
ONLINE USERS' PERCEPTION OF SENSATIONAL POLITICAL NEWS POSTED ON ONLINE NEWS PORTALS: A CASE STUDY OF ASTRO AWANI AND MALAYSIAKINI

Manimegalai Ambikapathy
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia
manimegalai@uitm.edu.my

Qistina Fisha Mohamad Fisol
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia
2021297542@student.uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Today, newspapers either online or printed play important roles in conveying political information to the public. Sensationalism is a strategy for grabbing the attention of a crowd. Media outlets often utilize provocative language, exaggeration, and outright lying to attract media consumer's attention. Politicians and media outlets alike frequently rely on sensationalism to advance their goals. The purpose of this research is to study what is the perception of online users towards sensational political news on the online news portals of Astro Awani and Malaysiakini. The researcher employed a qualitative method via in-depth interviews through purposive sampling with five informants based on screening eligibility procedures. Data revealed that news consumers read political news on online platforms for the main purpose of getting information about contemporary problems confronting Malaysia's political system compared to other functions. This study may serve as a guide to the journalism sector for having a clearer view of sensationalism in political news.

Keywords: *Online User, Political News, Sensationalism, Astro Awani, Malaysia Kini*

INTRODUCTION

In today's new media landscape, it is impossible to see what is happening in politics in Malaysia beyond the knowledge and concern of the Malaysians. The Internet has introduced a new world without borders, regardless of local, state, national or international issues in the blink of an eye to reach the people. Today, newspapers either online or printed play important roles in conveying political information to the public.

The relationship between politicians and media occurs when politicians need media to reach their target audience. As we know the Internet and online journalism is the platform that reachable to society. Besides, political parties use various media sources to persuade, engaging the public in public discourse, and participating in campaigns alongside politicians using the media to blame one another. At the same time, the media will inform the audience on what and how they should think about the issues that are reported to influence the audience's attitude toward the issues reported. Furthermore, the media also heavily uses sensationalism and various political strategies to influence voting patterns in influencing their targeted people (Lee Kuok Tiung, 2018).

Sensationalism in journalism has been an issue of concern since the 20th century when socially responsible media became vigorous due to the press being believed to be perpetuating a culture of irresponsibility. The function of yellow journalism is to attract readers to read the news that is reported using specific mechanisms or depictees. However, if yellow journalism is being used in the wrong way, it will have a bad impact on the reader's actions. Take the example of the Malaysian General Election. The opposition, Pakatan Harapan (PH) won the election because of the power of Internet Media and online journalism. Whoever rules the media will have the advantage of winning the election. This can be proven by how online journalism plays an important role in reshaping the mindset of the public regarding political news.

The usage of sensationalism is a strategy for grabbing the attention of a crowd. Media outlets often utilize provocative language, exaggeration, and outright lying to get their point across. Politicians and media outlets alike frequently rely on sensationalism to advance their goals. Thus, this research aims to explore the opinion of online users towards sensational political news on Malaysian online news portals Astro Awani and Malaysiakini. The purpose of this research is to study what is the perception of online users toward sensational political news portrayed by selected online news portals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Malaysian Online News Portals

Malaysiakini is a Malaysian online media outlet that publishes reports in four different languages: Malay, English, Mandarin, and Tamil. These languages are listed in the website's title. When it first went online on November 20, 1999, Malaysiakini included several different sections, some of which were titled "Main," "News," "Columns," "Opinion," "Editor's Mind," "Special Report," and "Others." It earned the accolade of being the first in terms of popularity in Malaysia ranking by Digital News Report in 2020 because it receives more than 37 million views every year (Hassim et al., 2022). The most recent political events and topics in Malaysia are given a greater amount of attention in the headlines of the website Malaysiakini. The English version of MalaysiaKini.com demands users to subscribe to their packages offered to enjoy the privilege of viewing English content.

Astro in Malaysia is the company that owns and operates the 24-hour pay television news channel known as *Astro Awani* in Malaysia. This station is owned by Astro AWANI Network Sdn. Bhd. It was broadcast on channel 501 and went on the air on September 6th, 2007, when it became live (SD). In 2009, it took the place of Astro News, whose broadcasts were terminated on March 1 of that year. Astro Awani, which broadcasts nonstop and claims to be "Malaysia's Number One News Channel 24 Hours a Day," provides viewers

with the most recent news and a variety of interesting programs such as lifestyle, current affairs, documentaries, talk shows, and magazines both domestic and international (Astro Awani, 2021).

According to the Annual Survey conducted by the Reuters Digital News Research Institute 2020, Astro Awani came in first position as the Most Trusted News Brand in Malaysia. This was followed by *Radio Televisyen Malaysia* (RTM) in second place, and *The Star* came in third place overall (Astro Awani, 2021). When it comes to the category of online news, Astro Awani was given the position of second place, while Malaysiakini maintained its position as the top website overall. As a result, the purpose of this study is to investigate these two online news portals about their use of sensationalism in political reporting.

Role of online news

The growth of digital media with advanced news reporting technologies has made it convenient for news readers to assess and consume easily at their convenience time and place. Furthermore, this function enables them to be multitasking-oriented while being creators, consumers, and distributors of news via a variety of platforms (Kim, Moravec, & Dennis 2019).

Digitalization changed traditional news businesses into online news commerce, which significantly transformed the production and consumption of news. The tremendous impact of these changes can be seen clearly in the roles of news, increased impact and immediacy of the news, added with creativity, interactivity multimedia context and finally users become creators in producing and sharing the news instead of consuming it (Yuan, 2015). The media is often referred to as the “fourth estate” in writing because of its role as the “spokesperson” of the people, the “critic” of the government, the “supporter” of policy, and the “creator” of policy. The capability of the press to either supply or withhold publicity, in addition to its ability to provide information, was a major contributor to the press’s impact (McQuail, 2010).

Online news appears on a website’s home page in the form of attractive short titles with audio, video and images. The titles are known as headlines and it’s are designed for better understanding and to aid enjoyment. Sentences in headlines use active voice to save words and produce a timely feel to the readers (Yuan, 2015). News especially content in newspapers are powerful because media have the potential to convince and influence the agenda of the public (Reese, Gandy, & Grant, 2001; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Entman, 2007). Stories in media are consumed by the public to get information and necessary updates in understanding any needed information, especially sensational topics. The way information is transferred into people’s minds through news content can affect reader perceptions about the covered stories. So, news industries especially online news portal needs to use the idea of the framing process in informing and convincing the public to attain public agenda through media (Entman, 1997).

Entman (1993) suggested that the frame for persuading people can be implemented by “certain devices such as keywords, phrases, particular images, source of information and sentences that provide certain meaning and cue for action through reinforcing cluster, facts or judgment” and Tankard (2001) arranged the most comprehensive practical approach for influencing readers are headlines, subheads, photos, photo captions, leads, sources selection, quotes selection, pull quotes, logos, statistics and charts, and concluding sentences and paragraphs.

Journalists use frames to put information into a usable context for readers, to make stories accessible and meaningful to their audiences, and to enable readers to act upon information when appropriate. Framing is doing its job effectively in mass media while emphasizing an issue's importance through the selection of photos, interesting texts, portrayal of actors, attractive headlines and so on to define the problems and find solutions for the problems (Entman 1993 & de Vreese 2005).

Frames also play an important role as a source for a reporter for any news reports. Reporters usually used frames to effectively define issues in favor of their preferred results and also to influence their readers to act as per their needs and expectations. In doing this, players or actors will be associated with any direct or indirect quotes in news reports to influence their readers and it will make sure that the stories will be framed and slanted in a way that is consistent with the journalist's preferred outcome (Hallahan, 1999)

When the media place stories in specific frames, they lend a different meaning to the news. Furthermore, the media's function to increase or decrease the salience of issues, can allows the public to remember and make judgments on such issues. Media are powerful because media have the potential to shape and influence the public's opinion and behaviour (Entman, 2007). Furthermore, the media is responsible for updating the publics with the latest and accurate information (Zanuddin & Abdoulaye, 2017).

We have now arrived at another one of the roles that the press plays, and that is that of a gatekeeper, selecting which pieces of information will be published. The ability to provide or withhold publicity or information of any kind, in general, to communicate with the audience is the foundation of this function. This position has a significant connection to the capacity to set the agenda or determine what news is reported and what issues are addressed, and it also has a strong connection to the ability to choose which problems are highlighted. This area of research has a strong connection to the concepts of framing and priming, as stated by David H. Weaver, a researcher who has researched the process of media agenda formation since 1972. Framing is the central organizing principle for news material that offers context and suggests what the issue is.

Framing accomplishes this by selecting, emphasizing, excluding, and elaborating on certain aspects of the material. The term "priming" refers to how the media may indicate which themes to utilise in grading political players while focussing on the impacts of agenda setting for public opinion. In other words, the media may recommend which topics to use in judging political players (Weaver, 2007).

Online news user's perception

Perception is a set or collection of views about a subject, issue or context. The perception of internet users might be defined as public opinion. Leong in 2015 said it is common that the perception or opinion of online journalism users is the view of the majority and freely formed of logical examination of arguments by the public. In the current mediated world, public opinion is frequently expressed directly and indirectly through polling, an essential and effective assessment technique in mass societies.

The institution of general elections regularly commenced the rationalization of public opinion. Mass media, public forums, and interpersonal channels are used to reflect the heightened significance of society's emotions and perceptions. Additionally, public opinion

can affect power relations. Fear of isolation, according to a spiral of silence theory, encourages individuals to conform to the perception of the majority opinion, making them less reluctant to express their own opinions. However, when individuals believe their viewpoint is appropriate, they are more likely to voice it.

Sensationalism

Sensationalism has historically been associated with the tabloid press. It describes how journalists use and display news pieces or information to the public to spark the public's attention, generate tension, or provoke agitation. In addition, sensationalism is executed through exaggerated headlines, strong phrases, and sensitive topics such as horrific images to influence public opinion or to create a public agenda (Cain-Arzu, 2016).

According to Herzog (2021) tabloid newspapers, which focus on entertainment, are known for their tendency to create sensationalism. Tabloid newspapers: small size and well-packaged news have dominated the market for a significant number of years in every region of the world, even though there have been growing worries regarding the proliferation of the tabloid style. One of the primary motivating factors behind the proliferation of sensational news is the intensifying competition for ratings that exists between various news organizations, physical appearances, and idiosyncrasies, all to attract the largest possible audience. Because the idea of sensationalism in the news has prompted significant arguments in several different countries, it is impossible to establish a definition of sensationalism that is both precise and comprehensive (Singh et al., 2023).

Dempster et al., (2022) proposed a definition of the term "tabloid" as it relates to the world of newspapers. They characterized it as either a movement in the emphasis of a particular medium from news and information to entertainment or as a shift in the bounds of taste across various types of media. They believed that the tabloid could be distinguished from other publications by two characteristics: first, it focuses on news topics such as scandal and entertainment, and second, it pays less attention to political issues, economic issues, and social issues. They point out, however, that this definition does not consider the visual aspects of the presentation of a tabloid newspaper, such as the layout, the sizes of the headlines, and the use of graphic content.

Mourão & Robertson (2019) provided a definition of sensationalism that considered both the narrative content and the formal aspects of the term. According to them, the content of sensational stories can include things like sex, scandal, crime, or corruption, while the formal features of sensational stories can include things like rapid editing pace, eyewitness camera perspective, zoom-in camera lens movements, re-enactments of news events, use of music, and tone of reporter voice-over narration. In conclusion, the term "sensationalism" refers to the emphasis placed on "soft news," in which topics like celebrity news, stories of human interest, entertainment news, and crime are given a larger prominence in the mainstream media than was previously seen. It devotes a disproportionate amount of attention to diversions such as sports, scandal, and popular entertainment, as well as the personal and private lives of people, both celebrities and ordinary citizens, which are frequently presented with sensational headlines, photos, pictures, a lot of colour, and other embellishments designed to increase attention and appeal.

Public perception of sensational news

How audiences see and interpret various forms of media, which in turn influences the myriad of attitudes those audiences have about the content of various forms of media they consume, is referred to as public perception. The public tends to develop their views and opinions on the local media as their exposure to information develops due to the availability of news consumption. This is because of the abundance of news consumption (Pelau et al., 2023).

Previous research has suggested that credibility and trust are important ways to conceptualize consumers in consuming and believing the media content which is derived from the human interactions that exist between news audiences and the media (Fisher et al., 2020). The same research also indicates that audiences' level of trust depends on what is featured in news material, such as the sourcing method or a news item that includes visual or aural proof to back their story and items to select and frame in news for gaining people's trust.

In addition, the hostile media perception element is also considered as a useful technique for influencing news readers; s perception because it concerns whether the media promotes or displays animosity towards a specific issue or group. If a person has a hostile media impression, they are more likely to believe that the news media is unfriendly toward their positions and the social links they maintain. According to Fisher et al., (2020), if people had the impression that the media were antagonistic toward them, it would cause a rift in public opinion and have a detrimental effect on democratic society.

According to Asad et al., (2019) because of the public's exposure to sensationalist news, they have less faith in the ability of governments and international organizations to effectively manage the social, physical, environmental, and technological environments. It is believed that this is leading to a feeling of fragmentation as well as the expansion of pluralist radicalism, notably in political arenas.

METHODOLOGY

This study collects its data through in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews are a qualitative data-gathering technique that entails direct, one-on-one interaction with each subject. In-depth interviews can be conducted in person or, in certain instances, over the phone. Purposive sampling is chosen by researchers because the capability to connect with a selected sample is faster and not constrained by physical geography. The researcher selects a sample from their sampling frame based on desired qualities by identifying the traits to explore and then seeks subjects who represent the entire spectrum of those characteristics.

The purpose of this study is to examine how online users perceive spectacular political news presented online. An in-depth interview was conducted with five informants. The researcher selected informants based on:

- Online news user who read about political news in Malaysia
- Age 18 years old and above

Before beginning the actual operation of data gathering, a preliminary test, often known as a pilot test, was carried out. This was done to ensure that the collection of questions that were asked during the in-depth interview would be successfully created to answer the research topic that was posed for this study. In this research, the researcher decided to use a thematic

analysis. Thematic analysis is a technique for conducting qualitative research that entails the methodical discovery, examination, and interpretation of discernible patterns within qualitative data. The generation of code from the qualitative data comes at the beginning of the theme analysis. Codes are the most minute discernible elements of analysis that are pertinent to the research issue (s). When all of the codes have been compiled, the next step is to assign them to their respective themes. The themes are the most overarching patterns that can be gleaned from the data, and they provide an interpretation that is both comprehensive and well-organized of how the data answers the study questions. As a result, for this study, the raw data will be schemed through for discernible codes. These discernible codes will then be used to generate themes, which will provide an organized interpretation of what is the perception of online users towards sensational political news on the online news portal of Astro Awani and Malaysiakini.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 provides an illustration of the names of the informants, their age, education level, occupation, frequency of reading about political news as well as the news platform that they always read regarding political news that is the subject of the investigation.

Table 1: Informant's information

Informant	Age	Education Level	Occupation/ Job	Frequency of read about political news	News Platform
Informant 1	25	Degree	Marketing Copy Writer	Daily	Astro Awani and Malaysiakini
Informant 2	25	Degree	Student	Daily	Astro Awani and Malaysiakini
Informant 3	26	Degree	Student	Daily	Astro Awani and Malaysiakini
Informant 4	30	Master Degree	Student	Once per week	Astro Awani and Malaysiakini
Informant 5	34	Diploma	Businessman	Daily	Astro Awani and Malaysiakini

Finding discovered that the reason for consumption of political online news among online users has been separated into two themes, the first of which is as a medium to know about political issues in Malaysia, and the second of which is political interest. One informant indicated that she read political news because of interest, while another informant stated that he had no interest in political news. The researcher discovered that three out of five informants read political news to get knowledge about political issues in Malaysia.

Medium to Know About Political Issues in Malaysia

The reason that online users tend to read sensational political news is that they read about political news on online platforms to discover more about current issues in Malaysia's political system without filtering or restriction. This is the main reason why online users tend to read

sensational political news. Three out of the five informants claimed that they read political news to be abreast of the most recent developments in Malaysian politics without restriction.

“I do read political news every day through online platforms because I want to know about current issues of politics in our country”.

“I read about political news more often during the election campaign period and the rest of the time, I only pay attention to my favorite figure and party using digital newspaper”.

(Informant 2)

“I read political news daily to gain information since everything regarding finances, education and health is related to politics. I just scrolled on my TikTok account and I will read all political news that pop out and once I click on that link news it will directly bring me to their online news portal”.

(Informant 5)

“I read about political news extra especially during General Election because it is quite interesting especially from online portal when we can see all political parties will start to do election campaign and they start to critique on each other’s action for the sake of to damage other’s reputation”.

(Informant 3)

“I read political news daily via online to gain information relating to politics. I even go for alternate online sources to gain additional news about politics news especially negative news about party”.

(Informant 1)

Interest (with/ in Political News)

The extent to which an individual is interested in politics is relevant in both a normative and an empirical sense. An interest in politics is a component of the normative definition of a democratic citizen, and an interest in politics is a widely used predictor of political engagement. Normatively, an interest in politics is a component of the definition of a democratic citizen.

“I read political news almost every day because I’m very interested with it. My interest in politics is influenced by how they view and interpret politics news. Understanding interest in this way seeks to clear up some of the imprecision around political interest”.

(Informant 1)

“I read political news among other news which I can say weekly. Emm.. I’m not interested in reading political news”.

(Informant 4)

"I read political news weekly due to I get addicted from my father"

(Informant 5)

Informants 2 and 3 have a same opinion: "No comments. Read for gaining political information".

Based on that answers, the researcher found that the opinion of online user towards sensational political news on online news portal of Astro Awani and Malaysiakini are sensationalism make political news interesting, sensationalism trigger the reader and sensationalism in political news change online user's perception towards politics. Four out of five informants stated that sensationalism make political news interesting while five out of five informants agree that sensationalism will trigger the reader and four over five informants believe that sensationalism in political news will change public perception and one informant out of five is not sure about that.

Sensationalism makes political news interesting to follow

Sensationalism is recognized to raise the expectations of readers, but it also tends to turn people off and drive them away. A great large number of people are attracted by the title, and as a result, they start clicking through. After being attracted by the attention-grabbing headlines, they can even make it a habit to go through the political news items regularly. However, to maintain the interest of the new breed of readers, the journalist will need to think of constantly more exciting things to write about and titles to give those articles. The readers are possibly only clicking on news articles because the headlines appear to be engaging. If they are unable to locate anything that satisfies their expectations, they can just leave and not look back again.

"Yes, sometimes it is interesting because headlines trigger us. But, as a good reader, we have to prioritize the content of the article instead of focusing on the headline and, always check from the mainstream media to know the facts and the truth about some info".

(Informant 1)

"Yes, for me sensationalism is interesting. Because sometimes through that news we can know about the others perception and opinion and yes I cannot deny that news with sensational things will be interesting to read since it will make readers wants to know more about the certain issue but on the other hand it will be risky to those who just only read the headline and then they will their own assumption"

(Informant 3)

"For me it can attract the reader since the style of writing itself is using interesting ways like using harsh word and overstated headline. Emm so I think sensationalism make the news quite interesting".

(Informant 5)

When a story gets sensationalized, it tends to distract both the journalists who are covering the subject and the readers who are reading it. The purpose of sensationalism is to cut through

all the clutter and grab the attention of the reader with something that may only be a minor component of the tale or even be irrelevant to the story. And because readers are constantly subjected to this kind of content, it can build up to the point where they construct an image of a person or an event that is completely out of context or even altogether incorrect. This is because readers do not have access to all the facts.

Sensationalism Tools/Devices to Trigger the Readers

The capacity to pique the interest and curiosity of members of an audience is what characterizes sensationalism as a content feature. As a result, “sensational” news is news that has the potential to elicit emotional responses from readers.

“Sensational and trigger cannot be separated. When the headline is sensational, of course it will trigger people to read it. Then, if the headline is not accurate with the context, it will trigger in terms of upset and the trustworthy will be declined”.

(Informant 1)

“For me the headline and pictures will triggered my attention to read more especially bad or negative headline”.

(Informant 2)

“I think the main reason why journalist use sensational material in political news is to attract and trigger the readers when they read about the political news however by using those ways journalist indirectly will make the readers confuse with the misleading or exaggerate headline”.

(Informant 3)

“Yes, I think so since sensationalizing a story can distract both reporters and viewers from reading it objectively. Sensationalism is intended to cut through the clutter and capture your attention with a minor or even irrelevant aspect of the story”

Informant 4)

“Obviously yes hahaha..because when they use exaggerate headline or sensitive images they will trigger the reader. Even though it will attract readers to read the article but they somehow will play with the readers emotions”.

(Informant 5)

Sensationalism can be interpreted in a more direct sense as the presence of news aspects that evoke emotional responses as well as physiological stimulation or arousal in the readers who are reading the material. Sensationalism is considered as a feature of the process of packaging news, which lays emphasis on those aspects that have the potential to elicit an effect on the human sensory system.

Sensationalism in political news change online user's perception of politics

Online user's perceptions of political news will be affected by sensationalism in political news. Four over five informants believe that sensationalism in political news will change public perception and one informant out of five is not sure about that.

The researcher found out that informants agree that sensationalism in political news can change online user's perception towards politics. This can be seen in their interview as follows:

"Yes, if the readers only depend on the headline, instead read the full context."

(Informant 1)

"Yes. In my opinion, those sensational material will influence readers thought about political in Malaysia since the reader not only adults but the young generation also read about political news. If they not read the whole news the will make wrong assumption and conclusion about the news".

(Informant 3)

"I think that the perception can be affected, but to change the perception is hard to answer since not all political news are sensational"

(Informant 4)

"I'm the one who believe that sensationalized stories receive more news coverage than non-sensationalized stories because of the excitement factor. Regardless if it's newsworthy or not. But journalist should make sure to check the fact correctly as it can change public perception towards political news in Malaysia".

(Informant 5)

While one informant not sure whether sensationalism in online political news can change online user's perceptions.

"Depends on the news itself. It might be good and bad depends on how the readers perception."

(Informant 2)

The in-depth interview results proved that sensationalism in political news can change online user's perceptions the researcher believe that sensationalism has always been a profitable method of generating revenue. With the aid of digital media, its efficacy is increased even further.

The way sensationalism in political news is used in the online news portals of Astro Awani and Malaysiakini can change online user's perceptions by the selection of words for news and also sensationalism in headlines will lead to misleading information. All informants agreed that the selection of words for news can change online user's perceptions. Besides, four out of five informants agreed that another way that sensationalism in political news can change online user's perceptions is sensationalism in headlines to attract people's attention.

Selection of Words for News

Journalists should choice of words to use as a headline and news content. There is a common misunderstanding that using a huge font or vivid colors will make the story more exciting. But journalists need to be extra careful in choosing words for news because it very risky if the reader misinterprets the news as stated by Informant 1 and 2.

“Sometimes, I think it can. If the using of the exciting words in headline is not misleading with the content of the article so sensational factor can be used to make people read the article and stories more”.

(Informant 1)

“yes. Just quote the politician without add up anything to their words and from that the reader will think if it is a good thing or not”.

(Informant 2)

Meanwhile, informant 3 and 4 also stated that she agrees that journalist need to choose correct words to avoid misinterpret information.

“I think yes this is the way to attract readers especially young generation to know more about current politics issue in Malaysia but journalist need to be extra careful in choosing of word to avoid any misinterpret and misleading in disseminate information”.

(Informant 3)

“The language is one of the factors causing misunderstanding, and in my point of view I think journalist should avoid exaggeration”.

(Informant 4)

Lastly informant 5 stated :

“Emm...I think sensationalism can be use but in proper way like journalist need to double check the facts and also choose the right words that suitable with the situation. If sensational material like controversial images or harsh word and exaggerate headline still continue to be used it will lead to defamation.” He also stated that “yes of course. Gory image I don’t think it always been used in political news but harsh word and mislead headline always happen”.

The researcher can conclude that sensationalism, which may be characterized by strong language, bright color, and huge font, can be found in a significant amount of news and media. This is because it creates headlines that capture people’s attention and tales that provoke thought.

Sensationalism in headline will lead to misleading information

One of the major irksome qualities of sensational headlines is that they tend to turn off the readers. The finding show that four informants agree that headline will lead to misleading informant which can affect the online user's perception. Informant 1 said:

"The political news that has sensational factor always using a tricky headline to attract readers. It's a clickbait process to gain viewers to read the news." She also adds that "like I said before, sensational can used if editor not used the misleading headline but still in sensational headline. For the example, the quote from politicians. Even though it a harsh word, it's still not misleading because it is the fact. And the readers must continue to read the full article to clarify what the headline discuss about."

Informant 1 also stated that:

"Please don't deny the fact. Check the fact before write the headline. Don't confuse the readers with the misleading fact. Usually, journalist will write the story and the headline will be decided by the editor. So, always cross-check with the sources to accurate it. So that, people will trust our media. But yeah, media in Malaysia have a root evil to be discuss in terms of freedom of press, also law. It's the different matters but always link."

Besides, informant 2 said that:

"Usually the headline plays a big role in telling the whole news. Because it is the first thing that I will look at before reading the news. In my opinion, using headline for a clickbait and maybe a news organization that look biased in writing a news about the party will lead to misleading information".

Moreover, informant 3 stated that:

"I hope that journalist don't easily use harsh and sensitive words in headline and news content. I know that journalist need to be truth in reporting the news but choosing of words is very important. This is because reader will believe all what they have read even me myself tend to believe all news that I read on online platform especially official online news portal".

And lastly informant 5 said that:

"Sensationalism in headline makes it tougher for the average reader to filter through sources. Ultimately it's the readers that are left disappointed with the lack of substance when journalists made to view sensationalized media".

DISCUSSION

The results show that users of online platforms have the propensity to read sensational political news for the simple reason that they read about political news on online platforms to learn more about contemporary problems confronting Malaysia's political system.

In addition, for individuals to be able to make choices regarding the General Election that are properly informed, they need information regarding the numerous candidates who are running for office as well as the most pressing issues of the day. People can make sure they are up to date on current events by ensuring that they read the news on a consistent basis. The most significant place to look for information such as this is in the latest political news. According to the findings of the study, the researcher discovered that the consumption of political online news posted on the online portal of Astro Awani and Malaysiakini among online users has been divided into two themes: to learn about political concerns in Malaysia and political interest. One informant said she read political news out of interest, while another said he had no interest in it. The study revealed that three out of five respondents read political news to gain awareness of Malaysian political concerns. Based on Haugsgjerd & Karlsen (2022) he stated that it is important that citizens of representative democracies follow news about politics and current affairs in the period leading up to an election. As news consumption is essential for citizens' abilities to make informed political choices and for their involvement in politics as such, we need to know more about how the develop in the period leading up the election.

Moreover, results of the research stated that the perceptions of online users regarding sensational political news on online news portal of Astro Awani and Malaysiakini are as follows: sensationalism in political news makes political news interesting; sensationalism in political news triggers the reader; and sensationalism in political news changes online users' perceptions of politics. Sensationalism, according to four out of five informants, is what makes political news interesting, while all five informants concur that sensationalism will trigger the reader and four over five informants believe that sensationalism in political news will change public perception and one informant out of five not sure about that. According to Uribe & Gunter (2007) sensational news is comprised of various aspects that stimulate the readers' feelings of empathy and emotion.

The way sensationalism in political news is applied in online news that can influence the perception of online users is via the selection of words for news, and sensationalism in headlines will also lead to false information. Both methods involve the usage of online news. Every single informant that the researcher spoke with concurred that the choice of words used in news articles can affect how users of online platforms perceive the information. Another method that sensationalism in political news can influence the perception of online users is the use of sensationalism in headlines, which will lead to inaccurate information, as agreed upon by four out of the five sources of information collected.

Consumers are able to scan a large number of news items in order to obtain a condensed news update or to select which articles to read as a result of a headline's ability to summarise the main idea of an article. Additionally, a headline's purpose is to attract attention and generate as much interest as possible. According to Ecker et al. (2014), people anticipate that a title will be pertinent to the article and contain information about it. This is true most of the time; nevertheless, headlines can also provide the wrong impression about the main point of an article, and as a result, they can be deceptive.

On the other hand, according to Carcioppolo et al., (2022) it is impossible to underestimate the significance of a story's headlines. It is good knowledge that a large number of newspaper readers "scan" articles rather than reading them in their entirety. Most people only read the title and maybe the first couple of paragraphs of the article. In articles published in

newspapers, the typical length of a paragraph is merely one or two phrases. These readers rely on little information that is frequently sensationalized to build their opinions.

CONCLUSION

Since the beginning of time, both conjecture and investigation have been focused on the topic of the role that the media plays in melding public views and opinions regarding key political and social issues. It is a widely held belief that what we know, think, and believe about what goes on in the world, apart from our own personal, first-hand experiences, is shaped, and some would say orchestrated, by how these events are reported in newspapers and communicated through the mediums of radio and television. This view is supported by several studies that have shown people's knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs about what goes on in the world.

In conclusion, sensational material like harsh words and exaggerated headline give an impact on online user's perception of political news posted on online platforms. Both journalists and readers should be responsible in this situation. As a news consumer, readers need to read the full article first before jumping to a conclusion after reading the headline. This is because sensational material will influence the reader's thoughts about politics in Malaysia. If they do not read the whole news, they will make wrong assumptions and conclusions about the news. As for journalists, before writing the headline, journalists ought to verify the accuracy of the facts. Avoid giving the readers a false perception of the deceptive fact. In most cases, a journalist will be the one to write the piece, while the editor will be the one to choose the headline. Therefore, journalists should constantly double-check the sources to ensure their accuracy. For people to have faith in our media. However, the media in Malaysia have a fundamental problem that needs to be discussed in terms of the freedom of the press as well as legislation.

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