

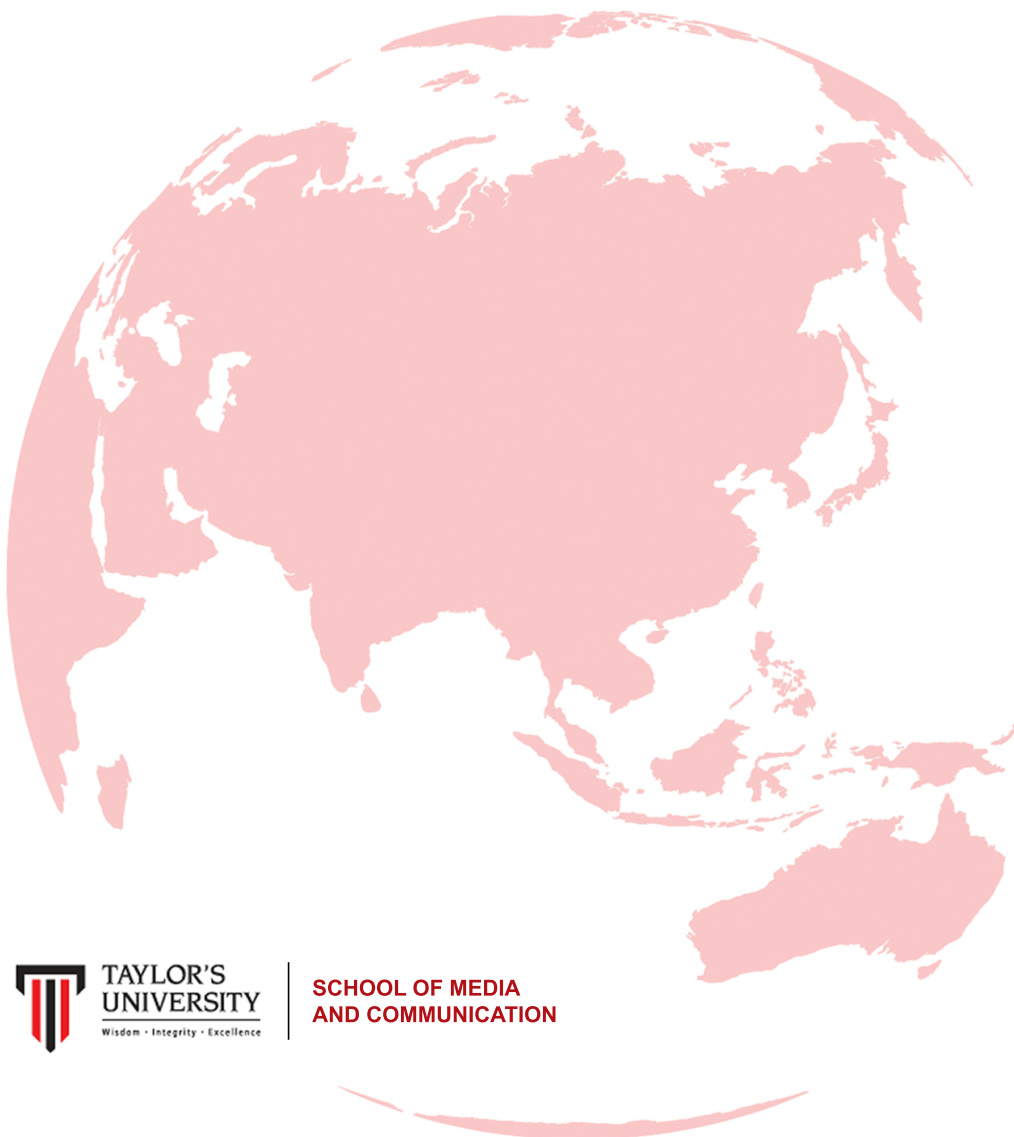
# SEARCH



**SEARCH Journal of  
Media and Communication Research**

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# **SEARCH Journal of Media and Communication Research (SEARCH)**

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The aim of the *SEARCH Journal of Media and Communication Research* is to promote and enhance research development and debates in the field of media and communication research. It also serves as a forum for researchers and industry players who use research as the frame for social awareness and change. We welcome any submission of manuscripts throughout the year. Authors are invited to submit scholarly works on communication such as International Relations, Media Management, Film and Media Arts, Digital Education and Communities, Communication and Policies, Globalization and Social Impact, Youth and Media, Audience and Perception Analysis, Democracy and Integration, Media Literacy and Education, Media and Development, Health Communication, Politics, Hegemony and the Media, Gender and Sexuality, Social Media and Subcultures, Popular Culture and Society, Media and Religion, Media and Identity, War/Peace Journalism, Conflict and Crisis Communication, Strategic Communication and Information Management, Digital Media, Advertising and Persuasive Management, Public Relations and Crisis Management, Global Journalism and relevant areas from the standpoint of media and communication research.

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# Organisational harmony: Exploring the effectiveness and correlation between nonverbal communication and conflict resolution among employees at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM)

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## ABSTRACT

This study delves into the realm of organisational conflict resolution, focusing specifically on the role and effectiveness of nonverbal communication among employees. The research is grounded in the recognition of nonverbal communication as a pivotal factor in addressing conflicts within an organisation. The primary objectives of the study are threefold: (1) to identify the effectiveness level of nonverbal communication among employees in the workplace, (2) to recognise the level of conflict resolution among employees in the workplace, and (3) to explore the correlation between nonverbal communication and conflict resolution in the workplace. A quantitative approach was employed using a survey via Google Forms. This study involved 50 respondents who were randomly selected among the employees of Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM). Data analysis including mean calculation, assessment of variable levels, correlation analysis, and T-test, was employed to derive meaningful insights. The findings reveal a positive influence of nonverbal communication on conflict resolution within the organisational setting. This implies that nonverbal cues play a significant role in fostering effective communication and subsequently contribute to resolving conflicts among employees. The implications of these results underscore the importance of recognising and cultivating nonverbal communication skills in the workplace to promote a harmonious and conflict-free organisational environment. Overall, this study contributes valuable insights into the dynamics of nonverbal communication and its impact on conflict resolution in organisational settings.

Keywords: ***Interpersonal communication, non-verbal, conflict resolution***

## INTRODUCTION

Communication, defined as the transmission of messages and symbols between individuals, plays a fundamental role in human interaction (Kurniadi & Mahaputra, 2021). Effective communication, facilitated by language, is vital for expressing thoughts, sharing knowledge, and fostering connections (Mailani et al., 2022). However, conflicts often arise in organisational settings due to differing perspectives and communication styles among members (Hyatt & Gruenglas, 2023).

Throughout history, humans have employed various communication methods, ranging from ancient oral traditions to modern digital platforms (Medoff & Kaye, 2021). While verbal communication is predominant, nonverbal cues, such as gestures and facial expressions, significantly contribute to conveying emotions and intentions (Burgoon et al., 2021). Despite its importance, the impact of nonverbal communication on conflict resolution remains largely underexplored (Hemshorn de Sanchez et al., 2022).

The rise of technology has further transformed communication, introducing new forms of nonverbal expression such as emojis and GIFs (Khmel, 2021). However, unresolved conflicts persist in organisations, negatively impacting morale and productivity (Imtiaz et al., 2022). Addressing this issue requires a deeper understanding of nonverbal communication's role in conflict resolution.

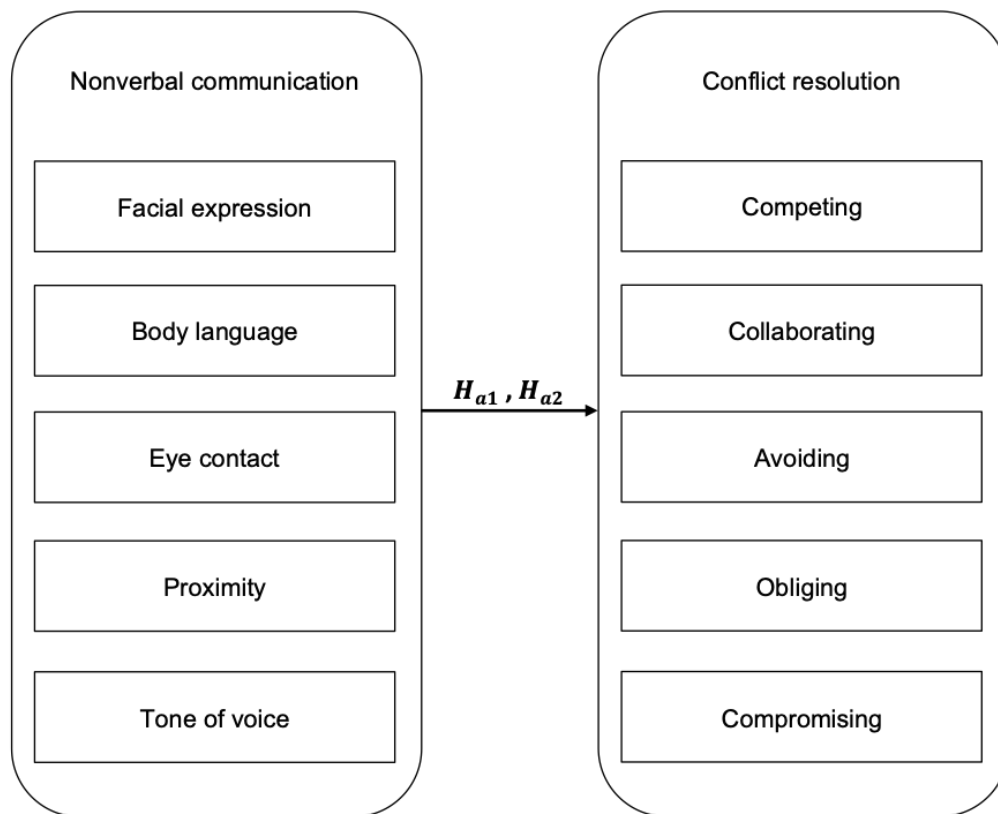
As organisations expand, the increasing demand for personnel often leads to role ambiguities and unclear task delineations. These ambiguities contribute to workplace disputes, heightened stress levels, and diminished job satisfaction, adversely affecting employee performance (Pauzi & Koris, 2020). Research shows a global rise in work-related stress, with Gallup (2023) reporting a 44% prevalence rate in 2022, up from 38% in 2019. In Southeast Asia, 26% of employees experience stress at work, while in Malaysia, over 50% of employees report stress, with 25% facing severe levels (Ahmad, 2023).

Work-related stress has severe implications, including early retirement and declining employee well-being. In 2017, approximately 20,000 Malaysian public servants retired prematurely due to stress, leading to talent loss and weakened organisational competencies (Abdul Gani, 2019). Chronic stress also contributes to physical and mental health issues, such as cardiovascular problems, compromised immunity, anxiety, and depression. Regus reported that 70% of Malaysians experience stress-related illnesses (Abdul Rahman & Musa, 2020). Furthermore, stress undermines employee productivity and organisational performance, leading to decreased focus, impaired decision-making abilities, and lower work quality. Disengagement caused by stress often results in delayed projects, reduced customer satisfaction, and challenges in achieving business objectives (Abdul Gani, 2019).

These challenges highlight the need to address workplace stressors such as role ambiguity and work pressure. Effective nonverbal communication offers a potential solution by facilitating understanding, fostering collaboration, and improving workplace relationships. Liddle (2023) also emphasised that nonverbal communication is integral to influencing behaviour and fostering dialogue among conflicting parties.

This study aims to fill the gap in understanding the effectiveness of nonverbal communication in resolving conflicts within organisational settings. Specifically, it seeks to (1) identify the effectiveness level of nonverbal communication among employees, (2) assess the level of conflict resolution in the workplace, and (3) explore the correlation between nonverbal communication and conflict resolution. Two hypotheses are proposed:

(1) there is a significant correlation between nonverbal communication and conflict resolution among employees in an organisation, and (2) there is a significant difference in nonverbal communication between administrative and professional staff.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework

Comparative insights from previous studies strengthen the foundation of this research. Mohammadi et al. (2022) examined the role of nonverbal communication in the Malaysian construction sector using a qualitative approach, providing relevant variables for comparison. Similarly, Oyediran et al. (2021) explored conflict resolution strategies among surgical team members in a Nigerian tertiary health institution, offering valuable references for theoretical frameworks and writing techniques.

This study employed a quantitative approach to examine its objectives and hypotheses. An online questionnaire, distributed to 50 staff members at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), served as the primary instrument for data collection. The research seeks to contribute actionable insights for organisational leaders, HR professionals, and conflict resolution practitioners, ultimately enhancing workplace communication, fostering positive relationships, and improving organisational outcomes.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary objective of this section is to analyse existing research findings, which have been crucial in shaping the study's design during its early stages. In this section, the researcher systematically references scholarly works that provide information, concepts, factual data, and methodologies relevant to the research problem. This approach

ensures the study adheres to scientific rigor and helps prevent issues such as plagiarism or unintentional replication of prior work. Furthermore, this review of literature seeks to identify the key characteristics and variables influencing the research problem, while exploring the relationships between theoretical frameworks and research design.

Accordingly, this section offers a comprehensive discussion of the concepts of nonverbal communication and conflict resolution within organisational settings, accompanied by an in-depth analysis of previous studies conducted both domestically and internationally.

### *Non-verbal communication in organisation*

Nonverbal communication plays a critical role in organisational settings, influencing understanding, attitudes, and behaviours (Ibrahim et al., 2022; Kurniadi & Mahaputra, 2021). In sectors like construction, it is particularly important, impacting leadership, productivity, and overall performance (Mohammadi et al., 2022). Despite this, further research is needed to explore its impact on organisational outcomes (Mohammadi et al., 2022). Nonverbal communication is also essential for organisational skills, especially for instructors.

Kurniadi and Mahaputra (2021) conducted a study in Indonesia to examine how nonverbal, vocal, and written communication affect organisational operations. They defined nonverbal communication as physical gestures and expressions, such as smiling, shaking one's head, or shrugging. Using qualitative methods and a literature review, they found that nonverbal cues significantly impact communication within organisations. The study, however, did not focus on a specific theoretical framework but examined previous hypotheses related to communication's effect on employee performance.

In Malaysia, Ibrahim et al. (2022) explored the role of nonverbal communication in organisations. They emphasised its importance in sharing information, ideas, and emotions without using verbal language, such as gestures and voice tone. Their study highlighted that nonverbal communication promotes effective communication and a smooth workflow in organisations. While no specific methodology was used, they addressed a gap in previous studies that focused primarily on nonverbal communication among students, extending the research to the corporate environment.

Mohammadi et al. (2022) focused on the construction sector in Malaysia. They found that nonverbal communication—through eye contact, gestures, and tone—plays a vital role in leadership and performance. Their research, based on a review of literature in the construction industry, revealed that nonverbal cues can help reduce misunderstandings and improve leadership effectiveness, especially during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. They referenced the Emotional Response Theory by Richmond et al. (2006), which suggests that leaders' nonverbal communication can influence employees' emotional responses.

Ciancarini et al. (2021) examined nonverbal communication within software development teams in Russia. Their study focused on how nonverbal cues affect team collaboration and productivity. Using a distributed cognition framework, they conducted interviews with IT professionals to understand the role of nonverbal communication in improving interpersonal connections during meetings. They found that nonverbal cues such as gestures and voice tone are crucial for effective communication, while a lack of clear nonverbal signals can lead to negative outcomes.

Popescu and Popescu (2019) studied nonverbal communication in job interviews, focusing on body language and gestures. Their research highlighted that nonverbal communication often carries more weight than verbal communication, with body language accounting for 55% of the message. Employers in their study relied heavily on nonverbal cues to assess candidates during interviews, although many local companies lacked formal training in interpreting body language.

Lastly, Okech et al. (2019) explored nonverbal communication in caring for dementia patients. They emphasised the importance of nonverbal cues like facial expressions, touch, and eye contact, as people with dementia have limited verbal communication abilities. Caregivers must be skilled in nonverbal communication to effectively interact with patients. This study was based on a literature review of peer-reviewed articles but did not employ a specific theoretical framework.

### *Conflict resolution in organisation*

Effective conflict management plays a key role in maintaining organisational harmony and promoting positive outcomes (Mills & Mene, 2020; Smriti & Kumar, 2021). Conflicts, whether functional or dysfunctional, are inevitable in any organisational setting. Managing these conflicts effectively fosters healthy competition, improves team collaboration, and enhances communication (John-Eke & Akintokunbo, 2020).

Smriti and Kumar (2021) conducted research in Bhagalpur, India, emphasising the importance of conflict management for human adaptation and organisational success. They explored the unavoidable nature of conflict and its role in shaping social relationships and achieving organisational goals. The study also highlighted the need to understand various conflict management techniques and how they contribute to organisational performance.

Similarly, Mills and Mene (2020) focused on conflict management in Nigerian organisations, discussing functional and dysfunctional conflicts, and outlining five different conflict management strategies. They emphasised that conflict is a natural part of organisational life, stressing the importance of employees appreciating individual differences to build positive relationships. Their research also noted the universality of conflict theories and the need for employees to adopt appropriate conflict resolution strategies based on specific situations.

Mustafa et al. (2019) examined conflict management in Kosovo, focusing on the influence of gender on managers' conflict resolution styles. Their quantitative study revealed that male managers tend to use more authoritative strategies, while female managers prefer conciliatory approaches. The study underscored the importance of understanding organisational dynamics and highlighted various conflict management theories, including the agency theory and the principal-agent model.

In Ukraine, Biduchak and Chornenka (2022) studied conflict in healthcare organisations. They identified socio-psychological factors contributing to conflicts, particularly between medical staff, patients, and families. Their findings stressed the impact of employee satisfaction on patient care and highlighted both functional and dysfunctional conflicts. The study also proposed changes in labour management and organisational structures to minimise conflicts in healthcare.

In Indonesia, Tando, Sudarmo, and Haryanti (2021) explored collaborative governance as a conflict resolution method. Their research emphasised the value of

involving multiple stakeholders to resolve organisational disputes, particularly economic or incentive-based conflicts. They noted the significance of collaborative governance in promoting long-term solutions.

In the education sector, Ukata and Nmehielle (2020) highlighted the importance of conflict management within educational organisations. Their study pointed out a lack of knowledge and skills in conflict resolution among educators and administrators. They advocated for improving conflict management training to better handle disputes in educational settings.

Conflict management is also relevant in industrial organisations, as noted by Glavaš, Kondić, and Balić (2019). They studied the role of leadership in managing workplace conflicts, emphasising that conflict, when properly managed, can lead to innovation and organisational growth. Their research also highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence in resolving conflicts.

Conflict resolution strategies have also been examined in the healthcare sector. Focusing on surgical teams in Nigerian hospitals, Oyediran et al. (2021) found that conflicts often arise from competition and role ambiguity. Their study emphasised the need for effective negotiation and communication to manage conflicts and prevent negative outcomes.

From an Islamic perspective, conflict resolution prioritises reconciliation, justice, and maintaining harmonious relationships. The Quran promotes peaceful conflict resolution through dialogue and fairness, as highlighted in Surah Al-Hujurat (49:9). Historical examples, such as the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah and the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph), emphasise forgiveness, patience, and reconciliation as essential principles for resolving disputes.

### *Non-verbal communication and conflict resolution in organisation*

Nonverbal communication plays a crucial role in resolving conflicts within organisations. It can influence attitudes, behaviours, and ultimately the resolution of disputes (Kundu, 2023). Nonverbal cues such as body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice convey emotions, social status, and personality traits, affecting both understanding and behaviour in conflict situations (Ibrahim et al., 2022). Effective communication, including nonverbal signals, is essential for achieving team goals and reducing workplace conflicts (Salvation, 2019). Further, proper management of nonverbal communication can also help prevent conflicts from escalating into violence (Iyekolo, 2020).

Iyekolo (2020) studied the impact of nonverbal communication on conflict resolution in Canadian educational organisations, focusing on interactions between staff and students. Using a qualitative methodology, including a literature review and theoretical analysis, the study revealed that managing nonverbal communication effectively can prevent conflicts and improve the teaching and learning environment. Misinterpreting nonverbal cues, on the other hand, can lead to misunderstandings and negative outcomes. The study also explored several theories related to nonverbal communication, such as Interactionist Theory, Labelling Theory, and Self-fulfilling Prophecy Theory, particularly in classroom settings.

In Armenia, Bekaryan (2020) examined the role of verbal and nonverbal communication in expressing conflict. The research aimed to identify how conflict manifests through both spoken and unspoken means, focusing on the signals used in

contentious relationships. The study emphasised the importance of conflict in social relationships and its expression through language and nonverbal cues. It also noted the differing perspectives among psychologists and sociologists regarding the nature and origins of conflict. The findings highlight that conflict and its resolution are central to various fields, including social psychology, politics, and management.

A study by Bernecker et al. (2019) in Germany and Switzerland explored the relationship between personal goals in partnerships and nonverbal communication during conflicts. The research examined how relationship goals, specifically approach and avoidance goals, influence behaviours such as positive engagement and avoidance during conflict interactions. The study observed the nonverbal communication patterns of 365 couples in conflict situations, analysing data from 28,470 observations. It found that individuals with a stronger focus on approach goals are more likely to engage positively and avoid withdrawing during conflicts. Furthermore, women who prioritise relationship goals are more likely to align with their partner's positive engagement during conflicts.

The researchers concluded that relationship goals significantly impact nonverbal communication in conflict situations. Individuals who pursue approach goals, aiming for positive outcomes, exhibit more constructive nonverbal behaviours, such as engaging in positive interactions. Conversely, those with avoidance goals, who seek to prevent negative outcomes, tend to disengage or avoid conflict. The study highlighted the importance of pursuing relationship objectives that foster positive engagement and communication, rather than those that promote avoidance and disengagement.

## METHODOLOGY

This research employed a quantitative approach which used an online survey via Google Form to examine the relationship between nonverbal communication and conflict resolution among employees in an organisation. The survey was distributed among 50 respondents. The study employed a random sampling method to minimise selection bias and enhance the generalisability of findings.

Respondents were randomly selected from a pool of employees at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM). To ensure randomness, a systematic approach was used: a list of potential respondents was generated from available organisational contacts, and respondents were invited through online platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Telegram, and email) using a random selection algorithm. This approach ensured an equal chance of participation for all eligible individuals, thereby reducing potential bias in respondent selection.

Furthermore, random sampling was complemented by ensuring a diverse representation of demographic characteristics, such as age, educational background, and job roles. This diversity ensures that the results reflect a broader perspective on nonverbal communication and conflict resolution styles within the organisation.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections which include respondents' demographic background, nonverbal communication as the independent variable, and conflict resolution styles as the dependent variable. The variable of nonverbal communication was measured using a Likert scale with values that ranged 1–5 while the variable of conflict resolution style used a 4-point Likert scale. In order to analyse the

data obtained, this study used Statistical Procedure for Social Sciences (SPSS) with an emphasis on descriptive findings, correlation, and t-test.

### Research design

Research design, as defined by Creswell (2012), refers to the systematic arrangement of steps taken to address research inquiries. Konting (2009) described it as a specific methodology for gathering information to solve problems. Similarly, Bougie and Sekaran (2019) defined research design as a structured process for examining a specific issue to provide solutions. Akhtar (2016) conceptualised it as a cohesive framework integrating all research activity components. Burn and Grove (2003) elaborated further, defining it as a comprehensive plan that includes strategies to manage potential interferences that could affect the accuracy of study outcomes.

In this study, the research design ensured the responses reliably address the relationship between the independent variable—nonverbal communication—and the dependent variable—conflict resolution. The quantitative research design used a questionnaire survey to gather information efficiently. Quantitative methods involve numerical analyses to assess data (Creswell, 2013; Polat, 2009), and they allow for generalisability to a larger population (Ahmad, 2019).

The questionnaire research design was preferred for its user-friendliness, efficiency, and ability to collect data from diverse sources within a short timeframe (Pauzi & Koris, 2020). Data was analysed using SPSS, employing descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and t-tests to address the research questions and objectives.

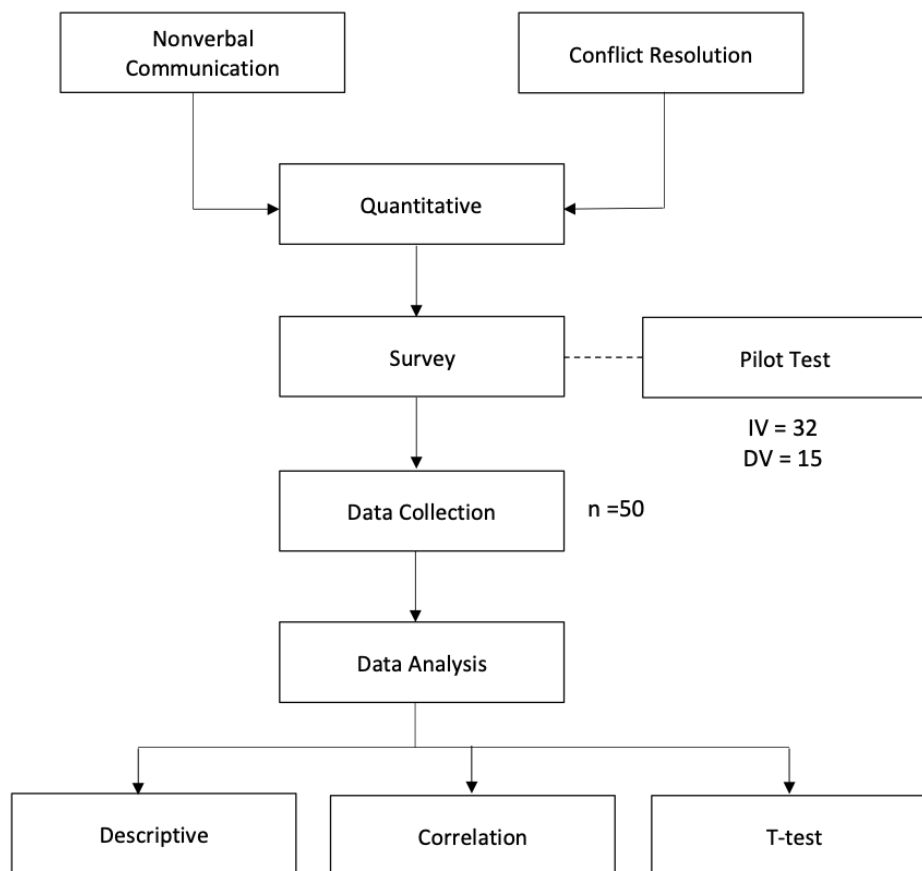


Figure 2. Research design

### *Instrument*

A well-structured questionnaire consisting of 50 questions was directly administered to respondents to ensure data accuracy. The questionnaire was adapted from previous studies (Ananda et al., 2020; Oyediran et al., 2021; Behera et al., 2017) and was divided into three sections, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Composition of questionnaire

Sections	Number of questions
Section A: Demographic background	5
Section B: Nonverbal communication	32
Section C: Conflict resolution style	25

Section A covers respondents' demographic information, including gender, age, education level, years of work experience, and position within the organisation. Section B focuses on nonverbal communication, addressing areas like facial expressions, body language, eye contact, proximity, and tone of voice. This section used a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree") to assess the effectiveness of nonverbal communication, with a total of 32 items.

Section C addressed conflict resolution styles, including collaborating, competing, avoiding, accommodating, and compromising. Unlike Section B, the items in Section C were not grouped by conflict resolution style (construct), but were arranged randomly to reduce bias, as shown in Table 2. A 4-point Likert scale (ranging from "always" to "rarely") was used to measure conflict resolution. This structured approach ensured the collection of reliable data to examine the relationship between the variables effectively.

**Table 2.** Conflict resolution styles and associated items

Conflict Resolution Style	Item Number
Collaborating	Item 1, Item 5, Item 7
Competing	Item 4, Item 9, Item 12
Avoiding	Item 6, Item 10, Item 15
Accommodating	Item 3, Item 11, Item 14
Compromising	Item 2, Item 8, Item 13

### *Pilot test*

Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the reliability of the questionnaire. A pilot test with 10 respondents was conducted prior to the main survey to evaluate the instrument's consistency. As Huck (2007) explained, reliability is essential as it reflects the consistency of a measurement tool's components. Cronbach's Alpha is the most commonly used measure of internal consistency, particularly with Likert scales, which are considered ideal for reliability testing (Robinson, 2010; Whitley & Kite, 2012).

**Table 3.** Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) reliability analysis for pilot test

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ )
Non-verbal communication (32 items)	0.973
Conflict resolution (15 items)	0.885

Table 3 shows that the Cronbach's Alpha scores exceed 0.7, indicating strong internal consistency among the questionnaire items. According to Nunnally (1978), a coefficient above 0.7 is deemed acceptable for measuring reliability. The pilot test results demonstrate that the instrument's reliability is high, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.973 for 32 items related to nonverbal communication and 0.885 for 15 items addressing conflict resolution. These findings confirm that the questionnaire is reliable and capable of producing accurate data in the main study.

Beyond reliability, the pilot test provided insights into the clarity, coherence, and feasibility of the survey items. Respondents' feedback during the pilot phase informed minor revisions to enhance question wording and ensure comprehensibility. For instance, ambiguous or overly complex items were rephrased, and the survey structure was refined for smooth navigation.

### *Operationalisation of variables*

The operationalisation of variables is crucial to understanding the relationship between nonverbal communication and conflict resolution. Nonverbal communication, the independent variable, involves transmitting information, emotions, and intentions through non-linguistic signals such as facial expressions, bodily movements, and gestures. Conflict resolution, the dependent variable, refers to managing differences to achieve peaceful outcomes and consensus among parties. Additionally, demographic attributes like age and professional tenure were included, measured in ranges such as "25–34 years old" and "2–5 years of experience."

A Likert scale was used to measure nonverbal communication, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Table 4 outlines the scoring system, which enables systematic analysis of numerical data.

**Table 4.** Scoring scale for responses of Likert scale

<b>Response</b>	<b>Points</b>
Strongly Disagree (SD)	1 point
Disagree (D)	2 points
Neutral (N)	3 points
Agree (A)	4 points
Strongly Agree (SA)	5 points

For conflict resolution, a 4-point Likert scale was applied, ranging from 1 (Rarely) to 4 (Always), as detailed in Table 5. These scales simplify data collection and allow for straightforward statistical analysis.

**Table 5.** Scoring scale for responses of 4-point Likert scale

<b>Response</b>	<b>Points</b>
Rarely	1 point
Sometimes	2 points
Often	3 points
Always	4 points

Nonverbal communication was operationalised through subjective accounts of behaviours like facial expressions, body language, eye contact, proximity, and tone of voice. For example, respondents respond to statements like, “*I believe the body language exhibited by my colleagues impacts my collaboration with them.*” Conflict resolution is measured by respondents’ use of five styles: collaborating, competing, avoiding, accommodating, and compromising. Responses to items such as “*I attempt to engage in negotiation to resolve problems*” provide practical insights into these styles.

A questionnaire was selected as the primary data collection instrument for its efficiency in gathering structured responses. This approach ensures systematic data collection within a short timeframe. A pilot test involving 10 respondents was conducted to assess the instrument’s reliability. Using Cronbach’s Alpha, the nonverbal communication variable scored 0.973, and conflict resolution scored 0.885, indicating high internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978). This pilot test ensured question clarity and improved the overall reliability of the instrument.

The study employed random sampling to minimise bias and enhance generalisability. A statistically determined sample size was used to represent the population accurately. Data collection was conducted over one week, balancing sufficient data acquisition and reducing potential biases from prolonged collection periods.

Ethical considerations were strictly followed, including obtaining authorisation and respondent consent. Respondents were informed about the study’s objectives, and confidentiality was maintained throughout. This thorough process ensured compliance with ethical norms and preserved the integrity of responses.

In summary, this study’s operationalisation of variables offered a structured approach to examining the connection between nonverbal communication and conflict resolution. Additionally, the methodology, including measurement scales, random sampling, and ethical safeguards, ensured rigorous, valid, and reliable outcomes.

### ***Data collection***

The study employed a self-administered online survey to collect respondents’ responses for convenience and accessibility. Respondents could complete the survey using any internet-connected device, such as smartphones, laptops, or tablets. The survey was distributed electronically via email, Telegram, and WhatsApp. Google Forms was used to design and manage the questionnaire. While the original survey was in English, it was also translated into Bahasa Melayu to accommodate respondents with limited English proficiency. Respondents were expected to answer independently, ensuring accurate and relevant data, as the questions closely aligned with their studies.

### ***Data analysis***

The study used Microsoft Excel and SPSS to process and analyse data collected from diverse sources. Two key variables were examined: nonverbal communication (Section B) and conflict resolution (Section C). Nonverbal communication was measured using a Likert scale, ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” Conflict resolution was assessed with a 4-point Likert scale, indicating frequency from “Rarely” to “Always.” The analysis focused on the mean as a measure of central tendency and employed correlation analysis to explore the relationship between the two variables. This systematic approach ensured rigorous and robust data interpretation.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on Table 6, there were 24 males and 26 females involved in the survey. According to Shamim and Hassim (2021), an increasing number of women are joining the workforce and assuming a broader range of roles beyond that of homemaker; these societal transformations have been seen in Asian countries, including Malaysia. The majority of the respondents (74%) have 10 years and above experience working at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM). The second highest group (14%) was five to 10 years of experience while 8% had less than 2 years of experience and only 4% had two to five years of experience working at USIM. The study found that most of the respondents worked as professionals (29 respondents), while others worked as administrative executives (21 respondents).

**Table 6.** Demographics of respondents (N=50)

Items	f	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	24	48.0
Female	26	52.0
<b>Years of employment</b>		
Below 2 years	4	8.0
2 – 5 years	2	4.0
5 – 10 years	7	14.0
10 years and above	37	74.0
<b>Staff</b>		
Administrative	21	42.0
Professional	29	58.0

The data was further analysed to identify the respondents' effectiveness in nonverbal communication based on five constructs: facial expression, body language, eye contact, proximity, and tone of voice. Table 7 highlights that the facial expression generated the greatest mean ( $M = 4.28$ ,  $SD = 0.708$ ). This suggests that respondents favoured facial expressions over other constructs.

Facial expressions play a crucial role in workplace communication, conveying emotions and enhancing interactions (Tegano, 2022). Effective facial expressions, such as smiling and nodding, demonstrate attentiveness and foster positive relationships. As a primary mode of nonverbal communication, facial expressions must align with the message being conveyed to ensure clarity (Hanafi et al., 2022). Employees often analyse facial expressions during workplace interactions as they serve as an initial point of contact, influencing interpersonal relationships and perceptions (Manusov, 2015).

In contrast, body language is less favoured, with the lowest mean score ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = 0.796$ ). This may reflect the influence of cultural norms, which shape how individuals express themselves through body language (Uzun, 2020). Despite this, the overall mean score for nonverbal communication effectiveness remains high ( $M = 4.18$ ,  $SD = 0.792$ ), indicating its significance in workplace interactions.

**Table 7.** Mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) for non-verbal communication (n=50)

Non-verbal communication	M	SD
Facial expression	4.28	0.708
Body language	3.98	0.796
Eye contact	4.26	0.884
Proximity	4.17	0.755
Tone of voice	4.25	0.795

Table 8 shows the effectiveness level of nonverbal communication which is identified as low, medium, and high. The findings reveal that the high level received the majority of responses with  $f = 43$ , followed by the medium level  $f = 6$ , and the low level with  $f = 1$ . This finding implies that for those who are working in an organisation, they need to communicate more effectively to ensure that the information reaches the recipient. Then, the recipient needs to understand the information given well (Newman & Ford, 2021). Thus, the effectiveness of nonverbal communication plays a vital role in communication among employees in the workplace.

**Table 8.** Effectiveness level of nonverbal communication according to frequency and percentage (%) (n=50)

Level	f	%
Low	1	2.0
Moderate	6	12.0
High	43	86.0

Table 9 presents the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) scores for conflict resolution among respondents in the workplace, measured across five conflict management styles: collaborating, competing, avoiding, accommodating, and compromising. The overall mean score for conflict resolution is  $M = 3.05$  ( $SD = 0.794$ ), with the accommodating style receiving the highest mean score ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 0.710$ ). This indicates that respondents prefer resolving conflicts through accommodation, followed by collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and, lastly, competing.

The accommodating style, where one party prioritises the other's needs, was also highlighted by Mohammed et al. (2019) as a dominant approach in hospital administration. Similarly, Mehrad (2019) noted that this style is often employed temporarily or with specific individuals or groups in conflict. Conversely, the competing style received the lowest mean score ( $M = 2.73$ ,  $SD = 0.801$ ), suggesting that respondents were less inclined to use this approach in resolving workplace conflicts. These findings highlight the tendency of respondents to prioritise harmonious and cooperative strategies, such as accommodation and collaboration, in conflict management.

**Table 9.** Mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) for conflict resolution (n=50)

Non-verbal communication	M	SD
Collaborating	3.17	0.779
Competing	2.73	0.801
Avoiding	3.06	0.914

**Table 9.** (con't)

Non-verbal communication	M	SD
Accommodating	3.21	0.710
Compromising	3.09	0.766
Overall Mean	3.05	0.794

Apart from that, the study also wanted to investigate the level of conflict resolution among the respondents. Table 10 shows two levels of conflict resolution among the respondents in their workplace, namely low and high. These levels have been divided into five different components of conflict resolution styles, namely collaborating, competing, avoiding, accommodating, and compromising. Based on the results, accommodating was chosen as the predominant style for resolving conflict, whereby the percentage of the low level is 22% ( $f = 11$ ) and the high level is 78% ( $f = 39$ ). In contrast, respondents selected the competing style as the least conflict-resolving style. The percentage of the low level, 58% ( $f = 29$ ) is higher than the high level which is 42% ( $f = 21$ ).

**Table 10.** Level of conflict resolution among respondents according to frequency and percentage (%) (n=50)

Level	f	%
Collaborating		
Low	15	30.0
High	35	70.0
Competing		
Low	29	58.0
High	21	42.0
Avoiding		
Low	19	38.0
High	31	62.0
Accommodating		
Low	11	22.0
High	39	78.0
Compromising		
Low	14	28.0
High	36	72.0

Next, the study found that there is a significant moderate and positive correlation between nonverbal communication and conflict resolution ( $r = 0.448$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). According to Cohen and Manion (1994), correlation values between 0.35 and 0.65 suggest a moderate positive relationship. The finding indicates that improved nonverbal communication correlates with enhanced conflict resolution. Thus, proper training in nonverbal communication is recommended to foster better conflict resolution in organisations (Bonaccio et al., 2016; Kudesia & Elfenbein, 2013).

An independent-sample t-test was conducted to compare the effectiveness of nonverbal communication in administrative and professional conditions. There was a significant difference in the scores for administrative ( $M = 127.19$ ,  $SD = 25.301$ ) and

professional ( $M = 138.41$ ,  $SD = 11.525$ ) roles [ $t(48) = -2.11$ ,  $p = 0.040$ ]. These results suggest that type of work or role, administrative or professional, also affect the effectiveness of nonverbal communication.

Differences in nonverbal communication may stem from work environments, communication patterns, and training. Administrative roles, focused on support tasks, might limit nonverbal cue usage, while professional roles often demand complex interactions that enhance these skills (Kanki, 2019). Additionally, specialised training and education in professional settings can contribute to differences in communication abilities (Tripathy, 2020). These findings underscore the importance of context-specific training to improve nonverbal communication across roles.

## CONCLUSION

As far as this study is concerned, nonverbal communication should always be practiced by the employees at their workplace because it plays a very important role in daily communication, especially in resolving conflicts that have arisen. With regard to effectiveness of nonverbal communication, findings show that a significant difference can be found between administrative and professional roles. Further, there is a significant relationship between nonverbal communication and conflict resolution among employees.

More efforts should be made to increase the effectiveness of nonverbal communication in resolving conflict among employees. Not only is there a significantly moderate and positive relationship between nonverbal communication and conflict resolution, but how they form, practice, or handle their situation when they are in a conflict and awareness of nonverbal communication cues in their daily lives may be highly instrumental in their relationship and interpersonal communication.

Therefore, effective communication skills are essential for future leaders, decision-makers, planners, producers, and performers to convey messages accurately. This ensures that recipients, such as community members, can take meaningful actions to drive positive societal change (Mohamad Saleh & Mehellou, 2024).

On the practical front, the study offers valuable insights for organisational leaders, human resources (HR) professionals, and conflict resolution practitioners. By recognising the importance of nonverbal communication in conflict resolution, this can guide the development of targeted interventions and real-world applications (Eaves & Leathers, 2017).

Organisations might integrate these valuable insights into their training and development initiatives. Workshops and seminars can enhance employees' ability to accurately understand and utilise nonverbal clues. Organisations can observe substantial enhancements in dispute resolution procedures and foster a healthy workplace culture by investing in the development of nonverbal communication skills. Integrating these findings into HR practices, such as recruitment and team building, can also enhance interpersonal connections in the workplace (Robertson, 2020).

This study can be extended to include an exploration of cultural variations to examine the relationship between nonverbal communication and conflict resolution. The results may reveal clearer insights into the influence of cultural norms and expectations on the understanding and use of nonverbal cues which would enhance the development of conflict resolutions that are culturally responsive in varied organisational settings.

The study also suggests future research to investigate the functioning of nonverbal communication in virtual or remote work environments, considering the growing dependence on technology-mediated communication in modern workplaces. Further, examining the efficacy of nonverbal cues on digital platforms and the difficulties in interpreting them in virtual environments might have practical importance.

In conclusion, this study addresses the pressing need to recognise the significance of nonverbal communication in resolving conflicts within organisational settings. By exploring this aspect comprehensively, organisations can develop effective strategies to promote harmony, productivity, and employee well-being.

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# Politicians' perspectives and media preferences regarding carbon neutrality policies: A comparative study in Malaysia and China

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## ABSTRACT

Media coverage of the climate crisis plays a key role in driving climate action. While most surveys related to climate change and its ramifications primarily assess public opinion at a collective level, this study targets politicians as the most influential segment of a population. The study examined politicians' perspectives on two aspects: (a) which policies are likely to be prioritised in their respective countries to achieve carbon neutrality, and (b) which media is the most preferred for promoting these policies. The scope is narrowed to two countries: Malaysia, a leading developing country, and China, a leading industrial country. Through an online survey targeting 40 politicians from each country, our findings reveal a consensus on afforestation and CO<sub>2</sub> capturing technologies as primary pathways towards carbon neutrality. However, while Malaysian politicians prioritise solar energy as the second-best option, their Chinese counterparts favour investing in public transportation alongside solar energy. Politicians consider social media the most suitable for promoting these policies, followed by chat applications in Malaysia, as well as television and online news portals in China. Our findings indicate that in promoting carbon policies, our respondents show a preference for media they perceive as news sources.

Keywords: ***Politician's perspective, carbon neutrality, government policy, media preferences***

## INTRODUCTION

The projected ramifications of climate change are ominously alarming. By 2070, 19% of the Earth's surface is expected to experience an annual average temperature of 29°C or higher, impacting up to 3 billion people and driving climate migration over the coming decades (Xu et al., 2020). The impacts of global warming are most pronounced in the equatorial belt stretching from southern China to northern Australia. Asia is the most affected region with increasingly frequent floods and extreme heatwaves (World Meteorological Organization, 2024). Global warming is overwhelmingly caused by human activities, which release into the atmosphere substantial amounts of greenhouse gases (GHG), such as carbon dioxide (National Academy of Sciences, 2020).

Given the global alarming impacts of climate change, 195 countries have agreed to reduce their GHG emissions by signing the Paris Agreement (United Nations Treaty Collections, 2015). Most countries, including Malaysia, have officially pledged to achieve Carbon Neutrality by 2050 (i.e., to have a balance between emitting and absorbing carbon from the atmosphere). Nevertheless, a few countries such as China, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia have pledged to do so by 2060, and by 2070 in the case of India (The Net Zero Tracker, 2023). However, the policies that are likely to be prioritised to achieve the said neutrality have not been officially disclosed.

Achieving carbon neutrality requires the reduction of carbon emissions, which in turn necessitates a shift from the consumption of fossil fuel energy sources (i.e., coal, petroleum, and natural gas) to that of clean and renewable energy sources such as solar energy. This shift of energy sources is unwelcomed by corporations who have economic interests associated with fossil fuel consumption (Chan & Tam, 2023). Consequently, governments worldwide have been rather slow in taking tangible actions to reduce their GHG emissions, including in China, which accounted for 29% of global GHG emissions in 2022 (Crippa et al., 2023).

Media coverage of climate change plays a key role in driving climate action. Framing climate change as an urgent issue has been instrumental in shaping public opinion and mobilising support for climate action (Hopke & Hestres, 2018). In 2019, *The Guardian* and other news outlets began to use terms such as “climate catastrophe” and “global heating” to describe the upcoming “climate crisis” (Schäfer et al., 2023). Furthermore, the use of the present tense has also become more common in the media coverage of climate change, denoting the fact that it is unequivocally happening (Stecula & Merkley, 2019). This widespread coverage of climate change reached its peak in 2021 and 2022 (Boykoff et al., 2022), with the media emphasising the economic benefits of taking climate actions, rather than focusing on their costs (Stecula & Merkley, 2019). Nevertheless, mainstream journalism has been criticised for its failure to encourage discussion on pathways towards achieving carbon neutrality (Pepermans & Maesele, 2017).

Political discourse is also as a major catalyst for climate action. Politicians shape public opinion which subsequently translates into climate action (Zawadzki et al., 2020). Moreover, politicians' perspectives significantly influence government decisions and policies, including those aimed at achieving carbon neutrality (Nie et al., 2019). For the purposes of this study, we adopted Heywood's (2021) definition of a politician as an individual actively engaged in the art of government and policymaking. This definition includes both elected officials and senior government administrators.

The body of media research on climate change predominantly examined public awareness of climate change and its consequences at a collective, non-segmented level (Azhari et al., 2023; Li et al., 2023; Liu, 2023; Tyson et al., 2023). However, recent research highlights the need for focusing on specific population segments to obtain meaningful insights when assessing public opinion on climate change (Wonneberger et al., 2020).

The present preliminary study targets politicians as the most influential segment of a population. Its goal is to gain insights from politicians into policies that are likely to be prioritised by governments to attain carbon neutrality in their respective countries. Additionally, this study investigated politicians' perspectives on the viability of different media for promoting their governments' policies to achieve carbon neutrality. The study focused on two economically contrasting countries: Malaysia, a leading developing nation, and China, a global industrial powerhouse. This selection of countries offers valuable insights into contrasting perspectives on carbon neutrality policies between countries at different stages of economic development and industrialisation.

In the next section, we synthesise relevant literature that investigates the public's media preferences and what they trust as sources of information in Malaysia and in China. We also review related research conducted in these two countries to gauge public awareness and willingness to partake individual actions regarding climate change challenges. Following that, we present our research methodology. Afterwards, we describe the findings gathered from our research respondents. Finally, this paper concludes with a discussion of our findings.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Media preferences and trust*

According to DataReportal (2023), the global population has surpassed 8.07 billion. Of this population, 65.7% (5.3 billion) use the Internet, and 61.4% (4.95 billion) are actively engaged in social media. The same report further revealed that the worldwide average number of social platforms used is 7.2. Interestingly, this average slightly increases to 7.7 in Malaysia, remains steady at 7.3 in China, but drops down to 6.6 in the U.S.A., despite 70% of the US population utilising social media (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Overview of social media adoption

	Population % actively using social media (2023)	Average number of social platforms used (2023)
Malaysia	86	7.7
China	50	7.3
U.S.A.	70	6.6
World	61.4	7.2

Source: DataReportal (2023)

Despite the increasing prevalence of internet usage, there appears to be a decline in interest among users when it comes to news. According to the latest *Reuters Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2023), the percentage of adults expressing either “very” or “extremely” high interest in news has decreased by a quarter over the past seven years, dropping from 63% in 2017 to just 48% in 2023. Additionally, Newman et al. (2023) found

that the proportion of individuals actively avoiding news has remained consistently high, hovering around 36%, nearing all-time highs.

In their survey of 1,063 Malaysians, Azhari et al. (2023) found that social media was predominantly preferred among respondents (86%), followed closely by chat apps (81%) and online news portals (72%). In contrast, printed media garnered the least popularity, with only 20% of respondents indicating its frequent usage. Notably, academic journals earned high trust, and with 80% of respondents expressing confidence in these academic publications, they are second only to scientists and environmental groups (86%).

Moreover, in surveying 346 students in Malaysia alongside in-depth interviews with seven informants, Yeh et al. (2022) disclosed that students' awareness of environmental issues does not necessarily reflect their education level. Instead, it correlates more strongly with their exposure to these issues on social media. Additionally, Yeh et al. (2022) also identified visual communication to be the most effective means of presenting environmental issues in cyberspace.

In China, according to Statista (2023), television maintains the highest penetration rate among traditional media, reaching an audience of 200 million. In contrast, newspapers have seen a drastic decline, dropping from 52% in 2010 to below 20% in 2020. Social media, on the other hand, is thriving, with over 500 million users, constituting half of the Chinese population. It is noteworthy that Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are all blocked in China, making the Chinese social media vastly distinct from its counterparts in the world (Chiu et al., 2012).

Moreover, an online survey conducted among young Chinese adults (Gong et al., 2022) concluded that both traditional and social media usage are positively associated with political trust. However, traditional media was judged by respondents to be more credible and having a stronger impact than online media.

### *Status quo of climate change*

Globally, a major study by UNDP and University of Oxford surveyed the opinions of 1.2 million respondents from 50 countries and found that only 64% of respondents see climate change as a global emergency (Flynn et al., 2021), while the remaining 36% do not. Moreover, only 53% of respondents were supportive of using wind, solar, and renewable power.

According to Chan and Tam (2023), this relatively high percentage of scepticism towards climate change challenges (36%) can be partially explained by higher levels of fossil fuel consumption in some societies. In fact, transiting to renewable and greener energy requires drastic changes in lifestyle (e.g., transportation choices) that some people are reluctant to make. Chan and Tam (2023) found consistent evidence supporting this explanation by analysing two publicly available datasets. The first dataset comprised 63,183 adults from 52 countries, and the second dataset included 45,199 respondents (ages 15 and above) from 23 countries.

In Malaysia, the first survey assessing public opinions regarding climate change concerns was recently conducted by Azhari et al. (2023). According to the authors, 86% of the 1,063 respondents expressed that the government should increase incentives for individuals actively working to combat climate change. Furthermore, 60% of respondents were of the opinion that Malaysia should reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, regardless of the actions taken by other countries.

Additionally, respondents in the same survey demonstrated a strong commitment to adopting individual practices aimed at reducing GHG emissions. Notably, 79% of respondents reported reducing home energy usage by turning off electrical appliances and lights when not in use. Additionally, an equally impressive 79% expressed intentions to install household solar panels in the future (Azhari et al., 2023).

On the other hand, Liu (2023) analysed the results from two nationwide surveys in China (3,785 respondents in 2009, and 3,794 respondents in 2016) regarding public opinion on climate change. His analysis revealed that respondents consider the central government as the entity most responsible for taking action on climate change. While satisfaction with the Chinese government's climate action was only at 39% in 2009, it significantly increased to 60% in 2016. Moreover, 73% and 68% of respondents, in 2016, expressed their support for both the cap-and-trade program, and the carbon tax, respectively.

Li et al. (2023) examined the public's perception of carbon neutrality through content analyses on the Chinese social media platform, Weibo. The findings indicate a prevailing sense of optimism concerning carbon neutrality, with positive sentiment micro-posts comprising 83.9%, a striking eightfold higher than the negative ones at 9.9%. For an overview regarding public perception of climate change, readers are invited to refer to Table 2.

In the United States, the most recent survey by the Pew Research Centre, involving 10,329 American adults, highlighted that 67% prioritise the development of renewable energy sources such as wind and solar over fossil fuel (Tyson et al., 2023). Despite this shared preference for renewable energy, the survey also unveiled a significant disparity in climate change beliefs among the American public. While 78% of Democrats see climate change as a major threat, only 23% of Republicans share this viewpoint, resulting in an average of 54% of Americans considering climate change a major threat (Tyson et al., 2023).

**Table 2.** Overview of public awareness of climate change

	Year of latest survey	Number of respondents	Public awareness of climate change (%)	Public willingness to use solar energy (%)
Malaysia	2023	1063	86	79
China	2016	3,794	83	73
U.S.A.	2023	10,329	54	69
World average	2021	1,200,000	64	53

Sources: Azhari et al. (2023), Li et al. (2023), Tyson et al. (2023), and Flynn et al. (2021)

## METHODOLOGY

As aforementioned, most countries are committed to achieving carbon neutrality. The present research aims to determine whether the roadmap to carbon neutrality has been clearly identified by politicians in Malaysia and in China. Furthermore, we investigate which media are considered effective by politicians for promoting carbon neutrality policies in their respective countries. The following questions serve as guidelines to fulfil these objectives:

1. From politicians' perspective, what policies are likely to be prioritised for achieving carbon neutrality in their respective countries?
2. From politicians' perspective, which media are considered effective for promoting carbon neutrality policies that are adopted by their respective countries?

This study adopted a quantitative approach, surveying politicians' perspectives from both Malaysia and China. Descriptive statistics was employed to analyse individual questions, and certain questions were cross-tabulated with others to derive impactful insights from the dataset. Specifically, we conducted comparisons between politicians' perspectives in Malaysia and their counterparts in China regarding carbon neutrality policies. We also compared their views on the most effective media for promoting these policies.

For this preliminary research, a pilot online survey was conducted, targeting politicians in Malaysia and China. Using convenience sampling, we reached out to 40 Malaysian politicians in the state of Kedah, and 40 Chinese politicians in either Henan Province or Chongqing municipality. This sample size was deemed sufficient for uncovering preliminary insights into politicians' perspectives, as the central limit theorem (CLT) requires a sample size greater than 30 to ensure statistical robustness, and Roscoe's guidelines for comparative analysis recommend at least 30 respondents per subgroup (Memon et al., 2020). To ensure respondent anonymity, respondents' names and contact information were not recorded.

### *Research instrument*

Based on the literature review, we constructed a questionnaire which was divided into three sections, comprising 11 items:

1. **Demographic information:** This section anonymously collected necessary demographic information about the participating politicians.
2. **Policies for reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions?** This section explored politicians' perspectives on policies that are likely to be prioritised to achieve carbon neutrality in their respective countries.
3. **Media to inform the public of carbon policies?** This section was designed to discern politicians' preferences regarding the media they use to receive news and the media they consider effective for promoting carbon neutrality policies.

## FINDINGS

### *Demographic profile*

The surveyed Malaysian politicians were relatively younger and less experienced in politics in comparison with their Chinese counterpart. Notably, 88% of the Malaysian respondents fell within the age range of 20 to 49 years, in contrast to only 63% of their Chinese counterparts being within the same age group. Correspondingly, merely one-third of the Malaysian respondents had a political tenure exceeding three years, as opposed to the substantial majority (83%) of Chinese respondents who had accumulated over three years of political experience.

Remarkably, respondents in both groups engaged in diverse occupations, as explicitly outlined in Table 3. Education, computer science and marketing are prominent

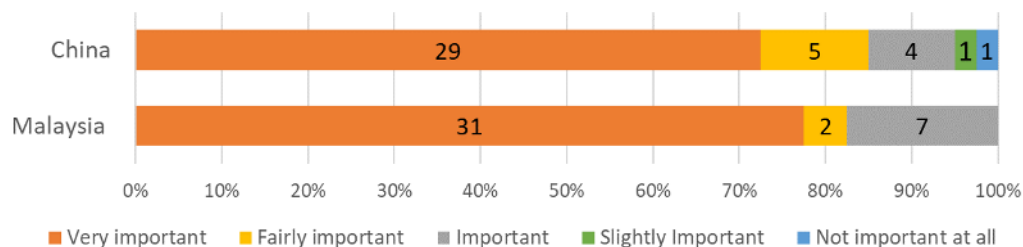
among Malaysian respondents, while administration, education and social services stand out among Chinese respondents. However, while only 68% of Malaysian respondents had an undergraduate degree or higher, the significant majority of Chinese respondents (93%) held qualifications of comparable levels.

**Table 3.** Summary of participating politicians' occupations

Respondent occupation	Respondents in Malaysia	Respondents in China
Engineering & Architecture	4	2
Management	1	4
Finance & Marketing	6	2
Banking & Insurance		1
Journalism & Media	3	3
Computer Science	6	1
Administration	4	10
Social Services	1	6
Law & Justice	2	3
Health care	2	1
Education	7	6
Tourism	4	1

### *Politicians' perspective on carbon neutrality policies*

Nearly all respondents acknowledged the significance of reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Among the participating politicians, a substantial majority, comprising 82.5% of Malaysians and 85% of Chinese representatives, deemed this reduction to be fairly or very important, as shown in Figure 1.



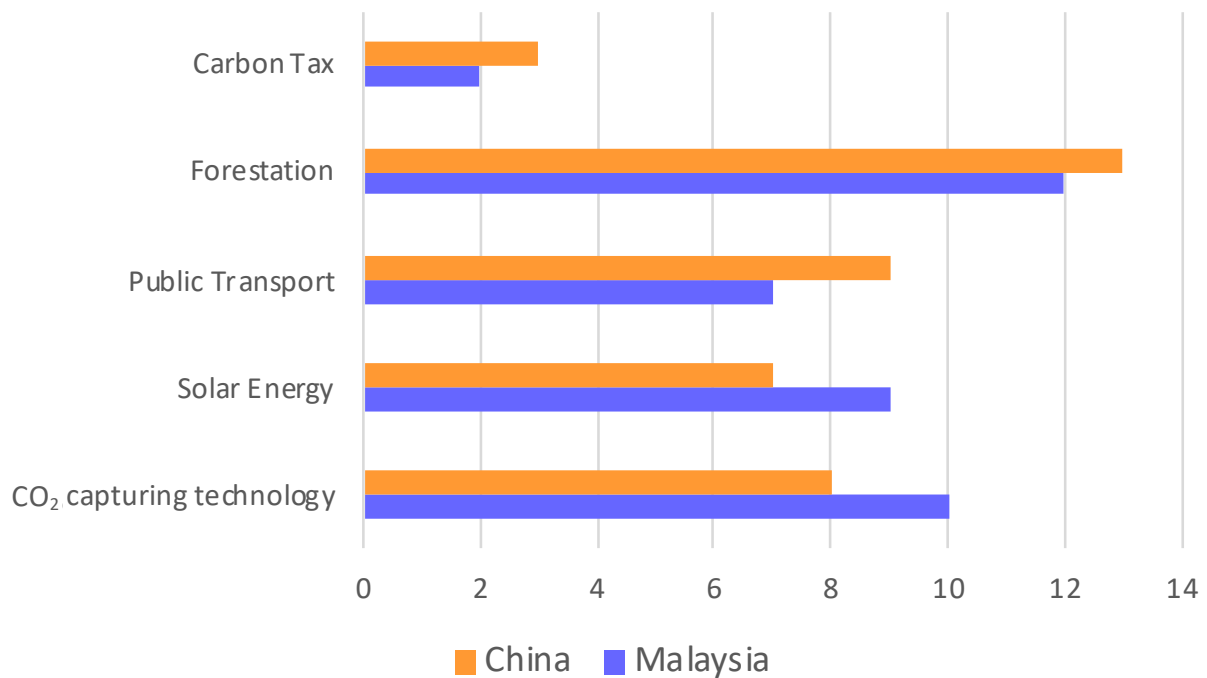
**Figure 1.** How important is reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions?

A common priority among Malaysian and Chinese respondents is forestation and CO<sub>2</sub> capturing technologies, which function as artificial forests for storing carbon. As Figure 2 shows, 12 of 40 Malaysian respondents (30%) and 13 of 40 Chinese respondents (33%) agreed on emphasising the high importance of implementing forestation policies. Additionally, 25% of Malaysian respondents (10 individuals) and 20% of their Chinese counterparts (8 individuals) prioritised investments in CO<sub>2</sub> capturing technologies.

The findings also suggest that the second phase toward carbon neutrality is likely to involve the integration of solar energy and public transportation policies, placing emphasis on solar energy in Malaysia and public transportation in China. In Malaysia, as shown in Figure 2, 23% of the respondents (9 individuals) anticipated the prioritised

adoption of solar energy policies, while 18% (7 individuals) believed public transportation policies to be more important. Conversely, in China, 18% of the respondents anticipated prioritising the implementation of solar energy, while 23% expected a focus on public transportation.

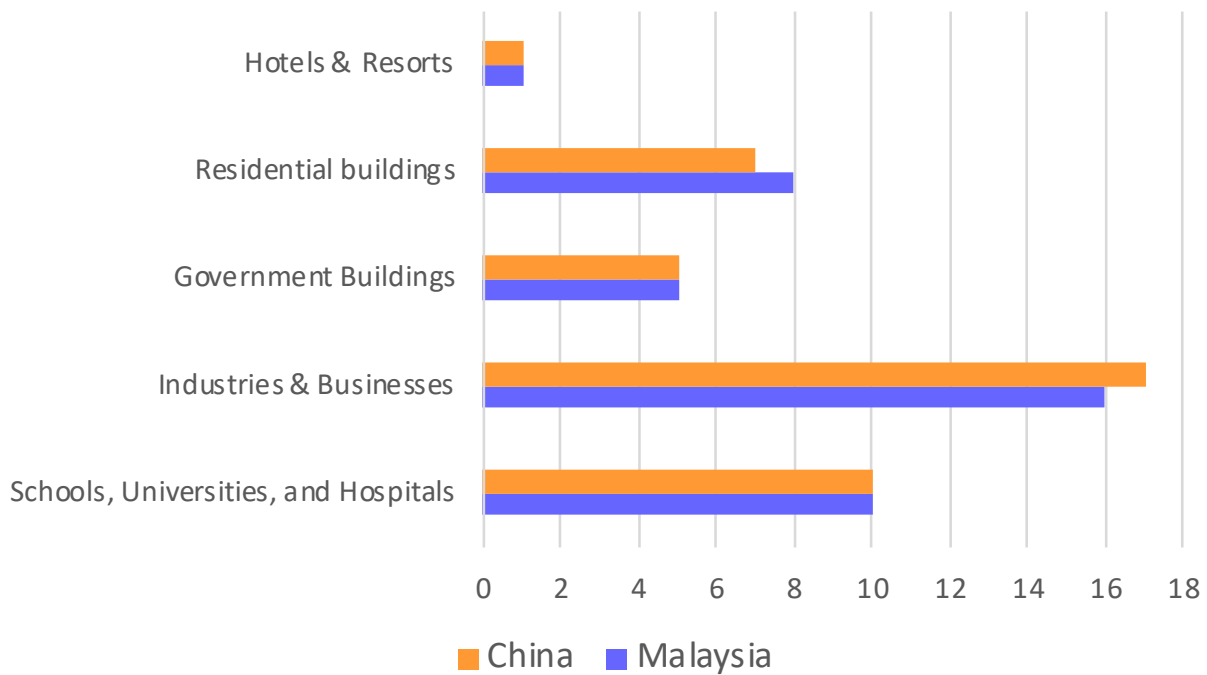
Respondents from both countries shared an additional common outlook: they all anticipated the implementation of a carbon tax to be the final measure in achieving carbon neutrality. Indeed, only two Malaysian respondents (5%) and three Chinese counterparts (8%) prioritised the implementation of a carbon tax over other policies, as Figure 2 clearly depicts.



**Figure 2.** Which part of the government policy to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> should be prioritised?

Concerning the deployment of solar panels as a greener energy source, there seems to be a consensus among Malaysian and Chinese politicians on prioritising businesses and industries over other sectors, as shown in Figure 3. In fact, 16 of Malaysian respondents (40%), as well as 17 of Chinese respondents (43%), anticipated the implementation of regulations to encourage the installation of solar panels in industries and businesses in their respective countries. For the tourism industry, the installation of such panels is likely to be optional, with an overwhelming majority of respondents (98%) not wishing to hinder the competitiveness of their respective countries in this sector.

Furthermore, as Figure 3 illustrates, 25% of Malaysian respondents (10 individuals) and an equal percentage of Chinese respondents expected a delayed implementation of regulations encouraging the education and healthcare sectors to transition to solar energy. Interestingly, 20% of Malaysian respondents (8 individuals) and 17% of Chinese respondents (7 individuals) foresaw policies encouraging the public to adopt solar energy in residential areas. In contrast, only 13% of respondents in each country (5 individuals) anticipated their respective governments to lead by example and transition to solar energy in their administration buildings.

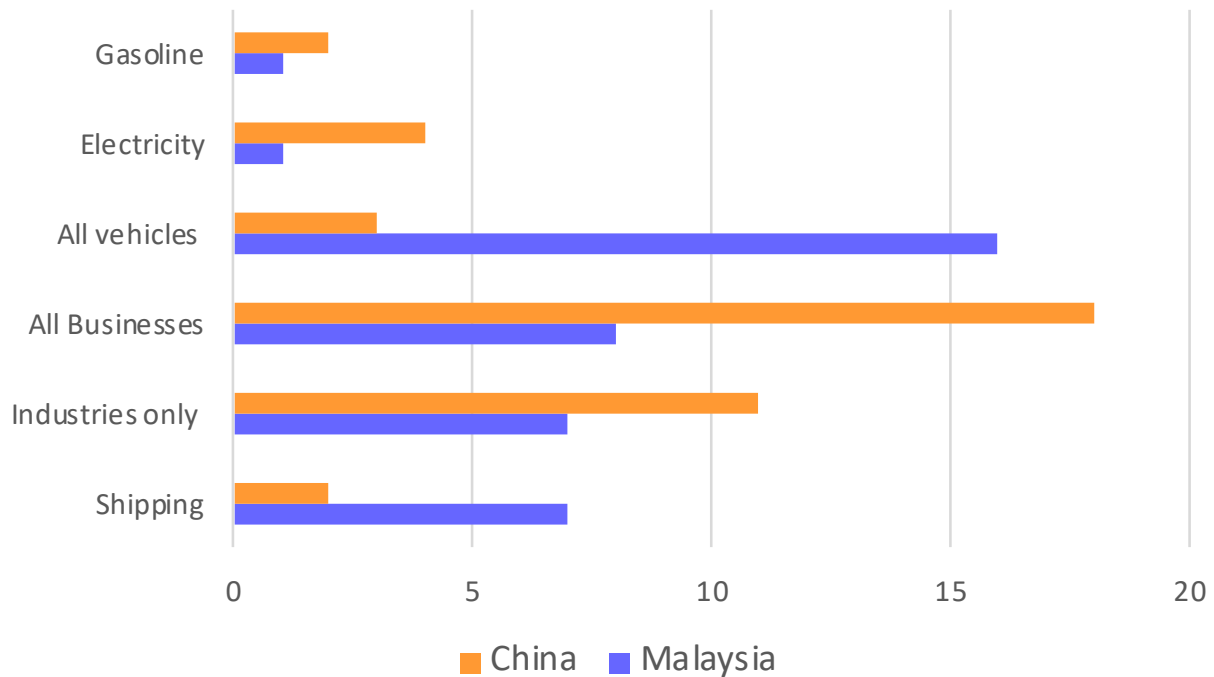


**Figure 3.** Where should solar panels be deployed first?

Moreover, when it comes to the properties that are likely to be targeted for initial carbon taxation, politicians' perspectives diverged significantly. On one hand, as depicted in Figure 4, Chinese respondents expected the nation's thriving industries and businesses to actively contribute to the government's efforts in achieving carbon neutrality. Specifically, 28% of respondents (11 individuals) anticipated a carbon tax exclusively on industries, and another 43% (18 respondents) expected the tax to be on all Chinese businesses. On the other hand, Figure 4 also shows that Malaysian respondents expected their compatriots to assist the government in achieving carbon neutrality. In fact, 40% of respondents (16 individuals) expected the first application of the carbon tax to be applied to all vehicles in Malaysia.

The divergence in perspectives among Malaysian and Chinese politicians persists, particularly in the sectors where respondents were reluctant to implement a carbon tax that may impede competitiveness. On one side, Chinese respondents were reluctant to hinder China's exportation capacity. Figure 4 shows that only two Chinese respondents (5%) anticipated the application of a carbon tax in the shipping sector. On the flip side, Malaysian respondents clearly did not wish to hold back the industrial development in Malaysia. On average, only seven Malaysian respondents (18%) expected the carbon tax to be implemented in each of the shipping, industry, and general business sectors.

Finally, Figure 4 also reveals that Malaysian and Chinese respondents shared a similar view regarding the application of a carbon tax on gasoline and electricity. Only one Malaysian respondent (2.5%) anticipated a carbon tax on electricity, with an equal expectation for gasoline. In China, four respondents (10%) foresaw a carbon tax on electricity, while only two respondents (5%) anticipated a carbon tax on gasoline.

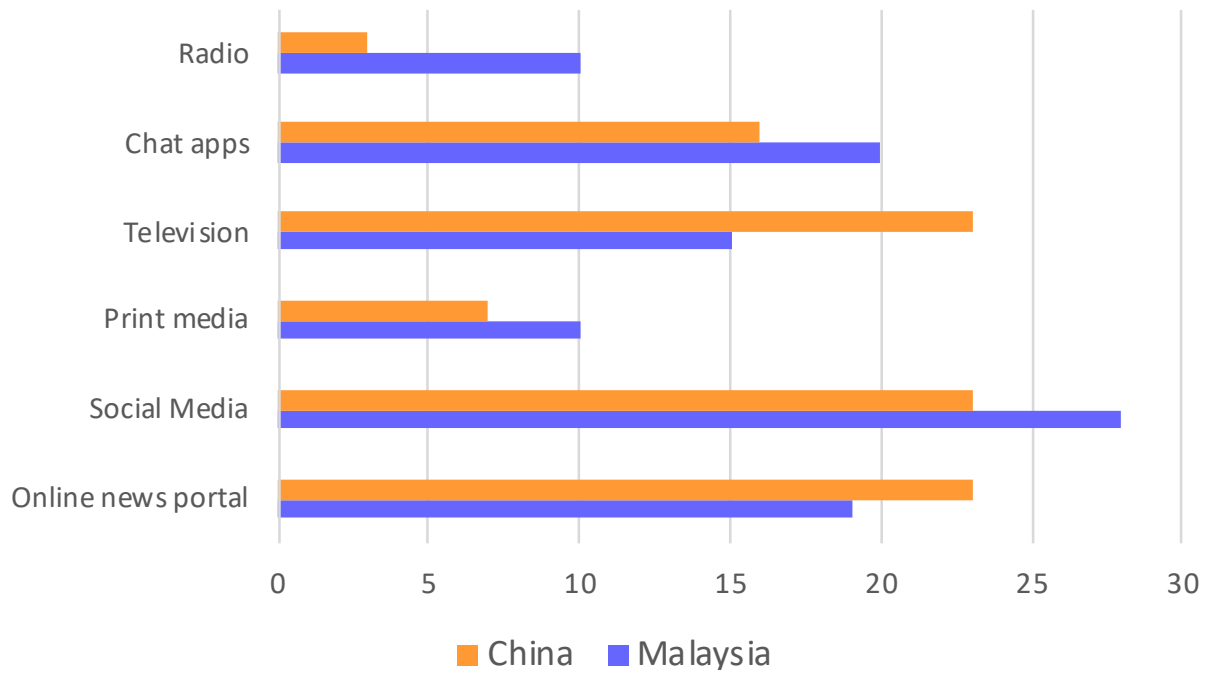


**Figure 4.** Where should carbon tax be implemented first?

### *Politicians' media preferences for promoting carbon policies*

All respondents, Malaysians and Chinese alike, confirmed the prevailing global trend wherein traditional radio and print media have receded in prominence, giving way to the ascendancy of online news portals, chat applications, and social media. As substantiated by Figure 5, this decline of radio and print media usage is more conspicuous in China than in Malaysia. Only 3 out of 40 Chinese respondents (8%) reported still relying on radio updates, while print media maintained attention from merely 7 Chinese respondents (18%). In the Malaysian context, 10 respondents (25%) affirmed their continued reliance on each of these traditional sources.

In contrast, social media has emerged as the predominant source of news for politicians in both nations, followed closely by news portals and chat applications. In Malaysia, 70% of the respondents (28 individuals) obtained news through social media, 47.5% (19 individuals) through online news portals, and 50% (20 individuals) through chat applications, such as WhatsApp. A comparable pattern is observed in China, where 57.5% of the 40 respondents (23 individuals) reported receiving news through social media and online news portals, while 40% (16 respondents) reported receiving news through chat applications, such as WeChat, as depicted in Figure 5.

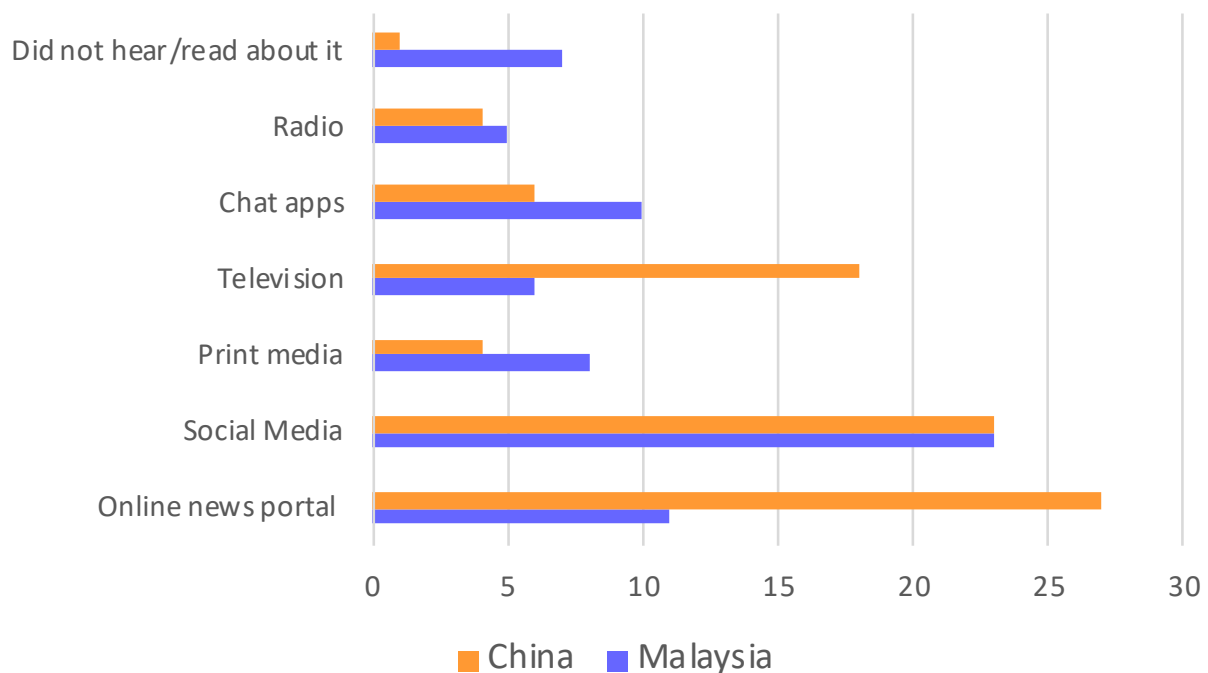


**Figure 5.** Where do you usually hear/read the news?

The findings also show that while television remains a prominent news source for politicians in China, its prominence appears to have fallen behind in Malaysia. In China, 23 respondents (57.5%) relied on television for news, while in Malaysia, only 15 respondents (37.5%) cited television as a source for news, as shown in Figure 5.

When asked about their awareness of their respective countries' policies for achieving carbon neutrality, the majority of respondents reported being well-informed on the subject. With only one respondent (3%) lacking knowledge about carbon neutrality, Chinese respondents appear to be more informed than their Malaysian counterparts, of whom seven respondents (18%) reported not having heard nor read about the topic, as Figure 6 illustrates.

Participating politicians, who were already informed about their respective countries' policies for achieving carbon neutrality, were subsequently asked to specify the media sources that informed them on the policies under investigation. Once again, social media emerged as the primary source of information on climate change and carbon neutrality in both countries. As depicted in Figure 6, 57.5% of both Malaysian and Chinese respondents, comprising 23 individuals in each group, reported being informed about their government's carbon emission reduction policy through social media.



**Figure 6.** Where did you hear/read about the government policy to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions?

Interestingly, climate change and carbon neutrality appear to garner more attention on Chinese television and online news portals in comparison with Malaysia. Figure 6 clearly shows that 18 Chinese respondents (45%) learned about their government's CO<sub>2</sub> reduction policy through television, while 27 respondents (67%) relied on online news portals, surpassing social media by 10%. In contrast, merely six of Malaysian respondents (15%) reported being informed about the topic through television, while only 11 respondents (27.5%) relied on online news portals.

Our findings also show that chat applications, such as WhatsApp, are far more prominent as sources of information for politicians in Malaysia than their counterparts in China (e.g., WeChat). As shown in Figure 6, 10 Malaysian respondents (25%) reported learning about CO<sub>2</sub> reduction policies through chat applications, whereas only six Chinese respondents (15%) reported such applications as their source of information.

Furthermore, our findings, depicted in Figure 6, illustrate a comparable trend in the significance of print media for politicians in Malaysia and in China. Similar to chat applications, the number of respondents relying on print media as an information source is twice as high in Malaysia compared to China. In Malaysia, eight respondents (20%) learned about CO<sub>2</sub> reduction policy from print media, whereas in China, only four respondents (10%) reported print media as their source of information.

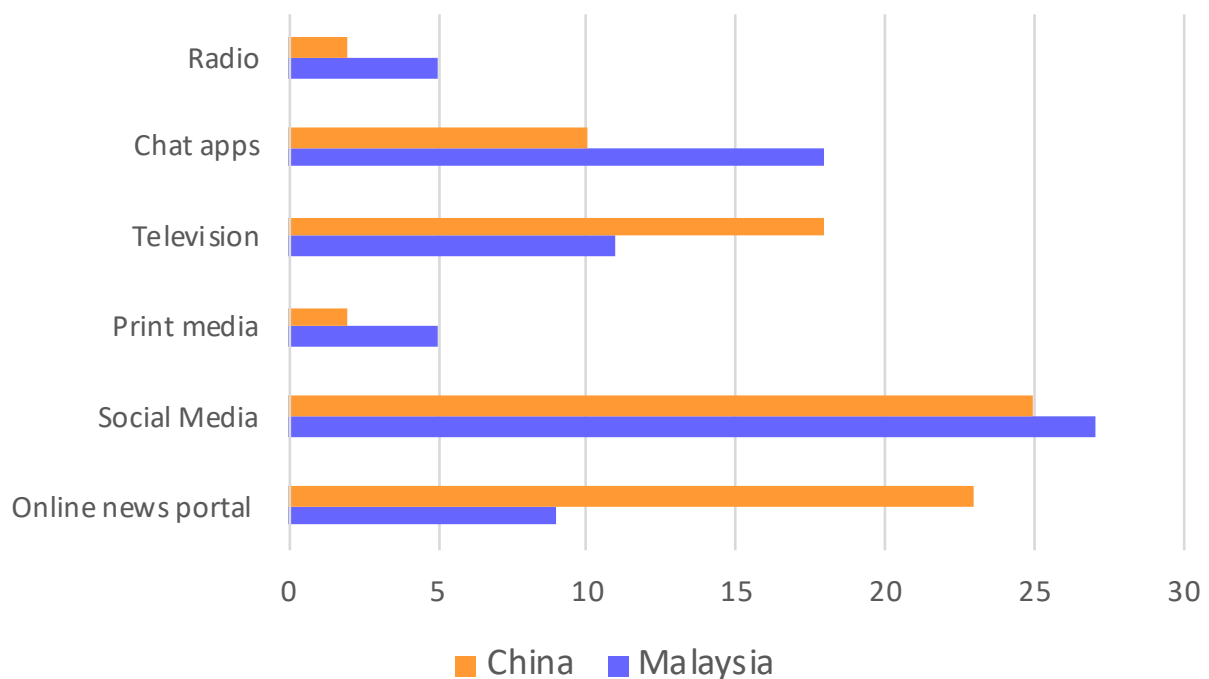
Finally, and more importantly, we surveyed politicians' media preferences for promoting their respective government policies regarding CO<sub>2</sub> reduction. Our findings, depicted in Figure 7, highlight a consensus among both Malaysian and Chinese respondents that social media is the preferred media for promoting these policies. In fact, 27 Malaysian respondents (67.5%) and 25 Chinese respondents (62.5%) concurred that social media is the preferred choice.

Our findings also reveal that radio and print are the least favoured media for promoting CO<sub>2</sub> reduction policies among both Malaysian and Chinese politicians. Figure

7 clearly shows that merely two Chinese respondents (5%) and five Malaysian respondents (12.5%) regarded radio as a suitable medium for promoting these policies. Similarly, an equally negligible proportion of respondents perceived print media as a viable option for promoting the said policies.

However, there is a divergence in the views of Malaysian and Chinese politicians when it comes to promoting CO<sub>2</sub> reduction policies on television, chat applications, or online news portals. As illustrated in Figure 7, Chinese respondents favoured television significantly more than chat applications for promoting these policies. Specifically, 18 Chinese respondents (45%) preferred television, while only 10 Chinese respondents (25%) appreciated chat applications for the same purpose. Conversely, among Malaysian respondents, only 10 respondents (25%) preferred promoting CO<sub>2</sub> reduction policies on television, whereas 18 respondents (45%) would rather do so on chat applications.

The viewpoints of Malaysian and Chinese politicians continue to diverge further when contemplating the use of online news portals for promoting CO<sub>2</sub> reduction policies, as depicted in Figure 7. Among Chinese respondents, 57.5% (23 individuals) viewed news portals as a viable option for promoting these policies, ranking second only to social media (62.5%). In contrast, among Malaysian respondents, only 9 individuals (22.5%) deemed online news platforms a suitable option.



**Figure 7.** Which media should the government use to reach more people when promoting CO<sub>2</sub> reduction policies?

## DISCUSSION

This study provides valuable insights into politicians' perspectives on carbon neutrality policies and their media preferences for promoting these policies. Most media research on climate change tends to gauge public opinion at a collective level. In contrast, the present

preliminary study focused on politicians as the most influential segment of a population, and the segment potentially responsible for making decisions that enable their nations to achieve carbon neutrality in the future. We compared politicians' perspectives in two countries with distinct socioeconomic configurations: Malaysia, a leading developing country, and China, a leading industrial country.

Our findings indicate that nearly all participating politicians recognise the paramount importance of addressing climate change challenges and clearly perceive the roadmap to carbon neutrality. Politicians from both nations prioritise afforestation policies (30% of Malaysians and 33% of Chinese) and CO<sub>2</sub> capturing technologies (25% of Malaysians and 20% of Chinese). Politicians' perspectives diverge regarding their second phase policies towards carbon neutrality. Solar energy (23%) appears to take precedence over public transportation policies (18%) in Malaysia, whereas in China, public transportation (23%) receives greater emphasis than solar energy (18%). Politicians in both countries agree that implementing a carbon tax should be a last resort, with only 5% of Malaysians and 8% of Chinese prioritising this policy.

Regarding the use of solar energy as a green energy source, politicians in Malaysia (40%) and China (43%) agree on prioritising the deployment of solar panels in businesses and industries. In the tourism sector, 98% of respondents in both countries are reluctant to impede their countries' competitiveness. Surprisingly, however, only 13% of respondents in each country expect their governments to transition to solar energy in administrative buildings.

When considering the implementation of a carbon tax, politicians showed distinct outlooks, aligning with the socioeconomic situations of their countries. In China, 71% expect industries to participate in carbon neutrality efforts, while only 5% anticipate a carbon tax in the shipping sector, seamlessly reflecting China's industrial status. In Malaysia, a country that aims to attract foreign investment, only 18% expect a carbon tax in shipping, industry, and general business sectors. However, 40% of Malaysian respondents support a carbon tax on all vehicles to aid carbon neutrality efforts. It is worth noting that respondents were all from the rural Kedah state, where reliance on private vehicles is high due to inadequate public transportation.

Next, our results clearly show the declining relevance of radio and print media as news sources, especially in China. Only 18% of Chinese respondents obtain news from print, and just 8% listen to the radio for news. In contrast, a quarter of Malaysian respondents still rely on these traditional media for news. The decline of radio and print media is a global phenomenon associated with the rise of social media as primary news sources. In 2023, the Pew Research Center surveyed 8,842 Americans to determine their news preferences. While 58% preferred digital devices and 27% preferred TV, only a minority opted for radio (6%) or print (5%) (Liedke & Wang, 2023).

Moreover, findings from our survey showcase social media as the primary source of news for the vast majority of respondents in both Malaysia (70%) and China (57.5%). Additionally, news consumption through online news portals is as common as through social media for Chinese respondents (57.5%), while online news portals are slightly less popular amongst Malaysian respondents (47%). These findings align with a major United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) survey, dating back to 2021, of over 21,000 individuals across 21 countries, revealing a significant trend in news consumption. Among

respondents aged 14 to 24, 45% rely on social media for news, compared to 17% of those over 40 (UNICEF, 2021).

More importantly, our findings also highlight two contrasting aspects of media consumption in China and Malaysia. Firstly, television remains relevant in China, with 57.5% of respondents getting their news from it, a proportion equal to that of social media. In Malaysia, its importance has declined to 38%, nearly half as popular as social media. Secondly, chat applications are increasingly used to obtain news, especially in Malaysia, with 50% using WhatsApp as a news source compared to 40% using WeChat as a news source in China.

In response to the second research question on politicians' preferences for promoting carbon neutrality policies, our findings show that social media is the preferred choice for the majority of Malaysian (67.5%) and Chinese (62.5%) politicians. This inclination towards promoting carbon policies on social media correlates with respondents' preference to receiving news through these platforms. Conversely, our findings indicate that print and radio are the least favoured media for promoting CO<sub>2</sub> reduction policies among politicians in both countries, with only 12.5% of Malaysian respondents and 5% of Chinese respondents regarding them as viable options. This disinterest correlates with the low popularity of print and radio for receiving news among respondents.

However, notable differences emerge in politicians' preferences for promoting carbon policies through television, chat applications, and online news portals. While the majority of Chinese respondents (57.5%) prefer television and online news portals for promoting carbon policies, only 25% and 22.5% of Malaysian respondents, respectively, share this preference. In contrast, a majority of Malaysian respondents (45%) view chat applications, particularly WhatsApp, as an effective medium for promoting carbon policies, while only 25% of Chinese respondents appreciate using chat applications, such as WeChat, for this purpose.

These findings suggest that government policies for attaining carbon neutrality should be primarily promoted on social media, which serves as the primary news source for politicians, and for the general public. Our findings also suggest that television in China and WhatsApp in Malaysia could complement social media campaigns for promoting carbon neutrality policies. Print and radio, on the other hand, should play a minor supporting role, with minimal resources allocated to these media for promoting carbon neutrality policies.

The particular emphasis accorded to WhatsApp by Malaysian respondents reflects the widespread popularity of this chat application in Malaysia. This observation aligns with the research conducted by Nizah and Bakar (2019), which underscores the decisive role WhatsApp played in shaping public opinion during the Malaysian 14th General Elections in 2018. Given its demonstrated effectiveness in influencing public discourse, WhatsApp emerges as a powerful medium for promoting government policies in Malaysia, including those related to carbon neutrality.

Finally, the relatively low preference of Malaysian respondents to promote carbon policies on television is likely due to the perception that their compatriots, particularly the youth, primarily view television for entertainment rather than for news. Several studies have demonstrated that Malaysian youths utilise television for entertainment and social surveillance purposes, rather than for talk shows or factual programs (Ahmad & Alimom, 2020; Nasser et al., 2020).

Table 4 clearly shows the correlation that emerges between politicians' perspectives regarding the optimal media for promoting carbon neutrality policies and the media they rely upon as sources of information. This correlation manifests consistently across various media and among both Malaysian and Chinese politicians. Essentially, when it comes to promoting carbon policies, respondents show a preference for media they perceive as news sources.

**Table 4.** Media preferences for receiving news and for promoting CO<sub>2</sub> reduction policies

	Preferences for news in China (%)	Preferences for promoting carbon policies in China (%)	Preferences for news in Malaysia (%)	Preferences for promoting carbon policies in Malaysia (%)
Social media	57.5	62.5	70	67.5
Chat apps	40	25	50	45
Online news portals	57.5	57	47	22.5
Television	57.5	45	37	25
Print	18	5	25	12.5
Radio	8	5	25	12.5

## CONCLUSION

This study surveyed the opinions of 40 Malaysian and 40 Chinese politicians regarding future policies aimed at achieving carbon neutrality within their respective countries. Our findings reveal agreement among politicians from both countries on prioritising afforestation and the development of CO<sub>2</sub>-capturing technologies as the primary pathways toward carbon neutrality. However, politicians' perspectives diverge on secondary policies, reflecting the distinct socioeconomic configurations of their countries. While Malaysian politicians prioritise deploying solar energy, their Chinese counterparts emphasise investing in public transportation alongside solar energy. The shift to solar energy is expected to be led by industries and businesses, with the exception of the tourism sector. Moreover, while politicians from both countries view implementing a carbon tax as a last resort policy, Chinese respondents expect such a tax to target the industrial sector, whereas Malaysian respondents anticipate its application to all vehicles.

On the other hand, our findings reveal consensus among politicians from both countries regarding social media as the most effective medium for promoting carbon neutrality policies. However, politicians' perspectives diverge again when identifying the second-most suitable medium for promoting these policies. Chinese politicians favour online news portals and television as alternative options, whereas Malaysian politicians prioritise chat applications, particularly WhatsApp, as the next preferred medium.

Finally, our descriptive analysis highlights a notable correlation between the media considered by politicians as the best option to promote carbon neutrality policies in their respective countries, and the media they consider to be reliable sources for news.

## LIMITATIONS

Politicians and government officials who participated in this survey from Malaysia were all localised in the Kedah state, while their counterparts from China who took part in the survey were all based in Henan Province or Chongqing Municipality. Nevertheless, the diverse backgrounds of the respondents allow the findings of this study to serve as a strong indicator for their respective countries. Furthermore, the results can serve as a solid foundation for nationwide surveys regarding politicians' perspectives on carbon neutrality in other countries.

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# Media framing on Bernama's Twitter coverage during Malaysia's GE15: An exploratory factor analysis

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## ABSTRACT

Integrating social media platforms like Twitter into election coverage has transformed information dissemination, making it important for political discourse. This study examines how Bernama, a government-linked news agency in Malaysia, used Twitter during Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE15), focusing on the role of media framing. Media framing is the intentional presentation of information aimed at influencing audience perceptions, significantly shaping voter attitudes, and constructing political narratives. A total of 1,103 tweets from Bernama were analysed through quantitative content analysis, and an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to identify key constructs, assess item quality, and evaluate construct validity. The findings reveal that most factors obtained Cronbach's Alpha values of between 0.5 and 0.9, demonstrating acceptable to excellent reliability. The study highlights two major challenges, which are media prejudice, where biased reporting influences public opinion, and media restrictions, which limit the depth and objectivity of coverage due to internal or external pressures. The findings demonstrate the transformative potential of Twitter in shaping political communication, emphasising the importance of media framing in constructing election narratives. The study's significance lies in its contribution to understanding how digital platforms influence democratic processes. It also provides practical implications for media practitioners by highlighting the need for transparent and unbiased reporting to promote informed voter engagement. Moreover, the findings serve as a foundation for future research on the role of social media in fostering equitable and democratic information dissemination in evolving media landscapes.

**Keywords:** *Media framing, election discourse, media narrative analysis, Twitter, exploratory factor analysis*

## INTRODUCTION

Journalism has undergone significant changes in the digital age, largely due to technological advancements that have transformed how news is created, shared, and consumed (Sultan & Amir, 2023). The era of handwritten newsletters is over; today, information spreads quickly through various online platforms, transforming communication. Social media, especially Twitter has become a powerful tool for political communication. It offers politicians a direct way to connect with voters, making it a key influence in shaping public discourse (Iman Anuar, 2025). In Malaysia, social media's role in political engagement has been particularly impactful, especially during elections. Twitter's ability to facilitate instant communication and rapidly spread information has made it vital in shaping election narratives and influencing public opinion.

During Malaysia's 14th General Election (GE14), Twitter played a key role in facilitating political discussions, allowing direct communication between politicians and voters. As the country prepared for the 15th General Election (GE15), the impact of social media on public discourse and electoral outcomes became even more significant, marking a crucial shift in Malaysia's political landscape. This change, largely driven by platforms like Twitter, highlights the power of social media in democratizing political communication. Twitter encourages real-time debates, amplifies diverse voices, and enables the fast spread of information, making it a powerful tool for shaping political narratives and promoting civic engagement (Halpern et al., 2017). This shift is especially important in Malaysia, where social media has become a primary means of raising political awareness and increasing participation, particularly among younger, tech-savvy voters. A key aspect of this digital shift is media framing, which significantly shapes how information is presented to the public. Media framing involves the use of specific angles, perspectives, and language in reporting, influencing how audiences interpret and emotionally react to the information. By emphasizing certain aspects of a story and downplaying others, media framing affects how people perceive political events and issues.

Moreover, during GE15, media framing on platforms like Twitter played a key role in shaping public opinion, influencing voter behaviour, and constructing the dominant election narrative. Taib and Vivian (2022) emphasised how Twitter created a participatory environment, where both political elites and ordinary citizens contributed to the narrative, leading to greater polarisation and fragmentation in political communication. Bernama, a leading government-linked news agency, was particularly influential in this process. By leveraging its Twitter presence, Bernama helped shape political discussions, frame key issues, and engage directly with the electorate. This study focuses on Bernama's role at the intersection of media framing and social media, exploring its impact on public discourse during GE15. It is particularly important in the Malaysian context for two reasons. First, it examines how Bernama used Twitter to influence public opinion and frame critical issues during a significant electoral period, offering valuable insights into the intersection of media, technology, and politics in Malaysia. Second, it highlights the challenges of media framing, such as bias and polarisation, which are crucial for understanding the complexities of Malaysia's socio-political landscape.

Throughout GE15, Malaysian voters experienced a surge in political awareness and participation, largely boosted by the widespread use of social media. Twitter emerged as a crucial platform for political discourse, allowing for dynamic exchanges of ideas and

rapid news dissemination (Delli Carpini, 2000). Media framing was central to shaping public opinion during this election, influencing both the narrative of the election and the broader political discourse (Aalberg et al., 2012). Political communication is considered as critical in a democracy for the development of a society in which the country and its citizens have a sense of belonging (Sern & Zainuddin, 2014). Journalistic integrity plays a key role in shaping foreign perceptions, reinforcing the importance of unbiased reporting to maintain Malaysia's standing on the world stage. In Malaysia, the media framing during GE15 faced analysis for potential bias, which contributed to polarisation and division within the country. The rapid spread of diverse narratives on social media further complicated the media framing process, shaping public discourse in new and complex ways. As a major news agency, Bernama played an important role in framing issues and influencing public opinion. Its active presence on Twitter allowed the agency to directly engage with a broad audience, framing issues in ways that shaped the electoral conversation.

The media framing of Malaysia's GE15 demonstrates both continuities and shifts from the previous GE14. In GE14, the focus was primarily on issues of governance, corruption and the promise of institutional reforms. This was evident in the way mainstream and alternative media approached their narratives, with platforms such as *The Star* and *Free Malaysia Today* offering contrasting perspectives—traditional versus progressive. Traditional outlets leaned towards a cautious, state-influenced narrative, while independent platforms like FMT provided more outspoken critiques of corruption and abuse of power, resonating with the broader calls for reform. In GE15, however, the media landscape evolved to encompass a more fragmented and polarised discourse. The emergence of identity politics and coalition-building significantly shaped media narratives. Unlike GE14, where narratives focused on a binary opposition between the ruling coalition and opposition, GE15 witnessed a hung parliament and the rise of multiple political blocs, including the Islamic party PAS, which capitalised on religious sentiments to sway voter preferences.

This shift was reflected in how different media platforms framed the election—mainstream media focused on political instability and coalition negotiations, while social media became a powerful battleground where participatory propaganda thrived. On Twitter, for example, the use of hashtags and user-generated content shaped public opinion dynamically, reflecting broader national sentiments and increasing political engagement (Asmolov, 2019). Moreover, the role of digital platforms in GE15 exemplified a move towards decentralized media, where influencers and ordinary users played significant roles in shaping the narrative. Unlike GE14, where traditional media maintained significant control over discourse, GE15 saw social media platforms like Twitter and TikTok become primary spaces for political discourse. These platforms facilitated a diverse range of voices, often engaging in identity-based politics and economic concerns, reflecting the complexities of a post-COVID-19 political climate (Rambukkana, 2015).

Additionally, media framing during GE15 placed more emphasis on coalition-building and voter sentiments around political instability, as no single party secured a majority, necessitating cross-party negotiations. This was evident in studies examining online media coverage, which demonstrated how different media outlets like *The Star* and *Free Malaysia Today* catered to distinct voter demographics, tailoring their messages to reflect either establishment views or more progressive, reformist perspectives.

Thus, the relationship between social media, media framing, and public diplomacy significantly influenced political discourse and public opinion during Malaysia's elections. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for analysing election outcomes and developing effective communication strategies in the digital age. GE15 not only marked a transformative moment for Malaysia, but also underscored the essential role of media—particularly platforms like Twitter—in shaping democratic dialogue (Chinnasamy & Roslan, 2015).

Recent technological advancements have enabled society to create and share news, allowing individuals to document and broadcast events in real time using smartphones and social media. Bernama's active involvement in framing issues and disseminating information highlights its centrality in Malaysia's media landscape. By contributing to the democratic process of GE15, Bernama underscored the significance of media in shaping public opinion and influencing the political landscape in this critical electoral period. This study stands out for its innovative approach in examining the intersection of media framing, social media, and political discourse during Malaysia's GE15. The use of Bernama's active role on Twitter offers a novel perspective on how a major government-linked news agency engages with digital platforms to influence public opinion. Unlike traditional analyses that focus primarily on content published in mainstream media, this research explores the dynamics of media framing through real-time interactions and participatory narratives that shape election discourse.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review provides key insights that guide the study's research questions and methodology, particularly in understanding the impact of social media on political discourse and electoral outcomes. The review emphasises the growing influence of platforms like Twitter, which have become essential tools for shaping voter sentiment, especially during critical elections like GE14 and GE15. Scholars highlight how social media, particularly Twitter, transformed political communication by enabling direct engagement between politicians and voters, thus shaping public opinion. This informs the study's primary research question regarding how social media influenced public opinion and electoral outcomes during GE15, with a focus on the role of media framing in this process.

Additionally, the literature on media framing provides a theoretical foundation for analysing how political messages are constructed and communicated. Studies on framing techniques underscore the role of media in shaping public perception, especially during elections. This is central to the study's secondary research question, which examines the framing techniques used by political parties and media outlets during GE15. The literature suggests that content analysis is an effective methodology for identifying and categorising the frames used in tweets and political messages, helping the study explore the different narratives that shaped voter perceptions and influenced political discourse.

The literature highlights the use of comparative media analysis and sentiment analysis to assess how traditional and new media outlets influenced both domestic and international audiences. The literature provides a comprehensive framework for the study's research questions and supports the selection of methodologies that will explore

the intricate dynamics of social media, media framing, and public diplomacy in the Malaysian electoral context.

### *Social media and Malaysian politics*

The political landscape of Malaysia has undergone a significant transformation due to the rise and advancement of social media platforms. These platforms have shaped political engagement by influencing individuals both directly and through their social networks, including posts by politicians they follow, and opinions shared by their peers (Hassim et al., 2020). An important moment in this shift occurred during the 2008 General Election (GE12), which marked the rise of social media as a powerful force in Malaysian political discourse. Before GE12, social media platforms were relatively inactive but they quickly became dynamic outlets for political expression and information sharing. Muniandy and Muniandy (2013) as well as Willnat et al. (2013) emphasised the significant role of blogs, social networking sites, and online forums in fostering political dialogue and citizen engagement. GE12 marked the beginning of internet-based political communication, with both traditional and new media playing critical roles.

During GE13, social media's influence was nurtured significantly, especially among young, urban voters (Sern & Zanuddin, 2014). This shift became even more pronounced in the 2018 General Election (GE14), when Pakatan Harapan (PH) secured a historic victory over Barisan Nasional (BN), marking a major political transformation in Malaysia. Social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp became fundamental tools for political mobilisation (Vermeer et al., 2020), with the rise of smartphones and broader internet access further fuelling online political discourse. The election campaign demonstrated the strategic use of social media to reshape traditional campaigning methods (Noviani et al., 2019). GE14 marked the end of six decades of BN coalition rule, with PH's successful social media campaign, particularly on Twitter, playing a critical role in influencing political discussions and voter behaviour. Despite concerns about misinformation, political leaders increasingly embraced social media as their primary communication channel.

Twitter's influence reached far beyond Malaysia, with politicians, journalists, and the public all using the platform to engage in political discourse (Noviani et al., 2019). Its importance became evident during GE12 when the opposition effectively used social media to challenge the ruling BN coalition's dominance. In the subsequent elections, particularly GE13 and GE14, social media—especially Twitter—played a central role in shaping the outcome. The success of the PH coalition in GE14 showed how powerful Twitter was in influencing voter sentiment. Although there are ongoing debates about the accuracy and reliability of information on social media, Twitter remains a crucial tool for political discourse. Understanding its role during elections requires examining how political events, user characteristics, and the platform's design interact (Reese & Shoemaker, 2016).

Furthermore, social media continued to evolve as a force in shaping electoral outcomes in GE12 and GE13. Platforms like blogs, YouTube, and Facebook pages empowered opposition voices and facilitated political discussion. GE15, held in November 2022, marked a significant turning point in Malaysia's electoral history. The emergence of multiple political coalitions, along with the aftermath of GE14, added complexity to the political landscape. GE15 highlighted the ever-changing nature of Malaysian politics,

underlining the necessity for political parties to adapt and innovate to stay relevant. With traditional power structures facing new challenges, parties must take advantage of shifting demographics and new communication channels to remain competitive in an increasingly dynamic political environment.

### *Media framing*

Media framing plays a critical role in shaping public perception across various domains, such as politics, social issues and economics. For media users, understanding how framing works is essential for critically evaluating information and forming well-informed opinions. Iyengar (1991) distinguished between episodic and thematic frames, two fundamental approaches that influence how events are presented to the audience. Similarly, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) identified five core news frames—responsibility, human interest, conflict, morality and economic consequences—that significantly shape audience responses. This highlights the need for refining frame codebooks to capture the complexity and subtleties of media framing in research.

Building on this foundation, Tankard's (2001) frame listing method categorises content into specific and generic issue frames, providing a detailed approach for analysing framing practices. Druckman (2004) highlighted the power of framing in selecting particular aspects of reality to present, thereby influencing how the audience perceives and understands an issue. Matthes and Kohring (2008) expanded on this by outlining the key components of framing: problem characterisation, causal interpretation, evaluation and recovery recommendations. They argued that frames act as symbolic tools that organise and simplify complex issues, helping audiences navigate and comprehend global events. Thus, understanding these framing techniques is essential for media consumers, enabling them to make sense of modern media and form informed perspectives on the world.

In addition to these theoretical insights, media framing has a significant impact on public opinion during political events, such as Malaysian elections. In this context, media framing shapes how election issues and candidates are perceived, making it crucial to analyse these frames to understand their effects on public diplomacy and election outcomes. The selection of frames in news stories is often driven by the need to convey powerful messages or reinforce particular narratives. Exploring the frame-building process is essential, especially in examining how specific perspectives, such as the portrayal of women in politics, are framed (Rajaratnam et al., 2020). In the broader context of international relations, public diplomacy plays an increasingly important role, particularly during elections, as it directly influences Malaysia's image and foreign relations.

Moreover, the role of social media during Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE15) adds another layer of complexity to media framing. Social media has accelerated the dissemination of diverse narratives, contributing to the shaping of political discourse (Taib & Vivian, 2022). Scholars have studied how traditional and social media interact to influence public opinion and political dynamics. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have become key tools in public diplomacy, enabling direct engagement with foreign audiences. This study, therefore, seeks to assess social media's impact on public diplomacy and identify strategies employed in this digital environment. The portrayal of Malaysia in the media also significantly affects foreign perceptions, raising concerns about the integrity of journalism on social media platforms. Thus, understanding the relationship

between framing, trust, and perceptions of truth is essential, particularly in how news was processed on social media during GE15.

## METHODOLOGY

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is a statistical technique used to identify the underlying structure within a dataset by grouping variables into dimensions based on their relationships. This approach simplifies complex datasets by reducing the number of variables into more interpretable dimensions, enabling researchers to better analyse patterns and relationships (Watkins, 2018). In media research, EFA is especially useful for examining how information is organised and conveyed on dynamic platforms like Twitter, where the content is continually evolving. EFA allows researchers to explore dimensions such as political polarisation, governance, and sentiment analysis, which shape how content is framed during specific events, such as elections or politically sensitive situations.

By applying EFA, researchers can examine the underlying constructs affecting media framing, offering a deeper understanding of how social media platforms influence the spread of information and impact public discourse. In studies of media framing on Twitter, Cronbach's Alpha is used alongside EFA to assess the reliability of these dimensions. For example, Ahmad et al. (2021) utilised both Cronbach's Alpha and EFA to evaluate the consistency of variables such as hashtags, emotional tone, and topic relevance during Malaysia's 15th General Election (GE15). This approach confirmed that media framing on Twitter consists of multiple interconnected dimensions, with a high Cronbach's Alpha value indicating robust and reliable framing constructs.

The quantitative content analysis conducted in this study involved converting unstructured data into quantifiable data points. This approach, as highlighted by Snelson (2016), allows for a systematic exploration of patterns, trends and relationships. By categorising variables based on frequency and associations, researchers enhanced the reliability and validity of their findings. Before conducting the reliability test among coders, the researcher analysed the items used to measure news frames. This step was essential for reducing and organising a large dataset into specific constructs aligned with the dependent variables of the research. The aim was to ensure a coherent categorisation of tweets, making it easier to understand how media framing influences public opinion. In contrast to traditional media like print and television, social media platforms like Twitter present unique challenges, including brevity in communication and rapid dissemination of information. These factors often require adjustments during factor rotation to ensure that frames are categorised effectively. This method ensures that frames remain relevant and appropriately reflect the nature of social media content, where hashtags, emotional engagement, and political narratives play critical roles in shaping perceptions.

To facilitate this process, the researcher developed a detailed coding scheme with seven categories: news frame, issues, news tone, news source, commentary, news slant, and Twitter post perspective. These categories provided a structured approach to systematically analyse the data. The coding process began with the creation of a coding book and coding sheets. The coding book defined each category and provided guidelines on how to classify various aspects of tweets, ensuring consistency and clarity in the categorisation. After establishing the coding framework, a pilot test was conducted to identify ambiguities or

inconsistencies. Based on the pilot test, a reliability test was then performed to measure the agreement level between two independent coders.

The reliability scores were exceptionally high, exceeding 0.8 for all main categories, indicating that the coding process was both consistent and reliable. This step ensured that measurement errors were minimised, and the results reflected accurate and robust data. Through EFA and reliability testing, this study maintained strong internal validity and ensured the credibility of the findings. By systematically categorising variables and ensuring coder agreement, researchers could effectively explore media framing dimensions on platforms like Twitter, gaining insights into how political and social narratives are shaped. The findings were validated by these high reliability scores, as shown in Table 1, confirming that the data used in the analysis were robust and trustworthy. These methodological steps ensured the study's internal validity, reinforcing the credibility of the results.

**Table 1.** Intercoder reliability in analysing Bernama's Twitter coverage of Malaysia's 15th Election

No	Category	Coder A & Coder B
1.	News Source	0.99
2.	News Frame	0.98
3.	Commentary	0.98
4.	News Tone	0.96
5.	Issue Context	0.95
6.	Twitter Post	0.95
7.	News Slant	0.72

Table 1 presents the intercoder reliability in analysing Bernama's Twitter coverage of Malaysia's GE15. The analysis focused on various dimensions such as news frame, issue context, news tone, and news source, with high reliability scores reflecting consistent agreement between two coders (Coder A and Coder B). The intercoder reliability analysis of Bernama's Twitter coverage of Malaysia's 15th Election revealed a high degree of consistency between coders in most categories, reflecting the clarity of the coding scheme and the ease with which certain aspects of the coverage can be categorised. The categories with the highest levels of agreement were News Source, News Frame, and Commentary, all of which achieved reliability scores of 0.99, 0.98 and 0.98, respectively. These results indicate that the coders were able to consistently identify the source of the news, the framing of the content and distinguish between objective reporting and subjective commentary. Such high reliability suggests that these elements were definite in the context of Bernama's coverage.

The consistency in categorising News Tone (0.96) and Issue Context (0.95) also highlights the reliability of the coding process. Both categories, while slightly lower than the top-performing categories, still reflect strong agreement between the coders. This suggests that while there may have been some detailed differences in interpreting the tone of the posts and the context in which issues were framed, these categories were still relatively straightforward to classify. The fact that coders agreed on how issues were contextualised in the election coverage shows that the framing of political content was

clear and distinguishable. In contrast, the Twitter Post category, with a reliability score of 0.95, also showed strong consistency. This suggests that the tweets were easy to categorise, likely because they were all from a singular, well-defined source, *Bernama*. The uniformity of the data set, composed exclusively of tweets from a reputable news organisation, likely contributed to the high level of agreement between coders. However, this category's reliability could also be seen as a reflection of the standardised format of Twitter posts, which provides a clear structure that is easily identifiable.

The most notable outlier in the analysis was *News Slant*, which achieved a much lower reliability score of 0.72. This indicates a more subjective element in the coding process, as coders appeared to struggle to agree on the presence and direction of bias or slant in the coverage. The lower score suggests that the concept of slant may be more difficult to define clearly, as it involves a deeper interpretation of the news coverage, potentially influenced by personal or cultural biases. This finding highlights the need for refining the definitions and examples used in coding for news slant, as well as further training for coders to ensure more consistent interpretations.

## FINDINGS

For three months, a total of 1,103 tweets were collected from *Bernama*'s Twitter account using the hashtag #PRU15*Bernama*, covering three distinct phases of the election: before, during and after the election. The majority of these tweets were posted before the election, with 880 tweets, making up 79.8% of the total sample. This reflects *Bernama*'s active role in shaping the pre-election political discourse, where the focus was likely on informing the public, presenting key political narratives, and engaging with voters as the election approached. The high frequency of tweets before the election also suggests that *Bernama* aimed to play a significant role in setting the stage for electoral decisions and guiding discussions around political candidates, parties, and key issues. In contrast, only 24 tweets, or 2.2% of the total were posted during the election itself. This smaller proportion can likely be attributed to the restrictions around media coverage on election days, where media agencies often adopt a more restrained approach, focusing on real-time reporting, live updates and logistical information. *Bernama*'s limited presence during the election suggests that its content strategy shifted to comply with electoral regulations and focused on ensuring accurate, transparent, and timely information during the critical period of voting.

After the election, *Bernama* posted 199 tweets, representing 18% of the total collected. This phase marked a shift towards post-election analysis, where the focus was on reporting the election results, reactions from political leaders, and the political consequences of the election outcome. *Bernama* likely used this phase to help shape public understanding of the election's implications, covering government formation, political negotiations, and responses from both domestic and international stakeholders. The distribution of tweets across the three phases highlights *Bernama*'s adaptive communication strategy, with a strong emphasis on pre-election engagement, a cautious approach during the election and a reflective, results-focused communication strategy in the aftermath.

**Table 2.** Frequency and percentage of tweets by Bernama across three phases in analysing Bernama's Twitter coverage of Malaysia's 15th Election

Phase	Time Frame	Date	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Before GE15	12 <sup>th</sup> October – 18 November 2022	880	79.8
2.	During GE15	19 <sup>th</sup> November 2022	24	2.2
3.	After GE15	20 <sup>th</sup> November – 7th December 2022	199	18
<b>Total</b>			<b>1,103</b>	<b>100</b>

To analyse the use of frames in Bernama's Twitter posts, this research adopted the five generic frames outlined by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). These frames which served as variables in the study provide a structured method to understand how issues are presented to the audience. The analysis of the tweets revealed how different framing techniques were used to shape the narrative and influence public perception. Table 3 presents the distribution of frame attributes across all tweet displays, offering a clear picture of how Bernama employed various framing strategies throughout the election period. The human-interest frame, which focuses on narratives that highlight the personal or emotional involvement of individuals and groups with a particular issue, was the most prevalent in Bernama's tweets. This frame was present in 87.8% of the tweets, totalling 924 occurrences. The dominance of the human-interest frame suggests that Bernama prioritised engaging the audience by focusing on personal stories and human experiences related to political issues.

This approach can help humanise complex political events, making them more relatable and emotionally engaging for the audience, which is crucial in shaping public sentiment and fostering voter engagement. The responsibility frame, which assigns responsibility to specific individuals, organisations, or levels of government for addressing an issue, was also widely used but less frequent than the human-interest frame. It appeared in 52.1% of the tweets, accounting for 548 occurrences. This frame likely served to highlight the role of various political figures, parties, or institutions in resolving key issues, which could help clarify the political stakes for the audience. By assigning accountability, the responsibility frame can guide public perception of who is responsible for certain outcomes, thereby influencing voter behaviour and political discourse. By using these frames, Bernama effectively shaped the narrative around the election, steering the public's understanding of political events and reinforcing its influence over the discourse.

**Table 3.** Frequency and percentage for frame attribute statements

Framing	Attribute Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Human Interest</b>	1. A narrative that gives an example of a human being or a human face on an issue.	716	68.1
	2. Narratives that use adjectives or personal backgrounds that generate feelings of anger, empathy, compassion, sympathy, and compassion.	235	22.3
	3. A narrative that emphasises how individuals and groups are involved with an issue or problem.	924	87.8
	4. A narrative that takes place directly in one's personal life.	152	14.4
	5. The narrative contains visual information that may generate feelings of anger, empathy, affection, sympathy, or compassion.	220	20.9

**Table 3. (con't)**

<b>Framing</b>	<b>Attribute Item</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Responsibility</b>	1. These narrative states that there are several levels of government or organisation that have a responsibility to alleviate the problem.	28	2.7
	2. These narrative states that there are several levels of government or organisation responsible for an issue or problem.	548	52.1
	3. This narrative suggests a solution to an issue or problem.	175	16.6
	4. This narrative suggests that an individual or group in society is responsible for an issue or problem.	233	22.1
	5. This narrative suggests that immediate action should be taken on the problem.	30	2.9
<b>Conflict</b>	1. This narrative reflects disagreements between various parties or parties, individuals, groups, or countries	55	5.2
	2. A parties, individuals, groups, or nations that criticize each other.	25	2.4
	3. A narrative that refers to two or more sides of an issue or problem.	58	5.5
	4. A narrative that refers to the winning party or the losing party.	8	0.8
<b>Morality</b>	1. A narrative that contains any moral message.	18	1.7
	2. This narrative refers to morality, divinity, and the pillars of other religions.	15	1.4
	3. Narrative that offers specific social direction on how to act.	20	1.9
<b>Economic Consequences</b>	1. There is mention of loss or profit (financial) in the present or future.	5	0.5
	2. There is mention of the cost or level of expenditure involved.	5	0.5
	3. There are references to economic effects whether following or not following the course of action.	19	1.8

To ensure the reliability of the measures used in the study, Cronbach's alpha was applied as an assessment tool. This statistical method helps determine the internal consistency of the instrument, essentially measuring how reliably the scale captures the concept under investigation. Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.00 to 1.00, with higher values indicating stronger reliability. In this study, Cronbach's alpha values were used to evaluate the reliability of five different news framing scales, which were crucial in assessing how consistently Bernama's tweets aligned with each frame. The analysis, as shown in Table 4, provides valuable insights into the stability of these scales across the tweets collected during the study.

The results from the pilot test indicate varying levels of reliability among the different framing scales. The morality frame achieved an excellent Cronbach's alpha value of 0.909, which is considered very strong, indicating that the items related to this frame were highly consistent in measuring the intended concept. This suggests that the morality frame in the dataset was reliable and stable across different observations. On the other hand, the conflict frame had a solid Cronbach's alpha of 0.754, which is generally regarded as acceptable and indicates good consistency. These two frames demonstrate the

effectiveness of the measures used for these constructs. Meanwhile, the human-interest frame scored a moderate Cronbach's alpha of 0.676, reflecting reasonable consistency, though slightly lower than the previous two frames. The economic consequences frame achieved a satisfactory score of 0.571, suggesting moderate reliability, but with room for improvement. Lastly, the responsibility frame had the lowest Cronbach's alpha of 0.507. While this still falls within the acceptable range (0.5 to 0.7), it indicates the lowest level of internal consistency among the frames. According to Hinton et al. (2004), a Cronbach's alpha in this range is typically interpreted as showing moderate reliability. These findings, which were obtained after performing the exploratory factor analysis, reflect the varying levels of reliability across the different frames and provide an understanding of how well each framing scale functioned in measuring the intended concepts during the study.

**Table 4.** Reliability analysis for media frame in Bernama's Twitter coverage of Malaysia's 15th Election

Variables	No of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Morality Frame	3	0.909
Conflict Frame	3	0.754
Human Interest	3	0.676
Economic Consequences Frame	3	0.571
Responsibility Frame	4	0.507

Before conducting the reliability test among coders, the researchers first analysed the items intended for measuring news frames. This step aimed to organise a large number of items into a specific construct under one dependent variable. Although a similar test had been conducted in previous research on print and television media in Europe, the researcher opted to perform it again due to the unique context and medium of tweets. The factor analysis was crucial in identifying common factors influencing the observed variables and reducing the complexity of the data (Watkins, 2018). It enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying constructs or dimensions being measured. Factor analysis involves exploring the data to determine the number of factors needed to represent the research data effectively.

This analysis considered various criteria, including the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, item load, eigenvalues, and the percentage of variance (Hair et al., 2006). The KMO test assessed whether the items were suitable for factor analysis, indicating a KMO value of 0.679, which suggests that the data was suitable. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity showed significant correlations among the items, supporting the adequacy of item correlations for factor analysis. Factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted, and seven components with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were extracted. This approach is commonly used in research to simplify complex data by identifying underlying factors that contribute to the variance in the dataset (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Field, 2013). By using varimax rotation, the factors are made more interpretable, aiding in the identification of distinct dimensions that contribute meaningfully to the study.

The eigenvalues represent the amount of variance captured by each factor, with

higher values indicating greater significance. In this dataset, the first eigenvalue is 2.943, followed by 2.546, 1.952, 1.647, and 1.444, suggesting that the first two factors explain the most variance. Correspondingly, the percentages of varimax explained reveal the proportion of total variance accounted for by each factor, with the first two factors explaining 13.182% and 11.197% respectively, while the subsequent factors account for diminishing percentages of variance. These findings indicate that the first two factors are the most influential in explaining the underlying structure of the data, suggesting they should be prioritised in further analyses or interpretations. Items with factor loadings below 0.30 were excluded to maintain strong internal validity, resulting in modifications to the number of items in the human-interest and responsibility frame constructs, with 17 out of the initial 20 items retained for assessing Twitter news frames related to GE15 updates at Bernama. These findings emphasise the prioritisation of the first two factors in further analyses or interpretations.

**Table 5.** Factor loading for media frames following the principal component analysis

Framing Factor Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = 0.679 Bartlett's Test of Sphericity; df = 190, p = 0.00	Factor				
	M	HI	C	R	EC
Framing Item	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Morality (M)</b>					
A narrative that contains any moral message.	.899				
This narrative refers to morality, divinity, and the pillars of other religions.	.863				
Narrative that offers specific social direction on how to act.	.856				
<b>Human Interest (HI)</b>					
A narrative that gives an example of a human being or a human face on an issue.		.399			
Narratives that use adjectives or personal backgrounds that generate feelings of anger, empathy, compassion, sympathy, and compassion.		.927			
A narrative that emphasises how individuals and groups are involved with an issue or problem.					
A narrative that takes place directly in one's personal life.					
The narrative contains visual information that may generate feelings of anger, empathy, affection, sympathy, or compassion.		.884			
<b>Conflict (C)</b>					
This narrative reflects disagreements between various parties or parties, individuals, groups, or countries.			.759		
A parties, individuals, groups, or nations that criticize each other.			.527		
A narrative that refers to two or more sides of an issue or problem.			.828		
A narrative that refers to the winning party or the losing party.					

**Table 5.** (con't)

Framing Factor Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = 0.679 Bartlett's Test of Sphericity; df = 190, p = 0.00	Factor				
	M 1	HI 2	C 3	R 4	EC 5
<b>Framing Item</b>					
<b>Responsibility (R)</b>					
These narrative states that there are several levels of government or organization that have a responsibility to alleviate the problem.				.368	
These narrative states that there are several levels of government or organization responsible for an issue or problem.				.533	
This narrative suggests a solution to an issue or problem.				.609	
This narrative suggests that an individual or group in society is responsible for an issue or problem.				.446	
This narrative suggests that immediate action should be taken on the problem.					
<b>Economic Consequences (EC)</b>					
There is mention of loss or profit (financial) in the present or future.					.484
There is mention of the cost or level of expenditure involved.					.479
There are references to economic effects whether following or not following the course of action.					.823

## CONCLUSION

The research findings provide valuable insights into Bernama's use of Twitter during Malaysia's 15th General Election, revealing how the news agency strategically framed political discourse to engage the public. The study based on over 1,103 tweets collected over three months, highlights key patterns in tweet frequency and timing. Particularly, the majority of tweets were posted before the election, suggesting a high level of engagement and anticipation in the lead-up to the electoral event. This emphasises the importance of timing in political communication and demonstrates how news agencies can influence public discourse by shaping the narrative well in advance of an election.

By exploring the content of these tweets, the study uncovers the framing strategies employed by Bernama, with a particular focus on the human-interest and responsibility frames. The dominance of the human-interest frame, which emphasises the involvement of individuals and groups in political issues, indicates a concerted effort to connect with audiences on a personal level, thereby humanising the election process. This strategy is likely to foster a deeper emotional connection with voters, making the issues at stake more relatable. The prominence of the responsibility frame, on the other hand, suggests an emphasis on accountability and the attribution of responsibility for political outcomes, an important aspect of shaping public opinion and ensuring that political actors are held accountable for their actions.

The reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha enhances confidence in the study's

findings by demonstrating the stability and consistency of the framing measures employed. The high-reliability coefficients for most of the frames suggest that the results are both robust and trustworthy. The lower Cronbach's Alpha scores for some frames, such as the responsibility frame (0.507), raise concerns about reliability. According to Hair et al. (2006), a Cronbach's Alpha score below 0.60 indicates low reliability, suggesting that the scale may not consistently measure the intended construct. Meanwhile, Taber (2018) mentioned alpha values were reasonable (0.67–0.87) and acceptable (0.45–0.98). In this context, the responsibility frame's low reliability may stem from inconsistencies in how items are measured or the variability in responses related to the accountability of political figures and institutions. These findings point to the need for further refinement of the items used to assess the responsibility frame to improve its consistency and reliability.

Additionally, EFA enriches the analysis by identifying the underlying dimensions or factors contributing to the variation in framing patterns. Through EFA, the study refines our understanding of how different framing elements interact and influence political discourse. By extracting relevant factors and adjusting frame constructs based on factor loadings, the analysis provides a deeper understanding of how framing strategies shape overall political narratives. These combined insights are crucial for understanding the dynamics of political communication in the digital age and will guide future studies on media framing. To explore Bernama's Twitter coverage of Malaysia's GE15 (#PRU15Bernama), EFA was employed to examine the underlying dimensions influencing media framing. By utilising the principal component method and applying varimax rotation, seven distinct factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were extracted.

This method is widely used to simplify complex data and identify significant dimensions that explain the variance within the dataset (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Field, 2013). The results show that the first two factors accounted for a substantial proportion of the total variance (13.182% and 11.197%, respectively), highlighting their importance in shaping the underlying structure of the data. These findings align with established media framing theories, which emphasise how specific dimensions, such as human interest and responsibility frames, play a crucial role in guiding public perception and influencing political communication (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). By focusing on these factors, Bernama effectively shaped election narratives and engaged with its audience, reflecting the strategic use of framing in political discourse.

The findings of this research are not only crucial for understanding Bernama's role in shaping public discourse during the election but also offer significant implications for future election coverage and framing studies. Journalists, policymakers, and researchers can draw upon these insights to better understand how framing strategies influence political narratives and voter perceptions. By paying closer attention to timing, content, and the use of framing, future election coverage can be more strategically designed to engage voters, enhance political dialogue, and foster a more informed electorate. Additionally, this study provides a foundation for future research on media framing, offering a methodological framework that can be applied to other contexts and elections.

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# Communicative discourses and ideological practices in Indonesia's digital political spheres

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## ABSTRACT

Discursive spaces are necessary for maintaining democratic politics. Media serves as one of the key components in attempting to preserve the sanity of democracy and protect it from oligarchic practices entrenched in many political parties and the Indonesian government. The present research is aimed at understanding the representation of deliberative democracy in the public sphere by analysing the podcasts presented in the *Akbar Faizal Uncensored (AFU)* YouTube channel and examining the ideological practices that unfold in the podcasts. This study employed the qualitative method and critical paradigm approach while applying John Fiske's semiotic analysis, with a focus on texts obtained from the AFU podcast. This podcast represents a possible case of deliberative democracy in practice. According to Jurgen Habermas, deliberative democracy pertains to all public policies carried out and legitimated through discourses held in public spheres. The YouTube podcasts of AFU have the potential to represent deliberative democracy as intended by its mission. The research findings suggest that although the AFU YouTube podcasts can indeed represent democracy, these podcasts cannot be considered representations of deliberations (deliberative democracy) in a comprehensive manner since no legitimacy was reached at the end of the discussions. The AFU YouTube podcasts are by no means an unadulterated public sphere, yet they can function as a conduit between public spheres in communities and the authority, which in this case, is the government.

Keywords: ***Discourse, deliberative-communicative, representation-ideology, digital public sphere***

## INTRODUCTION

The most widely used social media platform in Indonesia today is YouTube, a video-on-demand application utilised by 88% of Indonesian internet users between the ages of 16 to 64 in 2020 (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2020). One of the rapidly growing content formats on YouTube is the podcast format, which initially came in the form of audio recordings and is now largely packaged in a video format to increase its appeal and expand its audience (Sharon, 2023). Initially, podcasts were only available on platforms such as iTunes and Spotify, as well as some websites (Pérez-Alaejos et al., 2022). However, the potential of this media format extends beyond entertainment and art; it is also increasingly influential in news reporting and political discussions. A significant number of news-oriented podcast programs release episodes daily, some even multiple times a day, discussing current political situations and global affairs in a variety of formats, including news reports, interviews with political figures, and political commentaries (Dowling et al., 2022).

The consolidation of podcasts within the YouTube platform has resulted in a unique media phenomenon. Content creators now produce podcasts in audio-video formats and publish them via their personal YouTube channels. This integration has not only made podcasts more visually engaging, but has also expanded their audience reach and monetisation potential (Sullivan, 2019). As a social media platform, YouTube podcasts can function as a digital public sphere where audiences not only receive information, but also engage in discussions through comments and interactions. From the perspective of the traditional public sphere theory, podcasting presents an opportunity to reclaim the discursive potential of mass media (Sienkiewicz & Jaramillo, 2019). Further, studies indicate a positive correlation between social media use and civic engagement as well as political participation (Boulianne et al., 2022).

According to Habermas et al. (1974), public sphere is an arena where citizens can discuss political issues rationally and critically with neither state intervention nor economic interests. The digital public sphere is considered as a transformation of this concept, wherein social media platforms have the potential to create more inclusive spaces for discourse (Dommett & Verovšek, 2021; Sakariassen, 2020). However, a number of studies show that the digital public sphere still encounters challenges such as the dominance of certain actors, commodification of information, and algorithm bias that affect the distribution of discourses (Jungherr & Schroeder, 2021; Palau-Sampio & Lopez-Garcia, 2022). Nevertheless, the digital public sphere serves as a forum for dialogue between state and citizens amidst the lack of communication transpiring in formal spaces and mainstream media.

An understanding of digital public sphere helps to analyse potentially influential public opinions (Dahlberg & Mancewicz, 2021). Social media presents the public with opportunities to voice their opinions in the democratisation process. The concept of digital public sphere was developed to supplement or even replace the traditional public sphere, which had become a substantial part of modern democracy (Schäfer, 2015). In the last decade, the digital public sphere has gained dominance in Indonesia's political discourse. This is due to the fact that out of 274.9 million Indonesians, as many as 170 million (61.8% of the total population) were active social media users in 2021 (Kemp, 2021). Social media has become a medium for political communication between the state

and its citizens, where political debates emerge on social media, including YouTube. This is the underlying reason for conducting a study that seeks to examine how the digital public sphere functions in the context of political podcasts on YouTube, with a case study of the *Akbar Faizal Uncensored* (AFU) channel.

Although some scholars recognise the potential of the digital public sphere, they also caution that it may not fully embody an ideal public sphere conducive to democratisation. Economic interests and commercialisation have influenced modern public spheres, co-opting them into bureaucratic structures (Giannelos, 2023). Nonetheless, social media platforms provide a space for individuals to express their opinions and contribute to democratic processes. The rise of the digital public sphere has attracted academic interest in recent years, as it has been conceptualised as either a complement to or a replacement for the traditional public sphere, which has long been a cornerstone of modern democracy (Schäfer, 2015). Democracy is fundamentally based on the right of citizens to express their opinions, choose their ideology, and respect differing viewpoints. Freedom of expression is a core liberal and democratic principle, provided it adheres to legal boundaries. Additionally, political participation is crucial to democratic governance, as it influences public legitimacy and governmental accountability (Nuna & Moonti, 2019).

Deliberative democracy is a theory of democratic legitimacy that emphasises the exchange of public arguments among free and equal citizens. Developed in the late 1980s and 1990s, it serves as an alternative to aggregative democracy, which primarily derives legitimacy from the aggregation of votes in elections (Landemore, 2017). This study examines how deliberative democracy is represented and how ideological practices are constructed within the digital public sphere, as exemplified by the AFU YouTube podcasts.

The selection of the AFU Youtube podcast as the research object is based on its relevance as a prominent political podcast channel in Indonesia. The channel is affiliated with the Nagara Institute, an NGO founded by Akbar Faizal, a former member of the Indonesian House of Representatives (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Republik Indonesia – DPR-RI*) during the 2014–2019 period. Launched on September 21, 2020, the channel is hosted by Akbar Faizal himself and aims to provide political literacy to the public, aligning with Nagara Institute's vision of promoting a legal and democratic state system that upholds human dignity. According to Dandy Hakim Pradana, the person in charge of the channel's production, AFU podcasts strive to educate the public on political matters.

The topic on Jokowi's potential third term as the president of the Republic of Indonesia was chosen on account of its implications on principles of democracy, political stability, and the role of the media in creating public discourse and political narrative in Indonesia. The episode under study was selected based on its course of discussion, which particularly highlighted efforts made to push Jokowi to run for a third term, which is an act that goes against the basic principles of democracy outlined in the 1945 Constitution. This idea not only violates ethics of democracy, but also reflects a basic logical fallacy. The group that raised this discourse disregarded the principle stating that the leadership in Indonesia's democratic system must comply with constitutional boundaries (Akbar Faizal Uncensored podcast, 2021).

Accordingly, the current study is aimed at addressing the following key questions: (1) How did representation of deliberative democracy emerge in the discourses on the

AFU YouTube podcast? (2) How was ideological practice formed within the digital public sphere represented by the said channel?

This study is expected to provide new insights regarding how the digital public sphere functions within the Indonesian political context and the implication it has on deliberative democracy in the digital era.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Digital public sphere*

The concept of public sphere, developed by Jürgen Habermas and his team (1974), emphasises the significance of a discursive arena where individuals are able to discuss political issues rationally without state intervention and economic interests. In the digital era, public sphere has undergone a significant transformation, given the advent of various social media platforms allowing more extensive participation in the formation of political discourse (Schäfer, 2015). YouTube, as one of the largest video-based social media platforms, serves as a primary medium for political discussions in various countries, including Indonesia (Gil-Ramírez et al., 2020; Masadeh & Hamilton, 2023; Santoso et al., 2020).

The assumption that new media can augment democracy is based on the alignment between the features of new media and democracy. Equality, recognition of differences, freedom, participation, and protection of fundamental human rights reflect democracy. These democratic values are manifested in the new media, which opens free spheres (even unlimited at times), provides equality as support, and freedom. Each individual even has his/her respective independence as a content producer. The presence of the internet today has significantly driven the process of democratic deepening in social institutions, which results in people being able to appear fully as *demos* (the populace) (Jati, 2016). Yet, there is a great challenge in ensuring that the digital public sphere does indeed support rational and constructive deliberations.

Counter perspectives indicate that the digital public sphere does not necessarily reflect the idealism of deliberative democracy as Habermas suggested. Some studies indicate that the algorithm of digital platforms is more likely to reinforce polarisation by presenting echo chambers and filter bubbles, where users are more frequently exposed to information that reinforces their political preference (Kobellarz et al., 2022; Vasist et al., 2023). In the context of Indonesia, the political discourses that develop in the digital public sphere are often saturated with disinformation, biased media framing, and involvement of political actors with particular interests (Lim, 2017).

According to Schäfer (2015), the potential emergence of digital public sphere has been conceptualised by many scholars as a complement of, or even replacement for, the previously known “old” public sphere, as a crucial element of modern democracy (2015). Habermas posits that the public sphere is a key prerequisite of deliberative democracy (Schmitt-Beck, 2022; Seeliger & Sevignani, 2022). There are two conditions that need to be met as a public sphere, namely being free and being critical (Haliim, 2016). These two conditions are further elaborated by Cohen and Fung (2023) as a fair and ideal conversation situation requiring three formal conditions, i.e., inclusivity, freedom of coercion, dominance and intimidation, as well as symmetric and open deliberative procedure (Permana, 2019). However, in practice, the digital public sphere is often confronted by challenges that obstruct the unfolding of open and rational discussions.

The public sphere in the digital context, discussed in the current research, positions the public as the wielder of communicative power that is not entirely autonomous. Anonymity in the comment's column and the possibility of buzzers (*pendengung*, is an Indonesian term that refers to a person who attempts to influence public opinion to align with their cause) frequently appearing reinforce echo chambers and become toxic substance that polarises public discourse (Gusti, 2021). Further, public sphere in the form of a social media account, has a vested interest to enlarge its followers, subscribers, and viewers to achieve its purpose of creating the account, which may be both political and financially profitable. This also results in a gap between what is expected from the concept of public sphere as Habermas suggested with the actual reality unfolding in the current digital era. Nevertheless, the digital public sphere still allows responsive interactions and easy access for the state to receive information relating to public opinions.

### *Jurgen Habermas' deliberative democracy*

Deliberative democracy is, essentially, a legitimation process of a policy or political decision by means of rational consent by engaging in a discussion, i.e., authentic in-depth deliberations from and by various parties of interests or those who are impacted by the said policy or political decision (Habermas, 2015). According to the Habermasian perspective, an emancipatory community remains unattainable unless sustainable efforts are made to achieve a solid democratic format based on deliberative power embedded within the people's communicative capacity (Susen, 2018).

Deliberative democracy is a theory of democratic legitimacy that peruses laws and policies of the authority into exchanges of public arguments among free and equal citizens. Deliberative democracy is an alternative to the previously dominant theory of aggregative democracy, wherein democratic legitimacy is solely derived from the aggregation of votes in a free and fair election pitting one elite against others (Bernholz et al., 2021). Most experts on the theory of deliberative democracy follow the Habermasian aspiration of "public sphere" and accentuate the heterogeneity of groups engaged in deliberative discussions to ensure the diversity of arguments presented and to include demographically representative populace in reaching an optimal decision (Perna, 2017).

Habermas believes that social interactions in the society are rational in nature because these interactions constitute actions oriented toward achieving a consensus (Hardiman, 2019). Communicative acts refer to actions aimed at efforts to comprehend or achieve mutual understanding to reach an intersubjectively acceptable consensus about a specific condition for producing a design and coordinating mutually agreed actions (Littlejohn et al., 2017). To reach an agreement towards a consensus, Habermas (1985) posits that all communication activities occurring in the public sphere should be oriented toward a performative stance of the world (Hardiman, 2019). There are four kinds of validity claim that may be conducted by actors of the communicative action theory (Setyowati, 2016), namely:

1. **Propositional truth:** This kind of claim is a representation of several conditions in the objective and natural world.
2. **Normative rightness:** Statement claiming that several (actual or possible) conditions in the social sphere are right and are expected to be a consensus for the implementation of the inherent norms.

3. **Subjective sincerity/truthfulness:** Agreement on the alignment between one's expression and spiritual realm. This claim emphasises certain subjective conditions of the speaker in their case.
4. **Comprehensibility:** This claim is attainable once the prior three claims can be explained by the subject.

Through the theory of communicative action, Habermas suggests that effective communication is one that achieves the fourth claim, and the communicating actor can, thus, be said to have acquired "communication competence". Ideally speaking, free and rational discourse takes place in communicative action until such informed consensus regarding the inquired validity claim (comprehensibility) is achieved, although Habermas admits that progress toward such a consensus is seldom achieved in actual practice. Therefore, the current study not only examined the function of digital public sphere in the context of political podcast, but it also analysed how the concept of deliberative democracy and communicative action posited by Habermas can be applied in the digital era, which continues to develop in Indonesia.

## METHODS

### *Critical paradigm in semiotic analysis*

This research employed critical paradigm, a qualitative approach, and the semiotic analysis method. Critical paradigm is employed to understand and criticise power structure, ideology, and discursive inequality in digital political discourses (KhosraviNik, 2023). In the digital context, this space experiences distortion through set algorithm, political interests, and media framing (Almuqren, 2023). Thus, the study critically analysed how digital public sphere functions in political podcasts and how ideological elements work in digital deliberations to maintain discursive space.

The study adopted John Fiske's (2010) social semiotic approach to analyse visual and verbal texts in political podcasts. Fiske's semiotics enables analysis of meaning production and negotiation through codes of reality, representation, and ideology (Vera, 2014). Elements like narratives, visual expressions, host-source interactions, and visual data form part of deeper meaning analyses. The study aimed to identify how the AFU discourse construction affects deliberative democracy in the digital public sphere.

John Fiske's semiotics enables analysis of various symbols and linguistic models that are productive, creative, transformative, subversive, and anarchic (Pah & Darmastuti, 2019). Three levels of social codes encode audio-visual broadcasts:

1. **Reality Level:** Events encoded as visible reality, including appearance, attire, background, behaviour, conversation, gesture, voice, expression, and documents or interview transcripts.
2. **Representation Level:** Reality encoded electronically through technical codes like cameras, lighting, editing, music, and sound effects. In written form, this includes words, sentences, photos, graphs, and propositions.
3. **Ideology Level:** Elements organised into ideological codes such as patriarchy, individualism, race, class, materialism, and capitalism. These ideologies are typically represented within the reality construct (Vera, 2014).

### *Selection of subject and object of study*

*Akbar Faizal Uncensored* (AFU) YouTube podcast was selected as the object of study based on the following considerations. First, this channel is well-known for its data-based approach in presenting political discourses, which can enrich the dynamics of digital public sphere compared to other podcasts that are more opinionated. Second, AFU boasts credibility as a channel that features political figures, academicians, and experts who present their perspectives based on rational arguments. Lastly, this channel has a high level of interaction in every episode, in terms of both number of comments and level of audience engagement, indicating public participation in digital political discussions.

To reiterate, the study examined the podcast episode titled “*Karena Covid-19, Pantaskah Jokowi 3 Periode?*” (Because of COVID-19, Should Jokowi Run for a Third Term?) due to its relevance with issues of democracy and the discourse of extending the president’s term in office, which had been a heated public debate in Indonesia. This episode presented discussions about the impact that the pandemic had on political stability and the potential of democratic manipulation through amendments to the constitution. Accordingly, this episode served as the most fitting case study to analyse how digital public sphere represents deliberative democracy in the context of Indonesian politics.

### *Data collection and analysis procedure*

In addition to the data collected from the aforementioned video recording from the AFU YouTube channel, an interview with the channel producer, Dandy Hakim Pradana, served as secondary data to understand the discourse production and framing, while also facilitating data triangulation.

Data analysis comprised three qualitative stages:

1. **Data reduction:** Selecting and simplifying data to identify relevant meaning patterns.
2. **Data presentation:** Organising data through descriptions and tables to reveal discursive correlations.
3. **Drawing conclusion:** Interpreting findings through critical paradigm and theoretical frameworks.

These stages formed a sequential analytical process over eight months from May to December 2021.

To ensure validity and objectivity, three strategies were implemented: data triangulation comparing semiotic analysis with literature on deliberative democracy in digital media (Gunawan, 2017); contextual analysis of audience responses through YouTube comments; and member checking involving digital media experts and academics to review the analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The criteria for episode selection referred to aspects of deliberative democracy in the concepts, i.e., discussing political policy discourse that has quite a significant impact on the public through rational discourse as a deliberative procedure by prioritising sources from outside the government to represent social groups. The episode titled “*Karena COVID-19, Pantaskah Jokowi 3 Periode?*” (Because of COVID-19, is Jokowi worthy of

a third [presidential] term?) was aired on the September 20, 2021 and had been viewed 13,343 times with as many as 291 comments. This episode discusses the discourse regarding a third presidential term for Jokowi by presenting two opposing arguments from two sources or podcast guests, namely Baron Danardono Wibowo who was the General Chair of the JOKPRO 2024 Community, the main advocate of the Jokowi 3-term idea, and the opposing discussant, Hendri Satrio, founder of a survey institute known as KEDAI KOPI (*Kelompok Diskusi dan Kajian Opini Publik Indonesia* – Indonesia Public Opinion Study and Discussion Group) that disputed three terms for Jokowi.

### Discussion 1



Source: Akbar Faizal Uncensored YouTube channel (<https://youtu.be/9EFrESsiY8>)

**Figure 1.** Communicative action

In Discussion 1, Baron Danardono Wibowo can be seen conveying his argument in response to a question raised by Akbar Faizal: *What is the logical argument given by the JOKPRO side for proposing the idea of a third presidential term?* At the reality level, the behaviour code suggests that Baron Danardono Wibowo sitting cross-legged during the dialogue implies a dominant characteristic and commanding prominence so that his words are accepted by his interlocutors. While at the representation level, the camera scene was taken by using a full shot technique with the intention of providing a full frame of the speaker to explicate his argument. In terms of the dialogue code, the statement made by Baron Danardono Wibowo is as follows:

*Number one, our constitution is not something that is a taboo to change, things that we cannot change are the principles of state, the form of the state, apart from that it is possible, so long as the logical basis is solid, the reason is solid.*

By making an assessment using validity claims, the words in the dialogue code can be categorised as truth claim. At the ideological level, Baron Danardono Wibowo

is portrayed as giving precedence to individual rights rather than the constitution. This is apparent in the dialogue which indicates that citizens can suggest changes to the constitution so long as the principles and form of the state are not amended.

### *Discussion 2*



Source: Akbar Faizal Uncensored YouTube channel (<https://youtu.be/9EFrESsiY8>)

**Figure 2.** Communicative action

Based on Figure 2 which shows Discussion 2, the semiotic analysis of static code indications using John Fiske's three semiotic levels reveals the following. Two codes can be deciphered at the reality level. First, the dress/ appearance code, wherein all three discussants are wearing collared shirts to show neatness and mutual respect among them, with a nuance of sporting casual attire, indicating that the audience targeted by Akbar Faizal Uncensored is not under any specific category. Second, the environment code, which shows that the room setting is designed to imitate a comfortable living room with a big screen television on the wall displaying the logo of the Akbar Faizal Uncensored YouTube podcast, as well as Akbar Faizal sitting equidistantly between the two source persons in the room, intending to give the impression that a fruitful discussion or conversation is about to take place in that room.

At the representation level, for the lighting code, the lighting in the room is set as a soft key with the main lighting coming from the ceiling light, which not only creates a comfortable atmosphere, but is also meant to avoid interference with the display light coming from the television on the wall. At the ideological level, the static code analysis indicates the presence of class liberalism ideology in which the AFU YouTube podcast attempts to position itself as a better political podcast than other podcasts, while also placing individual equality and freedom along with inclusivism as a representation of the digital public sphere.

### Discussion 3



Source: Akbar Faizal Uncensored YouTube channel (<https://youtu.be/9EFrESsiY8>)

**Figure 3.** Communicative action

Figure 3 shows a scene when Akbar Faizal responds to a statement made by Baron Danardono Wibowo who argues that Jokowi's statement (rejecting the 3 terms) is a normative response to a question asked by reporters in a situation that is uncomfortable or inappropriate for the President, and the given response makes it seem like Jokowi is unwilling. At the reality level, in terms of gesture code, we can see Akbar Faizal leaning forward in his sitting position when talking, and he is speaking while moving both his hands. Subsequently, in terms of the expression code, Akbar Faizal is sharply gazing at Baron Danardono Wibowo. While in terms of sound code, Akbar Faizal's voice intonation is higher. At the representation level, in terms of camera code, we can see that medium shot is used to focus on the speaker, Akbar Faizal. In terms of dialogue code, we can listen to Akbar Faizal saying the following:

*Is this not democracy, we can talk about anything? Today our public sphere is different, Sir. So, a person can just ask, "Mr. President, you made this policy, it's wrong." Today, a president shouldn't get offended. That's how our public sphere works, Sir.*

The statement Akbar Faizal made in this context relates to democratic morality that he intends to convey to the interlocutor, indicating a rightness claim. At the ideological level, Figure 3 presents an ideology that is apparent through the representative code, regarding the freedom that every individual have in expressing their opinions to anyone, which would even include the President.

Communicative action has the ultimate objective of arriving at a rational consensus, given that the validity claims have been achieved by all the discussants in regard to their respective opinions and positions, freely and without any coercion. In the current research, the validity claims were entirely met by all the discussants in the research, yet they were unable to achieve an intersubjective, unanimous, and complete consensus at the end of the podcast. Habermas states that the success of a communication process depends on the

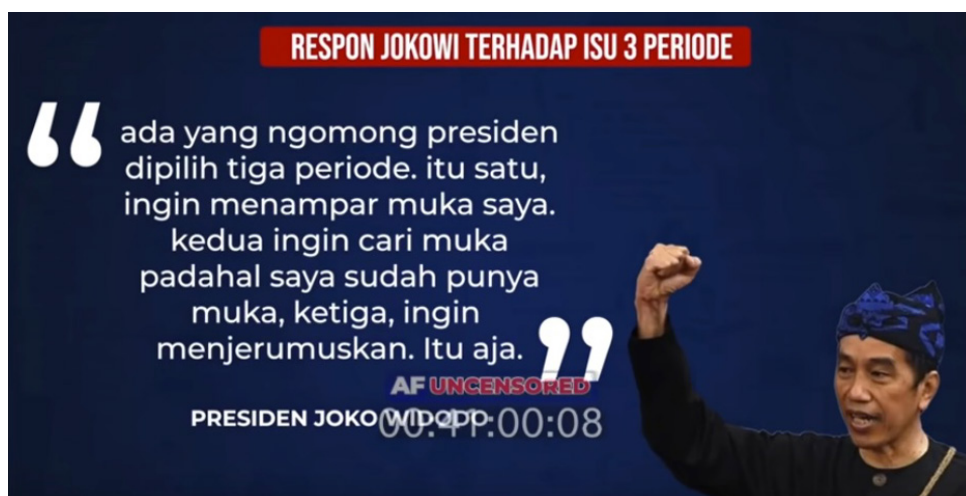
ability of listeners to “accept” (*Jaorder*) or “reject” (*Nein Stellungnahme*). Furthermore, according to Habermas, the three validity claims need to be concurrently accepted by the listeners to reach a consensus (Gora & Sandra, 2017).

### *Ideological practices in the AFU YouTube podcast*

The ideology that emerged is one that upholds equal rights for anyone to engage and participate in the discussion process, so long as they have the competence to conduct rational communication. There is also equality, thereby requiring identity clarity of all participants engaged in the discourse. With regard to the freedom of expression, we can observe an ideological characteristic that supports individual rights, including freedom of speech, the right for one’s ideas and views to be heard, freedom of thought without any coercion as exercised by each of the participants in the AFU YouTube podcast. Free and equal public sphere for public participation in politics signifies the identity of deliberative democracy. Most experts on the theory of deliberative democracy pursue the Habermasian aspiration of “public sphere” and accentuate the heterogeneity of groups engaged in deliberative discussion to ensure that diversity of arguments is represented and to include a demographically representative populace in aspiring for an optimal decision (Pernaa, 2017).

The proponents of Jokowi’s third term bid demonstrated a fatal flaw by forcing their interest in maintaining his power. This idea violates basic democratic ethics stipulated in Article 7 of the 1945 Constitution, which limits presidential terms to two periods. This provision is intrinsic to Indonesia’s democratic system. Those advocating for Jokowi’s third term ignored this logical fallacy, resulting in a manipulative claim by the Jakpro group that violated Indonesia’s political ethics. There is no rational reasoning or emergency condition warranting such an extraordinary measure for Indonesia’s leadership.

Although the third-term campaign failed, it undermined Indonesian political ethics’ fundamental values. No rational or legitimate reasoning existed to justify a third term. The campaign’s initiation by those aware of Indonesia’s democratic system’s two-term limit represents a manipulative claim that exploited public spaces for vested interests while destroying established democratic values and provisions.



Source: Akbar Faizal Uncensored YouTube channel (<https://youtu.be/9EFrESsiY8>)

**Figure 4.** Jokowi’s counter statement in pictures

In terms of political communication, while Jokowi himself denied any desire for running a third term, his political movements utilised various figures, influencers, and buzzers through social media and direct interactions to campaign for it. Social media was extensively used to promote a third term as essential for Indonesia's progress toward golden Indonesia. Ideally speaking, all parties should play a significant and equal part in the dialogue to exchange perspectives and conduct in-depth reflection regarding the topic of discussion, then reach and present a conclusion that all members of the deliberation are able to engage in (Burrall, 2015; Raisio & Vartiainen, 2015).

The dominant ideology found operating in the AFU episode analysed is the liberal democracy ideology, which relates to equal rights and individual freedom in expressing opinions. We did not find any commercialisation potential from AFU and according to the history of its establishment, the channel continues to voice its political viewpoints. Nonetheless, AFU podcasts indirectly functions as Akbar Faizal's political branding, bearing in mind that he is a cadre of the National Democratic Party (*Partai Nasional Demokrat* – NasDem). Although no political attributes are displayed in the podcasts, this can still be construed as an excess (result of) social media, and it is refined by having various guests who are not only proponents of the government, but those who are from the opposition as well.

### *Critique on representation of deliberative democracy in digital public sphere*

There is an alignment between the rationale of deliberative democracy shown in the AFU podcasts with Habermas' ideal public sphere principle, which emphasises the concept of public sphere as an element of a theoretical structure. This point of view is based on the principles of the ideal public sphere: (1) equality of status or egalitarian, which is important as a basis to confirm the argument that it is better to win the fight in social hierarchy; (2) free from any form of dominance, wherein the ongoing discussions remove dominance or authority; (3) inclusiveness, in which all individuals should be able to have easy access to and participate in discourses that essentially discuss public issues (Buhmann et al., 2019). This is the reason why digital public spheres are also vulnerable to the spread of misinformation and disinformation, which can hinder a healthy and fact-based deliberation process (Pira, 2023). In the Indonesian context, the rise of political hoaxes and digital polarisation is a major challenge for efforts to build an inclusive and rational deliberative space (Masduki, 2021; Zulkarnain et al., 2023).

Based on the dress/appearance code, equality is apparent at the reality level, wherein all participants of the dialogue are wearing casual attire, and no one's attire/appearance is more prominent than others or displaying the social levels of the participants. However, in terms of the behaviour code, we can see differences in the behaviour of the three participants. Source Person 1 displays a desire-to-dominate attitude while Source Person 2 presents a more low-profile attitude apparent from the way he sits and his gestures. These indications negate the egalitarian principle that Habermas advocates as one of the features of discourses in public sphere. Free from dominance of authority is another principle, which in the context of this research reveals that the podcast host/owner is one of the entities that dominates the discourse in the public sphere. This is, however indistinguishable from the responsibility of the podcast host who must take control of the discussion so that it remains discursive, conducive, and interesting to watch.

The public digital sphere deliberately created by the AFU podcast simply uses the internet and social media as a means for creating public space (virtual space) instead of creating digital public sphere (virtual sphere) as understood in Habermas' concept of ideal public sphere. Placing Habermas' concept of public sphere in the context of the current digital era has led to debates among scholars. Most of these debates encompass theoretical notes or essays that reflect optimism and pessimism regarding the development of digital public sphere and its impact on society. Meanwhile, optimistic scholars ("cyber-optimists", "utopians" or "net-enthusiasts") put more emphasis on the advantages and benefits of the internet. The differences of opinions between cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists are summarised in Table 1 (Schäfer, 2015).

**Table 1.** Pros and cons of digital public sphere

Cyber-Optimists	Cyber-Pessimists
Putting emphasis on the advantages of access to online media information that is relatively open, easy, and fast. Abundance of information in new and interactive ways that are not easily obtainable in real life.	Being sceptical about the level of public participation in the digital public sphere. Showing that the digital gap (differences in audience, social strata, or regional access) has an influence on the ability to use the internet.
Ease of uploading contents opens up the possibility of everyone's voice being heard anywhere and to have mutual connections among them without any intervention from gatekeeping journalists, large infrastructure, media institutions, and state or world authorities.	Questioning the diversity of online debates and believing that even among the participants, there is a danger of fragmentation by having small communities of likeminded individuals (algorithm of search engines provides information that is attuned to the user).

Freedom of speech in the digital public sphere is still maintained, which is proven by the fact that approximately 50% of the audience or participants do indeed participate in the discourse through the digital public sphere provided in the AFU podcast episode "Because of COVID-19, is Jokowi worthy of a third [presidential] term?" (only 101 out of 292 comments). However, it is unfortunate that the political discussion forum taking place in the comment column does not directly serve as an ideal digital public sphere since the political debates or discussions are anonymous, which increasingly opens possibilities of moral and social fragmentation, polarisation in social life, and even radical social movements in the real world due to irrational dialogues unfolding in the digital public sphere. Deliberative democracy emphasises the importance of rational discussion and public participation in policy formation and political decision making (Vrydagh, 2022; Willis et al., 2022). In the digital context, social media and video-based platforms such as YouTube create new spaces for deliberative processes by enabling more individuals to participate in political discourse (Gil-Ramírez et al., 2020).

However, in digital debates, the debates become irrational and produce meanings that do not undertake critical construction of politics. So, to avoid any vague debates of little value, a common virtue claim among participants of discourse is necessary. Discourse ethics requires freedom for all community members as well as equality for all participants who have a voice to discuss in an atmosphere of equality (Habermas, 2018). Paying a closer look at discourse ethics, we can see that Habermas requires all discourse participants to have a common understanding prior to starting a discussion so that a

positive public sphere is created, and rational discussions can be carried out to reach an intersubjective consensus. This is necessary as social media algorithms often amplify the phenomenon of filter bubbles and echo chambers, which leads to polarisation of opinions and reduces the possibility of healthy debates among groups with opposing views (Cinelli et al., 2021). This phenomenon is also observed in the Indonesian political context, where the digital public sphere is often used by political actors to build certain narratives that can restrict the space for balanced deliberation (Danaditya et al., 2022).

## CONCLUSION

The present study found that the digital public sphere in Indonesia offers potentials as alternative political discourses, yet it often becomes a pseudo-public sphere with deliberations that remain lacking. Using Habermas' approach, it is revealed that platforms like YouTube still facilitate open political dialogues that are essential for deliberative public spheres, despite the structural challenges encountered. The study also identified the risk of polarisation in the digital public sphere as a result of weak deliberative mechanism, thereby warranting the need for more moderation, platform accountability, and better design in the deliberative process.

The key contribution of the study is the analysis of the AFU podcast, which functions as a conduit between the public sphere and government authority. The novelty of the study lies in the use of John Fiske's semiotic analysis to understand the representation of deliberative democracy in digital media, which provides insights on ideological practices in Indonesia's digital political sphere. These findings enrich the digital democracy literature with perspectives from a country with a developing democracy.

Theoretically, the current study has broadened our understanding on the transformation of digital public sphere, while practically, it suggests a reformulation of media policies that balances freedom of expression and the need for quality discourses. Lastly, future research should further explore deliberative mechanisms that can optimise the democratisation of public digital spheres in the context of Indonesia's plural society.

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# News images and ideology: Investigating visual representation in news on selected Malaysian television stations

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## ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the ideology shaping Malaysian television media during Malaysia's 2022 transition to its Unity Government. Focusing on *Astro Awani* and *Berita RTM*, a content analysis of visual news elements reveals a clear ideological bias that privileges the ruling coalition. Both networks predominantly featured visuals from government press conferences, serving to disseminate state-sanctioned narratives. *Berita RTM* in particular, amplified Anwar Ibrahim's persona and reinforced a state-centric discourse that sidelines opposition voices. Although *Astro Awani* is privately owned and presents a broader range of perspectives through interviews and curated visuals, its overall framing still upheld a favourable portrayal of the new administration. The study demonstrates how visual framing operates as an ideological apparatus, reinforcing entrenched power structures and legitimising the prevailing political order. Despite the political transition, the framing strategies mirror those of previous regimes, raising concerns about media pluralism and the systematic marginalisation of dissenting views. These findings highlight the persistence of ideological influences in media practices, suggesting that changes in government do not necessarily lead to a more balanced or democratic media landscape as ownership dynamics and legislative pressures continue to marginalise dissenting voices.

Keywords: **Visual framing, ideology, political news, unity government, television news**

## INTRODUCTION

News visuals play a crucial role in shaping public beliefs and opinions, serving as powerful representations of news events that influence societal perceptions and ideological frameworks. Thus, news organisations' strategic selection of visuals is not merely a reflection of reality but a construction that reinforces or challenges dominant ideologies. Through careful curation, media outlets shape public discourse by highlighting specific aspects of events, thereby directing attention, framing narratives, and influencing how audiences engage with political and social issues. The presentation of news visuals can legitimise or contest prevailing power structures, reinforcing hegemonic ideologies or offering counter-narratives that challenge the status quo.

Given their immediate and compelling emotional impact, visuals effectively communicate complex political and ideological issues, making them robust for influencing public perception and belief systems. This study examined political news visuals in Malaysian television broadcasts, focusing on two key media outlets: *Berita RTM*, a government-owned station, and *Astro Awani*, a privately-owned network. The research aims to analyse the ideological representation of political news visuals within the context of Malaysia's new Unity Government, which came into power nine days after Anwar Ibrahim assumed office. The underlying assumption is that this political transition may have influenced the selection and construction of news content on local television, thereby shaping how political ideologies are communicated to the public. Accordingly, this study seeks to explore how news visuals are used to frame political news and to assess their role in shaping public perceptions of political issues and ideological discourse in Malaysia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Visual representation, framing, and ideology*

Visuals are pivotal in shaping news narratives, influencing public perception, and reinforcing ideological standpoints (Ash et al., 2021). Unlike textual reporting, visuals instantaneously communicate complex ideas and emotions, making them powerful tools for ideological reinforcement. Visual images often reinforce a particular message and perspective and summarise the story (Abdul Latif & Oh Ying, 2020). Huddy and Gunnthorsdottir (2000) argued that visuals are persuasive, often conveying implicit messages that subconsciously shape audience perceptions (Sonnett et al., 2015). McQuail (2010) further emphasised that images evoke strong emotional responses and are more memorable than words, entrenching existing beliefs or reshaping perspectives.

The power of visuals extends beyond inclusion to omission. What is left out of the frame is just as significant as what is included. The framing theory suggests that the selection and presentation of visuals direct the audience's attention towards specific aspects of an event, shaping their understanding and interpretation (Entman, 1993). Hall (1997) asserted that images not only reflect societal ideologies but also possess the potential to challenge or transform them. Similarly, Rose (2001) highlighted how visuals serve as cultural expressions reinforcing dominant societal narratives.

Framing strategies shape ideological perspectives through visual cues such as backdrop imagery, selective shot compositions, and emphatic patterns, which subtly indicate political leanings and influence public attitudes (Dan & Arendt, 2020; Lin &

Haputmann, 2009). Further, Touri and Koteyko (2014) noted that news frames are not neutral; they reflect the ideological orientations of media actors and institutions. Emotional responses triggered by images, particularly outrage or sympathy, can drive individuals toward specific ideological positions (Chan, 2016). For example, conflict framing in news coverage amplifies the perceived severity of an issue, shaping both emotional and cognitive responses while directing focus toward particular narratives (Shaid et al., 2023).

Furthermore, visual representation is essential in constructing social realities and shaping ideology. Visual symbols and iconic signifiers often create stereotypical or normative depictions, influencing public perception across different contexts (Mortensen et al., 2019). Visual representations also regulate, construct, and sometimes subvert ideologies, impacting cultural narratives and international relations (Danish & Riaz, 2022). Aiello and Thurlow (2006) contended that specific visual elements are deliberately chosen to naturalise cultural meanings, reinforcing dominant ideologies. Overall, visuals are supplementary to news narratives and integral to framing and ideological positioning. Their selection, presentation, and omission shape public discourse, influence emotions, and reinforce or challenge societal beliefs. Understanding media representation thus requires recognising the deliberate construction of meaning through visual imagery.

### *Television news and ideological framing*

Television remains one of the most influential news sources, primarily due to its reputation for delivering reliable content, in contrast to the proliferation of misinformation on social media. However, television news often frames visual content in ways that align with the state's ideology, shaping public perception through selective representation. Research indicates that visual representations in news media reinforce entrenched ideological positions by portraying specific narratives that support dominant political views while marginalising alternative perspectives (Mortensen et al., 2019).

The reinforcement of state ideology through television is a multidimensional phenomenon that reflects how media can serve as an instrument of political control and ideological propagation. State-controlled television often aligns its programming with government narratives, utilising various strategies to promote specific ideologies. Such practices are evident in countries where government influence shapes public broadcasting systems, constructing a shared national identity and reinforcing loyalty to the state. One example is the role of Turkey's public broadcasting service (TRT), which has been instrumental in disseminating a conservative, neo-Ottomanist agenda under the current government's direction. The Turkish government has leveraged state media to propagate ideologies that support its political objectives, ensuring that state-sanctioned narratives dominate while sidelining dissenting views and alternative perspectives (Algan & Kaptan, 2023).

Similarly, in Spain, public broadcasters have been perceived as politically aligned, with audiences more likely to consume state-owned media if their views align with the ruling party (Doménech-Beltrán, 2024). This reflects how television can function as a tool for ideological reinforcement, influencing public trust and engagement with media outlets. Humanes and Valera-Ordaz (2023) further highlighted how media consumption patterns contribute to political polarisation, fostering ideological echo chambers that sustain dominant state narratives. Historically, television has played a crucial role in ideological reinforcement. In socialist regimes, state-controlled media crafted consistent

narratives aligned with party ideologies, demonstrating how television can be instrumental in shaping political consciousness (Hai, 2012). This historical precedent continues to resonate in contemporary media practices, where selective framing of historical events and cultural symbols contributes to national identity formation (Blanes, 2016).

Beyond shaping current events, television plays a crucial role in constructing collective memory. By selectively framing historical events, television embeds ideological narratives into national consciousness. Phelps and Hamilton (2021) argued that television news normalises particular ideologies by carefully selecting images, editing techniques, and framing strategies, directly influencing public perception and political discourse. This reinforces dominant narrative structures favouring specific political agendas while diminishing alternative viewpoints. Television remains critical for examining how media shapes ideological constructs and sustains societal power dynamics. From depicting cultural values to partisan news framing, television is a potent tool for ideological dissemination, influencing how citizens engage with political realities.

### *Role of Malaysian mainstream media in reinforcing state ideology*

Malaysian mainstream media reinforces state ideology through framing, narrative construction, and content focus. The media landscape in Malaysia is heavily influenced by government policies and ownership structures, which play a critical role in shaping public perceptions and reinforcing the ruling party's narratives. The Malaysian government has curtailed media freedom under the pretext of safeguarding national security and ensuring political stability. This control and the influence exerted over media corporations linked to the government uphold the ruling party's dominance and political authority (Mohd Sani, 2005). Historically, mainstream Malaysian media has clearly preferred the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) government, particularly during election campaigns (Anuar, 2000), thereby marginalising dissent and critical voices. Moreover, ownership and legislative frameworks empower political elites to steer media narratives, resulting in a media landscape that consistently mirrors government perspectives (Yang, 2003). Recent studies, such as that by Ahmad Sabri and Abdullah (2022), have corroborated this view by highlighting how legislative measures and corporate influences further entrench media narratives that align with state interests.

Malaysian mainstream media often operates under ownership structures that align closely with political interests. For instance, although *Astro Awani* is a private entity, it is frequently critiqued for reflecting governmental ideologies, especially during politically sensitive periods. Strict broadcasting regulations in Malaysia influence political coverage, reinforcing narratives that favour the ruling party (Latif et al., 2013). Its editorial lines may lean towards positive portrayals of governmental actions to ensure ongoing viability in a competitive yet regulated market. Findings by Mohd Sofian and Azmawati (2021) also highlight that journalists in Malaysian mainstream media practice self-censorship to comply with media laws, resulting in less critical coverage of government policies. This tendency skews reporting toward affirming state ideologies rather than presenting balanced viewpoints that challenge the government narrative. Ch'Ng (2016) further demonstrated how Malaysian newspapers and television broadcasts align their editorial stance with government policies, particularly in foreign affairs. Television news employs selective framing to highlight state achievements while downplaying dissenting perspectives,

constructing a uniform political narrative that bolsters the ruling administration's legitimacy.

Framing of news stories is another mechanism through which state ideology is reinforced. For example, Abdul Wahab et al. (2024) discussed how *Astro Awani's* coverage during the political transitions in Malaysia has often aligned closely with government communication strategies. The media tends to frame events in ways that legitimise governmental actions or policies, thus reinforcing a narrative of stability and effectiveness. This approach shapes public opinion and influences political discourse by prioritising certain narratives while marginalising others. Moreover, Briandana (2019) explained how Malaysian broadcasting policies emphasise national identity and cultural unity in media content. Television programs are strategically designed to promote a sense of belonging and nationalistic feelings, which align with the government's agenda to portray a unified national identity. Such programming can reinforce state-held ideologies by framing cultural narratives highlighting the government's role in maintaining these identities, thereby legitimising its governance.

### *Malaysia's current political landscape and legislative control*

Before 2018, Malaysia was effectively a one-party state. The erstwhile Barisan Nasional (BN) ruled Malaysia continuously since the country's independence in 1957. The then BN government allowed political opposition, but the playing field was uneven, favouring the ruling government. The BN government enforced numerous draconian laws to stifle freedom of speech and dissent, namely the Internal Security Act, Sedition Act, Official Secrets Act, Printing Presses and Publications Act, and Anti-Fake News Act. Close policing of the media landscape was the norm during this time. Mainstream media served as the government's organ to showcase its policies and demonise opposition. Pockets of resistance existed, mainly in print and online news such as *Malaysiakini*, *Aliran Monthly*, and *Harakah*. Still, a few were constantly subjected to scrutiny and harassment by the authorities.

The 2018 general election saw the collapse of the long-entrenched BN regime and ushered in the Pakatan Harapan (PH) to form a new government. Institutional reforms were part of the PH government agenda, which included opening the media landscape to allow for more freedom and diversity of political views. In 2019, the Parliament voted to abolish the Anti-Fake News Act. There were also serious discussions to revamp the Communication and Multimedia Act sections as well as the Printing Presses and Publication Act. The reform efforts were short-lived when the PH government's tenure ended abruptly in February 2020 after merely 22 months in power. Several PH MPs defected in an event dubbed the "Sheraton Move", causing the government to lose its majority in the Parliament. Then, Perikatan Nasional (PN) formed a new government, and political fragmentation and instability ensued.

The PN government came to power without a public mandate as it was not through the general election. The lack of a public mandate became a significant source of political discontent, compounded by the challenges posed by the global COVID-19 pandemic. The PN government could not put its stamp of authority as many sections of the society questioned its legitimacy (Tayeb, 2021). The media landscape remained open and democratic, buoyed by the reform inertia from the previous PH government. The PN government lost in the general elections in November 2022 and was subsequently

replaced by the current government formed through an alliance between PH, BN, and Borneo political coalitions. Dubbed the “Unity Government,” it is still searching for the elusive political stability as it is built upon the rickety foundation of strange bedfellows and faces constant machinations from PN, which refuses to accept its electoral defeat fully. The effect of this political divisiveness is such that the media landscape remains vibrant and free.

## *Media ownership*

### *Astro Awani*

The All-Asia Television and Radio Company (ASTRO) was conceived within Malaysia’s Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) initiative, a vision spearheaded by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. As part of this initiative, the MSC project was exclusively serviced by the Measat Satellite System (Kim, 2001). Until 2017, ASTRO maintained a monopoly as Malaysia’s sole pay television provider, a position that attracted criticism for its monopolistic market control. By 2022, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission had issued Content Applications Service Provider (CASP) licenses to 35 media companies, of which only four were authorised to broadcast content via satellite television (Bernama, 2018). *Awani 7:45*, a prime-time news program broadcast on *Astro Awani*, is produced by Astro Awani Network Sdn Bhd. In 2022, *Astro Awani* collaborated with *Sinar Harian* to enhance media representation of public discourse, aiming to provide more extensive and in-depth coverage at the local and national levels (Yong, 2022). This partnership led to the introduction of a new prime-time segment, *AWANI 7:45 | Sinar Awani* (Yong, 2022).

### *RTM*

Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) is a government-owned broadcasting entity initially established as *Radio Malaya* in Singapore on April 1, 1946. Following the formation of Malaysia on September 16, 1963, *Radio Malaya* was rebranded as *Radio Malaysia*. That same year, Malaysia introduced its television broadcasting service under *Televisyen Malaysia*. On October 6, 1969, with the inauguration of Angkasapuri, *Radio Malaysia* and *Televisyen Malaysia* were consolidated under the administration of the Ministry of Information (Latif et al., 2013). Subsequently, on November 17, 1969, a second television channel was launched as part of *Rangkaian Satu*’s expansion and maintained a monopoly over free-to-air television broadcasting until 1984, when the emergence of private television stations, such as TV3, introduced competition in the sector. In response to the rise of digital media, RTM launched web-based streaming services for television and radio in 1996 (RTM, 2021). As of 2021, RTM operates six television channels (*TV1*, *TV2*, *TV Okey*, *RTM News*, *RTM Sports*, and *TV6*), with 34 radio stations (RTM, 2021).

## METHODOLOGY

The study’s methodology involved analysing the content of news broadcasts from *Astro Awani* and *Berita RTM*. While *Berita RTM* is a free-to-air government-owned channel, *Astro Awani* was chosen because it came first on brand trust scores (Newman, 2022). The prime-time news from *Astro Awani* and *Berita RTM* served as the study’s samples.

The selected news program aired from November 24, 2022, until December 7, 2022. The period was chosen since it is the transitional stage of the Unity Government, following the formation of a coalition of parties comprising of major and minor blocs. After no single bloc gained a sufficient majority to form a government in the previous election, it is fascinating to study how the news broadcasts handled their reporting in the wake of the recent change in power.

To provide additional context, past government transitions in Malaysia have also seen shifts in media coverage. For example, the transition following the 2018 general election, which brought PH into power, was marked by narratives of reform and governance scrutiny. Similarly, the 2020 transition under PN reflected crisis-oriented coverage, particularly concerning political stability. While this study does not directly compare those transitions, acknowledging these shifts provides a broader understanding of how Malaysian mainstream news media visually portrays and represents political parties after the change of government. By situating the analysis within the context of evolving political dynamics, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the media's role in shaping public perceptions of political legitimacy, power transitions, and party positioning within the broader governance narrative.

The news videos were gathered based on the predetermined dates using the keywords “(LANGSUNG) AWANI 7:45 (pre-determined date)” for *Astro Awani* and “(pre-determined date)-BERITA PERDANA PENUH” for *Berita RTM*. A total of 28 news videos from both *Astro Awani* and *Berita RTM* repository channels were obtained and examined. This study employed content analysis, which was divided into two parts. The first phase comprised a quantitative analysis of the frequency, news themes, and visual categories to identify recurring patterns within the data. Themes were categorised based on these patterns using an inductive approach, where they were defined post-data collection. The second phase involved a qualitative analysis of the visual elements in the news coverage. To ensure methodological rigour, a systematic coding procedure was implemented. A coding manual was developed to establish clear definitions for news themes and visual elements, providing a structured analytical framework. The thematic categories were refined iteratively based on emergent patterns in the data. To enhance reliability and mitigate bias, the researcher conducted repeated coding at different intervals and cross-validated the results with another researcher to ensure consistency and accuracy in categorisation.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *News visuals*

*Astro Awani* and *Berita RTM* presented six categories of visuals during the 14-day study period, including live interviews and press conferences, B-rolls, pictures, media statements, social media posts, and infographics.

*Astro Awani* portrayed 217 visuals for the coverage of its political news, of which 36% of its visuals, the majority featuring a press conference with government officials and a live interview with the public. Moreover, *Awani* also included a press conference with politicians from the opposing parties and live interviews with academicians. To contextualise and bolster the narrative of its news, *Awani* presented 30% of the B-rolls and 19% of the pictures. Moreover, 6% of *Awani*'s visuals were excerpts of media statements,

most from the opposing party, followed by the royals and NGOs. About 6% of *Awani*'s visuals also included social media post excerpts, mostly from government officials' accounts. On top of that, *Awani* featured an infographic from a survey that illustrates the public sentiment towards the appointment of a court cluster's minister in the cabinet and on Anwar Ibrahim's career and political background, amounting to 3% of the visuals.

Meanwhile, for its political news coverage, *Berita RTM* portrayed 254 visuals, with 38% of its visuals being from a press conference or live interviews. Many of its interviews featured a press conference with government officials, followed by live interviews with academicians and the public. Compared to *Astro Awani*, *Berita RTM* used a lot of B-rolls and pictures to contextualise its news narrative, amounting to 29% and 25%. Meanwhile, 5% of *Berita RTM*'s visuals were excerpts of media statements, mostly featuring the royals, followed by world leaders. Only one excerpt of the media statement from the opposing party was featured by *Berita RTM*, and none are from the press conference or live interviews. Moreover, *Berita RTM* included excerpts from social media posts, mainly from Anwar Ibrahim's official Twitter account. During the appointment of Anwar Ibrahim as prime minister, *Berita RTM* also presented an infographic on Anwar Ibrahim's career and political background, amounting to 1% of the visuals.

**Table 1.** Frequency of visual categories for *Astro Awani* and *Berita RTM*

Visual Categories	Awani		RTM	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Live interview/Press conference	78	36	97	38
B-roll	64	30	73	29
Picture	42	19	63	25
Media statement	12	6	13	5
Social media post	12	6	6	2
Infographic	7	3	2	1
Total	217	100	254	100

*Astro Awani*'s coverage prioritised the Unity Government while still acknowledging opposition perspectives, subtly shaping public perception through balanced framing. In contrast, *Berita RTM* reinforced pro-government narratives with minimal opposition coverage, revealing an ideological alignment with state interests and contributing to a media landscape that legitimises dominant political discourses while marginalising alternative viewpoints.

### *Visual analysis of Astro Awani and Berita RTM*

A visual analysis of 28 news videos from *Astro Awani* and *Berita RTM* over 14 days identified five key thematic categories: (1) Anwar Ibrahim's appointment, (2) Unity Government, (3) Opposition, (4) Royals, and (5) Economy. The selection of the Royals and Economy categories was justified by their direct relevance to the political news, particularly concerning coverage of the newly appointed Prime Minister.

*Astro Awani***1. Anwar Ibrahim's appointment***Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was sworn in as the 10<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister*

The visual shows live footage of Anwar being sworn in as Malaysia's Prime Minister and pledging his oath in front of Agong and The Queen. Shown alongside is a still photo of Anwar reading his oath. Next is a B-roll of Anwar receiving his book of pledges and bowing respectfully to Agong and the Queen.

November 24, 2022, *Awani*

Analysis:

The visual of Anwar's swearing-in ceremony demonstrates that the Agong was confident in the former being chosen as Prime Minister. This ended the debate about who would succeed as Malaysia's 10<sup>th</sup> prime minister. Anwar demonstrated respect and deference to the nation's highest authority by bowing down in front of the Agong. This act symbolises loyalty to the Malaysian monarchy and constitution.

**2. Unity Government***DAP apologises to the government, the people of Sarawak— Anthony Loke*

The visual shows an excerpt from Anthony Loke's Facebook post, entitled "DAP apologises to the government, the people of Sarawak". Shown alongside is a B-roll of Abang Johari at the GPS press conference. Abang Johari states that "GPS accepts DAP's apology".

November 24, 2022, *Awani*

Analysis:

The visual shows that the two political parties set aside their long-term political feuds to form a unity government. This signals the parties' stable cooperation and priority to serve the public rather than prolonging a feud.

**3. Opposition***Muhyiddin challenges Anwar to show a proof letter of support*

The visuals feature still images of Muhyiddin and Anwar speaking, shown side by side, alongside a live clip of Muhyiddin at a press conference. He urges Anwar to provide proof of support and declines to join the unity government, stating, "Thank you – PN wants to be the opposition." A media statement from PN is shown, followed by a still of Muhyiddin and Hadi Awang, with PAS later confirming it will not join the unity government.

November 24, 2022, *Awani*

Analysis:

The image suggests that Muhyiddin doubts Anwar's legitimacy as a Prime Minister with enough support from parliament members. Muhyiddin's firm choice to refrain from the unity administration, supported by the PAS leader, communicates that the goals and governance of the unity government do not align with the ideological convictions and objectives of the Perikatan Nasional party.

**4. Royals***Sultan of Johor accepts Prime Minister's visit*

The visual shows a picture of Anwar bowing down whilst shaking hands with the

Sultan of Johor. The HRH Crown Prince of Johor's Facebook account shared the images. A picture of Sultan Johor speaking and pointing his index finger to Anwar. A picture of Anwar saluting the Sultan of Johor while leaning in his direction. A picture of Anwar listening carefully to the Sultan of Johor while clasping his hands together. November 27, 2022, *Awani*

Analysis:

The visual portrayal of the strong connection between Anwar and Sultan Ibrahim signifies an enhanced relationship between the federal and state governments. The images shared on HRH Sultan Ismail's Facebook illustrate Sultan Ibrahim's authority concerning the Prime Minister, highlighting the deep respect and deference shown by the Prime Minister towards Sultan Ibrahim. This demonstrates Anwar's personality, which is marked by profound respect and adherence to the royal institution.

## 5. Economy

a) *The ringgit's value increased by 1.93 per cent against the USD.*

The visual shows a chart from the Bursa exchange, showing the ringgit strengthening by 1.93 per cent against the USD. Shown alongside a B-roll of Malaysian banknotes counted by the machine. November 24, 2022, *Awani*

Analysis:

Following the announcement of the new Prime Minister of Malaysia during the 15th General Election (GE15) by Istana Negara, there was an increase in the value of the ringgit. This indicates that establishing a new government instils confidence, particularly when the new administration is viewed as capable of providing effective governance and stability. The image of the charts serves as supporting evidence for this statement.

b) *The PM wants targeted subsidies, so it will take two weeks to prepare the paperwork.*

The visual shows a live interview of Anwar speaking at his press conference, pledging that his government will complete the targeted subsidy paperwork within two weeks. November 27, 2022, *Awani*

Analysis:

The press conference emphasised the new government's serious commitment to the people, seeking to demonstrate their dedication to boosting public confidence and gathering increased support. It highlights the government's proactive efforts to address subsidy issues by providing targeted assistance to specific demographics.

### *Berita RTM*

#### 1. **Anwar Ibrahim's appointment**

*The formation of a new government. Datuk Seri Anwar was appointed the 10th prime minister*

The visuals featured B-rolls of Anwar reciting the pledge of allegiance, delivering a speech in Perak, and receiving continuous applause. Additional footage shows him

stepping off a jet, greeting Sultan Nazrin Shah, interacting with Chinese and Malay elders, and joining a spontaneous community feast after Friday prayers, highlighting his public engagements and connection with diverse communities.

November 24, 2022, *Berita RTM*

Analysis:

The visual of Anwar taking the oath as Malaysia's prime minister exudes power and demonstrates that the Agung has formally chosen him. Anwar's haste to greet his supporters in Perak after his appointment was evident in the footage of him stepping off his private jet. This suggests that he did not overlook the constituents he was representing. Anwar's visit with the Sultan of Perak demonstrates his respect for the monarchy and indicates that the Sultan acknowledges Anwar. Anwar is perceived as favourable and welcomed by the people of Perak, regardless of race and age demographics.

## 2. Unity Government

*Melaka congratulates the appointment of PM. Ready to cooperate with the new government.*

The visual shows a live interview with Sulaiman Mat Ali, The Chief Minister of Melaka. He was seen smiling and said that the state government congratulated Anwar Ibrahim on his appointment as Prime Minister and that the state government was ready to cooperate with his government. Shown alongside is a B-roll of civil servants gathering in front of Perdana Putra.

November 24, 2022, *Berita RTM*

Analysis:

The visuals show the Melaka Chief Minister endorsing Anwar, reflecting strong support from a coalition-aligned state. However, opposition-led states like Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, and Terengganu were absent from interviews or visuals. In a B-roll, Anwar stressed that civil servants must serve the current government, regardless of their political leanings, reinforcing the message of administrative neutrality.

## 3. Opposition

*Pas did not join the unity government. Play the role of constructive opposition.*

The visual shows a picture of PAS Secretary General Takiyudin Hassan. An excerpt from the PAS media statement, titled "PAS did not join the unity government. Play the role of constructive opposition", is shown alongside. Next, a B-roll of the public casting their votes during the 15th general election, followed by a B-roll of a press conference by Takiyudin Hassan.

November 26, 2022, *Berita RTM*

Analysis:

*RTM* selectively featured statements from the opposition, choosing to interview Takiyudin Hassan due to his higher position in PAS. Interestingly, another opposition party member was absent from the news coverage. This could suggest that their perspectives and opinions were either deemed unimportant or deliberately omitted to silence the opposition's voice.

#### 4. Royals

*The authority of YDP Agong's wisdom. Successfully redacted the warmth of the political landscape.*

The visual shows Agong looking at Anwar, and both are smiling. The B-rolls of the politicians going in and out of Istana during the GE15 are shown alongside. Next is an excerpt of a media statement from the Palace confirming the appointment of Anwar as the Prime Minister of Malaysia. Shown alongside is a B-roll of Sultan cars moving out of the palace. Lastly, a broadcast journalist does a stand-upper in front of the Palace, highlighting Agung's authority in resolving the current political situation while describing the timeline for choosing the PM. The journalist noted, "The wisdom of the Agong once again succeeded in easing the heat of the country's political landscape".  
November 24, 2022, *Berita RTM*

Analysis:

The Agong is an essential figure since his blessing makes the people adhere to his command that the government is legitimate. Since the people are questioning the functions of a king as the protector of the people, Agong needs to set an example that he is a unity figure across political parties, races, and religions. The selection of the Prime Minister follows a systematic process involving careful consideration of the perspectives of all relevant parties following the country's constitution. The special meeting convened by His Majesty highlights his genuine commitment to collectively resolving the issue.

#### 5. Economy

*PM appointment. Give a positive impact on the national economy*

The visual shows a picture of Malaysian Ringgit banknotes, followed by a live interview with economic analyst, Associate Professor Dr. Ahmed Razman Abdul Latiff, who believes that the appointment of the PM has a positive effect on the country's economy and suggests that the formation of the new cabinet should concentrate on strategies for planning economic growth, including people's issues, such as the high cost of living and the rise in the price of goods.

November 25, 2022, *Berita RTM*

Analysis:

An interview featuring Associate Professor Dr. Ahmed Razman, an authoritative figure in economics, was used to support the assertion that Anwar possesses the capability and charisma to lead the country and stimulate the economy. The announcement of the appointment of the 10th Prime Minister had a positive impact on the national economy, leading to the strengthening of the national currency.

In this context, visuals are not merely neutral representations; they are strategically framed to emphasise specific narratives while marginalising others. This study reinforces that visuals are powerful ideological tools in shaping public perception and political discourse. Visuals guide how audiences interpret news and align with media organisations' institutional positions. The analysis reveals that *Berita RTM* uses more visuals than *Astro Awani*, primarily sourced from press conferences featuring government officials,

academicians, and the public. These visuals consistently construct a positive image of the Unity Government, reflecting *Berita RTM's* ideological alignment with state interests. *Berita RTM* draws heavily from Anwar Ibrahim's social media, reinforcing a personalised and favourable portrayal of the Prime Minister while excluding visual interviews with opposition figures.

Among all visual types, it is evident that the usage of media statements is the least common for both television stations. A close comparison reveals that *Astro Awani* tends to employ more excerpts from media statements, which predominantly highlight comments and concerns from the opposition party. Additionally, it was found that *Astro Awani* presents a comparatively pluralistic visual strategy. It is also apparent that in reporting political news, *RTM* attempts to downplay the perspective of the opposition party. These newsroom practices highlight how visual framing maintains or challenges dominant ideologies within Malaysia's media structures. Thus, the study demonstrates that visual choices are deeply embedded within institutional ideologies, contributing to the construction of selective political realities for the public.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that visuals in television news are not merely supplementary content, but function as core instruments of ideological framing. Drawing on the theoretical framework of media framing, particularly the notion that framing is inherently ideological, the findings show how visual elements shape political narratives by selecting and emphasising particular viewpoints while omitting others. While this is not new, it is worth noting that considering the current government was once in the opposition, the same dynamics seemed to apply to PN. To a certain degree, this revelation is not entirely unexpected. It highlights the common practice within media organisations of prioritising content based on ownership interests. *RTM* is a state-owned broadcaster, and *Astro Awani* operates under stringent regulatory oversight. The structural limitations imposed by media ownership and governmental regulatory control shape newsroom practices, ultimately determining the boundaries of the political discourse and reinforcing the centrality of institutional control in shaping news narratives. These limitations are firm and must be followed by all media organisations.

In covering Anwar Ibrahim's appointment as Prime Minister, various visual media, including photographs, infographics, and videos, reinforced his legitimacy and popularity. The videos primarily highlighted the swearing-in ceremony, with congratulatory messages from state leaders. Interviews featured individuals with similar political views to showcase broad support, while infographics detailed Anwar Ibrahim's background and achievements to elevate his public image. His political allies also received favourable coverage, with visuals used to demonstrate their loyalty and support. These elements collectively aimed to project Anwar Ibrahim as a capable and respected leader. Maintaining a strong profile is crucial for his political stability and success. While the coverage largely favoured Anwar Ibrahim and his coalition, *Astro Awani* included minimal opposition representation. Visuals from press conferences with Muhyiddin Yassin and Tun Mahathir reflected their scepticism and disapproval, subtly questioning the legitimacy of Anwar Ibrahim's appointment and offering a limited counter-narrative.

In line with earlier findings, this study reveals an overwhelming abundance of coverage and visuals that predominantly favour the government, particularly in the case of *Berita RTM*. Malaysia's political news landscape continues to exhibit patterns of media bias shaped by ownership interests and regulatory frameworks. Despite changes in political leadership, visual framing remains a tool for political legitimisation and ideological reinforcement, raising concerns about the state's role in shaping media narratives and limiting plurality in news coverage. Malaysia's news coverage continues to exhibit a persistent lack of balance, with little evidence of meaningful progress toward more diverse and impartial reporting. Rather than advancing towards greater media independence, Malaysian television news has regressed to familiar patterns of ideological alignment and selective framing, reinforcing existing power structures. These newsroom practices reflect how visuals guide public perception and reinforce dominant ideologies. Visuals from press events, interviews, and statements subtly instruct audiences on how to interpret political developments, constructing a sense of consensus while marginalising conflict. This aligns with the theoretical claim that media framing is not neutral; it reflects and reproduces institutional ideologies.

Given these findings, future reforms should focus on enhancing media independence and pluralism in Malaysia through greater editorial or newsroom autonomy, transparent regulation and ethical journalism practices. The rise of alternative and digital media offers a potential counterbalance to mainstream narratives by diversifying perspectives and fostering political accountability. However, alternative media alone is insufficient to dismantle entrenched ideological biases, particularly when regulatory structures and political influence over media ownership remain unchanged. Future research could explore how digital and alternative media platforms counterbalance mainstream ideological framing and the evolving role of visuals in shaping public trust and political engagement. Additionally, exploring the intersection between media regulation, ownership, and visual framing strategies would provide a deeper understanding of how news organisations navigate political pressures while striving to maintain credibility in a rapidly evolving digital media landscape.

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