



# Effectiveness of Initiatives and Enforcement of Laws in Handling, Managing and Countering False News Proliferation Related to the Covid-19 Pandemic

Researchers

Associate Prof Dr. Bahiyah Omar

Associate Prof Dr. Hasrina Mustafa

Associate Prof Dr. Aziah Ismail

Noor Zuleika Zulkipli

**COMMUNICATE@MCMC**

**SESSION 3/2022**

# Introduction



- Fake news threat during a health crisis is a major concern for policymakers.
- Malaysian government has undertaken several initiatives to counter the growing impact of online falsehood.
- How effective the counter-measures for curbing fake news spread has not yet been explored in past research.

# Introduction



## Research Objectives

1. To examine how Malaysians perceive the effectiveness of law enforcement, in relation to other national initiatives, in curbing COVID-19 fake news in Malaysia
2. To propose an instrument/ index to indicate the effectiveness level of law enforcement for countering COVID-19 fake news spread in Malaysia
3. To suggest effective enforcement strategies to curtail the spread of COVID-19 fake news in Malaysia

# Introduction

General Research Question:

How effective is law enforcement in curbing COVID-19 fake news in Malaysia?

Specific Research Questions:

1. Do Malaysians aware of government initiatives, exposed to live programs & social media channels, and follow updates & breaking news about COVID-19?
2. How do Malaysians perceive the effectiveness of law enforcement in curbing COVID-19 fake news in Malaysia?
3. Could fines, social media removal and court indictments deter people from spreading COVID-19 fake news in Malaysia?

# Introduction



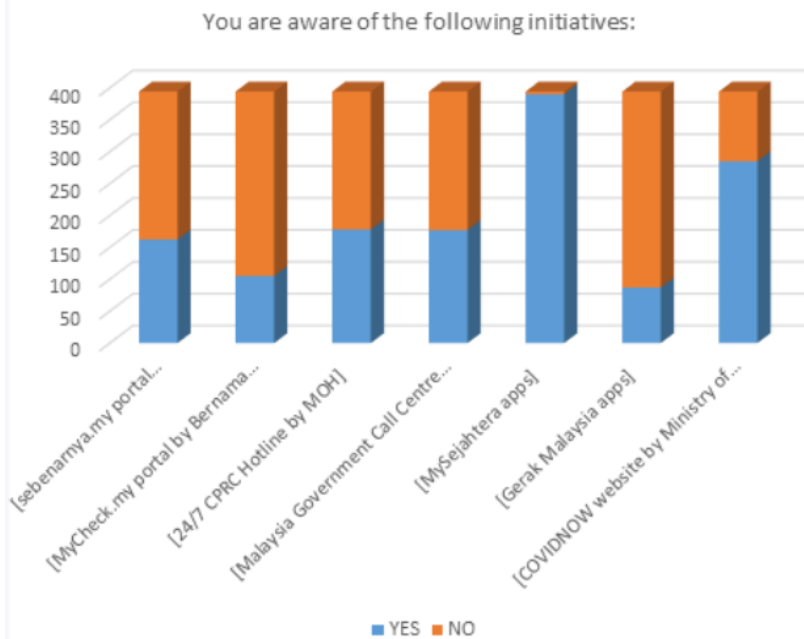
- Method
  - This study employed **online survey** using **Virtual Network Sampling** to reach respondents of the study who must be **Malaysian citizens** aged **above 18 years old** and are **active social media users**.
- Data Analysis
  1. **Survey data** = Descriptive analysis
  2. **Hard data** = Index development\*

\*Limitations: There is an insufficient data on monthly fines, social media removal and court indictments for a period of two years (Jan 2020-Dec 2021) to form a reliable index to measure law enforcement for the current study.

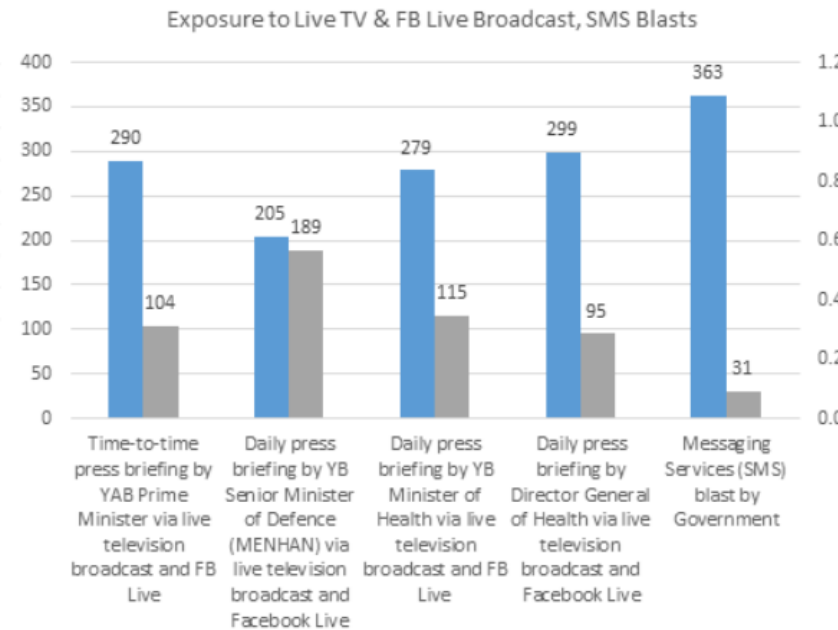
# Key Findings



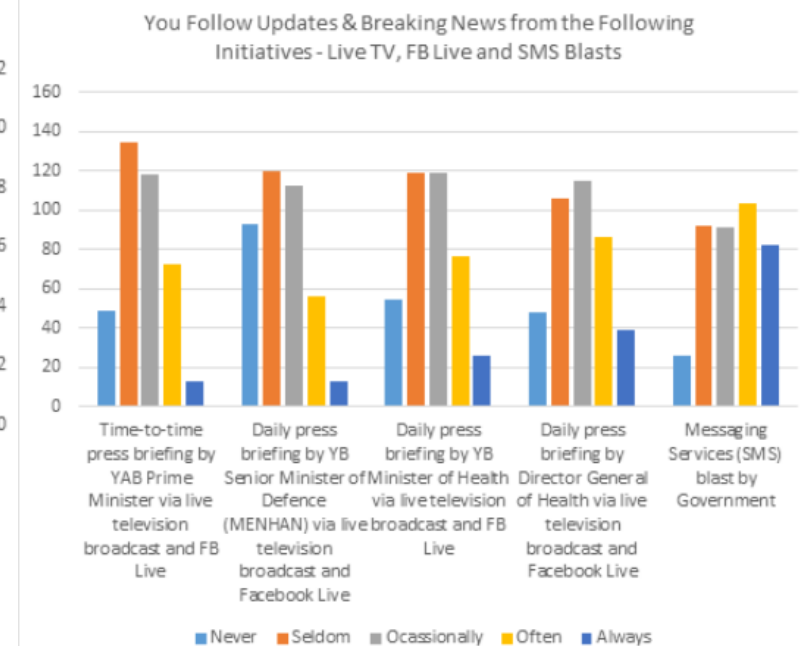
## • RQ1: Public awareness and usage of Government initiatives



Distribution of respondents according to respondents' awareness of government initiatives

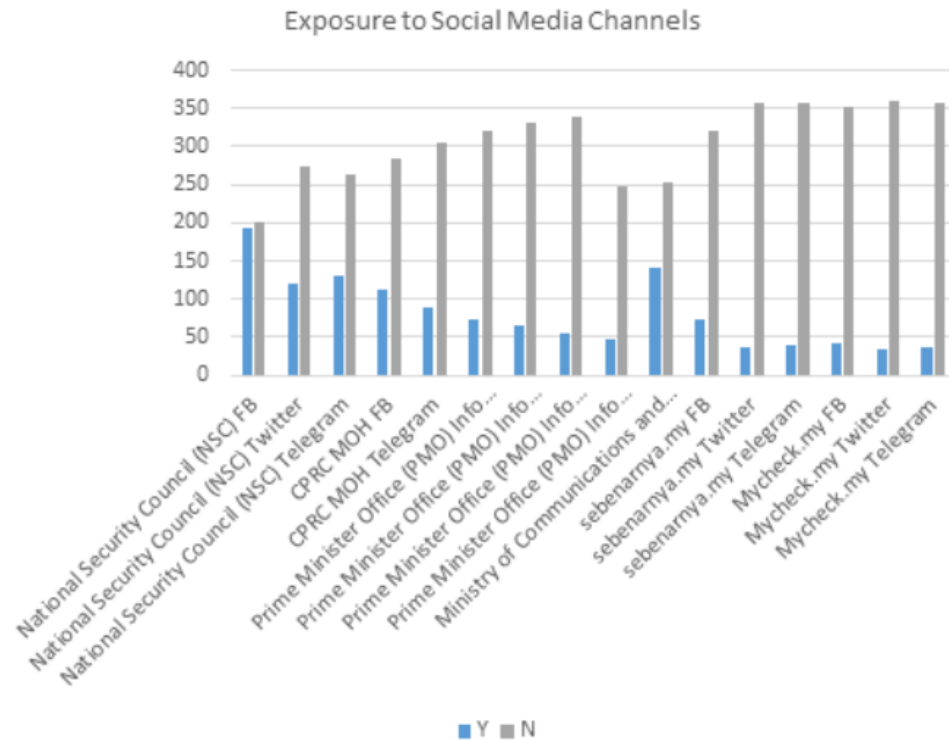


Distribution of respondents according to media exposure to COVID-19 information

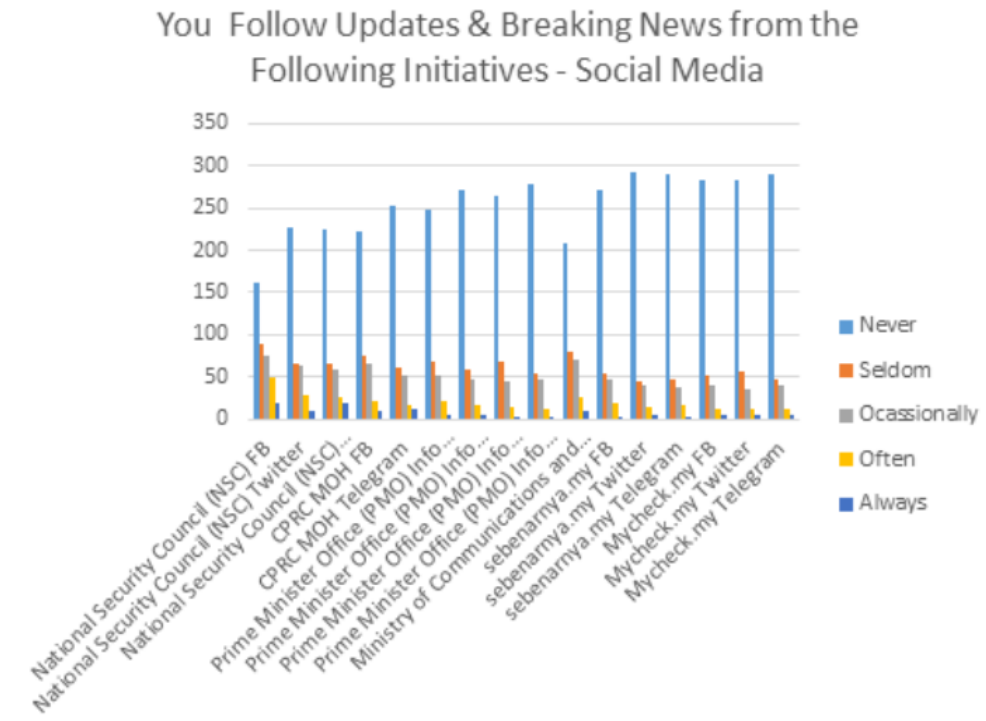


Distribution of respondents according to the frequency of following updates and breaking news about COVID-19

# Key Findings



Distribution of respondents according to social media exposure to COVID-19 related news



Distribution of respondents based on the frequency of following up updates and breaking news about Covid-19 on social media

# Key Findings



- Almost every Malaysian know about **MySejahtera apps (99%)** and many use it (56.3%) regularly.
- Other initiatives indicated a rather **low awareness** (less than 50% respondents were aware of their existence)
- Not many people are aware of the existence of **sebenarnya.my (41%)** and very few people use it at all times (1%) for facts verification.



# Key Findings

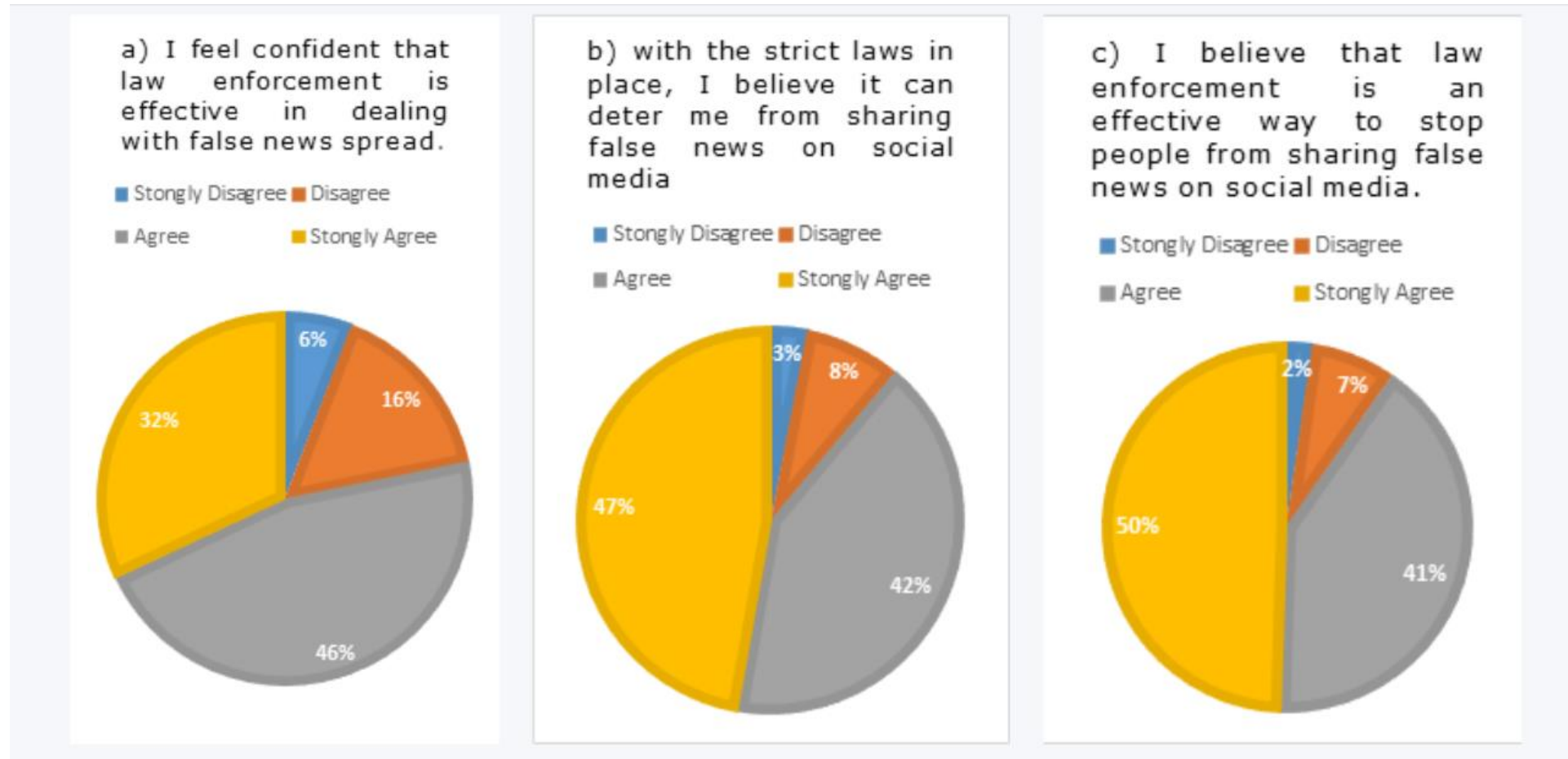


- Exposure to social media channels was relatively **low across all platforms.**
- Majority of respondents were **exposed to live TV, FB live broadcast and SMS blasts** to get time-to-time and daily press briefing
- Awareness of the channels was not associated with respondents' action of following updates and breaking news from the channels
- Higher number of platforms/channels does not guarantee higher level of exposure and usage. But low awareness definitely means low usage.

# Key Findings



## • RO1/RQ2: Perceived Effectiveness of Government Initiatives

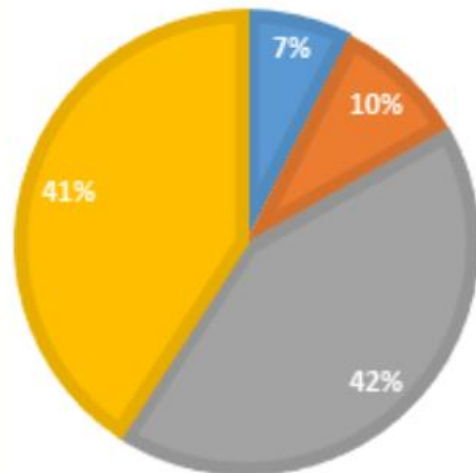


# Key Findings



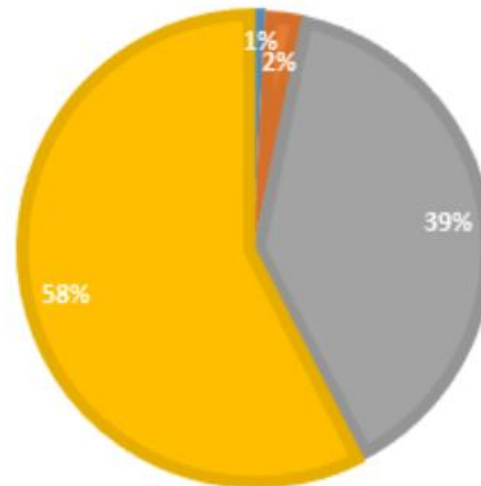
d) I feel terrified if the authority closes my social media account if I share false news on social media

■ Stongly Disagree ■ Disagree  
■ Agree ■ Stongly Agree



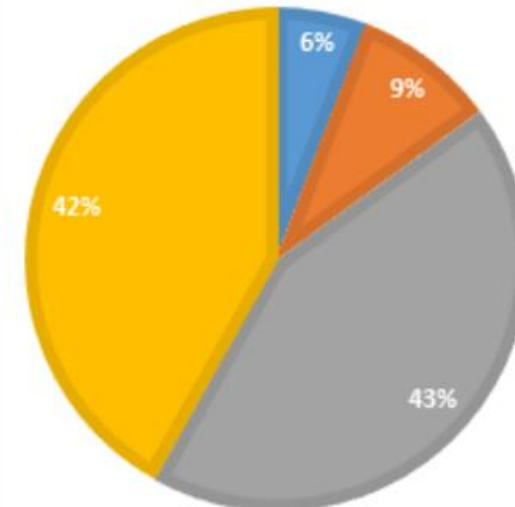
e) I must be careful when sharing news online because I may be charged in court if I were caught sharing false news on social media

■ Stongly Disagree ■ Disagree  
■ Agree ■ Stongly Agree



f) The fines imposed on false news sharers are very high and this deter me from sharing false news

■ Stongly Disagree ■ Disagree  
■ Agree ■ Stongly Agree



# Key Findings



- Survey data shows that people perceived **law enforcement as an effective way** of curbing people from sharing fake news (i.e: scores for agree and strongly agree exceed 80% for all indicators).
- Hard data suggests that **court indictment and social media removal are significant predictors**; but the findings should be treated with caution due to the problem of data instability.



# Key Findings

- **RO2/RQ3: Effects of fines, social media removal and court indictment (FSMI) on COVID-19 fake news spread in Malaysia**

**Table 1.0 Conceptual idea for the study**

No .	Index for C&D waste dumping*	(Proposed) Index for fake news spreading
1.	Fines	Fines
2.	Vehicle impoundments	Social media content removal
3.	Court indictments	Court indictments
4.	New construction (1000 m2)	New cases (per month)
5.	Waste Dumping (WD) ratio	Fake-news Spreading (FS) ratio

This study used Seror and Portnov (2020)\* method to develop the index. Multiple regression was conducted to determine the contribution of each factor (FSMI – fines, social media content removal, court indictments) in reducing fake news spreading.

Variables	Number of fake news cases
	Standardised coefficients beta, $\beta(p)$
Fines*	-
Social Media Accounts/Content Removal	<b>-.226 (.002)</b>
Court Indictments	<b>-.984 (.000)</b>
	$R^2$ .975
	Adjusted $R^2$ .969
	$F$ 173.257
	Sig. .000

# Key Findings



- RO2/RQ3: Effects of fines, social media removal and court indictment (FSMI) on COVID-19 fake news spread in Malaysia
- **Court indictments has the highest contribution** in predicting the reduction of fake news cases in Malaysia (98.4 percent of the variance explained).
- This is followed by **social media account/content removal** contributing about 22.6 percent of Malaysia's variance in fake news cases.
- Imposing fines, however, does not contribute to reducing fake news cases
- The  $R^2$  value of 0.975 indicated the **model's predictive ability** in predicting the fake news cases in Malaysia at **97.5 percent**. We can say that 97.5 percent of fake news cases in Malaysia can be reduced through two main law enforcement activities

# Key Findings



- **RO3: Suggestions for effective enforcement strategies to curtail the spread of COVID-19 fake news in Malaysia**
- Stricter enforcement to be in place so that **more cases of fake news spread can be charged in court**
- Although social media removal measure is effective, it has temporary effect. This study proposes **the use of veracity labels or warning labels** to indicate **the credibility of the sources or content.**
- This study echoes **the need for specific and dedicated laws** dealing with fake news and related matters

# Recommendations



- Develop MySejahtera as a **One-stop Information Centre** for health-related matters.
- Conduct a post-moterm analysis of **Sebenarnya.my's usability and applicability**.
- Improve people's level of awareness of the initiatives using **integrated strategic communication strategy**.
- Push important and useful health-related information to people. **Push distribution strategy** is effective to increase exposure/awareness and usage of the initiatives.
- Consider the use of **AI in news/information distribution** to the public.





**USM** UNIVERSITI  
SAINS  
MALAYSIA



**Communication**  
Universiti Sains Malaysia



**DSRG**  
DIGITAL SOCIETY RESEARCH GRANT

Thank you!

**COMMUNICATE@MCMC**  
**SESSION 3/2022**