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MONTHLY NARRATIVE REPORT

Completed June 2025
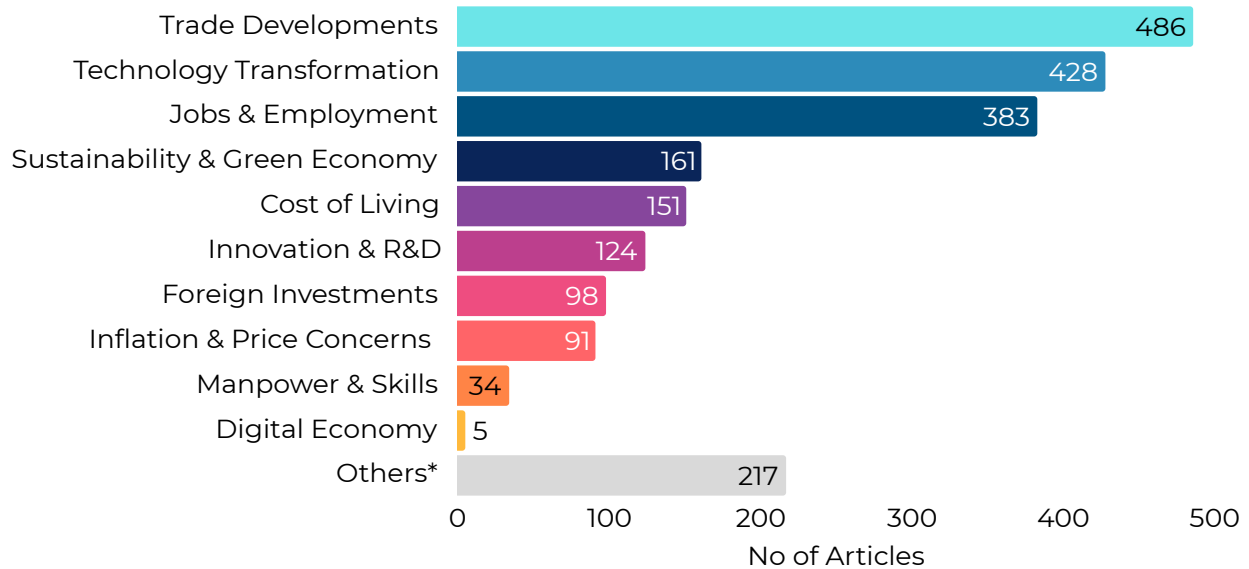
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (1-30 JUNE 2025)

This report presents a comprehensive analysis of public narratives relevant to MTI's strategic sectors from 1 to 30 June 2025. Insights were drawn from a total of 2,178 sources, including Singapore-based and international news outlets, social media platforms, and online forums.

Trade Developments — 486
Technology Transformation — 428
Jobs & Employment — 383
Sustainability & Green Economy — 161
Cost of Living — 151
Innovation & R&D — 124
Foreign Investments — 98
Inflation & Price Concerns — 91
Manpower & Skills — 34
Digital Economy — 5
Others* — 217

No of Articles

Top 3 Sectors (June 2025)

1. Trade Developments
The trade narrative focused on U.S. protectionism, export recovery, ASEAN diplomacy, and supply chain stability, highlighting Singapore's strategic role.

2. Tech Transformation
June's technology narrative highlighted strong progress in SME digitalisation and Singapore's growing role as a regional AI hub.

3. Jobs & Employment
June's employment coverage spotlighted challenges faced by graduates, ongoing upskilling efforts, labour market trends, and evolving wage expectations.

Mixed Sentiment

Sentiment was mixed, reflecting optimism over **export growth** and **Foreign Trade Agreements** alongside concern over **US Tariffs** and **geopolitical tensions**.

Positive Sentiment

Maintained a positive sentiment, focusing on **AI adoption** and **national digital initiatives**.

Negative Sentiment

Held a predominantly negative sentiment. Key concerns included **graduate hiring struggles**, **job mismatch** and **internship inequities**.

This narrative was largely top-down and analytical, with minimal public engagement.

Public forums reflected cautious optimism, mixed with concern over costs, job security, and equitable access.

Public engagement on this topic remained high, particularly in forums.

SUMMARY OF MEDIA COVERAGE

Sector Coverage (Volume & Trends)

In June 2025, media and forum coverage across mainstream news, forums, blogs, and social platforms spanned a wide spectrum of MTI-relevant domains. After a multi-layered classification process—including LLM-enhanced tagging—articles were mapped to 10 policy-relevant sectors.

From a total of **2,178 media and forum entries**, the most dominant sectors in June 2025 were (Figure 1):
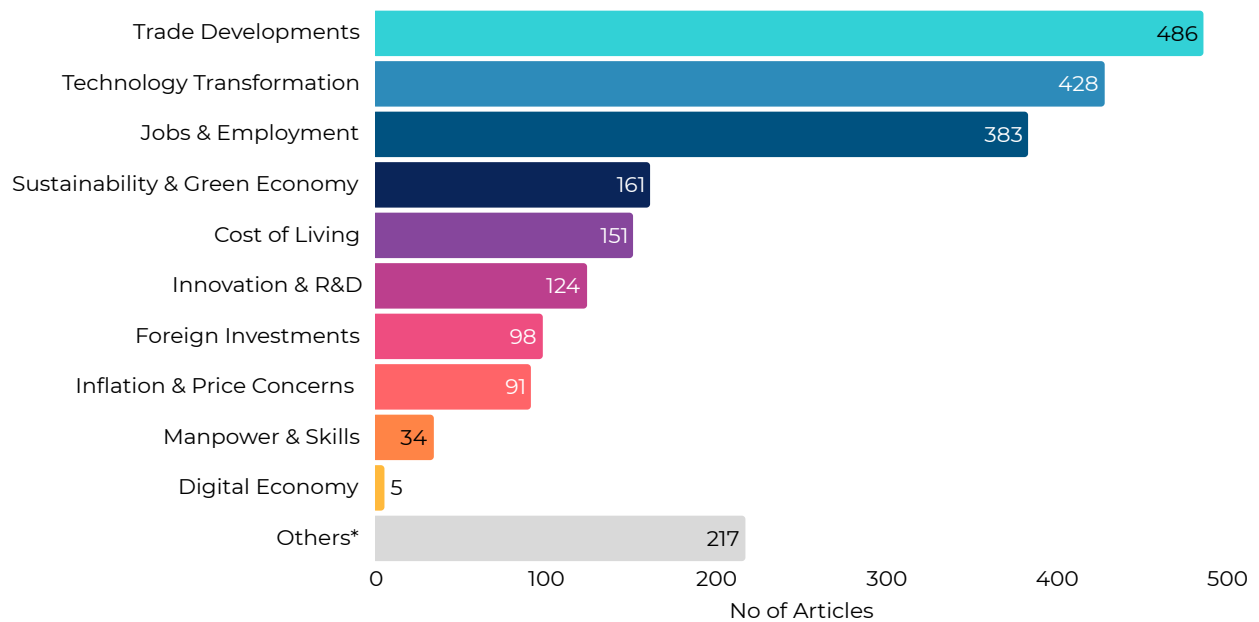

Figure 1: Top 10 Sectors in June 2025

includes articles that could not be classified in the top 10 sectors.

SUMMARY OF MEDIA COVERAGE

Theme	Sector Highlights (Top Themes by Sector)
Trade Developments	The trade narrative was the most heavily covered in June, largely anchored around U.S. tariff developments, ASEAN bilateral cooperation, and Singapore's positioning as a stable trade and logistics hub. Export performance and participation in trade forums were also frequently highlighted.
Tech Transformation	Technology narratives were initially driven by interest in AI deployment, national digital initiatives, and Smart Nation investments. These were often tied to government announcements and industry partnerships. Cybersecurity and automation were also recurring sub-themes.
Jobs & Employment	The employment narrative focused heavily on graduate hiring struggles, job mismatch, and internship inequities. Discussions of mid-career reskilling appeared in mainstream media early in the month, often in the context of new SkillsFuture initiatives. Public discussions reflected concerns about job access, salary expectations, and workforce alignment.
Sustainability & Green Economy	Themes included carbon reduction targets, ESG finance, and green innovation. The intersection of environmental goals with industrial and financial policies was a recurring focus.
Cost of Living	Content centred on affordability concerns across housing, transport, and food. Coverage of fare adjustments, rising grocery prices, and utility costs appeared frequently. Most attention stemmed from public platforms, reflecting rising cost sensitivity and daily financial pressures.
Innovation & R&D	Narratives featured startup activity, research funding, and public–private collaborations. Content volume was limited, with most mentions tied to national R&D strategies or ecosystem briefings.
Foreign Investments	Coverage emphasised Singapore's continued attractiveness to global capital, particularly in tech and sustainability-related sectors. Articles highlighted FDI flows, startup funding, and international partnerships.

SUMMARY OF MEDIA COVERAGE

Theme	Sector Highlights (Top Themes by Sector)
Inflation & Price Concerns	Sources referenced inflation trends, price hikes, and tax-related impacts. Content was typically embedded within broader economic reports and policy commentary.
Manpower & Skills	Mentions focused on skills development, workforce reskilling, and education alignment with industry needs. Government training initiatives and talent pipeline strategies were often mentioned.
Digital Economy	This emerging sector's coverage touched on e-commerce platforms, fintech, and digital trade. Discussions often linked to regulatory frameworks, online business infrastructure, and cross-border digital payment systems.

SUMMARY OF MEDIA COVERAGE

Sentiment Overview

Sentiment tagging was based on inferred tone, media framing, and forum language. Key observations reveal a sharp divergence in emotional tone between strategic or economic sectors and lived experience issues like jobs and affordability.

Theme	Inferred Sentiment	Notes
Trade Developments	Mixed	Coverage was evenly split between optimism over export growth and FTAs, and concern over rising tariffs, geopolitical tension, and supply chain disruptions. The tone reflects opportunity amid volatility. Many articles framed challenges as transitional, with emphasis on long-term opportunity.
Technology Transformation	Positive	Consistently forward-looking, highlighting AI adoption, cloud infrastructure, and enterprise digitalisation. Even when challenges like cybersecurity or tech talent shortages were mentioned, they were framed as solvable through innovation and policy.
Jobs & Employment	Negative	Sentiment was weighed down by frequent coverage of graduate unemployment, tech layoffs, and entry-level job scarcity. While some articles covered upskilling initiatives, the prevailing tone reflected frustration and labour market mismatch for young workers. News media coverage waned mid-month, but public intensity remained high.
Sustainability & Green Economy	Positive	Sentiment was constructive, with a strong focus on green financing, decarbonisation policy, and clean energy transitions. Environmental goals were portrayed as aligned with long-term competitiveness.
Cost of Living	Negative	Affordability pressures, with rising food, housing, and utility costs, dominated the public narrative. There was limited attention to structural relief or real wage gains.
Innovation & R&D	Positive	Focused primarily on policy support, R&D funding, and technological breakthroughs. Articles reflected confidence in Singapore's innovation ecosystem.

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SUMMARY OF MEDIA COVERAGE

Theme	Inferred Sentiment	Notes
Foreign Investments	Positive	Emphasised Singapore as a magnet for stable, tech- and sustainability-aligned investments Tone was typically solution-focused and framed in strategic future terms (e.g., "investment confidence", "transformational potential", "partnerships unlocking new frontiers").
Inflation & Price Concerns	Mixed	Coverage balanced between rising cost concerns and policy efforts to manage inflation. Monetary tightening and cautious optimism coexisted in most narratives.
Manpower & Skills	Mixed	Articles reflected a balance between efforts to address skills gaps and ongoing workforce transition challenges. Upskilling was a central theme, but sentiment varied by sector.
Digital Economy	Positive	While the sample size was small, tone was clearly upbeat. Articles praised fintech growth, platform development, and Singapore's positioning in cross-border digital trade.

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SUMMARY OF MEDIA COVERAGE

Language Analysis

This section analyses the language composition of media sources to understand how different linguistic channels contribute to MTI-relevant coverage. While English remained the default medium, language variation subtly reflects audience targeting and issue framing.
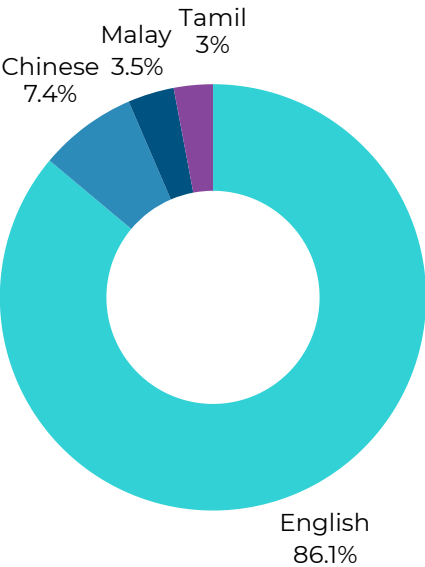

Figure 2: Language Distribution

Language	Observations
English	Dominant across all sectors, especially policy and business topics. Government statements, corporate news, and commentary are primarily English-language.
Chinese	Sustained coverage, largely centred on local economic developments, inflation concerns, and community-grounded business news. Noticeable concentration on consumer impact topics (e.g. price hikes, job market sentiments) with limited policy depth.
Malay	Typically surfaced in lifestyle or social issue contexts, especially cost-of-living. Tone was more community-oriented.
Tamil	Content primarily addressed employment support and community-level economic concerns. Coverage appeared in forums and vernacular platforms; few mainstream headlines, but the focus was socially grounded.

SUMMARY OF MEDIA COVERAGE

Source Origin Analysis

Content in this report was drawn from a cross-section of news media, forums, and social media sources*, capturing both institutional perspectives and public sentiment during June 2025.
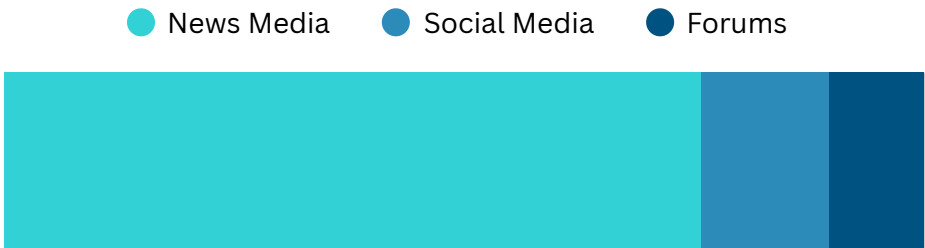
● News Media   ● Social Media   ● Forums

Figure 3: Media Distribution across platforms

Platform Type	Article Volume	Nature of Content
News Media	1,651	The bulk of coverage came from established sources, including **CNA, The Straits Times, and The Business Times**. These outlets covered strategic topics such as trade, innovation, and technology with a largely neutral or forward-looking tone. Government announcements and official data were typically reported here.
Social Media	304	Social media platforms (e.g. **Facebook, X, Instagram**) contributed a smaller portion of content, largely comprising short-form public reactions to topical issues such as the cost of living, wage pressures, and policy sentiment. These posts offered insight into how formal economic narratives were being received and reframed in the public sphere.
Forums	223	Forums, including **HardwareZone** and **Reddit**, provided longer, community-driven discussions focused on job security, inflation anxieties, and perceptions of government support. These posts were typically anecdotal and emotionally expressive, surfacing grassroots-level concerns not always visible in mainstream coverage.

*see Annex A for the full list of sources

NARRATIVE EVOLUTION

Narrative Overview

The reporting period spans five weeks, covering Weeks 22 to 26. Below is a week-by-week breakdown with strategic insights.

Week 22 (1-7 June)

Dominant Narratives:

Cost of Living and Household Affordability
- Consistently discussed across forums and social media. Posts focused on rising grocery, utility, and daily expense costs, with early signs of public anxiety.

US Tariffs and Regional Trade Risks
- News outlets began connecting escalating US tariffs to Singapore's trade exposure. Trade-related content appeared in over 250 entries, marking this as a high-frequency narrative.

AI Ethics and Hiring Technology
- Articles and posts debated algorithmic fairness in recruitment, automation in HR, and ethical concerns in digital workplaces.

Notable events/triggers:
Viral household budget posts on forums

Extensive media coverage of US trade policy

Week 23 (8-14 June)

Dominant Narratives:

Cost of living concerns
- Remained widely discussed. Housing prices, food inflation, and electricity rates were commonly mentioned across forums

Transport fare concerns
- Updates about the fare review process triggered high engagement. Over 130 entries linked to fare discussions appeared, with concern concentrated on equity and affordability.

AI Ethics and Workplace Automation
- Continued strong presence, with debates around automated hiring, fairness, and job displacement due to AI.

Notable events/triggers:
Public transport fare review framework announcement

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NARRATIVE EVOLUTION

Week 24 (15-21 June)

Dominant Narratives:

Cost of Living

- Maintained visibility with growing focus on housing, transport, and food expenses. Public fatigue with rising prices became more emotionally visible.

Upskilling and workforce transition

- Only week where upskilling-related posts crossed the traction threshold. SkillsFuture training stories and sectoral reskilling efforts were covered in news and shared on LinkedIn.

US Tariffs and Trade Risks

- Regional and international coverage emphasised Singapore's economic exposure as the US-China trade narrative deepened.

Notable events/triggers:
Momentum from previous weeks

Week 25 (22-30 June)

Dominant Narratives:

Cost of Living (Peak Intensity)

- Most emotionally charged week for affordability issues. Viral breakdowns of monthly expenses for food, rent and utilities circulated heavily

AI & Automation in Workplaces

- Regained visibility with specific focus on bias in resume filtering, loss of autonomy, and ethical compliance in hiring practices.

US Tariffs and Trade

- Continued heavy presence as commentary on geopolitical risk intensified.

ASEAN Trade and Regional Positioning

- Media previews of ASEAN Regional Forum framed Singapore as a key player in regional digital trade and economic integration.

Notable events/triggers:
Viral posts on monthly expense breakdowns

ASEAN Forum coverage and regional agreements

* Sustainability and the green economy remained a persistent but secondary narrative, reflected in regular institutional coverage but without significant public engagement or triggering events.

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NARRATIVE EVOLUTION

Key Narrative Transitions from May → June

This section tracks the evolution of key public narratives from May to June, identifying shifts in visibility and tone across mainstream media, forums, and social channels. By comparing the level of attention each narrative received month-over-month, we highlight which issues gained momentum, plateaued, or lost traction—and why.

Narrative visibility is tiered based on overall volume and salience across media, policy discussions, and online engagement:

- High: Dominant and recurring presence across media types; top-tier public concern or focus.
- Moderate: Sustained engagement with periodic spikes; visible but not top-of-mind.
- Rising: Rapidly gaining attention but not yet dominant.
- Low: Minimal media or public presence; generally background noise.

Narrative	May Visibility	June Visibility	Key Drivers
Trade Developments	Moderate	High	Pre-ASEAN diplomacy, US Tariff developments
Summary: Trade rose significantly in June—from a secondary topic in May to a dominant narrative—driven by institutional media coverage around the U.S. doubling tariffs on steel and aluminium, growing trade uncertainty, and positioning ahead of the ASEAN Regional Forum and Ministerial Meetings.			
Cost of Living	Rising	High	Viral fare/housing posts, inflation
Summary: The narrative sustained high visibility throughout June, especially across forums and social media. While not tied to a single spike, the issue gained cumulative momentum through fare review discussions, housing affordability debates, and recurring viral comparisons of living expenses.			
Jobs & Employment	High	Moderate	Continued frustration, reduced media pickup
Summary: Despite steady public engagement, this narrative saw a slight decline in media attention compared to May. The continued forum presence reflects high emotional relevance, but coverage fatigue may have set in across mainstream outlets.			

NARRATIVE EVOLUTION

Narrative	May Visibility	June Visibility	Key Drivers
Technology Transformation	High	High	Shift in tone from innovation to AI ethics and hiring automation

Summary: Volume remained consistently high, but the tone shifted. Coverage evolved from innovation and economic potential in May to increased scrutiny in June — especially around AI governance, fairness in hiring algorithms, and workplace automation.

Narrative Lifecycle and Interplay

This section visualises the rise, peak, and decline of major narratives across June 2025, based on an exclusive article assignment by dominant theme. It highlights how each narrative evolved in relative prominence week by week.
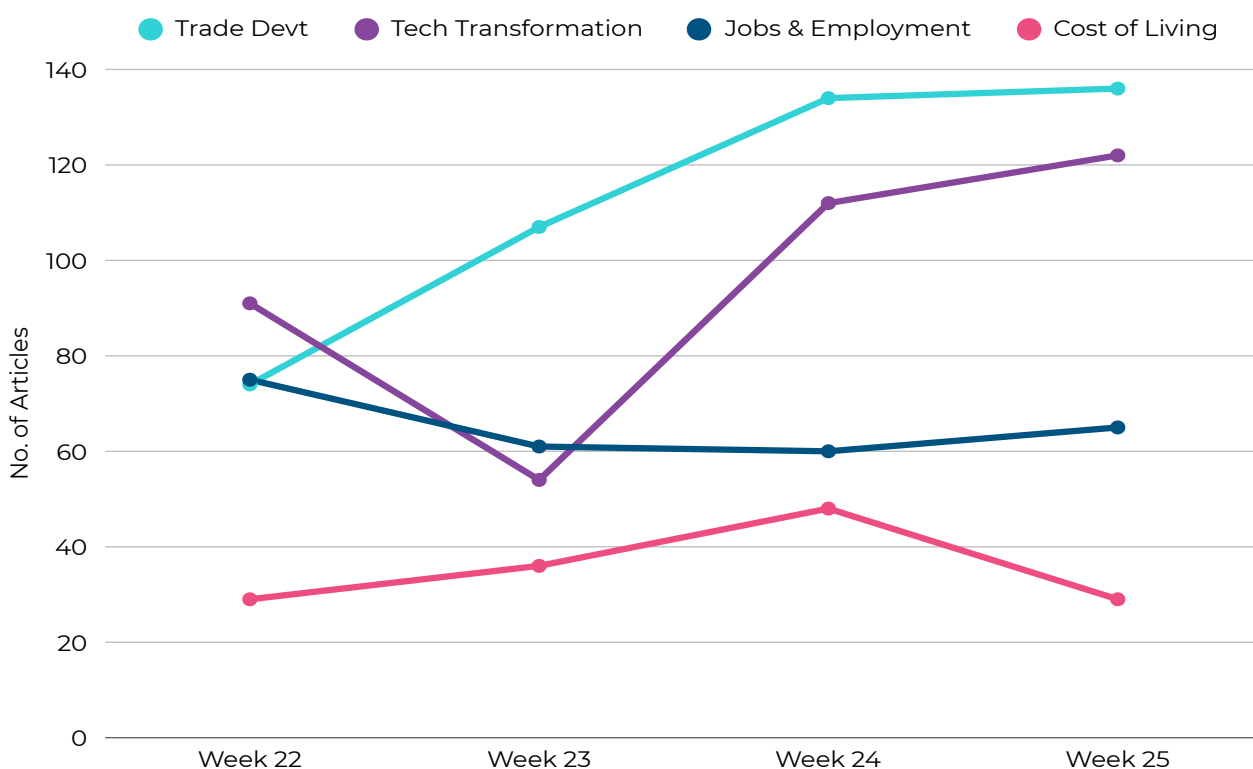

Figure 4: Lifecycle of dominant narratives in June 2025

** We observed a **noticeable decline in technology transformation narratives** in Week 23, following a period of high coverage in Week 22. This drop coincided with a pivot in media and public attention toward cost-of-living and trade issues, and may also reflect brief saturation of AI-related content before the theme regained momentum in the latter half of the month.*

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NARRATIVE EVOLUTION

Intersections between topics

Narrative themes frequently overlapped within single articles, highlighting the interconnected nature of public discourse. The most prominent intersections were:

- **Jobs and Technology Transformation** frequently co-occurred, particularly around themes such as automation, AI in hiring, and digital workforce adaptation.
- **Cost of Living and Employment** were often discussed together, with affordability framed in relation to wage pressures and job stability.
- **Trade and Technology** intersected through coverage on digital trade infrastructure and regional economic integration.

Platform Matrix - Where Narratives Lived

The platform matrix illustrates where the top 5 sectors were most actively discussed, based on article distribution across news media, social platforms and forums.

This provides insight into whether narratives were primarily covered by mainstream media or driven by public discourse.
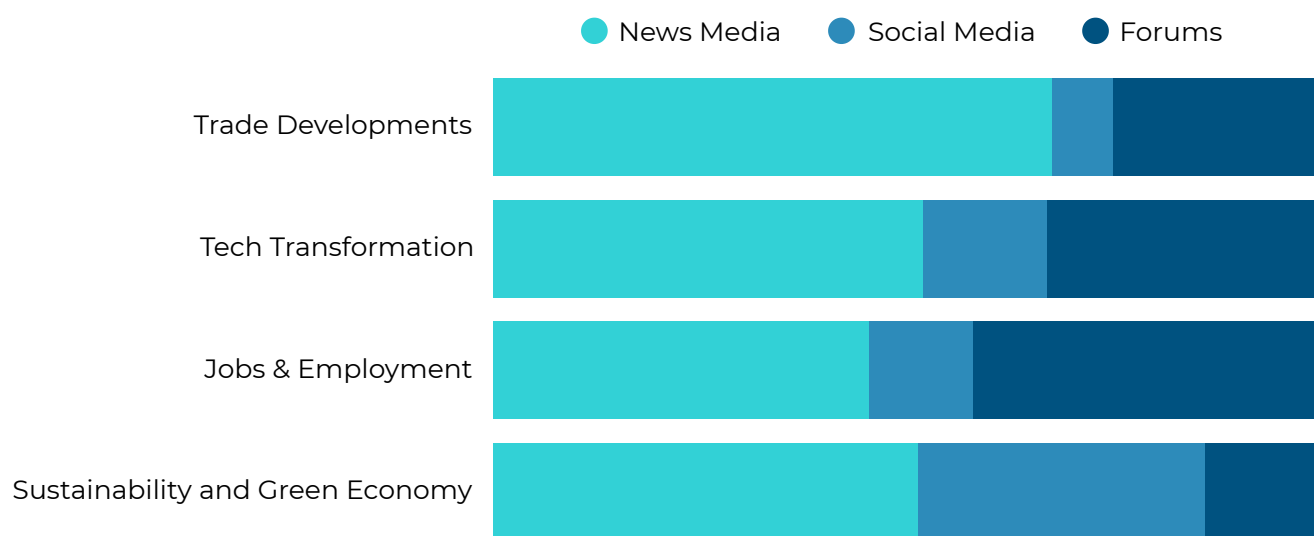

Figure 5: Platform matrix of dominant narratives in June 2025

Key insights:
- Trade was primarily driven by mainstream media, with limited uptake on public platforms.
- Jobs and employment had the strongest presence in forums as individuals turn to community platforms to share concern, seek advice and voice sentiment outside formal media.
- Technology transformation and sustainability and green economy had a relatively balanced distribution across news media and public platforms.

<u>Emerging Signals to Watch</u>

Housing Policy discourse

- Articles and social posts raised concerns about BTO availability, resale prices, and housing affordability. While no major policy announcement occurred, the frequency of references may point to rising sensitivity around broader affordability conditions.

AI and Job Displacement

- A shift in tone is emerging in discussions around automation. Several sources focused on AI replacing human roles- particularly in administrative and support sectors, indicating growing public concern about job security in a digital economy.

Middle-Income Sentiment on Cost of Living

- Forum and social media posts reflected a tone of sarcasm, fatigue, and frustration, particularly among self-identified middle-income earners. This may signal rising emotional intensity around affordability, beyond just price tracking.

Youth Employment Anxiety

- Discussions related to fresh graduate job prospects, starting salaries, and early career pathways appeared regularly in forum content. This signals emerging sentiment among younger workers, particularly around mobility and entry-level opportunities.

DEEP DIVE ANALYSIS

TRADE DEVELOPMENTS

In June 2025, trade was a high-volume media topic, driven by both global developments and domestic positioning. Coverage across local outlets such as CNA, The Business Times, and The Straits Times, alongside international publications like Bloomberg, The Edge, and News18, focused on Singapore's resilience amid renewed global trade tensions. These tensions were primarily linked to Trump-era tariff threats and volatility in global shipping and export routes.

Singapore was frequently framed as a neutral and stable partner, strategically navigating external shocks. However, this narrative remained largely top-down and technocratic, with coverage dominated by government announcements, policy summaries, and macroeconomic indicators. The tone was consistently professional and analytical—emphasising diplomatic ties, trade resilience, and economic credibility.

Sub-Topic Landscape
The trade narrative was built around four core sub-topics.

1. US Tariffs and Protectionism
This was the most prominent theme across the dataset, with articles referencing renewed protectionist rhetoric under President Trump. Media coverage was largely framed around the geopolitical risks posed by potential tariff escalation and its implications for ASEAN and global exporters.

Singapore appeared in these stories as a reliable and resilient trade partner, strategically positioned amid U.S.–China tensions. However, it was often treated as a reference point rather than a focal subject. Stories were shaped by institutional voices—policy analysts, trade bodies, and regional think tanks—with a tone of cautious realism and technical assessment.

A handful of forum posts touched on this narrative, often speculating about future tariffs or expressing mild sarcasm about the proliferation of trade deals. While public engagement was limited, there was clear awareness of the external risks shaping Singapore's trade outlook.

2. Export Recovery & Economic Resilience

The narrative of recovery and resilience was featured in 133 articles, focusing on Singapore's rebound in export performance. Coverage drew on data from trade balance reports and economic forecasts, noting a return to pre-pandemic levels in some sectors.

Media outlets such as the Business Times and international trade platforms framed this as a technical win. However, the reporting lacked granularity. There was little exploration of which industries were driving the recovery, how local firms- especially SMEs, were faring or what risks remained beneath headline growth.

The tone remained cautiously optimistic, but the narrative's impact was largely confined to economic circles. There was no observed grassroots engagement around this topic, suggesting a disconnect between macroeconomic success stories and everyday relevance for Singaporeans.

3. ASEAN Partnerships and Bilateral Diplomacy

Trigger/Event: Multiple regional forums, expos and dialogues

ASEAN and bilateral diplomacy formed a substantial part of the trade discourse, with 236 articles covering regional forums, high-level visits, and new economic agreements. This narrative was built on symbolic affirmations of Singapore's role in maintaining continuity and connectivity across a fractured global trade environment.

Media coverage was dominated by official speeches, joint communiqués, and diplomatic photo ops. Platforms such as CNA, News18, and AsiaOne often republished event announcements with limited analytical depth or follow-up. While these stories reinforced Singapore's reputation as a steady diplomatic player, they offered little insight into the tangible outcomes or local implications of these engagements.

Public response was nearly nonexistent. Facebook reposts and online shares of diplomatic announcements generated little traction or commentary, indicating a saturation point for symbolic diplomacy without clear domestic payoff.

TRADE DEVELOPMENTS

4. Supply Chain Stability and Diversification

Though less frequently covered, this subtopic offered strategic depth. Media reporting touched on Singapore's positioning as a trusted logistics hub amid supply chain reconfigurations, driven by ongoing U.S.–China decoupling and post-pandemic restructuring.

Singapore was framed as a "gateway to Asia," with narratives stressing reliability, neutrality, and adaptability. However, there was limited examination of what diversification looked like on the ground—how local companies were adjusting, or what structural shifts were underway in logistics and manufacturing sectors.

A few forum posts linked supply chain disruptions to rising business costs and competitive disadvantage, especially in relation to Malaysia. While not widespread, these grassroots comments provided a useful signal of the lived economic realities tied to abstract trade positioning.
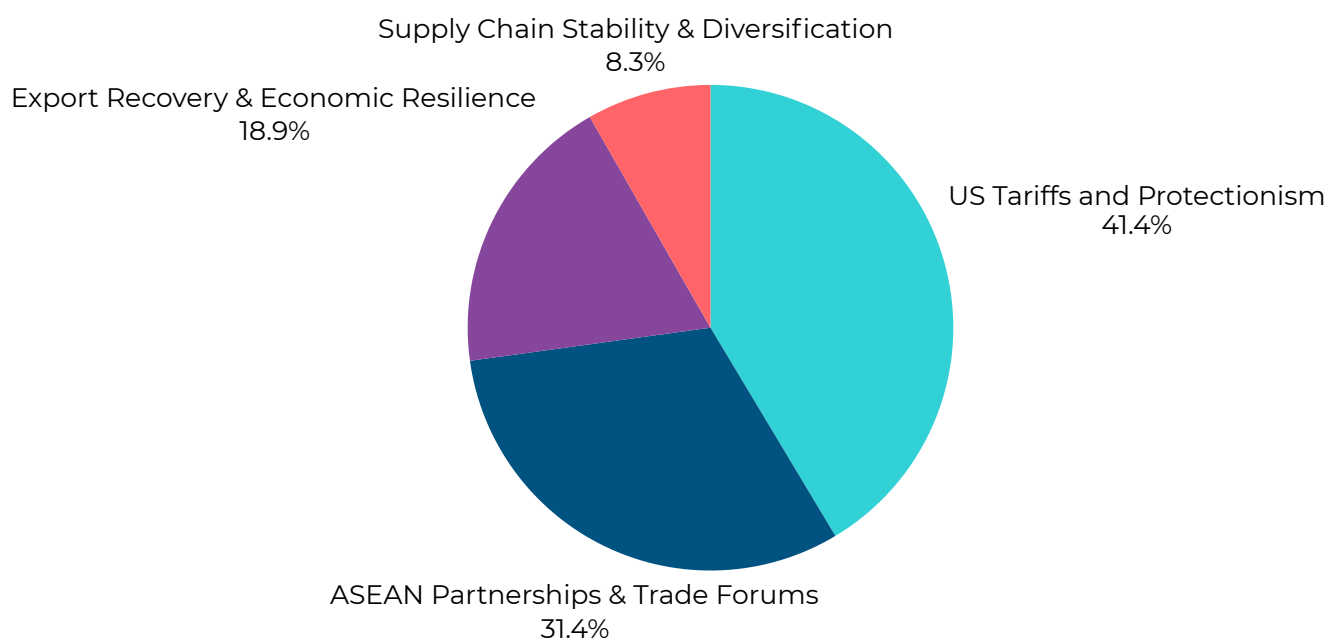

Figure 6: Distribution of Trade Development subtopics

Note: Despite the breadth of coverage, public engagement was minimal. Only 6 trade-related sources appeared in forums, and just 4% of the content could be traced to social media channels. Where public commentary did exist, it tended to be observational or sarcastic, not emotional or mobilising.

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TRADE DEVELOPMENTS

Narrative Characteristics

Style and Structure: The tone across mainstream media was professional, policy-driven, and externally focused. Stories were structured around macroeconomic data (e.g. trade balance, inflation rates), summit outcomes, and diplomatic positioning. This coverage leaned heavily on institutional voices, often assuming reader familiarity with technical concepts such as forex, export indexes, or tariff regimes.

> For example, The Business Times reported:
> "Trump's vacillations over trade tariffs have forced companies into costly guesswork."
> — The Business Times

> And CNA's coverage emphasised summit diplomacy, noting:
> "Dr Balakrishnan also shared concerns on sectoral tariffs... I've made the point repeatedly again to my American counterparts that in fact America has a trade surplus against Singapore."
> — CNA

Such coverage, while coherent and strategic, was high in volume but low in diversity. Few articles featured individuals, SMEs, or firms navigating trade shifts on the ground — resulting in an emotionally neutral or dry narrative with limited public accessibility.

Narrative Strengths:
Despite its technical framing, the narrative achieved several strengths:

- **Strategic clarity**: Singapore was consistently positioned as a neutral and dependable actor amid global trade volatility.
- **Policy coherence**: Messaging around resilience, diplomacy, and supply chain continuity was repeated with consistency across CNA, The Straits Times, and The Business Times.
- **International reinforcement**: Regional and global outlets mirrored this framing, bolstering Singapore's institutional credibility.

> For instance, The Straits Times highlighted:
> "S'pore can leverage its trust premium for growth opportunities."
> — The Straits Times

TRADE DEVELOPMENTS

Weaknesses and Risks:
However, several early signals suggest potential vulnerabilities in the trade narrative's current trajectory.

1. Narrative Fatigue
The media leaned heavily on event-based coverage — ministerial announcements, FTAs, regional visits — often repeating messaging without introducing new angles or stakeholder voices. The absence of new content formats or perspectives suggests diminishing narrative returns.

Notably, CNA's trade-related entries across June repeated diplomatic positioning but offered limited differentiation in style or substance, which likely contributed to audience disengagement.

2. Absence of Public Ownership
In forums like HardwareZone, public commentary was sparse and speculative. Rather than responding emotionally or critically, users posted short, observational remarks.

> "Would tariffs rates beo up down in next week?"
> — forums.hardwarezone.com.sg

This tone suggests that while the public is aware of trade developments, they do not feel personally connected to or impacted by the institutional framing. No forum post featured SMEs, exporters, or specific sectors, reinforcing the perception that trade narratives remain top-down

3. Visibility without Tangible Outcomes
Several media stories highlighted Singapore's regional diplomacy and trade agreements, but offered few concrete examples of how these initiatives translate into benefits for citizens or businesses. Forum users raised questions whether trade success stories truly trickle down to SMEs or workers.

> One user questioned:
> "B4 d tariffs situation alr is not good. With new ones, how SMEs survive?"
> — forums.hardwarezone.com.sg

TRADE DEVELOPMENTS

This suggests that some members of the public are beginning to question who truly benefits from Singapore's trade success, which could continue to grow if economic progress continues to feel distant from everyday life.

Emerging Signals to Watch:

- Skepticism about job payoff: Public comments linked trade success with outsourcing concerns and stagnant local employment.
- Inflation via shipping costs: While not widespread, users tied logistics shifts to rising prices — indicating potential spillover into domestic affordability narratives.

TECHNOLOGY TRANSFORMATION

IIn June 2025, public and media narratives around technology transformation in Singapore were shaped primarily by two key themes: AI and automation, and SME digitalisation. These topics received the highest volume of coverage and were most relevant to MTI's strategic priorities around economic competitiveness, workforce adaptation, and enterprise resilience. While news media consistently highlighted Singapore's global positioning in AI and digital policy, public forums reflected a more ambivalent tone.

Sub-Topic Landscape

1. SME Digitalisation and Adoption Barriers
This was the most consistent and locally grounded subtopic in June's technology narrative. Coverage focused on the barriers faced by smaller enterprises in adopting digital tools and platforms. Key issues included limited awareness, high implementation costs, and persistent skills gaps. Support schemes such as SkillsFuture and digital transformation grants were referenced, though not always linked to concrete outcomes.

While these articles often framed digital inclusion within broader regional or economic terms, forum commentary surfaced light concern over affordability, rising business costs, and uneven benefit distribution. Notably, few stories profiled SMEs that had successfully transformed, limiting emotional resonance or public identification.

2. AI and Automation
Artificial intelligence and automation were high-frequency themes in June's international technology coverage, appearing across hundreds of articles in global and regional media. These references included AI's impact on jobs, enterprise automation, and evolving business models.

The articles that did meet these criteria were largely institutionally driven, centered on government positioning, international partnerships, or global firms anchoring AI initiatives in Singapore.

> "US-based Kyndryl to base its ASEAN AI lab here"
> — The Straits Times

> "Singapore advances as Asia's leading hub in trusted AI and tech"
> — EDB (Facebook post)

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These stories were forward-looking and promoted Singapore's strategic positioning in AI governance and infrastructure. However, they rarely addressed implementation challenges, sector-specific use cases, or human impacts such as jobs, retraining, or productivity gains.

In contrast to the polished tone of media coverage, forum discussions on HardwareZone revealed a more anxious and sceptical undercurrent. These posts often explored the social implications of automation, including wage stagnation, job displacement, and generational gaps in opportunity.

> "[SG LaiLiao?] For Some Recent Graduates, the AI Job Market Is a Black Hole"
> — forums.hardwarezone.com.sg

> "Automation is helping the rich get richer"
> — forums.hardwarezone.com.sg

While these comments didn't engage with policy or technical innovation, they signaled growing public unease around automation's impact on livelihoods — especially among younger, digitally literate audiences.

Narrative Characteristics
Style and Structure: The June 2025 technology transformation narrative was institutionally led and predominantly top-down. Approximately three-quarters of the content came from local media outlets such as CNA, The Straits Times, and The Business Times, with most stories shaped by government agencies, corporate press releases, or national policy framing.

The style was strategic and forward-looking, focusing on Singapore's digital leadership in AI governance, SME transformation, and Smart Nation infrastructure. Content often assumed familiarity with policy goals and technical frameworks, leaving limited space for emotive language, everyday use cases, or ground-up storytelling.

Forum commentary on platforms like HardwareZone provided a rare counterpoint — casual, reactive, and sometimes anxious — especially in relation to automation and job prospects. However, these grassroots voices were not echoed in official media coverage, reinforcing the narrative's one-directional structure.

TECHNOLOGY TRANSFORMATION

Internationally, Singapore's tech transformation narrative was consistently positioned as stable and business-friendly, especially in the areas of cloud infrastructure, AI development, and regional 5G leadership. Outlets such as S&P Global Market Intelligence, Investopedia, and Market Wire News referenced Singapore as a regional anchor for smart infrastructure and digital investment. These references added credibility but often mirrored local institutional messaging — focusing on high-level economic signals, not public adoption or societal impact.
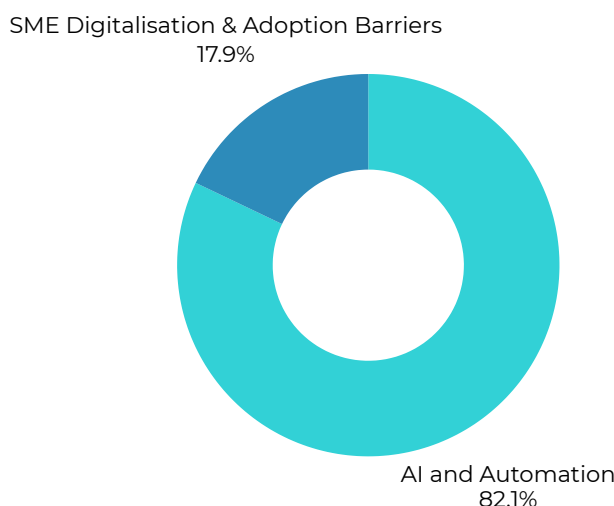

Figure 7: Distribution of Tech Transformation subtopics

Narrative Strengths:

- News media maintained a strategic and promotional tone, highlighting investment and innovation.
- Blogs and think tank commentary began raising ethical and regulatory flags around AI.
- Gradual tone shift: from "SG leads in AI innovation" → "Balancing AI progress with oversight".

The narrative's clearest strength was its strategic coherence. Across local and international platforms, Singapore was framed as:

- A trusted regional hub for emerging technologies like AI and 5G,
- A stable destination for global firms investing in tech infrastructure (e.g. Vodafone, Nokia, Kyndryl),
- A government actively managing the digital transition through structured workforce training and SME support schemes.

This coherence was visible not only in local reporting but also in international mentions, such as:

> "Vodafone Qatar selects Nokia in major network modernization deal to drive expanded 5G coverage"
> — Market Wire News

These international touchpoints affirmed Singapore's positioning — but also revealed that much of the narrative echoed top-down institutional themes, without deeper exploration of domestic uptake or public experience.

Weaknesses and Risks:
  1. Over-concentration of Institutional Voices
The narrative was dominated by government-linked media and agency press releases. While this ensured policy alignment and strategic clarity, it reduced diversity of perspectives. There was limited input from independent technologists, SMEs, academic voices, or civic sector actors — resulting in a transformation story that felt led by institutions and observed by the public, rather than co-owned.

This narrow sourcing may constrain the narrative's ability to adapt, resonate, or absorb alternative viewpoints — especially in areas like AI ethics, digital rights, or workforce disruption.

  1. Limited Global Narrative Depth
International media sources consistently referenced Singapore as a hub for digital infrastructure, investment, and regional coordination. However, there was an absence of coverage that engaged with Singapore's regulatory strengths, talent development, or broader digital society model.

  1. Fragmentation across policy themes
Technology-related subtopics such as AI, digitalisation, cybersecurity, and infrastructure were largely treated in silos. Cross-cutting linkages — for example, how cybersecurity underpins SME transformation, or how AI governance connects to workforce development — were rarely articulated.

This fragmented framing may obscure the broader strategic narrative of national digital transformation and limit the public's ability to understand how various initiatives relate to their lives, livelihoods, and long-term opportunities.

<u>Emerging Signals to Watch:</u>

Rising unease around AI and employment

Forum discussions surfaced recurring concerns around the impact of AI and automation on job prospects, wage inequality, and perceived barriers to entry, particularly for younger workers and mid-career professionals. Users described the tech job market as opaque and increasingly exclusive.

While mainstream media continued to frame AI as a national strength and investment opportunity, the disconnect between institutional optimism and public apprehension may widen if unaddressed. Without complementary narratives around inclusive growth, reskilling, or accessible pathways into AI-related roles, trust in transformation outcomes could erode.

Digitalisation perceived as uneven

In the SME digitalisation space, some public sentiment linked digital adoption to broader affordability and accessibility concerns. While institutional narratives focused on tools and schemes, public forums surfaced quiet skepticism about who stands to gain.

> "Singaporeans, we're getting left behind. Tech moves, but not everyone can keep up."
> — forums.hardwarezone.com.sg (Brandon Yeo thread)

JOBS AND EMPLOYMENT

Jobs and employment remained a prominent area of public and media attention, shaped by global market uncertainty, sector-specific volatility, and ongoing transformation in workforce expectations. Coverage spanned a wide spectrum — from macroeconomic labour indicators to graduate employment anxieties, retrenchment trends in the tech sector, and efforts to drive workforce resilience through upskilling. While institutional narratives highlighted adaptability and long-term planning, public sentiment, particularly on forums, revealed concerns around job security, career stagnation, and perceived mismatches between skills and opportunities

Sub-Topic Landscape

1. Graduate Employment
Concerns around youth employment featured prominently in both international and local coverage. Articles highlighted how economic uncertainty, wage stagnation, and skill mismatches are reshaping the job landscape for recent graduates. International media pointed to tightening labour markets, while Singapore-specific stories and forum posts reflected anxiety about job prospects, return on education, and mobility.

> "Report: New graduates struggle to get hired despite job openings"
> — MSN Singapore

> "The median starting salary for fresh graduates in Singapore is not keeping pace with inflation."
> — The Independent Singapore

The risk of underemployment or young talent delaying entry into the workforce may affect long-term productivity and social mobility if not addressed through more targeted support and career mapping.

2. Workforce Resilience through Upskilling
Reskilling and upskilling remained a core component of Singapore's employment narrative in June 2025, reinforced by institutional messaging and government-linked programmes. Articles highlighted initiatives such as SkillsFuture, the SkillsFuture Career Transition Programme (SCTP), and Work-Study Pathways targeting mid-career workers and lifelong learners.

3. Labour Market Outlook

The narrative around Singapore's labour market was marked by a tension between overall stability and rising unease among white-collar workers. While official reporting pointed to steady employment levels, a series of high-profile retrenchments both globally and in Singapore, contributed to a growing sense of vulnerability, particularly in the tech and finance sectors.

> "Singapore's job market stays healthy despite tech layoffs"
> — HRD Asia

> "LinkedIn slashes 281 jobs in California"
> — The Economic Times

International coverage of layoffs at firms such as Microsoft and LinkedIn reinforced this sentiment, with language focused on "restructuring" and "streamlining," but with little attention to re-employment outcomes or adaptation pathways. The tone across sources was institutional and sober, emphasising business logic over human impact.

4. Wage expectations

Wage dynamics and job expectations featured heavily in forum discourse and commentary. Users debated whether starting salaries, wage progression, and job benefits were keeping pace with living costs and productivity demands.

> "Why no MPs have asked in Parliament if Singaporeans are struggling to secure quality jobs?"
> — Prabu Ramachandran, Real Issues in Singapore

These narratives reflect a growing emotional intensity around jobs as a measure of fairness and opportunity. Unlike other subtopics, this one was largely public-led, with fewer institutional stories addressing wage competitiveness head-on. Bridging this narrative gap will require more deliberate communication on pay transparency, career progression, and the link between productivity and income.
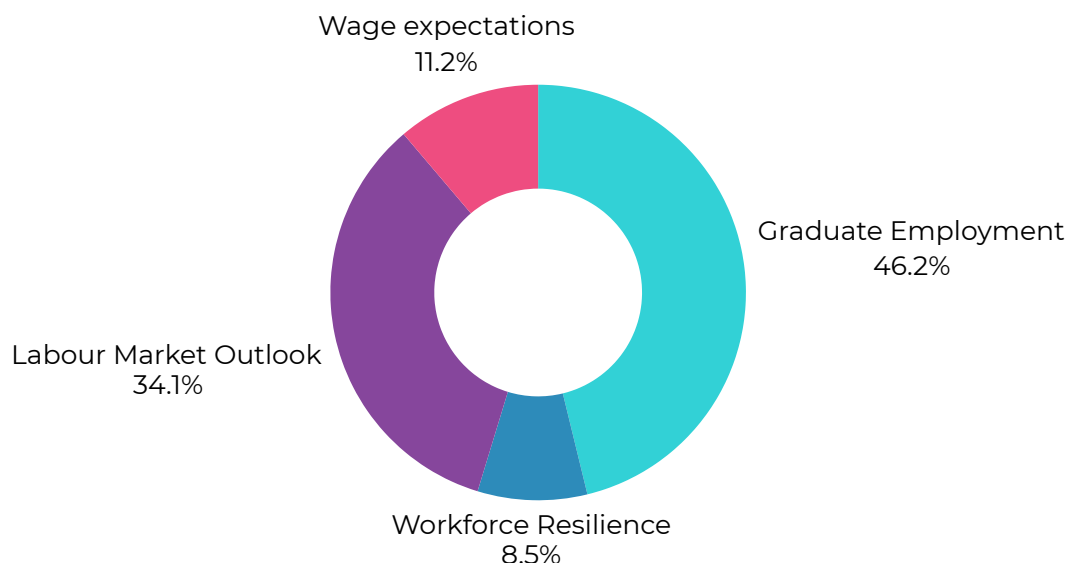
JOBS AND EMPLOYMENT

Figure 8: Distribution of Tech Transformation subtopics

Narrative Characteristics

Style and Structure:

The employment narrative in June 2025 was shaped by a mix of policy-led messaging, global economic commentary, and informal public sentiment, but remained thematically fragmented. The tone varied by platform:

- News media offered a structured and institutional voice, often highlighting national programmes (e.g. SkillsFuture, hiring outlooks), industry responses to retrenchment, and macro-level signals such as unemployment or workforce demand.
- International coverage focused on tech layoffs, labour market cooling, and salary stagnation in advanced economies — with occasional references to Singapore as a case of resilience.
- Forums such as HardwareZone contributed emotionally driven commentary on wage frustration, graduate anxiety, and perceived job market unfairness.

Narrative Strengths

Policy responsiveness was clearly visible. Initiatives around upskilling, workforce transition, and mid-career support were well-represented, particularly in government-affiliated media and agency channels.

Graduate employment and reskilling were consistently framed as national priorities. This helped reinforce institutional commitment to long-term workforce resilience.

Public forums showed active engagement. While informal, discussions reflected real-time sentiment around job-seeking, wage dissatisfaction, and generational outlooks.

<u>Weaknesses and Risks</u>
- **Limited Coverage of Employer Perspective and Job Quality**

While job availability was a consistent theme, job quality — including career progression, workplace expectations, and fair pay — was underreported. Few articles profiled employers, workplace practices, or innovation in HR strategies.

- Wage Dissatisfaction and Trust Gaps

Forum commentary showed visible discontent with salary benchmarks and hiring outcomes, particularly among younger workers. Some posts questioned whether degrees translated into real opportunity, suggesting a potential trust gap between education, economic contribution, and reward.

> "The job market is 'trash' right now."
> — forums.hardwarezone.com.sg

<u>Emerging Signals to Watch</u>

1. Increasing Cynicism Toward Systemic Promise

Forum posts reflect a growing sense that government efforts — while well-intentioned — are not reaching those who feel most economically squeezed. Commentary around upskilling, job creation, or hiring grants increasingly reads as cynical or ironic, especially when policy is viewed as too generic or one-size-fits-all.

> "No retrenchment? Send them go SkillsFuture upgrade."
> — forums.hardwarezone.com.sg

This reflects the perception that training is the default policy response, which may be effective — but could risk fatigue if outcomes are not visible or felt.

2. Emotion-Driven Job Narratives Gaining Ground

While official stories remain institutional and data-heavy, public job discourse is increasingly emotional. Frustration about stagnation, fear of irrelevance, and resentment around workplace culture are being shared in highly personal terms — often in public forums, sometimes semi-anonymously.

3. Silent Drift from Formal Employment Norms

While hybrid work and flexible arrangements were underreported in June's formal media coverage, forum posts suggest a quiet drift toward non-traditional employment arrangements. Users discussed gig work, informal freelancing, and temporary jobs as stopgaps, whether willingly or resignedly.

FORECAST AND STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

JUNE → JULY 2025

Predicted Narrative Shifts

ASEAN Diplomacy might demand relevance to domestic context	High probability

Previews of the upcoming ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AMM) and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) scheduled for July have begun surfacing in mainstream media, particularly through coverage of trade resilience, supply chain integration, and regional economic cooperation. However, June narratives have largely framed these issues through institutional or diplomatic lenses, with minimal connection to local business or consumer interests.

As AMM and ARF coverage intensifies in July, public and media scrutiny will likely pivot toward tangible outcomes from Singapore's ASEAN engagement. Stakeholders — particularly SMEs and trade associations — may increasingly demand clarity on how regional cooperation translates to market access, supply chain cost reductions, or regulatory harmonisation benefits.

Strategic Risk: MTI faces potential criticism that ASEAN engagement prioritises diplomatic protocol over measurable benefits for Singapore businesses and consumers. Without proactive domestic framing, regional leadership initiatives risk being perceived as elite diplomacy disconnected from citizen concerns.

Graduate and early-career disillusionment likely to intensify within July

With over 90 articles referencing graduate job mismatch and forum commentary describing the job market as "a black hole," this is the most visible and emotionally resonant trend. The emerging narrative reflects a deeper fear that while the economy is growing, it is not in ways that are inclusive or socially mobile.

Public focus will likely shift from employment quantity to employment quality metrics — including wage growth trajectories, hiring transparency, and career advancement pathways. Media coverage may increasingly frame job creation announcements through the lens of "good jobs" versus "any jobs."

Trade Resilience messaging requires outcome anchors

With continued uncertainty around US tariff policy, Middle East shipping routes and the China slowdown, the stability narrative may regain traction. This is as global risks rise, public appetite for supply chain resilience, food security and energy independence may grow. This presents an opportunity for trade and economic diplomacy to be reframed as protective tools rather than just growth levers.

Strategic risk: As speculation about renewed U.S.-China trade tensions resurfaces in media coverage, Singapore's repeated positioning as a "resilient, neutral, stable hub" may start feeling formulaic without a clear domestic impact demonstration.

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ANNEX A

1. Data Collection Approach

A multi-source, multi-platform collection approach was used to monitor and analyse public narratives relevant to MTI's priority sectors. Data was sourced through a combination of three SaaS media monitoring platforms and supplemented by targeted exports of high-volume platform content.

The data reflects publicly available information collected from:

Mainstream News Media	Bloomberg, BNN Bloomberg Canada, Business Standard, The Financial Express, The Hindu Business Line, Indian Express, Fox 5 Atlanta, News X, News18, The Times of India, Republic World, Livemint.com, MSN.com, New Straits Times, The Star Malaysia, Business Today MY, ABP Live, AOL.com, Channel News Asia, The Business Times, The Straits Times, AsiaOne, MSN Singapore, Yahoo Singapore, The Edge Singapore, 8视界新闻新加坡 8 world news, Lianhe Zaobao 联合早报, Fortune Times, Pin Prestige Singapore, Shin Min Daily News, Sinchew Business, Singapura Now, Singdao PR, Xinjiapo News, Tamil Murasu, SG Tamilan, Berita Mediacorp, Berita Harian
Social Media	Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, X
Online Forums	Investors Hangout, forums.hardwarezone.com.sg, Trading Charts, sgtalk.net, Singapore Opposition Forum, Reddit (SGExams, SingaporeR, SingaporeRaw, YahLahBut, askSingapore, singapore, singaporefi, singaporehappenings)
Blogs and Commentary	The Independent Singapore, Singapore Matters, The Online Citizen, Singapore Uncensored, DollarsandSense, YahLahBut, The Financial Coconut, petir.sg, Techgoondu

All data is proprietary and accessed under the licensed data environment of ST Engineering's digital ecosystem.

ANNEX A

2. Data Cleaning and Structuring

Extracted data was structured and cleaned for consistency. Each entry includes:

- Article/post metadata (eg. timestamp, channel, source name)
- Headline and summary content
- Language and media type
- Source classification (eg. news, forum, social media)
- Platform-generated sentiment label

3. Sectoral classification

Where possible, each post was categorised into one of the top 10 MTI-relevant sectors, using a structured dictionary tailored to policy and media language.

Articles were assigned to sectors based on text content, and classification was verified across multiple passes, including manual spot checks for fringe and ambiguous entries.

4. Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment attribution was based on both platform-generated labels and secondary verification using a lexicon-based model, along with manual reclassification for key sectors.

5. Narrative Tracking and Platform Dynamics

Content was analysed across time and platform type to identify:

- Narrative shifts by week
- Dominant vs. emerging themes
- Public-led vs news media-led coverage
- Trigger events driving volume spikes
- Cross-platform differences in tone and framing

6. Scalability and Portfolio Strength

This methodology is designed for scale, capable of processing 1,500+ articles per month, and built to support continuous monthly reporting.