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Between Awareness and Visibility: A Google Trends (GT) Analysis of Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park (MCKIP), East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) and Kuantan Port (2013-2024)

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Abstract

Malaysia and China established the Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park (MCKIP) in 2013. More cooperation follows, including significant projects such as the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) and Kuantan Port. These projects help to strengthen the economic and strategic partnership between both countries. Despite their strategic importance for the continuous growth of West Malaysia's East Coast Region, they struggle to establish a significant online presence, which is crucial for gauging public interest and social acceptance. In this article, the researchers use Google Trends Analysis to investigate the public's interests in the projects. Findings indicate that MCKIP has consistently experienced low search volumes, with interest concentrated in Pahang, which is likely tied to job opportunities and investments. Kuantan Port searches were more related to tourism, while ECRL queries focused on project progress. MCKIP and Kuantan Port's online presence is overshadowed by the ECRL's broader scope and media coverage; notably, a spike in search interest during 2018-2019 coincided with political shifts in Malaysia and news coverage. The results highlight the need for enhanced strategic communication to improve public engagement, inform public decisions, and increase public trust in the government and project visibility, fostering positive economic and social outcomes for local communities. Better public relations can counter negative narratives, such as China's "debt-trap diplomacy" critique, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of its economic statecraft. Copyright © IIUM Press.

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