





A Critical Discourse Analysis of Malaysian News Headlines on Social Media Licensing

Sharifah Nadia Syed Nasharudin¹, Norfarhana Fadilla Mohd Zaki^{2*}
Muna Liyana Mohamad Tarmizi³, Nur Syamimi Zahari⁴

¹Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

Email: sharifahnadia@uitm.edu.my

²Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

Email: farhanafadilla@uitm.edu.my

³Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

Email: muna4566@uitm.edu.my

⁴Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA Kelantan, 18500 Machang, Kelantan, Malaysia

Email: syamimi8058@uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

CORRESPONDING

AUTHOR (*):

Norfarhana Fadilla Mohd Zaki
(farhanafadilla@uitm.edu.my)

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News headlines are powerful discursive sites where ideologies and power relations are constructed. As Malaysia became one of the first countries to implement a social media licensing policy in 2025, it is crucial to understand how the media frames the policy and represents the power relations it entails. While CDA studies have examined headlines in various domains in relation to politics, ethnicity, and conflict, little attention has been given to how headlines represent government regulations, particularly in the context of digital governance. This study investigates how Malaysian news headlines represent social media licensing policy and the power dynamics embedded in these representations. 27 news headlines published between July 2024 and March 2025 were selected from a diverse range of Government-linked and Independent Malaysian media outlets, namely The Star Online, New Straits Times, Malay Mail, Free Malaysia Today, Malaysiakini, and The Business Times. The headlines were analysed using a combination of Fairclough's (1992) Three-Dimensional Framework and van Dijk's (1998) Socio-Cognitive Approach. The analysis reveals six systematic linguistic strategies employed in the headlines, including the representation of actors, evaluative language, quantification and immediacy, reference to emotion, metaphor, and predication. These strategies emphasise three main power dynamics: dominant, narrative-based, and time-related, which strengthen government authority and marginalise corporate voices. The findings suggest that news headlines serve not only as discursive means to represent the issue but also as powerful tools that portray

government authority and shape the public's perception of social media licensing policy. This research contributes to Critical Discourse Analysis by illustrating how headlines function as sites where language, power, and ideology intersect, shaping public perceptions of digital governance.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to Critical Discourse Analysis by examining how Malaysian news headlines construct power and ideology surrounding digital governance. It extends the existing literature by focusing on the underexplored representation of government regulation and revealing how linguistic strategies shape public perceptions of authority in social media licensing policy.

1. Introduction

Social media has become a focal point for communication, information exchange, and public discourse. As a result, dealing with social media has become increasingly complex, requiring governments to strike a balance between regulation and the protection of digital rights in addressing harmful content and combating cybercrime. According to [Gorwa \(2024\)](#), as its influence expands, state authorities worldwide are increasingly implementing regulatory frameworks to address concerns such as misinformation, online harm, and national security. A current and pressing case in point is Malaysia's recently implemented social media licensing policy. On August 1, 2024, Malaysia took a notable step in this global trend when the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) gazetted a comprehensive licensing framework for internet messaging services and social media services. Effective January 1, 2025, this policy requires all major social media platforms and instant messaging services with more than eight million users (including Facebook, TikTok, Telegram, and YouTube) to obtain annual licenses and comply with localised content moderation and reporting requirements ([Raba, 2025](#)). This measure has sparked significant debate, with the government framing it as a necessary step to protect citizens and ensure accountability among platform providers ([Huang, Kasim, & Ali, 2024](#)). The controversial regulation has also led to extensive media coverage and public discussions regarding state authority over online platforms.

News headlines serve as powerful discursive tools that shape public understanding of certain events through specific use of linguistic strategies ([Fairclough, 1995](#); [van Dijk, 1988](#)). According to [Sazan, Yusoff and Zaini \(2025\)](#), headlines have been shown to strategically employ linguistic devices and rhetorical structures that align with political interests or editorial biases. Far from being neutral, headlines frame events, embed ideological positions, and influence public perception through deliberate linguistic choices. They simplify complex policies into ideological cues that can legitimise or challenge power structures ([Ramle et al., 2021a](#)). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) offers a framework for examining how power relations and ideologies are embedded within textual practices, highlighting the connection between language use and social power ([Fairclough, 2013](#)). Past research shows that CDA is widely used to reveal how news headlines frame events and embed power representations across many domains, such as election coverage, marginal group representation, migration representation, public health crisis and gendered portrayals ([Badrul Halim et al., 2025](#); [Mai, 2023](#); [Md Zamin & Paridaluddin, 2023](#); [Ramle et al., 2021b](#); [Rubbani, 2024](#)). These works consistently demonstrate the use of various linguistic strategies in news headlines to simplify

complex issues and position readers towards a particular interpretation of events. Moreover, a recent study by [Shah \(2025\)](#) also explores the strategic use of rhetorical devices, linguistic choices, and visual elements to disseminate power and ideology through news headlines in the political domain.

While CDA has been applied across various domains, the ideological frameworks surrounding digital governance and regulation remain underexplored. Despite growing public attention to Malaysia's social media licensing policy, the way mainstream news media linguistically construct and represent the regulation issue through their headlines has not been sufficiently examined from a CDA perspective. This study addresses a critical gap in understanding how Malaysian media discourse constructs and represents digital governance issues. The timing and controversial nature of Malaysia's social media licensing policy make it particularly significant for understanding how linguistic choices in news headlines both reflect and potentially shape power relations in democratic countries dealing with digital governance challenges. By employing [Fairclough's \(1992\)](#) CDA framework to examine the linguistic strategies employed in headlines about social media licensing and drawing on [van Dijk's \(1998\)](#) sociocognitive approach to interpret how these strategies reproduce power and ideology, this research contributes to a broader understanding of media discourse in Malaysia and its role in shaping public understanding of digital policy issues.

1.1. Research Aim and Research Questions

Using [Fairclough's \(1992\)](#) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework and [van Dijk's \(1998\)](#) socio-cognitive approach, this study aims to investigate the linguistic strategies and power dynamics in Malaysian news headlines related to the social media licensing policy. The following research questions were formed to specify the goal of this study:

- i. What linguistic strategies do Malaysian news headlines employ to represent the social media licensing policy?
- ii. What are the underlying messages and power dynamics conveyed through the language used in news headlines about Malaysia's social media licensing policy?

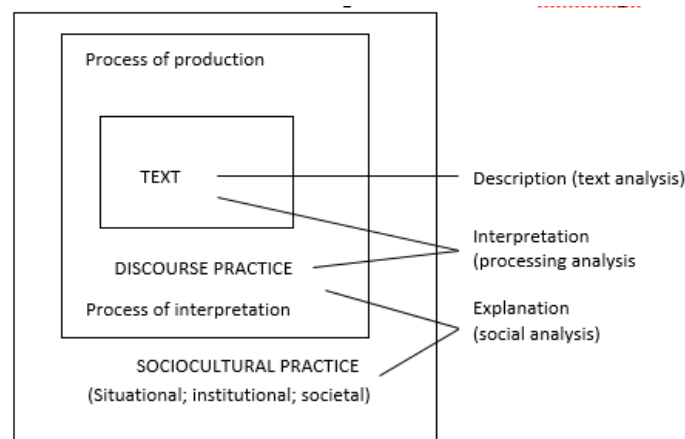
2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) serves as the theoretical foundation of this study, providing researchers with a framework and a powerful tool for uncovering the relationship between language, power, and society, particularly in the analysis of media texts. CDA is a post-mortem analysis of language to examine different meanings across various layers of language ([Sajid, Anwar, & Ashraf, 2019](#)). [Fairclough's \(1992\)](#) three-dimensional framework was employed as the primary analytical model to explore the linguistic features used in news headlines and uncover the representation of power dynamics. Complementing this is [van Dijk's \(1988\)](#) socio-cognitive framework, which focuses on the relationship between discourse and power. The combination of these two approaches provides comprehensive tools and serves as a guide for data analysis and interpretation. It represents the essence of CDA as an approach that is specifically concerned with the study and analysis of written and spoken texts to reveal and compare the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality, and bias ([van Dijk, 1998a](#)).

The analytical process of this study is guided by Fairclough's (1992) Three-Dimensional Framework, as illustrated in Figure 1. The analysis was divided into three levels, which are (i) textual practice, (ii) discursive practice and (iii) sociocultural practice. At the textual level, the analysis identified linguistic strategies used in the headlines. To further interpret how these strategies reflect and reproduce relations of power and ideology, van Dijk's (1998) socio-cognitive approach was integrated, particularly his concepts of the ideological square and discourse–power–society relations. By examining discursive practices in news headlines, this study not only reveals the news value of reporting Malaysia's social media licensing policy but also investigates the ideology of media practitioners and how the representation of this policy in news headlines influences public understanding.

Figure 1: Fairclough (1992) Three-Dimensional Framework



2.2. CDA and Power Representation in News Headlines

News headlines are the most visible and influential part of a news text. Van Dijk (1988) considered headlines to be the most essential feature of newspaper discourse. It captures a story in the fewest possible words and readers' interest to read the news upon glancing or skimming the headlines. News headlines can employ diverse voices in the way they are written, with a specific audience in mind. The way the media structured the headlines is also based on their intention of reporting the event and brings their own ideologies to the readers. According to Ninpanit (2020), in addition to summarising information about events, headlines are intentionally worded to position readers toward particular interpretations and attitudes. Shah and Islam (2025) suggests that headlines or subheadlines uncover the underlying ideologies present in the text.

Several studies provide evidence that these ideological positions are revealed through the linguistic strategies employed in newspaper headlines. This is evidenced by Arshad and Khan (2021), who confirmed that one of the most common strategies used is through the omission of subjects and auxiliary verbs to produce phrases and sentences that have a strong impact on their readers. In examining the representation of actors, previous studies have also highlighted the use of grammar and verbs to show who is to blame and who has power or who is a victim, which changes how people see responsibility and power through transitivity (Haimed, 2024; Fitriani et al., 2021). Emotive language is another strategy employed in news headlines to influence readers' perception of political actors by assigning blame or sympathy (Arshad & Khan, 2021). In a similar vein, Fitriani et al. (2021) analysed 212 headlines on rallies, showing that

metaphors were employed and depicting the rallies negatively while framing the government positively. These findings emphasise that emotive language and metaphor function as discursive tools to influence how readers see power.

Applying CDA to news headlines reveals how language choices within these texts work to reproduce power relations and embed ideological perspectives. For instance, [Akanda \(2020\)](#) applied CDA to examine BSS headlines on Bangladesh–China relations, revealing that governmental influence shaped the headlines as ‘micro stories’ framed diplomatically to reinforce state power. Similarly, [Badrul Halim, Wan Azman, and Hafiz \(2025\)](#) analysed news reports on Afghan women during the Taliban offensive, revealing how ideological positions shaped contrasting portrayals. From the findings of this study, *The Star* emphasised professionalism, while *Free Malaysia Today* highlighted victimhood, thereby demonstrating the power of media discourse in framing public perception. In another study by [Harjanti et al. \(2024\)](#), certain groups were found to be excluded from news headlines on social media through the use of negative words, harsh expressions, and question forms. These are used to strengthen social biases. Similarly, [Haimed \(2024\)](#) found that the textual characteristics of the news headlines reveal the ideological influences and power dynamics of the respective nations when examining how major world powers are depicted in newspaper headlines from different countries. [Fitriani et al. \(2021\)](#) further confirm that powerful people simultaneously use a biased representation of a particular event as news to spread their hidden agenda. In the Malaysian context, [Asad, Mohd Noor, and Jaes \(2021\)](#) examined ideological dispositions in reporting on Pakatan Harapan’s first 100 days using [Fairclough’s \(1992\)](#) CDA and Halliday’s systemic-functional linguistics. Their study showed that headlines function as sites of power where *Malaysiakini* projected neutrality while *The New Straits Times* subtly reinforced the ruling party’s dominance through favourable framing.

Despite these contributions, the absence of studies investigating Malaysian news headlines on social media regulation represents a significant limitation in the current CDA discourse. Investigating social media policy regulation in Malaysia is particularly important due to the controversial nature of the licensing policy, which has sparked widespread debate about digital governance. This study addresses the gaps by providing a systematic CDA analysis of Malaysian news headlines on digital policy, contributing to the understanding of Malaysian media discourse practice.

3. Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilising Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), to examine how Malaysian mainstream news media construct and represent social media licensing through headlines. The data for this study, which consisted of news headlines, were collected from a diverse range of Government-linked and Independent Malaysian media outlets, namely The Star Online, New Straits Times, Malay Mail, Free Malaysia Today, Malaysiakini, and The Business Times. Using a purposive sampling method, a total of 27 news headlines were collected from 27 July 2024 (when MCMC announced the licensing requirement) to March 2025. The selected headlines covered the policy announcement, preparation for implementation, and initial enforcement phases, detailed as follows:

- i. Policy Development and Announcement: July -August 2024
- ii. Implementation Preparation Phase: September- December 2024
- iii. Policy Implementation Phase: January 2025 onwards

The complete list of headlines analysed is presented in [Table 1](#), which served as the primary data for the content analysis.

Table 1: List of Headlines

ID	Headline	Source	Date
H1	Malaysia's social media licensing plans raise 'abuse of power' concerns	The Straits Times	July 4, 2024
H2	Social media licensing open to abuse, says human rights lawyer	Malaysiakini	July 29, 2024
H3	Bersih joins call to halt social media licensing scheme	Malaysiakini	July 30, 2024
H4	Licensing law for social media platforms could be used as a political weapon - Bersih	Malay Mail	July 30, 2024
H5	Malaysia's social media licensing plan could hurt innovation, SMEs: analysts	Free Malaysia Today	August 2, 2024
H6	Fahmi: UK, Singapore curious about Putrajaya's social media licensing; more to come when Malaysia chairs Asean	Malay Mail	August 8, 2024
H7	Other nations interested in Malaysia's social media licensing, says Fahmi	Free Malaysia Today	August 8, 2024
H8	Social media platforms must label AI-generated content, says Fahmi	The Star	August 15, 2024
H9	Social media licensing is for safety, say experts	The Star	August 19, 2024
H10	In letter to PM, industry group warns proposed social media licensing could harm digital economy	The Star	August 26, 2024
H11	Malaysia's social media licensing plan could hurt innovation, SMEs: analysts	The Business Times	September 12, 2024
H12	Media rights groups question proposal to require licensing for online media	The Star	November 16, 2024
H13	Press groups alarmed by proposed online media licensing	Malaysiakini	November 16, 2024
H14	Social media platform licensing non-negotiable	The Star	November 16, 2024
H15	Social media curbs 'easier said than done'	The Star	November 27, 2024
H16	Fahmi: WhatsApp, TikTok, YouTube among platforms required to obtain licenses under new licensing rules	Malay Mail	December 20, 2024
H17	Fahmi: WhatsApp, TikTok, YouTube among platforms required to obtain licenses under new licensing rules	New Straits Times	December 20, 2024
H18	Malaysia's social media licensing takes effect today	Malay Mail	January 1, 2025
H19	Malaysia begins social media licensing	MalaysiaKini	January 1, 2025
H20	Malaysia begins social media licensing for safer digital platforms	Free Malaysia Today	January 1, 2025
H21	Malaysia yet to license most social media platforms as new rules to curb online harm kick in	The Strait Times	January 1, 2025
H22	WeChat and TikTok get their operating license	The Star	January 2, 2025

H23	Elon Musk's X, Google yet to apply for Malaysia's new social media license	The Star	January 2, 2025
H24	Malaysia weighs LinkedIn's need for a social media license	The Star	January 9, 2025
H25	Meta in final process of obtaining social media license, says Fahmi	Free Malaysia Today	January 17, 2025
H26	Meta submitted documents social media license while talks ongoing with Google and Microsoft, says Fahmi	The Star	January 28, 2025
H27	Google, Meta and X yet to get social media licenses, says Fahmi	The Star	March 12, 2025

The analysis was conducted at two different levels, drawing on [Fairclough's \(1995\)](#) three-dimensional framework and supported by [van Dijk's \(1998\)](#) insights on discourse, power, and ideology. Firstly, at the textual (micro) level, all 27 headlines were examined and categorised according to linguistic strategies, including the representation of actors, evaluative language, quantification and immediacy, reference to emotion, metaphor, and predication. At the discursive and social (macro) level, the linguistic strategies were analysed to uncover the deeper meaning and reveal how power relation is embedded in the news headlines. The combination of these two approaches helped in understanding how linguistic strategies in headlines function not only as textual devices but also as tools of power representation.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. RQ1: What linguistic strategies do Malaysian news headlines employ to represent the social media licensing policy?

To answer the first research question of this study, the data were gathered and categorised to present the distribution of linguistic strategies employed in the news headlines related to social media licensing by the selected news outlet. The analysis of the news headline revealed six main linguistic strategies used to represent the issue of social media licensing: *representation of actors, evaluative language, quantification and immediacy, reference to emotion, metaphor, and predication.*

[Table 2](#) illustrates the representation of actors as a linguistic strategy for addressing the social media licensing issue. Government officials are personalised through the repeated use of "Fahmi" (referring to Datuk Fahmi Fadzil, Malaysia's Minister of Communication) in nine headlines (H6, H7, H8, H16, H17, H24, H25, H26, H27), which humanises the policy and frames it as the responsibility of a known individual rather than an anonymous organisation. In contrast, corporations are seen as collective entities rather than personal ones, such as "industry group" (H10) and "tech giants" (H11), or named individually like Meta, Google, TikTok, and WeChat (H16, H17, H22, H23, H25, H26, H27), highlighting accountability. Civil society actors are also represented through professional and organisational labels such as "experts" (H9), "analysts" (H5, H11), "human rights lawyer" (H2), "Bersih" (H3, H4), and "rights groups" (H12, H13), which provide support for their opinions and symbolise collective democratic voice.

Table 2: Representation of Actors

Actor Type	Representation Strategy	Headlines	Analysis
Government Officials	Named/Personalised	H6, H7, H8, H16, H17, H24, H25, H26, H27	"Fahmi" (9 times) to humanise policy and create personal authority
Government Institutional	Institutional Authority	H1, H18, H19, H20, H21	"Malaysia" as an actor - highlight state power
Tech Corporations	Collective (Anonymous)	H10, H11	"Industry group," "tech giants" - anonymous resistance
Tech Corporations	Named (Specific)	H16, H17, H22, H23, H25, H26, H27	Individual companies are named to highlight responsibilities.
Civil Society	Professional Authority	H2, H5, H9, H11	"Experts," "analysts," "lawyers" - authorise critique
Civil Society	Organised Groups	H3, H4, H12, H13	"Bersih," "rights groups" - collective democratic voice

Based on [Table 3](#), the headlines revealed three evaluative languages reflecting different stakeholders. Negative framing was used dominantly to reflect society's voices. Phrases like "abuse of power" (H1, H2), "could hurt innovation" (H5, H11), "harm digital economy" (H10), and "political weapon" (H4) present the policy as threatening. Neutral language was used to represent government-aligned headlines, such as "takes effect" (H18), "begins" (H19, H20), "required" (H16, H17), and "weighs" (H24). On the other hand, positive framing was employed to highlight the policy benefits, using words such as "for safety" (H9) and "safer digital platforms" (H20) in the headlines.

Table 3: Evaluative Language

Evaluation Type	Language Used	Headlines	Discourse Function
Negative Framing	"abuse of power"	H1, H2	Delegitimises policy through rights discourse
Negative Framing	"could hurt innovation"	H5, H11	Economic threat to justify opposition
Negative Framing	"harm digital economy"	H10	Stakes-raising for business community
Negative Framing	"political weapon"	H4	Frames policy as political instrument
Negative Framing	"alarmed"	H13	Emotional urgency from media groups
Neutral/Administrative	"takes effect," "begins"	H18, H19, H20	Normalises policy implementation
Neutral/Administrative	"weighs," "required"	H16, H17, H24	Bureaucratic legitimacy
Neutral/Administrative	"in final process"	H25, H26	Progress toward compliance
Positive Framing	"for safety"	H9	Justifies policy through protection
Positive Framing	"safer digital platforms"	H20	Policy as beneficial intervention

Table 4 illustrates the use of quantification and immediacy in headlines to convey different senses of urgency. Immediate urgency markers, such as “today” (H18), and present action, like “begins” (H19, H20), were used to signal active policy imitation. In contrast, delay markers, such as the use of “yet to apply/get” (H21, H23, H27), are implicit, criticising non-compliance acts by the actors. Process indicators such as “final process” (H25) and “ongoing” (H26) suggest that compliance is expected in the implementation of the social media licensing policy.

Table 4: Quantification and Immediacy

Strategy	Specific Language	Headlines	Effect
Immediate Urgency	"today"	H18	Creates a sense of immediate implementation
Present Action	"begins"	H19, H20	Signals active policy start
Incompletion/Delay	"yet to apply/get"	H21, H23, H27	Highlights non-compliance
Process Indicators	"final process," "ongoing"	H25, H26	Shows progress toward compliance

The headlines also employ emotional language to appeal to different target audiences, as shown in **Table 5**. Phrases such as “abuse of power” (H1, H2), “alarmed” (H13), and “political weapon” (H4) raise concerns about the government, thus creating worries among the democratic audience or society. For business communities, words like “could harm” (H5, H10, H11) create concerns about the economy. Additionally, the government is portrayed as being firm and in control of the situation, using words like “non-negotiable” (H14) and “required” (H8, H16, H17), which create an emotional appeal to authority and certainty. Positive emotions were also evident in the headlines, to appeal to international interest through words like “curious” and “interested” (H6, H7), making the policy seem more credible.

Table 5: Reference to Emotion

Emotional Appeal	Language Used	Headlines	Target Audience
Fear/Concern	"abuse of power"	H1, H2	Democratic/civil society concerns
Fear/Concern	"alarmed"	H13	Society
Fear/Concern	"political weapon"	H4	Society
Economic Concerns	"could harm," "hurt"	H5, H10, H11	Business community fears
Authority/Control	"non-negotiable"	H14	Government firmness
Authority/Control	"required," "must"	H8, H16, H17	Mandatory regulation
Positive Interest	"curious," "interested"	H6, H7	International validation

Table 6 shows how metaphors and figurative language were used to represent the social media licensing policy. The word “licensing” (H1, H2, H5, H11, H18–H27) was employed to portray the government as a gatekeeper that has control. In another headline, the phrase “curb online harm” (H21) was used to represent the policy as a safety barrier. Negative metaphors, such as “political weapon” (H4), “harm digital economy” (H10), and

“hurt innovation” (H5, H11), portray the policy as a dangerous threat to the country. Finally, compliance with the policy is described as a journey, suggesting that all relevant parties will eventually adhere to the rules. This is evident in the use of words such as “final process” and “ongoing” (H25, H26).

Table 6: Metaphors and Figurative Language

Metaphor Type	Language Used	Headlines	Ideological Function
Regulation as Control	"licensing"	H1, H2, H5, H11, H18-H27	Frames state as gatekeepers
Regulation as Restraint	"curb online harm"	H21	Policy as a safety barrier
Policy as Weapon	"political weapon"	H4	Policy as party-driven control
Policy as Threat	"harm digital economy"	H10	Regulation as a harmful impact
Policy as Injury	"hurt innovation"	H5, H11	Regulation as causing pain to progress
Journey	"final process," "ongoing"	H25, H26	Progress toward regulatory goal

Predication is another linguistic strategy employed in headlines, where actors are assigned specific attributes or qualities that influence their perception (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). As shown in Table 7, the social media licensing policy is described in contradictory terms: negatively as “unclear” and “harmful to innovation” (H1, H5, H11), yet positively as “necessary for safety” (H9, H20, H21). Additionally, tech companies are perceived as either “non-compliant” actors who are yet to take action (H21, H23, H27) or “cooperative” ones who follow rules (H22, H25, H26). In contrast, the government is consistently assigned positive predication, being portrayed as “authoritative” and “proactive” (H14, H18, H19), as well as “internationally respected” (H6, H7). Similar strategies were also observed in a study conducted by Chan and Yu (2024), which showed how the media assigned China with both positive (cooperative) and negative (global threat) predication during the COVID-19 pandemic. These similarities in findings emphasise how predication helps shape the perception of actors in an event.

Table 7: Predication

Actor	Attributed Qualities	Headlines	Discourse Effect
The Policy	Unclear, harmful to innovation	H1, H5, H11	Delegitimises through uncertainty
The Policy	Necessary for safety	H9, H20, H21	Legitimises through protection
Tech Companies	Non-compliant	H21, H23, H27	Shows resistance to regulation
Tech Companies	Cooperative	H22, H25, H26	Shows acceptance of regulation
Government	Authoritative, proactive	H14, H18, H19	Establishes regulatory power
Government	Internationally respected	H6, H7	Builds legitimacy through validation

In summary, the distribution of the linguistic strategies highlights the variety of techniques used to represent the social media licensing issue in Malaysian news headlines. These strategies illustrate how language choices construct different representations of the same issue. The following section will discuss the second research question.

4.2. RQ2: What are the underlying messages and power dynamics conveyed through the language used in news headlines about Malaysia's social media licensing policy?

The linguistic strategies identified in research question 1 demonstrate how headlines systematically create power representations of the actors involved in the event, strategically framing digital regulation in ways that strengthen the government's authority in the eyes of the public. Three main hidden messages and three recurring power patterns were identified. All these elements work together to legitimise state control over digital policy. First, the headlines present the Malaysian government as the ultimate authority over global technology companies. Through the use of modal language '*grants*' (H2), the Malaysian government has definite authority. At the same time, tech companies are portrayed as petitioners who can only '*urge*' and '*criticise*', which makes them sound weak and dependent. Additionally, possessive phrases such as '*Malaysia's social media licensing*' (H4) and '*Malaysia's laws*' (H10, H14) were used to establish ownership, further highlighting that authority resides with the state and not other corporate actors. This reflects the findings from previous studies on how grammar and verbs show "who has power" and "who is to blame," changing readers' perceptions of responsibility through transitivity patterns (Haimed, 2024). At the same time, interdiscursive mixing of legal ('licensing,' 'regulatory'), safety ('fight cyber offences'), and development ('milestone,' 'innovation') discourses reinforces government actions as natural and necessary, while narrowing corporate arguments to mere economic interests. This aligns with Haimed (2024) and Arshad and Khan (2021), who found that selective word choices in headlines often make state power look natural.

The second hidden message from the headlines is that the new media licensing policy is portrayed as a progress for Malaysia. The headlines employ positive metaphors to project licensing as a developmental achievement. The '*milestone*' metaphor (H6) presents regulation as a forward progress, while '*new law*' (H2, H3) emphasises innovation. This strategic use of positive metaphors indicated that metaphors serve as discursive tools to frame government actions favourably while targeting opposition negatively. In addition, temporal markers used in the headlines create a sense that the policy implementation must happen through '*takes effect today*' (H4) and '*specific dates*' (H16), showing the policy implementation as a natural progression rather than a fight. Controlling the timeline shows that the government sets the engagement; meanwhile, corporations are dependent on the state authority. Passive phrases, such as '*licensing takes effect*,' make government action look normal, while active phrases, like '*urge to pause*,' make corporations look disruptive. This pattern aligns with Asad et al. (2021), who argue that news discourse normalises government decisions as progress, while contrasting with CDA studies in Western contexts where corporate influence often dominates the narratives (Fairclough, 1995).

The third message is that corporate resistance is treated as a temporary obstacle. Meta '*criticises*' (H1) and companies create '*backlash*' (H14), suggesting they are just being emotional, while legal words ('regulatory license,' 'comply,' 'laws') normalise licensing

as a routine administration process, thus making corporate resistance appear as opposition to the government. This negative language shows how certain techniques enhance social biases and marginalise certain groups in news discourse, which is consistent with the findings by [Harjanti et al. \(2024\)](#) and [Arshad and Khan \(2021\)](#). Additionally, the headlines also show that government sources ('says MCMC,' 'say experts') are treated as neutral and credible, while company sources ('Meta says,' 'Tech giants urge') are shown as biased. The differential treatment reflects the conclusions of how ideological positions shape contrasting portrayals, demonstrating media discourse's power to frame public perception ([Badrul Halim et al., 2025](#); [Haimed, 2024](#)).

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Malaysian news headlines systematically construct and represent Malaysia's government power through coordinated discursive strategies, namely *representation of actors, evaluative language, quantification and immediacy, reference to emotion, metaphor, and predication*. These strategies work together to show how government power is presented. Specifically, three key messages emerge from the analysed headlines:

- i. portray the government as the ultimate authority,
- ii. present the new regulation as progress for Malaysia, and
- iii. reduce corporate resistance to temporary complaints.

These messages relate to broader power dynamics, including state dominance, control over discourse, and authority over timing, presenting government actions as natural expressions of authority. This supports earlier CDA research, which shows that headlines are not just neutral reporting, but active tools that reproduce power by highlighting state voices and sidelining corporate perspectives ([Akanda, 2020](#); [Asad et al., 2021](#)). Ultimately, the analysis shows that news discourse plays an active role by employing well-known linguistic and ideological strategies to shape the public's perception of social media licensing policy.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers adhered to the ethical guidelines outlined by the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Teknologi MARA (RECUiTM). This study involved analysing publicly available textual data; therefore, no human participants were directly involved. All materials were examined and reported objectively, with due acknowledgement of sources, in accordance with institutional research ethics and the principles of academic integrity.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest in this work and that there is no potential conflict of interest in the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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