

IFJ announces Trust in Media in Malaysia study results together with the Merdeka Center and NUJ

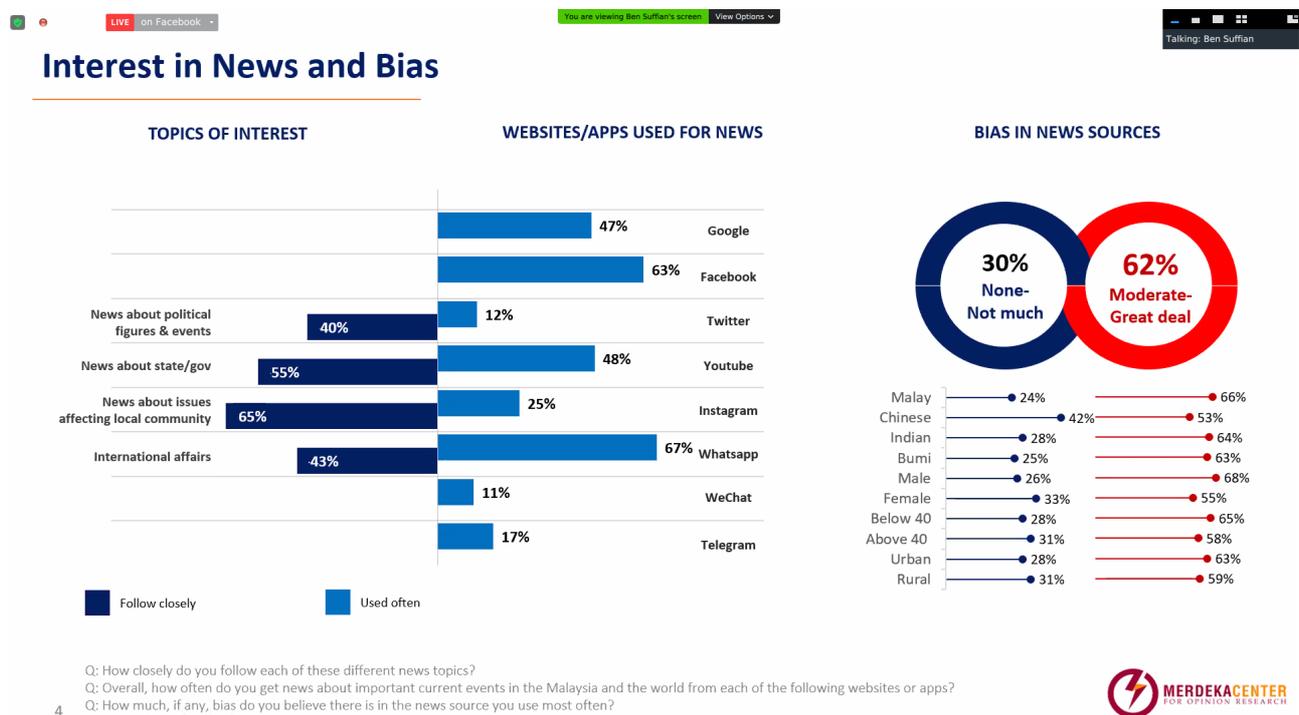
The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) Asia-Pacific Region announced results of the Trust in Media in Malaysia study at a virtual panel discussion via Zoom from 11am to 1pm on Monday 10 May 2021, in collaboration with the Merdeka Centre for Opinion Research and the National Union of Journalists of Peninsular Malaysia (NUJ).

The IFJ Asia-Pacific had commissioned the study to the Merdeka Center with generous funding by the **European Union, under the EU Strengthening Malaysia’s Media for Change project.**

The Merdeka Centre surveyed a total of 1,203 respondents across Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak by fixed and mobile telephone from 11 to 20 December 2020.

The four panellists were Ibrahim Suffian, Programs Director of the Merdeka Center who presented the findings, Cynthia Gabriel, Executive Director of Centre to Combat Corruption and Cronyism (C4), Jahabar Sadiq, Founder of *The Malaysian Insight*, and Charles F. Moreira, a freelance journalist and an Associate Member of the NUJ. The discussion was moderated by Norman Goh, Independent Journalist and Producer with *Bicara Minggu Ini*, with Mary Agnes, IFJ Asia-Pacific Malaysia Project Manager and Dr. Richard Phillips, NUJ Executive Secretary as observers.

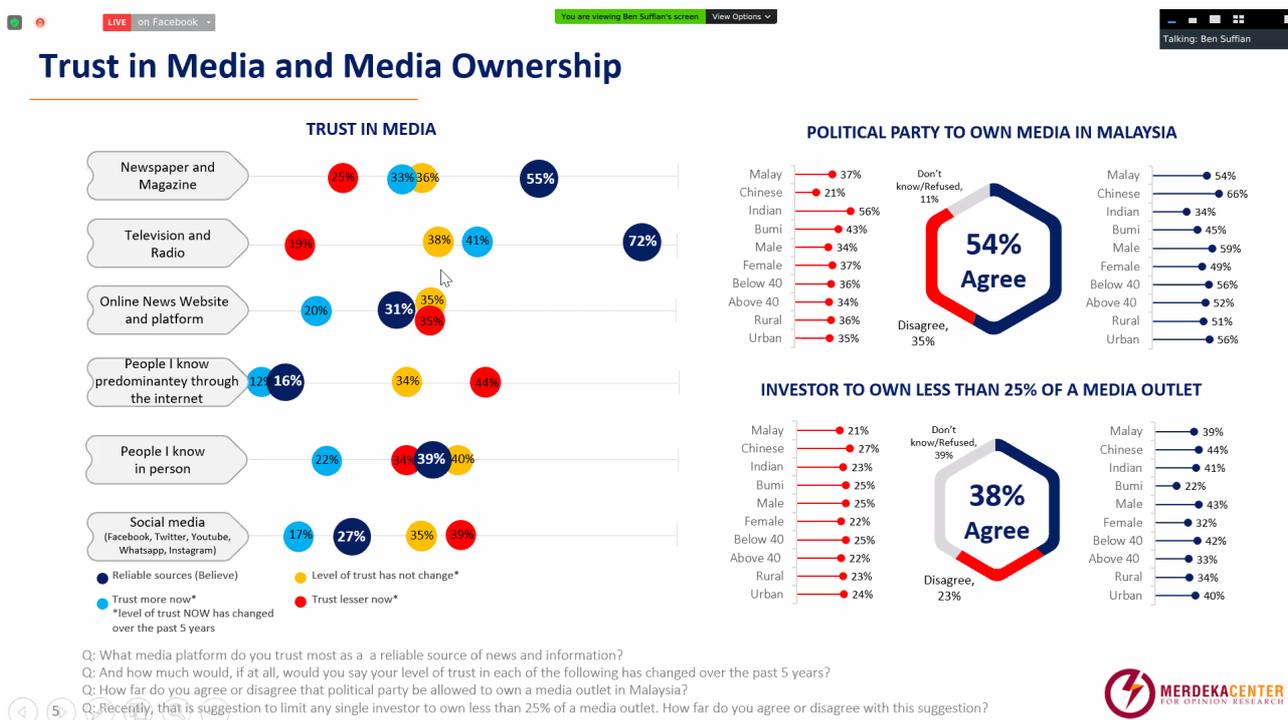
Altogether, 16 persons from various media and the advertising industry attended the virtual discussion, with others viewing it on the *MyMediaMatters* Facebook group and on the IFJ Asia & Pacific website.



For starters, only 40% of respondents said that they closely follow news about political figures and events, 43% follow international affairs, 55% follow news about state and government matters whilst 65% follow news about issues affecting their local community.

A whopping 67% said that they get news on current events in Malaysia and worldwide on Whatsapp, followed by 63% on Facebook, 48% on You Tube, 47% on Google, 25% on Instagram, 17% on Telegram, 12% on Twitter and 11% on WeChat. At the same time.

However, a whopping 62% believe that there is moderate or a great deal of bias in the news sources they use most often, whilst 30% believe that there is little or no bias in their most often used news source.



As for trust in media, a whopping 72% trust television and radio as sources of reliable information, followed by newspapers and magazines at 55%, people they know in person at 39%, online news websites and platforms at 39%, social media such as Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, Whatsapp and Instagram at 27% and persons they know predominantly online the least at 16%.

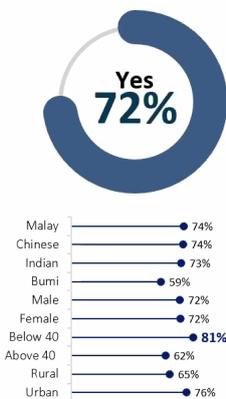
When asked about how their level of trust in the different media types has changed over the past five year, 41% said that they trusted radio and television more, 38% said that their trust had not changed and 19% said they trusted these media less. As for newspapers and magazines, the percentages were 33%, 38% and 25% respectively; people they know in person 22%, 40% and 34% respectively; online news websites and platforms 20%, 35% and 35% respectively; social media 17%, 35% and 39% respectively; and people they know predominantly through the Internet 12%, 34% and 44% respectively.

Fifty two percent agreed that political parties should be allowed to allowed to own media outlets in Malaysia versus 35% who disagreed. However, with regards the suggestion that any single investor be limited to owning no more than 25% in a media organisation, 38% agreed, 23% disagreed, whilst 39% either did not know or refused to answer.

However, did the question about Trust in Media clearly distinguish to respondents between the website editions of print newspapers and magazines, as well as those of different television and radio broadcasters, all of which require a license and which are regulated by the government on the one hand, and online-only news websites and platforms, as well as blogs (weblogs) which do not require a license on the other hand, since the articles in print or broadcast are usually the same as are published on their website, as an audio podcast or on a video streaming site such as You Tube?

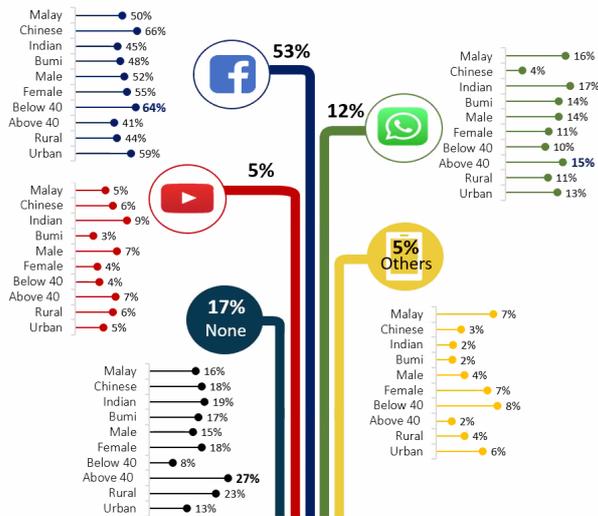
Social Media & News

MEDIA CONSUMPTION



Q: Has social media changed the way you consume media?
 Q: What social media platform do you use as your main source of news?

MAIN SOURCES OF NEWS (SOCIAL MEDIA)

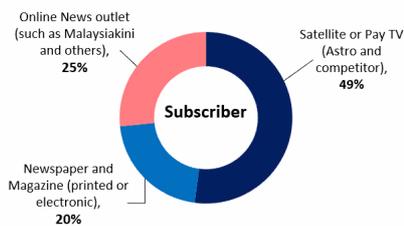


A whopping 72% said that social media has changed how they consume news today, with Facebook topping their main sources of news on social media at 53%, followed far behind by Whatsapp at 12%, YouTube at 5%, other social media at 5% and 17% not at all.

The above findings in the Social media & News slide tend to contradict the figures in the first slide – i.e. the Interest in News and Bias slide, where Whatsapp comes out top at 67% of respondents for frequency of access to news about important current events in Malaysia and worldwide, followed by Facebook at 63%.

Subscription and Problems of News Coverage

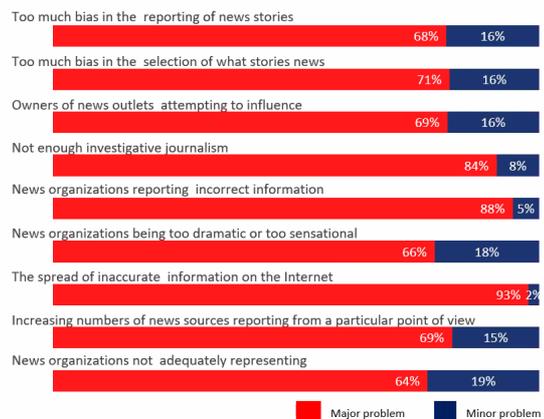
MEDIA SUBSCRIPTION



WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR QUALITY NEWS



PROBLEMS WITH NEWS COVERAGE TODAY



Q: Do you subscribe to any of the news media...
 Q: How much are you willing to pay for quality and professional produce news content in Malaysia?
 Q: Would you say each of the following is a major problem, a minor problem, or not a problem with news coverage today?

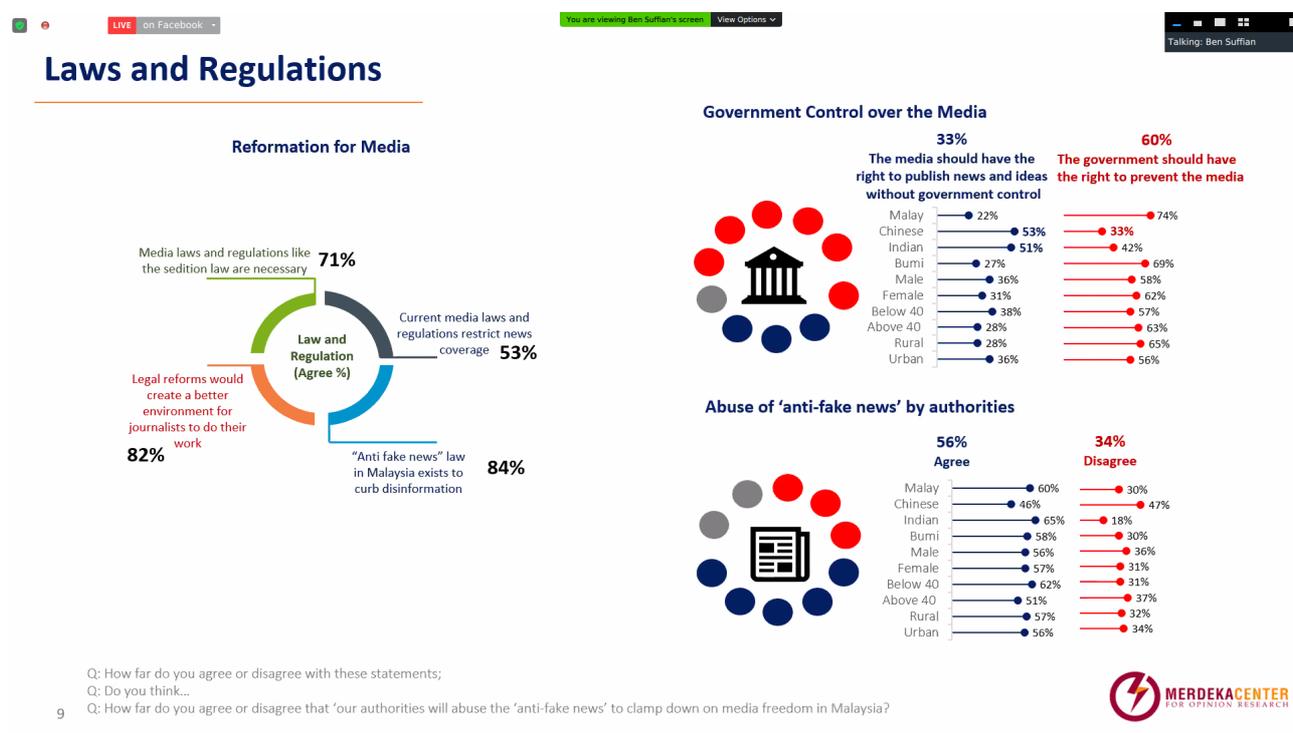


With regards paid media subscription, 49% subscribe to satellite or paid TV, followed by 25% to online news portals and 20% to printed or digital newspapers and magazines. However, 56% said

that they were not willing to pay for quality news, 27% would pay less than RM30 subscription for quality news, followed by 9% who were willing to pay between RM30 and RM60 and a mere 3% who were willing to pay more than RM60.

On major problems with news coverage, a whopping 93% regard the spread of information on the Internet as a major problem, followed by news organisations reporting incorrect information (88%), not enough investigative journalism (84%), too much bias in selection of news stories (71%), owners of news outlets attempting to influence opinion as well as an increased number of news sources reporting from a particular point of view tying at 69%, too much bias in the reporting of news stories (68%), news organisations being too dramatic or too sensational (66%) and news organisations not adequately representing (64%).

The above mistrust is really shocking and should be a wake-up call not only to journalists but more importantly to news organisations to seriously reconsider their editorial policies.

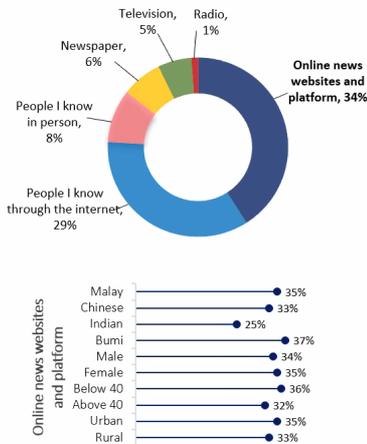


Contrary to what the NUJ, most journalists and civil libertarians believe, a whopping 71% agree that media laws and regulations like the Sedition Law are necessary, whilst an even bigger 84% agree that the “anti fake news” law in Malaysia exists to curb disinformation. At the same time, 53% agree that current media laws and regulations restrict news coverage, whilst a whopping 82% agree that legal reforms would create a better environment to do their work, though the survey question is not clear on what legal reforms

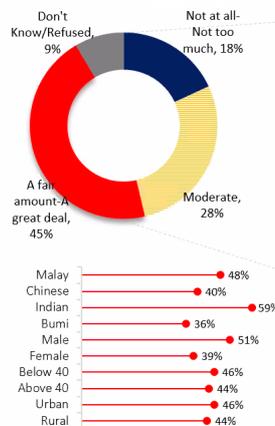
Sixty percent believe that the government should have the right to control the media, whilst 56% agree that the “anti fake news” law will be abused by the government to clamp down on media freedom in Malaysia.

Fake News and Political Bias

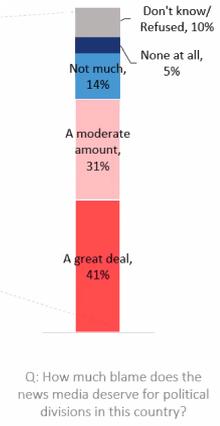
MEDIA WITH PERCEIVED MOST FAKE NEWS



POLITICAL BIAS IN NEWS COVERAGE



BLAME FOR NEWS MEDIA



Q: Which media do you think have the most fake news or disinformation? Please choose 2
 Q: To what extent do you see political bias in news coverage?
 Q: How much blame does the news media deserve for political divisions in this country?



On the media most perceived to have the most fake news or disinformation, with respondents being allowed to state two media types, 34% said online websites and platforms, followed by people they know through the Internet (29%), people they know in person (8%), newspapers (6%), television (5%) and radio (1%).

Forty five percent see a fair amount or a great deal of political bias in news coverage, followed by 28% who see a moderate amount and 18% who see little or no political bias. Nine per cent either did not know or declined comment.

At the same time, 41% blame the media for a great deal for political division in Malaysia, followed by 31% a moderate amount, 14% said not much, 5% said not at all, whilst 10% either do not know or declined comment.

In conclusion, Ibrahim Suffian said:-



Conclusion

Media plays a vital role in transmitting information to people. The information people received shape their mindset.

Younger people tend to use the online platform to news compared to older people (above 40). Traditional media such as television, radio, newspaper are more acceptable to people in their 40's and above. In the meantime, the usage of Whatsapp among older people is quite high compared to another online base, and it could be because of the network they have and the access to the chatroom or chat group that allows them to discuss more in Whatsapp.

Facebook is the top online app used by the respondents to stay up-to-date and most of them used it on a daily basis. However, most respondents think that most of the fake news is on the online platform. This showed by the trust in the online media and the people they know from the internet tend to be lesser now compared to the past 5 years.

Large majority of respondents, across the board, perceive biases in media reporting. Non-Malay respondents are more open to freedom of the press when more than half want the media free from the government to produce anything they intended. But large majority of respondents agree to sedition and anti-fake news laws despite the concern that it could be abused by the authorities.

People realized the threat of fake news, thus they support the law to curb fake news. The majority of the respondents could see many major problems in the media in Malaysia nowadays.

Whilst the above findings of the survey may not be what many media practitioners both in print and online would have expected, however they should serve as an eye-opener not only to journalists but more importantly to media organisations, as well as their owners and their editors, about what may they need to do to be more relevant to the expectations of their readers in order to regain public trust in them.

Charles F. Moreira
Associate Member
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