

The Impact and Contribution of Online News Channels on WhatsApp Towards Reading Culture in Malaysia

Mohd Syuhaidi Abu Bakar*, Nurul Shuhaidah Shokri

Faculty of Film, Theatre and Animation, University Technologic MARA (UiTM) Selangor Branch,
Puncak Perdana Campus, University Technologic MARA, 40150, Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan,
Malaysia.

*Corresponding author

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.907000303>

Received: 10 July 2025; Accepted: 17 July 2025; Published: 14 August 2025

ABSTRACT

WhatsApp has become a primary platform for sharing and receiving news, offering convenient access to information within Malaysian society. The widespread dissemination of online news via WhatsApp channels is believed to have influenced the reading culture in Malaysia. This study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the impact and contributions of online news shared through WhatsApp news channels on reading habits in the country. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, involving ten Malaysian adults who actively consume online news via WhatsApp news channels. The findings reveal several significant impacts and contributions of WhatsApp-based news consumption on the local reading culture. This study is expected to provide meaningful insights into the existing body of literature on the role of WhatsApp news channels in shaping reading practices in Malaysia.

Keywords: Impact, Contribution, News, WhatsApp, Reading Culture

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to Fahmy A. Rosli (2023), in an increasingly advanced digital era, news can now be accessed instantly through mobile phones or computers. This phenomenon has led many to perceive that the role of printed newspapers is diminishing, as the public can conveniently obtain news through their smart devices. Nevertheless, innovations in news delivery, such as online news and its integration with other social media platforms, offer interactivity and collaborative potential that may help printed newspapers remain relevant in the digital age. For instance, by upholding the integrity and quality of their reporting, printed newspapers can continue to serve as a crucial pillar in the dissemination of information to the Malaysian public.

According to Mohd Azul Mohammad Salleh and Za-Idah Ekhwan (2019), the term “WhatsApp” is derived from the English phrase “What’s up?”, which reflects its function as a medium for everyday conversations among friends and acquaintances. WhatsApp enables users to send and receive messages via mobile phones and allows the exchange of images, videos, voice notes, and text messages. Clearly, these features provide users with a platform to convey information more effectively and accurately, capturing public attention in Malaysia. Furthermore, WhatsApp allows users to create profiles and interact with others remotely, fostering the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships.

Roz Ariffin Rozaid (2023) asserts that one of the key strengths of printed newspapers lies in their rigorous editorial process, where news content is thoroughly verified before publication. This is because journalists often invest significant time in investigating and gathering accurate information, and most importantly, they are not subjected to the same time pressures when composing news articles. However, Norazlinda Mohammad (2023) highlights that today’s younger generation shows a declining interest in reading, which may contribute to lower intellectual development. The lack of reading habits among Generation Z is concerning, as it may lead to weaknesses in academic performance from school to university levels. As the Malay proverb goes,

“*Membaca Jambatan Ilmu*”, underscoring the importance of reading as a valuable practice that enriches one’s knowledge base.

Online news consumption should be recognised as an essential practice that fosters awareness, critical analysis, and informed citizenship in the digital era. According to Nur Azura Binti Bakar (2018), the impact of online news is evident in how viral information on social media is often accepted uncritically by readers. Therefore, it is imperative for readers to reassess such information and seek verification through reliable sources, including trustworthy news channels shared via WhatsApp. This is crucial because certain online news platforms allow users to post both positive and negative comments, sometimes anonymously, as seen on blogs where readers can leave feedback without revealing their true identities. Muhammad Aminnuraliff (2023) further emphasizes that certain fraudulent syndicates exploit social media platforms as a medium to disseminate false news, using it as bait to deceive and trap victims. These fake news stories often involve sensitive information such as government aid, loans, or investment schemes, which can mislead social media users and result in them falling prey to scams.

Nevertheless, online news disseminated via WhatsApp news channels also contributes positively to reading culture in Malaysia. According to Muhammad Adil Fikri Mohd Hamizi (2023), social media represents one of the technological tools commonly used by society today for daily communication and interaction. Among these platforms, WhatsApp stands out as a widely utilized medium. The existence and growing use of WhatsApp have had a positive impact, particularly following the introduction of its new feature, which are, online news channels. This development presents a significant opportunity for Malaysian society to subscribe to preferred news channels directly through the WhatsApp application. Thamijayi (2020) notes that online news is easily accessible via mobile phones or laptops, as mobile phones have become essential tools in modern life. Consequently, online news has become the preferred choice for many due to its convenience and accessibility through mobile devices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the Framing of News in Printed Newspapers

According to Fan Pik Shy (2024), the framing of news in printed newspapers involves processes designed to capture attention, which can indirectly elicit varying responses from the public. Common features used in the framing of printed news include headlines, subheadings, images, and captions. Among the four key dimensions of framing that can be examined are topic presentation, cognitive attributes, and affective attributes. This is because the inclination of a news story and its mode of delivery are believed to have the potential to influence public thinking, behavior, or actions. By incorporating either positive or negative elements, the news coverage reflects how thoroughly and critically an issue is portrayed, potentially shaping public perception of its merits or drawbacks.

The author posits that news coverage can be classified into three categories. First, when a writer expresses personal opinions on an issue, the interpretation of the news content tends to dominate the coverage. Second, a neutral interpretation, in which the writer presents an issue that partially aligns with or opposes their own viewpoint. Third, when the writer conveys issues sourced from external agencies, which typically involves restructuring the supporting frame and subsequently adapting the news content. Printed newspapers are therefore not only seen as influencing perceptions or opinions, but also play a vital role in shaping public attitudes and awareness of current issues, both domestic and international.

Excessive Trust in Unverified Online News

According to Sofian Baharom (2020), one of the domains that requires our contribution is the dissemination of news on social media. This is because social media platforms serve as spaces that host a wide range of information from various sources, many of which are not verified for accuracy. Angelina Ling (2023) said, avid WhatsApp users who place excessive trust in online news are at risk of experiencing negative consequences, as they tend to believe current issues without verifying the authenticity of the information.

Although such news may have originated from credible sources, once altered into false information, it can easily trigger panic among readers. Furthermore, exposure to fake news may lead readers to feelings of despair and emotional distress. In severe cases, this could drive individuals to take drastic actions, including suicide.

However, according to Ir. Muhidin Arifin (2020), communication without WhatsApp is now considered unusual. The author also believes that cybercrimes and fraud have exploited the use of WhatsApp to generate significant profits. Therefore, there is a need to develop a mechanism to curb the careless or excessive use of WhatsApp that could lead to social and security issues. In conclusion, the author asserts that Malaysia should examine why countries such as China, North Korea, and Syria have prohibited the use of WhatsApp. It is clear that Malaysia must take proactive measures to assess the potential consequences of excessive WhatsApp usage among its population.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach and employed interview methods. A total of 10 informants were interviewed to explore the impact and contributions of online news channels on WhatsApp towards reading culture in Malaysia. All data collected were analysed using thematic analysis to obtain a range of perspectives. According to Syukr Abdul Hay Kamat (2022), a qualitative research is a method that presents and analyses data filtered through individual or group thinking processes, aiming to obtain distinct data through interviews and observations. Therefore, this study is able to capture various interpretations and differing viewpoints among individuals. As stated by Hennink and Kaiser (2021), as well as Creswell (1998), for qualitative research using interviews, an appropriate number of informants typically ranges from 9 to 17 participants. Thus, this study adopts a sample of 10 informants who regularly consume online news via WhatsApp in Malaysia, consistent with the recommendations of Hennink and Kaiser (2021) and Creswell (1998). The focus of qualitative research is on data depth rather than breadth. Therefore, when the goal is to obtain a deeper understanding of a specific phenomenon, a smaller sample size is acceptable. Ten participants in all were chosen for this study using purposive sampling, with an emphasis on people who regularly use WhatsApp to consume news. This figure was considered adequate since it made it possible to reach data saturation, at which point no fresh themes surfaced from the interviews. The participants' thorough, in-depth answers were sufficient for examining the main research questions and spotting trends pertinent to the local setting. Upon completion of data collection, thematic analysis was conducted, and all interview data were transcribed verbatim.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Impact of Online News Channels on WhatsApp on the Reading Culture in Malaysia

A Platform for Diversity of News Sources

Informant 1 stated subscribing to Buletin TV3, Berita Harian, and star channels to conveniently access current news coverage. Similarly, Informant 2 subscribed to channels such as Astro Awani and Buletin TV3. Informant 4 also shared a similar preference, subscribing to Berita Harian for news updates, along with channels like Berita Utusan and Astro Awani.

Informant 10 explained that preferred sources for current information and news updates include Berita Harian, Harian Metro, Sinar Harian, The New York Post, and Buletin TV3. Notably, the majority of informants favoured Berita Harian as a primary source for current affairs, a preference reflected in its substantial subscriber base of over 676,000.

Increased Interest in Reading Behaviour Based on Headlines

Sensational or provocative headlines often capture readers' attention and encourage further exploration of an issue. Informant 1 shared frequent access to the Buletin TV3 channel and expressed a particular interest in headlines related to celebrity gossip or mysterious events, which spark curiosity and prompt deeper reading.

Similarly, Informant 5 explained being drawn to striking headlines or accompanying images, as these elements stimulate interest and lead to more engaged consumption of current issues through subscribed channels.

Informant 10 stated that compelling headlines are the primary motivation for reading the full content of a news article. The news consumed is often relevant and beneficial, and the convenience of accessing such information through WhatsApp news channels enhances overall engagement. Informant 7 noted that interest in news shared via WhatsApp largely depends on the relevance and clarity of the headline and content. News that appears vague or unconvincing is often ignored. In conclusion, the growing interest in news headlines reflects a dynamic shift in Malaysia's reading culture, driven by the accessibility and immediacy of online news via WhatsApp news channels.

Shift from Traditional to Digital Media

The transition from traditional media such as printed newspapers to digital platforms through applications like WhatsApp has transformed the way Malaysian society accesses news, making it faster and more convenient. This shift is particularly evident among the younger generation, who are less inclined to read printed newspapers and prefer to obtain news through WhatsApp news channels. Informant 1 observed that younger individuals today demonstrate a declining interest in printed newspapers due to the influence of advanced technology. Most youths own their own smartphones, some as early as the age of 12, and those aged 20 and above tend to rely on online news by simply accessing news channels available on the WhatsApp platform. The informant emphasized that online news on WhatsApp can also attract young people to engage with current issues and stay informed about events in Malaysia. Informant 2 concurred, noting that online news on WhatsApp has significantly changed their news consumption habits. Previously, they relied heavily on printed newspapers, but now they depend more on social media for accessing news, which has made the process much more convenient.

A Platform in Verifying News Authenticity

Informant 2 explained that their initial impression of an issue often drives their interest in current affairs such as flood incidents, accidents, or political developments. However, when the information presented is unclear, they feel compelled to consult alternative sources to obtain more accurate and detailed information. Additionally, they conduct personal verification and cross-reference the information due to the frequent lack of credible sources and evidence in the news circulated on WhatsApp. Informants 5 and 6 expressed similar views, stating that they consistently verify news content using credible sources. Informant 6 added that they follow official news websites and, upon receiving news in WhatsApp groups, would cross-check and conduct additional research to confirm the news' authenticity on other sources such as WhatsApp news channels.

Increased Access to Information

One of the main advantages of WhatsApp is its ability to facilitate the direct sharing of news links within family, friend, or community groups. With just a single click, users can access news from various sources available through the WhatsApp application. Informant 3 stated that they often receive numerous links to articles via WhatsApp news channels. Similarly, Informants 5 and 6 noted that the news feature on WhatsApp makes it easier for them to read articles in greater detail by simply clicking on the provided news links. Thus, Informants 3, 5, and 6 share the same view regarding the convenience offered by this function. Informant 10 agreed that increased access to information is a significant benefit. Previously, they had to visit official websites and manually search for news of interest. In contrast, news shared via WhatsApp allows them to access preferred channels directly through the provided links. Furthermore, the ease of accessing information through WhatsApp has contributed to greater public awareness and engagement with current issues among Malaysian society.

Strengthening Dependence on Technology

Informant 4 stated that online news via WhatsApp allows them to access a variety of news daily without the need to spend money on purchasing printed newspapers. This is largely due to their strong reliance on their

mobile phone, which provides convenience by enabling direct access to news channels through the WhatsApp application. This illustrates the increasing dependence on digital technology as a primary source of information in everyday life.

The Contributions of Online News Channels on WhatsApp to the Reading Culture in Malaysia

Strengthening Family and Community Communication

Findings from the study indicate that Informants 1, 8, and 10 were drawn to reading news due to the frequent sharing of verified information by family members and friends in WhatsApp groups. Informant 1 explained that an interest in news reading began when family members regularly shared articles and links from official websites in the family group chat, even before WhatsApp introduced dedicated news channels. Informant 8 noted that the habit of reading news via WhatsApp was sparked by friends who consistently shared engaging stories, which encouraged further exploration of the shared content.

This demonstrates how WhatsApp contributes to enabling users to share news easily within family or friend groups, thereby reinforcing interpersonal communication. Similarly, Informant 10 reported receiving credible news updates directly from family and friends through WhatsApp groups. This regular exposure to shared news content influenced the informant's reading habits, especially given busy work schedule. The informant noted that the convenience provided by current technology has shifted news consumption patterns toward digital platforms such as WhatsApp.

Easy and Fast Access to News

The ease of accessing news through applications such as WhatsApp has brought information directly to readers' fingertips. With just a single click, Malaysians can stay updated on current local and global issues, whether related to politics, the economy, health, or entertainment. Informant 1 agreed to frequently opening WhatsApp and going directly to news channels to access the latest updates, eliminating the need to search via Google. WhatsApp news channels was described as a convenient and straightforward platform for accessing news content.

Informant 6 expressed the view that WhatsApp now functions not only as a communication tool but also as a medium for accessing news, even during busy schedules. Despite a demanding routine, time is made to check news channels on WhatsApp to stay informed about current developments in Malaysia. According to Informant 2, the speed and ease of accessing news through mobile devices make WhatsApp content particularly engaging. However, the quality and credibility of the news remain key factors influencing the decision to read further. Informant 9 shared a similar perspective, noting that the availability of news channels on WhatsApp has made it easier to access news directly via mobile phone, which has increased personal interest in reading news, despite previously having little interest.

Enhancing Interest in Reading Activity

Online news disseminated through WhatsApp channels has significantly contributed to increasing reading interest among Malaysians. Informant 3 stated that news shared via WhatsApp often serves as an initial introduction to specific topics. When the content captures interest, it often leads to further exploration through credible sources for a deeper understanding. This process has fostered a growing interest in reading online news via WhatsApp channels and has encouraged greater effort to comprehend the content more thoroughly.

According to Informant 3, interest in reading online news increased due to the presentation style, which includes short videos, various infographics, and concise messaging to convey issues. A preference was expressed for news on WhatsApp channels because the format is straightforward and allows quick, efficient access to up-to-date information. Informant 4 explained that the growing interest in reading news via WhatsApp channels is driven by the use of high-definition images and clearer visuals, such as accident photos, which appear more appealing on a mobile phone. In comparison, printed newspapers are less preferred due to

lower visual quality and less vibrant image colors.

Cultivating a Digital Reading Culture

In the modern technological era, the shift from traditional reading, such as printed newspapers, to digital reading has become increasingly evident. Informant 3 shared that online news accessed via WhatsApp news channels has transformed the way information is obtained quickly. Previously, reliance was placed more on news websites than on printed newspapers. Digital news consumption is perceived as more convenient, allowing easy access to current issues through a mobile phone. In contrast, printed newspapers require daily purchases and lack portability, making them less practical for everyday use.

A Platform for Filtering and Verifying Information

WhatsApp also facilitates users in accessing multiple sources of information simultaneously. By comparing news shared through various links, users are able to filter out false information and gain a clearer understanding of current issues. According to Informants 5 and 8, they both emphasized the importance of ensuring that any news shared with them is accurate and credible, as misinformation can lead to negative thinking and misunderstandings among readers due to the spread of fake news.

Informant 6 shared a similar view, stating a preference for following official and reliable news channels on WhatsApp, as content from platforms such as Facebook and Instagram often contains unverified or misleading information. Informant 9 explained that the credibility of news on WhatsApp is assessed by analyzing the presentation style. For instance, news that uses exaggerated or sensational language - such as terms like 'viral' or 'breaking' - may indicate a lack of credibility. In contrast, authoritative news is typically presented in a formal and objective tone without provoking unnecessary alarm. Additional factors such as strong evidence, valid data, and accurate information help build trust and encourage further reading. Informant 9 also emphasized the importance of verifying the source of news, noting that content from reputable media organizations enhances confidence and helps prevent the spread of misinformation.

Encouraging Interest-Based Reading

Online news channels on WhatsApp offer users the freedom to select content based on their interests and needs, thereby making the reading experience more relevant and meaningful. Only Informant 1 addressed this aspect, stating that one typically chooses to read more extensively about current political issues and other topics of personal interest in order to stay informed about recent developments.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study aims to explore the impact and contributions of online news channels on WhatsApp to the reading culture in Malaysia. Online news channels have shown positive effects on readers, particularly in helping them reduce the cost of purchasing printed newspapers. However, it also exposes readers to potential negative effects, such as the dissemination of false information, which may lead to misunderstandings about current issues. However, online news provides readers with convenient and fast access to information, as well as a variety of news channels that offer the freedom to choose content according to their preferences.

In conclusion, through an extensive qualitative approach, this study was able to explore in greater depth the impacts and contributions of online news channels on WhatsApp to Malaysia's reading culture. WhatsApp news channels have significantly improved digital literacy and current affairs awareness, facilitated quick and simple access to news, and encouraged social interaction and conversation. Nevertheless, challenges such as the risk of spreading false information require attention and action to ensure that the positive impacts can be maximized. Overall, WhatsApp and its news channels contribute significantly to enriching the Malaysian reading culture and facilitating information dissemination.

REFERENCES

1. Angelina Ling. (2023, Mei 16). Jelaskan kesan yang wujud sekiranya pengguna media Sosial terlalu dipercayai berita palsu. <https://www.scribd.com/document/673041188/BM-Bahagian-B-Jelaskan-kesan-yang-wujud-sekiranya-pengguna-media-sosial-terlalu-mempunyai-berita-palsu>
2. Fahmy A Rosli. (2023, Mei 28). Peranan surat khabar masih relevan'-Anwar. Berita Harian Online. <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2023/05/1107135/peranansuratkhbarmasih-relevan-anwar>
3. Fan Pik Shy. (2024, Januari 31). Kajian tentang akhbar cetakan dan atas talian bahasa melayu terhadap Isu berkaitan dengan China - Pandemik Covid-19 sebagai kes kajian. http://web.usm.my/km/earlyView/104_KM-OA-10-22-0165.R2.pdf
4. Hennink, M. & Kaiser, B.N. (2021). Sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research: A systematic review of empirical tests. *Social Science & Medicine*, 292(1). <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277953621008558?via%3Dihub>
5. Ir Muhidin Arifin. (2020, Oktober 23). Kaji kesan penggunaan WhatsApp. Sinar Harian. <https://www.sinarharian.com.my/article/106517/kaji-kesan-penggunaan-whatsapp>
6. Mohd Azul Mohamad Salleh & Za-Idah Ekhwan. (2019). Manfaat aplikasi Whatsapp terhadap of hubungan antara peribadi masyarakat dan polis. *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal Communication*, 35(4), 135-154. <https://journalarticle.ukm.my/13912/1/33341-116210-1-PB.pdf>
7. Muhammad Adil Fikri Mohd Hamizi. (2023, Disember 15). Penggunaan media Sosial sebagai media baharu dan impaknya terhadap masyarakat Malaysia. *Perspektif Jurnal Sains Sosial dan Kemanusiaan*, 15, 24-37.
8. Muhammad Aminnuraliff. (2023, Januari 28). Sebar berita palsu perangkap mangsa. Sinar Harian. <https://www.sinarharian.com.my/article/242561/berita/nasional/sebar-berita-palsu-perangkap-mangsa>
9. Norazlinda Mohammad. (2023, April 5). Generasi muda tidak minat membaca, cetus kelesuan pembelajaran. Berita Dagang. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/NorazlindaMohammad/publication/369824155_Generasi_muda_tidak_minat_membaca_cetus_kelesuan_pembelajaran_DagangNews/links/642e424aad9b6d17dc3b8252/Generasi_muda-tidakminat-membaca-cetus-kelesuan-pembelajaranDagangNews.pdf
10. Nur Azura Binti Bakar. (2018, Mac 18). Kebaikan dan rebroken berita atas talian. <https://multiculturalfamily443178422.wordpress.com/2018/03/18/kebaikan-dan-keburukan-berita-atas-talian/>
11. Roz Ariffin Rozaid. (2023, Jun 9). Relevan surat khabar dalam era digital. Sinar Harian. <https://www.sinarharian.com.my/article/262523/suara-sinar/analisis-sinar/relevan-surat-khabar-dalam-era-digital>
12. Sofian Baharom. (2020, Februari 5). Sikap tanggungjawab dalam penyebaran maklumat. *MalaysiaKini*. <https://www.malaysiakini.com/letters/509590>
13. Syukr Abdul Hay Kamat. (2022). Pelaksanaan fiqh ayat curriculum bersepadu tahfiz: analysis penguasaan pelajar dan keberkesanan terhadap hafazan Al-Quran MITTIS Sabak Bernam. *Akademie Pengajian Islam University Malaya, Kuala Lumpur*. <https://ezaccess.library.uitm.edu.my/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdissertations-theses%2Fpelaksanaan-fiqh-ayat-kurikulum-bersepadu-tahfiz%2Fdocview%2F2848773072%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D42518>
14. Thamijayi. (2020, September 12). Akhbar dalam talian dan akhbar bercetak. <https://www.coursehero.com/file/75627326/Akhbar-dalam-talian-dan-akhbar->