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Discourses of Aging in a Malaysian Online Newspaper: Shaping of the Perceptions of Society

Shalini Selvaraj¹, & Shanti C. Sandaran¹

1) *University of Technology*, Malaysia

Abstract

Media representations of aging and older adults is an influential platform for shaping public discourse about aging related matters. Previous research has highlighted that the media's depictions of older adults are often limited and biased. Such representations significantly influence society's perceptions of the aging population. With population aging being currently a global social concern, such negative representations raise critical questions about media's portrayal of aging related matters. Taking on the view that aging is a socially constructed phenomenon, we undertake a Discourse Analysis of 83 online news reports on aging from May 2022 to May 2023, from Malaysia's high readership online newspaper, *The Star*. The results unveil several dominant discourses associated with aging, such as discourse of implications, positive aging and negative aging. The study provides valuable insights into the language used and the portrayal of aging populations in newspapers which play a vital role in shaping societal perceptions of aging, which can be either favourable or detrimental for the aging population's self-worth and dignity. We advocate for more positive portrayals using inclusive language that is crucial for developing a cultural mindset that appreciates and honours the dignity of older members of society.

Keywords

Aging, online newspaper, media framing, contextual, discourse analysis (DA), Malaysia

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Corresponding author(s): Shanti Chandran Sandaran & Shalini Selvaraj

Contact address: shanti@utm.my & shaliniselvaraj90@gmail.com

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Discursos Sobre El Envejecimiento En Un Periódico En Línea Malayo: Moldeando Las Percepciones De La Sociedad

Shalini Selvaraj¹, Shanti C.Sandaran¹

1) *Universidad de Tecnología, Malasia*

Resumen

Las representaciones mediáticas del envejecimiento y de los adultos mayores influyen en el discurso público sobre temas relacionados con el envejecimiento. Investigaciones anteriores han destacado que estas representaciones suelen ser limitadas y sesgadas, influyendo significativamente en las percepciones sociales sobre la población envejecida. Con el envejecimiento poblacional siendo una preocupación global, estas representaciones negativas plantean preguntas críticas sobre su tratamiento mediático. Adoptando la perspectiva de que el envejecimiento es un fenómeno socialmente construido, realizamos un Análisis del Discurso de 83 informes de noticias en línea sobre el envejecimiento, desde mayo de 2022 hasta mayo de 2023, del periódico de alta lectura de Malasia, *The Star*. Los resultados revelan varios discursos dominantes asociados con el envejecimiento, como las implicaciones, el envejecimiento positivo y negativo. El estudio proporciona ideas valiosas sobre el lenguaje y la representación de las poblaciones envejecidas en los periódicos, que juegan un papel vital en formar percepciones sociales, pudiendo ser favorables o perjudiciales para la autoestima y dignidad de la población envejecida. Abogamos por representaciones más positivas y un lenguaje inclusivo crucial para desarrollar una mentalidad cultural que aprecie y honre la dignidad de los mayores en la sociedad.

Palabras clave

Envejecimiento, periódico en línea, encuadre de los medios, contexto, análisis del discurso (AD), Malasia

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Correspondencia Autores(s): Shanti Chandran Sandaran & Shalini Selvaraj

Dirección de contacto: shanti@utm.my & shaliniselvaraj90@gmail.com

Aging is a global phenomenon characterized by a demographic shift towards an older population (World Health Organization, 2022). Baby boomers, as the largest aging demographic, are now entering retirement in significant numbers (Slagsvold & Hansen, 2021; Kim & Waldorf, 2019). By 2030, the global population will include 1.4 billion individuals aged 60 and older, representing one in six people worldwide. By 2050, this number is projected to double, reaching 2.1 billion people in this age group (World Health Organization, 2022). Based on the United Nations (UN) definition of aging, Malaysia too has been classified as an aging country, with the elderly population aged 65 and above reached 7.3 % in 2022 (Azuar, 2022). A country is generally considered to be aging when 7% or more of its population is 65 years or older (World Bank Group, 2019). The accelerated growth of Malaysia's aging population is attributed to improved living standards, enhanced healthcare, and declining fertility rates (Azuar, 2022). Due to this trend in the rise of the aging population, Malaysia has engaged in discussions on this topic for the past five years, especially through extensive research initiatives, which primarily revolve around key dimensions, including health, economy, social aspects and technology (Ahmad et al., 2022). Consequently, in the past few years, there has also been a notable surge in the pursuit of knowledge about aging, with the aim of revealing the realities, information and complexities associated with the aging population (Ahmad et al., 2022; Mansor et al., 2022). With Malaysia reaching the status of an aging society (Azuar, 2022), there is, therefore, a real need to understand this phenomenon, which the current study addresses.

Aging is a phenomenon that is socially constructed. This signifies that aging extends beyond a mere biological process that highlights physical changes. Aging is not solely dictated by biology but is also significantly impacted by a multitude of factors, including individual experiences, societal expectations, cultural beliefs and historical elements, among others (Chagas et al., 2023; Saxena, 2016). These factors contribute to different social constructions of age and aging which become part of the shared beliefs of society. For instance, when old age is viewed based on biological factors, the focus is mainly on the age factor of aged 65 and above. However, when it is perceived based on societal expectations, there is greater emphasis on conformity to certain behaviors and specific roles (Saxena, 2016). Therefore, societal understanding of aging is largely constructed by such diverse influences (Imran, 2023). The socially constructed nature of aging becomes reality and in turn, the meanings and representations of aging have an impact on the status of older adults in society and their transition into later life (Gilleard, 2023). Social constructionists thus, view language, culture and social process as the means for forming constructions and understandings of the world or reality (Burr, 1995). Social construction is specifically significant in the discussion of discourse and ageism (Phelan, 2018). According to Parker (1992), discourse is a collection of interpretations and narratives that serve the purpose of constructing or shaping an object. Discourse creates shared knowledge and stimulates ways of seeing the world. And ageism is known as the social construction of old age that depicts the older population and aging mostly in a negative stereotypical manner (Phelan, 2018).

One means for the social construction of reality or meaning is through media discourse. Media discourse significantly contributes to the social construction of aging through its representations of older adults and aging via its news reports. Media discourse can construct

positive, negative or neutral representations of aging, old age and older adults, with each yielding distinct outcomes (Bernhold, 2021). The language used in media narratives is in fact discourses, and they play a crucial role in shaping societal perceptions about aging and perpetuating the social construction of aging (Amaral et al., 2019). Moreover, media depictions incorporate cultural values, social norms and role expectations, thereby influencing how society perceives and understands the aging process (Wangler and Jansky, 2023; Arias, 2019). In this digital era, online platforms have become increasingly important for disseminating information and knowledge on various issues (Alzubi, 2022). Online newspapers are crucial media channels for promoting knowledge about aging, influencing public opinion and constructing worldviews (Sm-Rahman et al., 2021).

Generally, newspapers mediate the social production of aging knowledge through expert commentary and analysis (Phelan, 2018). However, newspapers can influence the readers' minds by using certain presentation strategies of information and framing of issues in their news articles to construct opinions and discourses (Mohamed et al., 2020). As Imran (2021) states, by selecting what information to present and how to present it, newspapers can influence public opinion and discourse. Dezhkameh et al. (2021) explain that there is a tendency for newspapers to promote their personal ideologies while discrediting those that diverge from their perspective. This helps newspapers to gain some benefits in terms of financial gain, greater readership and advancement of their political or social agendas (Imran, 2021). This can result in biased reporting over the promotion of a specific agenda (Dezhkameh et al., 2021). Hassan (2018) points out that neither ideology nor power relations are explicitly stated in media messages, but that these aspects remain as hidden social agendas that make individuals more susceptible to manipulation and exploitation, which means that media texts and discourses are more than informational, they also play a crucial role in constructing knowledge about particular subjects or issues (Hassan, 2018).

According to the Centre for Ageing Better (2021), the coverage of news concerning older individuals and the aging process tends to be predominantly framed in a negative light, with news articles often carrying a tone of negativity and pessimism. The media tends to use dismissive and discriminatory language to depict aging, such as describing it as a disease, a disaster or a decline in value. For example, the metaphor '*Silver Tsunami*' is frequently used to refer to the aging of the baby boomer generation as a deadly natural disaster (Sloane, 2023). Thus, the content of newspapers can reinforce and perpetuate stereotypes about older people through their language and images (Chen, 2015). Wangler and Jansky (2023) highlight that negative depictions of aging in the media not only reinforce stereotypes about older individuals but also contribute to a decline in society's perceptions of old age. Paradoxically though, such portrayals may also improve older individuals' self-image as they distance themselves from these negative stereotypes. On the other hand, a portrayal of aging that exclusively highlights the positive aspects of later life may enhance the public image of old age. However, this often fosters a sense of inadequacy among older adults who feel they cannot meet these idealized standards, thereby affecting their self-image. Newspapers in sum, play a significant role in shaping public opinion on aging (Amundsen, 2022; Ng et al., 2021; Swift & Steeden, 2020; Lustañas, 2019).

Given these considerations, this study adopts discourse analysis to examine the portrayal of aging in a Malaysian online newspaper. In this study, discourse analysis entails examining the language used in the context of aging within online newspapers, focusing on keywords, themes phrases, and sentences that collectively convey the underlying discourse. This discursive analysis of texts reveals how discourse is constructed and provides insights into how and why language about this topic is framed in specific ways. The analysis of discourse used in newspapers also uncovers the embedded cultural, social, economic and political perspectives, elucidating how these perspectives shape and are shaped by the language employed. Our study builds upon the foundation laid by previous research conducted by Imran (2021; 2023) and David and Alagappar (2013) within the context of Malaysia on the portrayal of older adults and aging in newspapers. However, there remains a shortage of studies investigating the contemporary aging related discourses in the context of online newspapers in Malaysia. By analyzing the language used in news reports, this study aims to uncover the discourses related to aging in a Malaysian online newspaper. With discourse and social constructionism as the central tenets of our study, of our study, we answer the following research question:

- What are the aging related discourses employed by Malaysian Online Newspapers that focus on cultural, social, economic and political perspectives?

Studies on Representations of Aging in Newspapers

Research on representations of aging in the media in various countries has shed light on the role of language in shaping perceptions of societies. Rovelli (2021) found that the portrayal of old age in UK-based newspapers between 1989 and 2018, revealed a positive evolution over time, with a shift from negative terms such as *'elderly'*, *'old'* and *'aged'* to more neutral or euphemistic terms such as *'older'* and *'senior'*. This change in language use suggests a potential impact on societal attitudes towards aging. This may be due to the evolution of cultural values and awareness over time. In contrast, Ishikawa's (2020) study on the baby boomer population in Japan and Finland showed that while the Japanese media honor active boomers as a social resource, the Finnish media often portrayed them in a negative light. While both countries recognized aging as a population dilemma, but the Finnish media displayed a more alarming tone. The study suggested that Japanese and Finnish baby boomers were portrayed in contrasting ways as examples of dual cultural representations of old age. Ng's (2021) study on various sources, including spoken/TV, fiction, magazines and newspapers examined ageism in the US and UK, which revealed a troubling prevalence of negative age stereotypes, surpassing positive ones by a factor of six. Negative stereotypes predominantly revolved around physical attributes (e.g., frailty), contrasting with positive stereotypes that focused on behavioral aspects (e.g., caring). Notably, magazines exhibited the highest levels of ageism, with the spoken genre (TV and radio talk shows) following closely. The study concluded that ageism is expressed across diverse media genres.

Other studies such as Lustañas (2019), on the Filipino context, revealed dual representations, depicting older adults as both active agents and passive victims. Negative

stereotypes, such as physical and mental weakness, vulnerability, dependence and poverty, were prevalent, thus drawing on ageism in the depiction of older adults. Although culturally Filipinos hold high respect for the elderly, the study however, pointed out that ageist assumptions are prevalent in the news discourse and contribute to the marginalization of its senior citizens. Ageist ideologies and cultural norms may in this way, be in conflict as a result. Imran (2021) compared the portrayal of aging in Malaysian and Australian media. He found that, within the Australian context, there is more focus on financial matters associated with aged care, while older adults are portrayed as both a burden on the economy and healthcare system. A similar narrative was also evident in the Malaysian context as social and economic problems related to aging is the main focus and older adults are presented as dependent, vulnerable and in need of care. The study highlighted that the portrayal of aging in Malaysian newspapers may reflect societal concerns, economic challenges and cultural perspectives on aging such as familial piety. On the other hand, the dominant discourse in Australian media revolves around economic rationalism. Imran and Budarick (2023) explain that older adults in Malaysia are constructed as respectful family heads due to their wisdom and experience based on established norms. However, they are also negatively portrayed as ‘*victims*’, ‘*burdens*’, ‘*frail*’ and ‘*abandoned*’, which impacts their social image and standing. The discussion so far shows that studies from the past five years on newspaper constructions of aging have demonstrated the prevalence of ageism and negative stereotypes. These findings underscore the motivation of the current study for examining portrayals of older adults in a Malaysian online newspaper. To this end, this study aims to examine more current portrayals of aging in Malaysian online newspapers to gain a deeper understanding of how news media perceives and represents aging related matters.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse Analysis (DA), functioning as both a theoretical framework and a methodological approach (Scharp & Thomas, 2017), is integral to the study of mass media, encompassing television, radio, newspapers, social media and other relevant platforms. Discourse refers to communication, language in use, language practices and the cultural ideologies expressed through language (Scharp & Thomas, 2017). Therefore, discourse analysis involves analysing written or spoken language, including communication, language in use, institutionalized forms of talk and more (Scharp & Thomas, 2017; Kamalu & Osisanwo, 2015) to identify implicit and explicit meanings within them (Normaliza, 2018). In this study, this study posits that discourse analysis not only examines the formal properties of language but also explores how language is used within social and cultural contexts (Kamalu & Osisanwo, 2015). This includes analysing the language used across various media platforms, which is known as media discourse. The analysis involves interpreting language and meanings within media messages by examining words, phrases and context. The purpose is to understand the implicit beliefs and values conveyed and how they influence individuals’ perceptions and attitudes (Farkhodovna, 2023). As highlighted by Mammadov and Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2022), media discourses encompass not only linguistic elements but also political, social and cultural

perspectives. In this sense, analysing the language of media provides a deeper insight into its character as a social and cultural phenomenon.

The current study focuses on news discourse, a pivotal component within the broader spectrum of media discourses. Drid (2019) explains that, news discourse serves as a means of communicating raw information in a manner that adheres to conventional standards across various media platforms. News discourse analysis, therefore, involves examining the language used in news reports, encompassing elements, namely headlines, articles, images, editorials and more. Since the 1990s, online news discourse has permeated the media landscape, manifesting in various forms such as news websites, news blogs, Twitter news, YouTube news videos and more (Drid, 2019). Taking on such views, we examine online news discourse related to aging, specifically looking at reports in a high readership news website. According to Yu and Zheng (2022), news report is regarded as a form of public discourse, employing political positions and ideologies that can shape the opinions of their readers. In addition, when news is framed through the lens of the author's and the country's ideology, facts may be distorted with the intent to shape readers' attitudes toward specific social events. Using discourse analysis, this study aims to explore aging-related discourses and uncover the cultural, social, and political perspectives embedded in discussions of aging within a Malaysian online newspaper.

Methodology

Data Collection

The data was gathered from one prominent English online newspaper in Malaysia, *The Star* ([The Star Online](#)). This online newspaper dominates the English segment with the highest readership (Xian, 2022). *The Star* offers comprehensive coverage across various sections, including news, business, metro, sport, lifestyle, food, technology, education and opinion. This study emphasizes the news from the sections of national news, business and metro for its relevance and suitability. Articles on aging or the aging population in *The Star* are authored by a diverse group of journalists and writers. *The Star* may also occasionally incorporate referenced studies and expert opinions into its articles to provide scientific evidence on aging ([The Star Online](#)). The data for the study was manually searched and retrieved from the online archives database using systematic and purposive sampling. A total of 83 hard news reports discussing aging in Malaysia from the one year of May 2022 to May 2023 were extracted by employing the keywords 'aging population', 'older adults' and 'elderly', to provide us with the latest insights on aging as represented in online news. The keywords 'aging population', 'older adults' and 'elderly' collectively cover a broad range of terms related to aging. This one-year period allows for a comprehensive account of the most up-to-date framings and discourses surrounding aging in the online newspaper. Furthermore, this one-year period provides more news on aging without the interference of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data Analysis

This qualitative study employs both framing analysis and contextual analysis to uncover and discuss aging-related discourses within online news articles. The framing analysis emphasizes how aging is presented and interpreted through recurring linguistic elements such as word choice, metaphors, catchphrases, and depictions. Using an inductive approach, key aging-related terms and concepts are identified through a detailed examination of the texts themselves. These emergent categories focus on how online newspapers frame the topic of aging, revealing recurring patterns in the portrayal and aging related discourses in Malaysian online newspaper. The table below illustrates the findings of framing analysis, highlighting common aging-related terms such as ‘*super-aged nation*’, ‘*aged nation*’, ‘*aged society*’, ‘*greying society*’ and ‘*old state*’. These terms are characterized by their use of adjectival nouns, framing aging as a significant demographic trend. They underscore a notable shift in age distribution within the population, constructing a discourse that emphasizes the urgency of addressing the implications of an aging society.

Table 1

Framing and Discourses

| Aging Related Terms | Textual Strategy | Framing | Discourse |
|---|-------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| <i>‘super-aged nation’, ‘aged nation’, ‘aged society’, ‘greying society’, ‘old state’</i> | Adjectival Nouns | Aging as a Demographic Trend | These terms emphasize the significant shift in age distribution, creating a sense of urgency to address the implications of aging. |

By combining framing and discourse, this study reveals how specific textual elements and discursive strategies (framing) shape broader narratives (discourses) on aging. Concurrently, the contextual analysis examines the cultural, social and political factors shaping the discourses on aging. It investigates how the language used in the articles reflects or challenges prevailing cultural norms, social attitudes and political ideologies. Grounded in an inductive approach to categorization, this study aims to comprehensively understand how aging is portrayed in online newspapers in Malaysia. It provides insights into both the textual elements and the contextual factors that shape these portrayals.

Findings

Aging Discourses

This study examines aging in news reports from *The Star*. A total of 10 framings of aging and 3 distinct discourses were identified from a collection of 83 news reports, which are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Framing Aging as a Demographic Trend

The news sources use adjective nouns such as ‘*super-aged nation*’, ‘*aged nation*’, ‘*aged society*’, ‘*greying society*’ and ‘*old state*’ to depict the current demographic trend in Malaysia. These noun adjectives highlight the important qualities of a subject, such as Malaysia’s characteristic as an aging country. The demographic trend is a phenomenon of significant change in the age distribution of a society. Furthermore, these terms create a sense of urgency for addressing the implications of aging along with the mention of percentages and time frames. These terms contextualize a demographic trend for various discussions such as societal challenges, healthcare needs and policy considerations. Therefore, the framing of aging in this context is tied to a discourse that explores the implications of the demographic trend. In other words, the framing of aging as a demographic trend draws on the *discourse of implications* because it goes beyond rather than merely describing the surface-level patterns of age distribution. In this context, the framing with strategic discursive elements tends to portray aging not merely as a statistical change in population demographics, but rather as carrying implications intertwined with the population.

- 14% of the population was expected to be aged above by 2044, with this age group expected to exceed 20% of the population by 2056, giving it the status of a super-aged nation (*The Star*, January 28, 2023).
- Malaysia has to address the needs of a greying society sooner rather than later (*The Star*, October 03, 2022).
- The state government takes this issue seriously and is preparing to face the challenges of an ‘old state’ by 2040 (*The Star*, May 18, 2023).

The news sources also employ the noun phrase ‘*life expectancy*’, which serves as a fundamental indicator of this demographic change. The term ‘*life expectancy*’ emphasizes the quantitative aspect of aging by looking at the average number of years people are likely to live. Furthermore, the news sources use adjectives such as ‘*longer*’ and ‘*continuous*’, along with nouns such as ‘*rise*’ and ‘*increase*’ to describe the rising average lifespan signifying a demographic shift towards an older population. The choice of adjectives and nouns, such as ‘*longer*’, ‘*continuous*’, ‘*rise*’ and ‘*increase*’, implies consequences and changes associated with a growing average lifespan. Mostly, aging is framed neutrally presenting the fact that life expectancy has increased, as well as the reasons for the increase. Aging is also positively framed, emphasizing the potential benefits of longer life expectancy such as longer career journey. Phrasing demographic trends in terms of longer life expectancy provides a forward-looking perspective. In this context, the framing of aging draws on the *discourse of implications* by emphasizing the quantitative aspect of aging, exploring the outcomes of an increasing average lifespan, adopting a forward-looking approach and taking into account societal preparedness.

- Continuous rise in life expectancy indicates Malaysia would experience an ageing population by 2030 (*The Star*, July 11, 2022).
- It would also enable the working age population to prepare mentally and plan for a slightly longer career amidst longer life expectancy (*The Star*, April 30, 2023).
- A country will normally experience an increase in life expectancy due to better healthcare services and living standards, as well as a decline in the fertility rate (*The Star*, October 8, 2022).

Framing Aging as Health Challenges

Aging is framed as health challenges, which refer to physical, mental and cognitive health difficulties that individuals may face as they grow older. These difficulties may affect the quality of life and well-being of older adults. Adjective nouns such as ‘*physical and mental health challenges*’ and ‘*medical conditions*’ are used in conjunction with descriptive nouns such as ‘*disabilities*’ and ‘*illness*’ as well as the noun ‘*health issues*’. These terms not only underscore the unavoidable health challenges associated with the aging process but also shed light on the diverse array of difficulties that individuals may confront as they grow older. These health challenges are seen as tangible impacts of the aging process. The onset of medical conditions during the aging process is considered a natural and inherent aspect. In this context, the framing of aging draws on the *discourse of implications* by discussing the consequences and considerations associated with aging-related health problems.

- As people age, they may face physical and mental health challenges that make it difficult to continue working (*The Star*, April 30, 2023).
- Among the reasons why public servants do not want to retire later is due to health issues that come with age (*The Star*, April 30, 2023).
- Many suffer from health issues, disabilities and mental illness but they are born as people so we take care of them as people (*The Star*, April 05, 2023).

Framing Aging as Retirement and Financial Challenge

Aging is framed as a retirement and financial challenge. Retirement is a significant life stage where individuals withdraw from the workforce after reaching a certain late age. However, the usage of the phrases such as ‘*not have sufficient funds/savings*’ and ‘*insufficient retirement saving*’ indicate the economic reality and challenge of post-retirement life. Furthermore, the term ‘*poverty*’ reflects the potential financial hardships experienced by the aging population. These key terms are linked to economic well-being and possible vulnerabilities that older individuals might encounter in their retirement years. Framing aging as a retirement and financial challenge draws on the *discourse of implications* by highlighting the consequences of inadequate savings and the potential challenges faced by the aging population in meeting their financial needs.

- Most retirees do not have sufficient funds to cover their retirement years (*The Star*, April 30, 2023).
- There is an increasing concern that ageing people may not have the sufficient resources to meet their needs in the later part of their lives (*The Star*, October 29, 2022).
- The ageing population are also at higher risk of falling into poverty (*The Star*, October 8, 2022).

Framing Aging as a Period of Vulnerability

The news sources employ the noun phrase ‘*vulnerable population*’ to portray aging as a period of vulnerability. Aging people are expected to become more vulnerable due to health factors. Furthermore, the phrase ‘*seniors have no one to turn to for companionship and daily support*’ underscores the social aspect of vulnerability. It implies that aging individuals may lack the necessary support systems, leading to increased vulnerability in terms of companionship and daily assistance. The framing emphasizes the multifaceted nature of vulnerability associated with aging, incorporating both health and social factors. This draws on the *discourse of implications* and stresses the vulnerability of older adults as a group and the potential consequences and impact of aging on individuals and society.

- He stressed that due to the expected increase in the vulnerable population, an all-of-society approach was needed to prevent the spread of flu (*The Star*, September 08, 2022).
- With their grown-up children having settled in different states or busy with other commitments, many seniors have no one to turn to for companionship and daily support (*The Star*, July 31, 2022).

Framing Aging as a Market Potential

Aging is framed as a market potential that refers to the potential business opportunities associated with the aging population. The terms ‘*silver-haired economy*’, ‘*silver-friendly economy*’ and ‘*silver-haired generation*’ indicate that the aging population has the potential to emerge as the most significant consumer demographic in the market. The selection of terminology positively aligns with the aging population and its potential economic contributions. The framing emphasizes the aging population not only as a demographic shift but as a significant market segment with economic potential. Besides, the framing of aging incorporates aspects of the aging population as an economic asset, all the while recognizing challenges linked to this demographic transition. This framing draws on the *discourse of implications* by highlighting the economic opportunities, positive terminology and potential contributions of the aging population to the market and economy.

- The silver-haired economy can be a boon to our country. There are huge opportunities on the horizon if we act now to create a better tomorrow (*The Star*, April 29, 2023).

- The nation is in critical need for occupational therapists, especially in the ageing population sector. Mental health care providers for the silver haired generation, he added, are also in short supply (*The Star*, Jun 26, 2022).

Framing Aging as the Golden Years

Aging is depicted as the golden years from an optimistic perspective, as the concept of the ‘golden years’ emphasizes the often-overlooked positive aspects of growing older within society. The use of the term ‘golden years’ is a metaphorical representation that highlights older adults’ positive experiences such as fulfilment, financial stability and well-being associated with the later stages of life (*enjoyed to the fullest*). ‘Golden years’ also reflects a rhetorical strategy aimed at framing discussions about aging in a positive light. It inherently carries positive connotations, constructing the *discourse of positive aging* that focuses on aging as something to look forward to.

- After all, working for a longer period could mean more money for our golden years and ease the sharp cost of living these days (*The Star*, April 30, 2023).
- Retirement is usually envisioned as a time when those in their golden years can sit back and reap the rewards of their decades of hard work (*The Star*, Jan 28, 2023).

Framing Aging as Empowering

The new sources employ positive adjectives such as ‘empowered’, ‘healthy’, ‘independent’, ‘productive’ as well as positive nouns such as ‘confidence’ to portray aging in an empowering light. The terms such as ‘empowered’ and ‘independent’ underscore the significance of maintaining autonomy at a later age. The emphasis on ‘stay healthy and have a productive life’ implies a commitment to overall well-being, showcasing the ongoing capability of older individuals to stay active in their lives and make meaningful contributions to society. This choice of language aligns with the *discourse of positive aging* by emphasizing the positive attributes and capabilities of older individuals.

- Early intervention was an important aspect in getting the Sarawak population to stay healthy and have a productive life when they aged. Sarawak also wanted its senior citizens to be as independent as possible (*The Star*, August 1, 2022).
- I hope more people will join in efforts to prepare our elderly to become a population with confidence and not feel left out (*The Star*, September 30, 2022).
- Senior citizens need to be empowered and enabled through increased involvement in civic and economic activities (*The Star*, August 22, 2022).

Framing Aging as A Period of Autonomy

In the context of the workforce, aging is framed as a period of autonomy. The choice of older adults to continue or retire is portrayed as a personal choice through phrases such as ‘*should they choose to do so*’ and ‘*who should work and how long they should work should be left to*

the individual'. This framing foregrounds the individual's autonomy in deciding whether to continue working or to retire. This framing draws on a *discourse of positive aging*, underscoring the importance of personal agency. This gives agency to the seniors as having the freedom and control to make decisions about their own lives, including their employment choices as they age, aligns with the positive aging discourse, which emphasizes empowerment, independence and personal agency for seniors.

- Questions of who should work and how long they should work should be left to the individual and the market (*The Star*, April 30, 2023).
- Workers should be allowed to work up to the age of 65 should they choose to do so (*The Star*, April 09, 2023).

Framing Aging as Disempowering

The news sources employ negative adjectives such as '*dependent*' and '*unproductive*' to frame aging in a disempowering light, aligning with societal assumptions. These adjectives perpetuate stereotypes and negative perceptions associated with aging. Additionally, phrases such as '*their days are numbered*', '*do not contribute much to the economy*' and '*drain on limited resources for welfare*' are generalized assumptions about the aging population. This framing fails to acknowledge the reality that many older individuals maintain their independence and actively contribute to their families and communities. The framing of aging in this context employs language and assumptions that align with ageism, as it perpetuates negative stereotypes and contributes to a disempowering narrative about older individuals. In this way, this framing draws on a discourse of negative aging.

- There is more likely to be passive, disappointed acceptance and the possibility of older people being unproductive and disengaged in their work (*The Star*, April 30, 2023).
- A nation with a high number of older people who are dependent and cannot contribute will cost us (*The Star*, Jun 26, 2023).
- After all, for the elderly their days are numbered. They do not contribute much to the economy and in fact are seen as a drain on limited resources for welfare (*The Star*, April 12, 2023).

Framing Aging as a Burden

Aging is framed as a burden for families ('*rely on the younger generation for support*', *burden on the younger generation*) and society and nation ('*health and economic burden*'), which highlights the challenges and negative aspects ascribed to the aging population. Factors such as prevalent health issues, financial constraints and caregiving are commonly associated with the portrayal of the aging population as a burden. Therefore, this narrative leans toward the negative aspects of the aging process, contributing to a potentially stigmatizing view of older individuals and their impact on families and society. The framing of aging draws on the

discourse of negative aging by focusing on the burdensome aspects of growing older, such as increased healthcare needs, economic dependencies and caregiving responsibilities.

- Given the country's ageing population, the health and economic burden of NCDs can be expected to worsen over time (*The Star*, August 9, 2022).
- Lastly, if people do not have pensions they rely on the younger generation for support, either their family, in-laws, etc. This places a burden on the younger generation (*The Star*, November 28, 2022).

Discussion

The prevalent framing of aging in this study, are demographic trend, golden years, health challenges, financial and retirement challenges, a period of vulnerability, disempowering, empowering, market potential, burden and autonomy. These aging framings are influenced by factors such as social, cultural, political and economic factors. The framing of aging as a demographic trend, health challenges, financial and retirement challenges, a period of vulnerability and market potential employs a discourse that addresses its implications. The implication discourse surrounding aging is not a new discussion, as evidenced by prior research. For instance, Imran's (2021) study sheds light on the financial consequences, particularly emphasized in Malaysian newspapers. Concurrently, Lee's (2022) research brings to the forefront social issues associated with aging, as highlighted in Korean newspapers. This study identifies that the discourse on the implications of aging primarily emphasizes both its contemporary social and economic dimensions. First, aging is depicted as a demographic trend, characterized as a neutral social implication. This observed trend in the aging population is neither inherently positive nor negative. Instead, it is presented as a factual demographic shift. Conversely, the framing of aging as a health challenge introduces a negative social and economic implication. The economic implications, particularly related to work and retirement and the social aspects involving the care and support networks for older individuals. Furthermore, the narrative extends to financial and retirement challenges, which are described as negative economic implications.

Additionally, aging is presented as a period of vulnerability, denoted as a negative social implication. It is important to note that the language used to frame aging as a period of vulnerability is more grounded in reality. The use of phrase such as '*vulnerable population*' emphasizes the health and social factors that contribute to vulnerability. Also, the examples provided, such as seniors lacking companionship and daily support due to grown-up children being settled elsewhere, depict realistic scenarios that contribute to the vulnerability narrative. This perspective is further elucidated by Sanchini et al. (2022), who distinguish two types of vulnerability: basic human vulnerability and situational vulnerability. Older adults can be vulnerable physically, psychologically, interpersonally, morally, socio-culturally, politically, economically and spiritually. Thus, it is essential to acknowledge and address the vulnerability in ethical considerations in both traditional and contemporary bioethics, necessitating intervention through socio-political-economic measures. Portraying aging as a phase of vulnerability in specific situations, such as the absence of daily support or susceptibility to

certain diseases, reflects a depiction rooted in reality rather than perpetuating stereotypes. On a contrasting note, the framing of aging also includes a positive economic implication, namely market potential. This framing highlights the benefits and opportunities that come with the aging phenomenon.

In sum, the framing of aging incorporates a complex interplay of neutral, negative and positive implications across social and economic dimensions. In discussions surrounding the implications of aging, there is a noticeable predominance of negative social and economic consequences over positive ones. In a similar vein, Zainulabidin (2019) highlight that the swift expansion of the aging population gives rise to social implications, encompassing living arrangements and social support for older individuals, as well as economic consequences that include challenges elderly individuals encounter in ensuring a secure and comfortable future. Regardless of whether the implications are neutral, negative, or positive in the social or economic context, addressing these dimensions will primarily involve political actions, including the formulation of policies and the implementation of proactive measures. *The Star Online* predominantly employs a discourse focused on implications to communicate the prevailing situation and reality of Malaysia's aging population, particularly as the country approaches the status of an aging nation. The primary objective of this discourse on implications is to foster public awareness and education regarding the challenges and opportunities inherent in an aging population. Moreover, it seeks to advocate for targeted policies and actions aimed at addressing the diverse needs of the aging population. Overall, the implication discourse provides a more all-inclusive, balanced and constructive way of discussing the various dimensions of aging.

While *The Star Online* predominantly employs implication discourse to contextualize aging, there are instances where positive aging discourse is also utilized to portray older adults in a favorable light. The framing of aging as the 'golden years' and 'empowering' reflects positive narrative perspectives within cultural contexts. During ancient Greece, the notion of the 'Golden Years' was characterized by harmony, the absence of conflict and an overall feeling of contentment (Dillon, 1992). Benda (2023) highlights that the expression 'Golden Years' became integrated into English literature over the years. The term was used to describe the prevalence of one's senior years in the 20th century, coinciding with increased life expectancy and the widespread adoption of retirement (Benda, 2023). Recognizing aging within cultural contexts is vital as cultural beliefs, values and norms exert significant influence on how societies perceive and interpret the aging process (Bergeron & Lagacé, 2021). For instance, conceptualizing aging as the 'golden years' aligns with a cultural appreciation for the contributions and experiences of older individuals, suggesting that they should relish and enjoy this later stage of life. In contrast, Van De Vinne (2021) mentions that media narratives about older adults often incorporate positive stereotypes, such as presenting old age as the 'golden years of a leisure-filled existence'. The quality of one's golden years is significantly influenced by both health and economic well-being. The term 'golden years' is used to convey that the current circumstances of older adults in Malaysia, particularly in financial terms, do not align with the positive connotations associated with the concept of their golden years. Furthermore, cultures that emphasize positive identities for older adults such as 'confidence', 'empowered', 'independent', 'productive' and 'healthy' reflect societal values that prioritize active and

fulfilling lives for seniors. The utilization of positive identities in newspapers may be influenced by various aging paradigms, including active aging, healthy aging, positive aging and others. Positively framing aging within cultural narratives serves as a response to ageist stereotypes that unfairly depict older individuals solely in a negative light, portraying them as frail, dependent, or lacking agency. The portrayal of aging as both the '*golden years*' and as an empowering phase utilizes the discourse of positive aging.

On the other hand, within the workforce context, framing aging as autonomy mirrors economic perspectives, portraying older adults as having control over their lifestyles post-retirement. The framing also projects older individuals' choice in the matter of work matters, whereby the newspapers promote new thinking that older individuals have a choice in choosing to work or not. Over time, it situates older adults as autonomous individuals who make informed decisions about their employment, although that may not be the case with all employers, as retirement becomes mandatory at 60 years of age. This framing suggests that older adults not only possess the capacity to make decisions regarding their economic commitments but also exert financial control in the post-retirement phase, whether through sustained employment or retirement. Framing aging as autonomy within the workforce aligns with positive aging discourse by promoting a constructive narrative that emphasizes empowerment and continued engagement, of older individuals especially in the professional sphere. Generally, the positive aging discourse serves as a reminder to not only acknowledge the challenges of aging but also to see the multitude of positive aspects associated with this stage of life on various aging models, including active aging, productive aging, healthy aging and more. Undoubtedly, the positive aging discourse acknowledges the individual's role in shaping their later life. One's agency is reinforced when they proactively take charge of health, financial plans, lifestyles and other aspects throughout their aging process. It is important to note that positive aging discourses greatly influence how older individuals perceive their aging process, bodies and other older people's aging processes (Pack et al., 2019). Therefore, these newspapers can actively contribute to reshaping perceptions of aging and promoting a more inclusive and age-friendly society through positive aging discourses.

The framing of aging as disempowering and burden is evident in the newspaper too. This framing is shaped by both economic and cultural perspectives. The use of negative adjectives such as, '*dependent*' and '*unproductive*' contributes to a one-sided and stereotypical view of aging individuals. Phrase such as '*do not contribute much to the economy*' are overly generalized assumptions that do not consider the diversity and capabilities of older individuals. The negative adjectives and phrases emphasize the economic impact of the aging population, coupled with the cultural values held by society regarding older adults. The framing raises concerns regarding the perceived economic burden associated with an aging population, ultimately undermining the intrinsic value attributed to older adults. Importantly, the portrayal of aging as an economic or societal burden in newspapers is not a novel phenomenon (Amundsen, 2022; Ng & Indran, 2022). The framing of aging contributes to negative aging discourse by oversimplifying the contributions of older individuals and eventually perpetuating stereotypes. Negative aging discourse is highly associated with negative aging perceptions of aging and ageism as well. Negative stereotypes, language and attitudes toward older people contribute to ageism. According to Ng and Indran (2022), the prevalence of negative themes in age-based framing has risen in newspapers, magazines, fiction and nonfiction, focusing more

on narratives related to burden, illness and death. The utilization of age-based terms and framing categorize older adults distinctly, influencing how they perceive themselves and contributing to negative societal perceptions of this demographic. The negative aging discourse stems from language choices that oversimplify and overgeneralize the challenges associated with the aging phenomenon, focusing predominantly on deficits.

Conclusion

The study set out to investigate one mainstream online newspaper in Malaysia's reporting of aging. The findings have provided some insights into the discourses surrounding aging based on both positive and negative aspects of the aging process. Understanding the discourses is crucial for uncovering the reality of the aging phenomenon as depicted in the newspapers. Moreover, they are significant information for developing effective policies, programs and initiatives to address the challenges and promote the well-being of the aging population. Recognizing the vital role of newspapers in portraying the realities of the aging population to society and the nation, it becomes essential to also appreciate the contributions of older individuals and uphold their rights to fair treatment, respect and support. This is integral to cultivating a societal ethos that values and respects the dignity of its senior members. The choice of language and how an aging population is presented in newspapers are crucial factors in preventing the overgeneralization of situations, which can contribute to stereotypes and ageism. The oversimplification of the aging phenomenon, whether viewed positively or negatively, may fail to accurately represent the contemporary situation. Therefore, the selection of language plays a pivotal role in conveying reality to society. Particularly, ensuring the use of age-inclusive language such as neutral connotations in publishing news about aging on public platforms is crucial for safeguarding the aging population from biased representations. By presenting information with inclusive language, we ensure that the reality and complexity of the aging phenomenon are portrayed respectfully and accurately, without devaluing or disrespecting this particular demographic group.

This study makes a significant contribution to the relatively scarce research on the portrayal of aging in Malaysia online newspapers, as well as from a linguistic perspective. To this end, it provides a valuable insight into an area that has received limited attention in the academic literature. The study recognizes some limitations. Firstly, it focuses solely on one online newspaper, even though several other online newspapers are operating in Malaysia. Therefore, we recommend more research to consider the broader range of Malaysian online newspapers discourses of aging. Second, the study covers a relatively short time frame ([May 2022 to May 2023 in the The Star Online](#)), which might not capture longer-term trends or changes in the portrayal of aging in online newspapers. A longer time frame could reveal additional shifts or patterns in media coverage. A third limitation of this study is its sole reliance on qualitative analysis through discourse analysis. By combining quantitative analysis (e.g., frequency of certain keywords) with qualitative analysis, a more robust understanding of the portrayal of aging could be obtained.

Media representations have the power to shape public perceptions of aging. By employing careful language, media outlets can contribute to reshaping perceptions, challenging stereotypes and promoting a more inclusive and age-friendly society. In this sense, publishing aging discourses that are balanced and diverse is a necessity to challenge stereotypes, foster understanding and share accurate information. On the other hand, as explained by UNECE (2019), a collaborative partnership between the government and the media is crucial for the development of future information policies concerning aging. By working together, the government can benefit from the media's ability to identify and highlight potential topics of interest related to aging. Additionally, online newspapers should pay more attention to the aging population's voice. Providing an open space for older adults to share their opinions and engage in debates is crucial. Newspapers that incorporate diverse viewpoints from the aging community can foster a more wide-ranging and representative media environment.

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