

Malay Language Usage in Digital Media: A Comprehensive Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

This systematic literature review examines the usage of the Malay language in digital media and explores current research trends, sociocultural influences, and educational implications within the digital communication environments. The increasing expansion of digital platforms such as social media, online learning applications, and multimedia communication has significantly transformed the way the Malay language is used, represented, and disseminated. However, existing studies remain fragmented across different disciplines, creating a need for a comprehensive synthesis of recent scholarly findings. Therefore, this study aims to systematically review the contemporary research on the Malay language usage in digital media between 2023 and 2025. The review employed the PRISMA protocol to ensure a transparent and systematic selection process. Two major databases, namely Scopus and ERIC, were utilized for data collection, while the advanced search was conducted using the keywords “digital media” and “Malay language.” A total of 22 primary studies were identified and analyzed based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The findings revealed three dominant themes in the literature: (1) Language, Discourse and Digital Communication, which highlights linguistic adaptation and communication patterns in online interactions; (2) Social Media, Identity and Sociocultural Representation, which focuses on identity construction, cultural expression, and community engagement through Malay language use on social networking platforms; and (3) Digital Media, Education and Behavioural Influence, which discusses the role of digital media in language learning, educational practices, and behavioural development among users. Overall, the review demonstrates that digital media has become a significant platform for the evolution, preservation, and transformation of the Malay language. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital linguistics and provides useful insights for researchers, educators, and policymakers in strengthening the relevance of the Malay language in the digital era.

Keywords: digital, Media, Malay Language

INTRODUCTION

The Malay language, as a national and regional lingua franca, is being reshaped by the rapid spread of digital technologies and social media in Malaysia, Brunei and surrounding regions. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter have become key spaces where the Malay language is written, mixed with other languages, and creatively transformed in everyday communication (Hashim et al., 2017; McLellan, 2022, 2023; Stapa & Shaari, 2012). Rather than simply threatening the Malay language, these platforms enable complex practices of code-switching, slang creation, and hybrid discourse that reflect users' multilingual identities and changing communicative norms (Izazi & Tengku-Sepora, 2020; Soo, 2025). Understanding the Malay language usage in digital media is therefore central to understanding contemporary

youth culture, identity, and language change in the Malay-speaking world.

Key Phenomena in Malay Digital Language

Phenomenon	Brief description in Malay digital use	Citations
Code-switching / code-mixing	Alternation between Malay and English (and other languages) within and across messages	1723
Slang & textism	Shortenings, phonetic spellings, leetspeak, emojis, playful jargons	5649
Nativised English & hashtags	Localised English–Malay forms (e.g. ME lexemes, lah) in posts and hashtags	921
Identity & ideology	Use of Malay vs other codes to signal belonging, modernity, or cross-border orientation	1101112

Figure 1 Main patterns of the Malay language in digital media

Across social media, the Malay language has commonly appears alongside English in multilingual repertoires, with users drawing flexibly on both codes. In Brunei and Malaysia, social media interactions range from monolingual Malay language to monolingual English, with many posts showing fine-grained mixing or translanguaging (McLellan, 2022, 2023). Analyses of WhatsApp chats, Facebook threads and Reddit or Brunei Subreddit discussions reveal that multilingual users treat any of their available languages as “unmarked” choices, selecting English for wider or more international audiences and the Malay language or the Brunei Malay language for local, in-group communication (McLellan, 2022, 2023). Studies of Malaysian university students’ Facebook use similarly show rich patterns of code-switching and code-mixing between the Malay language and English, often within a single sentence, with the Malay language providing the grammatical frame and English contributing key lexical items or quoted academic content (Hashim et al., 2017). Instagram comment data from a Malaysian radio station account confirm that intra-sentential Malay–English switching is by far the most common pattern, motivated by both communicative efficiency and varying levels of competence across languages (Ismail & Abdullah, 2023). At a broader theoretical level, such hybrid practices have been framed as part of “world Englishes,” involving the nativization of English and “englishization” of the Malay language in online spaces (McLellan, 2022).

Beyond code-switching, digital media have fostered new forms of slang, textism and internet-specific Malay language varieties. Research on bilingual Malaysian youths’ social media interactions identifies seven classes of internet slang—phrase and word abbreviations, derogatory and non-derogatory adjectives, adverbs, nouns and verbs—formed through strategies like abbreviation, semantic widening, borrowing and neologism creation (Soo, 2025). Earlier large-scale work on young Malaysians’ Facebook language documented spelling innovations, combinations of letters and numbers, vowel omission, homophone use, acronyms, playful jargon and emoticons, highlighting an emergent “online communicative language” that cuts across ethnic and first-language backgrounds (Stapa & Shaari, 2012). Focusing specifically on Malay-language users on Twitter, another study found extensive use of shortenings, onomatopoeic spellings, phonetic replacements, leetspeak, cacography and emoji in tweets containing the keyword makan (“eat”), suggesting the development of a robust Malay digital slang repertoire (Izazi & Tengku-Sepora, 2020). Together, these studies indicate that the Malay language in digital media is characterized by informality, creativity and textual economy, with users exploiting platform constraints and affordances to compress meaning and express stance.

A related strand of work examines localised English and hybrid Malay–English forms as they appear in Malaysian English (ME) and hashtag practices. Analyses of ME lexemes used as social media hashtags show that popular forms are typically short strings (often two words) and frequently embed code-switching, for example the Malay language elements within English-based tags. Some hashtags, such as #powerlah, rely on discourse particles like lah that are characteristic of colloquial the Malay language and Malaysian or Singapore

English, prompting the proposal of a new “# + discourse particle” category in hashtag taxonomies (Nasir et al., 2023). Studies of online Malaysian English also note the creative reworking of English words into new Malay-oriented forms (e.g. *kipidup* from “keep it up”), further blurring boundaries between languages in digital discourse (Izazi & Tengku-Sepora, 2020; McLellan, 2023). These patterns support broader arguments that mixing local vernaculars with global English online should not automatically be read as language shift; instead, hybrid practices can function as strategies for maintaining minority or local linguistic identities within global digital cultures (McLellan, 2023).

Malay digital usage is also deeply tied to identity negotiation, youth culture and language ideologies. Research on the bilingual Malaysian youths suggests that internet slang and textism operate as tools for identity construction, social solidarity and cultural expression, with usage varying by social circle and audience sensitivity (Soo, 2025; Stapa & Shaari, 2012). Studies of the Malaysian Chinese youth, though focusing primarily on Chinese-based mixed codes, similarly show how self-created hybrid codes on TikTok and Instagram become markers of “Malaysian-Chinese” identity and connect users to transnational communities (Hendrikus et al., 2024), paralleling Malay–English practices. From a critical discourse perspective, the adoption of Bahasa Indonesia—especially informal, slangy varieties—by Malaysian youth on social media has been interpreted as creating new hybrid registers that may displace Malay in some informal domains, raising concerns about the symbolic status of Malay as national language and prompting calls for balanced language policies (Firdaus, 2025). At the same time, large-scale corpus work on Malay–English code-switched tweets demonstrates the pervasiveness of these mixed forms and develops tools (e.g. MESocSentiment) to better understand how sentiment and stance are expressed in such bilingual environments (Shamsuddin et al., 2024). Overall, the literature converges on the view that the Malay language usage in digital media both reflects and reshapes how young people position themselves in relation to local, national and regional identities.

In conclusion, existing research portrays the Malay language usage in digital media as highly dynamic, hybrid and identity-laden. Across platforms and contexts, users mix the Malay language with English and other regional codes, develop new slang and textisms, and adapt localised forms into hashtags and other digital genres. These practices are influenced by audience, platform affordances, education and cross-border media flows, and they carry implications for national language ideologies, intergenerational communication and language policy (McLellan, 2022, 2023)(Firdaus, 2025). However, many studies focus on small samples, specific platforms, or particular communities, and there remain gaps in understanding patterns across regions, age groups and time, as well as the long-term impact on the Malay language structure and status. A focused study on “Malay Language Usage in Digital Media” can therefore build on this literature by synthesising dispersed findings, extending analyses to under-researched platforms and populations, and clarifying how digital practices are reshaping both the everyday use and symbolic meanings of Malay in the contemporary media landscape.(Hashim et al., 2017; McLellan, 2022, 2023; Stapa & Shaari, 2012)

Research Gap and Theoretical Perspective

Despite the increasing number of studies examining the Malay language use in digital media, several important gaps remain. First, previous studies have largely focused on individual digital platforms rather than providing an integrated understanding across multiple online environments. Second, many studies emphasise descriptive findings without examining broader theoretical implications concerning language change, digital communication, and sociolinguistic development. Third, limited attention has been given to the relationship between digital language practices, cultural preservation, and technological innovation. These research gaps justify the need for the present systematic literature review.

The present systematic literature review is interpreted through three complementary theoretical perspectives, namely Sociolinguistic Theory, Digital Communication Theory, and Language Change Theory. These theoretical perspectives provide an integrated framework for understanding how the Malay language practices evolve within digital environments, particularly through social interaction, technological advancement, and sociocultural transformation.

Sociolinguistic Theory

According to Labov (1972), language varies according to social context, community, and communicative purposes. Within digital environments, sociolinguistic theory explains the occurrence of code-switching, code-mixing, dialect variation, lexical innovation, and linguistic adaptation among the Malay language users. Social media platforms encourage users to negotiate identity and social relationships through flexible language choices that reflect multilingual practices and changing communicative norms.

Digital Communication Theory

Digital Communication Theory, as proposed by Castells (2010), explains how communication within networked societies has transformed interpersonal interaction, information exchange, and identity construction. Digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and X (formerly Twitter) provide interactive environments where language functions not only as a communication tool but also as a mechanism for participation, collaboration, cultural representation, and community engagement.

Language Change Theory

Language Change Theory, which is also closely associated with Labov (1994), explains that language naturally evolves through continuous social interaction and changing patterns of communication. In digital environments, rapid technological development accelerates lexical innovation, abbreviation, internet slang, code-switching, and hybrid linguistic forms. Consequently, the Malay language demonstrates continuous adaptation while maintaining its communicative and cultural functions within contemporary digital society.

Collectively, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for interpreting the findings of this systematic literature review. They explain how digital communication influences linguistic variation, identity construction, technological adaptation, and language evolution while highlighting the dynamic relationship between the Malay language and contemporary digital media ecosystems.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

PRISMA refers to the systematic review protocol used to identify, screen, evaluate, and select relevant studies related to Malay language usage in digital media. The PRISMA approach ensures that the review process is conducted in a structured, transparent, and reliable manner. In this study, articles were retrieved from Scopus and ERIC using the keywords “digital media” and “Malay language.” The collected articles then underwent several stages, namely identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, before the final 22 primary studies published between 2023 and 2025 were selected for analysis. Through the PRISMA framework, this study is able to systematically categorise and analyse themes related to language and digital communication, sociocultural representation, and the educational and behavioural influence of digital media.

Search Strategy

The search strategy was designed according to the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to maximise the retrieval of relevant studies. The literature search was conducted in May 2026 using Scopus and ERIC. Boolean operators (AND, OR) were applied to combine keywords related to digital media and Malay language. The search was restricted to journal articles published between 2023 and 2025 in English and Malay. Duplicate records were removed prior to screening, and only peer-reviewed empirical studies were retained.

Item	Description
Databases	Scopus, ERIC
Search Date	May 2026
Years	2023–2025

Languages	English, Malay
Article Type	Journal Article
Keywords	Digital media, Malay language, social media, online media, multimedia
Boolean Operators	AND, OR

Identification

According to the PRISMA framework, the identification stage represents the initial and most critical phase in the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) process, as it determines the breadth and relevance of the literature to be examined. In the present study, a comprehensive search strategy was conducted using two established academic databases, namely Scopus and ERIC. The search process employed the keywords “digital media” and “Malay language” to capture studies related to language usage and communication practices within digital environments. The preliminary search yielded a total of 368 records, comprising 359 publications from Scopus and 9 publications from ERIC in table 1. The substantial number of records retrieved from Scopus indicates that extensive scholarly attention were given to digital media and language-related studies across multidisciplinary fields, including linguistics, communication, media studies, and education.

The disparity in the number of records between the two databases can be justified by the differing scopes and indexing coverage of each platform. Scopus is recognized as one of the largest multidisciplinary databases, indexing a wide range of peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, and scholarly publications from diverse academic disciplines. Consequently, it generated a significantly higher number of relevant studies. In contrast, ERIC primarily focuses on educational research and pedagogical resources, which explains the smaller number of retrieved records. Nevertheless, the inclusion of ERIC remains essential to ensure that education-related perspectives concerning the Malay language in digital media contexts were not overlooked. Therefore, the integration of both databases strengthened the comprehensiveness, credibility, and methodological rigor of the identification process in this SLR study.

Table 1

Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("digital media" OR "digital content" OR "online media" OR "multimedia" OR "social media") AND ("Malay language" OR "Bahasa Melayu" OR "Malay")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , "2023") OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , "2024") OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , "2025")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English") OR LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "Malay")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE , "final")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOCI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "ARTS") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "MULT")) Date of Access: May 2026
Eric	("digital media" OR "digital content" OR "online media" OR "multimedia" OR "social media") AND ("Malay language" OR "Bahasa Melayu" OR "Malay") pubyearmin:2023 pubyearmax:2025 Date of Access: May 2026

The search string.

Although Scopus and ERIC are internationally recognised databases that provide high-quality peer-reviewed publications, the present review acknowledges that relying exclusively on these databases may have excluded relevant studies indexed in other international and regional databases. Databases such as Web of Science (WoS), Dimensions, DOAJ, MyJurnal, and Google Scholar contain additional publications related to Malay language research, particularly those published within Southeast Asian contexts. Future systematic reviews are

therefore encouraged to include a broader range of databases to ensure more comprehensive coverage and minimise publication bias.

Screening

The screening process represents the second stage of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) procedure and serves as a crucial mechanism for refining the initially identified records into a more focused and methodologically relevant body of literature. In this study, the screening stage was conducted systematically by applying several predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the quality, relevance, and academic rigor of the selected publications concerning the Malay language usage in digital media. A total of 326 records were excluded during this phase due to several considerations, including publications written in languages other than English and Malay, studies published before 2023, conference proceedings, books, review articles, and “in press” publications. Furthermore, articles outside the domains of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, and Multidisciplinary studies were omitted to maintain disciplinary consistency and ensure alignment with the objectives of the review. These exclusion criteria were strategically established to prioritize recent empirical studies and peer-reviewed scholarly works that provide substantial theoretical and practical insights into contemporary digital communication practices involving the Malay language. As a result of this rigorous filtering process, 42 publications were retained for further analysis, comprising 41 records from Scopus and one record from ERIC. The dominance of Scopus-indexed publications may be attributed to its broader multidisciplinary coverage and extensive indexing of high-impact journals related to linguistics, communication, and digital media studies, whereas ERIC primarily emphasizes educational research, thereby yielding fewer relevant studies within the specified scope. Subsequently, a duplicate screening process was conducted, and no duplicated records were identified or removed. This outcome suggests minimal overlap between the two databases and indicates that each retrieved publication contributed unique scholarly perspectives to the review. Overall, the screening process significantly strengthened the reliability and validity of the SLR by ensuring that only current, relevant, and high-quality studies were retained for the subsequent stages of analysis and synthesis in table 2.

Table 2 The selection criterion is searching

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English and Malay	Non-English
Time line	2023 – 2025	< 2023
Literature type	Journal (Article)	Conference, Book, Review
Publication Stage	Final	In Press
Subject	Social science, Art and Humanities, Multidisciplinary	Besides Social science, Art and Humanities, Multidisciplinary

Eligibility

In the third stage, referred to as the eligibility phase, a total of 42 articles were shortlisted for detailed evaluation. During this phase, the titles, abstracts, and core contents of each article were systematically examined to determine their relevance to the inclusion criteria and alignment with the objectives of the present study. This rigorous assessment was conducted to ensure that only studies with substantial relevance to Malay language usage in digital media were retained for further analysis. Consequently, 20 articles were excluded due to several factors, including being outside the scope of the study, having titles that were not sufficiently relevant, containing abstracts that did not correspond with the research objectives, and lacking accessible full-text versions necessary for empirical examination. Following this eligibility assessment, a final total of 22 articles met all required criteria and were therefore retained for the subsequent review and synthesis process.

Data Abstraction and Analysis

An integrative analysis approach was employed in this study as one of the primary assessment strategies to examine and synthesise findings derived from various qualitative research designs. The main objective of this analytical process was to identify significant themes and subthemes related to Malay language usage in digital media. The development of themes commenced during the data collection stage, where relevant information was systematically extracted from the selected studies. As illustrated in Figure 2, the researchers conducted a thorough examination of 22 selected publications to identify statements, discussions, and evidence relevant to the objectives of the present study. In addition, the researchers critically evaluated significant contemporary studies concerning Malay language usage in digital media, with particular emphasis on the methodologies employed and the findings generated by previous scholars.

Subsequently, the primary researcher collaborated closely with the co-authors to construct thematic categories grounded in the evidence gathered throughout the review process. Throughout the data analysis phase, a reflective log was maintained to document analytical interpretations, viewpoints, emerging issues, and other observations relevant to the interpretation of the data. The authors further conducted comparative analyses of the findings to identify and resolve any inconsistencies that emerged during the thematic development process. Any disagreements or differences in interpretation among the researchers were discussed collaboratively until a consensus was achieved. Finally, the identified themes were refined and adjusted to ensure conceptual consistency, coherence, and reliability throughout the analysis. The research questions developed for this study are presented as follows:

RQ1: How do Malay digital media users construct and adapt language, discourse, and communication practices across social media and online platforms?

RQ2: How does social media influence identity formation, sociocultural representation, and ideological expression among Malay communities in digital environments?

RQ3: How do digital media platforms influence educational practices, behavioural patterns, and Malay language learning among students and youths in digital environments?

Figure 2 illustrates the complete PRISMA 2020 flow diagram, demonstrating the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages used to ensure transparency and reproducibility throughout the systematic review process.

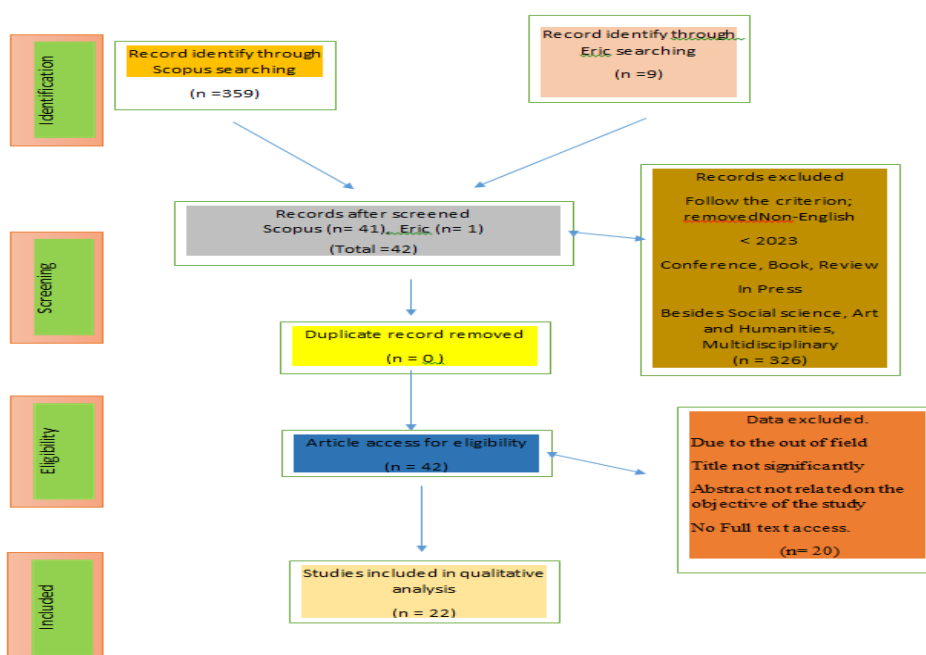


Figure 2. Flow diagram of the proposed searching study (Page et al., 2021)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion section of this systematic literature review is organised into three major themes identified from the selected studies on the Malay language usage in digital media. The first theme, Language, Discourse and Digital Communication, examines how the Malay language is adapted and utilised in online interactions, including communication styles, linguistic variations, and discourse practices across digital platforms. The second theme, Social Media, Identity and Sociocultural Representation, discusses the role of digital media in shaping identity construction, cultural expression, and sociocultural representation among the Malay language users in social networking environments. The third theme, Digital Media, Education and Behavioural Influence, focuses on the impact of digital platforms on language learning, educational practices, communication behaviour, and the influence of media exposure on users' attitudes and interactions. Together, these themes provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolving functions and significance of the Malay language within contemporary digital communication contexts.

Language, Discourse and Digital Communication

The analysis of studies under the theme of Language, Discourse and Digital Communication demonstrates that digital media has significantly transformed the patterns of the Malay language usage, communication styles, and online discourse practices in contemporary society. Several studies highlighted that social media platforms have become major spaces for linguistic creativity, interaction, and socio-discursive negotiation. Nazman, Ting, and Chuah (2023)(Nazman et al., 2023) identified the emergence of lexical innovation in Malay Twitter discourse, where users frequently employed clipping, pseudo-elliptical constructions, blending, and elongation to simplify communication and reflect spoken interaction in digital environments. Similarly, Nasir, Rahim, and How (2023) (Nasir et al., 2023) found that Malaysian English lexemes used as hashtags commonly adopted short forms, code-switching patterns, and discourse particles, demonstrating that online communication encourages hybrid linguistic structures and localized digital expressions. In another study, Irahim, Bakar, and Osman (2025) (Irahim et al., 2025) observed that congratulatory expressions among Malay Facebook users were often constructed through combinations of expressive, representative, and directive speech acts. Such findings indicate that digital interaction is not limited to information exchange but also functions as a mechanism for expressing emotions, maintaining interpersonal relationships, and reinforcing sociocultural identity. These studies collectively suggest that the Malay language digital communication is increasingly characterised by linguistic flexibility, multilingual adaptation, and evolving discourse patterns shaped by social media interaction.

Another dominant issue identified within the reviewed studies concerns the growing presence of impoliteness, abusive discourse, and hate-oriented communication in online environments. How, Abidin, and Zulkarnain (2025) (How et al., 2025) demonstrated that YouTube users frequently employed sarcasm, insults, pointed criticism, and resonance strategies to attack public figures and controversial issues related to Malaysia. The findings further revealed that users creatively manipulated spelling structures to bypass content moderation systems, which contributed to the wider circulation of hostile discourse on digital platforms. Similarly, Rofik and Osman (2024) (Rofik & Osman, 2024) reported that abusive expressions and implicature were extensively used during election seasons on Twitter and Facebook, particularly to communicate criticism and political dissatisfaction indirectly. The use of implicature enabled social media users to convey offensive meanings in more implicit forms while maintaining plausible deniability. Parallel concerns were also identified in the study by Zulkifli (2024) (Zulkifli, 2024), which revealed that social media discourse surrounding the phrase "kulit gelap" frequently portrayed dark skin negatively through stereotypical and discriminatory linguistic constructions. The discursive strategies identified in the study demonstrated how language on digital platforms can reproduce prejudice, social hierarchy, and exclusionary attitudes. These findings collectively indicate that digital communication environments have intensified the spread of impolite discourse, discrimination, and symbolic aggression, particularly when anonymity and unrestricted participation are present in online spaces.

The findings additionally demonstrate that digital media has contributed significantly to the expansion of computational linguistics, sentiment analysis, and multilingual language technology involving the Malay language resources. Mohamad Zamani, Kamaruddin, and Yusof (2025)(Mohamad Zamani et al., 2025)

developed a sentiment-based cryptocurrency corpus consisting of English and the Malay language tweets and online news data to facilitate machine learning and deep learning analysis. The study highlighted that sentiment regression approaches offer more detailed analytical capabilities compared to traditional categorical classification methods, particularly in handling noisy and imbalanced social media datasets. In a similar direction, Tan, Ong, and Leow (2025) (Tan et al., 2025) introduced a bilingual Malay-English dataset for hate speech detection consisting of 26,985 social media texts collected from multiple public sources. The study emphasized that the Malay language resources remain underrepresented in natural language processing research despite the increasing prevalence of harmful online communication. Both studies reveal that digital discourse in the Malay language contexts has expanded beyond traditional linguistic analysis into computational and technological applications. The growing availability of annotated datasets and bilingual corpora indicates the increasing relevance of the Malay language studies within artificial intelligence, automated moderation systems, and multilingual computational research. Furthermore, these developments reflect the broader transformation of digital communication into data-driven environments where language not only serves communicative functions but also becomes a resource for technological innovation and predictive analysis.

Another important pattern observed across the reviewed studies relates to the relationship between multilingualism, sociolinguistic adaptation, and identity construction in online communication. The studies consistently demonstrated that digital communication among Malay users rarely occurs in purely monolingual forms. Instead, social media discourse frequently combines the Malay language elements with English lexical items, informal abbreviations, dialect expressions, and culturally localized terms. Nasir, Rahim, and How (2023) (Nasir et al., 2023) identified code-switching variations and localized Malaysian English lexemes as dominant features in hashtag communication, suggesting that bilingual practices have become normalized within digital interaction. Similarly, Irahim, Bakar, and Osman (2025) found that congratulatory speech acts on Facebook were strongly influenced by bilingualism, multilingualism, and dialect usage, reflecting the sociolinguistic diversity of Malaysian society. Nazman, Ting, and Chuah (2023) further argued that phonological simplification and spelling modifications in Malay Twitter discourse originated from spoken conversational practices and were adapted into online writing systems. These findings suggest that digital communication platforms have accelerated the evolution of informal language practices by encouraging linguistic experimentation, speech-like textual interaction, and hybrid communication styles. The adaptation of multilingual discourse within social media environments reflects broader sociocultural realities in Malaysia, where digital users negotiate identity, social belonging, and communicative efficiency through flexible language selection and creative linguistic innovation.

Overall, the analysis of the selected studies demonstrates that the theme of Language, Discourse and Digital Communication encompasses multiple interconnected dimensions involving linguistic innovation, online interaction, impoliteness, sociocultural representation, and computational language development. The reviewed studies collectively indicate that digital media has transformed Malay language usage into a highly adaptive, hybrid, and technologically mediated form of communication. Social media platforms not only facilitate communication but also shape the production of meaning, emotional expression, political criticism, identity negotiation, and discriminatory discourse. At the same time, the increasing integration of computational approaches and multilingual datasets signifies the growing importance of Malay language resources in artificial intelligence and natural language processing research. The findings also suggest that online communication environments encourage informal language structures, abbreviated forms, and code-switching practices that differ significantly from conventional written discourse. Nevertheless, the unrestricted nature of social media communication simultaneously contributes to the spread of hate speech, abusive expressions, and symbolic discrimination. Consequently, the reviewed studies emphasize the necessity for further interdisciplinary research integrating linguistics, digital communication, computational analysis, and sociocultural studies to better understand the evolving nature of Malay language usage in digital media environments.

Despite the consistency of findings regarding code-switching and digital linguistic creativity, the reviewed studies differ considerably in their research focus and methodological approaches. Several studies concentrated on lexical innovation and hashtag usage, whereas others examined speech acts, hate speech, or computational

datasets. Consequently, the existing literature remains fragmented, making cross-study comparison difficult. Furthermore, most studies employed qualitative designs with relatively small datasets, limiting the generalisability of findings across different demographic groups and digital platforms.

These findings are consistent with Sociolinguistic Theory, which explains that language variation develops through continuous social interaction and changing communicative contexts (Labov, 1972). The widespread occurrence of code-switching, lexical innovation, hybrid discourse, and informal digital expressions demonstrates that the Malay language users continuously adapt their linguistic behaviour to suit the communicative demands of digital environments. Social media platforms encourage flexible language choices that reflect multilingual identities, online interactional norms, and evolving sociocultural practices. Therefore, the reviewed studies provide strong empirical support for the sociolinguistic perspective that language change is closely associated with social context and patterns of communication.

Social Media, Identity and Sociocultural Representation

The findings under the theme of Social Media, Identity and Sociocultural Representation demonstrate that digital media functions as an important platform for identity negotiation, socio-political participation, and cultural representation within Malay society. Several studies highlighted that social media has transformed political engagement among Malay youth, particularly first-time voters who rely heavily on digital platforms for political information and interaction. Kasmani (2023) found that first-time Malay voters actively consumed political content through Facebook and Twitter due to the perceived credibility of information shared on these platforms. Nevertheless, political participation remained relatively passive because many respondents lacked confidence and knowledge to publicly debate political issues online. Similar findings were observed in Kasmani (2024), where social media was conceptualized as an online public sphere that enabled young Malaysians to participate in political discussions through multiple digital spaces, including WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter. The study further revealed that concerns regarding digital surveillance encouraged youth to migrate political discussions into more private communication spaces such as WhatsApp groups. These findings indicate that social media has reshaped political communication among Malay youth by creating new forms of participatory engagement while simultaneously generating concerns regarding privacy, social monitoring, and political exposure. Parallel developments were also identified by Shukri (2023), who argued that online political expression in Malaysia is increasingly influenced by digital authoritarianism, particularly through state regulation of religion-related content and online discourse involving race, religion, and royalty. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that digital platforms simultaneously facilitate democratic participation and reinforce socio-political control mechanisms within Malaysian society.

Another major issue identified across the studies concerns the role of digital media in shaping religious identity, gender expression, and ideological negotiation among Malay Muslim communities. Razali, Senin, Mohammad Nasir, Ghani, and Wangsanata (2025) reported that social media platforms played a significant role in the formation of atheist identities among Malay Muslim millennials. Exposure to sceptical online communities, critical discourse, and alternative ideological content encouraged participants to question religious institutions and traditional beliefs. The findings additionally suggested that digital environments facilitated rational scepticism and intellectual exploration while simultaneously exposing users to moral policing and socio-religious criticism. Related patterns were also identified in the study by Kamaruzaman (2024), which examined gender nonconforming Malaysian Muslims on Instagram. The findings revealed that Instagram enabled users to negotiate complex intersections between the Malay identity, Islamic values, and non-normative gender expression through the adoption of “femeskulin” identity performances. Such digital practices reflected attempts to balance cultural expectations with personal self-expression within online spaces. Similar tensions between religion, authority, and social regulation were discussed by Shukri (2023), who argued that Islam has increasingly been employed as a legitimizing discourse for controlling online behaviour in Malaysia. The findings suggest that digital media has become an important arena where ideological contestation, religious authority, identity performance, and social resistance are continuously negotiated. Social media platforms therefore function not only as communication tools but also as contested sociocultural spaces where dominant norms and alternative identities interact dynamically.

The reviewed studies additionally indicate that digital media contributes significantly to the preservation, transformation, and commercialization of Malay cultural identity and heritage. Rubiyanto (2025) explained that dangdut music evolved from a local cultural expression into a globally recognized hybrid popular culture through the support of mass media, digital media, and the music industry. The findings demonstrated that dangdut integrated Malay, Indian, Arabic, and Western musical elements while maintaining strong cultural significance within Indonesian society. In another study, Effendy, Kurniawan, Arafah, and Hidayat (2025) reported that traditional ghost beliefs among the Pontianak Malay community remained deeply embedded within social life despite increasing modernization. Social media and digital communication facilitated the circulation of ghost stories and transformed these traditional beliefs into cultural commodities connected to tourism and entertainment. Nevertheless, the study emphasized that the core cultural values underlying these beliefs remained intact despite technological changes. Similar observations were presented by Frymus (2025), who examined *Berita Filem* and the role of Malay fan magazines in constructing participatory fandom and modern Malay identity during the 1960s. The findings suggested that media publications contributed to the formation of collective cultural belonging and Muslim modernity before the emergence of contemporary social media platforms. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that digital and media environments do not merely replace traditional cultural practices but instead reshape, preserve, and redistribute cultural meanings through new technological forms and participatory structures.

Another significant pattern identified within the studies concerns the role of social media in shaping transnational identity, heritage discourse, and intercultural tensions. Curaming (2023) discussed the online disputes between Indonesian and Malaysian netizens regarding the historical identity of Enrique de Malacca or Enrique de Maluku. The findings suggested that digital media intensified heritage-related debates by enabling continuous interaction, contestation, and nationalistic discourse among online communities from both countries. The study further argued that digital communication strengthened mutually reactive national identification processes, which could potentially escalate historical disputes into prolonged cultural conflicts. Similar forms of identity construction and intercultural representation were identified in the study by Rubiyanto (2025), where dangdut music was interpreted as a hybrid cultural product influenced by global and local cultural exchanges. The integration of diverse cultural elements demonstrated that Malay cultural identity in digital media environments is increasingly fluid and interconnected with transnational influences. Frymus (2025) also highlighted that media participation and celebrity culture contributed to the formation of modern Malay identity during periods of rapid social change. These findings collectively suggest that digital media has expanded the boundaries of sociocultural representation by enabling heritage negotiation, cross-cultural interaction, and transnational identity formation. At the same time, the findings indicate that digital communication may also intensify cultural competition, symbolic conflict, and identity-based polarization within online spaces.

Overall, the analysis of studies within the theme of Social Media, Identity and Sociocultural Representation indicates that digital media has fundamentally transformed the ways Malay communities negotiate identity, religion, politics, culture, and social belonging. The reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that online platforms function as dynamic sociocultural spaces where political participation, ideological resistance, cultural preservation, and identity performance occur simultaneously. Social media environments facilitate access to political information, support alternative identity formation, and enable cultural traditions to adapt within digital ecosystems. However, these platforms also introduce new challenges related to surveillance, ideological conflict, moral policing, and identity-based tensions. The findings further indicate that Malay digital communication cannot be understood solely from technological perspectives because online interaction is closely interconnected with sociocultural norms, historical narratives, religious values, and political structures. Consequently, contemporary digital media environments represent complex ecosystems where traditional cultural practices coexist with emerging forms of hybrid identity and globalized communication.

Another notable observation is that most studies investigated identity construction from sociocultural and political perspectives, whereas relatively limited attention has been given to linguistic identity development among younger users across emerging platforms such as TikTok, Threads, or Discord. This indicates an important gap that future research should address.

The findings are also consistent with Digital Communication Theory (Castells, 2010), which proposes that digital platforms function as networked communication spaces where individuals construct identities, exchange information, and participate in sociocultural interactions. The reviewed studies demonstrate that social media enables Malay users to negotiate political identities, cultural values, religious beliefs, and community participation through continuous online interaction. These findings indicate that digital communication extends beyond information sharing by facilitating identity formation, social participation, and cultural representation within interconnected digital networks.

Digital Media, Education and Behavioural Influence

The studies categorized under the theme of Digital Media, Education and Behavioural Influence demonstrate that digital technology and social media have significantly reshaped educational practices, behavioural patterns, and social interaction among Malay-speaking communities. Several studies highlighted that digital platforms are increasingly integrated into everyday educational and communication environments, particularly among youths and university students. Samsudin, Salman, Rameli, Pitchan, and Zulkifle (2024) found that social media has become one of the primary sources of information among Malaysian youths, influencing behavioural responses and patterns of online interaction. The findings indicated that factors such as social awareness, information dependency, and tabayyun significantly influenced youth behaviour on social media platforms. The concept of tabayyun, which emphasizes verification and confirmation of information, emerged as an important mechanism in evaluating the trustworthiness of online content. Similarly, Sultan, Ismail, Saad, Husain, Daud, and Alswat (2025) reported that university students spent a substantial amount of time on social media for social interaction and entertainment purposes, with WhatsApp identified as the most frequently used application among respondents. Although social media usage was not significantly associated with academic achievement, the findings suggested that digital communication had become deeply integrated into students' daily academic and social routines. Parallel developments were identified by Shahrazad, Mohd Hashim, Zailani, Hui, Ruslan, Mustafa, and Ahmad (2025), who observed that increased social media usage and online learning environments following the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to concerns regarding student well-being and social media addiction. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that digital media environments increasingly shape educational behaviour, communication practices, and psychological experiences among Malay youths and university students.

Another important issue emerging from the reviewed studies concerns the relationship between digital media usage and psychological well-being among students and young users. Shahrazad et al. (2025) found that university students with stronger problem-focused coping strategies demonstrated better well-being compared to students who experienced medical illness or higher psychological vulnerability. The study also highlighted that extensive online learning exposure and increased social media engagement following the pandemic contributed to emotional and psychological challenges among university students. Similar behavioural concerns were identified by Sultan et al. (2025), who reported that sleep deprivation was common among university students despite many respondents maintaining satisfactory academic performance. The findings indicated that prolonged social media usage and online activities potentially disrupted healthy sleeping patterns and overall well-being. However, the study simultaneously suggested that many students demonstrated resilience and effective time-management abilities despite extensive digital engagement. In another perspective, Samsudin et al. (2024) emphasized that behavioural influence on social media is strongly associated with the ability to critically evaluate online information. The incorporation of tabayyun principles into digital communication practices was considered essential in minimizing misinformation and irresponsible online behaviour. These findings collectively indicate that digital media environments generate both positive and negative behavioural consequences. While online platforms facilitate access to information and communication opportunities, excessive exposure and weak information verification practices may negatively affect emotional stability, cognitive health, and responsible digital citizenship.

The reviewed studies additionally reveal that digital technology has contributed significantly to the transformation of Malay language education and cultural learning practices. Omar, Ali, Dahlan, and Soh (2024) examined the relevance of digitized classical Malay prose within the context of the Fifth Industrial Revolution and found that digital and interactive approaches increased the acceptance of classical literary

materials among modern learners. Although classical prose was traditionally perceived as difficult and less engaging, the integration of digital delivery methods enhanced its relevance within contemporary educational settings. The findings further indicated that classical Malay literature continued to provide important moral values and ethical guidance suitable for modern youth exposed to technological and social media environments. Similar educational concerns were identified by Haidir, Silvana Sinar, Mulyadi, Setia, and Saragih (2023), who emphasized the importance of revitalizing the Panai Malay archaic vocabularies through formal and informal learning strategies. The study demonstrated that language revitalization efforts could be strengthened through educational integration, digital dictionaries, folklore publication, and dissemination through social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp. These findings suggest that digital media has expanded opportunities for preserving linguistic heritage and traditional cultural knowledge within contemporary educational systems. Digital technology therefore functions not only as a communication tool but also as a mechanism for sustaining cultural continuity and strengthening language preservation initiatives in increasingly modernized societies.

Another recurring pattern identified across the studies relates to the changing nature of learning environments and behavioural adaptation in response to technological advancement. Omar et al. (2024) argued that educational systems operating within the Fifth Industrial Revolution require more interactive, technology-driven learning approaches to maintain student engagement and relevance. The study revealed that learners exposed to digital culture and social media environments responded more positively toward educational materials that incorporated interactive and digital elements. Similarly, Haidir et al. (2023) demonstrated that formal educational institutions play an important role in preserving local language heritage by integrating traditional vocabularies and cultural knowledge into modern curricula. The findings further suggested that combining traditional knowledge with social media dissemination strategies could improve youth engagement and cultural awareness. Sultan et al. (2025) (Razali et al., 2025) also highlighted that students increasingly rely on digital communication technologies not only for academic purposes but also for leadership activities, networking, and social interaction. These developments indicate that educational environments are progressively influenced by digital communication ecosystems that shape learning behaviour, interpersonal interaction, and knowledge acquisition processes. Consequently, digital literacy, information evaluation skills, and adaptive learning strategies have become increasingly important within contemporary educational systems.

Overall, the analysis of studies within the theme of Digital Media, Education and Behavioural Influence demonstrates that digital media environments have profoundly transformed educational practices, behavioural patterns, and language learning processes among Malay-speaking communities. The reviewed studies consistently indicate that social media and digital technologies influence information consumption, communication behaviour, emotional well-being, and educational engagement among youths and university students. While digital platforms provide greater accessibility to information, collaborative learning, and cultural preservation initiatives, excessive exposure to online environments may also contribute to psychological stress, sleep deprivation, and behavioural dependency. The studies further reveal that educational institutions increasingly integrate digital approaches to preserve traditional Malay literature, local vocabularies, and cultural heritage in response to technological modernization. At the same time, the concept of responsible digital engagement, particularly through information verification practices such as *tabayyun*, emerges as an essential component in promoting ethical communication and reducing misinformation. Overall, the findings suggest that digital media should not be viewed solely as technological tools but as influential sociocultural environments that shape behavioural adaptation, educational transformation, and language sustainability within contemporary Malay society.

Although digital media is consistently reported to support language learning and educational engagement, the reviewed studies provide limited empirical evidence regarding its long-term effects on Malay language proficiency and literacy development. Most studies relied on cross-sectional data, suggesting the need for longitudinal investigations.

Furthermore, these findings support Language Change Theory (Labov, 1994), which argues that language continuously evolves in response to social interaction and changing communication practices. The increasing integration of digital technologies into education has encouraged new forms of language learning, digital

literacy, and online communication that contribute to the ongoing evolution of Malay language use. Consequently, digital media not only facilitates educational innovation but also accelerates linguistic adaptation, technological integration, and the development of new communication practices among Malay-speaking communities.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review examined the usage of the Malay language in digital media by synthesising recent scholarly studies published between 2023 and 2025. The review was conducted using the PRISMA protocol and involved the analysis of 22 primary studies retrieved from the Scopus and ERIC databases. The study focused on understanding how Malay language practices are constructed, adapted, and represented within contemporary digital environments, particularly across social media platforms, online communication spaces, and digital educational contexts. The review also aimed to identify the influence of digital media on sociocultural representation, identity formation, communication behaviour, and language learning among Malay-speaking communities. The findings of this review revealed that the Malay language usage in digital media is highly dynamic, adaptive, and closely connected with technological and sociocultural transformation. Three major themes emerged consistently across the selected studies, namely Language, Discourse and Digital Communication; Social Media, Identity and Sociocultural Representation; and Digital Media, Education and Behavioural Influence. The review demonstrated that digital communication environments encourage linguistic innovation through code-switching, abbreviations, hybrid discourse, and localized expressions. Social media platforms were also found to function as important spaces for political participation, identity negotiation, religious discourse, and cultural representation among Malay communities. In addition, digital media increasingly influences educational practices, behavioural adaptation, and language preservation efforts through online learning systems, interactive communication, and digital dissemination of cultural knowledge. These findings collectively indicate that digital media has become an influential ecosystem that shapes both the practical and symbolic functions of the Malay language in modern society.

This review contributes to the field by consolidating fragmented discussions on the Malay language usage across multiple academic disciplines, including linguistics, communication studies, education, sociocultural studies, and digital media research. The synthesis of findings provides a broader understanding of how digital technology transforms language practices, online interaction, and sociocultural communication among Malay-speaking users. Furthermore, the review offers a structured thematic categorisation that highlights the interconnected relationship between digital discourse, identity formation, educational influence, and computational language development. The review also extends current knowledge by emphasizing that Malay digital communication should not be viewed solely from linguistic perspectives, but rather as a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by social, cultural, political, and technological factors. The findings additionally provide several practical implications for educators, policymakers, researchers, and digital communication practitioners. The increasing integration of digital media into language usage and educational environments suggests the need for stronger digital literacy practices, responsible online communication, and critical information evaluation skills among users. Educational institutions may benefit from integrating digital approaches into Malay language learning and cultural preservation initiatives to ensure the continued relevance of traditional knowledge within modern technological environments. The findings also indicate the importance of developing more Malay language resources in computational linguistics, artificial intelligence, and automated content moderation systems to address issues such as misinformation, hate speech, and harmful online discourse. In broader sociocultural contexts, the review highlights the need to balance linguistic modernization with the preservation of the Malay cultural identity and language sustainability in increasingly globalized digital spaces.

Nevertheless, several limitations were identified throughout the review process. The study was limited to publications indexed in Scopus and ERIC, which may have excluded relevant studies from other academic databases or regional publications. The review also focused only on studies published between 2023 and 2025 and included articles written in English and the Malay language, which may restrict the comprehensiveness of earlier or multilingual research perspectives. Another limitation concerns the possibility of publication bias, since unpublished studies, conference papers, dissertations, and other forms of grey literature were excluded

from the review. Consequently, some emerging evidence regarding the Malay language use in the digital environments may not have been captured. Furthermore, many of the reviewed studies focused on specific digital platforms, communities, or population groups, limiting the generalisability of the findings across different demographic, cultural, and technological contexts. These limitations should therefore be considered when interpreting the findings, and future systematic reviews are encouraged to incorporate a wider range of databases, publication types, and longitudinal evidence to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Malay language use in rapidly evolving digital environments.

In addition, most reviewed studies concentrated on specific digital platforms, communities, or limited population groups, thereby reducing broader generalisation across different demographic and regional contexts. Future research should therefore expand the scope of databases, include longitudinal investigations, and examine emerging digital platforms, artificial intelligence technologies, and cross-cultural communication patterns involving the Malay language. Further studies are also recommended to explore the long-term linguistic impact of digital communication on language structure, cultural identity, and intergenerational communication practices. In conclusion, this systematic literature review demonstrates that digital media has significantly transformed the usage, representation, and development of the Malay language within contemporary society. The review confirms that online communication environments simultaneously support linguistic creativity, cultural preservation, identity negotiation, and educational innovation while also introducing challenges related to misinformation, digital dependency, and harmful discourse practices. Overall, systematic literature reviews remain highly important in advancing evidence-based understanding within digital language research because they provide comprehensive synthesis, identify emerging trends, and establish stronger theoretical foundations for future empirical investigation. The present review therefore contributes meaningful insights into the evolving relationship between the Malay language and digital media while strengthening future directions for interdisciplinary research in this expanding field of study.

Overall, this review extends current understanding by integrating findings from linguistics, communication, education, and sociocultural studies into a single conceptual framework. Beyond summarising previous research, the review identifies existing knowledge gaps, highlights methodological limitations, and provides clear directions for future investigations concerning Malay language development within rapidly evolving digital ecosystems. The findings of this review also provide valuable evidence for policymakers, educators, and digital communication practitioners in developing strategies to strengthen the sustainability, relevance, and competitiveness of the Malay language within rapidly evolving digital ecosystems.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to report regarding the present study

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