MOTIVATIONS BEHIND INSTANT NEWS SHARING: A USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study applies Uses and Gratifications Theory to identify the psychological motives that drive Malaysians to share news instantly on social media. A cross-sectional survey of 370 Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp users was conducted and analysed with multiple regression. Results show that Pass Time (β = .232, p < .001), Information Sharing (β = .136, p = .090) and Socialization (β = .241, p < .001) significantly predict instant news sharing, jointly explaining 15.2 % of variance, whereas Information Seeking and Entertainment are negatively or non-significantly related. The findings indicate that idle moments and social bonding,

rather than civic-oriented information needs, fuel rapid forwarding. For policymakers, the study suggests embedding friction-free verification cues and gamified accuracy badges into existing sharing flows to exploit the same gratifications that currently reward speed. Future research should incorporate additional psychological variables and adopt probability sampling to enhance explanatory power and generalisability.

Keywords: *Instant news sharing, Uses and Gratifications Theory, social media, misinformation, Malaysia*

1.0   INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of digital communication technologies has fundamentally transformed the landscape of news dissemination and consumption. Social media platforms, in particular, have enabled users to access, share, and interact with news content at unprecedented speed and scale, making instant news sharing a defining feature of contemporary information ecosystems (Hai & Xiong, 2025), (Wang & Rzeszotarski, 2023). Munusamy et al. (2024) stated this rapid circulation of news has not only enhanced the immediacy and reach of information but has also introduced complex societal challenges, including concerns over information accuracy, public trust, and the widespread diffusion of misinformation and fake news.

While previous research by Hai and Xiong (2025) and Wang and Rzeszotarski (2023) has extensively examined patterns of news consumption and the technological affordances of social media, there remains a notable gap in understanding the underlying motivations that drive individuals to share news instantly. Addressing this gap is critical, as the motivations for news sharing are closely linked to the dynamics of information credibility, the formation of public opinion, and the potential for both positive and negative societal outcomes (Sampat & Raj, 2022), (Dan & Sannusi, 2024), (Wei et al., 2024).

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) offers a valuable framework for exploring these motivations, positing that media users are active agents who seek out and engage with media to satisfy specific psychological and social needs (Wang & Rzeszotarski, 2023). Empirical studies grounded in UGT have identified a range of gratifications that influence news sharing behaviour, including information seeking, socialization, status enhancement, entertainment, and altruism (Apuke & Omar, 2020). For instance, information seeking and sharing are consistently found to be strong predictors of news sharing intention, as users aim to inform others and remain updated on current events (Wang & Rzeszotarski, 2023). Socialization and the desire for connectedness also play a significant role, with users leveraging news sharing to maintain social ties and participate in collective discussions (Hai & Xiong, 2025). Additionally, status seeking and self-promotion motivate individuals to share news as a means of enhancing their social standing and influence within digital communities (Hai & Xiong, 2025).

However, the same gratifications that drive instant news sharing can also contribute to the rapid spread of misinformation, particularly when users prioritize

speed, social rewards, or emotional impact over the verification of content accuracy (Wei et al., 2024). This underscores the importance of understanding the psychological and social drivers of news sharing, not only for advancing theoretical knowledge but also for informing practical interventions aimed at promoting digital literacy, improving content regulation, and mitigating the risks associated with misinformation in today's connected society.

In light of these considerations, this study seeks to examine the key gratifications that motivate individuals to share news rapidly on social media platforms, drawing on the Uses and Gratifications Theory to provide a nuanced understanding of this increasingly prevalent behaviour. By elucidating the motivations underlying instant news sharing, the research aims to contribute to the development of more effective strategies for fostering responsible information sharing and enhancing the resilience of digital information environments.

2.0   PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to Aïmeur et al. (2023) and Langraw and Zaman (2023)   The phenomenon of instant news sharing on digital platforms has emerged as a significant problem in today's interconnected world. The unprecedented speed and scale at which information is disseminated through social media have fundamentally altered the dynamics of public communication, making news accessible to millions within seconds. While this rapid exchange of information offers clear benefits such as real-time updates and democratized access to news it also introduces profound challenges that threaten the integrity of information ecosystems and the stability of societies.

One of the most pressing issues associated with instant news sharing is the proliferation of misinformation, disinformation, and fake news. Social media platforms, by design, facilitate the uncontrolled and immediate spread of content, often without adequate verification or editorial oversight (Abualigah et al., 2024), (Tomassi et al., 2024). This environment enables malicious actors, automated bots, and even ordinary users to circulate false or misleading information with ease, amplifying its reach and impact. Angus et al. (2023) stated the deceptive nature of fabricated content, coupled with the lack of user awareness and the dynamic, viral nature of online networks, makes the detection and containment of fake news exceptionally challenging. Akter et al. (2025) findings reveal Artificial intelligence and machine learning tools, while promising, remain limited in their ability to fully address these challenges, as fake news is often crafted to closely mimic legitimate information, evading both human and algorithmic scrutiny.

The societal consequences of instant news sharing are far-reaching. Exposure to misinformation has been shown to erode public trust in traditional media, distort individual attitudes and beliefs, and contribute to the polarization of public opinion (Langraw & Zaman, 2023), (Khan, 2025). Study by Watson et al. (2024) show the viral spread of negative or sensationalist news, incentivized by social media algorithms and user engagement metrics, further exacerbates these effects, fostering anxiety, confusion, and even social unrest. In extreme cases, the unchecked dissemination of false information can incite violence, undermine democratic processes, and compromise public health and safety (Devi & Singh, 2025).

3.0   LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1   Instant News Sharing

Instant news sharing refers to the rapid dissemination of news content across digital platforms, particularly social media, where information is shared and consumed in real time, often without prior verification or editorial oversight. This phenomenon is characterized by the immediacy with which news whether factual, misleading, or false news which can reach vast audiences through user interactions such as posting, forwarding, commenting, and liking (de Arriba-Pérez et al., 2024), (Anderson, 2024), (Mazhar et al., 2024).

3.2   Hypothesis Development

Pass time, or using social media to alleviate boredom, is a well-established driver of online engagement. Multiple studies confirm that pass time motivation significantly predicts instant news sharing. For example, a meta-analysis found that passing time had the strongest positive relationship with misinformation sharing, indicating that users often share news to fill idle moments (Sun & Xie, 2024). Research among university students also identified passing time as a key predictor of fake news sharing behaviour ($\beta = 0.517$, $p < 0.001$) (Wei et al., 2024). Additional studies highlight that pass time, alongside entertainment, is a major gratification for sharing news, especially during events like the COVID-19 pandemic (Hai & Xiong, 2025). These findings suggest that when users seek to occupy their time, they are more likely to engage in instant news sharing.

Information seeking is a core motivation for news consumption and sharing. Empirical evidence consistently shows a positive relationship between information seeking and instant news sharing. Among Generation Z in Vietnam, information seeking significantly increased the intention to share news ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.05$) (Hai & Xiong, 2025). A systematic review also found that information seeking is a common intrinsic motivation for sharing both real and fake news on social media (Melchior & Oliveira, 2024). Furthermore, studies in developing economies and among university students confirm that information seeking, as part of the U&G framework, positively influences both the intention and actual behaviour of instant news sharing (Mombeuil et al., 2025). This suggests that users motivated to stay informed are more likely to share news rapidly to keep themselves and their networks updated.

Entertainment, or the desire for enjoyment and amusement, is another significant motivator for instant news sharing. Research during the COVID-19 pandemic found that entertainment motives mediated the relationship between instant news sharing and the spread of information, including fake news (Mazhar et al., 2024). A meta-analysis reported a medium positive effect of entertainment motivation on misinformation sharing (Sun & Xie, 2024). Additional studies confirm that entertainment is a major gratification for sharing news, especially in contexts where news content is dramatic or engaging (Melchior & Oliveira, 2024). These findings indicate that users seeking entertainment are more likely to share

news instantly, particularly when the content is perceived as amusing or emotionally engaging.

The motivation to share information helping others stay informed or contributing to public knowledge with strongly predicts instant news sharing. Studies show that information sharing tendencies are directly associated with the propensity to share news, including fake news, on social media (Mombeuil et al., 2025). Research among LINE users found that motivations for information sharing intention significantly predicted actual sharing behaviour (Yossatorn et al., 2023). A systematic review further supports that information sharing is a key intrinsic motivation for news dissemination (Melchior & Oliveira, 2024). These results suggest that individuals who habitually share information are more likely to engage in instant news sharing.

Socialization, or the desire to connect and interact with others, is a robust predictor of instant news sharing. A meta-analysis found a large positive effect of socialization motivation on misinformation sharing (Sun & Xie, 2024). Research during the COVID-19 pandemic identified socialization as a key rational choice influencing instant news sharing (Mazhar et al., 2024). Studies among Generation Z and in cross-cultural contexts confirm that socializing motives foster online interactions and strengthen social connections through news sharing (Cosme et al., 2025). These findings underscore those users motivated by social interaction are more likely to share news instantly to maintain and enhance their social bonds.

Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H_1 Pass Time will be positively related to instant news sharing.
H_2 Information Seeking will be positively related to instant news sharing.
H_3 Entertainment will be positively related to instant news sharing.
H_4 Information Sharing will be positively related to instant news sharing.
H_5 Socialization will be positively related to instant news sharing.
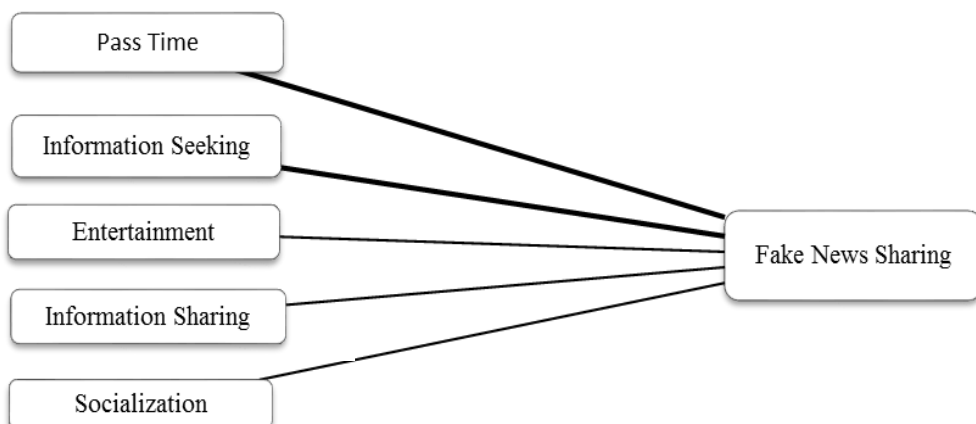

Figure 1: Research Model

4.0   METHODOLOGY

A quantitative, cross-sectional survey was adopted to test the antecedents of social-media use through the lens of Uses and Gratifications Theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974). The single-point design is optimal for capturing contemporary usage patterns and motivational profiles from a large pool of users (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The questionnaire was constructed in Google Forms and remained open from 1 August 2025 to 31 October 2025. Four trained enumerators circulated the link through Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and personal networks participation was voluntary and anonymous, with informed consent indicated by ticking the first item. There was a token incentive offered to the enumerators.

Because a national register of social-media users does not exist, convenience sampling was employed (Etikan et al., 2016). An a-priori power analysis conducted in G*Power 3.1.9.7 (Faul et al., 2020) indicated that 189 valid cases were required to detect a medium effect ($f^2 = 0.15$) at 95 % statistical power and $\alpha = .05$ for five predictors. The survey ultimately yielded 384 usable respondents, comfortably exceeding the threshold and minimising the risk of Type-II error.

All constructs were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "Strongly Disagree", 5 = "Strongly Agree"). Items were adopted from previously validated UGT studies and subjected to back-translation to ensure semantic equivalence (Brislin, 1970): Pass-time items were taken from Apuke and Omar (2021b) and Balakrishnan et al. (2021b); Information-seeking items from Whitty and Joinson (2008) and Lee and Ma (2012); Entertainment and Information-sharing items from Apuke and Omar (2021a) and Thompson et al. (2020); and Socialization items from Thompson et al. (2020).

All analyses were performed with IBM SPSS Statistics 26 (IBM Corp, 2017) following the protocol recommended by (Field, 2024). After data cleaning with removal of out-of-range values and straight-lining patterns, reliability was assessed with Cronbach's α and composite-reliability coefficients and also several tests were inspected to screen for multicollinearity. The study hypotheses were then tested with ordinary-least-squares multiple regressions, entering pass-time, information-seeking, entertainment, information-sharing and socialization as predictors of instant news sharing.

5.0   RESULTS AND FINDING

This section outlines the procedures and results of the data analysis undertaken in this study. The analysis began with data screening to detect missing values, outliers, and inconsistencies. 384 questionnaires received and 370 cases (96.4%) remained after data cleaning and were included in all subsequent analyses. Before proceeding with hypothesis testing, all statistical assumptions associated with multiple regression were examined using established cut-off criteria in the field. Normality was evaluated using skewness and kurtosis values, applying the conservative ±2.0 threshold (George & Mallery, 2024).

All variables satisfied this requirement. Linearity was verified using bivariate scatterplots and Pearson correlations, and only predictors demonstrating correlations of at least r ≥ .30 with the dependent variable with considered the minimal

meaningful level in social science research (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019) were retained in the model. Multicollinearity diagnostics further confirmed the suitability of the dataset for regression analysis, with the highest Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) recorded at 3.1, well below the recommended cut-off of 5.0, and all tolerance values exceeding 20 (Hair et al., 2019). Collectively, these results demonstrate that the dataset fully satisfies the statistical prerequisites for conducting ordinary least-squares multiple regressions, enabling robust and reliable examination of the hypothesised relationships.

The research model explains approximately 15.2% of the variance instant news sharing among Malaysian. The results of the hypotheses testing are presented in Table 1. H1 examined the relationship between Pass Time and fake news sharing, revealing a positive and significant effect ($\beta = 0.232$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that Pass Time significantly contributes to the instant news sharing. In contrast, H2 investigated the association between Information Seeking and instant news sharing and found a negative but significant effect ($\beta = -0.237$, $p < 0.001$), thus not supporting the hypothesized positive relationship. H3, which explored the influence of Entertainment, did not show statistical significance ($\beta = -0.056$, $p > 0.05$). H4 examined Information Sharing and revealed a positive but marginally significant relationship ($\beta = 0.136$, $p > 0.05$), indicating limited support for the hypothesis. Finally, H5 assessed the relationship between Socialization and instant news sharing and found a positive and significant effect ($\beta = 0.241$, $p < 0.001$). In conclusion, the findings support H1, provide limited support for H4, and confirm H5, while H2 and H3 are not supported.

Table 1: Multiple Linear Regression Result

Variable	Hypothesis	Beta value	T Statistics	P Values	R^2	Remark
Pass Time	H_1 Pass Time will be positively related to instant news sharing.	.232	4.093	.000		Supported
Information Seeking	H_2 Information Seeking will be positively related to instant news sharing.	-.237	-3.923	.000		Not Supported
Entertainment	H_3 Entertainment will be positively related to instant news sharing.	-.056	-.883	.378	0.152	Not Supported
Information Sharing	H_4 Information Sharing will be positively related to instant news sharing.	.136	1.698	.090		Supported
Socialization	H_5 Socialization will be positively related to instant news sharing.	.241	3.324	.001		Supported

6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study set out to uncover the psychological engines that propel Malaysian social-media users to instantly news sharing within seconds of encountering it. Rooted in Uses and Gratifications Theory, a cross-sectional survey of 370 active Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp users revealed that three motives which is Pass

Time, Information Sharing and Socialization was significantly predict instant news sharing, together accounting for 15.2 % of the variance. Pass Time emerged as the strongest driver (β = .232, p < .001), indicating that idle moments are fertile ground for impulsive forwarding. Socialization followed closely (β = .241, p < .001), affirming that news is often used as social glue to initiate conversations, signal group membership and elicit likes or comments. Information Sharing showed a marginally significant positive effect (β = .136, p = .090), suggesting that a subset of users still derive satisfaction from being perceived as helpful broadcasters. Contrary to expectations, Information Seeking exhibited a negative coefficient (β = –.237, p < .001), implying that individuals who actively hunt for facts are more cautious and less likely to disseminate unverified headlines. Entertainment failed to reach significance (β = –.056, p > .05), underscoring that amusement alone is insufficient to overcome the cognitive effort of pressing "share."

While the model is parsimonious and theory-aligned, its modest explanatory power highlights the need for richer constructs. Future work should integrate variables such as fear of missing out, perceived information overload, algorithmic literacy, trust in legacy media and personality traits (e.g., narcissism or Machiavellianism) that may amplify or inhibit rapid sharing. Methodologically, the reliance on convenience sampling limits external validity; replications using stratified random or quota frames that balance age, ethnicity, urban–rural residence and platform preference are essential before generalising coefficients to the national population. Longitudinal or experience-sampling designs could also clarify how momentary mood fluctuations and daily routines interact with stable gratifications to trigger sharing episodes.

For policymakers and platform designers, the findings translate into actionable leverage points because Pass Time and Socialization are largely hedonic and socially driven, interventions must be equally friction-free and socially rewarding. Embedding "one-tap verify" buttons that display a visible "checked-by-me" badge beside shared stories can co-opt the same status-seeking impulse that currently rewards speed. Media-literacy campaigns should therefore recast verification not as a chore but as a quick, gamified act that enhances one's reputation within peer networks. Regulatory bodies such as the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission can partner with platforms to insert micro-delay prompts such as three-second "think first" windows during peak idle-scrolling periods on evenings and weekends when Pass Time motivation is highest. Finally, civil-society organisations can recruit micro-influencers who habitually share information to model reflective practices, thereby transforming altruistic Information Sharing from a conduit for virality into a checkpoint for accuracy. Only by aligning technical architectures and policy instruments with the gratifications that actually animate users can Malaysia hope to preserve the democratic benefits of instant news while mitigating the attendant risks of misinformation.

Author Contribution

Wan Hashridz Rizal Wan Abu Bakar, Abdul Rauf Ridzuan, Mohd Sufiean Hassan, and Fahmi Zaidi Abd Razak jointly contributed to all components of the writing process. This included the development of the introduction, the discussion and

organization of key ideas, the review and refinement of language and writing style, as well as the editing and preparation of the final manuscript draft. All authors participated collaboratively and approved the final version of the article.

Conflict Of Interest

This manuscript has not been published elsewhere, and all authors have agreed to its submission and declare no conflict of interest regarding the manuscript.

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