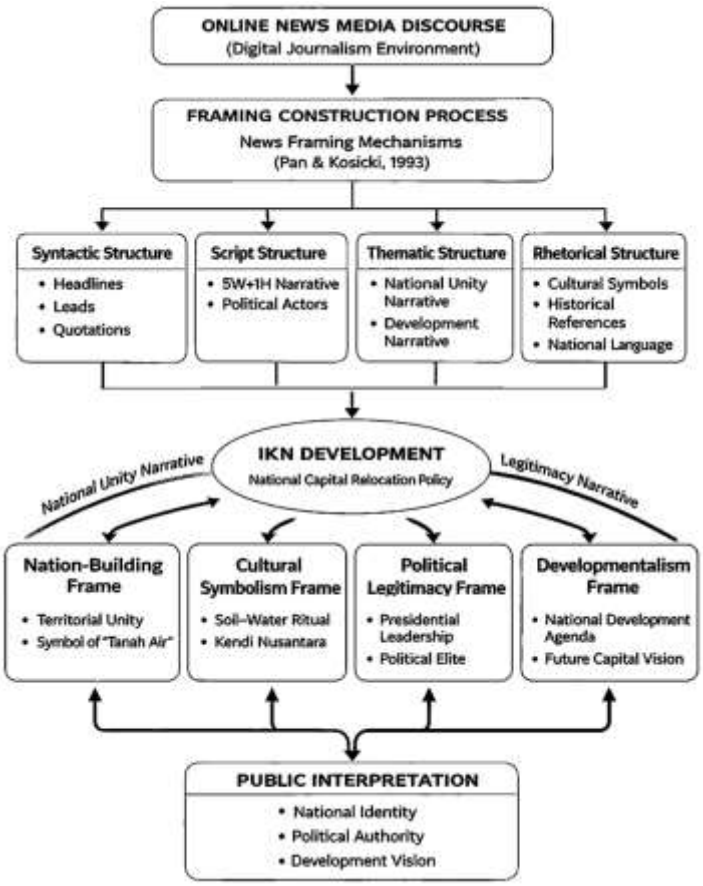


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Media Framing of IKN Development in Online News

These frames collectively shape how audiences interpret the meaning of IKN development. Rather than presenting the project solely as an administrative policy, media narratives transform it into a symbolic story about national identity, political leadership, and the future trajectory of Indonesia's development. As shown in the final stage of the model, these framing processes influence public interpretation by shaping perceptions of national identity, political authority, and development vision. In this way, media framing functions as a crucial communicative mechanism through which large-scale national development initiatives are interpreted within the public sphere.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that online news media constructed the development of Indonesia's new capital city (IKN) through a complex narrative framing process that integrates political, cultural, and developmental meanings. Rather than presenting the capital relocation primarily as a technical infrastructure policy, media narratives transformed the project into a symbolic national story linked to regional unity, political leadership, cultural heritage, and national development aspirations. Through the interaction of syntactic, script, thematic, and rhetorical structures, journalists organized news discourse to emphasize ceremonial rituals, political actors, and cultural symbolism. As a result, the capital relocation was framed as a collective national endeavor rather than a mere administrative decision. These findings confirm that framing processes in digital journalism go beyond simply reporting policy developments to actively constructing interpretive narratives that shape how large-scale national initiatives are understood in public discourse.

This study also offers several theoretical implications for communication and media studies. First, the results reinforce the relevance of Pan and Kosicki's framing model for analyzing contemporary digital news discourse. The structural analysis suggests that framing emerges from the interaction of various textual mechanisms within news narratives. Second, the identification of four dominant frames of nation-building, political legitimacy, cultural symbolism, and development shows how development policies can be communicated through symbolic storytelling that connects policy initiatives to broader narratives of national identity and historical continuity. In this regard, this study extends existing framing research by illustrating how large-scale national development projects are embedded in cultural narratives and political symbolism in media discourse. The conceptual model presented in Figure 1 further illustrates how framing mechanisms in the digital journalism environment produce interpretive frames that shape public perceptions of national identity, political authority, and development visions.

In conclusion, this study highlights the crucial role of media framing in shaping public interpretations of large-scale national development initiatives. Coverage of the new capital in online news media illustrates how policy communication can be transformed into symbolic narratives that resonate with cultural values and the collective national imagination. By emphasizing ceremonial rituals, historical references, and political leadership, journalists construct a narrative in which the development of the new capital represents not only infrastructural transformation but also a symbolic project of nation-building and modernization. Future research could expand this study by examining a wider range of media, incorporating comparative analysis across different political orientations of news organizations, or exploring how audiences interpret and respond to these media frames in digital public discourse.

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