

Escalation of News Reading Preference In The Post Vicennial Era of New Media Revolution

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Abstract

The gradual degradation of conventional newspapers has become inevitable today. Just about a decade ago, compact newspaper was viewed as the most preferred public reading news medium – and predicted to last for at least another 20 years. Ironically, its decline is no longer a mere speculation with the presence of new media – online news platforms. This latest hybrid of journalistic medium has become the latest reading trend in today's era of post vicennial new media revolution. This new journalistic horizon, nevertheless, must be embraced by all media organizations with precise comprehension of its spiritual and physical demands and needs. Concisely, today's public reading preference has skewed to a fresher and simpler medium of news presentation – the online news. This phenomenon has made many media organizations paused to restructure their operations to cater the demand and needs of the new horizon of communication. Hence, this paper began with a few queries – among others are in finding out the areas of reformation that had been accomplished by the Malaysian media organizations in fulfilling the increasing demands of the public on online news, and in determining the key factors that triggered the change of reading preference among Malaysian. Findings of this research may alter our perceptions on how rapid the public attitude in gratifying their media as the source of information. Yielded results are expected to instil better understanding upon the possibilities of future threats and obstacles that may befall unto any news publication. In short, this paper aspires to generate better understanding on contemporary news' reading preference – not only amongst Malaysians, but also in ensuring the future relevance of news representation throughout this digital millennium.

Keywords: Reading Preference, Compact Newspapers, Online News, New Media.

Introduction

In the past vicennial, wireless voice communications in Malaysia have expanded significantly. Wireless technologies hold the promise for the future data transfer, as we are rapidly becoming an information society. Nevertheless, wireless technologies have significant potential to serve our information needs (Huntington, 1999). This potential for providing information services will result in the fastest growing market today. Wireless technologies are seen as the prime movers in the telecommunications arena (Rahman & Hashim, 2022). Globally to date, almost all universities have built wireless networks on their campuses. These networks enable staff and students to access data from any point on the campus. All of these advancements representing the convergence of two fastest growing markets and developing technologies in the telecommunications field – as the catalyst to the telecommunications landscape's development (ibid.). In this regard, the Malaysian government has promoted building its telecommunications service industry under the control of local entrepreneurs. As the new millennium dawns, the local telecommunications industry is expected to play a more prominent role in helping to create an informed society. Malaysia has also introduced the *Communications and Multimedia Act in 1998* (Mohammad, 2000). The Act is the first legislation of its kind in the global effort to address the issues arising from the convergence of the telecommunications, broadcasting, and computing industries. And thus, made Malaysia amongst the pioneers in electronic government (ibid.)

Objective of the Research

This research aims at determining the future prospect of conventional newspapers in the vicennial era of post-digital revolution – considering the rapid escalation of reading preference towards online news). In precise, the objectives are:

- i.) To determine Malaysians reading preferences on online news in comparison to compact newspapers
- ii.) To determine Malaysians reading gratifications on online news in comparison to compact newspapers
- iii.) To determine Malaysians basis of reading preferences and gratifications of online news in comparison to compact newspapers

Literature

Defining 'new media' is rather a very subjective notion. Definitions may vary tremendously and arguments are almost unavoidable. This is due to the term 'new' itself. With today's rapid development of technology, what is extremely new today might be the relic of tomorrow. However, in the simplest and most agreeable definition, 'new media' can be well understood as the most popular, acceptable, and the latest mass medium for contemporary media agencies in disseminating their messages to their masses (Rahman et al., 2022). Malaysian new media was first originated from the information communication technology campaign by our government herself – which upholds a noble ambition in empowering her citizens to face global challenges and tackling global threats with the arrival of globalization. For such aims, Malaysia since then has allowed for the efficient and cost effective flow of information, products, workforce, and capital across national and regional boundaries (ibid.). Though information communication technology is not a panacea for all rural development problems, it has the potential to help rural poor to leap from some traditional barriers to development (Jaafar, 2002). As for the case of Malaysia, the use of communication technology is expanding rapidly, whence it comprises of a diverse set of technological tools and resources to create,

disseminate, store, and manage data and information (ibid.). Traditional communicational tools such as television, radio, and telephone have proven their effectiveness in promoting development in marginalized areas (Rahman et al., 2022).

Indeed, communication technology came along with the emergence of computers via internet facilities (a cordless communication technology), that are attached to powerful soft wares for processing text, and audio visual materials (Zainudin et al., 2021). This technological advancement had slashed the costs of information and communication – thus, costs of transmitting digital information to anywhere in the globe has fallen dramatically (ibid.). Despite the opportunities for development, developing countries like Malaysia also has to face some negative aspects of post-digital revolution. As a result, few gaps were created – i.e. the rich against the poor, the developed against the undeveloped, and the technologically literate against the illiterate. All of these misfortunes have sum up to the creation of another terminology – 'the digital divide'. Numerous studies on digital divide had observed that all countries had been increasing their access to ICT - though the developed countries move faster than the developing countries (Ahmed, 2001).

Demands of Globalization in the New Media Revolution

Globalization today has become an idea so entrenched that it is very difficult to say or do anything that is against it. To do so would involve charges of heresy (Mohammad, 2000). The dissenter becomes the object of universal opprobrium. He or she is bound to be castigated by all and sundry and shunned – even by his or her friends or own kinds (ibid.). Today, however difficult it will be, one must pause to ponder on the literal meaning of globalization. Its initial meaning is a formation of practical union of all countries into a single global entity – of which, physical borders would separate any nation no more (Rahman & Hashim, 2022). Perhaps the simplest understanding of globalization means the whole world becoming a single community via the assistance of high technology and international communication (ibid.).

According to Friedman (2000), globalization (as the father of new media) began somewhere in late 1989 in a bad Cold War and a choked economy era, while the global populations were left at the mercy of bureaucrats. To other scholars, globalization is another form of imperialism – an extension of economic bounty's pursuance among colonizers (Musa, 2002). Perhaps, the notorious difference between today's means of globalization and colonialism is that the latter was of no choice of resisting – whereas in today's globalization, world nations embrace freely (ibid.). In today's globalized world, no nation is literally forced to join – for any nation can opt out, close its doors, or censoring some of the influences from the outside world (Hassan & Rahman, 2000). However, most scholars realized did not perceive technology is neutral by virtue – therefore, it could bring highly unpredictable repercussions (ibid.). In fact, it took some time for the world to realize that modern technology do not limit only to information technology. It has enabled, especially neighbouring countries and companies, to mutually enrich one another (Greider, 2000). If we can imagine how our grandparents felt about the freedom of movement when automobiles were first introduced, we can appreciate this sense of freedom internet has made possible in this new media age. Despite most older generations are still afraid of 'a test drive of new media', most youth have already adopted surfing as their second nature (Rahman et al., 2022). In fact, the contemporary escalating inclination of online news (and the degradation of reading preference of print compact newspapers) is a form of a youth-led revolution (ibid.). After all, being young, dynamic, and

seeking for greater ideals in life – this globalism provides the basis for youthful energy to thrive for the betterment of the self and mankind at large (Rustam, 2004).

Media Theories

Two theories were applied for this study:

- 1.) Uses and Gratifications Theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974)
- 2.) Media Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976)

Uses and Gratifications Theory: this theory was created by Blumler and Katz in 1974 – which dealt with comfortability of media audience. It assumes that any audience may actively use media to fulfil several personal needs (Blumler & Katz, 1974), and they knew the reasons that lead them to use a specific mass medium (Johnson & Kaye, 2004; Palmgreen, 1984). It dealt with audience-centred perspective, emphasizing on individual choice in clarifying media effects, of when audience activity is the core concept perspective – and becoming apparent in people’s selectivity, intention, involvement, and utility with the mass media (Blumler & Katz, 1974). When someone is comfortable with a particular media, it is very unlikely to change for another – as long as they felt gratified with its content (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014).

However, anyone may have various activities when using media, and thus makes media behaviour is variably purposeful and goal directed (Ruggiero, 2000). At the end of the day, levels of utility, intention, selectivity, and involvement vary when media are experienced by people under different circumstances (Kim, 2015). The theory also focuses on the identification of the people’s motivations for the use of different media, and had become one of the most acknowledged analysis perspectives of the adoption and use of communication media (ibid.). As for this study, it was applied to determine the level of gratifications among the Malaysians upon reading online news in comparison to conventional compact newspapers.

Media Dependency Theory: As for this theory, it was stated that when any individual lives turned to be more complex, he or she will become more dependent to the media (Tai, Z., & Sun, T., 2007). Dependency on something occurred when any entity’s fulfilment is depending upon the assets of another (Loges & Ball-Rokeach, 1999). This theory (as created by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, 1976) stated that the ultimate basis of media impact lies within the idea of three connections.

The three connections co-exist between social system; the media roles in the system; and, the relationship of the audience with media – reciprocally and continuously (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). As indicated in this study, there had been a high reliance on media for information among Malaysians throughout the past 20 years after the new media revolution. Evidently, this phenomenon is connected to the fact that media impact is dictated by the interrelations between media, its audience, and its society (ibid.). More, this theory also predicted that mass media have affective, cognitive, and behavioural affect upon any society it serves (ibid.). Such cognitive functions include ambiguity resolution – of which can be accomplished rapidly in the midst of social change (i.e. the new media revolution).

Research Methodology

The focus of this research is upon four mainstream print media news agencies located within the heart of Malaysia's capital city – the Klang Valley of Kuala Lumpur. The four agencies are *Utusan Melayu (M) Berhad* and *Berita Harian Sdn. Bhd.* (later grouped as the Malay News Agencies) and *The New Straits Times (M) Bhd* and *The Star Publications (M) Bhd* – (later grouped as the English News Agencies). These four media agencies were chosen based on few essential criteria: (1) Having profound historical background, (2) Being the pioneers of compact newspapers publication, and (3) Begun their first publication in broadsheet size newspapers, before evolving to compact newspapers.

The instrument of this research is a set of self-administered questionnaires, which had been disseminated online via google form application. This method was chosen due to: (1) a good set of questionnaires will never create any difficulties of understanding to the respondents; (2) a set of questionnaires are non-time consuming and most of the time it saves a lot of energy and costs; and, (3) dissemination via online platform has wider coverage as well as in accordance with contemporary research approach in this age of new media revolution. The set of questionnaires were divided into two sections. The first dealt with general questions regarding the demographic information of the respondents; the second section dealt with precise questions about the respondents' perception upon the important of informative elements in the published news articles.

The uni-dimensionality of Likert scales (McLeod, 2019) were applied to this section: (1) Strongly disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Undecided; (4) Agree; (5) Strongly Agree. These questionnaires were developed after precise references to techniques applied by numerous scholars (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014; Babbie, 2021). All demographic questionnaires were aimed at determining the independent variables of this research. Gender, race, and highest education were measured nominally, while current age and monthly income were measured ordinally. All questions in the second section were developed to measure dependent variables.

Respondents and Samplings

The research respondents are Malaysian of Klang Valley (Klang Valley is the other name for Kuala Lumpur surrounding areas). After referring to Babbie (2021), the chosen respondents had represented the characteristics of the population for this research – since this research is also a message-oriented study (Rubin et al., 2005). More, all questionnaires were used to elicit the respondents' demographic information and their exposures to new preference of media reporting of newspapers. Pre-testing of all instruments was further conducted, and reliability test yielded alpha value of 0.72. Total of 400 respondents from Klang Valley were involved – with 383 respondents have returned the complete and useable questionnaire forms. Data were analysed using *Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), Version 28.0*. The alpha levels of all independent variables are more than 0.05 – as displayed in Table 1.

Research Findings And Discussions

Demographic Findings:

Total number of female respondents is higher than the males. However, there's no significant differences. Majority of the respondents are comparatively young. Working age group began from 18 and above after considering the eligible age for working (Rubin et al., 2005). The data shows that majority of respondents belong to middle class and above – the social stratification

that should have enriched themselves with information (Reeves, 1993). In answering all the objectives of this research, the study has first determined the level of the respondents' awareness of the latest Malaysian newspapers agencies' inclination on publishing online news. The purpose is to ensure the respondents' significance in participating with the consecutive questions proposed in this research.

Table 1:
Demographic Variables (n = 383)

Demography	Analysis			
	x ²	dk	p	
Gender	2.666	3	0.446	
Race	3.017	3	0.389	
Highest education	5.171	9	0.819	
Current age	8.783	12	0.721	
Monthly income		4.094	6	0.664

Findings on Table 2 below, showed a great majority of the respondents were aware of the latest inclination. The findings also showed that the Malay respondents have outnumbered the other races by 97.9% compared to the Chinese (87.7%) and the Indian (80.3%). All of the respondents were found significant for this study.

Table 2:
Awareness of Malaysians on Inclination Towards Online News (n = 383)

Race of respondents	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Total
Malay	2.3	0.8	97.9	100%
Chinese	3.1	6.1	87.7	100%
Indian	5.3	10.5	80.3	100%

Malaysians Reading Preference of Online News in Comparison to Compact Newspapers

Table 3 demonstrated the existence of a high recommendation from the majority of Malaysians toward the Malaysian newspaper agencies for significant changes in news dissemination. The highest score upon reading preference is upon *online news' headlines more appealing to the contemporary public compared to compact newspapers* by 75.3% (when we total up on both percentages of *agreed* and *strongly agreed* scores). Nevertheless, simple yet attractive, but without losing the integral approach in disseminating information the headlines of contemporary compact newspapers have gained the majority of Malaysian public preference. Indeed, this rising concern of the public on the importance of new approaches in disseminating knowledge and information in the newspapers is nothing new, especially to the developing countries (Loges & Ball-Rokeach, 1999).

The highest score on the negative reading preference (if we total up on both of the percentages of disagreed and strongly disagreed scores) as displayed on Table 3, is upon the item online news provides more sensational and interesting news compared to compact newspaper by 26.6%. This has somehow denied the many assumptions that the contemporary public prefer only on the sensational and interesting news as their feeders for daily information. However, majority of the respondents remain undecided on the item online news provides trustworthy news compared to compact newspapers by 44.0%.

Table 3:

Items	Percentages					Mean (x 2)	Standard deviation (p)
	SD	D	UD	A	SA		
Online news provides more trustworthy news compared to compact newspapers	4.7	6.7	44.0	37.3	7.3	3.360	0.892
Online news provides more resourceful news compared to compact newspapers	4.0	12.0	29.3	44.7	10.0	3.447	0.966
Online news provides more sensational and interesting news compared to compact newspapers	9.3	17.3	30.0	35.3	8.0	3.153	1.098
Online news provides more issues that appeal to new generations compared to compact newspapers	2.7	7.3	24.0	53.3	12.7	3.660	0.889
Online new provide more fair reporting compared to compact newspapers	1.3	8.7	30.0	48.0	12.0	3.607	0.858
Online news headlines more appealing to the contemporary public interests compared to compact newspapers	4.0	8.0	12.7	52.0	23.3	3.827	1.008

SD = Strongly disagreed D = Disagreed UD = Undecided A = Agreed SA = Strongly agreed

Malaysians Reading Gratifications on Online News

The three highest individual scores (on agreed scores) are for item online news provides more appealing issues to the society compared to compact newspapers (58.7%), online news provides more attractive photos and more interesting new reporting styles compared to compact newspapers (57.3%), and, online news provides more contemporary languages in reporting compared to compact newspapers (56.7%).

Table 4:

Malaysians Reading Gratifications of Online News in Comparison to Compact Newspapers (n = 383)

<i>Items</i>	Percentages					Mean (\bar{x}^2)	Standard deviation (p)
	SD	D	UD	A	SA		
Online news provides more sufficient and satisfactory information compared to compact newspapers	2.7	13.3	30.0	48.0	6.0	3.413	0.891
Online news provides more reliable information compared to compact newspapers	2.0	12.7	18.7	53.3	13.3	3.633	0.937
Online news provides more attractive photos and more interesting new reporting styles compared to compact newspapers	2.7	12.0	19.3	57.3	8.7	3.573	0.907
Online news provides more appealing issues to the society compared to compact newspapers	2.7	7.3	17.3	58.7	14.0	3.740	0.886
Online news provides more contemporary languages in reporting compared to compact newspapers	2.0	10.0	18.0	56.7	13.3	3.693	0.897
Online news provides less misreporting compared to compact newspapers	4.7	12.7	49.3	30.7	2.7	3.140	0.8438

SD = Strongly disagreed D = Disagreed UD = Undecided A = Agreed SA = Strongly agreed

The highest score is on item *online news provides more appealing issues to the society compared to compact newspapers* by 58.7% has somehow confirmed by Itule and Anderson (2006). More, the highest score on negative reading gratifications (when total up *disagreed* and *strongly disagreed* scores) is on item *online news provides less misreporting compared to*

compact newspapers (17.4%). This finding is significant to contemporary Malaysian news agencies in embarking strategies to mend such digital news' discrepancy. Lots of online news are making simple, yet consistent and obviously repetitious mistakes. Table 4 also displayed the third highest percentage of respondents remain *undecided* on item *online news provides more sufficient and satisfactory information compared to compact newspapers* (30.0%). The second highest percentage of respondents remain *undecided* is on Table 5 for *online news makes the public more concern on academic-oriented issues compared to compact newspapers* (38.7%). Perhaps, the online news has its own disadvantages in term of spaces available for lengthy news coverage (*ibid.*). However, this percentage was overruled by the score of 48.0% of the same item category (Table 4). This findings, is in accordance with contemporary online news orientations that focuses more on local issues than the nationals or internationals (*ibid.*).

Malaysians Basis of Reading Preferences and Gratifications of Online News in Comparison to Compact Newspapers

The notorious individual score is on item *online news provides more vital contemporary information compared to compact newspapers* by 50.0%. However, the overall highest is *online news provides more attractive and resourceful supplement compared to compact newspapers* (66.0% when total up both *agreed* and *strongly agreed* scores). Again, this finding is in accordance with Itule and Anderson (2006) that, such matter is among the significant criteria for future survival of news. On the other hands, the highest score on the negative basis of reading preferences and gratifications is upon item *online news did not provide more sufficient information compared to compact newspapers* (40.7% when total up both *disagreed* and *strongly disagreed* scores). Meaning, majority of the respondents disagreed that online news (despite the constraint of space) did not able to provide sufficient information. However, Table 5 also displayed the second highest percentage of respondents remain *undecided* on item *online news makes the public more concern on academic-oriented issues compared to compact newspapers* (38.7%). This finding is equally significant to Malaysian news agencies – of which they should take a proper measure in building a more credible human capital by restructuring strategies to overcome such opinion (Awang, 2004).

As mentioned earlier, there had been a lot of simple, yet consistent and obviously repetitious mistakes in Malaysians' online newspapers today – especially on the choice of words in reporting academic-oriented issues. Perhaps, conventional Malaysians news agencies must allocate more staffs at their online sections as an immediate resolution to such challenge. Such resolution is imperative in sustaining a healthy climate of media dependency – i.e. maintaining the reciprocal and continuous existence of the social system; media roles in the system; and, relationship of the audience (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976).

Table 5:

Malaysians Basis of Reading Preferences and Gratifications of Online News in Comparison to Compact Newspapers (n=383)

<i>Items</i>	Percentages					Mean (\bar{x})	Standard deviation (p)
	SD	D	UD	A	SA		
Online news did not provide more sufficient information compared to compact newspapers	6.7	34.0	33.3	21.3	4.7	2.833	0.993
Online news makes the public more concern on academic-oriented issues compared to compact newspapers	6.0	15.3	38.7	34.7	5.3	3.180	0.963
Online news provides more vital current information compared to compact newspapers	6.7	10.7	32.0	50.0	0.7	3.273	0.912
Online news provides more latest approach in disseminating heavy information compared to compact newspapers	10.0	31.3	32.7	22.0	4.0	2.787	1.027
Online news provides more comprehensive news coverage compared to compact newspapers	7.3	27.3	35.3	27.3	2.7	2.907	0.972
Online news provides more attractive and resourceful supplement compared to compact newspapers	5.3	6.7	22.0	44.7	21.3	3.700	1.048

SD = Strongly disagreed D = Disagreed UD = Undecided A = Agreed SA = Strongly agreed

Conclusion

Mastering new media revolution is a worn-out cliché. Nobody could claim such ability in manoeuvring this perilous and treacherous realm of globalization – despite the term globalization has been with us since Francis Drake or Ferdinand Magellan circumnavigated

the globe. Thus, whatever the new media revolution brings, it should only be welcomed if it serves the interest of everyone at large. It should stand as the property of all mankind, including the poorest individual of an isolated province (Rahman et al., 2022).

To Malaysia, today's post vicennial era of new media revolution could be manoeuvred towards bringing about a better world, provided that the majority are not fanatical (Karim & Khalid, 2003). Malaysia will always be on the lookout for adverse consequences and consistently steadfast in taking corrective measures (ibid.). There is always a high price to be paid by those who blindly embrace the entire package of new media revolution and the era beyond (Rahman et al., 2022). Referring to this research findings, it is evident for media agencies to further strengthen their online news platforms – as lesser and lesser people are reading printed compact newspapers. Apparently, the online news as a part of new media revolution's parcel, did not occur in vacuum – neither the most celebrated compact newspaper before (ibid.). Evidently, these new media reading preferences' phenomena will never be the finale of media challenges in this digital millennium.

For instance, in 2005, all Malaysia's print media agencies had transformed their print newspapers from broadsheet-size to compact-size. However, in less than five years, all Malaysia's print media agencies had to venture into digital online newspapers due to the inevitable escalation of public's news reading preference. Such rapidity of change must be properly attended to by all media agencies globally since the new media technology brought along its new set of media users' preference and gratifications. Findings in this study had shown that the significant rise on the level of gratifications among the Malaysians upon reading online news had significantly arisen in comparison to conventional compact newspapers. This is in accordance with Uses and Gratifications Theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974), that dealt with comfortability of media audience, audience-centred perspective, individual choice in clarifying media effects.

Findings had also shown that more Malaysians were dependent on reading online news in comparison to conventional newspapers as their lives becoming more complex (Tai, & Sun, 2007). This phenomenon is in accordance with Media Dependency Theory of which, the ultimate basis of media impact lies within the idea of three connections – the co-existence between social system, the media roles in the system, and, the reciprocal and continuous relationship of the audience with media (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). Thus, all findings from this research had pointed out towards the importance of all media agencies to be consistently adaptive towards change, ability to manoeuvre the unpredictable demands of media trends, and the ever-shifting media audience's preference throughout this post vicennial era of new media revolution. Such immense digital challenges had never been faced by any media agencies since mass media were born in the past millennium.

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