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# The role of social media in shaping public opinion among Jordanian university students

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**Abstract:** The increasing use of social media has played a prominent role in shaping opinions and forming attitudes, especially among university students. They use them increasingly to transfer information, exchange data, and disseminate topics among students and all members of society. Therefore, this study aims to examine these networks and their role in public life, especially in shaping public opinion among university students. The study adopted a descriptive survey approach to achieve its objectives. The study was conducted on a sample of undergraduate students from four Jordanian universities, totaling 832 participants selected through purposive sampling and using the equal distribution method according to variables (gender, university, specialization). The study relied on a questionnaire as a method of data collection and filling out the data from the respondents in the questionnaire. The study found that social media plays a significant role in shaping opinions, beliefs, and ideas, and that its role is unparalleled. Also, the study showed that social media had a significant impact on shaping public opinion in Jordan among university students who use social media extensively and exchange opinions, ideas, and information, contributing to shaping a series of opinions among young people and contributing to their adoption of new ideas or changing their old ones through the dialogue facilitated by these networks, as users exchange and adopt ideas, contributing to shaping a public opinion on an issue. These findings underscore the importance of understanding and leveraging social media and online platforms to effectively communicate with and engage students.

**Keywords:** public opinion; social media; university students

## 1. Introduction

Social media plays a crucial, pivotal, and pioneering role in shaping public opinion, especially among young people, who are described as the most frequent users of social media platforms. The past years have witnessed an increasing interest among young people in these platforms. Hence, this study aims to explore and understand the role of social media in shaping, forming, directing, and controlling public opinion. Jordan is considered one of the leading countries in the spread of social media networks, as these platforms are widespread across various governorates, especially among university students, who are the most frequent users of these networks to obtain social and political information. This contributes to the formation of their knowledge, information, and experiences about life, and thus shapes their views on public life (Alkhaza'leh et al., 2022). The use of modern internet-based media has increased

significantly in recent times, becoming a major source of information, opinion formation, and views, while the use of traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, TV stations, and radio has decreased. The ease of use of modern media tools and technologies has contributed to the penetration of this media among the public, increasing its contribution to shaping their culture and influencing them, thereby reinforcing the hypothesis of the role of social media in forming and shaping public opinion and controlling it. Many political institutions, parties, and countries have started using social media for this purpose. In Jordan, most official and private institutions have created their presence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and even YouTube, indicating the importance of these platforms and their role in influencing young people, shaping their opinions, and forming beliefs and ideas (Al-Dulaimi, 2020).

### **1.1. Statement of the problem**

The problem with this study lies in the increasing use of electronic media, especially social media, which has a significant and prominent role in shaping opinions and forming views, especially among university students who are increasingly using them to shape opinions and views. These networks have become effective, important, and central in transmitting information, exchanging data, and spreading topics among students and all members of society. Therefore, the researcher believes that it is imperative to study these networks and their role in public life, especially in shaping public opinion among university students.

### **1.2. Questions of the study**

- 1) What role can social media play in shaping public opinion among Jordanian university students?
- 2) Do social media contribute to shaping public opinion among Jordanian university students?
- 3) What are the reasons that make social media preferable to traditional media?
- 4) What are the positives and negatives of social media, and do they have negative implications for students?
- 5) What is the extent of freedom given to students in using these sites in Jordan?

### **1.3. Objectives of the study**

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) To understand the role of social media in shaping public opinion among Jordanian university students.
- 2) To identify the issues that students discuss on social media platforms.
- 3) To explore the reasons why students use social media.
- 4) To determine the extent and type of benefit students derive from these platforms, whether for entertainment, political, social, or religious purposes.
- 5) To clarify the positives and negatives of social media platforms and the nature of their impact on students.

#### **1.4. Significance of the study**

The current study holds significant theoretical importance as it delves into the pivotal role of social media in shaping public opinion among university students, a crucial demographic in society. By exploring the impact of social media on public opinion, the study aims to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of these platforms, shedding light on their influence on the youth and whether this influence is positive or negative. Additionally, the study seeks to analyze the behavior of public opinion and its susceptibility to social media influence. By enriching the applied aspect of using social media as a modern technological tool, the study contributes to the broader understanding of the role of these platforms in contemporary communication and information dissemination. The applied significance of this study lies in the widespread use of electronic networks in various societies, especially in Jordanian society. Therefore, this research examines the role of social media in shaping public opinion among students, and seeks to understand the positives and negatives of these platforms and their role in the lives of Jordanian university students.

#### **1.5. Key terms of the study**

**Social media:** Refers to websites and applications that are used to create virtual communities on the internet. These communities are interconnected through fiber optic cables or are social structures composed of individuals or organizations called nodes, connected through various types of links. Social media platforms have witnessed widespread adoption in recent years, offering a variety of services and user satisfaction, with Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, among others, at the forefront.

**Public opinion:** Linguistically, refers to the mind, contemplation, and reflection on a matter, whether public or private. Public: is the plural form of “public,” which is the opposite of “private.” The term “public” refers to a common denominator among members of a community, a shared position that interests them and is characterized by its transparency. “Public” is opposed to “private,” and therefore public opinion differs from private or personal opinion. There are hundreds of definitions for the term “public opinion,” but most of these definitions share a common denominator, which is the collection of the public’s opinions on a matter open to dialogue and discussion. It is a collection of popular and general ideas expressed by individuals living within a single community. It is also known as the prevailing beliefs in a certain environment, which may be accepted and correct, or rejected and incorrect, and may be rephrased or modified to suit the surrounding circumstances.

Public opinion has been recognized as a means of expression since ancient times. Popular opinions have contributed to changing many prevailing concepts and ideas concerning a group or a class of people. Public opinion is considered one of the influential elements in many aspects of human life, including politics, economics, social issues, and more, as it is associated with the public and clear expression of a certain opinion, with popular support. Al-Dulaimi (2020) defined public opinion as the prevailing opinion among the majority of the enlightened people at a certain period regarding one or more issues that are the subject of intense debate and discussion and affect the interests and values of this majority (Al-Mashaqba, 2017). Al-Haiti (2019)

defined it as the free expression of voters' opinions on various public issues, where the degree of conviction and agreement among voters on these public issues is sufficient to influence the undecided public and public matters.

Communication networks are viewed as the organization of communication within any group as a complex network of interconnected relationships between individuals. These relationships reflect the existence of multiple networks or various ways of communication among members of the group.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework of the study relies on the uses and gratifications approach, which emerged during a time when belief in media effects was dominant. This approach is considered a significant turning point in media studies, as it aims to answer a crucial question: how do media affect the audience? The uses and gratifications approach seeks to discover how individuals use media and interpret their motivations for exposure to specific media, confirm the results of using these media, and understand the role of intervening variables in individuals' use of media. The labeling of the uses and gratifications theory has varied, with some referring to it as a model and others considering it a theory. The theory was first introduced in a comprehensive book by Katz and Blumler in 1974, titled "Uses and Gratifications of Mass Communication." The book portrayed the functions of mass media, the motivations for individuals' or audiences' choices, and the content they present. The theory was based on a set of assumptions according to Katz and Blumler, including individuals' use of media achieves specific goals that meet their aspirations, and the audience is an active element in the communication process. The desire to choose a media outlet to satisfy specific needs is attributed to the audience itself, and these desires vary among individuals according to their needs. Individuals are the ones who choose the media that satisfy their desires, as the media do not use the audience but rather the audience uses them. The audience is aware of the benefits it may gain from choosing the media it is exposed to, and it is also aware of its motivations and needs. Understanding prevailing values in society is based on the content consumed by the audience, not on the content provided by the media.

### **2.1. Theory of uses and gratifications**

The theory of uses and gratifications seeks to achieve specific goals, starting with understanding how the audience uses media, after studying the active audience in following the media outlet. The objectives can be mentioned as follows: understanding the reasons and ways in which individuals use media, understanding the motives behind an individual's use of a specific media outlet over another or behind exposure to specific content over others. As for the motives for the audience's exposure to media, experts have differed in classifying the underlying motives for an individual's use of one media outlet over another. Some believe that the motives are not apparent and that the individual is not aware of them. Needs directly influence the individual without them being aware of it, as the content or media outlet is selected unconsciously. Others believe that motives can be studied and understood, and that individuals have the ability to express their needs and motives for exposure to content (Vonsoo, 2010).

Another category interprets motives as needs that cannot be directly identified, but rather require studying individuals' behavior to understand them. This group believes that there are no specific motives, but rather exposure to a specific media is a habit for individuals and not according to specific needs. A motive is defined as a psychological state that directs an individual to engage in specific behavior to satisfy a specific need. The theory of uses and gratifications classifies the motives for the audience's exposure to media into two main categories: utilitarian motives, which are motives for acquiring knowledge, learning information, and gaining experiences in life, such as exposure to news bulletins on television, and ritualistic motives, which include breaking boredom, escaping from the realities and problems of life, as well as entertainment reasons. Examples include exposure to movies, series, and comedy programs (Hristova et al., 2014).

## **2.2. Cultural cultivation**

The researcher also used the theory of cultural cultivation to analyze and interpret the studied phenomenon. Cultural cultivation is defined as the process of planting and developing cognitive and psychological components carried out by sources of information. Since the mid-1970s, this term has been associated with a theory that attempts to explain the social and cognitive effects of the media. Cultivation is a special case of a broader process, socialization, through the cultivation of attitudes and mental images about the surrounding world. This theory uses a study strategy with three important aspects. The first aspect is called institutional analysis, which deals with analyzing the pressures and organizational constraints that affect the selection, production, and distribution of educational messages. The second aspect is called system analysis, which tracks the images. The third aspect is called cultural cultivation analysis, which explores the extent to which various media contribute to instilling concepts about the world. With the advent of the internet's public use in 1995, social networking sites began to spread to various countries worldwide, starting from Europe until they reached all corners of the globe. In 2002, there was a peak in the spread of these networks, with Facebook appearing in 2004, followed by the rapid and unexpected emergence and spread of other sites (Schultz, 2011).

## **2.3. Social networking**

Social networking sites are characterized by interactivity and participation, as each member enriches their personal page. Communication through these networks is spontaneous, interactive, informal, and unexpected. It is also low-cost, easy to use, and constantly present, as it does not require constant attendance. Members can communicate with each other through text messages, images, or information. Social networking sites also feature openness and support for gatherings by creating many inexpensive pages. They are characterized by flexibility in use and breaking down social barriers. However, they may violate privacy, waste time, contribute to social isolation, and lead to staying in the virtual world away from the real world. Social networking sites have begun to take over the role that families, schools, and universities should play in individuals' upbringing and acquisition of real skills to be productive members of their society. These sites have become places for entertainment,

wasting time, and moving away from real culture in favor of a popular culture created through social media, which is considered the dominant culture controlling the media.

## **2.4. Public opinion**

University students are the most frequent users of social networking sites, as they need them to get to know and communicate with other students for academic purposes or to form new relationships and friendships. It is a space that various students cannot do without. The term “public opinion” is relatively modern, but it has been used in many ancient civilizations under different names. Machiavelli was the first to draw attention to the importance of paying attention to the voice and trends of the people, often echoing the phrase “the voice of the people is the voice of God.” The English poet Shakespeare, through the character of King Henry IV, expressed the concept of public opinion, which helps in reaching a judgment. Undoubtedly, the wars and conflicts that occurred in England between the king and Parliament greatly contributed to the emergence of some terms, such as “prevailing opinion,” which Parliamentarians clung to in their bloody disputes with the kings and Catholics. William Temple, in his publication in 1672, expressed the nature of government and its source, stating that its source is the prevailing opinion about the government, and the goodness and courage that characterize the ruler.

The English philosopher John Locke was interested in studying the legal and ethical foundations of public opinion, especially in his essay published in 1690 titled “Understanding.” Starting from the writings of Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), there was considerable development in the way philosophical thought addressed the concept of public opinion, considering it an element that must be taken into account in the struggle for power. Rousseau (1712–1778) was the first philosopher to use the term “public opinion,” and among his many writings, his book “The Social Contract” is notable. The basic idea behind the social contract is the concept of unity... the unity of social construction, achieved by subordinating private interests to public administration. The role of government is supportive, as public administration is the sum of the will of the people who establish the laws, and the government is merely the individuals who enforce the laws. It is clear that the concept of the will of the people refers in practical terms to the essence of public opinion in its contemporary sense (Amsha and Al-Ananba, 2017).

In the 18th century, known as the “Age of Enlightenment,” the American and French Revolutions were the most prominent events that reflected the role and power of public opinion. Then came the 19th century, rich in events and changes, where the Industrial Revolution took place, scientific inventions evolved, and new means of communication were invented, making public opinion influential and powerful. One of its outcomes was the demand by workers for legislation to ensure their rights and interests. The end of the 19th century witnessed the writings of Gustave Le Bon, a social scientist who was one of the first to understand the concept of “public” and “mass” opinion, and its impact on political action. Finally, the 20th century came and witnessed the triumphs of public opinion. The emergence of radio, television, and cinema made this century the century of public opinion. The First World War, which took place in this century, had a significant impact on strengthening public opinion.

The emergence of psychological studies in the New World after this war, which focused on studying behavior, led to the discovery that behavior is simply a form of preparation for action, and it introduced the concept of “attitudes” or “orientations,” which is nothing but public opinion in its essence, or the basis upon which public opinion is based. Since the early 1930s, what is known as public opinion research has begun, where these studies measure positions and reactions to the issues and topics in political and social life. The massive events of the 20th century, which shook the global conscience entirely, starting from the First World War (1929–1932) to the Second World War, have influenced public opinion in one way or another, and its role in national and international political life has become significant. Decision-makers now take it into account whether they openly acknowledge it or not.

Public opinion has become a tool of political power in many countries, especially in Europe, where political parties govern, and there is fierce competition among them. Ensuring the party’s continuity in power relies on winning public opinion and making it supportive. Public opinion is a crucial tool for stability and continuity in governance (AlKhudari et al., 2023). This has led to the emergence of many public opinion-making centers in the West and in third world countries alike. Decision-making centers now measure public opinion before making decisions. These centers can be governmental or private, with the private sector increasingly involved in measuring public opinion on various issues. Based on these measurements, the political system often adjusts its behavior or changes a decision it was about to make. Public opinion is of great importance in our contemporary world and has become a fundamental pillar of societies. If the function of the state is to manage and organize society’s affairs, then understanding the opinions and inclinations of citizens is one of the most prominent means by which it can fulfill this function. Therefore, most countries and their political systems give public opinion a special status by establishing specialized and effective centers to study public opinion, aiming to manage and interact with it, and maintain political and social stability. From this perspective, public opinion plays a significant role in the decision-making process within the state. However, this role is contingent upon the extent to which society enjoys public freedoms, as well as the nature of the political system and the philosophy governing it. Public freedoms are what preserve and ensure public opinion, and the political system determines the extent and level of its interaction with citizens’ opinions and orientations.

## **2.5. Review of literature**

Some previous studies have addressed the topic of social media networks and their role in shaping public opinion among students. However, this study stands out from others in that it focuses on university students in Jordan. This study is the first of its kind in this area, conducted on university students in Jordan, and it examines the role of social media networks in shaping public opinion.

The role of social media networks in shaping public opinion among students at Saudi universities was studied by Osama Ghazi Al-Mudni. The study, conducted on Umm Al-Qura University students in Saudi Arabia, found that social media networks play an important role in shaping public opinion among users of these networks (Al-Mudni, 2016).

The study conducted by Fayez Ali aimed to analyze the impact of internet usage on social relationships among young university students in Jordan. The study surveyed a sample of 325 students from Mu'tah University. It aimed to highlight the social effects of internet usage on this group, as perceived by the respondents, and to identify the general characteristics of internet users' behavior and its impact on individuals (Ali, 2017).

The study conducted by Ali Fawaz Adwan aimed to examine the role of social media in influencing public opinion in Jordan. The study concluded that social media has become an effective and influential tool in shaping public opinion in societies, and has become a necessity in daily life and an active tool in public life (Al-Adwan, 2023).

The study conducted by Khalaf Lafi Al-Hamad focused on the role of social media in shaping the political public opinion among students at Yarmouk University. The study found that the majority of respondents rely heavily on social media to follow political events and issues (49.3%). Facebook had an average score of 2.27, while Twitter had an average score of 1.78. The study also revealed that these platforms play a significant role in shaping the political public opinion among the respondents regarding political events and issues (Al-Hamad, 2021).

The study found that the most significant contributions of these digital networking platforms in shaping the political public opinion regarding political events and issues are in "increasing political awareness" with an average score of 2.21. It is worth noting that there is a correlation between the degree to which respondents rely on social media to follow political events and issues and the degree to which these platforms contribute to shaping the political public opinion. Additionally, there is a relationship between the degree to which respondents rely on these social platforms to follow political events and issues and the effects resulting from this reliance.

A study titled, *Social Networks and Their Role in Shaping Public Opinion*, was conducted by Rigi Khadija and Falak and published in the *Journal of Legal Sciences*, Issue 7, 2022, p. 783. The study found that social networks play a significant role in influencing individuals and shaping their attitudes and beliefs. Their role is particularly clear in influencing public opinion among all members of society, especially youth (Khadidja and Falak, 2022).

Another study, *The Role of Social Networks in Forming Public Opinion in the Arab Society*, was conducted by Hayr and Kadi (2023). The study considered the Internet as an unprecedented revolution in the world of communication, contributing to the development of communication and changing the way it operates. Its role is increasing and growing in its impact on individuals and societies (Hayr and Kadi, 2023).

Surveys on social media attitudes are common, but this article's focus on university students in Jordan is significant for several reasons. Firstly, the study population represents a crucial demographic group that is often at the forefront of adopting new technologies and trends, making their attitudes and behaviors highly relevant. Secondly, while similar studies exist, the Jordanian context adds a unique perspective due to cultural, social, and political factors specific to the region. Understanding how these factors intersect with social media use can provide valuable insights into the broader dynamics of opinion formation and information dissemination in the Arab world. Additionally, by focusing on university students,



who are future leaders and influencers, the study can offer insights into the potential long-term impact of social media on society and politics in Jordan. Therefore, this study's contribution lies in its ability to deepen our understanding of social media's role in shaping public opinion among a key demographic in a distinct cultural context, adding nuance and specificity to the existing literature.

### **3. Materials and methods**

This study falls within the descriptive research, which seeks to describe a phenomenon as it is and to explain its causes, dimensions, and future implications based on quantitative data that provide indicators and implications subject to diagnosis, discussion, and conclusion. The survey method was adopted as the mechanism used in researching any problem, leading to specific results that lead to the presentation of solutions. It is considered an appropriate method for media research and studies, as it allows for the clarification of the characteristics of the phenomenon under study and the extraction, interpretation, and logical analysis of data. Descriptive-survey research designs are commonly used to depict a population or phenomena. They collect data on variables' distribution, correlation, prevalence, and current state within a sample or population. This approach is valuable in various fields, such as public health, marketing, and social sciences, where understanding specific characteristics or behaviors is crucial. Surveys, questionnaires, or interviews are often employed to collect data in descriptive survey studies. The primary aim of researchers is to paint a picture of the population or phenomena under study, without trying to control variables or establish causation. Instead, they focus on summarizing and presenting the acquired information to provide meaningful insights (Siedlecki, 2020).

#### **3.1. Population and sample of the study**

The study was conducted on a sample of undergraduate students from four Jordanian universities, two private and two public. The sample was purposively selected from these universities, namely, Al-Hashemite University, the University of Science and Technology (both public universities), Applied Science University, and Al-Zarqa University (both private universities). The sample size totaled 832 participants, equally divided between males and females, with 416 participants from applied colleges and 416 from theoretical colleges, and 208 students from each university. The sample selection was based on equal distribution according to gender, university, and general specialization.

The Ministry's data on the state of higher education for the academic year 2020-2021, obtained by "Al-Ghad Newspaper," indicates that the total number of students enrolled in Jordanian universities at all levels reached 344,796, including 250,137 studying in public universities and 94,659 in private universities. These data show that the number of female students in Jordanian universities exceeds that of male students, whereas the opposite is true for community colleges. In universities, the number of female students, totaling 194,011, constitutes 56%, while the number of male students, at 150,785, makes up 44%. In community colleges, the number of students enrolled is 35,674, including 16,528 female students, accounting for 46%, while the number of male students is 19,146, making up 54%.

### **3.2. Data collection**

The study relied on a questionnaire as a method for data collection. The questionnaire was designed with multiple variables and was subjected to validation. Based on some opinions, several modifications were made to it. Subsequently, it was distributed to a subset sample consisting of 100 individuals, representing 12% of the total sample. Afterward, direct interviews were adopted as a method to fill in the data from the respondents in the questionnaire. The questionnaire used in the study consisted of multiple sections aimed at gathering information about various aspects related to the role of social media in shaping public opinion among Jordanian university students. The sections included:

- **Background Information:** This section collected demographic data such as gender, age, university, college, level of study, and socio-economic status of the participants. It provided a comprehensive overview of the sample's characteristics, allowing for a better understanding of the study population.
- **Means of Communication:** This section explored the various media channels used by students to gather information, highlighting the prevalence of social media networks and news websites over traditional media outlets.
- **Usage of Jordanian News Websites:** This section focused on the daily usage patterns of Jordanian university students regarding news websites, indicating a significant interest in staying informed about local and international issues.
- **Issues of Interest:** This section identified the specific issues that interested students and were used by websites to inform them and shape public opinion. It highlighted a diverse range of topics, including political, economic, human rights, and cultural issues.
- **Issues Related to Shaping Public Opinion:** This section examined the issues addressed by social media and news networks in shaping public opinion, revealing a strong focus on human rights, non-discrimination, and social security.
- **Motives for Using Social Networks:** This section explored the reasons behind students' reliance on social networks for shaping their opinions, indicating a mix of intellectual curiosity, social interaction, and entertainment.
- **Degree of Interest in Public Opinion Issues:** This section assessed the degree of interest among students in issues contributing to shaping public opinion, showing a moderate level of interest overall.
- **Allocation of Space by Social Networks:** This section gauged students' perspectives on the space allocated by social networks to address intellectual issues, indicating a perception of limited to average space for such topics.
- **Quality of Coverage by News Websites:** This section evaluated the quality of coverage by Jordanian news websites of human rights issues, indicating a perceived bias in some cases but overall moderate to objective coverage.
- **Elements of Multimedia Content:** This section identified the types of multimedia content used on websites, highlighting the prevalence of text and images in engaging users.
- **Assessment of General Coverage Characteristics:** This section assessed the general characteristics of website coverage of issues influencing public opinion, indicating a mix of negative, neutral, and positive coverage.

Overall, the questionnaire was comprehensive and well-structured, allowing for a detailed analysis of students' attitudes and behaviors regarding the role of social media in shaping public opinion. It provided valuable insights into the media consumption habits and preferences of Jordanian university students, highlighting the significant influence of social media in shaping their opinions and perceptions.

The study employed a five-point Likert scale, which is a standard tool in survey research, to assess the attitudes and perceptions of participants. This scale likely ranged from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree (5)," with a midpoint of "Neutral" (3). By utilizing this scale, the study aimed to quantitatively measure how respondents viewed various aspects related to the influence of social media on public opinion among Jordanian university students. The scale's straightforwardness and ability to capture subtle nuances in opinions made it an appropriate choice for this research, allowing the researchers to analyze the data and derive meaningful insights into the participants' perspectives. The responses were corrected according to the range wright equation: 1–1.80 = v. low, 1.81–2.60 = low, 2.61–3.40 = medium, 3.41–4.20 = high, 4.21–5.00 = v. high.

### **3.3. Validity and reliability**

The study's validity was verified before its application on sample individuals through the administration of validity and reliability tests on a pilot sample of 30 individuals. Validity involves testing the tool's ability to measure its intended constructs accurately through the questionnaire, ensuring no bias or errors at any stage of the study. Therefore, the researchers opted for face validity and identified interconnected questions to ensure their coherence and alignment with the study's objectives and inquiries. Subsequently, the questionnaire underwent a thorough review process involving five colleagues who acted as reviewers. Their feedback and suggestions were carefully considered and integrated into the final questionnaire. This iterative process was vital in ensuring the questionnaire's clarity, relevance, and effectiveness in collecting the required data. The reviewers, experts in social media and public opinion research, provided valuable insights and recommendations that improved the questionnaire's quality and validity. Their input helped refine the wording of questions, enhance the overall structure, and ensure the questionnaire accurately captured the desired information. By incorporating the feedback from these reviewers, the researchers developed a robust questionnaire that was well-suited to achieve the study's objectives.

To ensure the tool's reliability, the questionnaire was distributed to a pilot sample comprising thirty Jordanian students. The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated between their estimates to determine the stability factor. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha equation was applied to all study items to assess their internal consistency. The reliability coefficient, Cronbach's alpha, was calculated and amounted to 0.834.

### **3.4. Data analysis**

After distributing the questionnaire to the respondents and collecting the data, it was reviewed and tabulated. The data was then entered into and processed using the

statistical program SPSS, version 25. The background data was processed by frequencies and percentages, and students' responses to the main section in the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation. To determine the reliability of the questionnaire's variables, the Cronbach's alpha test was applied. In addition, Chi-square was computed to detect any significances in the respondents' answers. Tests like Cronbach's alpha can assess the reliability of questionnaire items, while Chi-square tests can detect significant associations between categorical variables. These tools are crucial for condensing and presenting information to derive insightful findings in descriptive survey research.

#### 4. Results

**Table 1.** Distribution of the study sample according to demographic variables.

Variable	Category	Freq.	%
Gender	Male	416	50%
	Female	416	50%
	Total	832	100%
Age	18 to 20 years old	218	26.3%
	20 to 22 years old	210	25.2%
	22 to 24 years old	212	25.5%
	24 to 26 years old	146	17.5%
	Older than 26 years old	46	5.5%
	Total	832	100%
University	Al-Hashemite University	208	25%
	Zarqa University	208	25%
	Science and Technology University	208	25%
	Applied Sciences University	208	25%
	Total	832	100%
College	Applied Colleges	416	50%
	Theoretical Colleges	416	50%
	Total	832	100%
Level of study	First year	184	22.1%
	Second year	210	25.5%
	Third year	212	25.5%
	Fourth year	142	17%
	Fifth year	44	5.3%
	Sixth year	28	4.6%
	Total	832	100%
Socio-economic status	Low	186	22.4%
	Medium	470	56.5%
	High	176	21.1%
	Total	832	100%

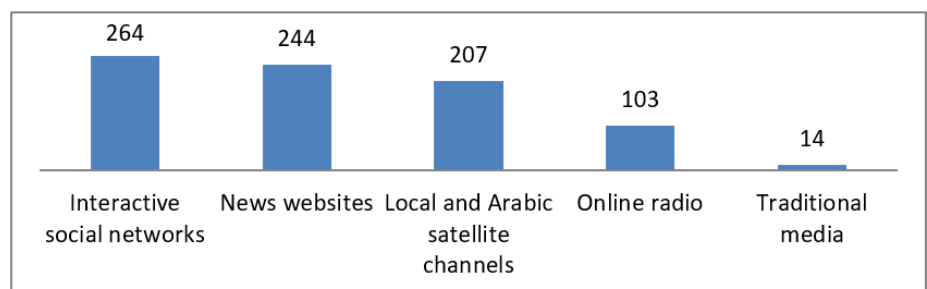
According to **Table 1**, the study utilized an equal distribution method for

variables such as gender, university, and general specialization. Analysis of the data revealed that the majority of the sample came from middle socio-economic backgrounds, comprising 56.5% of the total. A higher socio-economic status was observed among students from private universities. Regarding academic distribution, the sample covered most academic years, particularly the first four. In terms of age groups, the majority fell between 18 and 26 years old, with only a small percentage exceeding 26 years. These findings provide a comprehensive overview of the sample's demographic characteristics, highlighting key trends in socio-economic status, academic progression, and age distribution.

The results in **Table 2** and **Figure 1** indicate a significant preference for digital communication channels over traditional media among the participants. Interactive social networks emerged as the most favored means of communication, with 32.9% of participants preferring platforms like Facebook and Twitter. News websites also garnered substantial preference, with 29.3% of participants opting for them. Local and Arabic satellite channels were preferred by 25% of participants, while online radio was less popular, with only 11.1% selecting it. Traditional media had the lowest preference, with only 1.7% of participants opting for it. These findings underscore the increasing reliance on digital platforms for communication, reflecting a shift away from traditional media sources. Social networks and websites outperform other media due to their ease of use and the capabilities they provide for expressing opinions, positions, and trends through writing, commenting, and sharing, exchanging all elements of multimedia content (Mohammed, 2010). As a result, traditional media outlets have taken the initiative to create electronic arms as extensions of the content and programs they offer in order to remain competitive.

**Table 2.** Distribution of the study sample according to the means of communication used to gather information.

Means of communication	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Chi-Square	df	P-value
Traditional media	14	166.4	-152.4	267.075	4	0.000
Online radio	103	166.4	-63.4			
Local and Arabic satellite channels	207	166.4	40.6			
News websites	244	166.4	77.6			
Interactive social networks	264	166.4	97.6			
Total	832					



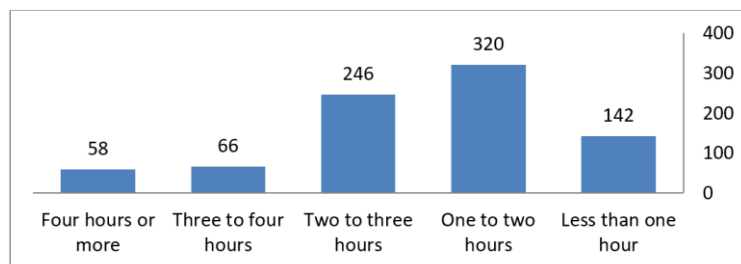
**Figure 1.** Frequency of means of communication.

The data in **Table 3** and **Figure 2** shows varying patterns for time participants

spend on a particular activity. A significant portion, 39.2%, allocates one to two hours, making it the most common duration. Following closely, 29.3% spend two to three hours, indicating a substantial commitment. In contrast, only 17.3% spend less than one hour, suggesting a smaller group engages briefly. Interestingly, fewer participants, 7.9%, dedicate three to four hours, indicating a drop-off in engagement beyond the two-hour mark. The smallest segment, 6.3%, devotes four hours or more, indicating a minority with a more extensive commitment. These findings suggest a general preference for moderate time investments, with fewer participants at both the shorter and longer ends of the spectrum. The variation in terms of the number of hours of use can be attributed to several variables, most importantly: gender, major, year of study, and socio-economic status.

**Table 3.** Time university students spend Jordanian news websites daily.

No. of hours	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Chi-Square	df	P-value
Less than one hour	142	166.4	-24.4	314.635	4	0.000
One to two hours	320	166.4	153.6			
Two to three hours	246	166.4	79.6			
Three to four hours	66	166.4	-100.4			
Four hours or more	58	166.4	-108.4			
Total	832					



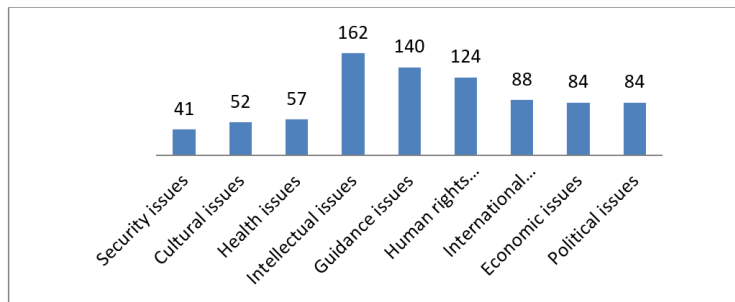
**Figure 2.** Frequency of time using news websites.

The data in **Table 4** and **Figure 3** illustrates varying levels of interest among students in different issues. Intellectual issues stand out as the most engaging, with 19.5% of students expressing interest, followed by guidance (16.8%) and human rights (14.9%) issues. Conversely, cultural (5.5%) and security (4.8%) issues appear to be of less concern. Notably, political, economic, and international political issues all garnered around 10% interest, indicating a moderate level of engagement. Health issues also received moderate interest (12%), while falling below expectations. These findings suggest a diverse range of interests among students, with intellectual and societal concerns like human rights and guidance holding particular importance. Understanding these preferences can help educators and policymakers tailor their approaches to engage students effectively. These results reflect the characteristics of the study sample and the changing interests of students compared to previous generations, as well as the social and economic conditions that have led to the emergence of specific areas of interest related to living standards, education sectors, human rights, health, and social aspects. The priorities of Jordanian students now focus on the perceived benefits of digital communication, regardless of the nature of

these benefits.

**Table 4.** Nature of the issues that interest students and used by websites to inform them about their details and contribute to shaping public opinion.

Issues that interest students	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Chi-Square	df	P-value
Political issues	84	92.4	-8.4	149.238	8	0.000
Economic issues	84	92.4	-8.4			
International political issues	88	92.4	-4.4			
Human rights issues	124	92.4	31.6			
Guidance issues	140	92.4	47.6			
Intellectual issues	162	92.4	69.6			
Health issues	57	92.4	-35.4			
Cultural issues	52	92.4	-40.4			
Security issues	41	92.4	-51.4			
Total	832					



**Figure 3.** Frequency of issues of interest on social media websites.

The data in **Table 5** reveals varying degrees of interest among students in issues related to shaping public opinion. There is a strong emphasis on human rights, with defending the right to life, freedom, and security, as well as treating humans in a dignified manner, garnering significant attention. Non-discrimination is also a major concern, reflecting a commitment to equality. However, certain issues such as gender equality and freedom of movement seem to have less traction among students. Additionally, topics like participation in public meetings and the right to work and ownership are of relatively low importance. These findings suggest a nuanced perspective among students, with a strong focus on fundamental human rights issues but varying levels of interest in other societal concerns. Understanding these preferences can inform efforts to engage students in discussions and actions related to public opinion shaping. These data point to the following considerations:

- 1) This system of values related to public opinion issues has become widespread among students and the public, whether in Jordan, the Arab world, or around the world.
- 2) Public opinion issues have become of general interest and in various circles, as the media has begun to shape a new type of public culture called mass culture.
- 3) The media has led to a kind of intellectual awareness among the public in general and students in particular. Therefore, students have begun to take an interest in public issues that shape their cultures and contribute to forming their opinions and positions on life.

**Table 5.** Issues related to shaping public opinion addressed by social media and news networks.

Issues related to shaping public opinion	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Chi-Square	df	P-value
Equality among people	28	59.4	-31.4	138.276	13	0.000
Non-discrimination	144	59.4	84.6			
Defending the human right to life, freedom, and security	156	59.4	96.6			
Not treating humans in an undignified and inhumane manner	156	59.4	96.6			
Equality among people	28	59.4	-31.4			
Freedom of movement	32	59.4	-27.4			
Gender equality	26	59.4	-33.4			
The right of individuals to express their opinions and ideas	24	59.4	-35.4			
The right of individuals to employment	24	59.4	-35.4			
Participation in public meetings	14	59.4	-45.4			
The right of individuals to social security	140	59.4	80.6			
The right of individuals to live	20	59.4	-39.4			
The right of individuals to work and ownership	8	59.4	-51.4			
The right of individuals to belief and thought	14	59.4	-45.4			
Total	832					

**Table 6.** Motives behind students' reliance on social networks in shaping their opinions.

Motives behind students' reliance on social networks in shaping their opinions	Mean	Standard deviation	Level
I do not pay attention to what is published on social networks.	4.25	1.149	Very large
I follow social networks to get intellectual issues.	4.22	1.131	Very large
I follow social networks to increase my knowledge about the types of issues circulating in Jordan.	4.19	1.188	Large
I identify the violations that occur to individuals and the public.	4.25	1.104	Very large
I form a background about the needs of the Jordanian society regarding the prevalence of the culture of tolerance.	4.21	1.146	Very large
I acquire more knowledge, skills, and experiences related to public life.	4.24	1.135	Very large
I communicate with others and search for social stability.	4.18	1.161	Large
For fun, entertainment, and to fill leisure time.	4.21	1.151	Very large
I always use these sites because I have become addicted to them.	4.15	1.176	Large
Total	4.21	1.088	Very large

The data in **Table 6** indicates that students rely on social networks for various reasons, with a strong inclination towards intellectual engagement and staying informed about societal issues. They use these platforms to access intellectual content (mean = 4.22, SD = 1.131), increase knowledge about Jordanian issues (mean = 4.19, SD = 1.188), and understand societal needs regarding tolerance (mean = 4.21, SD = 1.146). Additionally, social networks serve as a tool for identifying violations in society (mean = 4.25, SD = 1.104) and acquiring knowledge and skills related to public life (mean = 4.24, SD = 1.135). Despite these positive motives, there is also a notable concern about addiction, indicating that some students may use social networks excessively (mean = 4.15, SD = 1.176). Overall, these findings highlight the multifaceted nature of students' reliance on social networks, suggesting a mix of positive motivations for information-seeking and engagement, as well as potential



risks associated with overuse. Understanding these motives is crucial for promoting responsible and balanced use of social networks among students. These results can be attributed to the significant contribution of social media networks in shaping students' opinions regarding the issues raised through these networks.

**Table 7** illustrates diverse perceptions regarding the degree of interest social media networks have in shaping public opinion. A significant portion of respondents, 50.5%, perceive social media's interest as moderate, indicating a substantial role in influencing public views. Conversely, 37% view this interest as weak, suggesting a less influential role. Surprisingly, only 12.5% of respondents perceive social media's interest as good, indicating a strong impact on public opinion. These findings highlight the complexity of social media's role, with a considerable proportion of respondents acknowledging its influence but differing in their assessments of its strength. Understanding these perceptions is crucial for comprehending the evolving dynamics of public opinion formation in the digital age. These findings suggest that students have varying levels of interest in social media networks for shaping public opinion, possibly influenced by the diverse issues presented on these platforms. It appears that students rely significantly on social media networks to form their opinions and ideas about societal matters.

**Table 7.** Degree of interest of social media networks in issues that contribute to shaping public opinion.

Degree of interest of social media networks in shaping public opinion	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Chi-Square	df	P-value	%
Weak	308	277.3	30.7	116.124	2	0.000	37%
Moderate	420	277.3	142.7				50.5%
Good	104	277.3	-173.3				12.5%
Total	832						100%

The data in **Table 8** indicates varying perceptions among respondents regarding the space allocated by social networks to address intellectual issues. A substantial portion, 46.9%, believe that social networks provide only average space for intellectual discourse, indicating a perceived limitation in the platform's commitment to such content. Similarly, 42.3% feel that the space is limited, suggesting a concern about the prominence of intellectual issues in social media spaces. Conversely, a smaller percentage, 10.8%, perceives social networks as providing a large space for intellectual discussions. These findings underscore a nuanced view of social media's role in fostering intellectual discourse, with a significant proportion of respondents noting room for improvement in the platform's treatment of intellectual issues. Understanding these perceptions can inform strategies to enhance the visibility and engagement with intellectual content on social media platforms.

**Table 8.** Students' perspective on the space allocated by social networks to address intellectual issues.

Space allocated by social networks to address intellectual issues	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Chi-Square	df	P-value
Limited space	352	277.3	74.7	109.155	2	0.000
Average space	390	277.3	112.7			
Large space	90	277.3	-187.3			
Total	832					

The data in **Table 9** reveals varying perceptions among respondents regarding the coverage quality of human rights issues on social media. A majority, 58.7%, believe that the coverage is moderate and varied, indicating a perceived balance in the representation of these issues. However, a significant portion, 17.3%, perceive the coverage to be biased or colored, suggesting a concern about the objectivity and fairness of the coverage. Additionally, 24% view the coverage as objective, though this group is smaller than those perceiving biased or moderate coverage. These findings underscore the importance of ensuring balanced and objective coverage of human rights issues on social media to provide a comprehensive and unbiased view of these critical topics.

**Table 9.** Quality of coverage by Jordanian news websites of human rights issues.

Coverage quality of human rights issues	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Chi-Square	df	P-value
Biased (Colored) Coverage	144	277.3	-133.3	187.123	2	0.000
Moderate (Varied) Coverage	488	277.3	210.7			
Objective Coverage	200	277.3	-77.3			
Total	832					

The results of **Table 10** reveals that text is the most prevalent element in multimedia content, with 34.9% of respondents indicating its presence. This is followed by images at 23.8% and two or more elements at 22.8%. Videos and graphics/shapes are less common, with only 9.6% and 8.9% respectively. The significant presence of text suggests its importance in conveying information, while the use of multiple elements indicates a trend towards more engaging and dynamic content. The lower prevalence of videos and graphics/shapes may suggest a potential for increased use of these elements to enhance multimedia content and capture audience attention. Overall, these findings emphasize the importance of using a variety of multimedia elements to create engaging and informative content on social media platforms.

**Table 10.** Elements of multimedia content used on websites.

Elements of multimedia content	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Chi-Square	df	P-value
Text	290	166.4	123.6	187.123	4	0.000
Images	198	166.4	31.6			
Videos	80	166.4	-86.4			
Graphics and shapes	74	166.4	-92.4			
Two or more elements	190	166.4	23.6			
Total	832					

The data in **Table 11** indicates varying perceptions among respondents regarding the general characteristics of website coverage. A significant portion, 39.7%, perceive the coverage to be neutral, suggesting a balanced and unbiased representation of information. Additionally, 35.8% view the coverage as positive, indicating a favorable portrayal of content. However, a notable minority, 24.5%, perceive the coverage to be negative, suggesting a critical or unfavorable depiction of information. These findings

underscore the subjective nature of perceptions towards website coverage and highlight the importance of maintaining objectivity and balance in reporting to ensure credibility and trustworthiness among audiences.

**Table 11.** Assessment of the general characteristics of website coverage of issues influencing public opinion.

Assessment of the general characteristics of website coverage	Observed N	Expected N	Residual	Chi-Square	df	P-value
Negative Coverage	204	277.3	-73.3	187.123	2	0.000
Neutral Coverage	330	277.3	52.7			
Positive Coverage	298	277.3	20.7			
Total	832					

## 5. Discussion

The study aimed to understand the role of social media in shaping public opinion among students in private and public universities. The results indicate that social media has become a source of news and information, competing with traditional media. Students' use of social media has both negative aspects, such as wasting time, distorting facts, and spreading rumors, and positive aspects, such as making new friends, communicating with friends and relatives, and exchanging opinions. The study also showed that social media satisfies students' cognitive needs by providing them with information about the world, enabling them to form their opinions and ideas on various issues discussed through communication channels, whether political, social, religious, or other issues.

Based on these results, the study emphasizes the importance of social media in shaping public opinion, especially among the youth. The study highlights the role of these platforms in university life, especially Facebook, which is considered influential in Jordanian society and among university students. Students rely on Facebook for information, news, exchanging opinions, and communicating with each other, unlike Twitter, which is considered an elite platform in Jordan. The study found that Facebook is a popular site among students, unlike Twitter, with very few students using it. These findings are highly consistent with the hypotheses set by the researcher (AlKhudari et al., 2023).

The study found that Jordan is one of the countries that enjoy a kind of freedom in using social media, and it is among the countries that do not impose any restrictions on the use of social media. Students answered that social media enjoys a kind of freedom in this field. This study is consistent with previous studies that indicated the presence of freedom in using social media in several Arab countries and the role of social media in shaping and forming opinions.

The study agrees with previous studies that students have become reliant on social networks to obtain information. It also confirms that social media has both negative and positive aspects. University students benefit from these platforms to enhance the positives and use them in a way that serves their university life. The results of previous studies align closely with the findings of this study. Most of the previous studies emphasized the importance of social networks and electronic media in public life. They also highlighted the role of the information revolution and the internet in influencing the public, especially university students. This study agreed with the study

by Al-Mudni (2016) and Al-Adwan (2023). The results of these studies were similar to the findings of this study, indicating the credibility of our results. The results also aligned with the study by Al-Hamad (2021), Khadidja and Falak (2022), and Hayr and Kadi (2023), which emphasized the role of social networks among young people.

In more details, this study is in line with several previous studies that examined the role of social networking sites in shaping public opinion among university students in the Middle East. Al-Mudni's (2016) study focused on students at Umm Al-Qura University in Saudi Arabia. It found that these sites play a significant role in shaping public opinion, replacing traditional institutions like schools, universities, and traditional media. This role has grown with the development of life and the spread of electronic media. Similarly, Al-Majali's (2007) study examined Internet use among university students in Jordan. It highlighted the social effects of Internet use among youth, showing how it affects individuals' behavior and opinions. This study also concurs with Al-Adwan's (2023) study, which found that these sites have become essential tools in shaping public opinion, reflecting a societal necessity.

Additionally, our study's findings are consistent with those of Al-Hamad's (2021) study, which showed that a majority of respondents rely heavily on social networking sites to follow political events, with Facebook and Twitter being the most used platforms. These sites were found to significantly influence public political opinion. Our study also agrees with Rigi and Saleh's study, which emphasized the significant role of social networking sites in shaping public opinion and influencing individuals' attitudes and beliefs, particularly among young people. The study by Hayr and Kadi (2023) further supports these findings, considering the Internet a revolutionary tool that has changed communication dynamics, with a growing influence on individuals and societies. Therefore, it can be concluded that our study's findings align with a consensus in the literature regarding the influential role of social networking sites in shaping public opinion and attitudes.

## **6. Implications**

The study's findings highlight the significant role of social media in shaping the information consumption habits of Jordanian university students. With social media networks being the top interest among surveyed students, followed closely by news websites and satellite channels, it is evident that these digital platforms play a crucial role in their daily lives. The study also reveals insights into the time students spend on social media, with a sizable portion dedicating one to two hours, indicating its considerable influence on their daily routines. Moreover, the preference for text-based content on websites suggests that students value informative and engaging written material.

## **7. Conclusion**

The study's findings highlight the profound impact of social media on shaping opinions, beliefs, and ideas, particularly among university students in Jordan. Social media's role in influencing public opinion was found to be unparalleled, with students extensively using these platforms to exchange opinions, ideas, and information. This exchange of ideas has contributed to the formation and adoption of new ideas among

young people, leading to changes in their opinions. The study underscores the importance of understanding and utilizing social media and online platforms to effectively engage and communicate with students. It also emphasizes the crucial role of research in expanding our knowledge and understanding of these technologies. Social media has become a major player in people's lives, especially among youth and university students. These platforms have contributed to reducing the impact of traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, radio stations, and national television channels. They now play a significant role in shaping minds, spreading ideas, and have become an effective tool in building the personality and mindset of youth, controlling it through the content they publish. These networks have become the family, school, and university from which young people learn everything new and follow what is happening in the world. It is expected that the role of these networks will increase in the future, and the role of the state, its institutions, and religious institutions and their programs will diminish in favor of these networks, which are gaining more followers every day. The study has limitations. It relied on students from Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan, Al-Hussein Bin Talal University, Al-Balqa' Applied University, and the University of Jordan, with a total of 832 students. The study was conducted in 2024 in Jordan, specifically in four universities in the central region. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that both governmental and private institutions utilize social media networks as a means to shape and control public opinion. These networks should be leveraged to provide students with information across various public domains. Furthermore, introducing media education as a subject in university curricula can help equip students with the necessary knowledge for the optimal use of social media platforms. Based on the extensive data gathered in this study, several avenues for future research emerge. Firstly, investigating the long-term effects of social media use on students' academic performance and social interactions could provide valuable insights. Secondly, exploring the impact of social media on political opinions and activism among university students could offer a deeper understanding of its role in shaping public discourse. Additionally, studying the effectiveness of interventions aimed at promoting critical thinking and media literacy skills in navigating social media content could be beneficial. Finally, examining the evolving nature of social media platforms and their impact on public opinion over time could provide valuable insights into the changing dynamics of communication in the digital age.

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