

The Role of Journalistic Style Transformation in the Development of News Literacy

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Abstract

This study aims to explore and understand the journalistic style prevalent on online news websites devoted to news literacy from the perspective of a media practitioner. The argument will first and mainly revolve around the journalistic approach that should be taken while reporting on digital news sites. Another critical job is determining the elements affecting the evolution of journalistic style in online news websites. The study's aims were accomplished by employing a semi-structured qualitative interview approach. Ten media experts were interviewed in-depth until the data set was saturated. According to the study's findings, journalists interact with their audiences in four unique journalistic approaches while teaching them about news items which has affected news literacy. Furthermore, the study's findings illustrate how journalistic style has evolved in the setting of online news websites. To fully appreciate how journalistic style has evolved in online news websites, media practitioners, educators, and journalism students must possess a working understanding of journalism history. This study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge by illustrating how the growth of journalistic style in online news websites has made new journalistic practices relevant.

Keywords: Journalistic Style, News Literacy, Online News Website, New Media, Digital Journalism

Introduction

Since its beginnings, the internet has developed into a means of keeping people informed of breaking news. Users can access various channels, including social media platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram), blogs, and news websites (*Malaysia kini*, *Mymetro*, and *Utusan Online* are just a few examples). As the news industry shifts from traditional to digital media, the journalism profession will inevitably change. The journalistic style is one of the characteristics that has been emphasised thus far. The trend toward digital platforms in journalism has affected the quantity of misinformation in the news (Tully, 2021; Vraga, Bode & Tully, 2021).

Growth in the number of news portals and blogs available on the Internet has occurred in recent years. A possible explanation for this significant rise is the dynamic nature of online portals, which may be explained as follows: In contrast, many online news portals update weekly, with some even updating on an hourly basis (or more frequently). The proliferation of news portals is a result of an overabundance of information. (Oh et al., 2021; Chen & Chen, 2020). The increasing need for news literacy (Johnson et al., 2021; Scheibenzuber et al., 2021) on issues such as "fake news," "misinformation," and "disinformation" has arisen as a result of the deluge of information accessible (Johnson et al., 2021).

The spread of false information has had a profound effect on the field of journalism. According to Vraga, Bode, and Tully's (2021) research, users demonstrated an increased belief in myths, a decreased acceptance of facts, and an inclination to promote myths. Additionally, Baptista et al (2021) research established that the distribution of information or news on internet platforms demonstrates a larger proclivity to accept fake news. As a result, it is essential to expand news writing in reporting on online news websites.

In the case of news websites, a variety of factors influence the impact of the news literacy. According to Edgerly (2021), a variety of factors lead to decreased general news consumption. Low news consumption is related to political apathy, a dismissive attitude toward news, a lack of trust in one's capacity to affect the news, and a lack of comprehension of the news system. Interestingly, it was discovered that the emotional toll of news (such as news fatigue and negative feelings) did not influence overall levels of news consumption. As a result, studying online news is critical for determining the factors that influence the development of journalistic news styles.

According to prior research, news on internet platforms has sparked worries about news literacy. When it comes to news literacy, it refers to a body of information about the creation, dissemination, and consumption of news, as well as the skills necessary for consumers to reclaim control over their relationship with the news (Tully et al., 2021). While society struggles to identify genuine and untrue when bombarded by mass media messages, the intricacy of technology and the Internet has also affected reporting. The researchers are interested in news literacy because it helps them better understand the proper news writing style for digital internet reporting and the elements that influence journalistic style transformation.

This study aims to explore and understand the news writing style in online news websites about news literacy from the perspective of a media practitioner.

Transformation of Journalistic Style

The news writing style (Ödmark, 2018) is a term that relates to the method in which information is presented. It is classified into two categories: the inverted pyramid (factual) style (Po"ttker, 2003) and the narrative style (Emde, Klimmt, and Schluetz, 2015). With the introduction of internet news websites, the evolution of news articles has affected the evolution of journalistic style. As defined by Ahmad and Buyong (2017), A news portal is a hybrid of traditional web-based media and social media platforms. According to previous research (Can et al., 2008), the news portal gathers data from several sources, the most important of which is online news (Lee, & Yoon, 2010).

Because of technological advancements, news writing has seen a boost in creativity. At its core, reporting is concerned with the objectivity of reporting (Thomson et al., 2008); yet, with the advent of the Internet, journalists have evolved a more transparent journalistic style (Aker et al., 2019). Since news websites and social media have exploded in popularity, the journalistic approach is changing (Emde et al., 2016; Wise et al., 2009).

It is critical to comprehend journalistic style in the field of digital journalism, as news writing is a critical component of news coverage (Yang et al., 2019; DeAngelo et al., 2019). Fake news, news credibility, and misinformation are all problems that arise when a journalistic style is not adhered to (Johnson et al., 2021; Wanta & Alkazemi, 2017). It is important to pursue this transition in order to transform news writing style to the point where it embraces new journalistic narrative modes via the use of digital resources to activate literary journalism methods (Jacobson et al., 2016).

On the other side, the change in journalistic style is concerned with the challenges inherent in the transition from fact-based reporting to a more interpretive form of reporting, among other things (Bull et al., 2014). False news has been a prominent topic of controversy among journalists and media professionals in recent years, owing to the growth of social media platforms and blogs, as well as a shift in the manner of news reporting (Zollo, 2019; Shu, 2018; Lee & Tandoc, 2017; Rubin et al., 2016). According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), Malaysian citizens are responsible for 99 per cent of all fake news posted on social media platforms (Abas & Ismail, 2018). When journalists express their opinions, foresee the future, or attempt to explain why something happened without relying on verified facts or quotes from news sources, they are referred to be "interpretive journalists" (Soontjens, 2018).

This study fills a journalistic void by exploring the appropriate journalistic style for reporting on online news websites.

Methodology

This study conducted semi-structured interviews with editors and journalists to better understand the effect of journalistic style shifts on the development of news literacy. The researchers verbatim transcribed the text. Since the research's inception, ten media professionals have ensured its success, including seven journalists and three editors. The researchers conducted interviews with journalists from mainstream media to ascertain the extent to which the mainstream media has embraced journalistic writing. Additionally, the study named *Harian Metro*, *Bernamea*, *Berita Harian*, *Sinar Harian*, and *Malaysia Kini* as the top 30 online newspapers in Malaysia. Simultaneously, alternative media outlets like *Suara Merdeka*, *Malaysia Gazzete*, *Malaysia Indicator*, and *Malaysia Kini* have been chosen due to their combined Facebook following of over 30,000. *Suara Merdeka* was founded by journalists with decades of experience at *Utusan Melayu (M) Berhad* and *Malaysia Gazette*, while *Malaysiakini.com* was the Malaysia first online daily. The goal was to elicit a range of viewpoints to increase the amount of information accessible about the events and offer the most comprehensive responses to the research questions. To guarantee that every word was preserved, the whole interview was taped using a voice recorder.

The term "transcendental" refers to the process by which meaning is created in daily situations in this inquiry (Van Manen, 2014; cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the significant instrument researcher, this study adhered to transcendental (or descriptive) phenomenology, which may aid in avoiding bias and prejudice in the data. The researchers analysed and categorised the data obtained through interviews to enhance categorisation and sub-themes to aid essential subjects. The researchers utilized Nvivo 12 to assist in managing data for this reason. The saturation threshold was achieved using data obtained from ten informants. The data analysis procedure begins with converting recorded conversations into documents that the researcher can easily read. The researchers provided the translator with the interview transcript to get the language translated from Bahasa to English. Each transcript is reviewed again before the development of code and categories—the categorisation of these data aided in the topic's shaping in answer to research questions.

Findings

Journalistic Style

The data for this research question was obtained through interviews with professionals in the media industry. Four critical components emerge from the journalistic style patterns used by journalists when reporting on news on the news portal:

1. Data journalism
2. Narrative journalistic style
3. Interactive journalistic style
4. Inverted pyramid journalistic style

Data Journalism

Data journalism has been characterised as an opportunity for the media business to expand and capture the attention of its target consumers. Based on interviews with ten media practitioners, this study discovered numerous subthemes in the process of creating journalistic data. According to the study's findings, journalists covering breaking news items in the digital era must be adept at data gathering to develop media practitioners who understand how sources are used. The following is the scenario, as described by informant 7, who is the editor of the web portal Malaysia Indicator:

"It is all about how you capture the information and how you relate it. When we attempt to connect the news, we must first ensure that we have all of the necessary information (data). We are unable to simply connect, copy, and paste what we want. We must first scan all of the contents from the credible media, followed by all of the contents from the dependable media, before compiling them into a single document. After that, we take a look at social networking platforms. Instead of discovering new information, the goal is to bolster the narrative of people who have been exposed to mainstream media."

As a media practitioner in the digital era, it is his or her responsibility to report the news and demonstrate how the information they hold complements and strengthens the information provided. In today's digital era, readers have instant access to a plethora of information. An excellent example of this is the fact that there are several internet sources for obtaining news quickly.

The journalistic style employed in data journalism allows for more in-depth perspectives, and media practitioners can alter the narrative. The informant is curious about how journalists acquire information, how rapidly they can spread it, and how they connect all of the

information. This information is intended to address concerns about correctness and logic. On occasion, the argument is presented from one's perspective, but it is also presented from the perspective of the broader public in numerous instances. Thus, the advent of new forms of journalism, such as data journalism, which is gaining popularity, illustrates how the journalistic profession has changed.

Along with data collection, an assistant editor from *Sinar Harian* and journalists from *Malaysia Kini* and *Harian Metro* remarked that infographics are critical for attracting readers' attention and aiding in assimilating information via visuals or graphics. According to the associate editor of *Sinar Harian*, if we embrace data visualisation now, it may make things more enjoyable:

"Technology is developing swiftly, so we cannot be reluctant to acquire the skills." There is a need for us to learn how to use applications and explore the resources that the Internet has to offer."

Today's digital news environment enables the presentation of information about news items graphically through comprehensive and emotive visualisations of the stories themselves. According to these two interviewees, infographics and visualisations deliver a compelling message while efficiently conveying a significant quantity of information. This scenario was conceived by Journalist 3. He acknowledged that visualisation affects clickbait:

"When people are drawn to headlines and news stories that include many photographs and infographics, they can share them on social media. It is taking place because, once they look at it, they rapidly grasp the significance of the situation. It is easier for readers to follow along with this visual narration."

Between the digital news outlet and the interviews, a clickbait link has been formed. The availability of visualisation as a way of driving traffic may affect the volume of online news coverage. The use of visualisations in news stories facilitates the discovery of trends within the data given. Apart from that, the message will be succinct and easy to comprehend for the audience.

Additionally, Thomson (2018) identified a substantial correlation between the chronology of interactions and comprehensiveness, accuracy, and fairness.

The use of data journalism has provided media practitioners with new tools and techniques and a shift in reporting patterns; data journalism is a dynamic profession that is constantly developing and evolving. Bhargava and D'Ignazio's (2021) explanations of information seeking and the development of a critical culture are particularly notable. Data journalism is gaining traction among journalists to do a more in-depth analysis of material collected from a variety of digital channels. For data journalists working in the news, minimal protection from additional constraints such as audience demand was given, and effort minimisation was promoted.

Narrative Journalistic Style

According to the interview, another type of journalistic style that may capture readers' interest is the narrative journalistic style prevalent on internet news portals. According to Van Krieken and Sanders (2019), a journalistic narrative piece employs narrative storytelling components to provide a subjective account of reality.

Human interest articles are a defining feature of narrative journalism. Readers want a diverse selection of colourful stories and news relevant to them, such as news on emotionally charged people. Journalist 1 stated the following:

“We make extensive use of narratives. We don’t go into very inverted ones, for example. To entice individuals to read the story, we rely on their natural curiosity. Sometimes we present the narrative of the weather first, for example, during demonstrations or assembly stories, or while telling interesting stories, such as a highlighted story, for example. So we will extract information from the weather, clothing, attire, what people do, what they shout about, slogans, and everything else.”

A breaking news of human interest is a popular spectacular genre that has re-emerged in popularity in recent years. As a result, it is permissible to employ journalistic styles that deviate from more stringent definitions of what constitutes news. According to the interviewees' findings, the use of human-interest stories in narrative news writing entails a distinction between emotionally charged "feature" stories and objective "news" facts (Parks, 2019).

Journalists are defined by their ability to use their emotions to bring news to life via their writing. Consequently, journalists go above and beyond the call of duty to establish a connection with their viewers. The stories of journalists are both personal and essential to their audience.

Meanwhile, Journalist 7 provided clarification:

“Consequently, it would help if you modified it in the future. In terms of the writing, it is a good start. Giving stories rather than telling the facts is what it is all about.”

The informant believes that the journalistic approach will need to evolve in the future to match present developments. A news frame must examine how to foster a positive attitude toward the storytelling format, which may be accomplished by employing a narrative journalistic approach. In today's media environment, journalists have obligations that extend beyond just delivering information and reporting the news. To discover remarkable tales and better understand niche markets, it is essential to exercise journalistic skills.

They are adding colour to journalism by changing the tone of journalistic style in a digital news site. Because readers prefer an emotional approach to news reading, media practitioners must inject more colour and passion into their journalistic style as the number of citizen journalists and journalists grows. Journalists 1 and 10 have a similar approach to narrative news writing. According to his experience as a journalist, he claimed the following:

“Regarding reading patterns, the “reader” community, as it exists today, does not wish to read solely simple news stories. However, this article is primarily concerned with what is known in journalism as “yellow journalism,” which is currently being used for dramatic news stories. Although the paper news looks straightforward, once we obtain it online, we will adapt it into a more exciting stories than printed in newspapers.”

As reported by Journalist 1:

“If we look at the games of news portals, they just employ viral stories, Facebook articles, and other social media content.” The news may be utterly inaccurate at times. For example, the stories in *Siakap Keli*, *Himpunan Lawak*, and *Roti Kaya* are all based on actual events. Every single one of these portals. Oh my God, they are all providing false information. They did not verify and cross-check the facts, and there is no such thing as media ethics in this country. They go ahead and do whatever they want.”

Due to the proliferation of online media outlets such as social networking websites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, blogs, and other online publications, the traditional journalistic approach has been supplanted by narrative news writing. According to the findings of the interviews, individuals prefer reading news articles that have aspects of

sensationalism. This sort of material is easily accessible via various internet channels, and it is simple to locate and read. On the other hand, the trend away from the traditional journalistic approach and toward narrative yellow journalism is cause for concern. According to their results, academics are concerned about the overall quality of news and information, specifically how news organisations will adapt to and capitalise on these new dimensions.

Interactive Journalistic Style

Interactivity is described in the context of mediated environments as "technological features of mediated environments that enable reciprocal communication or information exchange, allowing interaction between communication technologies and users, or between users via technology" (Bucy & Tao, 2007, p. 647).

Digital news organisations have responded by producing clickbait in the form of interactive journalism to pique readers' attention and entice them to click on the content. Five (5) respondents believed that clickbait is a necessary component of interactive journalism.

"The writing has evolved; there are numerous elements to consider, particularly from the perspectives of reading and "marketing," or the promotion of the article.

"The readers choose to glance at the headline when it is in the context of the newspaper, and if it is exciting and catchy, they will read it."

According to one media practitioner, clickbait is a critical component of interactive journalism. Because clickbait enables online news organisations to market their content through advertising. Furthermore, journalist 6 stated that

"... Some newspapers will tell which (news) stories are the most popular. There will be headlines on the top page that will sell regardless of the narrative content because they want the readers to repurchase it then."

When it comes to interactive journalism, clickbait is used to boost income. As a result, an increasing number of online news sites adopt a journalistic style that entices readers to click on the news, particularly the headlines. According to Molina, Sundar, and Rony (2021), headlines increase engagement.

With the evolution of journalism from print to digital, a new viewpoint on digital journalism has arisen. The video format conveys information in an interactive journalistic approach that is facilitated by digital technology. As Journalist 9 has stated, a single image is worth 1,000 words. A greater quantity of knowledge must be revised for the contemporary era. He stated the following based on his personal experience:

"Like us, the journalists, we now operate in the field of visualisation. For example, a journalist in Bernama just began editing for a television segment he was working on himself. To put it another way, you build a video, you record a video, and you edit it in your phone, and there is already a crawler and a logo ready to go. In a manner, you are learning new things, but this is the challenge of the situation. You started with one thing (writing), but now you're doing several things at the same time—but the good news is that you're a journalist who can multitask and is proficient. In order to generate five items at a time, writers must also write stories and create videos, as well as provide standby voice over for radio and television, and provide cross live streams for online-based platforms. It was a difficult task, but one that was worthwhile. It increases the overall status of the journalism industry."

In terms of interactive journalism, the journalism industry is improved. As a result of the interactive and journalistic approach, a journalistic environment has developed in which

information is decoupled from human experience. As a result, the interactive journalism style used by digital news sites is more approachable and has a more robust social presence (Marchionni, 2015). The journalistic style of interactive news has had a significant effect on today's media.

Inverted Pyramid Journalistic Style

According to informant interviews, the inverted pyramid journalistic method is still used in reporting internet news sites. According to the research, the inverted pyramid is a journalistic style widely employed in online news site reporting. Breen et al. (2017) discuss the inverted pyramid structure of journalistic style, their judgements on who and what to quote, and the rationale behind their choices. Journalist 1 from *Malaysia Kini* gave the following views on the subject:

"The 5W1H is still prevalent in the environment. However, 5W1H is not used in the lead position, oh no, no, no. Our studies years were spent learning how to employ the 5W1H formula. Unfortunately, when I went to do my internship, it came out that I had made a mistake. As a result, we have been reminded that the use of 5W1H is not required. In addition, they emphasise that the lead does not necessarily have the information on who, when, and where."

The study's findings indicate that the inverted pyramid news style continues to be influential in digital media writing. The inverted news format is a simple journalistic approach. Journalist 7 is aware of this.

"Being a journalist in the digital age is easier than it used to be, as information is now everywhere. It's straightforward to determine what you require. As a result, it is all about how quickly data can be acquired, how quickly it can be communicated, and how quickly data can be connected. That is the critical point. When it comes to writing, the medium is straightforward."

5W1H may be broadened to encompass more in-depth coverage of an event or person in news portals; he continued:

"However, in newspapers, it is necessary to get straight to the point. As previously stated, the vocalist AA has passed away. If you're writing for a magazine, I can make an introduction along the lines of "After five years of misery...", but when I'm writing in RAP, my boss doesn't allow me to write lengthy paragraphs, as he does with his employees. Because every media outlet has its own house style, which is distinct from Kosmo's. In compared to Harian Metro, it provided greater opportunities for journalists to collaborate closely."

The inverted pyramid journalistic style is employed to address the article's first five questions, followed by a conclusion. The inverted pyramid journalistic technique is used in this piece of writing. As a result of this journalistic approach, a professional standard has been established for all media practitioners to follow while reporting breaking news stories. Objectivity is frequently cited as a necessary component of news reporting.

According to journalistic style development, data journalism that incorporates a narrative, interactive news journalistic style provides much more information (Lu. et al., 2020). Additionally, the evolution of journalistic style contributes to the growth of interactivity, hyper-textuality, and multimedia (Palau-Sampio & Sánchez-Garca, 2020). The findings of this study add to the body of knowledge by concentrating on trends in a journalistic style in online news portals, a relatively new field of study. According to the findings, each journalist's experience and knowledge contribute to analysing news trends used when news is distributed

via a digital news platform. This example demonstrates how the evolution of journalistic style on internet news portals affects news literacy.

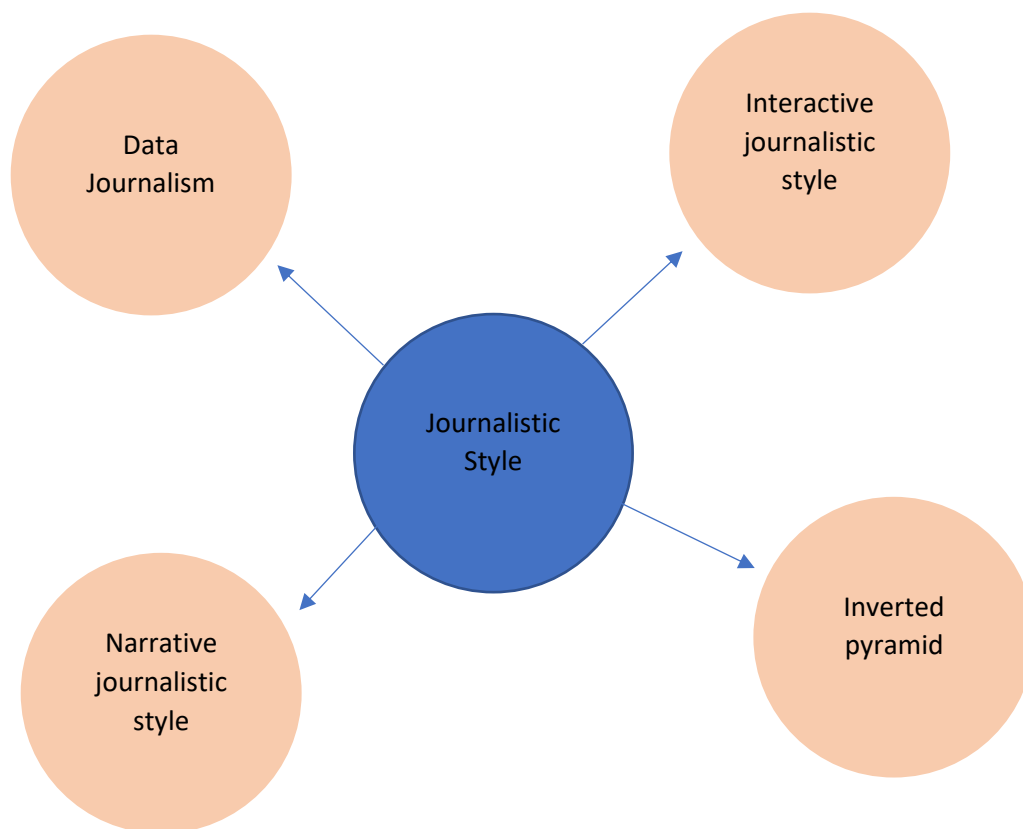


Figure 1: Journalistic style in online news website.

Discussion and Conclusion

The journalistic style being explored is how journalists write news stories for online news websites, which affects news literacy. In general, the semi-structured interview technique indicated that four distinct journalistic approaches are used to distribute news stories on online news websites.

As a result of the structure of news delivery, the development of a journalistic style on online news websites has developed. Graphics, hashtags, infographics, and videos are all components of the journalistic style of a digital news platform that must be altered and changed to incorporate them. The inverted and detailed language was frequently emphasized in the old journalistic style. The outcomes of this study revealed four distinct forms of journalistic style: data journalism, narrative journalism, interactive journalism, and inverted pyramid journalism. Since 1997, several stylistic changes in journalism have occurred due to technical developments, most notably the arrival of the Internet in Malaysia (Zuwairi et al., 2016). Recognizing the benefits of changing the journalistic style in digital news portals is an opportunity for information delivery, but striking a balance between data privacy, integrity, and innovation presents a problem.

Rather than just relaying facts, data journalism and narrative journalism may assist in painting a more attractive image for the reader. Apart from that, the transition from traditional media

to data journalism might be more obvious. Journalists may also explain how they arrived at their conclusions or encourage readers to conduct their research. "Transparency is the new objectivity," as the journalistic cliché goes. The evolution of journalistic style in digital news portals is a positive development for the news business. Journalists frequently assemble their data from the same sources, including police records, legislators, residents, and public opinion surveys. By adding the data that supports the articles, the process of obtaining and organising this material may be significantly improved, if not completely automated.

In recent years, it has been proven that the interactive journalistic approach, as exemplified by appealing and engaging headlines, visual news, live video platforms, and inventive graphic representation, benefits news reporting and may be utilised to improve reader engagement. It enables content to be sent to readers over a vast network of traffic while simultaneously attracting the attention of clickbait in the digital news environment. Additionally, previous research has shown that interaction helps audiences become more engaged in their news consumption experiences (Chung & Nah, 2009).

Digital news media platforms deliver news and information to online users through the use of social media platforms. In recent years, the growth of journalistic style has been criticised owing to the continuing development of the technology used to distribute news. Because of the convergence of notification, this has happened in the past year. When digital communication was introduced, it changed the character of the journalistic approach, culminating in the creation of interactive content and database news.

The study discovered that news dissemination via data journalism, interactive journalism, and narrative visualisation substantially impacted news clickbait. Journalism is evolving as a result of the public's decline in reading interest. As a result, news organisations should aim for journalistic growth to enhance readers' news literacy.

The study's scope should be expanded to include both news literacy and consumer news in general among Malaysian consumers. In light of the study's findings, it is clear that the growth of journalistic style affects readers' capacity to grasp news content. What is less known is how much influence these factors may have on consumer news and journalistic style.

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