

Online News Use Habits of University of Jordan Students

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Abstract

Objectives: Young people's news consumption has evolved due to increased online news media and the shift to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study investigates changes in news habits among Jordanian youth.

Methods: The study is based on a quantitative survey of students (N=147) enrolled at the University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan, aged between 18 and 30 years, using voluntary response sampling. The survey questionnaire was conducted in order to explore their news consumption habits and media preferences, with a highlight on social media as a way to acquire and share news items.

Results: The results provide that the vast majority of students (69.4%) are news consumers, although with different usage habits and consumption patterns. Nevertheless, the findings revealed that the internet is the most used path to get news, with news websites and social media platforms as the most preferred. The majority of surveyed students (74.2%) share news via social media, mostly with family members and close friends. Moreover, gender in this study was found to have a major influence on news type preferences. Sports news is the type of news that most male students in the sample were interested in following, whereas most female students were interested in following societal news.

Conclusions: This study established that university students are followers of news, national and international, and that there is a rise in the importance of online news, particularly social media and non-mainstream news websites among young adults. Results suggest that young people are also news sharers.

Keywords: News usage, online news, social media, news consumption, students, University of Jordan.

عادات استخدام الأخبار عبر الإنترنت لدى طلبة الجامعة الأردنية

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ملخص

الأهداف: تأثرت عادات استهلاك الأخبار لدى الشباب بتوسع وسائل الإعلام عبر الإنترنت وزيادة الارتباط ببيئة الإنترنت بسبب التحول إلى التعليم عن بعد في أثناء تفشي جائحة كورونا (COVID-19). بناءً على ذلك، يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة التحولات في عادات استخدام الأخبار لدى الشباب في الأردن.

المنهجية: تعتمد الدراسة مسحاً كمياً للطلبة (n = 147) المسجلين في الجامعة الأردنية، الذين تتراوح أعمارهم بين 18 و30 عاماً عن طريق الاستجابة الطوعية. جرى إجراء الاستبيان المسحي من أجل استكشاف عادات استهلاك الأخبار وتفضيلات وسائل الإعلام لديهم، مع تسليط الضوء على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي كطريقة للحصول على الأخبار ومشاركتها.

النتائج: تشير النتائج إلى أن الغالبية العظمى من الطلبة (69.4%) هم من مستهلكي الأخبار، على الرغم من اختلاف عادات الاستخدام وأنماط الاستهلاك لديهم. ومع ذلك، كشفت النتائج أن الإنترنت هو المسار الأكثر استخداماً للحصول على الأخبار، مع تفضيل للمواقع الإخبارية ومنصات التواصل الاجتماعي. أيضاً، غالبية الطلبة (74.2%) تشارك الأخبار عبر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، خاصة مع أفراد الأسرة والأصدقاء المقربين. علاوة على ذلك، وجدت الدراسة أن النوع الاجتماعي له تأثير أساسي على تفضيلات نوع الأخبار: حيث تبين أن الأخبار الرياضية هي نوع الأخبار التي يهتم معظم الذكور في العينة بمتابعتها، بينما يهتم معظم الإناث بمتابعة الأخبار المجتمعية.

الخلاصة: أظهرت الدراسة أن طلبة الجامعة متابعون للأخبار على الصعيدين الوطني والدولي، وأن هناك ارتفاعاً في أهمية الأخبار الرقمية، وخاصة وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي والمواقع الإخبارية الإلكترونية المستقلة بين الشباب. تشير النتائج إلى أن الشباب يميلون أيضاً لمشاركة الأخبار. الكلمات الدالة: استخدام الأخبار، الأخبار على الإنترنت، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، استهلاك الأخبار، الطلبة، الجامعة الأردنية.



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Introduction

The worldwide outbreak of Covid-19 disease has prompted lockdown and closure measures in Jordan and elsewhere as of March 2020. Lockdown forced education institutions, schools and universities, to turn into online teaching and learning; students turned to the Internet for education (Houlden and Veletsianos, 2020; Li and Lalani, 2020) as well as for keeping up with news updates (Oosterhoff and A. Palmer, 2020). The DIGITAL 2021: JORDAN report revealed that the number of internet users in Jordan increased by 56 thousand between 2020 and 2021, and recorded 6.84 million users in January 2021, with 6.30 million social media users accounting for 61.5% of the total population (Kemp, 2021).

Moreover, 62.9% of the population in Jordan are under the age of 30 (Department of Statistics, 2020); and most internet users in Jordan are between the age of 18 and 35 years (Silver et al., 2019); post-secondary education students form a significant portion of this age group. The number of students enrolled in the 26 public and private universities in Jordan in 2020 was 337,280, in addition to 34,374 students enrolled in 45 community colleges (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2020). Also, there are 26,484 students studying abroad (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021). In this context, one can see that exploring news consumption habits of this social category is worthwhile.

Early research has depicted that intense engagement with the internet is foreseen to have a positive effect on online news-seeking and usage rates of young adults (Nguyen and Western, 2007). In 2011, when internet penetration rate was only 34.9% (International Telecommunication Union, 2011); television was the main source of news for 82% of Jordanians (Ipsos survey, 2011, as cited in Fanack, 2017). In 2017, a survey by Northwestern University in Qatar revealed that the “Digital news consumption across the Arab region is high and growing”. This survey reported that 77% of Arab nationals obtain news through their smartphones and 67% of them — 74% in Jordan — are doing that on a daily basis (Dennis, Martin, & Wood, 2017). The same report also indicated that the importance of the internet for news increased 15 percentage points from 65% in 2013 to 80% in 2017. The question remains whether the internet is an important source of news for young people in Jordan or not. A survey conducted in Jordan in 2015 in the framework of the Networks of Mediterranean Youth Project (NET-MED Youth) indicated that only 43% of young Jordanians (aged 18-29) go online to watch news content. Still, the matter remains whether this percentage has grown noticeably over time and in view of the current state of affairs or not.

Problem Statement

Following the above queries and due to the matter of fact that non-recent studies have been found exploring online news consumption habits of young university students in Jordan; this study was designed to identify changes in news consumption practices and preferences of young Jordanians studying at this university, particularly in the context of the increasing importance of the internet in their lives, for both education and as a source for news information because of the reliance on online education in the aftermath of COVID-19 outbreak.

Research Objectives

This research thus has three primary objectives to address this issue:

1. To examine first whether the young generation (aged 18-30) in learning consume news.
2. To find out if online news media are the preferred channels for university students to consume news.
3. To explore news sharing behaviour of university students who consume news through social networks.

Research questions

In order to develop an in-depth understanding of the online news use habits of university students, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

Q1: To what extent do university students consume news? And how often do they seek news?

Q2: How do university students prefer to consume the news; is it through (a). Mainstream media (Radio, TV channels, and newspapers), or (b). Social media and news websites, or (c). Online mainstream media, or (d). Blogs and microblogs, or (e). News aggregator websites?

Q3: To what extent do university students share news items through social networks? If they do, mostly to whom? And why?

Literature review

News consumption habits have been investigated thoroughly by scholars in different parts of the world. Consistent assertions have been depicted in the literature that the emergence of internet media has impacted the way news and information are consumed and used (Möller et al., 2020; Qayyum et al., 2010; Casero-Ripollés, 2012; Edgerly, 2017; Nguyen and Western, 2007; Sweeney, 2006). Online news popularity heightening worldwide can be seen due to the flexibility and ease of use and the incorporation of attracting and constantly advancing technological advantages and means (Tewksbury and Rittenberg, 2012; Ahlers, 2006). To date, most of the studies have explored the consumption habits of online news of young adults as part of forging news consumption rates as a whole, unlike this study which focuses on their internet usage for news. A variety of methodological approaches, qualitative, and quantitative such as this one, have been used by scholars to explore this issue. Some researchers have explored online news use patterns of the youth population as part of a broader and cross-disciplinary study (e.g., Ahlers, 2006; X. Hao et al., 2014). Others considered the influence of some demographic factors such as gender and education level on online news consumption and preference patterns (e.g., Clark, 2010; Casero-Ripollés, 2012; Geers, 2020). Studies examining the news consumption habits of young people in the Arab world are rare. Fortunately, a qualitative study was found which utilized a semi-structured questionnaire to investigate the attitudes of students at The University of Jordan towards using the internet. The exploratory study revealed that the majority of students do use the internet to read the news (84.51%) and that most of them are daily users of the internet in general (82%). In addition, the study noted that 79.95% of the surveyed students use social media sites (Almarabeh, Majdalawi, and Mohammad, 2016). The following review is arranged chronologically in order to provide an overview of transformations in news usage patterns of young people and how the internet has emerged over time as a way to consume news.

A very earlier study conducted on this subject was by Ahlers (2006) and addressed a hypothesis that both news consumers and producers are substituting traditional media for the lower cost online news media. This study demonstrated that the shift towards online news was not significant at that time. The author suggested some setbacks that prevent the spread of online news consumption, concluding that “the lack of ease in connecting to the Internet via dial-up modem is a limiting factor in the migration of consumers to the online news media” (p. 38), although he referred that the expansion of broadband connection services will change the equation. Analysing available data in the industry, Ahlers found that only 12.2% of American adults consume online news only. He also found that young American adults (18-29) merely read/watch the news, and only a fourth of this age group gets its news online. The study deemed online news as a complement for traditional news rather than a substitute.

A Qualitative (interpretive) study by Qayyum, Williamson, Liu, and Hider (2010) investigated the news-seeking behaviour of young adults (18-25) in Australia. The study showed that 15 students out of 20 expressed precise interest in seeking local news. The first stage of the study, which explored through in-depth interviews the students’ attitudes towards the different sources used for news, revealed that the internet was the main source of news for only a few participants; online news played a minor role in news-seeking for most of the participants, noting that Facebook was used by only 9 participants for news. Furthermore, most participants favour printed newspapers over the online version of newspapers.

Clark (2010) examined how students at the University of Nebraska in the US consume news. In his thesis, he anticipated that students who consume news for more than 15 minutes per day probably get their news from the Internet instead of the traditional media. Clark also hypothesized that pre-graduation or advanced students probably consume more news than foundation-level students. He surveyed eight classes (Five 400-level classes and three 100-level classes) with a total of 159 respondents. While 48.1% of the students surveyed were found to consume news from various sources, 47.5% of respondents said they go online to consume news, confirming that online sources outperform other sources (TV, radio, print). For example, 49.4% of the students surveyed said that they consume more online news than the actual newspaper. Interestingly, the results also show that advanced-level students consume online news more than entry-level students; as 46.4 % of foundation (100-level) students go online for news, and 49.4% of advanced (400-level) students go online for

news. The study has not exactly specified each of the total numbers of 100-level students and the number of 400-level students who responded.

A similar study to this one has been conducted by Casero-Ripollés (2012). The scholar investigated, using a quantitative survey, the news consumption habits of Spanish youth (16-30). The study demonstrated that Spanish young people are still interested in news, although younger adults in the sample are less interested in news consumption than the older ones (23 or older). Also in his sample, men are higher news consumers than women, as 40% of men in the sample read news on a daily basis in comparison to 19% for women. Moreover, 56.6% of the respondents use mass media websites, 77.4% use social networks to access news, and 73% use more than one media source to get their news. With regard to gender, men in this study seem to diversify in media resources used more than women. Surprisingly, men in the study were greater news consumers than women, although women were more interested in news than men.

News media consumption of young people in Australia has also been investigated using an online survey of 2296 Australians in Lancaster, Hughes, and Spicer's (2012) research. The authors found that Australian youth (16-24 years old) are still news media followers and in fact have a high level of contact with news media. The results revealed that between 66.4% and 86.5% of participants had weekly or more frequent contact with news (Television news, online news, radio news, and/or print newspapers). 47.9% of respondents get their news online every day or almost every day, and 28.0% once a week or more. Moreover, age in this study has an effect on news consumption; with 55.6% of the older group reporting that they have used news every day or almost every day in the last twelve months, compared to 38.4% of the younger group (16-19). The study has found a slight difference in media consumption patterns when compared by gender. Unlike the study of Qayyum et al., (2010), the results of this quantitative study can be generalized to the youth population in Australia, thus, it provides this author with an idea of their news use habits at that time.

Freeman (2013) researched the news consumption behaviours of young Malaysians by surveying 500 college students. The researcher found that young people in Malaysia are still consuming news with favour towards online news sources (62.4%), although different news preferences have been found based on gender and age. The quantitative study revealed that males are more likely to pursue news habitually, whereas females are apt to follow news occasionally. In the neighbouring country Singapore, young adults also have favour towards the internet as a source of news (X. Hao et al., 2014). X. Hao et al. (2014) investigated, through an online survey, news consumption habits of Singaporean university students and their association with political and civic engagement. A descriptive analysis of the data obtained from 397 responses showed that the vast majority of the respondents utilize the internet to get news; as more than 85.2% of them spend some time daily on the Internet to acquire news. Furthermore, 91.9% of the students used social media to obtain news and 41.2% have used email as a source to get news. Another distinctive finding of this study is that 93.7% of the students shared news offline with family or friends, while only 55.3% did that online on social media networks.

Using the focus group method, Van Cauwenberge, d'Haenens and Beentjes (2013) studied the role of news in the lives of Flemish college students. The results, although it doesn't provide an overview of the students' general attitude towards news, showed main dependence on traditional media, with an emphasis on it as a source for public affairs information. In addition, traditional news users in this study were also the most online news seekers.

Elareshi, Ziani, and Gunter (2014) investigated how university students in the GCC region get their news, particularly local news. A survey of 1221 media and communication students confirmed that young people in the GCC still have a strong desire for news. 52% of the respondents reported that they "enjoyed" keeping abreast with the latest events in general, noting that a majority of the respondents (60.1%) said they care more about following local news closely when something of importance occurs. The results also showed that 52% of the respondents followed international news closely, "regardless of what was happening". Furthermore, the study found that young people in GCC use a variety of news sources. With regard to online ones, there was a considerable preference towards social media sites (67%) over online local newspapers (43%). Young people there also reported high engagement in various online activities, with 78% reported sharing local news by email to others, and 62% of them reposting news on Facebook.

Using the news repertoire approach, Geers (2020) studied news consumption of young people (16 years or older) across

combined news media platforms and content. Survey results of 1,084 students from secondary and tertiary education (16 years or older) in the Netherlands revealed that traditional media is still used largely for news, especially for domestic political news; a finding that has been a matter of surprise to this reviewer. The results also depict that gender has an influence on news usage rather than education, as online news users in this study were mostly females, whereas the “traditionalists” were mostly males. Another interesting finding is that online news users prefer entertaining news content.

A recent study by Saeed & Ullah (2021) explored news media usage among university students in Pakistan. They surveyed 600 students (aged 15-25) from different departments at Kohat University of Science & Technology. Expectedly, the results record that the most popular news media among young students are social media (36.69%) and radio (26.18%). In addition, websites were the least used among all media used. 42% of the respondents use social media for national news, and 41% use it to get international news. Furthermore, social media was the major source of political, entertainment, and sports news. With regard to used social media applications, Facebook is favoured by just over half of the population (54%). One thing is that the study did not specify any gender-based preferences, despite the fact that the sample comprised 223 female respondents.

Although young adults in several parts of the world are still interested in the news, it can be noticed that social media platforms have evolved to become the most popular source for online news among them. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, social media has served not only as a tool to obtain news, but also to connect the learning communities of students and educators during the lockdown and social distancing times (Greenhow & Askari, 2017). Furthermore, research shows that experience in social media usage has an influence on the news sharing habits and intentions of young people (Lee & Ma, 2012). Notably, gender has generally been found to have more influence on news usage habits than the educational level. The review of literature indicates that the methodology most used is survey, which signifies the convenient of this approach as a mean to capture data about usage patterns of news via online media. Finally, the significance of this paper can be seen in that it will contribute to contextualizing the news use and consumption habits of university students in Jordan within such trends found in the literature.

Methodology

In order to investigate frequencies, opinions, and attitudes held by students of the University of Jordan on online news usage (B. Singh & A. Singh, 2015) the selected methodological approach for this study is quantitative (descriptive) and statistical analysis was adopted in analysing data. Data were collected using an internet-based survey questionnaire by means of Google forms. Determined from the research questions, the questionnaire consisted of 11 closed-ended questions (multiple choice) and one open-ended question. The first 3 questions were designed to obtain, first, demographic data (gender, place of living, age group) about the participants, then came 8 questions about their news usage habits and patterns. Participants were demanded to respond on a five-point Likert scale as to the questions on the frequency of their news following and the frequency of their news sharing habits via social media: always; often; sometimes; rarely; or never. The last question (open-ended) aimed to explore their personal reasons for sharing news via social media platforms. The questionnaire was face-validated by three experts knowledgeable in the field of quantitative research, who read it and made some corrections in terms of style and wording to ensure clarity of the questions. Reliability was unable to be assessed due to the nature of the questions, as varied scales were utilised. The independent variables of the study are age group and gender, whereas interest in news, consumption patterns, preferred media, preferred news type, and tendency to share news are considered the dependent variables.

Sample

The survey was conducted in January 2022 and the questionnaire was filled out by students (N=147) from the “Communication Skills” course enrolment in the first semester of the academic year (2021-2022) based on their willingness to participate (voluntary response sampling). The author intentionally selected this course as it is a compulsory course (currently taught via Microsoft Teams) for undergraduate students from every discipline. This means that despite being

relatively small, the sample can represent the undergraduate population, who constitute the majority of the student population at the university. Moreover, this course includes a module on the types and uses of mass media, which provides a guarantee that students are acquainted of the concepts of this subject. Nonetheless, it was no surprise to this author that the majority of respondents were female students (71.9%), as females outnumber male students (65.3% females, 34.7% males) at this university (Admission and Registration Unit, 2021). Furthermore, the majority of respondents (57.8%) were in the age group (18-20), after which comes the age group (21–25) accounting for 40.1%, then (26-30) which accounts for 2% of the participants. Finally, most of the respondents live within the city of Amman (72.8%).

Results

Data obtained by means of the survey questionnaire will be revealed in this section in order according to the research questions. Firstly, data concerned with interest in the news will be revealed. Secondly, data related to preferred media to acquire news will be shown. Thirdly, results related to preferred social media platforms to get news will be displayed; and lastly, data pertaining to news sharing habits on social media platforms.

Table 1: Type of most followed news.

Type of News	Female	Male	Grand Total
Cultural	14	3	17
Entertainment	3	2	5
Political	18	11	29
Scientific	6	4	10
Societal	61	9	70
Sport	3	13	16
Grand Total	105	42	147

Table 2: Type of most followed news by country.

News Type by country	Female	Male	Grand Total
International	2	4	6
Local	32	13	45
Local & International	71	25	96
Grand Total	105	42	147

1. Interest in news

The first research question was: To what extent do university students in Jordan consume news? And how often do they seek news? University students who reported that they follow the news “Very Often” were 39.5% of the respondents. 28.6% said they follow the news “Sometimes”, whereas only 17.7% said they follow the news “Always”. 12.2% of the surveyed students “Rarely” seek news and 2% don't at all or “Never”. Overall, these figures indicate that the majority of the respondents (69.4%) care to keep up with events and happenings around them.

Students were also asked to state the type of news that they care to know about mostly in terms of country; national, international, or both, and the type of news stories they look for (societal, political, cultural, sports, scientific, entertainment) (Table 1&2). 65.8% of students who seek news said they follow both local and international news, 30.1% said they follow local news only, and 4.1% reported that they seek only international news. Moreover, 47.6% care mostly to acquire societal

news, 19.7% care for political news, 11.6% care for cultural news, 10.9% seek sports news, while 6.8% care for science news, and 3.4% for entertainment news.

Table 3: The most preferred pathway to acquire news.

Preferred way to consume news	Female	Male	Grand Total
Blogs & Microblogs	2		2
Mainstream media (Radio, TV, and Newspapers)	3	3	6
News aggregator websites	1		1
Online Mainstream Media	13	8	21
Social Media & News Websites	42	14	56
Socializing Media & News Websites	44	17	61
Grand Total	105	42	147

2. Preferred media

The second research question was on what are the students' preferred pathways to acquire news; is it through (a) Mainstream media (Radio, TV channels, and newspapers), or (b) social media and news websites, or (c) Online mainstream media, or (d) Blogs and microblogs, or (e) News aggregator websites? 79.5% reported that they prefer to get their news from news websites and social media platforms. In addition, the second most preferred media for news for the students is online mainstream media which was preferred by only 14.4% of the respondents, indicating the importance of the internet for news, especially non-mainstream online media, for the young adults. Followed by traditional media (TV, newspaper, radio) which accounts for 4.1% of the total, after which comes blogs and microblogs (1.4%), and finally news aggregators (0.7%).

Table 4: Preferred social media platform to obtain news.

Social Media Platform	Female	Male	Grand Total
Facebook	72	28	100
Instagram	19	4	23
Twitter	10	9	19
YouTube	3	1	4
Other	1		1
Grand Total	105	42	147

3. Preferred social media for news

To probe into the last research question, students who prefer social media for news were asked to select what digital platform they tend to get news from. It was no surprise that 68% of students who state that they get their news through social media named Facebook as their most preferred social media platform for news. Instagram was the second preferred platform for news for the students, accounting for 15.6%, then came Twitter 12.9%, and YouTube 2.7% (Table 4).

In addition, students were asked how often they check social media platforms for news updates during the day, and 145 students responded. According to the results, 77 of the respondents (53.1%) reported that they randomly read/watch the news when browsing social media platforms, 25 students (17.2%) reported that they check for news (3-5) times a day, 22 students (15.17%) reported checking news (1-2) times a day, 12 students (8.27%) said they check news (6-8) times a day,

and only 9 of them (6.2%) check for news (9-10) times during the day (two students did not answer this question).

Table 5: Extent to which students share news.

<i>Sharing frequency</i>	Female	Male	Grand Total
Sometimes	33	16	49
Very often	33	11	44
Rarely	24	4	28
Always	12	4	16
Never	3	7	10
Grand Total	105	42	147

Table 6: People with whom students tend to share news mostly.

Sharing category	Female	Male	Grand Total
Close friends	28	17	45
Colleagues	1	2	3
Family Members	49	6	55
Other	9	10	19
Social media friends	18	7	25
Grand Total	105	42	147

4. Sharing news via social media

The third research question examines the extent to which students share news items, to whom mostly, and reasons why they would share news with others. Students' responses were very much varied (Table 5). With regard to the extent to which they share news items with others on social media, 33.3% of them said that they sometimes share news, 29.3% said they share news very often, whereas 19% said they rarely share news, 11.6% reported they always share news, and 6.8% said they never share news items on social media platforms. These results demonstrate that most of the students are news sharers, which can be attributed to the notion that youth are experienced social media users (Lee & Ma, 2012).

Those who share news via social media were also asked to state with whom they mostly share news items (Table 6). 37.7% stated that they share news mostly with family members, 30.8% mostly with close friends, 16.4% said they share news mostly with social media friends in general, and finally 2.1% reported that they share news with study colleagues. Furthermore, 13% said they share news with other segments without stating who. It is obvious that the results indicate that more than half of students share news merely within their close circle of family and friends, which can be connected to the results of the final enquiry.

Students who share news were further asked to justify their sharing habits. Eighty-six students responded, and answers were pretty much divided between 3 justifications: 46.51% of the students said they share news to spread the information, 17.44% share news as a way to socialize, and 18.60% indicated that they share news stories to discuss and verify them. Thus, the habit of sharing news among the students is mostly motivated by the desire to inform their family and close friends of information and news they come across, then comes their natural human need to socialize.

Discussion

Research shows that most internet users in Jordan are young adults between the age of 18 and 35 years (Silver et al., 2019). University students (18-30 years old) who have become more engaged and accustomed to the electronic media were investigated in this study. The aim was to explore whether the internet is the students' most-used pathway to obtain news, exploring first their interest to seek news and how often they do that. Preferred online media to obtain news and which of those are mostly used were investigated as well.

The vast majority of the students in this study care to keep abreast with events around them, which complies with findings in the literature that news is still important for young adults (e.g., Williamson, Qayyum, Hider, and Liu, 2012). The data obtained reveal that undergraduate students at this university are news followers, with a high thrust towards getting their news online (96%). This result shows a higher percentage than what's found in the literature, particularly in Almarabeh, Majdalawi, and Mohammad's (2016) study which reported a lower percentage of online news use (84.51%) among students of the same university. The data also convey a substantial withdrawal from following the traditional media for news (only 4.1% follow traditional media) unlike youth in some studies who are still keen to use those (e.g., Saeed & Ullah, 2021; Geers, 2020). The rise in using the internet for news to this extent calls for further investigation of a potential association with students' becoming habituated to the web due to high contact with this medium during the pandemic time.

The fact that 79.5% of the students preferred "Social Media & News Websites" of all internet news sources confirms that social media platforms are becoming the primary source for online news for young people in Jordan. This preference towards social media for news is coherent with such shifts in the young generations' preferences in other parts of the world (e.g., Casero-Ripollés, 2012; Elareshi, Ziani, and Gunter, 2014).

The results of this survey also reveal that Facebook is the used social media platform for news for 68% of the respondents. In addition, a majority (53.1%) of the respondents (77 students) reported that they read/watch the news while browsing social media platforms. A matter of interest is that 47 of those (61%) said that they do that using Facebook specifically. Those findings are compatible with the soaring popularity and usage rates of Facebook in Jordan in comparison to other platforms (Statcounter, 2022).

Another noteworthy result of this survey is that youth in this university has an interest in both local & international news. This finding is appealing because this interest is dissimilar to students' interest in some other counties who mainly care about following local or national news (e.g., Qayyum, Williamson, Liu, and Hider, 2010; Elareshi, Ziani, and Gunter, 2014). The finding raises a question of whether this interest in international updates has to do with the global pandemic crisis; considering the importance of international news coverage and media during health crises (C. Smith et al., 2013; Mutua & Ong'ong'a, 2020).

This paper shows that most students (over 74.2%) admitted to having shared news stories via their social media accounts. This sharing habit can be attributed to being experienced in using social media and that using news via this medium is becoming in a way a social experience (Lee & Ma, 2012).

With regard to the gender variable, "local and International News" appears to be the dominant choice of both female and male students in this sample. In addition, sports news is the type of news that most males in the sample are interested in following, whereas societal news is the type of news that most females are interested in pursuing. One reason for this gender divide could be because published news, in general, tends to be gender-biased (Pao and Taboada, 2021). More research on this issue is recommended by this author.

Finally, the age variable was also examined in relation to news checking frequency. The majority of students fall in the age groups (18-20) and (21-25) and most students in the two groups follow news "Very Often", with close percentages, at 38.8% and 40% respectively. This suggests that age group in this sample is not correlated with interest in the news. Ultimately, people of close ages tend to adopt similar habits.

Conclusion

As the internet becomes increasingly central to young people's everyday lives, it is important to understand how different online news media affect their appetite for news, their favourite way to follow news, and how they deal with news. The findings of this descriptive study gives an overview of the online news use habits of young students at the oldest, largest, and most comprehensive university in Jordan. This study established that students are followers of news, national and international, and that there is a rise in the importance of digital news, particularly social media and non-mainstream news websites, which can be linked to continuous interaction with the network due to online education. Results suggest that young people are also news sharers, which can be related to their high experience with social media. The small number of participants in the study at hand can't represent all university students in the country, though can be considered a starting point for further research on the online news habits of young people in Jordan. Conducting similar investigations in other universities in Jordan, especially private and remote ones, would give a broader perspective on this issue. Furthermore, diving more into news preferences and social media news sharing habits and practices of young people using other methodological approaches is also suggested for in-depth knowledge on this matter.

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Declaration of interest

The author reports that there are no competing interests to declare.

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