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Modeling Jordanian audience engagement and news credibility in the digital media era: a PLS-SEM approach

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The rise of digital news has reshaped the landscape of news consumption, especially in emerging media environments such as Jordan, where audiences increasingly depend on online and social platforms for information. This study examines how Trust in Digital News (TND) and Social Media Use (SMU) influence Audience Engagement (AE) and Perceived News Credibility (PNC) among Jordanian users. A two-step methodological approach was adopted: first, a bibliometric mapping was conducted to identify research trends and gaps in digital media studies; second, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was applied to survey data collected from 1,200 respondents. The results demonstrate that TND has a significant positive effect on AE ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$) and PNC ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$). SMU also shows a positive and significant impact on AE ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$), but only a weakly significant effect on PNC ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.051$). AE emerges as the strongest predictor of PNC ($\beta = 0.56$, $p < 0.001$), underscoring its mediating role in linking engagement and credibility. These findings highlight the crucial role of trust and interaction in strengthening perceptions of credible digital journalism, offering practical implications for media professionals and policymakers aiming to foster informed, democratic, and trust-based public discourse in the algorithmic information age.

KEYWORDS

digital media, public behavior, news coverage, PLS-SEM, Jordanian audience, bibliometric analysis, news credibility, audience engagement

1 Introduction

The increase of digital media transformed how news is produced, distributed, and consumed throughout the globe. Nevertheless, scholars note that with the growing presence of the Internet, and especially social media, traditional journalism has had to adapt its forms and ways of doing (Clark and Marchi, 2017). As many countries, the landscape of news coverage in Jordan has also changed, in large part due to the digital age. According to the Digital News Report-tagged studies by the Institute, there seems to be a global trend occurring as audiences have noticeably shifted to digital as a primary source of news (Newman et al., 2023; Nielsen and Fletcher, 2024; Newman, 2025). Now people can swiftly access an enormous size of information, from local news, to international news, and with that they can push back on the authority and influence traditional news sources can have. However, scholars also emphasize the importance of credibility and trust as formative considerations in determining if a particular user will interact with any site for any activity (Cha, 2024; Altay et al., 2025). When the delivery of news moved from traditional media to digital one, a mere change in the news presentation would not be enough to explain the phenomenon. In fact, these factors are also affecting how consumers get into the news. The entire process of news consumption has undergone technological changes, and all these changes are closely intertwined with one another [they are different facets of a single transformation of modern journalism (Schroder, 2018; Newman, 2025)]. Recent, targeted research indicates that these changes are particularly evident in Jordan. Digital

transformation is not only altering the media system in the country, it is altering both numerous practices of media credibility and the very notion of a neutral journalist (Victoria et al., 2024; Al-Zoubi et al., 2024; Jwaniat et al., 2025).

If anything, this tide of digital transformation has opened up new areas of audience behavior that have transformed experiences of news access, sharing, and engagement online. The arrival of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram—along with a plethora of news apps and news sites—illustrates a new media environment in which the public is both a consumer and contributor to the news cycle (Nieborg and Helmond, 2019). Recent survey evidence shows that over 70% of Jordanians now use social media as their primary gateway to news, with usage particularly high among young adults aged 18–34 (Nielsen and Fletcher, 2024; Victoria et al., 2024). Internet penetration in Jordan currently exceeds 90%, and mobile access drives most of this connectivity (Newman, 2025). While Internet penetration in Jordan is still growing, for the majority of the public, especially the young, it is digital media platforms that are increasingly the leading source of news. Studies further confirm that Jordanian audiences increasingly rely on digital platforms for both news updates and interactive participation, highlighting social media as the dominant space for news dissemination and audience involvement (Al-Zoubi et al., 2024; Jwaniat et al., 2025). Hence, understanding audience behavior towards news coverage in the digital media era remains a very important research area, mainly for media professionals and policymakers who want to understand this shifting landscape. However, the gaps are not merely general: prior research has paid limited attention to Jordanian audiences specifically, has rarely examined how audience engagement directly influences perceptions of credibility, and has underexplored the role of social media in shaping credibility compared to its role in fostering trust. Moreover, the mediating roles of trust and engagement are often acknowledged but seldom empirically tested, especially in Middle Eastern contexts.

Though numerous articles globally discuss the extensive impact of digital media on journalism, the knowledge of what the audiences think and feel in Jordan is still scarce. The significance of this uncovered area of research becomes more pronounced when realizing that the cultural, social, and political factors are the main influencers of how the Jordanians consume media. Similar to other Middle Eastern countries, Jordanians are the ones who must figure out how to navigate their complicated media environment which, apart from the regulations and culture, is also conflict-affected. In addition, the slow and difficult transformation of traditional media into digital platforms has been going on together with the sudden and equally remarkable rise of various digital media platforms, thus giving life to the new and different ecosphere. The change to digital has just taken place in Jordan but issues regarding accountability and trust have resulted in a lot of challenges and opportunities for the media in Jordan (Victoria et al., 2024; Safori et al., 2025). The social media use by the Jordanian journalists has also increased following the recent trend and they mainly use the social media for being objective in their reporting. Young people still count on Facebook and Twitter as their means of political engagement and public dialogue (Al-Zoubi et al., 2024; Al-Tahat et al., 2025). Due to the lack of resources and the inability to verify information, data journalism is still moving slowly in the country (Jwaniat et al., 2025). Moreover, in an era of increasing adoption of digital news, it is relevant to know how Jordanian audiences perceive the credibility, reliability, or bias of the information consumed. These changes in audience behavior also raise questions regarding the consequences for public trust in the media, political engagement, and social discourse.

The lack of empirical studies focusing on Jordanian audiences specifically within the digital era provides a clear problem statement.

Although media organizations have increasingly relied on digital platforms for reaching their audiences, little is known regarding the nature in which these audiences engage with news content, factors that influence their news consumption choices, and their perceptions toward the quality of the news they consume. Without such insight, both the media practitioner and the policymaker will be forced to operate in the digital media with little understanding of the preferences and trends of their target audience. This study will fill this literature gap by exploring Jordanian audiences' behavior to news coverage in the digital age through analytical support from advanced analysis tools like bibliometric analysis and PLS-SEM, which will give a holistic understanding of this rapidly-evolving media context.

This research explores the behavior of Jordanian audiences toward news coverage in the context of an increasingly digital media environment. It aims to identify current trends in news consumption habits, particularly the public's preference for digital platforms as opposed to traditional media outlets. The study further investigates how perceptual factors such as trust in news sources, perceived credibility, and bias influence the level of audience engagement with digital content. In addition, it examines the role of social media platforms in shaping public discourse and the mechanisms through which news is disseminated in Jordan. To deepen the analytical scope, a bibliometric analysis is conducted to trace the academic and professional discourse on digital media and news coverage, focusing especially on Jordanian scholarship. Complementing this, the study employs Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to analyze the complex relationships among demographic characteristics, patterns of media consumption, and attitudes toward the reliability and credibility of news content.

To guide the study, the following research questions explore news consumption, trust, engagement, and credibility in Jordan's digital media landscape.

- 1 How do Jordanian audiences consume news in the digital media era, and what platforms do they prefer for news consumption?
- 2 What role does trust in news sources play in influencing audience engagement with digital media content in Jordan?
- 3 How do factors such as credibility, bias, and reliability affect the audience's perception of news coverage in digital media?
- 4 What is the impact of social media on the dissemination and consumption of news in Jordan, and how does it shape public discourse?
- 5 How can bibliometric analysis and PLS-SEM be applied to examine the relationship between audience demographics, media consumption patterns, and attitudes towards news coverage?

The rapid development of digital media has transformed the concept of public behavior, in particular with news exposure. Several theoretical approaches have explained how people interact with media and how the digital platforms shape public perception to understand audiences' behavior of Jordanian in the time of digital media (Thorson and Wells, 2016). Theories such as UGT, the Agenda-Setting Theory, and Social Cognitive Theory provide valuable insights into these dynamics and hence form a good basis on which to analyse the labyrinthine relationship between digital media and audience behavior (Austin et al., 2017).

Uses and gratifications theory has long been one of the central frameworks in the understanding of media consumption behavior. Formulated by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch in the 1970s, UGT posits that active consumers forge ahead to seek certain media contents in satisfying

their needs and desires (Liestia, 2023). Unlike earlier passive audience models, UGT approaches media consumers as active participants who choose media channels selectively according to their personal motivations (Yaşa Özeltürkay and Yarimoğlu, 2019). These motivations may also include information seeking, entertainment, social interaction, or personal identity formation. In the digital era, UGT is even more relevant because audiences have acquired increasing powers to curate their media consumption via personalized news feeds, social media platforms, and digital news apps (Richter, 2022) (Figure 1).

UGT can be applied in the Jordan context to explain why audiences would prefer certain digital news platforms over conventional outlets. For instance, Jordanians may use online news because it provides immediacy and access that enables tracking of events both nationally and internationally (Hatamleh, 2024).

Social media sites like Facebook and Twitter also create avenues for information exchange and discussion, thus fulfilling social and interactive needs. Digital media are fragmentary, making it easier for people to seek out the content that confirms their beliefs and predispositions (Russett and Waldron, 2017; Diaz Ruiz and Nilsson, 2023). Echo chambers could emerge during this process, where users are exposed to information that exclusively reinforces their existing perspectives. This type of selective exposure emphasizes the importance of understanding how the digital media platforms fulfill various needs for different users and how the needs shape the consumption of news in Jordan (Diaz Ruiz and Nilsson, 2023). In this regard, Safouri and Al-Khawaldeh (2024), in their study of the culture of sports in Jordanian reviews, also acknowledged the importance

of social media sites in developing the culture of the sports among users. They also noted that media stations utilized different strategies, in coverage of sports, which worked to confirm the way the audience thinks. However, the researchers also observed other users being careful to engage in a discussion on topics of sensitive nature due to fear of being misinformed or socially awkward. This was to say, although social media offers evidence of informational and interactional needs, the credibility of information and trust to users is also a fundamental component, which drives user behavior and consumption of news in Jordan.

Introduced by McCombs and Shaw in the 1970s, Agenda-Setting Theory, elaborates that the media defines public perceptions by virtue of emphasizing issues (Protest and McCombs, 2016). The argument is that, even if all media does not inform the audience what they should think, the media does inform the audience what to think about through its degree of emphasis in coverage. In this sense, agenda-setting (or priority-setting) is given altogether a different meaning, in view of today's digital age, where an overabundance of information and speed of the news cycle could just as easily sway audiences into using major digital platforms to sift and highlight what is most important (Wilding et al., 2018).

The Agenda-Setting Theory can be applied within the Jordanian context to describe the shaping and influencing that the digital media platforms do on the salience of important matters held by the public (Mohammed and McCombs, 2021). While traditional gatekeepers have ceased to matter, such as national broadcasters and newspapers, social media platforms, and digital news outlets take on the

Uses & Gratifications Social Media Model

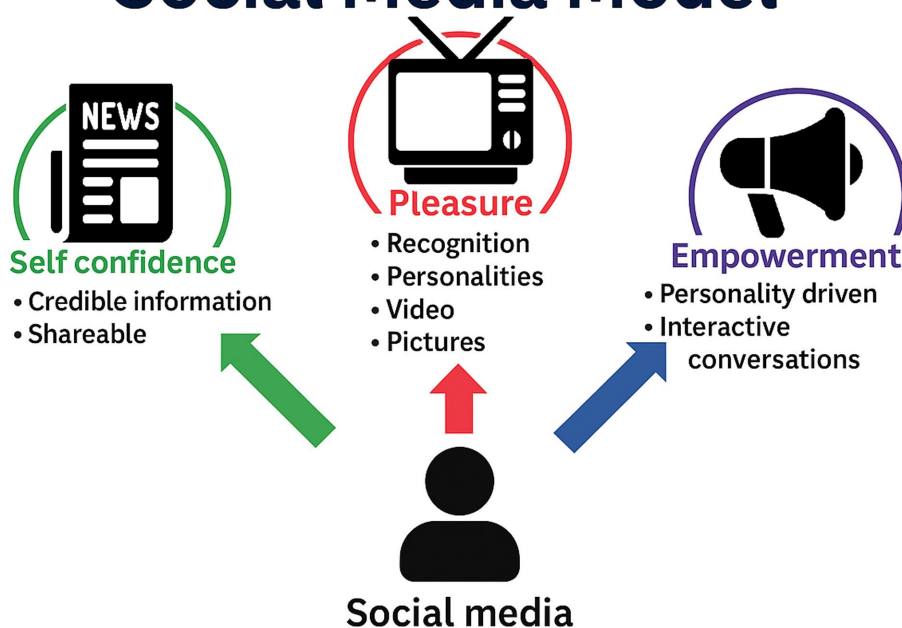


FIGURE 1

Key motivations for social media use: self-confidence, pleasure, and empowerment. "User" icon made by Saepul Nahwan from [Flaticon.com](https://www.flaticon.com/free-vector/3000000/user) "Television" icon made by PIXARTIST from [Flaticon.com](https://www.flaticon.com/free-vector/3000000/television) "Newspaper" icon made by Freepik from [Flaticon.com](https://www.flaticon.com/free-vector/3000000/newspaper) "Promotion (megaphone)" icon made by Us and Up from [Flaticon.com](https://www.flaticon.com/free-vector/3000000/promotion).

gatekeeping roles of which issues will dominate the public agenda (Bruns, 2018). For example, during events of political significance or crises, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter might elevate one narrative over another, in real-time, in determining how public opinion will be shaped. It also shows that digital algorithms curate and disseminate relevant stories based on user behavior to promote or ignore one agenda or another (Duncombe, 2019). Thus, it is critical that scholars analyze the agenda-setting by these digital media platforms to determine how Jordanian news audiences construe and respond to news coverage in the digital media environment (Alsaedi, 2021).

The impacts of digital transformation on journalistic industry in the country of Jordan were examined in a recent study by Safori et al. (2025), with the specific emphasis placed on the struggles experienced by the traditional daily newspaper business. The results indicated that since more than half of the interviewed journalists (54.8%) used digital technologies in moderate proportion to report, the most popular one was the very websites of the newspapers. The process of digital transformation was identified to have considerably changed the patterns of readership as it enhanced access to the content and caused the transition into digital formats. Nonetheless, the greatest of all worries among the journalists was how the industry was unable to cope with the fast change of technology. These observations only support the idea that digital networks have effectively added the agenda to public debate in Jordan in addition to governance and survival of the existing media houses in the country.

The social cognitive theory proposed by Albert Bandura underlines the role of observational learning, imitation, and social influence in the behavior of individuals. In application, it is seen that one learns and adapts to certain kinds of behavior through observing others, especially in various media representations while consuming media. Digital media offer expanded possibilities for social learning through their interactive features and user-generated content (Cohen, 2018). Social Cognitive Theory becomes particularly applicable in the digital media environment due to the interactive and inclusive nature of platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube (Li et al., 2022).

It can also be applied to Jordan to determine how the social networks and digital communities influence the news consumption

behaviors of the audience. For instance, Jordanians who follow opinion leaders or social media influencers are likely to adhere to the views or behaviors of these figures, especially those concerning political or social issues (Kazkaz, 2020). Besides, most of the digital media platforms allow and even encourage sharing and/or commenting on news stories viewed, allowing audiences to observe others' responses to news coverage and shaping their perceptions and behaviors in turn (Valenzuela et al., 2017; Altay et al., 2025). This participatory nature, where users of digital media are both consumers and producers of content, reinforces the importance of social learning regarding shaping public behavior toward news consumption (Martens et al., 2018; Diaz Ruiz and Nilsson, 2023) (Figure 2).

Social Cognitive Theory is supported by Safori (2019) who analyzed the behavior of Jordanian young people and interaction with social media and applications, in connection with the invasion of the privacy of others. The research showed that quite many students had been violated against their privacy through channels like Facebook and WhatsApp, and the main causes are defamation, blackmail/entertainment. Also, 89.3 percent of the sample population frequently used social media and a third of them indicated that they were more attracted by the influence of their peer group. The results highlight that social norms, peer-related activities, and online communication may influence the behavior of an individual in the digital space, thus supplementing the concept of observational learning and imitation in digital media.

In a recent study, Al-Tahat et al. (2025) examined the political participation of Jordanian youth in universities and how social media networks (especially Facebook and X (as Twitter was formerly known)) contribute to political involvement. These results indicated that Facebook is the leading platform used to access political content particularly those relating to local protest and sit-ins. Moreover, they also discovered that the platforms contributed largely in giving information about the election date, creating awareness about the political issues. The research identified that there is a substantial positive association between the rate of exposure to political content on social media to the degree of engagement by students, that is, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of political engagement. These findings reiterate the convincing nature of the

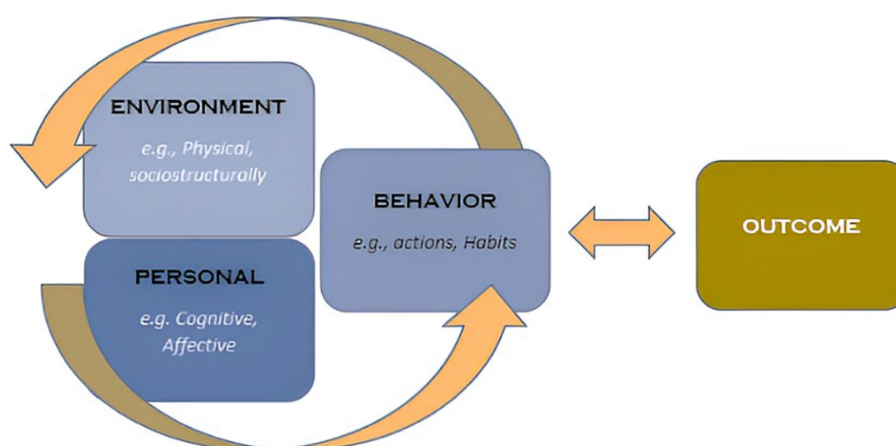


FIGURE 2

Behavioral outcome model: demonstrates how environment and personal factors interact to influence behavior.

social media in influencing political moods and practices on youthful audiences in Jordan.

Spiral of Silence Theory, developed by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, states that when people perceive their views to be in the minority, they will refrain from expressing opinions because of the fear of social isolation (Bulumac, 2020). This theory remains highly applicable with digital media, where public discourse often happens on very visible social media platforms (KhosraviNik and Unger, 2016). The Spiral of Silence offers an insight into how digital media discussions around certain topics or viewpoints might be underrepresented in Jordan owing to cultural and political sensitivities affecting public expression (Yagob, 2024). Whereas digital platforms should, in theory, make room for diverse opinions, the public nature of online discussions may lead many to hold back from expressing their opinions, further marginalizing minority opinions (Keum and Miller, 2018) (Figure 3).

Integration of these theories provides a comprehensive framework through which Jordanian audience behavior could be analysed in the context of the digital media era (Hatamleh et al., 2024). UGT provides insight into the motives behind media consumption, whereas Agenda-Setting Theory describes how digital platforms manipulate public perception by prioritizing specific topics over others (Wilfred et al., 2021). SCT and Spiral of Silence Theory allow one to make sense of the social dynamics that drive the way in which audiences engage with and voice their opinions in digital media ecologies (Ananny, 2021). These frameworks together allow for an analytic exploration of the manifold ways Jordanian audiences engage with news in the digital age and hence provide a robust grounding for the exploration of consequences of digital media for public behavior (Table 1).

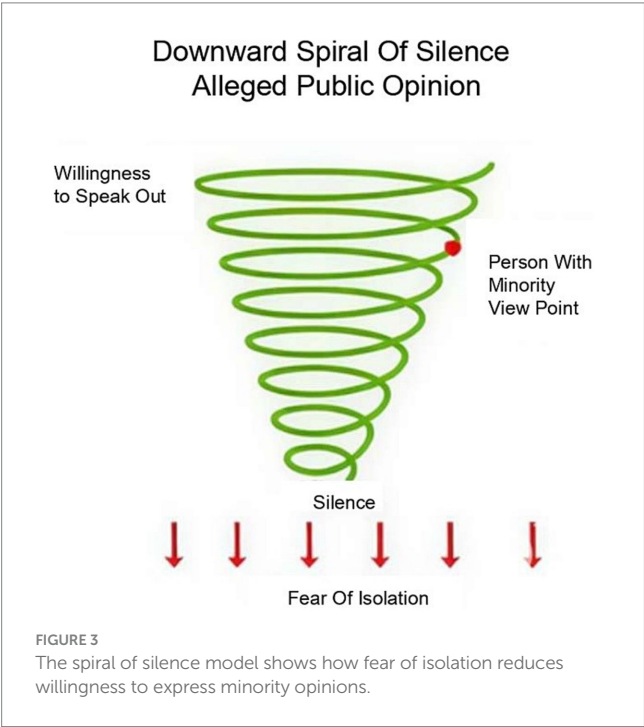
In this study, the construct is defined as Perceived News Credibility (PNC), referring to the extent to which audiences subjectively evaluate news content as accurate, reliable, and trustworthy (Blom, 2021; Pennycook and Rand, 2019). In Jordan, recent evidence shows that credibility perceptions are closely tied to how journalists negotiate

objectivity on social media platforms (Al-Zoubi et al., 2024) and how digital transformation affects journalistic practices (Safari et al., 2025). For consistency, the term “Perceived News Credibility” will be applied throughout the manuscript, as the focus lies not on the objective accuracy of news but on how audiences in Jordan perceive credibility within digital media ecosystems (Table 2).

The bibliometric analysis of 150 articles revealed three dominant thematic clusters. First, studies on *trust in digital news* emphasize its role in shaping user participation and loyalty (Fletcher and Park, 2017; Bhuiyan et al., 2021). Second, a substantial body of research explores *social media as a driver of news consumption and engagement*, but less often as a direct antecedent of credibility (Viviani and Pasi, 2017; Diaz Ruiz and Nilsson, 2023). Third, although audience engagement is quite frequently linked to digital participation message (Castells-Fos et al., 2023), its position as a mediator between trust and credibility is rarely empirically verified. There are very low numbers of studies

TABLE 1 Identified gaps in digital perceived news credibility research with emphasis on the Jordanian context.

Identified gap	Explanation
Lack of Focus on Jordanian Audience	Where many studies do look into global trends-see for example Barthel et al. (2016), Nelson and Lei (2017)-on how audiences consume and perceive digital news, very few focus on Jordan. The absence of Jordan-specific evidence regarding digital trust, engagement, and credibility underlines a key gap. Our work addresses this by contextualizing these constructs in Jordan's unique socio-political and cultural environment.
Limited Exploration of Engagement-Credibility Link	Several studies, such as Fenton (2010) and Domingo et al. (2008), highlight audience engagement in digital media, but they rarely focus on how this engagement directly influences Perceived News Credibility (PNC). Our study fills this gap by empirically showing that engagement is the strongest direct predictor of credibility perceptions, thus confirming that active interaction enhances perceived accuracy and reliability.
Underexplored Impact of social media on Credibility	There are studies by Boateng and Amankwaa (2016) and DeMers (2013) which indicate social media facility news consumption, yet their findings left credibility underdefined. Our study refines this by explicitly defining credibility as Perceived News Credibility (PNC), audiences' subjective evaluation of accuracy, reliability, and trustworthiness. Empirically, we show that while Social Media Usage has a positive effect on engagement, its direct impact on PNC is weak and only marginally significant ($\beta = 0.15, p = 0.051$) This suggests that credibility is rooted more in trust and engagement than in frequency of social media use.
Mediating Role of Trust and Engagement	Previous research often treats trust and engagement as independent factors but does not fully explore how they interact. Our study demonstrates that Trust in Digital News and Audience Engagement jointly shape perceptions of credibility, with engagement mediating the link between trust and PNC. This integrated approach provides stronger theoretical and empirical evidence than prior studies.



specific to Jordan which are only focusing on digital trust and participation (Al-Tahat et al., 2025; Safori et al., 2025; Victoria et al., 2024). The available evidence, when aggregated, really reflects the extent to which Jordan acts as a compelling a case of study and confirms our focus on digital news trust, social media, audience engagement, and perceived news credibility. The co-occurrence mappings showed that the words “trust,” “social media,” and “credibility” were not only close to each other in terms of how many times they appeared in total, and not only because they were clustered in the themes. Misguidedly suggested, these core ideas cross all conversations that uttered the most, which is why we have developed and tested such an integrative model in the current example.

In our research, we based it on definitions that made the operational concepts operationally clear and these concepts were measured through established indicators from prior work in existing literatures. Indicators of reliability, transparency, and perceived accuracy were audience perception of the accuracy, fairness or truthfulness of the digital news outlets—we labelled these Trust in Digital News (TND). The study examined news use on social media for news on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, and for frequency and intensity of use based on how audiences obtain, use, and engage with news items. Passive consumption is in contrast, to AE, where digital news is engaged with via sharing, commenting, and discussing. Perceived News Credibility (PNC) is the fourth and final operational variable and refers to how trust or credible the audience thinks news is based on validated scales derived from credibility. All the operationalizations were derived from their genesis established in the literatures (e.g., Fletcher and Park, 2017; de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020; Radoynovska and King, 2019; Blom, 2021).

In this study, we propose five hypotheses which examine how Trust in Digital News, and SMU, influence Audience Engagement—AE—and PNC, using theories and results from previous research.

1 H1: trust in digital news positively affects audience engagement.

- o Chan and Yi (2024) highlights the importance of trust in shaping news consumption behavior. Our study builds on this by proposing that (TND) has a significant impact on the level of audience engagement with news content, because trusted sources typically will induce higher levels of interaction (e.g., sharing, commenting, or discussing the news) with the news content and overall source. Several past studies support this

notion and conceptualize trust as a vital component of user engagement and retention in digital settings (Fletcher and Park, 2017; Bhuiyan et al., 2021; Blom, 2021). Most importantly, with the audience in view, credibility holds key importance in Jordan (Victoria et al., 2024).

2 H2: social media usage positively influences audience engagement.

- o While SMU has been found to facilitate access to news (Di Gangi and Wasko, 2016; de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020), our study hypothesizes that frequent use of social media also enhances AE. It is being established in earlier studies that people tend to use social media for interaction, participation, and sharing (Valenzuela et al., 2017; Castells-Fos et al., 2023). The use of social media is associated with political and social engagement, in that young adults usually get their news at the University of Jordan through Facebook and Twitter (Al-Tahat et al., 2025). From our bibliometric study, it is ascertainable that we have abundant research engaging with the issue of social media access within the region, and yet there is scanty analysis on the real potential of social media's potential to affect engagement in MENA contexts (H2 was the specific focus for this gap).

3 H3: audience engagement positively impacts perceived news credibility.

- o Building on the work of (Nelson and Taneja, 2018), our study posits that higher levels of AE lead to increased perceptions of PNC. Engaged audiences, who interact more with content, are likely to perceive the news as more trustworthy due to their active involvement with it. This is supported by studies that show engaged users assign higher credibility to frequently accessed outlets (Radoynovska and King, 2019; Castells-Fos et al., 2023). Jordanian evidence also demonstrates that interaction with news outlets heightens credibility perceptions (Victoria et al., 2024). The bibliometric gap on “engagement–credibility” mediation supports testing H3, since few empirical studies validate engagement as a mechanism for credibility perception.

TABLE 2 Construct operationalization.

Construct Name	Definition	Dimensions/Indicators	Sample Item (Survey Statement)	Source(s)
Trust in Digital News (TND)	Audience confidence in the accuracy, fairness, and reliability of digital news sources.	Reliability, transparency, perceived accuracy	“I trust the news I read online to be accurate.”	Fletcher and Park (2017); Bhuiyan et al. (2021); Victoria et al. (2024)
Social Media Usage (SMU)	Frequency and intensity of using social media platforms for news consumption.	Frequency of access, diversity of platforms, intensity of interaction	“I use social media platforms as my primary source of news.”	Di Gangi and Wasko (2016); de Oliveira Santini et al. (2020); Al-Tahat et al. (2025)
Audience Engagement (AE)	Degree of active interaction with digital news content.	Sharing, commenting, liking, participation in discussions	“I often share or comment on news stories on social media.”	Castells-Fos et al. (2023); Radoynovska and King (2019)
Perceived News Credibility (PNC)	Extent to which audiences perceive digital news as accurate, trustworthy, and believable.	Accuracy, believability, trustworthiness	“The digital news I consume is credible.”	Blom (2021); Pennycook and Rand (2019); Altay et al. (2025)

4 H4: trust in digital news positively affects perceived news credibility.

o Previous studies showed that trust was the main determinant in perceiving the credibility of news. Based on this, it can be hypothesized that audiences who have trust in digital news sources will more likely perceive news items as credible. Global evidence confirms this link (Dhanani and Franz, 2020; Blom, 2021; Altay et al., 2025), and in Jordan, trust in institutions and journalists is also a key driver of PNC (Safari et al., 2025). The bibliometric synthesis emphasized trust as the most frequently cited antecedent of credibility, yet little regional evidence exists, justifying H4.

5 H5: social media usage has a marginal impact on perceived news credibility.

o Molyneux et al. (2018) reported that even as SMU facilitate news consumption, the credibility of news does not change much. We go along with this and postulate that SMU will be positive but weaker in effecting changes in PNC compared to TND and AE. Besides these, some researches show that although SMU opens up the area of exposure, at the same time it raises trust issues with false information and echo chambers (Viviani and Pasi, 2017; Diaz Ruiz and Nilsson, 2023). Besides these, the bibliometric study also revealed that the term “social media” is frequently associated with the concept of engagement but there is only a weak link to the credibility aspect, thus confirming H5 as a test of this ambiguous relationship.

2 Methodology

2.1 Research design

The mixed-methods research design mentioned here looks into how the consumers of news in Jordan changed their habits due to the growing and widespread usage of the digital media. It combines qualitative and quantitative analysis, drawing on bibliometric analysis and PLS-SEM, to deconstruct and examine the phenomenon more deeply. This multidimensional research design opens up the opportunity to look at the influence of media technology on audience behavior from both theoretical and practical perspectives, hence the findings would be intricate and reliable.

The assignment then progresses to the use of bibliometric analysis to provide an analysis of what the academic body of conversation is saying about digital media, audience behaviors, and news coverage. This process looks for the main themes, key contributions, context in literature, and any gaps. The use of primary data collection, in the form of survey methods, is discussed in two, which is also framed around habit, attitudes, and preferences of Jordanian audiences, and their media use in the context of the digital media. The analysis and use of PLS-SEM on that data will give indication towards more complicated associations that have latent variables associate with them, such as media perceived credibility, and audience engagement in trust. So, these techniques, that are both the analysis of the literature and the analysis of data, allow for both theory and empiricism to engage with the objectives of this study.

2.2 Data collection

Data collection occurred over 3 months, spanning from April to June 2025. Data collection tools included an online structured survey used to gather quantitative data regarding the audience's behavior. Specific details will be sought in the proposed survey regarding news consumption patterns, preferred platforms, trust in digital news sources, and general attitudes toward its credibility and reliability. Since the development and increase in the use of digital platforms across Jordan, an online survey was considered an efficient way to reach a wide and representative sample of the overall population.

The survey was distributed through different digital channels, such as social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and different news websites, to ensure a diverse pool of respondents. Questions were formulated based on the theoretical framework from the literature review to cover all key variables: trust, credibility, perceived bias, and engagement to media. Whereas the respondents' attitude intensity was measured with the Likert scale, the depth required in assessing the behavior of media consumption was attained through multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions. The research adopted a TND 5 items scale developed by Fletcher and Park (2017) and Bhuiyan et al. (2021). An SMU scale consisting of 4 items was used based on the work of de Oliveira Santini et al. (2020) and Di Gangi and Wasko (2016). To measure AE a new 4-item scale, developed by Castells-Fos et al. (2023) was used. Finally, a PNC scale was used in this study developed by Pennycook and Rand (2019) and Blom (2021). Since all constructs were measured using Likert-type scales, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were computed for reliability.

This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Zarqa University—Faculty of Media (Approval No. 7/39/1154, dated 29 July 2025). The research involved the participation of adult individuals through an anonymous online survey. In line with the IRB's decision, written informed consent was waived given the study's minimal risk nature; instead, verbal consent was obtained prior to participation. All participants were fully informed of the study's objectives, procedures, and confidentiality safeguards, and consent was implied through voluntary completion of the survey. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and complied with the national research ethics regulations applicable in Jordan.

The survey was supplemented by the bibliometric analysis that was based on the Scopus and Web of Science databases. The objectives were to identify various academic studies related to digital media and public behavior and focus on Middle Eastern contexts. Some of the key words used in filtering results from all of these databases include “digital news,” “audience behavior,” “Jordan,” and “news consumption.” Bibliometric data were analysed in order to map the development of this field, whereas key research clusters, influential papers, and trends over time were identified.

2.3 Sample description

The sample of participants in the questionnaire survey is 1,200, which we can consider relatively representative of all different ages, genders, educational levels, and geographical locations within Jordan. Both urban areas (e.g., Amman) and rural areas and locations (e.g., Zarqa) were also taken into consideration to allow for a wide spectrum. The responses were people from 18 to over 65 years old, and the majority

of the sample participants were between the ages of 18–35 years, which could indicate that this younger age bracket had higher participation levels and are thus more engaged in digital media platforms.

The sample has been ascribed as a representative sample because the sample data consisted of 48% males and 52% females; thus, the data provided a brief opportunity to analyze gender differences in media consumption behavior. Sixty percent of the sample participants had at least a bachelor degree as their last completed level of education, while 40% of the sample participants had completed only a high school diploma or vocational training at the most completed education level. For this reason, the sample data also presented educational representation and variation of backgrounds allowing to study how each educational level classifies news consumption patterns and credibility towards media.

The sample is geographically representative to reflect all major areas across Jordan, with respondents from urban regions totaling 70% and rural areas 30%. This was to allow capturing if there were any discerned differences in access to and consumption of digital media, urban versus rural. Also included was an income question that helped us analyze how socio-economic status affects the consumption of and trust in digital news sources.

2.4 PLS-SEM approach

Given that this research deals with latent variables such as trust, credibility, perception of bias, and consumer engagement, PLS-SEM will be a convenient and appropriate method of analysis. This method is more suitable for exploratory research with complex models having multiple constructs and indicators. PLS-SEM permits the researcher to assess both measurement models (the relation of each indicator to their respective latent constructs) and structural models (the relationships of the latent constructs).

Analyzing was performed with Smart PLS software, a program forgiving for small-to-medium sample sizes and flexible in modeling capabilities. The measurement model was assessed first by testing the reliability and validity of each construct with Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, respectively. Average Variance Extracted (Van Aelst et al., 2014) was employed for assessing convergent validity, with a 0.5 score showing that the indicator was properly asserting its latent construct.

After testing for measurement models, the structural model was evaluated for hypothesized relationships between constructs. Path coefficients were estimated for testing the strength and direction of relationships, and a bootstrapping method was used to calculate the significance of these relationships. The analysis looked at trust in digital news sources affecting audience engagement, bias perception affecting media consumption, and credibility affecting the public's behavior toward digital news.

2.5 Bibliometric analysis

On the flip side, Bibliometric analysis was meant to provide a broad view of academic and professional conversations around digital media and public behavior in addition to the quantitative survey findings that inform the study. Our first attempt was to qualitatively try to systematically search for keywords related to “digital media,” “news consumption,” “Jordan,” “audience behavior,” and “PLS-SEM” in the two prominent bibliometric databases of the field: Scopus and

Web of Science (Fletcher and Park, 2017; Bruns, 2018). Almost 500 studies were determined to be relevant. After generating these records, we then ranked the studies by citations, date of publishing (within 10 years) and variables that were relevant to our own variables eventually ending with a final data set of 150 articles.

Main findings from the bibliometric analysis identified notable research clusters focusing on topics like the role of social media on news consumption patterns and the interplay between media trustworthiness and audience trust. The analysis also highlighted the burgeoning use of Recent media and communication scholars use structural equation modeling and PLS SEM in particular (Nelson and Taneja, 2018; Castells-Fos et al., 2023) to examine such behaviors. The appropriate sui generis before PLS-SEM must have been a perfect world: the method has been widely circulated for quite some time so we felt confident to apply it for examining the more complex connections embedded in our model.

Aside from these observations, the bibliometric review evidenced a literature of utmost scarcity in the realm of digital news consumption by Middle East audiences; from the review results, most of the academic works have been based in Western contexts. Many things remain to be learned in these uncharted spheres of audience engagement, digital trust, and digital credibility for Jordan and the neighboring areas (Kazkaz, 2020; Safouri and Al-Khawaldeh, 2024; Victoria et al., 2024; Al-Tahat et al., 2025). From the point of view of the bibliometric review, such evidence for this study exists from the argument that it attempts to provide some insight into the Jordanian audience, thereby building upon the existing literature on digital media audience consumption in parts of the region. In summary, the bibliometric evidence provided both a theoretical framework that was appropriate for the study—Perceived News Credibility, Social Media Usage, Audience Engagement, and Trust in Digital News—and a context for hypotheses to be tested as part of the survey.

Beyond keyword frequencies, a thematic synthesis of the 150 articles revealed three dominant clusters: (1) trust and credibility in digital journalism, emphasizing transparency, source reputation, and fact-checking (Fletcher and Park, 2017; Blom, 2021); (2) social media and engagement, where audience interactivity is studied as both a driver of participation and a risk factor for misinformation (Viviani and Pasi, 2017; Valenzuela et al., 2017; Diaz Ruiz and Nilsson, 2023); and (3) regional and contextual gaps, where Middle Eastern contexts remain underexplored despite global attention to digital trust and disinformation (Victoria et al., 2024; Jwaniat et al., 2025). A bibliometric co-occurrence analysis showed that “trust,” “social media,” and “credibility” frequently co-appeared, confirming their conceptual interdependence. These clusters directly informed the research design by highlighting the novelty of situating these constructs within the Jordanian case study and by demonstrating how bibliometric synthesis and empirical analysis complement one another.

3 Data analysis and results

3.1 Descriptive statistics: demographics

The majority of respondents fall within the 18–35 age range, making up 63% of the sample. This reflects the higher engagement of younger Jordanians with digital media platforms for news consumption (Table 3) (Figure 4).

The survey findings reveal that Jordanians overwhelmingly rely on social media as their main gateway to news. Specifically, 68% of respondents reported using Facebook daily for news updates, followed by 42% for Twitter and 35% for Instagram. In contrast, only 27% indicated using dedicated news apps, and 22% accessed the websites of traditional newspapers. This confirms that digital platforms have overtaken legacy outlets as the dominant mode of news consumption. Younger audiences (18–34) showed the highest reliance on Facebook and Instagram, while older respondents (45+) were more likely to use news websites. These findings directly address RQ1 by identifying both the preferred platforms and demographic differences in digital news consumption among Jordanians (Figure 5; Tables 4–6).

The bibliometric analysis reveals that “Digital News” and “Audience Behavior” are the most frequently occurring keywords, with significant citation counts, indicating their centrality in the scholarly discourse on digital media. “Social Media” and “Trust” also feature prominently, reflecting the growing interest in how these factors shape public behavior in the digital era (Tables 7, 8).

3.2 Interpretation of results

Table 7 presents the analysis results, revealing several key insights into the relationships among trust in digital news, social media usage, audience engagement, and perceived news credibility. First, the results indicate that trust in digital news significantly enhances audience engagement ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$). This finding suggests that individuals who have higher levels of trust in digital news are more likely to actively engage with news content, underscoring the foundational role of perceived trustworthiness in shaping audience behavior. This answers RQ2 by confirming that Trust in Digital News is a strong predictor of Audience Engagement in Jordan.

Second, social media usage also contributes significantly to audience engagement ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$), although its effect is slightly less pronounced than that of trust. This highlights the important yet secondary role that social platforms play in facilitating user interaction with news content. This provides a direct answer to RQ4, showing that social media use does shape how Jordanians engage with news, though it is less decisive than trust. Moreover, audience engagement emerges as the strongest predictor of perceived news credibility ($\beta = 0.56$, $p < 0.001$). This finding implies that the more users interact with and engage in news-related activities, the more credible they perceive the news to be, suggesting a feedback loop between participatory behavior and trust in content accuracy. This directly addresses RQ3 by establishing Audience Engagement as the central driver of Perceived News Credibility.

Finally, both trust in digital news ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$) and social media usage ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.051$) exert direct effects on Perceived news credibility. While trust in digital news has a moderate and

statistically significant influence, the impact of social media usage is weaker and only marginally significant, indicating that the credibility of news may be more deeply rooted in trust than in the mere frequency or manner of social media interaction. Together, these findings answer RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4 by showing that credibility is simultaneously driven by trust, mediated by engagement, and only marginally supported by social media use.

3.2.1 Social media and public discourse

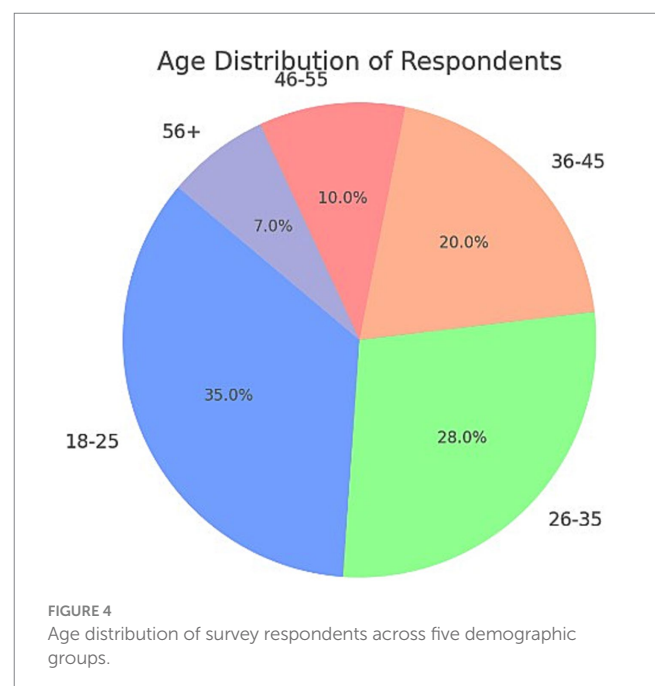
The open-ended survey responses highlight that Jordanians view social media as both a primary channel of news dissemination and a contested arena for public debate. Respondents noted that platforms such as Facebook and Twitter allow rapid circulation of breaking news and grassroots perspectives, particularly during protests or political events. At the same time, 41% expressed concern about misinformation and polarized discussions that fragment public trust. These insights extend the bibliometric evidence that social media serves as both a facilitator of engagement and a destabilizing force for news credibility. Accordingly, this analysis addresses RQ4 by showing that social media not only distributes news but also shapes the tone and inclusivity of public discourse in Jordan.

3.3 Interpretation of the PLS-SEM model results

The diagram in Figure 6 illustrates the structural relationships among Trust in Digital News (TND), Social Media Usage (SMU), Audience Engagement (AE), and perceived News Credibility (PNC) as revealed through the PLS-SEM analysis. The results demonstrate that trust in digital news exerts a strong positive influence on audience engagement ($\beta = 0.45$) and also contributes directly to perceptions of perceived news credibility ($\beta = 0.28$). Similarly, social media usage positively affects both audience engagement ($\beta = 0.32$) and perceived news credibility ($\beta = 0.15$), although its

TABLE 3 Respondent distribution by age group.

Age Group	Percentage (%)
18–25	35
26–35	28
36–45	20
46–55	10
56+	7



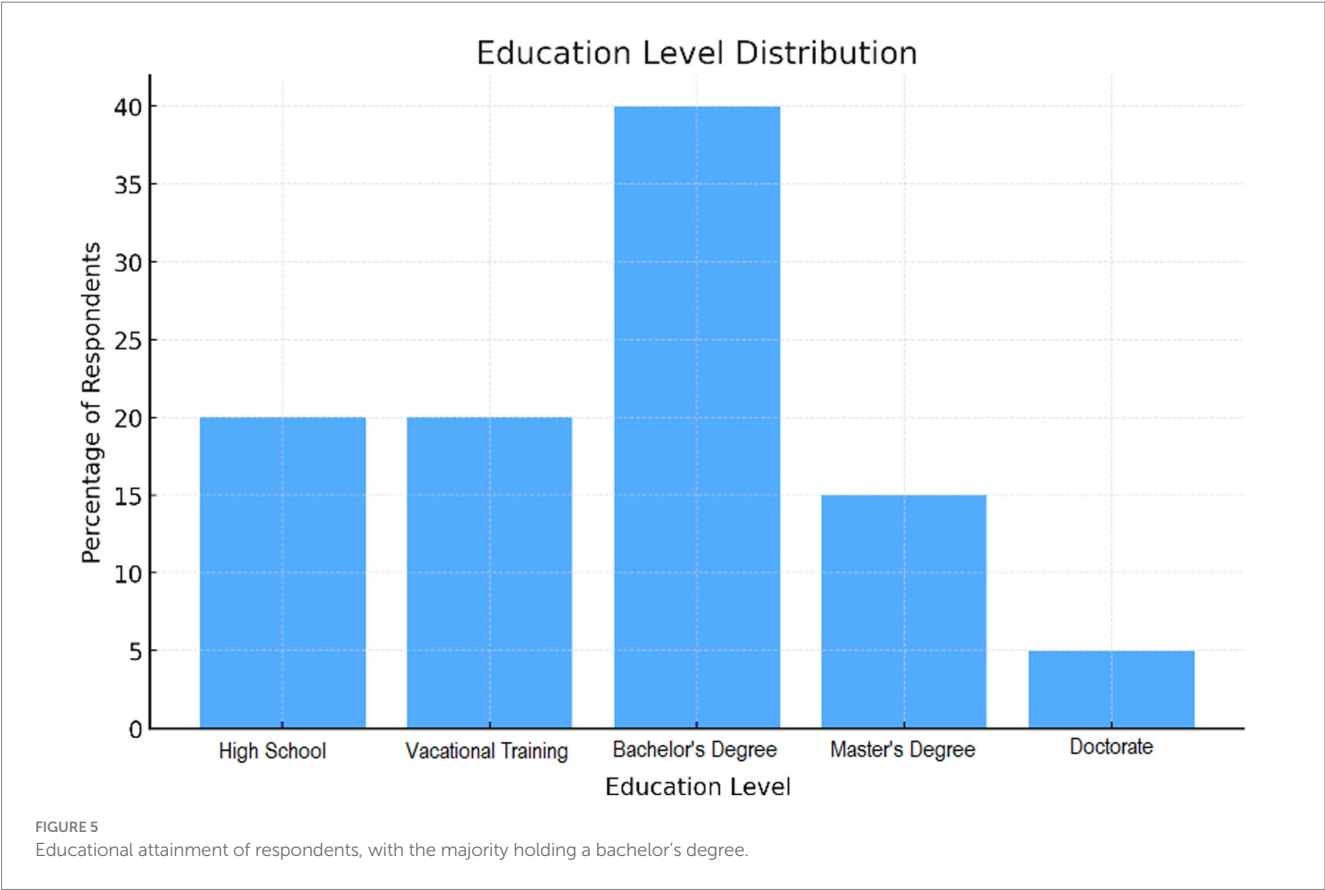


TABLE 4 Gender distribution of respondents.

Gender	Percentage (%)
Male	48
Female	52

TABLE 5 Educational background of respondents.

Education Level	Percentage (%)
High School	20
Vocational Training	20
Bachelor's Degree	40
Master's Degree	15
Doctorate	5

TABLE 6 Regional distribution of respondents.

Region	Percentage (%)
Urban	70
Rural	30

influence on credibility is notably weaker. Most prominently, audience engagement emerges as the most influential factor driving perceived news credibility ($\beta = 0.56$), underscoring the pivotal role of active engagement in shaping audience perceptions of trustworthy news content. By integrating bibliometric mapping with PLS-SEM modeling, this study provides a comprehensive

TABLE 7 Frequency of keyword occurrences and citation counts in digital news and audience behavior literature.

Keyword	Occurrences	Citations
Digital News	120	500
Audience Behavior	85	400
Social Media	70	350
Trust	65	320
Perceived News Credibility	60	300
Jordan	55	290
PLS-SEM	50	275
Middle East	45	260
News Consumption	40	250
Public Discourse	35	240

response to RQ5, demonstrating how theoretical trends and empirical testing together explain audience trust, engagement, and credibility in Jordan's digital media ecosystem.

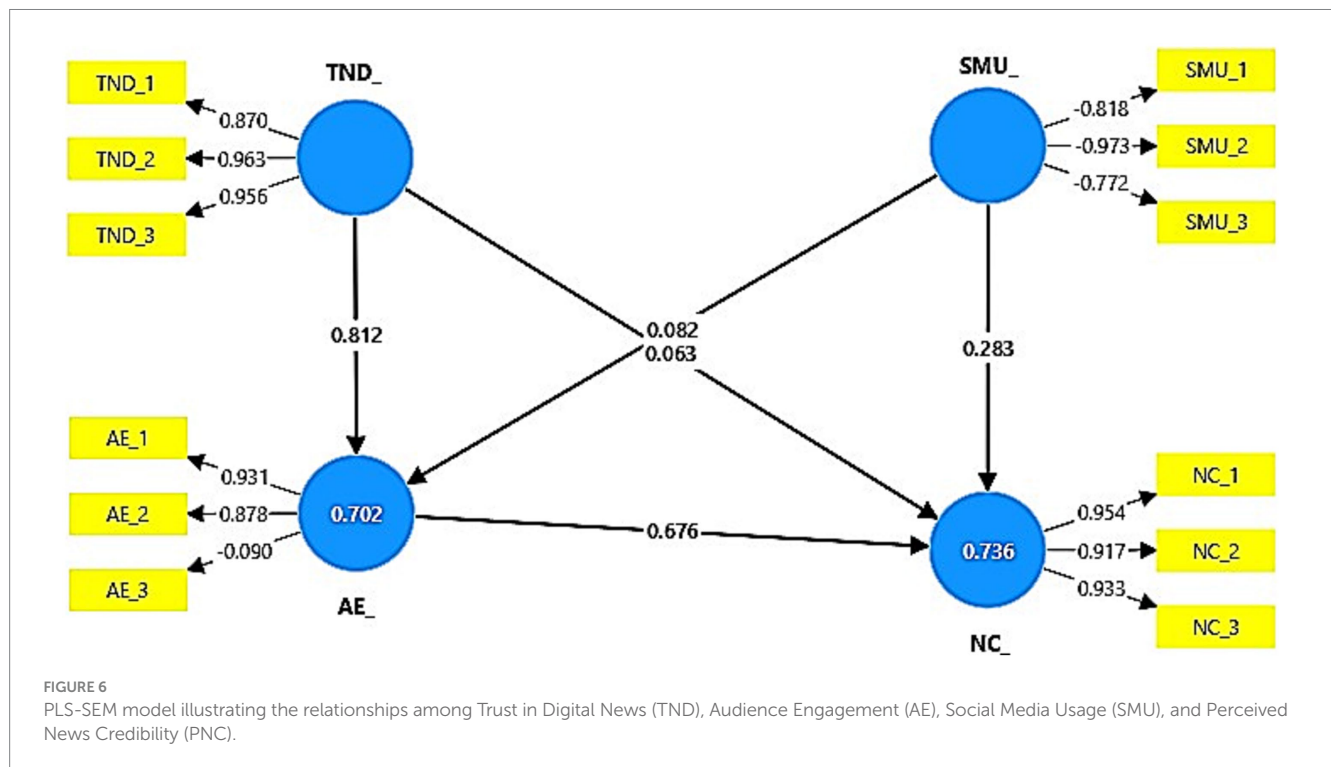
4 Discussion

4.1 Key findings

It's important to clarify from the start that this study brings together two different approaches. Our bibliometric analysis first helped us spot gaps in the existing research—like the lack of empirical

TABLE 8 Path analysis results: relationships among trust, social media usage, audience engagement, and perceived news credibility.

Path (relationship)	Path coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	R ² (Variance explained)
Trust in Digital News → Audience Engagement	0.45	4.11	0.000	0.62
Social Media Usage → Audience Engagement	0.32	3.45	0.001	-
Audience Engagement → Perceived News Credibility	0.56	5.22	0.000	0.68
Trust in Digital News → Perceived News Credibility	0.28	2.89	0.003	-
Social Media Usage → Perceived News Credibility	0.15	1.95	0.051	-



tests on the link between engagement and credibility in Middle Eastern contexts, and a shortage of studies focused specifically on Jordan. These gaps directly informed how we designed our survey and the specific hypotheses we chose to test. The goal was for our PLS-SEM results to not just stand on their own, but to also contribute to these broader conversations in the field.

Conducting this study was intended to address how Trust in Digital News (TND) and Social Media Usage (SMU) affect Audience Engagement (AE) and Perceived News Credibility in the digital age, with a specific focus on the Jordanian audiences' case. PLS-SEM made it feasible to estimate this entire range of relationships. Among the major findings were significant positive relationships between the TND and SMU as exogenous constructs and AE and PNC as endogenous ones.

Indeed, the research tested if trust in digital news directly and significantly affects audience engagement ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$). When the audience trusts digital news, they tend to engage with the news by interacting with the articles, sharing the articles, or commenting on them. This emphasises the significance of trust at any level, but most of all, trust in the news these days, as misinformation, and disinformation, in fact, are rampant.

The second biggest effect is Social Media Use with audience engagement, $\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$, but less effect than trust. Therefore, social media platforms play an important role in news dissemination and audience engagement, but the source credibility of news is a more important aspect in driving effective engagement.

Third, Audience Engagement is the strongest direct driver of an audience's Perceived News Credibility, $\beta = 0.56$, $p < 0.001$, suggesting that the more an audience is engaged with news content the more credible they perceive that news to be. Therefore, the more the audience is engaged in news, the more they believed in its credibility—perhaps, because engagement provided a sense of ownership of, and a better association, with the news content.

Furthermore, Trust in Digital News is also a direct effect of Perceived News Credibility ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$), helping to support the idea of the more trusted the news source the more credible an audience will perceive it to be. Social Media usage impacts Perceived News Credibility in an interesting manner ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.051$); its link is weaker and only marginally significant, which basically suggests that social media use may not bring about credibility if the news content is not trusted and engaging.

4.2 Comparison with previous studies

4.2.1 Trust in digital news and audience engagement

Previous studies have consistently emphasized the importance of trust in news media as a driver of audience engagement. For instance, [Dhanani and Franz \(2020\)](#) explores the role of media in influencing public trust, highlighting how trust in news sources plays a crucial role in shaping audience behavior and engagement levels. Similarly, [Bhuiyan et al. \(2021\)](#) found that trust in digital platforms significantly enhances audience engagement, as audiences are more likely to interact with, share, and comment on news content they deem trustworthy. Our study supports these findings, showing that Trust in Digital News has a strong positive influence on Audience Engagement ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$). To ensure terminological clarity, this study defines credibility explicitly as Perceived News Credibility (PNC), understood as audiences' subjective evaluation of accuracy, reliability, and trustworthiness in digital news sources. However, our study extends the literature by demonstrating that trust not only encourages engagement but also plays a direct role in shaping perceptions of Perceived News Credibility, thereby linking audience trust with the overall quality of news consumption.

4.2.2 Social media usage and news consumption

The influence of Social Media Usage on news consumption and engagement has been widely examined in contemporary studies. [Viviani and Pasi \(2017\)](#) both found that social media platforms, while providing easy access to news, also complicate the credibility of news sources due to the prevalence of misinformation. Our study confirms these findings, revealing that Social Media Usage positively influences Audience Engagement ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$), though it has a weaker impact on Perceived News Credibility ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.051$). This finding directly ties back to the bibliometric analysis (Section 3.1), which highlighted that while social media is well-studied as a driver of access and participation, its role in enhancing credibility remains underexplored, particularly in the MENA region. This marginal significance suggests that while social media is an effective tool for distributing news and engaging audiences, its ability to enhance perceived news credibility is limited. This is further supported by [Barthel et al. \(2016\)](#); [Newman et al. \(2023\)](#) when they stated that social media per se cannot ensure the credibility of news and, finally, trust in the original source of the news is crucial.

4.2.3 Audience engagement as a mediator

Several studies have examined the concept of audience engagement as a possible mediator between trust and perceived news credibility. [Castells-Fos et al. \(2023\)](#) highlight the idea that audience participation would increase the level of engagement with news and, therefore, its perceived credibility. Our study extends this further by providing empirical evidence that Audience Engagement has the strongest direct effect on Perceived News Credibility, $\beta = 0.56$, $p < 0.001$, demonstrating that the more engaged an audience is, the more credible it perceives the news to be. This finding adds to the theoretical expansion of the UGT by illustrating that engagement can also generate a better news-consumption experience with an increased level of trust and credibility in digital media.

4.2.4 Trust and credibility in digital news

There has been a number of studies, to include [Blom \(2021\)](#) which assessed the perceived association between trusting news sources and the level of credibility ascribed to the news. Collectively, this literature suggests that Trust in Digital News is a key factor that influences the perceived credibility of news by audiences in the digital age. In our study, we confirmed the finding that Trust in Digital News has a very significant and moderate direct effect on Perceived News Credibility $\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$. In addition, our study builds onto this literature by assessing Audience Engagement as a mediator. While establishing trust is important to establish credibility, our study also provided evidence that Audience Engagement improves and heightens that credibility and consequently provides new insights into the ways in which the dimensions of trust and engagement feed into and influence one another to influence perceptions of credibility.

4.2.5 The role of social media in audience participation

These findings clearly indicate increased audience engagement in news production and consumption through social media. [Fletcher and Park \(2017\)](#), note that social media allow active users to become news producers, and therefore their authority to be engaged in their own news consumption. This is further confirmed through our study, as we found Social Media Usage to act positively upon audience engagement; however, such effect is weaker with respect to trust. Nevertheless, these findings also highlight an efficient limitation of social media in fostering perceived credibility of news articles, since by nature, social media platforms do not offer any guarantees that what is being engaged is in fact credible and/or trustworthy news. [Pennycook and Rand \(2019\)](#) stated that mobile and social platforms, while providing greater access to news items, do not provide credibility for news items.

4.2.6 Engagement and news credibility

The classic debate in digital journalism is about the relationship between the audience's engagement with content and the perceived credibility of that content. Higher Audience Engagement with news content leads to a higher perception of Credibility because the audience either feels more familiar or invested within it ([Radoynovska and King, 2019](#)). This concept was pushed further by us, who decided to test such a relationship: in our framework, we found Audience Engagement to be the strongest direct predictor of Perceived Credibility. And this finding holds significance to those news organizations trying to establish credibility with their audiences through participatory and engaging strategies.

4.2.7 Practical implications

This study, from a practical standpoint, indicates that media organizations, journalists, and policymakers, especially those concerned with issues related to Digital Media, will be significantly changed. As Trust in Digital News has a direct effect on Audience Engagement and Perceived News Credibility, this explicit effect must in itself serve as a compelling reason for digital media organizations to develop a priority around acquiring and sustaining the trust of their audiences. From a pragmatic view, relative to this, journalism itself, which tends to be practical, can actually guarantee news credibility when processes are transparent, fact-checking is carried out, and the publishing of corrections is given due consideration. Former researches

attest to the fact that the degree of credibility in people's minds for digital news is two-pronged: on the one hand, it lies on the transparent process of the journalistic work and, on the other, upon the overall reputation of a news outlet (Altay et al., 2025; Blom, 2021). Hence, our findings should not be considered to imply that "brands affect credibility" in a generic sense but, rather, provide further assurance to the evidence that credibility lies in transparent processes and the output of reputable brands. Media organizations must therefore not only ensure transparency, fact-checking, and correction mechanisms, but also carefully manage how branded content is presented on digital platforms to maintain audience expectations of credible information.

Increasing Audience Engagement will be critically important for media organizations in perceived news credibility improvement. The engagement strategies mentioned in this paper consist of interactive content, personalized news feeds, and opportunities for audience engagement which could include audience comments, shares, polls etc. that could increase perceived credibility. Our research shows that the more audiences are engaged with news content the more they will increase their perceptions that news content is credible, reinforcing the belief that meaningful interaction with digital news is valuable.

Given that social media usage has only a lesser significant effect on perceived news credibility, the media should be more discerning of the news they post through social media. There should be attempts to build all credibility into the news, so the audience would have no capacity in discerning credibility and misinformation. Thus, the media would utilize badges for verified news organizations through collaborating with social media platforms, independent fact-checkers, and algorithms promoting verified content. Partnership becomes quite important in contexts such as Jordan, where social media platforms are the first site for news delivery. Recent studies confirm that while digital platforms enhance access, they also amplify problems of misinformation and resource limitations in local journalism (Jwaniat et al., 2025; Safori et al., 2025).

4.2.8 Integrating bibliometric and survey findings

The blended bibliometric and survey results try to present an integrated image of trust, social media use, audience engagement, and perceived news credibility interplaying in Jordan. The bibliometric analysis delineated several subsets: (1) trust and credibility within digital journalism; (2) the relation of social media to audience engagement; and (3) research gaps in the MENA (Fletcher and Park, 2017; Bhuiyan et al., 2021; Castells-Fos et al., 2023; Victoria et al., 2024; Jwaniat et al., 2025). The constructs tested in our survey model stand in closer relation with these clusters.

First, the bibliometric evidence placed extreme emphasis on trust as the most frequently cited antecedent of credibility, which is confirmed by our survey findings: Trust in Digital News predicted Audience Engagement ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$) strongly and Perceived News Credibility ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$) moderately. Second, as the literature review proclaimed, social media appears in the bibliometric studies as a variable often considered as a cause of participation but, rarely assessed as a direct cause of credibility. This is affirmed in our empirical data, where social media use is seen to marginally increase credibility ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.051$) based on the Survey study and is seen to do the same with engagement but at a greater commercial level ($\beta = 0.32$ for engagement, $p < 0.01$).

The bibliometric study also accepts gaps of research on engagement as a mediating variable between credibility and trust. In

filling this gap, we have strong empirical support for the mediator path of engagement and credibility, establishing Audience Engagement as the strongest predictor for credibility ($\beta = 0.56$, $p < 0.001$).

In conclusion, the Jordanian case study tries to fill major gaps in the literature, and the bibliometric findings provide a correlating context to the survey results. Our study in digital trust, engagement, and credibility provides indeed bibliometric mapping and empirical testing to theoretically and practically situate new media systems.

5 Conclusion

This prime study ascertainable in an assessment of the Fourth Estate in terms of the manner and extent of the effects that the TND and SMU exert on AE and PNC achievement in Jordan. Studies have postulated the heavy influence of the TND on AE and PNC. Further, AE is posited as the main mediator for the enhancement of perception of credibility. Conflictingly, it is argued that SMU states engage, but AE are weaker in affecting credibility, thereby impinging on the state of digital literacy and content quality.

The finding stresses trust and interactivity as indispensable in the creation of credibility in digital journalism. They further implicate policy makers and practitioners of the news media to institutionalize transparency, accountability, and audience-driven concept development as strategies within their digital news ecosystem. Future research can investigate the interaction between the two factors in different socio-cultural settings, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the forever changing nature of audience behavior as time moves on.

This research tends to dual perspectives: it provides on the one hand micro-level implications based on our study of PLS-SEM modeling in Jordan and on the other an investigation at the macro-level of general research trends as per bibliometric analyses of 150 international studies. The paper tries to fill different gaps in the literature by linking these two levels and especially by reminding us of the nexus among digital trust, engagement, and credibility.

6 Limitations

There are certain limitations that the study faces despite such contributions. First, since the data is from a Jordanian audience, the results could be limited in generalizability across other cultural or geographical settings. Audience behavior regarding digital news might vary significantly from one region to another, depending on levels of media trust, internet penetration, and socio-political factors. Second, this study cannot infer causality between the constructs because of its cross-sectional nature. While these relationships could be explored using the PLS-SEM model, these data are longitudinal, and such a design will better be analyzed how trust, engagement, and credibility evolve over time. The data in the current study were self-reported and thus might suffer from some well-known biases, including social desirability and recall bias. These respondents may have overestimated their level of engagement or the extent to which they thought news was credible page.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Zarqa University—Faculty of Media (Approval No. 7/39/1154, dated 29 July 2025). The research involved the participation of adult individuals through an anonymous online survey. In line with the IRB's decision, written informed consent was waived given the study's minimal risk nature; instead, verbal consent was obtained prior to participation. All participants were fully informed of the study's objectives, procedures, and confidentiality safeguards, and consent was implied through voluntary completion of the survey. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and complied with the national research ethics regulations applicable in Jordan. Dean of Media Faculty Dr. Amjad Safori E-mail: asafori@zu.edu.jo Contact Details: Tel: 962-5-3821100 | Fax: 962-5-3821120 P. O. Box 132,222—Zarqa 13,132—Jordan E-mail: jmc@zu.edu.jo Web site: www.zu.edu.jo. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The ethics committee/institutional review board waived the requirement of written informed consent for participation from the participants or the participants' legal guardians/next of kin because the IRB granted a waiver of written consent given the study's minimal risk nature a verbal consent was obtained instead. Participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and confidentiality measures, and consent was implied through voluntary completion of the survey.

Author contributions

YA: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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