



TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR) FOR RESEARCH CONSULTANT

Title: “Research on Platform Monetisation and Its Relation to Misinformation, Disinformation, and Hate Speech Content Targeting Refugees in Malaysia”

Project: Strengthening Malaysia's Information Ecosystem through Evidence-Based Research on Harmful Content, Platform Incentives and Digital Rights

Location: Malaysia (Hybrid – Remote/On-site as required)

Duration: Maximum 6 months

Reporting to: Programme Officer and Executive Director

1. Background

Digital platforms have transformed the global information landscape, including the landscape in Malaysia. While social media platforms have enabled greater participation in public discourse, they have also facilitated the spread of misinformation, disinformation and hate speech (MDH).

Monitoring of information spaces on digital platforms conducted by the Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) over the last four years has identified the presence of influential actors, coordinated networks, and engagement-driven content strategies that contribute to the amplification of harmful narratives online. The monitoring has highlighted how certain actors and communities leverage social media platform features and audience engagement to expand their reach and influence.

While significant research exists on the prevalence and impacts of MDH on social media platforms in Malaysia, less is understood about the monetisation structures that encourage its production and dissemination of MDH against refugees.

Recent investigations have [revealed](#) that social media monetisation in Malaysia closely intersects with these issues through what is termed the "hate economy." In this system, substantial budgets are allocated to hate campaigns, which employ influencers and marketing agencies to promote content that normalises hate speech, disinformation, and xenophobia. This strategy aims to spread hateful narratives that divide and polarise the country. These findings are important for us to further delve into the monetisation aspects of the social media companies, especially targeting one of the marginalised populations in this country.

This research, initiated by CIJ, ARTICLE 19, and Sinar Project, builds on CIJ's Rohingya Monitoring Report (May 2026), which highlighted patterns of monetisation of MDH concerning Rohingyas in Malaysia. Following this, the research aims to provide evidence-based insights into how the monetisation of MDH is incentivised and amplified within Malaysia's digital ecosystem. Through this research, we aim to focus on the economic, political, and social structures that make MDH content appealing to produce and use against refugees in Malaysia. Additionally, this research will be useful to identify opportunities for policy, platform, and civil society interventions that

strengthen information integrity while respecting freedom of expression and other fundamental digital rights. It will also be essential for developing sustainable policy responses that go beyond merely removing individual pieces of content and instead address the underlying systems and architecture of social media platforms that reward harmful behaviour.

This research is aligned with the objectives of the overall project, “Safeguarding Our Information Ecosystems: Empowering Civil Societies in Malaysia to Strengthen Data Governance and Responding to Emerging Threats”, led by ARTICLE 19 and CIJ, in partnership with Sinar Project, which aims to empower civil society organisations to promote a progressive information ecosystem and enhance engagement with policymakers and technology companies.

2. Research Goal

To understand how MDH content is monetised, amplified and rewarded within Malaysia's digital information ecosystem, in order to support evidence-based, rights-respecting policy and platform responses.

3. Research Objectives

This initiative is aimed at:

- 3.1** Examining the monetisation structures that contribute to the creation and dissemination of MDH content targeting refugees in Malaysia.
- 3.2** Understanding the actors, communities and networks involved in the production and amplification of MDH content in the context of refugees in Malaysia.
- 3.3** Assessing how platform design, ad revenue model and engagement mechanisms contribute to amplification and monetisation of MDH content in the context of refugees in Malaysia.
- 3.4** Identifying the monetary value derived from producing highly engaging MDH content.
- 3.5** Developing evidence-based policy recommendations to strengthen platform accountability, protect digital rights, and promote information integrity in Malaysia.

4. Scope of Work

The research consultant will undertake the following tasks:

4.1 Literature Review:

Conduct an in-depth review of existing local, regional and international research related to MDH, platform governance, attention economies, creator economies, online influence and the MDH ecosystem, including comparative research and methodologies used in other jurisdictions facing similar challenges.

4.2 Ecosystem Mapping:

Identify and analyse key actors, communities and networks involved in the production, amplification and dissemination of MDH content in Malaysia.

4.3 Platform Analysis:

Examine the role of major social media platforms in shaping visibility, engagement and amplification of MDH content and the implications for platform accountability and the protection of users' rights. This may include analysis of platform features such as recommendation systems,

reposting mechanisms, livestreaming functions, reporting mechanisms, users' and creators' code of conduct policy, creator monetisation programmes and audience engagement tools.

4.4 Incentive Analysis:

Examine both direct monetisation mechanisms (e.g. platform revenue sharing, subscriptions, affiliate marketing, online sales) and indirect incentives such as audience growth and organisational objectives.

4.5 Case Studies:

Develop case studies of selected content creators, campaigns, networks, online communities, or incidents that demonstrate how MDH content is amplified, monetised and rewarded within Malaysia's digital ecosystem.

4.6 Stakeholder Consultations:

Support the development of consultation frameworks and participate in stakeholder consultations to validate preliminary findings, gather expert perspectives, and refine policy recommendations.

4.7 Research Report:

Prepare a detailed research report outlining key findings, analysis and evidence-based recommendations for policy, platform and civil society action.

5. Deliverables

The consultant is expected to deliver one final report consisting of key findings, analysis and policy recommendations. The consultant is expected to produce the following:

5.1 *Overview of Research* outlining research methodology, research framework, proposed case studies, stakeholder mapping, workplan and timeline, to receive feedback from CIJ, ARTICLE 19, and Sinar Project.

5.2 *Progress Report* summarising the research conducted, key preliminary findings, and emerging trends and observations.

5.3 *Draft Research Report* - A comprehensive analysis of findings, case studies, network and ecosystem analysis, and initial recommendations for feedback from CIJ, ARTICLE 19, and Sinar Project.

5.4 *Final Research Report* – A revised and finalised research report incorporating stakeholder feedback, an executive summary, key findings, analysis and policy recommendations.

5.5 *Summary Brief* - A concise policy brief summarising key findings and recommendations for policymakers, civil society organisations, platforms and other stakeholders to support rights-respecting approaches in addressing MDH content in the context of refugees in Malaysia.

6. Qualifications

The ideal candidate should have:

- a. Advanced degree in law, public policy, human rights, political science, data science, communications or a related field;
- b. Strong knowledge of social media platform design and architecture or equivalent experience analysing platform or digital data;

- c. Experience in legal research and policy analysis, preferably related to platform accountability;
- d. Ability to conduct stakeholder consultations and qualitative research;
- e. Strong analytical and report-writing skills.

7. Reporting

The researcher will report to the Programme Officer and Executive Director and will work closely with project partners and other project stakeholders.

8. Application Process

Interested candidates should submit:

- a. A cover letter outlining their qualifications and experience.
- b. A CV with relevant research experience.
- c. A sample of previous research work.
- d. A proposed work plan, budget, and timeline (max. EUR 4000).

Deadline for applications: 21 September 2026

Submission email: cijmalaysia@cijmalaysia.net

The Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) 's vision is centred on a democratic, just, and free society, where all peoples enjoy free media, and the freedom to express, seek, and impart information. We strive to reflect the diverse identities, experiences and geographies of the communities and peoples we serve, believing that embracing different perspectives fosters innovation, inclusion, and shared growth. Thus, we actively promote inclusivity and substantive equality for all, including non-discrimination on the basis of age, disability, sex, gender, ethnicity, race, religion or belief, marital status, pregnancy/maternity, sexual orientation or any other protected characteristics.

We welcome all applications from a wide range of backgrounds, particularly those from underrepresented groups or communities at risk. Selection will be based on experiences, skills, potential and availability of funding.

NB: Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.