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A study of citizen journalism practices in the Kingdom of Bahrain: insights from the social responsibility theory and news verification tools

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This study aims to investigate to what extent citizen journalists in the Kingdom of Bahrain comply with social responsibility code by adhering to the media law and legislation in Bahrain. This investigation is done using news verification tools as a variable. The methodological framework of the research relies upon a survey of a sample of 132 citizen journalists carried out from January 1 to March 28, 2025. Three research findings emerged. First, two key pillars need to be emphasized for the success of citizen journalism in the Kingdom of Bahrain. These two pillars which are raising awareness of media laws and regulations and fostering a sense of social responsibility are viewed to be capable of leading to increased verification of news before publication, making citizen journalism an effective tool in societal engineering and avoiding sensationalism at the expense of credibility. Second, there is the need to adopt professional ethical guidelines to fit the specific context of citizen journalism. Third, the imperative of organizing educational initiatives and outreach programs in order to promote professional ethical practices among citizen journalists cannot be overstressed. These results explain that the essence of establishing citizen journalism in the Kingdom of Bahrain lies in transforming publishing from an available technical act to a responsible standard practice that is subject to the balance of law, ethics, and professional culture.

KEYWORDS

citizen journalism, ethics, news verification tools, social responsibility theory, the Kingdom of Bahrain

1 Introduction

Digital media has reconfigured the relationship between audiences and journalistic authority, transforming users from passive recipients into active participants (El-Qaari, 2020). This shift underpins the rise of citizen journalism and raises pressing questions about objectivity, credibility, and power within contemporary media ecosystems. The development has highlighted the increasing role of citizen journalism and its ability to shape social matters and patterns. This emergent citizen journalism has left a marked impact on the media ecosystem offering a significant threat to the established paradigm of media objectivity (Ahmad et al., 2024). Nonetheless, citizen journalists are expected to be ethical and highly socially responsible because journalism, as a profession, has some core values, notably to provide the citizens with true and unbiased information and to protect the interests of publics most impacted by media representation and governance.

With the prospects that digital media has offered to people in terms of their participation in the field of journalism, this study sets out to discover what citizen journalism in the Kingdom of Bahrain is all about, and whether it abides by the rules and regulations of ethical reporting and social responsibility. In addition, it evaluates the degree to which citizen journalists are concerned with accuracy by employing news verifications tools before publishing their content on social media.

1.1 The concept of citizen journalism

Citizen Journalism can be defined as a key tool for maintaining press freedom and reporting truth and events accurately and transparently, as it enables citizens to express their opinions and experiences freely (Goyanes and De Zúñiga, 2021). It is characterized by interactivity, transparency, and cooperation (Horoub, 2023). In the view of many media scholars, citizen journalism is a practice which empowers the citizen to play the role of a journalist, taking advantage of all techniques to produce, edit, and publish news on social media platforms (Min et al., 2025). In addition, it helps to spread awareness of social, economic, political, human rights, and other important issues and topics that affect members of citizens.

1.2 The importance of citizen journalism

It is a well-known fact that the openness that exists in the world today emanates from the technological leaps in communication and media technology which have motivated individuals to be actively present in various digital spaces (Peña-Fernández et al., 2024). This has contributed to improving and strengthening public dialogue, highlighting local and national problems, and doubling the interest of citizens in practicing citizen journalism, resulting in an increase in the value and importance of citizen journalism and its impact on citizens.

With the increasing number of those interested in citizen journalism, many private accounts have emerged in various digital media platforms which publish and transfer news or media materials with ease to reach a huge segment of followers (Zhang, 2024). Many appeals have therefore emerged calling for the need for citizen journalism to have recognized and well documented professional ethics to regulate journalistic work. In this regard, researchers and media specialists have conducted many studies toward evolving professional ethics which citizens must adhere to when practicing the profession (Doig, 2024). This is imperative because journalists are considered worldwide as constituting the “fourth realm of the estate” in governance. Journalists wield the power to evolve societal changes. They are the voice of the people. Therefore, citizen journalism requires a profound sense of social responsibility from its practitioners. The role and importance of citizen journalism in society cannot never be overlooked. It has recorded many achievements by improving societal systems and have contributed to filling legal gaps by unraveling many cases of abuse of power or office in society (Sheen et al., 2021). It has also exposed inherent flaws in societal practices, defended

freedom of expression, underscored the need to promote human rights, and mitigated violence in society (Nave, 2022). It can therefore be said that citizen’s participation in the media has led to the full realization of the true meaning of the press, contrary to a situation where the media platforms were non-independent institutions, operating as the façade of the ruling class (Abdulmumi and Joseph, 2024). By citizen journalism, the citizens move from a position of tranquility and docility to that of genuine enquiry and investigation to unravel the truth. It is safe to conclude that citizen journalism plays a pivotal role by empowering citizens and impacting the communities positively through its responsible and regulated practice.

1.3 Ethical frameworks for the citizen journalism practices

The concept of journalistic ethics was developed in 1910 in the United States of America. This was followed by a code of in Sweden in 1916, and a charter in France in 1918 (Roberts, 2019). Subsequently, many other efforts have been made toward establishing a comprehensive code of honor worthy of defending public interest and protecting the freedom and rights of others.

Ethics expresses all the lofty principles that practitioners of the profession of journalism must adhere to during their practice of the profession. The knowledge of journalistic ethics is taught and inculcated during academic and professional training of journalists in universities or higher institutions. The knowledge is further rehearsed in the training schools owned by individual media houses immediately after the employment of journalists (Donev and Vojinović, 2022). Despite the superficial variation in the standard and rules of these journalistic ethics from one institution to another and from one media house training school to another, they constitute an umbrella under which journalistic practice operates.

The above highlights the importance of citizen journalism and its transcendence of the boundaries of traditional journalism, which is subject to censorship in many developing countries. Consequently, it is important to study the actual role of citizen journalism in society by identifying the extent to which citizen journalists in Bahrain adhere to the principles of social responsibility, as well as identifying the extent to which they employ news verification tools before publishing, which contributes to the effectiveness of their role in society.

2 Literature review

Bahraini citizen journalism, like in many other international environments, is significantly influenced by the frequent and accelerated developments in digital technology which allow individuals to engage actively and constructively in the complicated processes of news output and circulation across multiple channels. The study by Srikandi and Budiharjo (2023) submits that this new culture of media participation not only permits individuals to produce a whole spectrum of material capable of shaping and changing public thinking but also frequently evidences a deficiency of those stringent verification protocols habitually linked to traditional journalistic processes. The practice of citizen journalism

within Bahrain's borders must therefore adeptly embrace a variety of barriers required for the preservation of accuracy and fairness in reportage, primarily because empirical studies have revealed that news generated by citizens frequently do not conform to core journalistic principles. Kartanawati and Wisudawanto (2020) argues that this is because of the differences among the erstwhile institutions and training schools, together with a clear deficiency in professional credentials among participating citizen journalists.

In this complicated setting, Lobato et al. (2021) argued that the development and operation of fact-checking systems, such as those operating on social media platforms, for example, Twitter through hashtags like #StopBulos, are certainly critical for controlling the spread of scams and misinformation. Salvi (2020) posits that the proposed integration and application of state-of-the-art technologies, such as machine learning and blockchain, have been suggested as new solutions aimed at enhancing the process of verifying news content, thereby ensuring the reliability and authenticity of information shared by citizen journalists. However, to uphold its great influence and remain credible among the populace, Lopez et al. (2022) postulate that it is critical for citizen journalists to strictly adhere to the prescribed journalistic ethics and effectively apply the available verification checks tools to guarantee that shared news is both factual and balanced. This study by Lopez et al. (2022) revealed that the attitude toward citizen journalism was positive. The results of the data analysis revealed that a significant proportion of the study sample used citizen journalism to obtain information related to their university specialization. The research findings confirmed that citizen journalism provides a free space to present various opinions and ideas through social media platforms.

Similarly, Syahputra and Ritonga (2019) investigated how citizen journalism has affected the mobilization of Indonesian public opinion and its impact on the governmental decision-makers. The study defined citizen journalism as a new phenomenon supported by digital media technologies. The authors used a mixed-method design because they carried out in-depth interviews with four key informants along with creating a special Twitter account to follow and interact with the citizen journalism practitioners. The research findings revealed that new media has been a great boost to the ability of citizens to report on observed situations. In addition, citizen journalism has created new channels for public voices to reach government authorities.

Luo and Harrison (2019) focused on identifying how citizen journalism influences a traditional media agenda as well as political decision-making in China. The authors analyzed three sources of data: 490 news articles published in the local newspapers in the section of "important news", 994 posts on Weibo (a Chinese social media platform), and 5,030 posts on China Forum (a government-sponsored online discussion platform). The research findings revealed that citizen journalists have made a considerable impact on the selection of traditional media content and that they can put significant pressure on governments to act on matters of interest.

From the foregoing literature review, we can conclude that regardless of differences in methodology, the composition of the samples, and the goals of the research, the scholars remain united in their understanding of the crucial role of citizen journalism in modern media ecologies. The scholars also agree that citizen

journalism has become a formidable player in the policy-making processes as well as a significant source of information for various people. Some of the above studies have also explored the professional ethical dimension of the practice of citizen journalism.

3 The scope of the study

This study focuses on the use of communication technology enabling citizens to send news and information easily and in real-time. This enhanced ability for real-time reporting has been very helpful, especially in cases of emergencies and crises that call for urgent attention. Also, this paradigm shift has made ordinary citizens become active contributing members to journalistic practice and has erased the hitherto traditional dichotomy between professional journalists and citizen participants. In addition, the study investigates to what extent citizen journalists in Bahrain comply with the established ethical norms and act responsibly toward the citizens in their news-sharing behaviors. In particular, the study examines how these amateur journalists can make a balance between media liberty and responsible journalism considering Bahrain's unique sociocultural environment.

Despite the widespread international interest in citizen journalism studies and their relationship to social responsibility and news verification, this study is significant because it examines citizen journalism practices in the Kingdom of Bahrain, deploying the theoretical framework of the social responsibility theory. Furthermore, it fills a considerable gap in Arab media studies, where ethical considerations of citizen journalism remain underexplored. The research findings will not only advance the knowledge of digital citizen journalism ethics but also provide reference points that can enhance further research in this field within the context of Arab Media Studies. The research findings will also be valuable to scholarly discourse as they will fill the gap between theoretical concepts and empirical evidence of how citizen journalists make ethical decisions within the Bahraini society.

Flowing from the scope of study discussed above, this study aims to:

- reveal the extent of citizen journalists' adherence to the principle of social responsibility.
- examine the level of awareness of the media laws and legislations in the Kingdom of Bahrain.
- discuss the technological news verification tools that are used by citizen journalists in Bahrain.
- develop a set of ethical principles tailored to citizen journalism in Bahrain.
- identify the challenges that face citizen journalism in Bahrain.

4 The theoretical framework of the study

4.1 The social responsibility theory

The Social Responsibility Theory provides the theoretical framework for this research. The Social Responsibility Theory

emerged after the Second World War (Toliver, 2013). Experts and specialists have defined the theory of social responsibility as a set of ideas and functions that fall on the shoulders of the journalist who practices them in various cultural, political, and economic fields in the society with a high sense of professionalism, credibility, and balanced objectivity in the transmission of information and news within the context of freedom of opinion for the journalist and under the responsibility of the law (Ahva, 2022).

The codes of social responsibility of citizen journalists are based on the social responsibility theory, which was developed in the West, and applied to the Arab world. The social responsibility theory stresses that every citizen must adhere to social responsibilities (Waktola et al., 2024). It supports active involvement in solving social problems, increasing awareness of the population, in order to achieve the best result for all stakeholders.

Social responsibility practices by the people are associated with society norms and traditions (Saragih, 2024). In this connection, citizen journalists create work that not only informs but also improves the reputation and status of their community globally. Hence, this theory involves the media practitioners as important players in this shared responsibility whereby ethical reporting will lead to national building as well as an enhanced international image.

Citizen journalism practices the values of transparency, liberty, and flexibility in the coverage of news stories on digital platforms. Citizen journalism enhances social cohesion and active participation in societal issues by encouraging civic accountability. Citizen journalism is a new mode of communication that operates outside the censor's scissors. Its strength should not be underestimated. Therefore, there is the need to raise awareness about the correct practices of citizen journalism. In addition, there is the need to focus on the laws and legislation that regulate its work in the digital space (Sylvia and Hasan, 2025). Since journalism, by its nature, carries a profound message aimed at enhancing the awareness of the target audience as it increases the level of cultural knowledge to make the public keep pace with the developments of its current era, citizen journalism plays a prominent role in creating an enduring impact on people's opinions and orientations.

It is imperative to establish a code of professional ethics for citizen journalism to regulate their daily practice of journalists. This code of ethics must include a sense of social responsibility of the citizen journalist. In this regard, citizen journalists should be committed to acting professionally within the context of their professional ethics, social norms, and values when dealing with news and other media content. This implies checking the accuracy of all published content to determine whether it is accurate and suitable for the target audience. Citizen journalism, like any other practice in society, ought to be guided by ethics such as honesty, transparency, and objectivity in news reporting (Popović, 2024). Citizen journalists must not engage in sensationalism. Also, they must observe the dignity of individuals and institutions. In addition, privacy safeguards must be observed diligently to avoid causing harm to other people. The fulfillment of these journalistic functions contributes to maintaining social

balance and the integrity of information (Moussaoui and Souraya, 2022).

As previously mentioned above, the social responsibility theory emerged after the Second World War (Toliver, 2013). There were motives behind the emergence of this theory, which are explained in Figure 1:

According to Figure 2, the reasons for the emergence of the social responsibility theory are as follows (Gong et al., 2025):

- The right of individuals to obtain correct information and not to hide it from them.
- Accepting constructive criticism from individuals and discussing their ideas and opinions.
- Contributing to the dissemination of the scientific and educational aspirations of the community through various media.
- Providing information to individuals in a way that contributes to adding value to their cultural and cognitive levels and upgrading their scientific level.
- The journalist's work should be based on credibility and balance in the publication of news materials.

In the light of the social responsibility theory, the ethical responsibilities of citizen journalism, are presented in Figure 2:

- Political responsibility: this signifies that the citizen journalist should present every new development in the political sphere in a transparent manner. In addition, he should open channels of communication between the public and the concerned authorities while respecting the privacy of all parties involved (Bataineh et al., 2025).
- Educational responsibility: this signifies that the citizen journalist should contribute positively to educational issues by offering suggestions and providing information in a transparent and truthful manner that will advance the cause of literacy in the country (Gao et al., 2024).
- Cultural responsibility: this means that the citizen journalist is a great intellectual force capable of influencing the digital environments. Furthermore, he has become responsible for developing cultural awareness within community and preserving its identity, customs, and traditions (Yudhanti and Tjahjadi, 2021).
- Value responsibility: this responsibility is one of the most important responsibilities entrusted to the citizen journalist. It involves disseminating positive values of various cultural and societal forms in order to help the citizens and other users of digital applications to imbibe desirable values and discard unwanted societal values (Cheng et al., 2024).

In summary, the theory of social responsibility was employed in this study to identify the extent of the commitment of citizen journalists to social responsibility practices and their awareness of media legislation and ethics. In addition, the theory will help to determine the extent of keenness by citizen journalists to verify the accuracy of news before publishing it.



FIGURE 1

The social responsibilities of the citizen journalist.

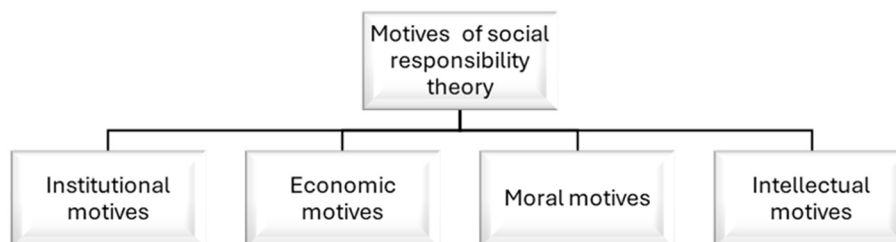


FIGURE 2

Motives of social responsibility theory.

5 Research questions and hypotheses

5.1 Research questions

The study questions formulated for this research are as follows:

- Q1. What is the level of commitment of citizen journalists to social responsibility standards?
- Q2. What is the level of media education and professional training required for promoting social responsibility among citizen journalists in the Kingdom of Bahrain?
- Q3. What are the technological tools available to citizen journalism in Bahrain to ensure accuracy of information before it is published?
- Q4. What are the main challenges facing citizen journalists in the Kingdom of Bahrain?

5.2 Research hypotheses

Flowing from the above study questions, the following study hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: Citizen Journalists' level of commitment to social responsibility standards has a positive and significant impact on the level of news verification before publishing.
- H2: The awareness level of the citizen journalists about social responsibility has a significant impact on the level of news verification before publishing.

H3: There are statistically significant differences between citizen journalists' level of commitment to social responsibility attributable to the following demographic variables: (gender, age, educational level, and number of years of experience).

6 Methodology

This study depended on the survey method to determine the levels at which the citizen journalism practitioners within the Bahraini society comply with ethics and adhere to the social responsibility. The study population included all citizen journalists in the Kingdom of Bahrain who actively participate in the production and dissemination of media content using digital platforms and social media. These individuals included loggers, activists, freelance reporters, and digital content creators. This is because the concept of citizen journalists refers to individuals who engage in journalistic activities as non-professional or amateur journalists, and who use digital platforms and technologies to report news and share information.

Despite the multiple definitions of citizen journalism, the operational definition in this study is that of a person who works in the profession of journalism unofficially, and transmits news through one of the platforms that he personally manages, and which is followed by many of the public to obtain information and news from it, instead of relying on traditional media that may not have the same credibility as citizen journalism, which is considered free journalism without restrictions. In this context, the social responsibility of citizen journalism lies in its credibility in presenting constructive news to the community, avoiding the

TABLE 1 Demographics of the participants.

Variables	Sub-groups	Frequency	
		NO.	%
Gender	Males	62	47
	Females	70	53
Age- Group	18–30	34	25.8
	30–40	52	39.4
	40+	46	34.8
Level of Education	High school	38	28.8
	University	87	66
	Postgraduate	7	6.8
Number of years of Experience	Less 5	45	34
	6–10	62	47
	10+	25	19
Total		132	100%

incitement of discord, and emphasizing the importance of verifying information before publication.

The current study employed the snowball sample to reach the required study sample, which comprised 132 citizen journalists. The authors chose this sample purposely due to their active involvement in media collection and production across different social media platforms. They relied on Google Forms to distribute the study questionnaire from January 1 to March 28, 2025.

As seen in Table 1, the respondents are composed of 47% male and 53% female. The largest age group is those who are between 30 and 40 years (39.4%). 66% of the participants graduated from university and 47 % had experience of 6–10 years as citizen journalists. The authors measured the social responsibility level through a scale the Likert consisted of 6 statements as highlighted in Table 2.

7 The study results

The details of the study results are as follows:

7.1 Citizen journalist’s usage of digital platforms

Figure 3 shows that Instagram ranks first (69.9%) among the platforms used by the citizen journalists in the study sample to publish their videos and news. This is followed by TikTok (36.3%), and Snapshot (31.4%). This ranking is consistent with the ranking of social media usage in the Kingdom of Bahrain, as announced by the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, which reported 1.10 million Instagram users in Bahrain, and approximately 1.18 million TikTok users in Bahrain aged 18 and above in early 2024. Snapchat had 1.04 million users in Bahrain in early 2024 (Alwatan News, 2025).

TABLE 2 The social responsibility scale.

Paragraph	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	Relative weight
I care about the accuracy and reliability of the information that I publish	3.2	0.931	71%
I feel morally responsible when it comes to the content I share as a citizen journalist	3.33	0.962	75%
I consider the cultural or societal norms in Bahrain while publishing any news	3.48	0.895	81%
I believe that citizen journalism in Bahrain can contribute to promoting transparency, accountability, and social change	3.48	0.895	83%
I have a great awareness regarding media legislations in Bahrain and consider them during my work as a citizen journalist	3.38	0.895	74%
I can make a balance between freedom of opinion individuals’ privacy and social responsibility	3.41	0.941	80%

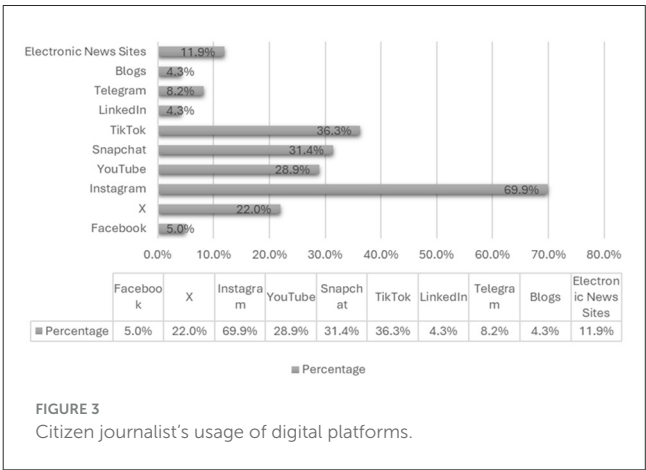
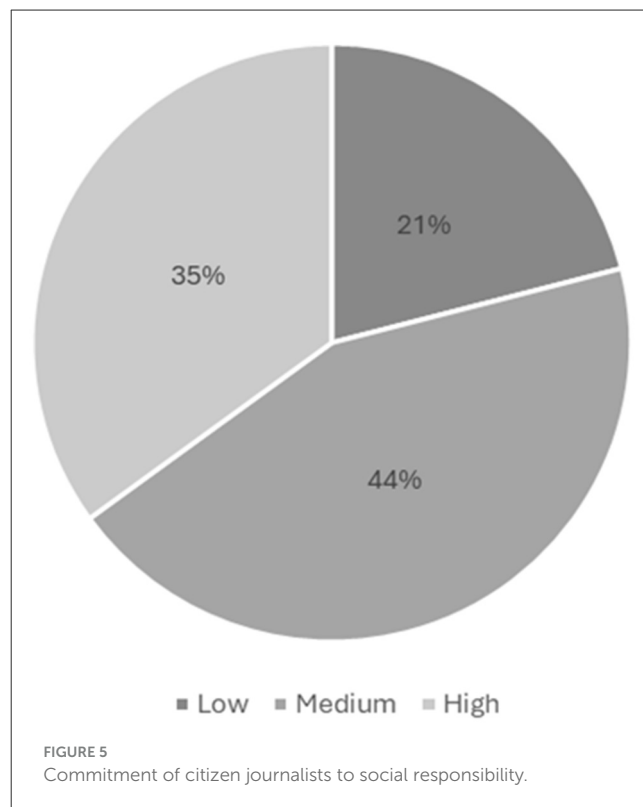
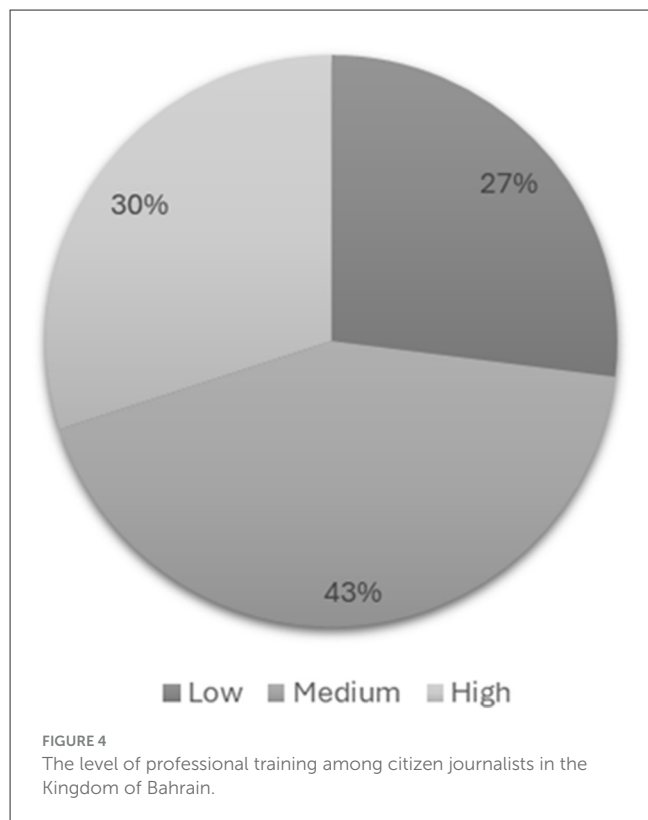


FIGURE 3
Citizen journalist’s usage of digital platforms.

7.2 The level professional training among citizen journalists in the Kingdom of Bahrain

Based on Figure 4, 43.0% of the participants had a medium level of professional training in citizen journalism, 30.0% had a high level, and 27.0% had a low level of training. Generally, this result can be explained in light of the fact that the citizen journalists are essentially free-lancing journalists, not affiliated with a specific media organization that would be responsible for their training,



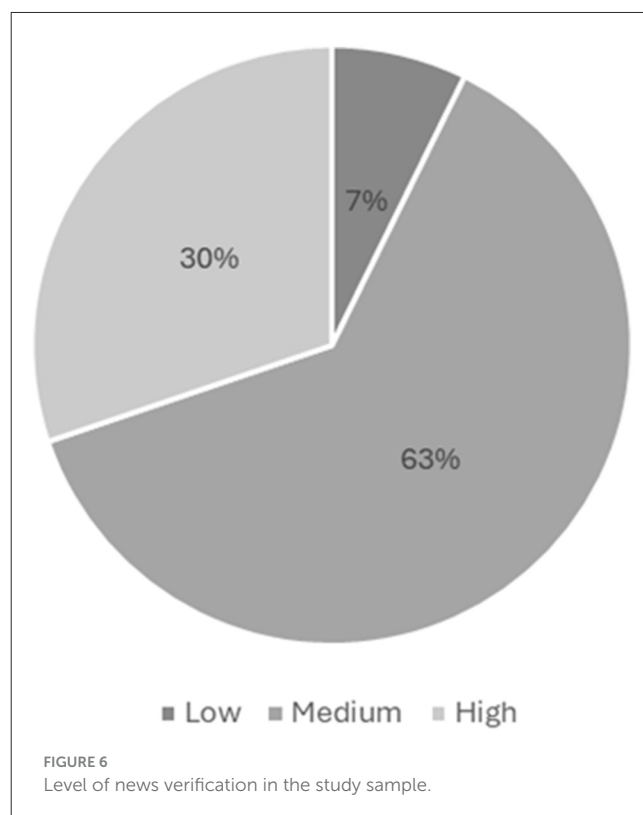
which makes training non-mandatory for them, but according to their choices.

7.3 Commitment of citizen journalist to social responsibility

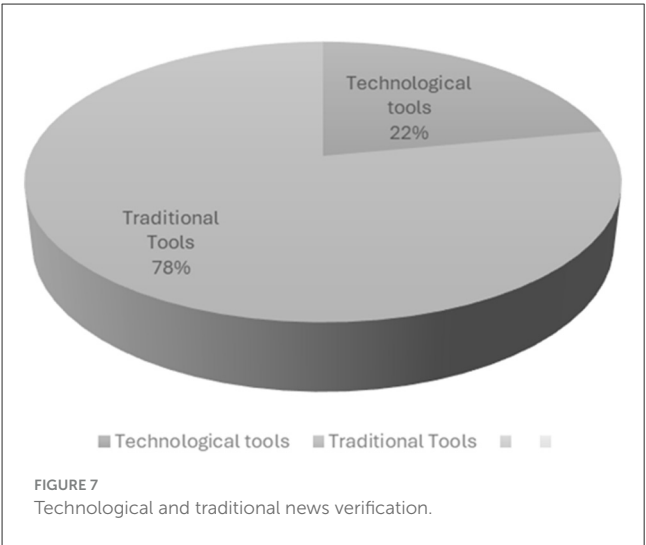
Figure 5 shows the commitment level of social responsibility by the citizen journalists in the study sample. It indicates that some of the respondents have a medium level (44%), some have a higher level (35%), and the rest operate at the low level (21%) of social responsibility commitment. This result suggests that social responsibility may not be the first choice for the citizen journalists who may seek fame through content that may sometimes conflict with the accepted principles of social responsibility.

7.4 Level of news verification between the study sample

Figure 6 shows that the highest level of news verification by the participants is 62%. A total of 30% of the participants operate at high-level, while 7.3% of them operate at low-level of news verification. This result may seem somewhat contradictory to the previous result, which indicated that the level of social responsibility among the study sample of citizen journalists was moderate. However, this result indicates their awareness of the importance of verifying news before publishing it on



personal responsibility, as publishing some unreliable news may expose them to a lack of public credibility for the content they provide.

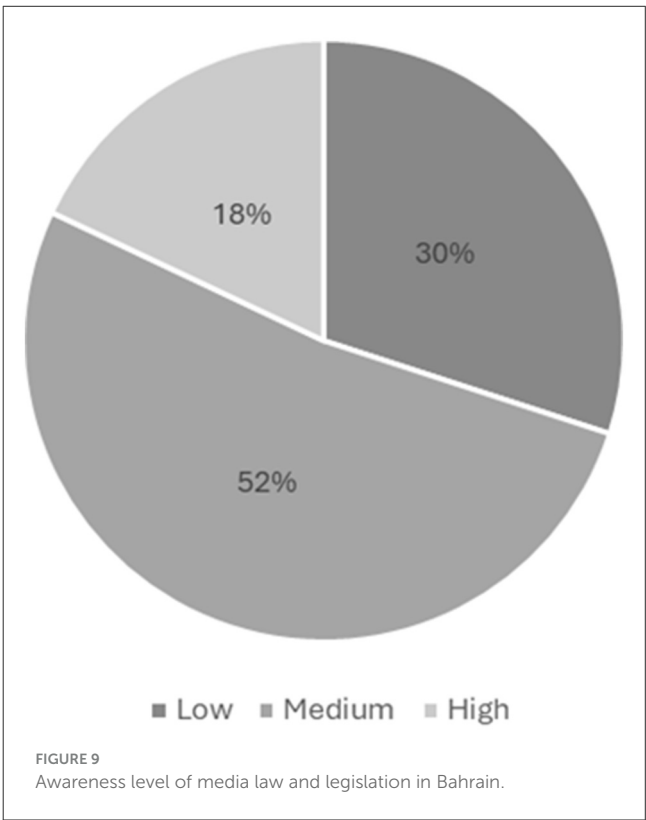
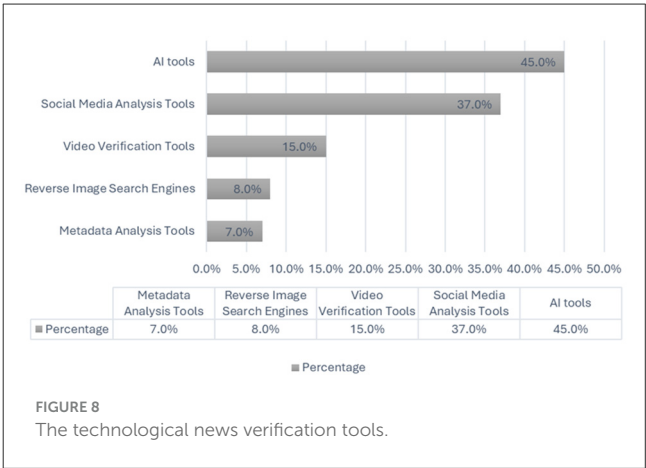


7.5 Technological and traditional news verification

Figure 7 shows that the highest percentage of the respondents (78%) engaged in traditional news verification rather than verification by technological tools (22%). The usage of these traditional tools ranked as follows: direct communication with the news source (52%), using databases and archives (23%), and through expert consultation (25%). Despite the proliferation of numerous AI-powered news verification tools, the unexpected dominance of traditional fact-checking methods over their modern counterparts underscores the importance of ongoing training for journalists on the continuous integration of technology into their news work.

7.6 The technological news verifications tools

Figure 8 shows that out of 22% of those who mentioned that they use technological news verification, AI tools are the most technological tools that the respondents used for news verification (45%). This is followed by social media analysis tools (37%), video verification tools (8%), reverse image search engines (8%), and metadata analysis tools (7%). In general, this percentage still needs to be increased in light of the rapid spread of the AI applications, which have the ability in a few seconds to detect fake news and images.



journalist is not affiliated with a particular newspaper or institution, and perhaps this freelance work has made him concerned with breaking news at the expense of full knowledge of media legislation and ethics in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

7.7 Awareness level of media law and legislations in Bahrain

Based on Figure 9, the highest level of awareness level of media law and Legislation in Bahrain among the respondents is medium (52%). This is followed by low level (30%), and high (18%). These percentages can be explained in light of the fact that the citizen

7.8 The main challenges facing citizen journalists in the Kingdom of Bahrain

The study sample highlighted that the main challenges facing citizen journalists in the Kingdom of Bahrain are as follows: legal restrictions (42%), Content incredibility between target audiences (31%), technical challenges (20%), weak access to information

TABLE 3 The statistical testing of H1 and H2.

H	Independent variable	Dependent variable	R	R ²	F	F Sig.	Beta (Std.)	t	t Sig.	Result
H1	Level of commitment to social responsibility standards	The level of news verification before publishing.	0.268	0.072	10.047	0.0019	0.268	3.17	0.0019	Approved (significant +)
H2	Awareness level of media laws and regulations		0.359	0.129	19.201	2.4e−05	0.359	4.382	2.4e−05	Approved (significant +)

TABLE 4 The statistical testing of H3.

Independent variable	Sub-groups	dependent Variable	No.	SMA	T. Test Value	Df	p-Value	Result
Gender	Males	Commitment to social responsibility standards	62	3.169	−1.324	132	0.188	Rejected
	Females		70	3.271				
Independent Variable	Sub-groups		No.	SMA	ANOVA (F)	Df	p-Value	Result
Age-group	18–30		34	3.169	0.374	132	0.688	Rejected
	30–40		52	3.231				
	40+		46	3.255				
Education level	High school		38	3.164	0.672	132	0.513	Rejected
	University		87	3.256				
	Postgraduate		7	3.143				
Number of experience years	Less 5		45	3.2	0.265	132	0.767	Rejected
	6–10		62	3.218				
	10+		25	3.28				

(7%). These restrictions are logical in light of the free press, which is generally associated with the desire to exist without any legal restrictions that journalists may face in some Arab press institutions.

7.9 The study hypotheses testing

7.9.1 The statistical testing of H1 and H2

Table 3 shows the results of the Study Hypotheses, as follows:

H1: Citizen journalists' level of commitment to social responsibility standards has a positive and significant impact on the level of news verification before publishing.

H2: The awareness level of the citizen journalists about media laws and regulations has a significant impact on the level of news verification before publishing.

As depicted in Table 3, the level of commitment to social responsibility standards variable has a positive impact on the level of news verification before publishing. The statistically significant F-value is (10.047) at $p < 0.05$. The T-value (3.170) at $p < 0.05$ consistently confirms the same result. Therefore, H1 is accepted.

Furthermore, Table 3 shows that the awareness level of media law and legislation among the study sample has a positive impact on their level of news verification before publishing. The statistically significant F-value is (19.201) at $p < 0.05$. The T-value (4.382) at $p < 0.05$ consistently confirms the same hypothesis 2 result. Therefore, H2 is accepted. This result can be explained by the fact that a high level of social responsibility and awareness of media laws and regulations in Bahrain will inevitably lead citizen journalists to verify news before publication, and vice versa.

7.9.2 The statistical testing of H3

H3: There are statistically significant differences between citizen journalists' level of commitment to social responsibility standards to the following demographic variables: (gender, age, educational level, and number of years of experience).

As shown in Table 4 the results indicate that there are no statistically significant differences in citizen journalists' level of commitment to social responsibility standards according to gender, age group, educational level, or years of experience, as all p-values are greater than 0.05. This suggests that the level of commitment to social responsibility standards among citizen journalists is relatively consistent across different demographic groups, reflecting

a shared sense of ethical and professional responsibility regardless of personal characteristics.

8 Discussion

The above results revealed some important insights regarding citizen journalism in the Kingdom of Bahrain, especially their connection with social responsibility and training, using digital platforms to publish their content and news verification. As mentioned above, the study relied on a sample consists of 132 Bahraini journalists. The results showed a wide range of commitments by the respondents which ranged from medium (44%) to high (35%). Nevertheless, the results on professional training indicate that there might be a gap in that regard since a significant percentage of the respondents were medium (43%) to low level (27%). This result indicates that a designed training program in all relevant aspects of citizen journalism is compelling in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

The results also showed a diverse usage of digital platforms in Bahrain. Instagram (69.9%) ranked first. This is followed by TikTok (36.3%), and Snapchat (31.4%). Generally speaking, the choice of appropriate social media platforms by citizen journalists enhances content engagement, because of the informal nature of citizen journalism.

The results also demonstrated that the highest level of news verification by the participants is medium level (62%). This strongly suggests the need to enhance the accuracy and credibility of citizen-generated news by offering citizen journalists high-quality training in this aspect. With regard to news verification, the study revealed a major reliance on traditional verification tools (78%) rather than technological tools (22%). This poses the question of the nature or types of challenges associated with the use of technological news verification tools by citizen journalists in Bahrain.

The results highlighted the main technological tools that were used by the respondents for news verifications, which is AI tools ranked (45%). It is well acknowledged that AI and Machine Learning tools are considered emerging methods that are being developed to automatically detect manipulated content. AI tools ranked first in usage by the respondents because of their ease of use and the availability to the respondents through monthly or annual subscription. The other technological news verification tools that were used by the respondents were 'social media analysis tools' (37%), and video verification tools (8%). The latter is used to analyze a video in order to identify its manipulative and fake content. Other verification tools were 'reverse image search engines' (8%), which help in verifying the origin images, and 'metadata analysis' tools (7%), which are used to extract metadata from files in order to reveal information about the origin and any other modifications.

The awareness of the Bahrain media law and legislation by the respondents was moderate awareness (52%) and a low level of awareness (30%). The finding is important because it directly influences the responsible behavior of citizen journalists in terms of adhering to media law and ethics. However, there is the need for special educational programs to raise awareness of these laws.

The theoretical framework of the study is anchored on the social responsibility theory, which highlights the intricate dilemmas and prospects in the field of citizen journalism. According to this theory, the press must be accountable to citizens by focusing on accuracy, fairness, and the interests of people. From the above results of our study, it is evident that although citizen journalists contribute to a more democratized information environment, their approach to the question of social responsibility, as well as their limited formal educational background and professional training in this field of activity raise concern for a concerted intervention by stakeholders. It is also worth noting that even with the use of sophisticated technology, the verification process is still dependent on traditional means, which underscores the fact that the entire arsenal of instruments is still largely unused to elevate the practice of journalism.

As contemporary studies have shown, accountability and ethics have to be re-imbibed to ensure the preservation of the democratic process within the context of responsible journalism in the era of social media. Thus, a greater sense of social responsibility by citizen journalists, supplemented with their thorough training and their efficient usage of technological aids in verification, should be prioritized to effectively regulate the credibility and social usefulness of their activities. This is in line with the demand of the theory that confirms that the press should serve the interests of society rather than an individual, in the face of its ever-evolving shape and practice.

The study hypotheses confirmed that both the level of commitment to social responsibility and the level of awareness of media law and legislation by the respondents have a positive impact on their level of news verification before publishing. This finding underscores the importance of integrating key pillars for the success of citizen journalism in the Kingdom of Bahrain. These pillars include raising awareness of media laws and regulations in addition to fostering a sense of social responsibility. Both pillars will lead to increased verification of news before publication, making citizen journalism a veritable tool in societal transformation and avoiding sensationalism at the expense of credibility. In the same vein, the results indicated that the interviewed respondent's demographic variables did not have significant differences in their commitment to the ideals of social responsibility. This means that commitment to the ideals of social responsibility may originate from the journalists' sense of belonging to their home country rather than from mere demographic characteristics.

Since this study was applied in the Kingdom of Bahrain, comparing these results with other international research on the same topic will be beneficial for a better understanding of its role in society. In this regard, [Goyanes and De Zúñiga \(2021\)](#) highlighted that the vernacular journalism has replaced the traditional concept of citizen journalism, where local individuals' interest in journalism is keen to publish the local issues from their perspectives. Other research found that there are three converging forces that are accelerating the spread and the influence of citizen journalism globally: the credibility of citizen journalism between the public, especially Gen Z, who evaluated citizen journalism and the user-generated content as more "authentic" than traditional media ([Lennox, 2022](#)). Secondly, the technological democratization, in

which any person can use high-quality mobile phones to shoot and live-stream on social media with thousands of followers. The third factor is the speed in publishing the breaking news, as the traditional newsroom takes time to verify facts and for traditional production steps, which still take a long time in some countries compared to the fast production by the citizen journalists (Horoub, 2023).

Finally, it can be said that the commitment to social responsibility by citizen journalists, even with official journalists in the traditional media, can help increase public credibility, which leads to more engagement, and thus reflects on the efficiency of these communication channels.

8.1 Implications

Based on the findings of the current study, it can be said that its theoretical implications lie in its confirmation of the theory of social responsibility in journalism, a principle that remains constant despite the varying stages of media development throughout history. In other words, while the medium itself changes and evolves, the message remains unchanged from the perspective of its social responsibility. As for the practical implications, those responsible for official media should support citizen journalists and guide them toward greater attention to credibility and factchecking, given the dangers of fake news to community.

9 Recommendations

The study result showed that citizen journalism in Bahrain faces many challenge. Therefore, there is the need for formal training and institutional support to activate its role in society.

The findings suggested that citizen journalists have different levels of awareness and understanding of ethical practices. Due to the lack of training and standardized guidelines, educational initiatives and awareness programs are needed to promote professional ethical knowledge among citizen journalists.

The study identified that citizen journalists face challenges in implementing ethical practices due to technological constraints. Therefore, there is the need for official support for them by facilitating the availability of technological tools used in news verification.

As citizen journalism has an impactful power in any community, it is essential to have a continuous dialogue between citizen journalists, professional journalists, media institutions, and relevant stakeholders. Engaging in discussions, knowledge sharing, and collaborative initiatives can contribute to promoting and improving ethical practices within the citizen journalism community.

As highlighted in the results, there is a low percentage of the citizen journalists who did not have a good orientation about professional ethical guidelines in Bahrain. For this reason, it is essential to develop specific professional ethical guidelines for citizen journalism. These guidelines should address the challenges and dynamics of citizen journalism in addition to providing clear and practical guidance for ethical decision-making.

It is necessary to establish training programs and educational initiatives for citizen journalists. These programs should cover ethical principles, case studies, and practical guidelines to equip citizen journalists with the necessary knowledge and skills.

It is imperative to strengthen partnerships between citizen journalists and professional journalists. This will facilitate the exchange of knowledge and mentorship. Professional journalists can provide guidance on ethical practices and support citizen journalists to adhere to high journalistic standards.

Based on previous studies, and in light of the fact that citizen journalists are influential in society, it is preferable for press unions in Arab countries to work on improving citizen journalism practices and guiding them in the right direction. In this regard, it is desirable to create platforms for citizen journalists to engage in ethical discussions and provide peer support to enhance the sense of community and accountability. Forums, workshops, and online conferences can also serve as spaces for dialogue and exchange of best practices in ethical citizen journalism.

Regarding the Professional Ethical Guidelines in Citizen Journalism Farmwork, the authors propose a set of ethics, values, and principles that citizen journalists in Bahrain can possess, as follows:

- Honesty: consists of verifying the news material, information, or facts before publishing it to avoid the spread of false information, false news, or false facts that cause chaos, strife, and corruption in society.
- Neutrality: this characteristic connotes not being aligned with one side or the other and not engaging in the glorification of certain personalities. It denotes total objectivity in the transmission of facts and news.
- Use the language professionally so that it is free from abuse, insult, or inappropriate words for readers.
- Respect the privacy of individuals and institutions and not publish delinquent images or information about them without prior permission or permission to publish.
- Taking into account the feelings of followers or the public and selecting media or news materials suitable for publication very carefully.
- Respect the intellectual property rights of others.
- Enjoy a sense of social responsibility and not participate in the dissemination of news or material capable of destabilizing the safety and stability of citizens.
- Develop a sense of commitment and dedication to contribute positively to various issues and events.
- Contribute to the dissemination of noble moral values and good behaviors, such as enhancing community awareness in all situations, spreading the culture of sustainability, and preserving resources for future generations.
- Ignoring to respond to offensive comments by some followers on the public pages of social networking sites and resorting to legal methods to reduce such improper moral transgressions.
- Avoid monitoring and tracking individuals or institutions within the state to catch errors or lapses, publish them, and talk about them in an abusive and harmful manner which deviates from reform goals.

- No need for buying followers and content fans by adding value to the content they provide through fake follow-ups and seeking to reach large numbers of followers to attract advertisers.

In conclusion, citizen journalists should be keen to adhere to adopted professional ethics as citizen journalism is inherently characterized by freedom, flexibility, and the absence of official bodies that control the content. Therefore, the commitment to professional ethics contributes to building trust between the public and citizen journalists in addition to strengthening the role of the press as a powerful instrument in societal engineering. Additionally, it is expedient to enhance the sense of social responsibility, especially among citizen journalists who are accomplished social media influencers by having a high number of followers in the digital space, because they are veritable tools capable of contributing to ameliorate the lifestyle of people as well as the development of their society. This is particularly true from the perspective of the enormous strength, influence and capacity which social media platforms wield.

Finally, there is still a need for future research on how to employ new technology, such as AI, in detecting fake news presented by some citizen journalists. In addition, more research is needed on the role of citizen journalism in crises and to what extent this role is consistent with social responsibility. Finally, future research can focus on the integration between traditional and citizen journalism in development issues, especially in developing countries.

9.1 Limitation

This research was conducted in Bahrain only, which has only four private journals and a limited number of citizen journalists, compared to other countries that are the biggest in population, which is considered the main limitation of this paper.

Data availability statement

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

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