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Exploring Malaysians' News Consumption Habit with Multimedia-Integrated News: A Reflexive Thematic Analysis Using Uses and Gratifications Theory

Ng Wei Liang* and Lee Kuok Tiung

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, 88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Multimedia integration in online news has changed Malaysians' perceptions of news. This paper uses the uses and gratification theory (UGT) and reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) to explore how multimedia integration in news influences users' consumption habits. Through semi-structured interviews with ten informants, five key themes emerge: evolving news consumption habits, the role of multimedia and technology in engagement, cognitive and emotional responses, interactive and social experiences, and challenges in multimedia news integration. Findings indicate that multimedia-integrated news enhances engagement by improving comprehension, fostering emotional connections, and encouraging participation in the news. However, concerns arise over sensationalism, which may lead to people's negative perception of the news. Social media's dominance as a news source further amplifies these issues, as comment sections and content generalisation alter public discourse. At the same time, multimedia enhances storytelling. Informants expressed concerns about declining news quality, clickbait strategies, and credibility issues. Prior research has primarily examined ethnolinguistic differences in news content and framing, while evidence of audiences' actual cross-language news consumption remains limited. This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating how multimedia integration enables audiences to access news across language boundaries, suggesting that news consumption is not necessarily confined by linguistic differences. Future research could explore how news organisations and government policies can work together to address language-related barriers in news access, while promoting accurate cross-lingual reporting and minimising the risk of multimedia tools misleading audiences.

Keywords: Audience engagement, digital journalism, Malaysia, multimedia news, online news consumption, uses and gratifications theory

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E-mail addresses:
ngliang342@gmail.com (Ng Wei Liang)
lee@ums.edu.my (Lee Kuok Tiung)
* Corresponding author

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INTRODUCTION

In today's rapid information era, the news industry is actively developing new strategies to remain relevant. The transformation of traditional media into digital platforms has encouraged audiences to consume news (Anderson et al., 2016). With the emergence of news portals, social media, and mobile applications, integrated reporting that uses multimedia elements has become an essential strategy for engaging audiences (Li, 2022). Multimedia integration is not merely about combining different media formats such as images, videos, and interactive graphics; it represents a fundamental change in news consumption habits, affecting how audiences process and share information (Geers, 2020).

As media keeps pace with technological progress, news consumption has evolved beyond passive reading or watching (De Corniere & Sarvary, 2022). Today's audiences actively engage with news through digital platforms, use social media for discussion, share news, and respond to real-time updates (Möller et al., 2019). This shift is particularly relevant in Malaysia, where internet penetration and smartphone use have contributed to the growing dominance of digital news consumption (MCMC, 2023). In addition, studies have shown that Malaysian audiences increasingly rely on online news portals and social media platforms for timely updates, entertainment, and social involvement, leading to a more dynamic and participatory culture (Omar et al., 2023).

Multimedia integration in news has been widely studied in Western contexts, especially in relation to technological innovation and mechanisms for public involvement (Avilés & Carvajal, 2008). However, this body of research is skewed towards individualistic cultures (Van Aelst et al., 2021). There has been limited research in areas such as Malaysia, where collective values and multilingual media ecosystems shape distinct consumption patterns. This difference constrains practical strategies for using multimedia elements to connect the public with culturally fragmented markets. By drawing on thematic analysis, this study addresses an evidence gap in how multimedia is communicated within Malaysia's social and technical context and helps to redress a regional imbalance in digital journalism research.

Given these changes, it is important to determine how multimedia affects audiences on online news portals. Uses and gratifications theory (UGT) is a valuable framework for explaining why individuals use news and multimedia elements to meet their needs and achieve satisfaction (Katz et al., 1973). Applying UGT, this study aims to understand the habit of consuming multimedia-based news in the Malaysian context.

In addition, while UGT has been widely used to investigate motivations for media consumption, fewer studies have applied it to news portals that integrate multimedia elements. This study seeks to address these gaps in understanding the multimedia properties that affect public involvement in

the Malaysian news context and to provide insights that can inform future digital journalism strategies.

This study aims to:

1. Examine how multimedia integration in Malaysian online news portals influences audience engagement.
2. Identify the key needs of Malaysian audiences when consuming multimedia news content using the UGT framework.
3. Explore audience perceptions and experiences related to multimedia elements in online news consumption through reflexive thematic analysis (RTA).

This study is significant because it contributes to a broader understanding of digital journalism in Malaysia and informs media organisations of effective strategies to increase public participation. This research bridges technological advances and public needs by examining multimedia integration through the UGT lens, providing practical implications for news organisations, journalists, and content creators.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) in News Consumption

UGT provides an important framework for understanding news consumption behaviour based on audience initiative. Unlike traditional media theory, UGT posits that news users do not receive information passively but actively choose media according to specific requirements to satisfy their needs (Katz et al., 1973). At its core, UGT seeks to reveal the motivations behind news usage patterns: individuals meet multidimensional needs, such as cognitive, social interaction and affective needs, through news consumption, and they choose relevant platforms according to media characteristics (Ruggiero, 2000). For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, audiences active search for health news reflects informational needs driven by cognitive motives, whereas sharing content on social media reflects the social need to participate in public discussion (Ahmed & Zia, 2022).

Regarding needs classification, UGT research reveals complex needs in news consumption. Cognitive needs involve collecting information and building knowledge, such as understanding political effects through in-depth reports. Social needs are reflected in establishing social connections and maintaining group identity through sharing news. Affective needs include relieving stress through entertainment or fostering hope and motivation through positive reports (McQuail, 1987). In the digital media environment, news usage patterns show new characteristics (O'Riordan et al., 2023). The news push feed system aligns with users' interests based on individual usage patterns, improving the efficiency of information collection and exposing users to homogeneous material, thereby satisfying their needs. This contradiction highlights the complexity of need reception during technological change.

The development of media forms and technology has further shaped news consumption patterns (Van Aelst et al., 2021). Traditional media meet the need for systematic information through ritual viewing, whereas social media enables users to engage in real-time monitoring and co-creation of news. However, this shift has also fuelled controversy. Information overload can weaken deeper understanding, and the tendency towards news-as-entertainment can reduce the seriousness of public information (Meel & Vishwakarma, 2020). In addition, the instrumental functions of mobile news consumption show that news is not only about information sharing but is also embedded in daily practice (Wheatley & Ferrer-Conill, 2020).

Although UGT provides a flexible framework for explaining news consumption, its theoretical boundaries still require rigorous scrutiny. On the one hand, the theory overemphasises individual rationality and can overlook structural obstacles (Wei et al., 2024). The ambiguity in the classification of needs also raises questions about the validity of the measures it inspires. In this connection, some researchers have advocated combining UGT with additional forms of analysis, such as distinguishing between commuting reading and deep reading behaviours (Han et al., 2023). However, this study aims to examine the relationship between news algorithm stress and user independence and to uncover the cultural production of Malaysian news through multimedia integration using RTA.

Multimedia Integration in News

Multimedia integration has reshaped audiences, especially in terms of the cognitive and emotional needs associated with news consumption by combining media forms such as text, images, videos, and interactive graphics (Omar et al., 2024). Studies have shown that users' preference for multimedia news is not only due to technical innovation but also because it can fully meet multiple needs. At the level of cognitive requirements, multimodal information presentation can significantly improve the efficiency of understanding. For example, dynamic data visualisation translates complex financial trends into infographics, helping users quickly grasp core information (Freixa et al., 2021). Video reduces the cognitive burden on the audience to treat abstract concepts through the complementary combination of "picture + explanation" (Swart, 2021). In addition, scrolling through an interactive timeline to see the development of events and to locate information further strengthens the depth of knowledge building (Raza & Ding, 2022).

At the level of emotional needs, multimedia elements evoke strong resonance through sensory stimulation (Choi et al., 2020). For example, on-site audio and interview videos embedded in disaster or war reports can stimulate the audience's empathy, prompting the public to pay attention to social issues and participate in aid efforts. Immersive news enhances emotional engagement through a first-person

experience, making it easier for users to connect emotionally with news events (Wu et al., 2021). At the same time, lightweight multimedia content such as infographics and short video news suits fragmented reading habits, providing entertainment while satisfying the need for instant information acquisition (Owilla et al., 2023).

However, multimedia integration can also distort arguments about satisfying demand. On the one hand, increased dependence on visual elements may introduce cognitive bias. Users become aware of shocking images first and ignore textual details, which reduces overall comprehension efficiency when using information technologies (Lee & Hamilton, 2022). On the other hand, the misuse of emotional material can lead to ethical disputes: sensational soundtracks or selective editing can manipulate public sentiments and undermine the fairness of news (Cheng et al., 2021). More seriously, Deepfake technology blurs the boundary between reality and imagination, and users may inadvertently receive false information in emotional specialisation (Lee & Shin, 2021). These contradictions highlight the double-edged nature of multimedia news. Thus, expanding the ways of meeting users' needs also demands high levels of digital media literacy. This research further examines how to adapt to multimedia news, for example balancing emotional appeal and information overload or designing inclusive, interactive interfaces to reduce cognitive load for different groups. In addition, variations in users' multimedia needs must still be supported by empirical cross-group evidence.

News Consumption Habits in Malaysia

Malaysia's consumption reflects the tension between its multi-ethnic social structure and a wave of digitalisation (Tapsell, 2022). As a multilingual and multi-religious country, the media options available to the Malaysian displays significant ethnic discrimination: mainstream Malaysian outlets such as Utusan Malaysia and Astro Awani primarily serve the Malay majority, while Chinese-language newspapers such as Sin Chew Daily and China Press have become important information channels for Chinese readers (Mohamad Jamil, 2020). This discrimination stems from language preferences and is linked to ethnopolitical narratives, in which ethnic minorities access news with strong cultural affinity through their own language media to resist marginalisation in public discourse (Abdullah & Jamil, 2024). At the same time, religious values shape news consumption practices: Muslim groups prioritise coverage of Islamic issues and prefer content that adheres to religious morals (Saleh et al., 2021). The Chinese community is more sensitive to China-Malaysia news (Yu, 2023).

The popularity of digital technology is transforming Malaysia's traditional news landscape. In 2023, data indicated that Malaysia's internet penetration rate reached 89%, and social media users accounted for 86% of the total population (MCMC, 2023). The younger generation in particular

depends on Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok for instant news. Although this shift has intensified the information crisis and social platforms have broadened the reach of news, the spread of fake news has been exacerbated by public trust in online information generally being lower than in traditional media. To manage these risks, Malaysian users have developed a defensive media use strategy and cross-checking social media content with mainstream media outlets to confirm authenticity (Schuldt, 2021). In addition, there are significant differences between urban and rural areas. Urban inhabitants prefer to access news immediately via mobile devices, while rural communities still rely on television and word of mouth (Rami et al., 2021).

Political rules give clearer shape to the news ecology in Malaysia (Rajandran & Lee, 2023). The Anti-Fake News Act 2018 and the current Communications and Multimedia Act strictly control online content and have particularly cultivated public self-censorship around sensitive subjects (George, 2020). Moreover, studies have found that such guidelines have given rise to double information sites. The public avoids controversial news on open platforms and instead engages in niche discussions through encrypted communication applications such as Telegram, including the "Hidden News Contortion Subculture" (Radue, 2022). This partitioned state highlights the complexity of news consumption in Malaysia, which is under pressure from both technical authority and political obstacles. Consequently, the public continuously adjusts their information-gathering strategies to balance needs and risks.

Ultimately, this research focuses on the impacts of multimedia tools on reduce or bridge information gaps between ethnic groups.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative research approach using RTA to determine how it affects multimedia integration into Malaysian online news portals. RTA is suitable for identifying patterns and themes in audience experiences, providing an in-depth understanding of news consumption behaviour. By employing RTA within UGT, this study aims to provide comprehensive findings.

Data Collection Process

To achieve the research objectives, the data were collected through semi-structured interviews. These interviews involved Malaysian news consumers from different states, aged 18 and above, who are actively engaged with online news portals. Purposive sampling was used to ensure diversity in demographics and preferences for news consumption. The interviews included open-ended questions designed to explore connections with the participants' experiences, motivations, and multimedia news integration, enabling them to share their perspectives independently (Siedlecki, 2022).

Before data collection, pre-testing semi-structured interviews were conducted using a cognitive interview method with two informants. Cognitive interviewing as a pre-testing method helps evaluate draft interview questions by exploring the respondent's mindset (Bhalla et al., 2023). This method was applied based on Tourangeau's (1984) four-stage cognitive model: comprehension, retrieval, judgement, and response. It refined the questions to enhance their clarity and relevance. The final semi-structured interview questions are:

1. Can you describe your daily or weekly news consumption habits? How do you usually access news?
2. How do different multimedia elements influence your interest in reading or watching the news? Do you use different multimedia tools for news?
3. Do you think multimedia elements help you understand the news better? Can you share an example of a news story where multimedia enhanced or reduced your comprehension?
4. How often do you share news articles or engage in discussions online? Do multimedia features encourage you to interact more with news content?
5. What challenges do you face when engaging with multimedia news content? How do you think Malaysian news portals can improve their multimedia integration?

Ethical guidelines were strictly followed to protect the informant's rights and data. Informed consent was obtained before the interviews, and participants were assured that their responses would remain anonymous. Consequently, all data collected have been securely stored, and only the researcher has access to this information. This study follows the rules of the institutional research board to maintain integrity and moral compliance throughout the research process.

A total of 10 informants were interviewed, as data saturation was reached, meaning no new insights or themes emerged from additional interviews. This outcome confirms that the collected data is sufficient for analysis and provides a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Table 1 presents the informants:

Data Analysis

RTA is a qualitative research method that involves significant reflection on the researcher's role and impact on data interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Accordingly, the data collected in this study were analysed using RTA. The data analysis process followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of coding, conducted using ATLAS.ti.

First, the researcher familiarised himself with the data by reviewing the audio transcript to identify the initial pattern. The initial coding highlighted the recurrent theme, followed by the same codes and emerging subjects. The identified subjects and codes were then reviewed and refined to ensure consistency and accuracy.

Table 1
Informant's profile

Informant	Gender	States	Races	Occupation
Informant 1	Female	Johor	Chinese	Educator
Informant 2	Male	Penang	Chinese	Content-creator
Informant 3	Male	Sarawak	Bumiputera/i	Master students
Informant 4	Female	Sabah	Bumiputera/i	Educator
Informant 5	Male	Kedah	Malay	Waiter
Informant 6	Male	Perak	India	Lecturer
Informant 7	Female	Kelantan	Malay	Degree students
Informant 8	Male	Melaka	Chinese	Engineer
Informant 9	Male	Labuan	Chinese	Salesperson
Informant 10	Female	Selangor	India	Degree students

Source: Authors' work

Once this process was completed, the themes were defined and named to clarify the most important findings, which would be reported and interpreted in relation to the study's research objectives.

ATLAS.ti is qualitative analysis software that can identify complex thematic connections and analytical paths more effectively through in vivo coding and network-visualisation functions, which improves the depth and theoretical saturation of coding. It enables multimodal analysis in which coding tools can systematically integrate mixed data. Researchers can also reduce bias, thereby increasing research validity.

RESULTS

The findings are divided into five key themes in Table 2.

Table 2
Key themes of the present study

Themes	Description
Evolving News Consumption Habits	Suggests how participants have moved from traditional to multimedia-integrated news portals, their favourite platforms, and their consumption habits.
Role of Multimedia and Technology in Enhancing News Engagement	How do multimedia and technology elements affect audience interest, information retention, and overall engagement with online news?
Cognitive and Emotional Responses to Multimedia Content	It examines how multimedia improves understanding of news and affects the emotional responses to multimedia news.
Social and Interactive News Experiences	Analyses how multimedia promotes social interaction, encourages news sharing, and influences participation in discussions through comments, live chats, and social media integration.
Challenges and Expectations for Multimedia News Integration	Identifies obstacles to future expectations of multimedia news, user preferences for improvement, and more effective multimedia integration in Malaysian news portals.

Source: Authors' work

Evolving News Consumption Habits

With the development of the internet and new technologies, traditional media such as newspapers and television are no longer people's preferred information channels in Malaysia. As the informant stated, today's news consumption behaviour is being influenced and reshaped by different media, and people are increasingly relying on social media to obtain news.

> In the past, our family would sit in front of the TV to watch the news. Now, our family is holding their phones, watching TikTok, sharing it with friends on WhatsApp, forward to a lot of friends and then discussing it with them (Informant 5).

> During my childhood, we read text-based news only. Now we can see videos because most of the news content is now multimedia; they post videos with captions or perhaps with a hyperlink (Informant 3).

Another informant noted that short video platforms have changed how news is disseminated. Short video news has developed rapidly in Malaysia and has become an important channel for news dissemination.

> I don't have any friend that actually reads the news; I think most people use short videos or TikTok to watch the news now because it's engaging, or even watch it on different social media platforms like Facebook or IG (Informant 8).

The informant also pointed out that social media algorithms and AI personalise the news users like and are interested in, while filtering out only the information they want in today's news.

> What I like is the news algorithm for this news portal; if we have searched for news related to Football only. For me, one of its benefits is that what we want to find will be more about Football (Informant 9).

> Now I don't have to read the news manually every day. I can just open the news app such as "Lumi" or social media and AI, and my push feed will summarize and filter out the news I want to read today (Informant 2).

> All of the platforms have news: WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Telegram. We don't intend to watch it; the news will come to us (Informant 7).

Role of Multimedia and Technology in Enhancing News Engagement

Most informants believed multimedia helps them engage with the news. When discussing news engagement, many informants highlighted online news portals that integrate the multimedia elements of social media platforms as the primary reason.

> Nowadays, social media make it easier for you to share, and they know that people want to share. On some online news portals, it's very easy to click twitter, Facebook button, automatically share (Informant 6).

> There are a lot of people who comment below the news; I also will read their comments, so I will communicate with them and make things interesting (Informant 1).

The informant stated that users can engage with news through various technologies and media, including text, pictures, videos, and other multimedia. Consequently, a culture of user engagement has gradually formed.

> It's quite easy for us; we can engage with news content like commenting, liking, and sharing. These features let people freely express their opinions, react to the news, and interact with others (Informant 7).

> For me, I use my social media accounts to share my own content or provide in-depth commentary on news stories. Creating content allows me to express my personal perspective and share my professional knowledge. Plus, it can help add more depth and support to the news itself… (Informant 8).

Cognitive and Emotional Responses to Multimedia Content

Multimedia has made significant progress in news dissemination, and it is believed that multimedia can help people understand some news more easily.

> It helps me easily gain my knowledge. I am doing my FYP; it helps me easily know what people are sharing and how people are thinking, what people's perspectives are on this issue. It really helps me to gain knowledge through these platforms… (Informant 10).

> Multimedia that I prefer is the comments because not everything in the news text is conveyed in depth; even though sometimes the comments give information that is wrong, we also require views from everyone to know the information in the news that the news wants to convey and understand the news (Informant 4).

Traditional news emphasises professionalism, which rarely includes emotional responses to our society. In multimedia news content, emotional factors can be highly involved, as the informant stated:

> TV news does not talk about topics that we care about, and we can't share, but now the news will report all the things in internet, which is closer to our lives; the news is what people care about (Informant 9).

> I find it interesting that news media now report on many things, such as viral content, or maybe people response of the content, the emotional in the comment section between users, and interviewing some citizens, which I can feel in the news (Informant 6).

> With the development of cameras, now the incidents we see in online content are so "real", especially through video and live (Informant 2).

Social and Interactive News Experiences

In Malaysia, multimedia is enhancing news experiences across multiple races. The informant also mentioned that with multimedia capabilities, they are now accessing news in different languages and discussing it with other races.

> Sometimes, I can understand Chinese news by translating the Chinese captions or comments, and at the same time, I can learn Chinese and discuss it with my Chinese friend (Informant 7).

> … some Malay or Chinese online news portals share content from Indian online news portals such as Astro Vanakkam (Informant 10).

Now, with the ease of internet access, news portals from different regions or even states can set up their own websites, allowing people to engage more with places that give them a sense of belonging.

> We have news portals like Oh! My Sabah, and it shares things happened in Sabah, and although I am working outside, I can keep interacting with my hometown friends (Informant 4).

> In Johor, we have Chinese online news portals like "Big Johor", which is very good for me to have more connections with my hometown (Informant 1).

Challenges and Expectations for Multimedia News Integration

Informants also raised concerns about the challenges of navigating multimedia news. While acknowledging the benefits of Multimedia news integration, they cautioned against sensationalism and questioned its credibility among audiences.

> Most of the multimedia news headlines and infographics are just to attract audiences; the content and the headlines are completely different (Informant 8).

> With the information overload in multimedia content, we will keep facing challenges from false and misleading information and fake news (Informant 10).

> The content of the news comes first; if we want people to see what we are saying, we need to give something that is sensitive, something that is interesting, so interesting news highlights will attract people's interest. So, the problem now is that if we only

> read the highlights, we don't know from the beginning to the end; that will make us predict that incident… (Informant 3).

There has been a shift in current news production. The generalisation of news and the diversification of content have caused many informants to lose confidence in the news.

> Especially on the content side, maybe balance in reporting, don't like 70 percent on entertainment (Informant 10).

> I am quite disappointed in Malaysian news, especially on the quality of the content; maybe I watch some news on Facebook; the news content comes out with different things on another platform. Usually, I have to check again on mainstream media and Google it to check the news (Informant 2).

> You know that? Multimedia news, they want the exposure; they will keep focusing on highlights and focus on 3R, you know, right? And politician saying (Informant 1).

Given Malaysia's diverse linguistic landscape, informants recommended expanding multilingual content.

> I hope that Malaysia government can pay attention to our racial harmony news, such as combining all of them into one platform… maybe? And terms and conditions to publish some news, because they should know that every word they use may affect society (Informant 9).

> We hope the future of Malaysian news can pay attention to other races' news, and we can understand each other easily. Adding more language tools will help, not just like Chinese pay attention to Chinese News… (Informant 5).

DISCUSSION

This study reveals the complex dynamics of Malaysian audiences' participation in multimedia news by examining the interactive relationship between UGT and the algorithmic news ecology. The study found that the active audience emphasised by traditional UGT theory presents a duality within algorithmic recommendation systems. Users may efficiently satisfy their cognitive needs through personalised push feeds, reflecting technological empowerment (Han et al., 2023). Conversely, the narrowing of information caused by algorithmic filtering weakens exposure to critical news and creates passive audiences. This challenges the assumption of pure initiative and echoes Lee and Tandoc Jr.'s (2023) research on platformed agency, which emphasises that algorithmic structures and individual strategies jointly shape user behaviour. For example, respondents mitigated information bias through cross-platform verification, reflecting the reconstruction

of audience agency in a technologically mediated environment.

Multimedia integration as a cognitive tool is particularly prominent in the Malaysian context. Dynamic visualisation enhances understanding efficiency through multimedia integration, confirming cognitive needs (Omar et al., 2024). Emotional narratives can enhance social empathy but may be appropriated by commercial logic and turned into a sensational trap. This finding thus enters into dialogue with the notion of emotional hijacking in ethnic-political news framing. It highlights the specificity of Malaysia in the wake of the Anti-Fake News Law and persistent ethnic politics (Mohamad Jamil, 2020). The media further amplifies sensational content in competition for fragmented attention, leading to a structural imbalance in the quality of public information.

Beyond this, the study reveals the challenge of applying Western theoretical frameworks to Malaysia's news ecology. First, language-driven information stratification is pronounced (Tapsell, 2022). Ethnic minority users actively use translation tools to access cross-language content, transforming the social integration function of UGT into cross-ethnic negotiation practices and challenging McQuail's (1987) single cultural identity model. Second, hyperlocal platforms strengthen emotional connections through regional identity, indicating that multimedia news can simultaneously meet globalisation and localisation needs. However, the cultural blindness of algorithmic recommendations has exacerbated ethnic information gaps, in sharp contrast to multilingual studies dominated by English. This finding calls for UGT to incorporate a critical cultural-technological perspective to explain the co-construction of technology and culture in non-Western contexts.

The dimension of citizen participation presents a contradictory picture: although multimedia promotes instant interaction, the fast-food consumption of short news videos has spawned shallow participation, confirming Schuldt's (2021) criticism of platform sociality. More critically, discussions on sensitive issues have shifted to encrypted platforms, forming a shadow public sphere and exposing the repressive effects of authoritarian regulation on digital democracy. This phenomenon suggests that participation in Malaysia is not merely a technical choice but a sensitive matter of risk calculation (George, 2022)

CONCLUSION

This study has achieved three theoretical breakthroughs in digital news research. First, by constructing the UGT framework, it integrates news algorithms, ethnic satisfaction, and cultural aspects, systematically challenging the universalist paradigm in media psychology research. This framework reveals how individual news consumption behaviour is reshaped by news algorithms and highlights cultural negotiation practices in Malaysia's multi-ethnic society. For example, the translation and use of cross-language comments provide a new analytical dimension

for understanding non-Western digital ecologies. Secondly, at the methodological level, the study closely captures the micro-dynamics of technology-society interaction through RTA, such as users' strategic resistance to algorithmic recommendations or the political calculations behind platform encryption behaviour. This qualitative orientation compensates for the neglect of contextual complexity in traditional quantitative UGT research, especially in revealing implicit power relations such as the impact of algorithmic exclusion on ethnic minorities. Finally, by dissecting institutional constraints in Malaysia's authoritarian context, the study reveals the dialectical relationship between technological empowerment and political repression in multimedia news practice. This opens a new problem domain for digital research in the Global South: how technology diffusion and local governance structures are mutually constructed.

At a practical level, the study proposes a set of context-sensitive multimedia strategy systems to address the unique challenges of Malaysia's news ecology. To promote cognitive fairness, it is recommended that news organisations embed deep text analysis in visualisation tools such as interactive charts to avoid overly simplistic representations. In terms of cultural adaptation technology, it is necessary to move beyond existing mechanical language conversion systems and develop AI-based tools for cultural semantic mapping. For example, such tools could automatically identify and convert localised expressions of religious terms in Chinese translations of Malay news. In addition, reform for algorithmic transparency should allow users to customise content filtering rules, breaking platforms' monopolistic control of black-box recommendations, alleviating algorithmic bias and enhancing audiences' media literacy.

However, this study still has certain limitations. Due to the urban-rural and ethnic composition of the sample, the news practices of Indigenous groups in rural areas have not been fully captured, and their multimedia usage patterns may reveal entirely different news engagement habits. Future research can deepen this exploration through mixed methods and longitudinally track how the abolition of the Anti-Fake News Law affects the multimedia integration strategies of news organisations. At the same time, participatory news algorithms empower marginalised groups to co-govern recommendation systems. These directions will help refine the theoretical model and provide empirical support for the digital rights movement in Southeast Asia.

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