

# Analysis of selected political *Malaysiakini* news visuals: A discursive news value and visual semiotics approach

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## ABSTRACT

This research examines the newsworthiness and ideological values embedded in political visuals, particularly those depicting leaders and politicians, as published by *Malaysiakini*, a leading Malaysian online news platform. Using a qualitative content analysis approach, the study is informed by Bednarek and Caple's (2017) framework on discursive news values and Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) visual semiotics. It analyzed 12 political visuals published on *Malaysiakini* between April and October 2021. The analysis focuses on how these visuals align with three key newsworthiness values: eliteness, negativity, and positivity. The findings reveal that *Malaysiakini* often combines eliteness with either negativity or positivity, with eliteness serving as the dominant framing element for political figures. These visual representations reflect *Malaysiakini*'s editorial stance and ideological priorities, shaping how political leaders and issues are presented. Furthermore, the analysis highlights how political visuals function as ideological tools, embedding implicit meanings that align with the platform's editorial identity and influencing audience perceptions. This study underscores the significant role visuals play in constructing and conveying ideologies. By portraying political figures and events in specific ways, *Malaysiakini* reinforces dominant political narratives, influencing public understanding of key issues. The research contributes to visual news analysis by demonstrating how media visuals can frame political discourse and shape ideological perspectives. Additionally, it offers insights into how Malaysian media organizations strategically use visual content to engage audiences and communicate editorial priorities.

**Keywords:** Ideologies; *Malaysiakini*; news value; politics; visual analysis

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## INTRODUCTION

The role of visuals in news reporting has garnered increasing attention in recent years, particularly within the linguistic discipline. This includes multimodal studies, which examine the integration of various modes of communication, such as text and visuals. Local and global scholars have explored how visual elements contribute to meaning-making and audience engagement, often combining linguistic and semiotic frameworks. The rise in visual studies parallels advancements in digital

camera technology, which now enables the production of high-quality images that enhance the storytelling process in news reporting (Lie & Xie, 2020). Notably, visuals are a key feature in online news, often accompanying textual content to attract and engage audiences.

As Lester (2006) highlights, the increasing ubiquity of images in society, from books and magazines to news and television, has amplified their significance in communication. Images are not only used to complement text but also serve to guide

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audience attention and influence interpretation. These visuals shape understanding by directing focus on specific objects, individuals, or events, thereby enhancing audience engagement and fostering emotional connections (Esfandiari et al., 2021).

Visuals in news reporting have long been a subject of scholarly discussion. Barnhurst et al. (2001) describe images as visual symbols that enhance the storytelling process (Bednarek & Caple, 2012), emphasizing their capacity to draw readers into narratives and encourage deeper involvement with news stories. The role of visuals in shaping narratives and engaging audiences, particularly in digital media, has become a key area of research. As visual symbols, images complement the written word, independently conveying meaning, evoking emotions, and guiding interpretation.

Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) theory of visual semiotics provides a foundational framework for understanding how images, like written texts, communicate meaning through composition, framing, color, and other visual elements. This approach has been pivotal in studies of how media images shape ideologies and influence public perceptions. For example, the framing of political figures—including their positioning, facial expressions, and contextual elements—profoundly impacts audience perceptions of power, authority, and credibility (Salamon, 2023). Furthermore, visual politics conveyed through images and videos, can distill and communicate complex political ideologies (Bucy & Joo, 2021). Lagopoulos and Boklund-Lagopoulou (2024) argue that visual codes such as gaze, color, and framing can guide emotional and cognitive responses to news stories.

The digitalization of news has amplified the role of visuals in conveying ideologically charged messages and shaping political discourse through carefully framed images (Perez-Montoro, 2020). While much research has focused on visual semiotics and news values, studies applying the Discursive News Values Analysis (DNVA) approach in Malaysian media remain limited. For example, Fathir et al. (2023) analyzed visual framing in the context of political participation during BERSIH 2.0 but did not apply DNVA or examine the interaction of visual content and newsworthiness values in traditional media. Similarly, Embong (2014) explored visual and linguistic representations of a political figure in editorial cartoons, offering insights into visual framing but without addressing DNVA or broader news reporting. Ismail et al. (2022) conducted a multimodal discourse analysis of Paralympic athletes in newspaper coverage but did not engage with DNVA to explore the interaction between visual content, newsworthiness values, and ideological framing. Rahman et al. (2024) examined the ideological power of political trolling visuals on

social media but did not apply DNVA to analyze newsworthiness values such as eliteness, negativity, or positivity. Notably, no study has specifically analyzed these dynamics in *Malaysiakini*, a leading Malaysian digital news platform. Known for its visual portrayals of political issues, *Malaysiakini* shapes the electoral narrative through themes like governance, economic challenges, and social justice—issues that resonate across Malaysia's diverse social and cultural contexts (Liang & Tiung, 2024).

In politically sensitive environments like Malaysia, visuals play a pivotal role in shaping ideologies without relying on text (Baharin et al., 2020). For instance, powerful images of political leaders or distressed crowds may evoke emotional reactions aligned with particular political perspectives. The composition, color usage, and positioning of individuals in these images can reinforce political narratives, guiding public opinion in favor of or against certain figures or events.

In this study, “political visuals” refers to images of political leaders and politicians in news contexts (Huang et al., 2023). These visuals act as communicative tools that convey information, frame narratives, and shape audience perceptions. Newsworthiness values, which determine the importance of events or individuals, play a significant role in selecting and presenting these visuals. The study also explores how visuals embed implicit ideologies—sets of beliefs, values, and perspectives that influence the representation and interpretation of political events and figures.

Political visuals often capture audiences' attention before they engage with the content, suggesting that their selection reflects editorial strategies aligned with the newspaper's ideological stance and target audience (Low, 2013; Ooi, 2016). Newspapers embed ideological positions in their visual content, influencing how audiences interpret them (Sanawi, 2014). For example, images may either glorify or delegitimize protests depending on the outlet's political perspective. Sanawi (2014) demonstrates that visuals not only complement textual narratives but also function as standalone ideological tools. Recent studies have highlighted the power of political visuals to shape beliefs and convey hidden meanings (Pratama, 2019).

However, there is a gap in research on how visual content, newsworthiness values, and ideological framing intersect within Malaysian online news, particularly in outlets like *Malaysiakini*. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing how *Malaysiakini* uses visual representations to frame political figures and events and communicate ideologies. By adopting a discursive news value and visual semiotics approach, the research explores how visuals reflect values, such as eliteness, negativity, and positivity, and how they shape audience interpretations.

This research addresses the lack of studies on the role of visuals in framing political ideologies within Malaysian media. By examining how *Malaysiakini* employs visual representations to reinforce specific ideological perspectives, the study contributes to the growing body of research on visual news analysis. The findings will enhance understanding of how visuals function as ideological tools and influence perceptions in politically charged news environments. This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do visual representations of political leaders and politicians in *Malaysiakini* reflect newsworthiness values like eliteness, negativity, and positivity?
2. How do implicit ideologies embedded in these visual representations influence audience interpretations and perceptions of political figures and events?

By examining the intersection of visual content, newsworthiness values, and ideology, this study contributes to the growing body of research on visual news analysis within the linguistic and semiotic disciplines. It also provides insights into the specific strategies employed by *Malaysiakini* to engage and influence its audience through political visuals. The findings are expected to enhance understanding of how visuals function as ideological tools and how they shape audience perceptions in politically charged news environments. By combining discursive news value analysis with visual semiotics, this research seeks to advance both the theoretical and methodological frameworks for studying visual communication in news media.

### **A Discursive News Value Theory and Visual Semiotics Approach**

This research integrates and adapts DNVA and the Visual Semantics Approach. Developed by Bednarek and Caple (2017), DNVA offers a comprehensive method for examining linguistic and semi-linguistic phenomena, particularly in the context of news values. The strength of this theory lies in its ability to analyze both verbal and visual elements, allowing researchers to explore their multidimensional interplay in constructing news narratives. This dual focus is essential for critically examining the visual content and underlying news values that shape audience perceptions.

The press, particularly in visual contexts, reflects deliberate choices that serve specific purposes behind the selection of visuals (Bednarek & Caple, 2017). While verbal elements are important, visuals often hold primary significance, and their relationship with text helps construct meaning that may not always align with reality or truth. DNVA identifies ten key news values embedded in visual representations. These include the following:

1. *Stereotypical News Value*: Visuals that align with societal norms or reinforce commonly held views, showcasing harmony or shared perspectives.
2. *Eliteness*: Visuals highlighting power, fame, authority, or high social status, often contrasted with depictions of ordinary individuals.
3. *Impact*: Representations emphasizing significant societal events, such as natural disasters, wars, or moments of historical importance, portraying visuals with weighty consequences.
4. *Negativity*: Imagery that highlights conflict, defeat, or adverse situations, evoking negative emotions or responses from audiences.
5. *Positivity*: Visuals showcasing victory, unity, or cooperation, often evoking positive emotional responses such as hope or happiness.
6. *Personalization*: Focus on ordinary individuals and their experiences, emphasizing how these stories resonate with the audience's emotions.
7. *Proximity*: This value, often referred to as "territoriality," relates to visuals emphasizing geographic or cultural closeness, highlighting local relevance or connection.
8. *Superlativeness*: Representations of scale, intensity, or magnitude in visuals, such as vast crowds, monumental structures, or extreme numbers.
9. *Timeliness*: Visuals reflecting contemporary or immediate elements, focusing on what is new or recent in the news cycle.
10. *Unexpectedness*: Representations of unusual or rare events, highlighting novelty, oddity, or shock.

This theoretical framework offers a structured approach for examining the construction of new visuals, particularly in their role as tools for conveying ideological or emotional messages. In the context of this study, the combination of verbal and visual analysis facilitates a deeper understanding of how these elements interact to construct and reinforce narratives in news media.

The Visual Semiotic Theory, introduced by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), originates from the social semiotics discipline and primarily focuses on critical discourse analysis in visual communication. *The Grammar of Visual Design* (1996) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the semiotic roles visuals play in communication. It stresses the ideological roles visuals assume, showing how they are strategically crafted to convey certain messages and values. By analyzing how

objects, people, and places are represented visually, the theory illustrates that visuals can be as communicative as textual language, such as written clauses or sentences. There are three key metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual.

1. *Ideational metafunction*: This aspect looks at how images represent and symbolize real-world experiences, actions, or relationships. Through this metafunction, images can mirror societal realities or express ideological viewpoints, serving as visual metaphors for specific societal issues or occurrences.
2. *Interpersonal metafunction*: Here, the theory examines how images forge a connection between the producer, the visual elements, and the audience. This includes considering how components like gaze direction, angle, and proximity in an image establish emotional or relational dynamics between the viewer and the visual content. For instance, low-angle shots may denote power, influencing how the viewer emotionally interprets the image.
3. *Textual metafunction*: This dimension integrates ideational and interpersonal elements to provide a coherent narrative. Vectors focus on the visual composition of an image, such as layout, framing, and the use of lines of action or gaze that effectively guide the viewer's interpretation of the scene.

The placement of objects, whether central or peripheral, alters the viewer's perception of their significance in the image's narrative. The three metafunctions produce a cohesive visual message. The ideational metafunction focuses on how visuals represent actions or experiences, while the interpersonal metafunction highlights the relationships between the creator, the content, and the audience. The textual metafunction merges these two aspects, providing a structural framework that helps guide the viewer's understanding of the visual message, connecting the individual elements within the image to its broader societal, cultural, or political context (Ha, 2024).

The vectors in an image represent dynamic forces such as movement, gaze, or interaction, drawing the viewer into an unfolding event. For example, in an image of a protest, vectors could manifest as lines or arrows pointing to individuals, actions, or objects, constructing a narrative about the event's progression. These lines of action, such as the direction a protester gestures or where a crowd is looking, help indicate the development of the event, guiding the audience's understanding of both the action within the image and its broader narrative context (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Additionally,

the composition of an image—its position, angle, and direction—further influences interpretation. A low-angle shot might portray a subject as powerful or dominant, while a high-angle shot could make them appear vulnerable or submissive (Levy, 2021).

Similarly, the symbols within an image—whether facial expressions, objects, spatial arrangements, or colors—invite the audience to decode and interpret underlying meanings, often revealing ideological and social messages. Visual elements like framing, balance, and color choices guide the audience's interpretation of the image, invoking emotional or cultural associations. Through these complex interactions, images become powerful tools for shaping public perception and engaging audiences both cognitively and emotionally (Ahmad et al., 2022). By analyzing these compositional elements, researchers can uncover how visuals influence perceptions, ideologies, and emotional responses. This theory emphasizes the active role of visuals in communication, compelling viewers to engage cognitively and emotionally to interpret the meanings presented.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research methodology for an in-depth analysis of visual content, focusing on the visual representation of leaders and politicians in *Malaysiakini* that reflect newsworthiness values, such as eliteness, negativity, and positivity, as well as the implicit ideologies embedded in these representations that influence audience interpretations and perceptions of political figures and events (Hao et al., 2016). The DNVA framework supports the analysis of news values, while Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) theory provides an approach to understanding how visual elements function semiotically. The use of both DNVA and Visual Semiotic Theory enabled the study to explore how visuals actively shape and reflect societal and political ideologies, uncover deeper ideological meanings in *Malaysiakini*'s political imagery, and provide a comprehensive understanding of how visuals contribute to meaning-making, frame narratives, and influence public perceptions within the socio-political context.

This framework demonstrates how visual content serves as a potent medium for political communication, revealing the strategies behind its use to shape public discourse and reinforce ideological narratives.

The primary data source for this research was political content from *Malaysiakini*, a prominent online news platform recognized for its comprehensive political coverage. Political visuals depicting Malaysian politicians or leaders were specifically chosen, as these images are rich in ideological narratives and news value elements. The

analysis was limited to visuals published between April and October 2021, ensuring relevance to the socio-political dynamics leading up to the Malaysian elections. Only visuals directly produced and authored by *Malaysiakini* were included in the study. Content sourced from external agencies like Bernama or Reuters was excluded to maintain the focus on original material. A total of 12 political visuals were selected for analysis, chosen based on their original authorship and relevance to political discourse, ensuring a focused and authentic dataset.

### **Data Analysis**

The research employs DNVA and Visual Semiotic Theory. The DNVA involves analyzing news values in political imagery, focusing on how features like facial expressions and symbolic settings reflect newsworthiness values such as eliteness, negativity, and positivity. This approach examines how specific visual elements align with or reinforce these values, shaping the way political figures and events are perceived by the audience.

The Visual Semiotic Analysis, guided by both DNVA and Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) Visual Semiotic Theory, delves into the implicit ideological messages embedded within the visuals. This theory provides a framework for understanding how visuals communicate layered meanings that go beyond their surface representation. It explores how visual elements such as composition, framing, color, and gaze are used to convey political or ideological narratives. By applying this approach, the study reveals how visuals in *Malaysiakini* subtly embed ideological narratives, shaping how political figures or events are portrayed to resonate with specific socio-political agendas and engage the audience effectively.

The analysis steps were as follows:

1. Identification of Visual Elements: The first step involved identifying the key visual elements in the selected images, including facial expressions, body language, spatial arrangements, and symbolic settings.
2. Application of DNVA: The second step applied the DNVA to assess how these visual elements reflected newsworthiness values. This involved examining how the visuals conveyed values such as eliteness, negativity, and positivity and how these values influenced the perception of political figures and events.
3. Visual Semiotic Analysis: The third step involved a deeper analysis of how these visual elements functioned semiotically, using Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) framework. This analysis looked at the ideological roles of the visuals and how they conveyed layered meanings, such as reinforcing societal ideologies and political narratives.

4. Contextual Interpretation: Finally, the visuals were interpreted within their broader socio-political and cultural contexts to understand how they reflect or reinforce specific ideologies, values, and political messages. This step allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how *Malaysiakini* uses visuals to construct political narratives and shape audience perceptions.

By following these steps, the study highlighted how visual content in *Malaysiakini* is strategically crafted to communicate ideological messages and influence public perception, revealing how political figures and events are framed within specific socio-political contexts.

### **RESULTS**

The findings of the study reveal that *Malaysiakini*'s selection of 12 political visuals embodies three distinct combinations of news values. The first combination is a blend of negative and positive news values, reflecting a subtle approach to constructing balanced narratives. The second combination involves the pairing of negative with another negative news value, intensifying the visual portrayal of tension, controversy, or conflict. Lastly, the third combination reverts to a mix of negative and positive news values, illustrating a recurring strategy to juxtapose contrasting emotional and ideological elements within the same visual frame.

#### **A Blend of Negative and Positive News Values**

This combination reflects a subtle approach to constructing balanced narratives. The images in this section utilize both negative and positive news values, which are carefully intertwined to offer a more nuanced portrayal of political figures. This strategy balances conflicting emotions or ideologies, allowing for a complex and reflective understanding of the political context.

The analysis of the four sample images in Figure 1 highlights how the news value of *eliteness* is visually constructed through the social status, power, and public prominence of the participants depicted. These participants, Datuk Seri Najib Razak, Lim Guan Eng, Datuk Seri Wee Ka Siong, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Mohamad Sabu ('Mat Sabu'), Datuk Seri Zahid Hamidi, and Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz, represent key figures in Malaysian politics. The participants occupy significant political roles and wield considerable influence within the sociopolitical landscape of Malaysia. This aligns with the broader notion that visual representations of elite figures inherently reflect their authority, fame, and recognition within the public sphere, as noted in media studies (Bednarek & Caple, 2017).

**Figure 1**

*The News Value of Eliteness, Positivity, and Negativity*



The visuals in Figure 1 incorporate negative and positive news values, discernible through the participants' facial expressions. Expressions such as defensiveness, neutrality, smiles, or contemplation are strategically employed to convey nuanced emotional or ideological messages (Wang, 2024). For instance, defensive expressions could signal crisis or conflict, while smiling or pensive looks suggest optimism or reflection. These visual cues are not arbitrary and shape audience perception and engagement, reinforcing ideological narratives embedded within the news content (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Additionally, *Malaysiakini* employs a composite approach by juxtaposing two or three participants within the same frame to create a comparative narrative. This editorial choice reinforces political contrasts, fostering a sense of relational tension or ideological competition among the depicted figures.

A noteworthy feature in Figure 1 is 'stock photographs,' which are pre-existing images edited and repurposed for current news stories. This technique, commonly observed in digital journalism, allows media outlets to maintain relevance while reusing archival imagery when current visuals are unavailable (Aiello, Thurlow & Portmann, 2023). The reliance on stock photographs introduces an additional layer of editorial framing. *Malaysiakini*'s selection and editing of these images amplify their newsworthiness by embedding a mix of intrigue, negativity, and positivity within the visuals, thereby enhancing their emotional and ideological appeal to the audience.

Moreover, the obscured or neutralized backgrounds in Figure 1 are deliberate choices to direct audience attention exclusively to the participants. This focus on facial expressions, body language, and other semiotic elements emphasizes the prominence of political figures while minimizing contextual distractions. For example, the

defensive expressions of Datuk Seri Najib Razak, Datuk Seri Wee Ka Siong, and Datuk Seri Zahid Hamidi are juxtaposed with the more natural or contemplative expressions of Lim Guan Eng, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Mohamad Sabu, and Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz, creating a visual dichotomy.

This comparative framing suggests differing narratives or ideological stances, directing audience attention toward the individuality and symbolic significance of each participant's expression about the political discourse being addressed. The size of the images in Figure 1 further underscores *Malaysiakini*'s editorial strategy. As Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) argue, the spatial relationship between visual elements and their proximity to the audience serve as semiotic indicators of salience. The large size of the images, nearly filling the frame, visually prioritizes the participants and their associated political narratives. This magnification draws immediate attention and situates the participants within the central visual discourse, emphasizing their relevance to the political topic.

Additionally, the compositional arrangement of images left, center, or right within the frame reflects *Malaysiakini*'s ideological framing. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), the spatial positioning of elements within a visual composition carries distinct connotations. Images placed on the left often represent new or unfamiliar information, inviting the audience to consider emerging narratives. Centered images typically signify information of primary importance, while those positioned on the right convey established or familiar content.

This arrangement reveals a deliberate effort to guide audience interpretation in *Malaysiakini*'s context. For instance, participants positioned on the left might signify emerging controversies or debates, while those in the center reflect their centrality to

the topic at hand, and images on the right suggest closure or resolution within the narrative.

Thus, *Malaysiakini*'s visualization strategies blend multiple news values, particularly eliteness and negativity, to construct a layered ideological narrative. For example, samples 5 to 8 in Figure 2 further illustrate how elite figures are juxtaposed with negative news elements to amplify tension and controversy. This dual-layered approach underscores the ideological power of visual semiotics in shaping audience perceptions, aligning with Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) assertion that visual communication extends beyond representation to actively construct meaning and influence. *Malaysiakini*'s use of semiotic strategies, ranging from stock photographs and compositional techniques to the manipulation of facial expressions

and spatial arrangements, illustrates a sophisticated approach to political communication. By embedding ideological narratives within visual elements, the publication informs, persuades, and positions its audience within specific interpretive frameworks. This critical interplay of visual elements underscores the ideological potency of visual media in contemporary political discourse.

### Pairing Negative News Values to Intensify Tension

The second combination involves pairing negative news values to intensify the portrayal of tension, controversy, or conflict. Here, the visual focus shifts toward amplifying negative emotions, such as defensiveness or distress, which magnify the sense of political conflict or crisis.

**Figure 2**

*The News Value of Eliteness and Negativity*



The elite news value in Figure 2 is exemplified through the selection of high-profile participants, such as Dato' Seri Azmin Ali, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Lim Kit Siang, and Dato' Sri Ismail Sabri Yaakob. These figures possess significant political influence and authority, characteristics that inherently define elitism in media visuals (Bednarek & Caple, 2017).

*Malaysiakini* strategically capitalizes on this by selecting visuals that emphasize the negative emotional expressions of the participants, thereby framing the narrative to elicit specific audience interpretations. The deliberate depiction of negativity enhances the dramatic appeal and aligns with the ideological framing of political discourse.

In the visual samples of Figure 2, *Malaysiakini* employs single-subject imagery to foreground the individuals directly associated with the news narrative. This approach, as Williams (2000) argues, underscores the role of isolated visuals in constructing political meaning. By focusing exclusively on individual participants, *Malaysiakini*

directs the audience's attention to the specificities of their visual and emotional representation.

The visual framing fosters a sense of immediacy yet simultaneously creates a psychological barrier through the absence of direct eye contact. For example, in the second image, where the participant seemingly faces the audience, the gaze is deflected, symbolizing alignment with external viewpoints rather than direct engagement. As suggested by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), it evokes a nuanced relational dynamic, emphasizing detachment while inviting interpretative involvement from the audience.

Furthermore, the proximity and scale of these visuals play a pivotal role in shaping audience perception. The close framing of the participants' images amplifies their prominence while restricting contextual background, forcing the viewer to focus entirely on the participants' expressions and positioning. This selective focus reflects *Malaysiakini*'s strategic use of visual semiotics to reinforce ideological messages, as proximity in

visual communication often signifies importance and authority (van Leeuwen, 2008).

### **A Return to a Blend of Negative and Positive News Values**

The third combination returns to a mix of negative and positive news values, illustrating a recurring strategy of juxtaposing contrasting emotional and ideological elements within the same visual frame. This strategy draws attention to the duality of political life, showing both the accomplishments and challenges faced by the figures depicted.

The analysis extends to Figure 3, which features Datuk Seri Zahid Hamidi, Datuk Seri Ahmad Maslan, Tengku Zafrul Aziz, and Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. This set introduces a complex interplay of negative and positive news values, forming a dualistic narrative. For instance, while the visuals may highlight the participants' political accomplishments through compositional techniques,

the concurrent use of negative expressions tempers the celebratory tone, thereby fostering a balanced yet critical perspective. Such duality aligns with *Malaysiakini*'s editorial strategy to provoke reflection and engagement, a hallmark of their ideological approach to news framing (Kim et al., 2021).

In these visuals, *Malaysiakini* further utilizes compositional elements, such as spatial arrangement and gaze direction, to signal ideological constructs. Images positioned prominently on the left may suggest emerging narratives or unestablished truths, as posited by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), while central placements denote heightened focus and authority. By strategically manipulating these elements, *Malaysiakini* ensures that the visuals not only inform but also influence the audience's interpretative frameworks, ultimately shaping their perception of political events and actors.

**Figure 3**

*The News Value of Eliteness and Positivity*



This analysis demonstrates *Malaysiakini*'s deliberate use of elite and negative news values to construct ideologically charged visuals. The interplay of semiotic strategies such as framing, gaze, and compositional emphasis reveals an intricate narrative architecture designed to both engage and challenge the audience's interpretive capacities, thereby reinforcing the platform's political discourse (Liu & Cheng, 2021).

As discussed in the previous description, the news value of the elite can be explained based on the presence of images of the participants in each image, and the positive news value can be seen based on the facial expressions of the participants and good and positive emotions in Figure 3.

The selection of such news values will create high positivity in the audience to the participants. Looking at ideology in this visual context using the approach of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), the

results of the analysis of Figure 3 show a different view of the audience's focus on the image of the participants compared to the visual source of Figure 2. The image of the participants above shows the representation of the participants in their respective political party networks, each of which brings positive elements and emotions to the participants.

As shown in Figure 3, *Malaysiakini* uses a single image focused on the front as the main image to form a transaction image. According to van Leeuwen (1996), a transactional image is an image that has a direct relationship with the participants from the audience's point of view; for example, what is highlighted can be seen by the audience. In this case, the intended transaction image is based on the relationship between the participants and the audience, assuming the existence of communication interactions formed in this visual. The

communication interaction is ongoing, and the participants' images are not static in each sample.

Correspondingly, the use of image backgrounds in each sample associated with participant images was found to be different. The image background in image one in this figure highlights the Barisan Nasional party flag, and this background indeed highlights the confidence and advantages of the participants in building trust in the audience in addition to symbolizing voting for the Barisan Nasional party. For Datuk Seri Ahmad Maslan's image, this background is obscured to build focus and direct connection with the audience to the participants. Meanwhile, Tengku Zafrul Aziz and Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's images, which were formed based on the image during the role, highlight the power of the participants connected to the background. For example, Tengku Zafrul Aziz's image highlights the friendliness and courage of the participants when communicating at official events, and Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohammad features the character of the participants, who are often used as idols and references among politicians and the public. This sample depicts participants in a place or official residence.

Based on further research in Figure 3, it turns out that every cheerful facial expression of the participants is significant to *Malaysiakini* in creating a positive perspective, impact, and influence on the audience. This view is aligned based on the image of the transaction and the participants's background image. Indeed, *Malaysiakini* has a strong foundation based on the selection of news value and image of the participants.

As is well known, news selection is based on interesting news content, novelty, meaning, etc. However, Hall et al. (1978) explained that news is an event that has been "chosen" and "planned" because news does not happen by itself. Likewise, with news involving politics in this visual context, *Malaysiakini* sets the selection of news value, political topics, and participant images to get the audience's attention. Usually, news about politics often gets attention other than war news, marches, demonstrations, and others. This view, which is also said by Othman (2018), that news that is mostly political, such as elections or anything related, is the best example to explain the importance of the news selection to the audience.

From the interactive perspective of Figure 3, it clearly shows that there is a relationship between the participants and the audience based on eye contact, image distance, and the main image. Figure 3 shows the images of the participants dominating the picture frame, and this explains the power of influence under *Malaysiakini* to realize their motives and ideologies to the audience. Following the prevalence of visual studies conducted, images that dominate visuals give important clues to an entity. This view also reveals the characteristics of journalism and the

intention of the author. Based on this claim, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) call it the "indicative scale in our world," which means that knowledge about the entity underlies the audience's experience.

The formation of discursive news value in Figure 3 consists of elite news value and positive news value. This combination of news values is linked to the visual ideological mix formed by *Malaysiakini* based on the audience's reflection on the participants, especially in terms of the authority, trust, and confidence of the participants in the politics they play.

## DISCUSSION

As explained in the findings section of the study, it is clear that the role of newspaper authors is very significant in forming a reputation that is in line with the principle of ownership. Most authors show a clear bias towards their publication process (Zulli, Liu & Gehl, 2020). Nevertheless, in the production of news, there are other obstacles to influencing news reporting due to complicated processes, such as information filtering, policing, truth, target topics, and others. According to Nasser (1983), the author needs to be knowledgeable in order to distinguish the selection of news in Asian and Western countries because this is part of the function of the media with its ideological form. In the context of media practice in Malaysia, political focus and newspaper ownership are closely related, for example, from the point of view of how news reporting is produced and how to deal with an issue involving political bias among the people and the government. This kind of news gets more attention from the audience due to the ideological relationship that has been built based on the frequency of the audience's focus and the audience's own biases.

Seeing the approach of discursive news value, elements of eliteness, positive and negative, become the main highlight of the author in presenting the identity of the participant's image in the political news column. This combination of news value elements is part of *Malaysiakini*'s element to frame every political news with an ideological mix. This is as claimed by Bednarek and Caple (2017) that the elements of news and visual values have long been seen as the ideology of news professionals based on their interpretation and connotation. This claim also proves that by selecting news value based only on visual sources, *Malaysiakini* can highlight its ideological form and control the audience.

Further, by looking at visual sources thoroughly to unearth ideological permeation involving leaders and politicians in the news, *Malaysiakini* highlights many visual sources that are provocative for the audience. This is evident when the newspaper emphasizes images that create participants' association with political news based on visual composition and other visual features.

Among them are image arrangement, image position, size measurement, image distance, image background, and expression. This can be seen based on the image narrative form in *Malaysiakini* involving the image of each participant discussed. Leuween (1996) does not deny that this detail is very significant because visual dependence also leads to psychological significance to the audience. This is highlighted by the opinion of Billard and Moran (2022), who argued that the audience is also indirectly affected by the display of images that can have psychological effects based on what they see. Bock (2020) also argued that this kind of thing will have a dominant effect on the audience due to the visual character that is highlighted and contributes various forms of meaning in all components. With this method, the media is more mobile and seems to use its freedom to achieve its ideological goals, like *Malaysiakini*.

Participants' images in the form of "stock photographs" are part of *Malaysiakini*'s visual sources, even though there are direct visual sources. The use of "stock photograph" in this context acts as an adaptation of the image to give the image that is to be targeted to the audience. For example, in *Malaysiakini*, images that use "stock photographs" are used to create news values of eliteness, positivity, and negativity. Based on the researcher's opinion, the "stock photograph" used by *Malaysiakini* is seen as an important opportunity and necessity to influence the audience related to the identity and background of the participants. The role of "stock photograph" can be used and adapted to any image and situation to portray the participants.

Interestingly, political visualization involving a number of images of participants is also part of *Malaysiakini*'s strategy to shape ideological diffusion among the audience. Power comparisons are also associated with each visual feature included in the picture frame. What stands out is that *Malaysiakini* likes to use the facial expressions of the participants to describe the emotions that dominate them, in addition to revealing characteristics related to political news involving the participants to the audience.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Malaysiakini* has effectively embedded its ideological and philosophical stance through the strategic use of visual resources, particularly in the portrayal of leaders and politicians in Malaysia. By leveraging the principles of discursive news value and visual semiotics, *Malaysiakini* constructs and disseminates its ideological positioning to the audience. The study reveals that the construction of news values predominantly focuses on eliteness, positivity, and occasionally negativity, which is central to this visual framing. Such discursive strategies are

evident in the careful selection and presentation of visual elements, which shape perceptions of political figures and invite deeper audience engagement with the underlying messages.

This approach raises critical questions about how audiences interpret and internalize these visual representations. The deliberate framing of leaders through confident postures, cheerful facial expressions, and symbolic visuals represent the visual's function not merely as illustrative tools but as ideologically charged mediums. As Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) argue, visual media operates as a vehicle for meaning-making, enabling news outlets like *Malaysiakini* to subtly influence audience perceptions and public discourse.

The findings underscore *Malaysiakini*'s ability to dominate audience cognition by embedding ideological cues through calculated visual strategies. Such dominance reflects broader trends in media ideology, where news values and visual representation play a crucial role in shaping public trust and attitudes toward political actors. The implications of this study highlight the importance of critically analyzing visual content as an ideological construct rather than a neutral representation.

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