



## ***Tidak pasti, jangan kongsi!! Secret Sauce for Success in Media Literacy Is Crucial in Battling Fake News***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Today, social media are frequently associated with the propagation of defamation, which is believed to impact society negatively. Most of this fake news originates via Whatsapp, Twitter, and Telegram applications, indicating that this social media facility that facilitates the transmission of fake news continues to exist. This study aims to explore and understand the style of news writing in preventing fake news on digital media platform devoted to news literacy from the perspective of a media practitioner. The debate will focus mostly about fake news and the appropriate journalistic methodology for reporting on digital news sites. Identifying the factors that influence the evolution of the style of journalism on digital media is a further crucial endeavour. The objectives of the study were achieved through the use of semi-structured qualitative interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted with ten media professionals until the data set was saturated. According to the findings of the study, data journalism is the news writings styles that can aid in the prevention of "fake news" in digital media. In addition, research demonstrates that data journalism is characterised by data cap-

ture, graphics, and visualisation. This study seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by demonstrating how the expansion of journalistic style on online news websites has made new journalistic practises relevant.

**Keywords:** *News Writing Style, Fake News, Data Journalism, News Literacy, New Media, Digital Journalism*

## INTRODUCTION

The world has drastically changed. With the development of technology and the Internet, print media has given way to new media platforms. Globally, "fake news" has always been at the centre of criticism. "Fake news" is a symptom of a more significant systemic challenge surrounding the accuracy and credibility of information and how individuals—socially, politically, and economically—will deal with the threats and opportunities of new communication technologies, mainly social media.

Multiple waves of digitalisation have already revolutionised the media industry. To thrive, news organisations must maintain technology at the centre of their operations, allowing them to produce engaging content and attract new audiences. The fundamental components of writing are incorporated into this new form of media. Having unique content is no longer enough in today's hypercompetitive market. The authenticity of the news is the most crucial consideration.

Traditional media such as newspapers are experiencing a progressive decline in readership due to the introduction of new media formats. The Internet revolution and the sophistication of technologies like smartphones and social media have made these new media accessible. Today, most people obtain their news through social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as online personal blogs, as the new media market continues to expand and become the dominant method of news consumption. According to a study by Baptista et al. (2021), people are more likely to believe fake news when it is disseminated via an Internet platform. This current process of reading information places enormous pressure on journalists. Journalists must work faster to provide breaking news before another outlet or person hears about it, creating fake news.

However, writing and reporting began to transform as the world evolved. Writing for new media platforms represents a significant shift from traditional news reporting and writing forms. The method journalists use to source their content distinguishes them from other types of writers. Journalists use methods to gather their information: interviewing informants, looking over government papers, digging up old stories, and going to the action scene. "Inverted pyramid" is a style of writing used in news articles. The most important information is at the top of the inverted pyramid, while the least important information is at the bottom.

One of the reasons for the rise of fake news is the rise of citizen journalists (Molina, Sundar, Le, & Lee, 2019). Social media has changed journalism since individuals may now influence which articles are published and shared. Live tweeting or first-hand accounts can add to the tales. When a news organisation does not have journalists in a region, they go to Twitter and other social media for first-hand stories. This strategy swiftly spreads the news. Twitter information cannot be checked promptly, resulting in "fake" news.

Fake news is a symptom of a more significant problem, such as a lack of media literacy (Guess et al., 2020). False content is being created, disseminated, and consumed at an unprecedented speed due to information and communication technology advances. Citizens can become confused and unable to make critical choices if they lack credible information, which can harm public discussion.

This study aims to investigate and obtain a better knowledge of the writing style employed on online news websites to deliver information about news literacy from the viewpoint of a media professional.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Beginnings of Journalism

Journalism is collecting, organising, and delivering news through print and non-print media. The earliest reference to a journalistic product comes from Rome in 59 BC, when the *Acta Diurna* documented news. It was published daily and hung across the city for everybody to read. During the Tang dynasty (618–907), China developed a court report called a "bao" to inform government authorities. It continued under many titles until 1911 when the Qing empire fell. The *Weekly Newes*, published in 1622, was the first English-language newspaper (although in "old English"). The *Daily Courant* was the first public daily newspaper, beginning in 1702.

These early attempts to inform the public was often greeted with government opposition. They tried to censor the press by taxing and restricting publications. However, newspaper publishing exploded as the population's literacy grew, coupled with improved printing and circulation technology. Today, there are pockets of news censorship around the world, but journalistic freedom reigns for the most part. After newspapers gained popularity, magazines emerged. *Tattler* and *Spectator* were early examples. By the 1830s, magazines were mass-circulated and appealed to a broader audience. There were female-targeted illustrated serials.

Time passed, and the expense of news collecting rose as publishers tried to keep up with a growing thirst for printed news. News agencies replaced independent publications gradually. They hired employees to gather and create news reports and then sold them to news outlets. Print media soon faced a new method of news gathering

— first the telegraph, then radio, TV, and mass broadcasting. Technology's progress appeared inevitable.

Non-print media transformed news gathering and reporting. It sped up everything, making news more immediate and relevant. Soon, technology will become a fundamental aspect of journalism, even in print. Satellites that send information in seconds and the Internet put breaking news into practically everyone's hands at once. New standards of journalism have been formed as a result of this.

It is time to move on to 20th and 21st-century journalism now. This industry's professionalism has grown since the days of yellow journalism. Journalism became a recognised university subject, giving it an aura of importance it lacked before. A growing body of research on journalism explained its shortcomings and mass communication tactics from a social and psychological perspective. Social responsibility became a trademark of journalism, and journalists created professional groups. "A free and responsible press" is the battle cry of modern journalists, who value ethics and standards.

New technologies change the news. Newspapers remained the most trusted source of information for Americans, who complimented it with non-print media. Non-print media dominate news acquisition by the public and have proven more significant than expected. Non-print media gives Americans and others worldwide sound bites. Newspapers that spend time, effort, reflection, and blood on news collecting and reporting still seek depth. Who wants to ponder the world the way journalists do? "News" has a new definition. Hard news, celebrity news, breaking news, and other categories have changed journalism.

### **Background of News Writing**

The tone in which the news is presented to the intended audience is referred to as the news writing style. It incorporates the fundamentals of journalistic writing, such as its structure, style, and norms (Johnson-Cartee, 2005). The inverted pyramid format is used to answer the who, what, when, where, why, and occasionally the how questions. New media studies have switched their focus from print to digital because of increased research into digital news and new media. As indicated by interrelated newsroom practises, news texts, and media reception, globalisation should be considered a significant factor of news styles (Berglez,2008).

In Mesopotamia, writing began with images, which evolved into symbols, and then the alphabet. By the fourteenth century, new technological advancements had drastically changed the nature of writing. As writing became more widely available, so did the printing press. When the Prince of Wales Island Gazette was founded in Penang in 1805, other newspapers like the Malacca Observer and the Perak Pinoor were also formed. A large amount of newspaper material in the nineteenth century was indus-

trial journalism and advertising. When Malaysia was first introduced to the Internet in 1990, it set the stage for a digital revolution that would include computers and smartphones, affordable Internet connections, and free social media sites (Normah et al., 2017). Because of the development of social media, the way news is reported is evolving. A year-by-year look at the data by Zuwairi et al. (2016) shows that journalists have used a descriptive writing pattern since 1987. In fact, there is no evidence that journalists add any kind of interpretation to specific news stories. In 1997, 6.2% of Utusan Malaysia journalists used a mixed (descriptive and interpretive) style of writing. In 2014, that number had risen to 8.8%. When compared to Berita Harian, the number of journalists who use mixed writing styles has gone up from 3.8% in 1997 to 16.2% in 2014. This means that Berita Harian has grown a lot. From 1997 to 2014, journalist wrote about events in a lot of different ways. Zuwairi and Normah (2017) also stated that as technology changes, both internal and external factors affect how journalists in Malaysia write

### **Factors Affecting Digital News Portals' Writing Styles**

News is presented differently than before. Market principles have changed the writing style of news stories on digital news portals. Internet and other communication technology have changed how local media report events (Klinenberg, 2005).

Internet and technology, including social media and online news, influence the evolution of news writing style (Fahmy & Attia, 2020). Nor Afizan Zakaria and Fariza Hanis (2018) note that social media has become a 'one-stop centre' that allows users to swiftly and easily find information, including photos and videos.

Clickbait has become popular due to the change in digital news writing style. Clickbait plays an essential role in digital news, especially in news headlines (Arza-Otano & Salaverra, 2019; Geckil, Mungen, Gundogan & Kaya, 2018; Kuiken, Schuth, Spitters & Marx, 2017; Karnowski, Kümpel, Leonhard & Leiner, 2017).

Online value chain also affects news writing style. Today's readers demand more information; therefore, newswriting must alter. As web-based news adds languages, colour photographs of events, audio, and video clips to print descriptions, people's demand for the latest information grows. Interactive news boards or chat rooms make them more appealing (Swatman, Krueger & van der Beek, 2006, p.63). Some say the Internet and digital technology have transformed journalism. Al-Rawi (2017) notes that web-based news writing tools have enhanced reader participation, allowing news to propagate faster.

Blatchford (2019) argues social media has revolutionised news writing. According to Taibi and Nada (2020), the landscape of journalism must evolve as citizen journalists produce more content and are credited with establishing a new writing style. Tradi-

tional journalism must embrace a new kind of storytelling due to the changing news writing style.

Fink and Schudson (2014) mentioned that worldwide journalism has changed since the 1950s. Berglez (2008) describes global journalism from an epistemological standpoint, "paving the way for a more complete analysis of news texts"

The widespread use of the Internet and technological advancements have changed journalism, especially the writing style of news stories. Digital news writing has given journalists new challenges.

### **Fake news on online media**

In a world where information is contested, the phrase "fake news" shows how hard it is for journalists to deal with the fact that people are losing faith in what they do. Most research agrees that optimised fake news is dangerous (Levitin, 2016; Barclay, 2018; Bartlett, 2017; Vaidhyanathan, 2018; Stephens-Davidowitz & Pabon, 2017).

"Fake news" reflects the challenged position of news and the mechanics of belief creation in modern society (Waisbord, 2018). Now fake news is persuasive. Many users could not tell truth from fake and get their information from memes (Ireland, 2018). Molina, Sundar, and Lee (2019) categorised seven distinct forms of online content as "fake news" (false news, polarising content, satire, misreporting, commentary, persuasive information, and citizen journalism). According to the findings of Tandoc, Jenkins, and Craft (2018), fake news is a social media phenomenon that thrives on political divide driven by ideology and money. Therefore, they attributed the proliferation of fake news to the current political climate, social media platforms like Google and Facebook, as well as audiences. Not only does this imply accuracy and balance, but it also necessitates the kind of diligence that only comes with thorough reporting. The re-establishment of journalism's credibility hinges on a return to the basics (Richardson, 2017).

According to Duffy, Tandoc, and Ling (2019), fake news affects real news, especially when the person sharing it is not sure of the truth. Fake news can also hurt relationships between the sender and the receiver. Fake news in digital media can be reduced by understanding the style of news writing.

### **A Cognitive Approach**

The purpose of this study was to investigate and understand better the writing style employed by online news sites to deliver information on news literacy. Thus, theories regarding the writing style of news articles on digital portals may explain the phenomena.

Social media often spreads false or misleading political "news." In 2020, fake news concerns were redoubled due to social media misinformation about the COVID-19 epidemic. Misleading hyper partisan news and yellow journalism contribute to political polarisation. False and misleading statements arise in a variety of ways, including study on conspiracy beliefs, superstition, rumours, susceptibility to foolishness, and misconceptions. This study employs a cognitive approach to investigate how digital media users think, remember, learn, and use language when reading news on social media. The publication of "Cognitive Psychology" by Ulric Neisser in 1967 marks the official commencement of the cognitive approach.

This study applied cognitive theory to explore the impact of news writing style on digital media. By gaining a deeper understanding of how users receive information, researchers can investigate the effect of news writing style on digital media. Cognitive psychology views the individual as an information processor, comparable to how a computer receives input and executes a programme to provide a result. According to McLeod (2008), the method to information processing is predicated on the following assumptions:

- (1) a sequence of processing mechanisms (such as attention, perception, and short-term memory) processes information made available by the environment;
- (2) these information processing systems transform or alter the data in a systematic manner;
- (3) the purpose of study is to identify the underlying processes and structures of cognitive performance;
- (4) information processing in humans is comparable to computer processing.



**Figure 1 : Information processing models**

### **A Practice Approach to the Style of News Making**

A practice approach to the style of news making is another framework that has led this research in addition to the Cognitive Approach. Both frameworks were based on the idea that news production is a practise.

Previously, the practise theory employed it in social science. Schmidt (2018) claimed practise theory tries to challenge structuralism's notion that social order lacks human agency. Theory of practise can be applied to a journalistic investigation (Ryfe, 2018). 'Practise theory' is a combination of cultural and social models that allows a departure from the industrial or professional frameworks of journalism studies. It investigates how journalism is reproduced in the practises of the many journalism studies

components (Ahva, 2016). Practices are unique collections of actions that are logically related to form frames or strips of activity by rules, norms, or techniques. A practice-theory approach to journalism trains students to analyse at numerous levels, from micro to meso to macro (Ryfe, 2018).

Improved practise helps shape news writing styles in digital news portals (Ammerman, 2020). According to studies, transforming news writing style in online news portals enhances understanding (Joutsenvirta, 2016), provides insights into problematic situations (Svendsen, 2019), and improves process and outcomes.

Boeman and Meijer (2018) used the practise theory to explore how journalists handle factually wrong stories in their regular news practise. They construct a framework for newsmakers and storytellers to use in their search for and delivery of stories. Figure 2 shows the contrast between newsmakers and storytellers, as well as how journalists produce and present news. The study found that newsmakers prefer pegs and established points of view when putting together stories, whereas storytellers consider them barriers. Consequently, current research can benefit from prior work. This paradigm will better describe how Internet news portals cover breaking news in the future.

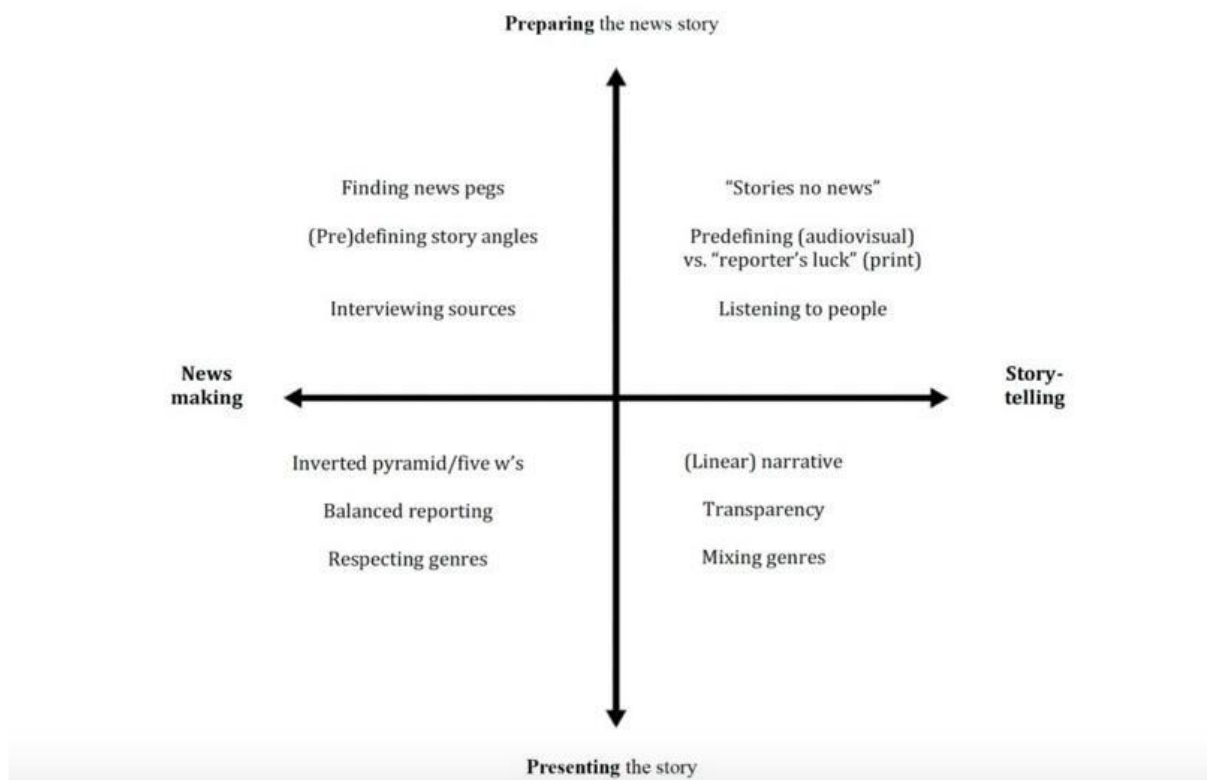


Figure 2 : How newsmakers and storytellers prepare and present their news  
(Source : Boeman and Meijer 2018)



The researchers analysed news consumption through a theory of practise lens and the newsmaking and storytelling process. Heikkila and Ahva looked at public research and the digital roles of journalists in 2014. They looked at how people talk to each other in social networks and how people use and talk about the media. Ahva looked at both traditional media and citizen journalism in 2017. Ahva (2016) says that journalists should think about materiality, activity, and reflexivity. Figure 3 depicts journalism elements. Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, and Matassi (2018) were the first to use practise theory to study how people get their news. They looked at how young people in Argentina picked up random news from social media and found four key things: text-materiality, "anytime and anywhere" time-space coordinates, everyday sociability, and text-materiality (or socialisation).



Figure 3 : Elements of practice  
(Source: Ahva 2016)

Journalism practises have sparked a new style of study to address stability and rapid change with the introduction of new media. According to Witschge, Anderson, Domingo, and Hermida (2018), hHybridity is "solutions that creatively tackle the field's categories. This hypothesis is used despite its flaws. The current researcher chose to adopt this theory despite its flaws and analysed whether Malaysian online news portals follow Boeman & Meijer's (2018) and Ahva's (2018) original techniques (2017).

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The principles that this research is built on were developed using a combination of cognitive and practise theories. The cognitive approach is important to study the way news is written to figure out to fight fake news. Practicing theory also helps to figure out how the way news is written which promotes clickbait content. The researcher has used the practise theory to analyse and understand how the way news is written or how journalists write helps clickbait in digital news. By using this theory, it is hoped that it will show more about how journalists try to make sense of their work. Figure 4 shows the overall structure of the ideas.

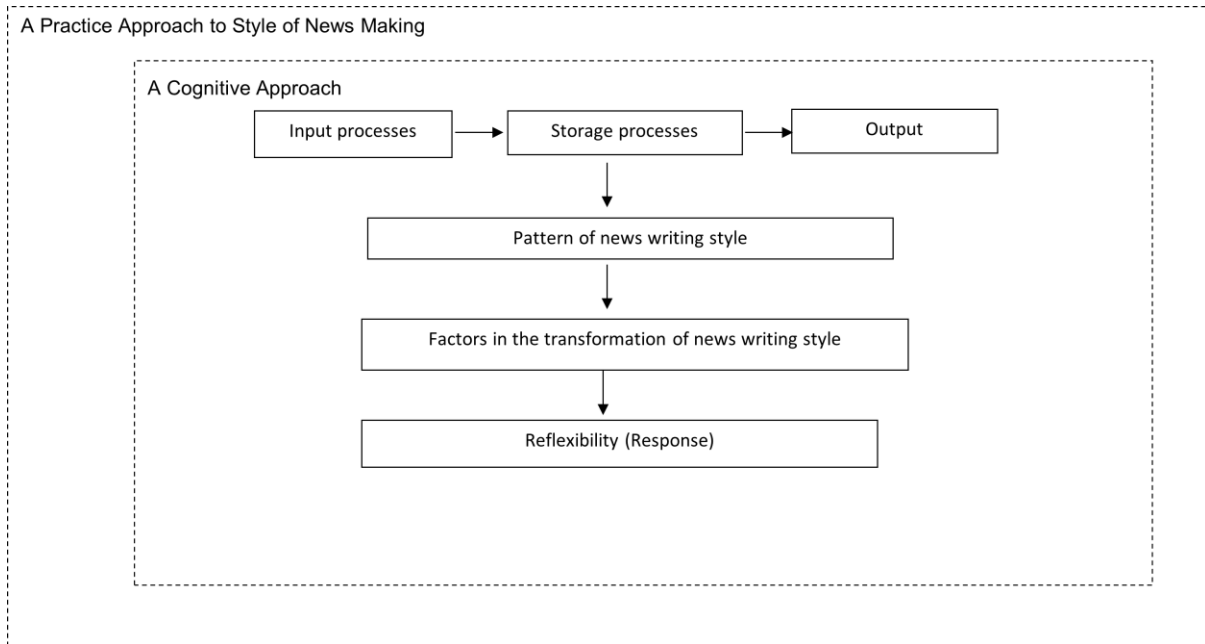


Figure 4 : Conceptual research framework, adapted and revised to reflect the transformation of the news writing style in digital news portal

## METHODOLOGY

This study utilised semi-structured interviews with the mainstream and alternative media editors and journalists to gain a better understanding of the style of news writing that is acceptable for digital media in order to prevent the spread of fake news. The text was transcribed verbatim by researchers. Since the beginning of the study, ten media professionals have secured its success, including seven journalists and three editors. Reason of choosing mainstream media journalists is to determine the extent to which mainstream media has embraced journalistic writing. The report also identified Harian Metro, Bernama, Berita Harian, Sinar Harian, and Malaysia Kini among the top 30 online newspapers in Malaysia. Likewise, alternative media outlets such as Suara Merdeka, Malaysia Gazzete, Malaysia Indicator, and Malaysia Kini were selected due to their combined Facebook following of more than 30,000. Suara Merdeka was established by journalists with decades of experience at Utusan Melayu (M) Berhad and Malaysia Gazette, whereas Malaysiakini.com was the first online daily in Malaysia. The objective was to elicit a variety of perspectives in order to expand the quantity of available information about the events and provide the most thorough answers to the questions of the study. The entire interview was recorded using a voice recorder to assure that every word was captured.

In this study, the term "transcendental" refers to the process through which meaning is formed in everyday settings (Van Manen, 2014; cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study adheres to transcendental (or descriptive) phenomenology, which may

benefit in eliminating bias and prejudice in the data. The researchers analysed and categorised the data acquired from interviews in order to improve categorization and subthemes for the benefit of vital topics. For this purpose, the researchers used Nvivo 12 to assist with data management. Using data collected from ten informants, the saturation threshold was attained. The technique for data analysis begins with the transcription of recorded conversations into documents that can be easily read by the researchers. The interview transcript was supplied to the translator so that it may be translated from Malay Language to English. Each transcript is re-examined prior to the creation of codes and categories; the categorization of these data aided in the development of the topic in response to research questions.

## FINDINGS

According to the media experts interview sessions, this study demonstrated that data journalism is a form of news writing that can contribute in minimizing or eliminating the problems that come with fake news in digital media.

Digital news writing has ushered in a new era of news writing, including data journalism, concurrent with the advent of the Internet as a communication medium in the media. Data journalism has emerged as one of the most prominent trends in news writing style in journalism. Data journalism has been regarded as a potential for the media industry to expand and attract the attention of its target viewers. This study, too, has uncovered various subthemes in the creation of journalistic data.

### Capture Data

Journalists in the digital news era need to know how to collect data so they can report on breaking news and build media professionals who know how to use sources. The editor of Malaysia Indicator, source 7, says that the situation is as follows:

*"It's about capturing and relating information. Before connecting the news, we must gather all the facts (data). We can't copy, paste, or connect. Before combining them into a single document, we must first scan all of the reliable media's information. Then we look at social media. Instead finding fresh information, the purpose is to buttress mainstream media narratives."*

As a media practitioner in the digital era, he or she must not just report the news, but also show how their knowledge makes it more significant and dependable. In the digital age, readers have easy access to information. This is because the Internet offers various platforms for swiftly and easily acquiring news.

Data journalism provides deeper insights and can influence narratives. The researchers need to figure out how journalists receive information, how fast they can spread it, and how they link it. This answers questions about accuracy and logic. Thus, the rise of data journalism shows how journalism has progressed.

The journalists use Facebook, Twitter, and blogs to supplement interviews and follow-ups. As journalists, they must find unique news stories and determine how to capture them.

Journalist 7 shared his experience at Malaysia Indicator:

*"When (I) joined Malaysia Indicator, our methodology was data journalism, so when talking about data journalism, writing is no longer an issue because if you can visualise the data in a chart or an infographic, you do not need to write as many paragraphs." Introduction and conclusion both used 5W1H. It's best to let the data speak for itself rather than write much about the material. "That's the problem."*

Data journalism has introduced new tools and ideas to media practitioners and transformed reporting patterns into; it is a dynamic, expanding discipline. Bhargava and D'Ignazio (2021) did an excellent job of describing information searching and critical thinking. Journalists are using data journalism to analyse digital content more deeply. Data journalists in the news were granted minimal protection from audience demand to reduce effort.

### **Graphic Approach**

By analysing data journalism of news writing style in data visualisation pieces, academics are able to analyse how news coverage has been structured using infographics in the media. An assistant editor from Sinar Harian and journalists from Malaysia Kini and Harian Metro said infographics capture data and help readers integrate information visually. According to Sinar Harian's assistant editor, data visualisation can make things more pleasurable.

*"Technology changes quickly, therefore we must keep up." We must learn to use apps and Internet re-sources."*

Data journalism is replacing traditional news writing as technology advances. Media workers should be cautious while exploring the Internet's audience-expanding prospects.

*"Now we must think more about graphic ways and visual strategies, and writing abilities are outdated," said a MalaysianKini journalist.*

He/she continued:

*"The more visuals we can provide, the easier it will be for readers to understand. Add more graphs to your presentation. Such things pique the audience's curiosity. They don't care what you wrote. A fresh pop-up with a vital point appears from another pie chart in the graph or chart. It's news too. That's also news."*

Data journalism's transformation affects news delivery from the audience's perspective. Today, audiences or readers want easily digestible and rapid material. For example, graphic approaches give a more compelling overall picture. Graphs, infographics, and maps have changed news writing style in the digital age.

Context is important in data journalism because it helps people understand how the data was collected, why it is important, and what it means for the people it represents. One change in the way news is written that has happened in journalism is data journalism. Infographics are a type of graphic tool that are often used in news writing. From the point of view of data journalism, this changes the way news is written and makes it easier for people to understand the information or news on the news portal. When given a context, data can be looked at with less bias and preconceived notions, and with a better understanding of how people's actions affect the numbers (McBride, 2020).

### **Visualisation**

The digital news environment of today makes it possible to show news articles in a visual way, with full and emotional pictures of the stories. According to two interviewees, infographics and visualisations send a strong message and get a lot of information across quickly and clearly. Journalist 3 admitted that clickbait looks seems is important:

*"People can share headlines and news stories with lots of photos and infographics on social media if they are interested in them. It's happening because when they look at it, they quickly realise how important it is. With this kind of story, it's easier for readers to follow along."*

Between the digital news platform and the interviews, a clickbait link has been made. The amount of online news coverage may be affected by the fact that visualisation can be used to get more traffic. When data is presented in a news article, it is easier to see if there are any trends when the data is shown in a visual way. Aside from that, the message will be short and easy for the audience to understand.

Thomson (2018) also found that the timeline of interactions is strongly linked to completeness, accuracy, and fairness. He has found that visual stories could show role conformity and conflict in a way that words alone are unable to do. An example is pointed out by journalist 2.

*"Graphics are more interesting to people than words. Visualization will be the way that journalism is done in the future. When information is shown in a visual way, it is easier for people to understand. The way things are going now, people just read the headlines and then say what they think, especially on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter."*

Interviewees said that data journalism is very important for reporting on online news sites. Data journalism lets journalists find and report news in more interesting and visually appealing ways. Visual design that uses clear, easy-to-understand graphics makes it easier for people to read. So, journalists often use infographics to show how their news writing fits together. Notably, Lewis (2021) defines data journalism as the significant use of numerical evidence as a pattern-detection technique in journalism. In the future, data journalism could provide a lot of information about a wide range of topics.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

This study has focused on data journalism's philosophy and practise. From the interview with ten journalists, this study showed that using data journalism to get accurate information and knowledge depends on a number of factors, such as, but not limited to: 1) capture data, 2) graphic approach, and 3) visualization. For data journalists, access to, availability of, and constraints on data have a huge impact on what they know. Because of that, with the character of data journalism it can help to prevent users to get wrong information from the digital media.

Data journalism plays a crucial role in the prevention of fake news. Because the information is derived from data. It cannot be changed or modified COVID-19 as an example of a great deal of misinformation, misleading, or inaccurate information covid 19. However, when The Ministry of Health Malaysia employed data journalism in its news dissemination, the material became more reliable.

Data journalism can construct a more appealing picture than just delivering facts. The shift from traditional to data journalism may be more visible. Journalists may clarify their conclusions or invite readers to research. "Transparency is the new objectivity" is a well-known phrase in journalism. The way journalists write for digital news portals is changing, which is good for the news business. Journalists get information from police records, government documents, people, and surveys of public opinion. By adding article data, acquiring and organising this material can be improved, if not automated.

Digital news platforms employ social media to reach Internet users. The evolution of news distribution technologies has criticised the expansion of journalistic style in recent years. In the past years, notification converged. Digital communication has transformed journalism, leading to interactive content and database news.

A study has found that data journalism affects news clickbait. Journalism is changing as people read less. News organisations should strive for journalistic progress to improve news literacy.

The scope of the study should be widened to cover Malaysian consumer news literacy and consumer news in general. Based on the outcomes of the study, it is evident that the evolution of journalistic style influences readers' ability to comprehend news material. Less well-known is the extent to which these elements may impact consumer news and journalistic style.

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