



Source Credibility, User Commentary, and Social Media News Sharing in the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

In the digital age, social media (SM) platforms have changed how people access, verify, and share news. This study explores the effect of source credibility and user commentary on news-sharing behaviors among Arabs in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Using media literacy theory, the research examines self-reported credibility-checking and how user commentary may impact news-sharing behavior. A survey of 324 respondents shows that while most use SM daily as a primary news source, nearly one-third do not share news. Therefore, the analysis includes an analytic subsample of 220 news sharers. Smartphones lead in news sharing, though usage patterns differ across platforms. Respondents express high confidence in their ability to assess credibility. Commentary is standard but only weakly related to credibility checks. There are notable differences in news sharing, credibility checks, and user commentary based on age and gender. The results highlight the need to enhance practical media literacy for more responsible news sharing in the UAE. The importance of strengthening transparent sourcing practices, fostering audience trust through credible, verifiable content, and actively engaging with user commentary to encourage informed, responsible news-sharing behaviors on social media platforms are among the implications for newsrooms in the Emirates.

Introduction

In today's digital world, social media is a common way to access, consume, and share news. Unlike traditional institutional journalism, which is controlled by gatekeepers, SM allows users to take on multiple roles as both consumers and news creators, mixing professional and unverified reports. People can share news, comment on stories, and influence the flow of information with just one click. This change raises important questions about how users interact with news content. Who posts news, how often, and why? More importantly, to what degree do people assess the trustworthiness of the material they share?

Sharing a piece of news with one's social media contacts involves a certain level of approval about the quality of the information (Ardévol-Abreu et al. 2020) as well as the potential value of the content to those contacts (Wong and Burkell 2017). Guess et al. (2020) and Gil de Zúñiga

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et al. (2012) have shown that, although many users claim confidence in their ability to evaluate online content, their actual behaviors for checking credibility often fall short. This highlights the need to investigate how people access and utilize media, as well as to develop important literacy skills that foster active engagement.

In the UAE, Ahmed (2023) found that 88.9% of a sample involving 324 individuals in Dubai and Abu Dhabi obtained their news from social media platforms. Shamseldien et al. (2025) report that 71% of 400 Emirati students primarily obtain news and stories through social media platforms. This underscores the significant role of SM as a primary channel for news and interaction among young Emiratis. As social media becomes a primary news source for youth, the ease of sharing raises serious concerns about credibility, accuracy, and media responsibility. While news consumers have unprecedented access and the ability to share content easily, many lack the necessary skills needed to verify what they share.

Research indicates that most social media users tend to overestimate their ability to assess the credibility of news and sometimes share unverified or false information, often influenced by peers, opinions, or platform algorithms (Hargittai et al. 2010; Guess et al. 2020). Given how quickly news spreads across platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, X, and Snapchat, it is crucial to examine how frequently users share news. This study aims to address the news-sharing research gap by exploring how Arab expats and Emirati SM users engage with news, specifically their ability to fact-check sources and their likelihood of sharing news with commentary. By examining news-sharing habits, credibility assessments, and commentary routines, this research illuminates the expanding importance of media literacy in today's interconnected information environment.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Media scholars have applied various communication theories to investigate news-sharing behavior. Ma et al. (2014) used diffusion of innovations theory to examine factors predicting news-sharing behavior. They found that perceptions of strong ties, online news choice, and awareness of opinion leadership influenced sharing. Karnowski et al. (2018) applied the theory of reasoned action to understand news sharing among German social media users, concluding that news-sharing behavior should be interpreted through the logic of rational choice. Grounded in media literacy theory, this research examines news-sharing patterns and the relationship between the ability to detect misinformation and social media usage. The theory provides a conceptual framework for explaining how people consume social media news content, specifically their capacity to validate news before sharing it.



Media Literacy

The media literacy approach aims to foster analytical thinking skills that enable individuals to assess, analyze, evaluate, and create messages across various formats (Aufderheide 1993; Potter 2010; Livingstone 2004; Hobbs 2010). In the digital age, media literacy is crucial for navigating a vast amount of information, discerning credible from non-credible sources, and preventing the spread of disinformation, especially on social media, where information often circulates casually without proper verification. Consequently, verifying credibility becomes a key aspect of media literacy. Individuals with media literacy are more likely to fact-check news, question sources, recognize bias, and avoid sharing unverified content (Vraga and Tully 2019). Additionally, commenting on headlines, sharing opinions, or offering interpretations requires digital skills and critical thinking, highlighting that commentary can serve as both a measure and an outcome of media literacy (Mihailidis and Thevenin 2013). Media literacy theory supports examining news-sharing behaviors, exploring what users do, why, and how, particularly in terms of the credibility of the content they share. It provides a solid basis for analyzing how often, in what style, and with what sensitivity users share news on social media. Media literacy encompasses the ability to evaluate the quality of news content, including comments, sometimes without them, which is vital for understanding user news sharing and platform preferences, especially in the rapidly evolving digital media landscape of the UAE.

Factors Predicting Social Media News-sharing Behavior

Research suggests that several factors can influence news sharing on social media. Some of these are linked to media literacy components.

1- Credibility Checking in News-Sharing

One key predictor of news sharing is the ability to assess the credibility of the news source. Kim and Dennis (2019) noted that people tend to trust news from sources they see as experts and dismiss news from sources known for spreading false information. They explained that a news source's credibility can influence how social media users behave, including liking, commenting on, or sharing an article without reading it. Ardevol-Abreu et al. (2020) noted that once warned about a falsehood in a publication, people tend to stop believing and sharing it. Wu (2008) argued that trust is the assessment of network members' honesty, suggesting that they adhere to acceptable standards and strive not to cause harm to other members. Trust also entails the emotional connection an individual has with other members of their social media platforms, which is an essential factor in information dissemination (Chang and Chuang 2011). Ma et al. (2014) found that perceived news credibility and personal discernment of opinion-



seeking did not predict the intention to disseminate news on social media platforms. Kümpel et al. (2015) noted that individuals tend to share positive news, especially when it comes from a trusted source or contains high-informativeness factors, such as controversy, relevance, or unexpectedness. Apuke and Omar (2020) found that trust in network members predicts news-sharing behavior. This finding is linked to the role of fact-checking and labeling fake content on SM, which may seem a straightforward way to fight misinformation. Little is known about it in the Arab region. Therefore, the first research question is:

RQ1: *How do respondents engage in credibility-checking when sharing news on social media?*

Media Literacy and Credibility Verification of Online News Sources

In credibility checking, the literature consistently identifies an awareness–action gap between self-reported competence and actual behavior. Pennycook and Rand (2019) suggest that people often overestimate their ability to identify misinformation, to the extent that even innocent sharing occurs among individuals who claim to be media literate. This highlights the need for stronger practical media literacy to help overcome this awareness–action gap (Vraga and Tully 2019). Media literacy has proven to be a vital framework for understanding how people interact with online news environments. A key aspect of media literacy in the digital age is the ability to assess the credibility of online news. As social media platforms become more central gateways to information, audiences are repeatedly exposed to content with varying accuracy and intent, including disinformation and misinformation. Media literacy equips users with the critical thinking skills necessary to identify credible sources, verify facts, recognize bias, and prevent the unintentional dissemination of false information (Mihailidis and Viotty 2017).

Credibility-checking is a clear example of media literacy in practice. It includes searching for reliable news sources, detecting bias in news items, verifying authorship, cross-checking sources, and identifying signs of manipulation. Studies have shown that individuals with higher levels of media literacy are more likely to fact-check, question the source of news content, and decline to share unverified information (Vraga and Tully 2019; Guess et al. 2020). Thus, the first hypothesis is formed as follows:

Higher self-reported credibility-checking and competency are associated with news-sharing patterns.

Commentary news-sharing

Commenting entails SM users assuming a more definitive stance with reputational implications, especially when the content is sensitive. Digital



media have created numerous opportunities to interact with the news and directly shape the news agenda by posting comments, pictures, and videos (Newman et al. 2017). Adding comments to shared news adds another layer to the study of news sharing. Bente and Anders (2018) explained that by sharing heartfelt stories or thoughtful commentary on SM profiles, users aim to showcase the best sides of themselves to appear as concerned, engaged citizens to friends, family, and acquaintances.

The concept of participatory culture explains how users both consume and contribute to the media they encounter (Jenkins 2006). By commenting on news shared online, users move beyond passive sharing and adopt a more active role in interpretation, asking questions, or sharing personal perspectives—roles that align with what Hermida (2011) calls “audience participation in news.”

Participation in commenting varies significantly by country. The proportion of people who comment on the news, either on social networks or on news organization websites, is high in Latin American countries (44% in Mexico and Chile) and Southern European countries (34% in Greece, 29% in Portugal), but lower in some Northern European countries such as Denmark (14%) and Germany (11%), as well as Japan (8%) (Newman et al. 2017, 45). Little is known about the Arab countries. Accordingly, the second research question is:

RQ2: How frequently do respondents share news with or without commentary, and how is this related to their credibility-checking behaviors?

Media Literacy and Commentary news-sharing on SM

The social media revolution has turned users into active participants in the news cycle, rather than passive consumers of information. In this context, media literacy is a crucial framework for understanding how people consume, interpret, and respond to news content online. Commenting on news is a performative act that reflects an individual’s opinion and a user’s ability to engage with information (Mihailidis and Thevenin 2013). The more media-literate individuals are, the more likely they are to read, evaluate, and contextualize news before forming a judgment. This aligns with the general definition of media literacy by Aufderheide (1993). Studies have shown that more media-literate individuals tend to be more critical in their public responses and avoid using overly emotional reactions (McDougall et al., 2018; Tully et al., 2018). Lower levels of media literacy can lead to reactive, misinformed, or biased commentary, which may perpetuate false narratives or polarizing rhetoric (Guess et al. 2020). Thus, social media news commentary serves as both an experiment and a demonstration of media literacy, revealing how users exercise interpretive and evaluative skills in real time within public digital spaces.



This research examines the role of source credibility checking and news commentary in promoting media literacy through social media operational expressions. Commenting on the news is an expression of a user's evaluative stance: whether to amplify, criticize, personalize, or refute the information presented. More media-literate individuals are expected to be more active in this task, demonstrating the ability to detect bias, evaluate credibility, and frame comments effectively (Mihailidis and Thevenin 2013; Tully et al. 2018). Conversely, less media-literate individuals may remain silent or express visceral reactions that perpetuate misinformation or fuel emotive polarization (Guess et al. 2020). Therefore, the second hypothesis is stated as follows:

Commentary-based news-sharing is associated with source-credibility checking.

2- SM Platform and Accessible Device

Research shows that social media news-sharing is a complex behavior influenced by cognitive skills, such as assessing credibility, and technological features, including device and platform choices. Studies indicate that various factors affect news sharing in Western countries; however, there is limited knowledge of this behavior among youth in the Arab region. This raises the third research question:

RQ3: How do demographic and platform-related factors influence credibility-checking and commentary-based sharing?

Social media platforms vary in their technological features, shaping how users consume and share news. Platforms like Facebook and X are designed to facilitate link-sharing and commentary, while Instagram and Snapchat focus more on visual communication rather than traditional news-sharing (Westlund 2013). The device used also influences user behavior. Desktop users may be more engaged with content but tend to scan and share impulsively (Chyi and Yang 2009). An interesting finding in the literature is that while the most shared stories on X typically feature "hard" news, covering topics like foreign policy, immigration, or military service, stories shared on Facebook are more often "soft" news, related to parenting, children's issues, health, and education (Bente and Anders 2018, 1683). Additionally, newsrooms increasingly rely on audience metrics, platform analytics, and social sharing behaviors. Understanding why and how users verify, comment on, and share news is essential for editorial decisions. Perceptions of credibility influence trust in identification, while commentary and sharing affect visibility within algorithmic systems. Therefore, the theoretical perspective links individual media skills to broader managerial concerns, such as building audience trust, developing engagement strategies, and creating news ecosystems resistant to misinformation. Hence, the third hypothesis is stated as follows:



The use of specific social media platforms is significantly related to self-reported credibility-checking and credibility-check competency.

This study investigates the credibility of news sources and user commentary in relation to social media news-sharing patterns.

Methodology

Measurements

– **News-sharing frequency**

Respondents were asked how frequently they had shared news stories on social media over the past two weeks. Adapted from Andrew and Rich (2020), this was measured using a 6-point scale from never (1), rarely (2), very infrequently (3), infrequently (4), frequently (5), and very frequently (6).

– **News-sharing pattern**

Respondents were asked to indicate how often they shared news from four sources. The items included: sharing news that “I read on SM,” “my friend has shared with me,” “I watch on a news website,” and “I receive from a trusted SM friend.” These items were chosen because they represent the primary ways users share news through social media, trusted peers, and news websites, providing a conceptually grounded measure of news-sharing practices. This was measured using a 6-point scale from never (•), rarely (1), very infrequently (2), infrequently (3), frequently (4), and very frequently (5). The following categories were combined to make the results more meaningful: infrequently and very infrequently; frequently and very frequently; and rarely and never. The final scale ranged from 4 to 16. Cronbach’s alpha was .786.

– **Commentary news-sharing**

This variable measures the tendency of the news sharer to add a comment before sharing a news post. Adapted from Newman et al. (2017), a 6-point scale from never (0), rarely (1), very infrequently (2), infrequently (3), frequently (4), very frequently (5) was used. Respondents indicated how often they share news with or without comments. The combined scale ranged from 2 to 6, and Cronbach’s alpha was .660.

– **Self-reported news source credibility-checking**

Respondents were asked how often they verify the news’s credibility before sharing it. The options were: always (5), often (4), sometimes



(3), rarely (2), and never (1). The scale mean was 14.10. Cronbach's alpha is .722.

- **News source credibility-check competence** involves individuals evaluating their competency to verify the trustworthiness of news sources. Respondents were asked to rate themselves on four items using a 5-point scale ranging from very good (5), good (4), moderate (3), bad (2), and very bad (1). The items are: “fact-checking ability,” “searching for reliable news sources,” “ability to discover news bias,” and “avoiding unreliable news sources.”

This measure was adapted from earlier research on fact-checking, verification behaviors, and news sharing (e.g., Kožuh and Čakš 2023; López-Meri et al., 2024). The scales were combined to produce more meaningful results. The scale ranged from 4 to 12, with a mean of 11.28 and a Cronbach's alpha of .71.

The questionnaire included questions about respondents' social media usage habits, the news topics they frequently share, the types of SM friends they share news with, adapted from Duffy and Ling (2020), and the intervening demographic variables of age and gender.

Data Collection and Sampling

The study focused on young adults, who represent the most active demographic in digital news consumption. Thus, a quantitative online survey was used to investigate the relationships between credibility-checking, commentary, and news-sharing behaviors among social media users in the UAE.

Sampling and Participants

A non-probability convenience sampling method was employed. The survey link was distributed via Zayed University announcements and further shared within students' local and regional networks. Based on feedback from 10% of the sample during the pretest, modifications were made to the wording and sequence of specific questions. The sample consisted of 324 Arab respondents residing in the UAE, which is sufficient to provide indicative analytical insights rather than to generalize the results. Among them, 220 participants reported sharing news on social media and were included in the analysis of sharing behaviors. The average age of participants is 25.61 years. They were grouped by demographic traits, with 84.9% female and 15.1% male. Emiratis comprised 67% of the sample, while Arab expatriates accounted for 33%. Most participants, 82.7%, were either pursuing or had completed undergraduate degrees, while 17.3% were enrolled in or had completed postgraduate studies in various fields.



Ethical statement

The Zayed University Research Ethics Committee granted full ethical clearance, number ZU20_146_F, to conduct the survey and approved the university announcement to students, sharing the survey link.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics summarized demographic characteristics and overall social media use. Pearson correlations, chi-square tests, and ANOVA were used to examine relationships among variables and test hypotheses. Differences among demographic groups, including gender and age, were also examined.

Results

General results

- The results showed that 95.4% of respondents use SM multiple times per day, only 4% use it once a day, and 0.6% use SM once a week.
- 81.2% of the respondents use SM “always” as a news source on a typical day, while 17.6% use it “sometimes” and 1.2% “never” use SM as a news source.
- 42.0% of respondents have frequently shared a news story on SM, 17.6% have infrequently shared, and 8.3% rarely shared a news story on SM over the past two weeks.
- 32% of the sample said they do not share news via SM. Therefore, they were asked to skip to the personal information at the end of the questionnaire.

Devices used in sharing news via social media

The results show that smartphones are the most used devices for sharing news. 41.4% of respondents reported “frequently” using it for sharing news. The practice aligns with local (Shamseldien et al. 2025) and international media trends, which suggest a continued dominance of mobile phones in accessing news and sharing (Newman et al. 2023). Their widespread use of reading news is often linked to their mobility, immediacy, and availability on social media platforms that enable quick sharing and engagement (Westlund 2013; Molyneux 2018). Smartphones are portable, user-friendly, and equipped with all the applications for sharing news.

However, 57.3% stated that they never use smartphones to share SM news. Laptops were the second-most-frequently used, with 29.5% reporting regular use and 49.5% reporting occasional use. This suggests that laptops remain convenient tools for news delivery, likely because of their larger screens, multitasking capabilities, and suitability for more formal or



professional settings. Scolari (2012) also noted that device use is influenced by the affordances of individual platforms, such as typing ease, navigation, and media creation. By contrast, desktops and tablets are used much less for news sharing. Less frequent use is mentioned by only 23.2% and 20.9%, respectively. Thus, these devices seem less integral to news-sharing behavior. This is due either to their more consumption-focused and passive nature, especially with tablets, or simply to the non-mobile nature of desktop use, as noted by Van Damme et al. (2015).

Patterns of news-sharing via Social Media

Two hundred twenty respondents said they share news “always” through SM. Table 1 presents the frequency of news-sharing behavior among participants.

Table 1: New-sharing patterns (%) (N=220) *

News-sharing patterns	Frequently	Infrequently	Rarely	Mean	St. Dev.
1. Sharing news I read on SM	78.2	20.5	1.4	2.77	.454
2. Sharing news I receive from trusted SM friends	69.5	21.8	8.6	2.61	.642
3. Sharing news my friends shared with me on SM	66.8	27.3	5.9	2.61	.598
4. Sharing news I watch on a news website	63.6	29.5	6.8	2.57	.619

**Respondents can select more than one option*

Table 1 shows that the most prevalent news-sharing was to “share news I read on social media,” with 78.2% reporting doing so frequently. This trend received the highest mean score (M = 2.77, SD = 0.454), indicating a frequent practice of sharing back what is personally consumed. This corroborates earlier research that identifies SM as a source of information and a platform for discussion and sharing (Hermida et al. 2012; Newman et al. 2023).

“Sharing news, I receive from trusted SM friends,” which indicates word of mouth, was the second most common category reported, 69.5%. It had a lower mean value (M = 2.61) and a larger standard deviation (SD = .642), indicating greater response variability. This suggests that interpersonal trust is an essential variable in initiating news sharing, yet the variability in response to trust-based actions is larger. In this manner, sharing news circulated to friends in SM and sharing news sourced from news websites were reported by 66.8% and 63.6% of the respondents, respectively. Both groups have similar means (M = 2.61 and M = 2.57, respectively), indicating that these sources are less potent than self-read news in SM, yet still influence users’ sharing behavior. Compared to user-generated or peer-shared content, the decreased ratio of news sharing from official websites



may reflect the social aspect of online news participation, where peer endorsement lends the news credibility and local salience (Turcotte et al. 2015).

Overall, the *rare* sharing practice across categories is small (ranging from 1.4% to 8.6%), which supports the finding that news sharing is a normalized, ordinary digital practice for participants. Standard deviations are low, indicating that responses are clustered around the means, except for news shared with close friends (SD = 0.642), which exhibits greater personal variation.

Type of SM friends with whom the respondents share the news

Respondents were given a list of five SM friend types and asked how frequently they share news with each type. They were allowed to select multiple types of friends. The results indicate that *family groups* are the most common SM group for news sharing, with 44.1% reporting frequent sharing, followed by friends (42.7%) and family members (40.9%). The findings imply that strong social relations are the essence of users’ news-sharing behavior, supporting the strong-tie communication model in cyberspaces. Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2012) support this finding, indicating that individuals are more inclined to share news with credible individuals with whom they can sympathize emotionally. *Co-workers and colleagues often share news* at a rate of 40.0%, but they also exhibit the highest rate of infrequent sharing, at 22.7%. This indicates a more selective approach to sharing news within this group. Users tend to distinguish between professional and personal spheres when choosing what news to share. The high “*never*” rates, especially among offline friends 50.0% and family members 53.6%, indicate that sharing news is not common across all social ties, even close ones. This may stem from personal preferences, views on the importance of news, or different communication styles.

News Credibility and News-Sharing

Most news sharers 81.4% stated that they *always* check the credibility of the news before sharing it with SM friends. Only 18.6% check it *sometimes*. The respondents were then asked to rate their ability to detect news source credibility. Table 2 presents the results:

Table 2: Respondents’ news credibility check competency (N=220) *

News Source Credibility Competency Factors	Bad	Moderate	Good	Mean
1. Fact-checking ability	0.9%	14.1%	85.0%	2.84
2. Searching for a reliable news source	0.9%	15.5%	83.6%	2.83
3. Avoiding unreliable news sources	0.5%	18.2%	81.4%	2.81
4. Ability to discover bias in news items	0%	19.5%	80.5%	2.80

*Respondents can select more than one item



Table 2 displays how the respondents rate themselves on four competencies critical to assessing news-source credibility. The results are overall high in confidence, with all participants giving themselves a “good” rating on all competencies. The highest-rated credibility competency was *fact-checking ability*, with 85.0% of participants self-reporting as *good* ($M = 2.84$). Such high confidence aligns with Wineburg and McGrew (2017), who document a growing awareness, among younger, digitally engaged users, of the necessity of checking facts in a world of misinformation. Hargittai et al. (2010) also noted that self-reported media literacy does not always reflect actual competence. Though levels of self-confidence were high, competency was less than optimal in practice. Then, 83.6% said that they are good at “*searching for a reliable news source*” ($M = 2.83$), and 15.5% said they are *moderate*. *Avoiding unreliable news sources* (81.4% good, $M = 2.81$) and *recognizing bias in news reporting* (80.5% good, $M = 2.80$) were rated *highly*. These results align with the critical thinking practice that Kahne and Bowyer (2017) often describe as “evaluative news engagement,” in which individuals intentionally analyze the motives, tone, and ideological framing of the news before sharing. This indicates that most respondents understand how framing and agenda-setting can influence objectivity, leading them to apply this knowledge in their posting behaviors. Flanagin and Metzger (2007) noted that users are better at dismissing suspicious material than at searching for high-quality, verified sources. It also highlights a distinction between information literacy and proactive versus reactive information literacy: anyone can recognize harmful content but may lack the strategies or habits needed to identify good sources independently.

Commentary news-sharing

Table 3 shows the frequency with which respondents share news on SM with and without commentary.

Table 3: Frequency of commentary news-sharing (%) (N=220)

Commentary news-sharing	Frequently	Infrequently	Rarely	Mean	St. Dev.
Sharing news by adding a comment	60.0	33.2	6.8	2.53	.622
Sharing news without adding a comment	63.6	29.5	6.8	2.57	.619

Table 3 shows that both practices are *frequent* among participants, with sharing news without commentary occurring more frequently than sharing with commentary, 63.6% vs. 60.0%. The mean score for both indicates that respondents participate in both types similarly. The low standard deviations indicate homogeneous patterns throughout the sample. Meanwhile, the low but comparatively higher rate of non-commented sharing suggests that many users engage in low-effort, passive news sharing, aligned with the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch 1973), which hypothesizes that people utilize and disseminate



media to fulfill specific needs and gratifications. Meanwhile, Lee and Ma (2012) indicated that non-commentary users are driven by a need to provide instant notice to others or to express solidarity with issues or causes without engaging in further discussion. The difference between infrequent sharing with commentary 33.2% and infrequent sharing without commentary 29.5% indicates that cognitive and social effort might be intervening variables. Vraga et al. (2015) confirm that users share without commentary when they are afraid of being judged by others who do not have the time or believe they would not be able to express their views.

News topics shared and the type of SM friends

The respondents were asked to declare the types of SM contacts through whom they share 14 news topics they selected from 19. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship between shared topics and friend types. Table 4 presents the results.

Table 4: Correlation between news topics shared and the type of SM friends

News Topics	Type of SM friends				
	Family members	Family groups	SM Friends	Online friends have never met	Colleagues Work/Univ.
Weather				.218**	
Crime			-.132*	.215**	
Economic				.176**	
Health				.227**	.159*
Environment	-.153*			.134*	
Technology				.198**	
Education		.152*		.182**	
Transportation				.180**	
Arts	-.139*		-.150*		
Celebrities				.134*	
Sports				.143*	
Fashion	-.147*				
Video games				.226**	
Entertainment	-.191**				

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Table 4 shows a positive correlation between online friends who have never met and all news topics except Arts, Fashion, and Entertainment News. Health news is widely shared with colleagues ($r = 0.227, p < 0.01$), highlighting its importance in work or academic settings. Education news is significantly associated with family groups ($r = 0.152, p < 0.05$), likely because of its perceived practical value. Arts ($r = -.139, p < .05$), Fashion ($r = -.147, p < .05$), Environment ($r = -.153, < .05$) and Entertainment ($r = -.191, p < .01$) are not usually shared with family members, i.e., these culture-bound subjects are avoided with family members, perhaps on grounds of generational or values differences. Crime news and Arts negatively weakly



correlate with SM friends ($r = -.132, p < .05$) and ($r = -.150, p < .05$), respectively. Although it is a modest weak correlation, it suggests that those news topics are shared with a more specialized or like-oriented audience.

Difference in the types of devices used for news-sharing across different social media platforms.

Table 5 displays ANOVA results comparing the devices used to share news across six SM platforms.

Table 5: Differences in the device type used to share news across SM platforms

Social media	The device used in news-sharing			
	Smartphones	Tablets, i.e., iPads	Desktop	Laptop
WhatsApp	-.008 NS	.267**	.322**	.247**
X	-.106 NS	.284**	.371**	.225**
Facebook	.150*	.321**	.517**	.305**
YouTube	-.003 NS	.396**	.537**	.243**
Instagram	-.197**	.150*	.207**	.170*
Snapchat	-.164*	.299**	.313**	.156*

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level * Correlation is significant at 0.05 level NS Non-significant

- Table 5 shows no significant differences in smartphone sharing of news across all platforms except Instagram ($p < .01$), Facebook ($p < .01$), and Snapchat ($p < .05$), where differences indicate less use of smartphones than other platforms. The results suggest that Instagram and Snapchat are used extensively on mobile phones for entertainment or social purposes; however, they may be less prevalent in mobile news sharing.
- There were significant differences between tablet usage across all SM websites. The most significant differences were observed with YouTube ($p < .01$), Facebook, and Snapchat, suggesting that tablets are most in demand for news exchange on video or multimedia platforms.
- All SM platforms demonstrate significant differences in using desktops and laptops to share news. Facebook and YouTube show the most significant difference. It suggests that these sites are more likely to be used for sharing news on laptops and PCs, given the content types (e.g., long videos, text updates, embedded links) that are better optimized for larger screens and a keyboard interface.

The differences between males and females in the research variables

- The Chi-Square test revealed no significant difference between males



and females in their frequent use of SM. Both groups use SM multiple times daily: males, 93.9% and females, 95.6%.

- There is no significant difference in using SM as a news source; 81.5% of females vs. 79.6% of males use it “always” for news.
- No significant difference exists between males and females in sharing news via SM. 47.6% of females share news “always” compared to 44.9% of males. Additionally, 81.1% of females vs. 83.3% of males frequently verify the credibility of news before sharing it.

The differences in the research variables among age groups

- Chi-square showed no significant difference among age groups in their use of SM as a news source on a typical day. However, the results indicate a significant age-group and news-sharing difference ($\chi^2 = 15.895$, $p < .01$), suggesting that news-sharing frequency is predicted by age.
- The 25–29 age group, 65.3% shows the highest percentage of “always” news sharers, indicating it is the most active age group in continuous social media news sharing.
- The 20–24 age group also shows a high frequency, with 47.3% saying they “always” pass on news, which suggests that young adulthood remains a time of active engagement.
- Conversely, the youngest group, under 20, has the lowest rate of sharers, 38.9% “always” share, and the highest rate of non-sharers, 44.4%, implying that some in this age group might not be interested in sharing news or are engaged in other activities.
- The 30+ group is more balanced, with 41.1% “always” sharing, 31.5% “sometimes”, and 27.4% “never”. This suggests more varied news-sharing habits, possibly due to differences in media consumption, work situations, or personal sharing preferences.
- The findings reveal significant variation across age groups in news source credibility check, $\chi^2 = 7.460$, $p < .05$.
- The youngest two age groups, <20 and 20 – <25, show identical behavior: 80% always check news credibility in each group. The age group 25 – <30 exhibits a slightly more varied pattern, with a lower percentage, 70.3%, constantly checking credibility and a higher proportion, 29.7%, doing so only sometimes.
- In contrast, the 30+ group demonstrates the strongest tendency to constantly verify credibility, with 92.5% indicating they do so



consistently, and only 7.5% reporting that they check occasionally.

Hypotheses testing

H#1 Higher self-reported credibility-checking and competency are associated with news-sharing patterns.

Pearson Correlation was used to test the first hypothesis.

Table 6: Correlation between News-sharing patterns and Credibility variables

	Credibility-checking competency	Self-reported Credibility-checking
News-sharing pattern	.181*	-.053- NS

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

NS Not significant

The positive, significant correlation between news-sharing patterns and competence in credibility checking ($r = 0.181, p < 0.05$) suggests that users who share news more frequently tend to be more competent in assessing credibility. Psychologically, this may reflect an illusion of competence: active participation on social media can give users a heightened sense of digital literacy and judgment, despite limited evidence of analytical checking. Culturally, frequent sharing – especially in collectivist cultures – may be seen as a social duty or a way to participate in communal conversations, reinforcing a sense of being informed and capable, regardless of whether the credibility is truly warranted. From a platform perspective, social media interfaces reward activity and visibility, creating feedback loops where users perceive frequent sharing as a sign of skill or awareness. The negative, non-significant relationship with self-reported credibility checking indicates a disconnect between competence and self-reported verification regarding news-sharing patterns, suggesting that platform-driven habits and cultural sharing norms can boost users’ confidence without encouraging rigorous evaluation of sources. Therefore, the first hypothesis is partially accepted.

H#2 Commentary-based news-sharing is associated with source-credibility checking.

Pearson correlation coefficient examined this hypothesis. Table 7 displays the results.

Table 7: Correlation between news commentary and credibility-check

Commentary news-sharing	Credibility-checking competency	Self-reported credibility checking
Sharing news by adding my comment	.106 NS	-.135*
Sharing news without adding my comment	.024 NS	-.013 NS

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), NS = Non-significant



Results in Table 7 show a significant negative correlation between sharing news with added commentary and self-reported credibility-checking ($r = -0.135, p < .05$). This suggests that people are more likely to comment on shared news when they are less likely to verify the source’s credibility before sharing. It may indicate that some social media users add comments instead of taking the time to verify the source. It supports earlier research indicating that opinion-driven posts can sometimes be made without thorough screening (Pennycook and Rand 2019).

Conversely, sharing news without comment is negatively non-significantly linked to self-reported credibility checking ($r = -0.013$). It also shows a weak, positive, non-significant correlation with credibility-check competency ($r = .024$). The results also show a positive, non-significant association between commenting, sharing, and competence in checking credibility ($r = .106$). This suggests that sharing news without adding a comment does not strongly correlate with how competent people are at verifying the credibility of the news source. They also suggest that news sharing without commentary can often be a neutral, standard activity, not necessarily driven by verification (Molyneux and Holton 2015).

Psychologically, users who add commentary may be motivated more by expressive or opinion-based reasons than by analytical verification. Additionally, in Arab social media settings, commentary often serves as a social space where sharing one's stance and engaging with others takes precedence over evaluating the credibility of the information source. Platform design further reinforces this pattern: commenting increases visibility and boosts algorithmic reach, encouraging participation over accuracy. Conversely, sharing without comment tends to be a routine, low-effort action with little connection to actual or perceived credibility-checking skills. Therefore, the second hypothesis is partially accepted.

H#3 The use of specific social media platforms is significantly related to self-reported credibility-checking and credibility-check competency.

Pearson’s Correlation was used to test this hypothesis. Results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Correlations between SM platforms used in news-sharing and credibility checks

SM used in news-sharing	Credibility checking competence	Self-reported credibility-checking
WhatsApp	.083 NS	-.126- NS
X (Twitter)	.119 NS	-.047- NS
Facebook	.138*	.089 NS
YouTube	.113NS	-.001- NS
Instagram	.221**	-.171-*
Snapchat	.143*	-.147-*

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level * Correlation is significant at 0.05 level NS Non-significant



Table 8 indicates that Instagram shows the strongest positive association with users' credibility check competence ($r = .221, p < .01$), suggesting that individuals who rely on Instagram for news tend to feel more confident in their ability to verify information. Snapchat ($r = .143, p < .05$) and Facebook ($r = .138, p < .05$) show similar but weaker patterns, indicating that users of these platforms also perceive themselves as somewhat competent at evaluating source credibility. Taken together, these results suggest that across visually driven and socially interactive platforms, frequent users may *feel* more capable of identifying credible information—though this confidence may reflect platform familiarity rather than actual accuracy-checking behavior.

These results are consistent with the visual and interactive environment of these sites, in which users are more active in engaging with the material and, thus, more likely to feel secure in judging credibility. However, such results may indicate overconfidence among users in their competencies, particularly given the broader literature that has challenged the validity of self-reported online competency (Hargittai et al. 2010). Other sites, including X, YouTube, and WhatsApp, do not exhibit significant correlations with perceived competence; that is, users of these sites do not differ significantly in their self-ratings of credibility-checking ability. Unlike source-credibility competence, no significant positive correlations exist between any SM platform and self-reported credibility-checking behavior. There are even tiny, yet significant, negative correlations for Instagram ($r = -0.171, p < .05$) and Snapchat ($r = -0.147, p < .05$).

These results suggest that Instagram and Snapchat users feel more capable but are less inclined to verify the credibility of the information they receive. This aligns with Pennycook and Rand's (2019) argument that confidence in assessing online information does not necessarily lead to better discernment or critical thinking. All other platforms, Facebook, X, WhatsApp, and YouTube, show no significant link with actual credibility-checking, implying that using these platforms is not associated with proper verification practices. Therefore, the third hypothesis is accepted.

Regression analysis for variables predicting self-reported news source credibility check

To use regression analysis to further investigate variables predicting self-reported source credibility check, the question's categories, which measure this variable, were merged into two categories: "always and often" (1) versus "sometimes and rarely" (0). Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients were used to test the variables predicting respondents' source credibility check. The logistic regression analysis yielded Cox and Snell R-squared's value of 0.253 and Nagelkerke R-squared's value of 0.410. Therefore, the independent variables in the model explain 41% of the variance in the



dependent variable, specifically, the 4 independent variables as shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Regression analysis of the research variables predicting the source-credibility check (df 1)

Variables		B	Sig.	Exp(B)
SM usage		-1.960-	.173	.141
SM as a news source		1.117	.000	3.055
Type of Social Media	Twitter	-.024-	.885	.976
	Facebook	.279	.185	1.322
	YouTube	.021	.913	1.021
	WhatsApp	-.229-	.251	.795
	Instagram	-.572-	.024	.564
	Snap Chat	-.251-	.201	.778
Type of Friends	Family members	.208	.187	1.231
	Family groups	-.752-	.000	.472
	My friends	.543	.002	1.721
	Online Friends who never met	-.186-	.264	.831
	Colleagues at work, school, etc.	.085	.616	1.089
News Commentary	Sharing news by adding a comment	-.026-	.918	.974
	Sharing news without adding a comment	.157	.524	1.170
Gender		.129	.842	1.138
Age		.104	.730	1.109
Education Level		-.299-	.187	.742

Table 9 shows that the “*use of SM as a news source*” is predicting the self-reported source credibility check among respondents, with a strong positive correlation (B = 1.117, and the ExpB value 3.055 at significance level $p < 0.000$). Thus, an increase in SM usage as a news source increases the probability that the source credibility check will occur. Regarding the type of friends, the results showed that “*My friends*” has a significantly positive correlation (B = 0.543, $p < 0.002$) with the source credibility check. This means respondents tend to verify the source's credibility before sharing the news with friends. However, the “*Family groups*” variable has a significantly negative relationship (B = -0.752, $p < 0.000$), indicating that respondents tend not to verify the credibility of news sources when sharing news with family groups. This result implies that respondents exercise



greater attention and responsibility when addressing peer audiences, possibly due to concerns about reputation, judgment, or accountability within friendship networks. In contrast, the negative association with family groups suggests a more relaxed approach to credibility verification in familial contexts. This may reflect higher levels of trust, perceived shared values, or assumptions of benign intent within family networks, reducing the perceived need for rigorous source checking. *Instagram* has a significant negative relationship with the self-reported source credibility check ($B = -0.572, p < 0.024$). This suggests that respondents who share news on Instagram do not typically verify the source's credibility before sharing. Instagram's visually driven and fast-paced environment may encourage more casual sharing practices, where visual appeal and immediacy outweigh news sources' evaluation.

Discussion

This study highlights the significant role of social media as a primary medium for news-sharing, with source credibility and user commentary emerging as key factors influencing this behavior. Analyzing data from 324 Emiratis and Arab expatriates in the UAE, including 220 news sharers, indicates that news is often shared with online friends who have never met in person. This supports the social capital theory's distinction between bonding and bridging social ties, which explains why weaker ties receive less trust or salience in online news exchanges (Ellison et al. 2007). The pattern aligns with Goh et al. (2017), who found that people prefer sharing news with friends over family. Duffy and Rich (2020) demonstrated that SM friends and family are the most common recipients, whereas individuals who are likely to disagree are avoided. These results collectively reinforce the importance of social proximity, trust, and the strength of relationship ties in shaping online news-sharing practices.

The study underscores the dominant role of smartphones, confirming a mobile-first mode of news consumption that aligns with Dennis et al. (2019), who reported that nearly nine in ten nationals under 45 in the UAE access news daily via smartphones. Most respondents expressed high confidence in evaluating news credibility by fact-checking, identifying bias, and avoiding unreliable sources. However, there is still a need to investigate whether this confidence is aligned with actual behavior. This observation is consistent with Hargittai et al. (2010), who noted that self-assessed digital competencies do not always translate into effective online behavior.

Regarding the shared content, respondents reported sharing 14 out of 19 news topics with social media friends. The least were topics related to government, science, lifestyle, food, and travel. Online friends were the primary recipients, with limited sharing of news about arts, fashion, and



entertainment. Notably, health news was primarily shared with coworkers or university colleagues, while education news was more likely to be shared within family groups. These findings align with Duffy and Rich (2020), who found that soft news topics often serve to maintain social contact rather than inform the public. Respondents who feel more capable of verifying credibility are more likely to share news, supporting Austin et al. (2012), who demonstrated that media literacy and self-efficacy promote greater engagement with online news. The study identifies an inconsistency between sharing news and verifying sources, emphasizing that commentary does not always reflect actual engagement. Weak correlations between self-reported credibility-checking skills and use of visually oriented platforms like Snapchat and Instagram indicate an overestimation of media literacy in entertainment-focused spaces (Westlund 2013; Chyi and Yang 2009). These findings underscore the need for targeted media literacy interventions, particularly for young people and influencers, to foster their social media usage skills.

Results indicate that device use for news sharing varies significantly across different platforms. Facebook and YouTube support multi-device use, allowing access from desktops, tablets, and other devices. At the same time, Instagram and Snapchat remain primarily mobile-centric, with lower news-sharing rates due to their entertainment focus. WhatsApp showed slight differences, likely due to its more closed and private nature. Age also plays a role: individuals aged 25–29 are the most active news sharers, while younger users show lower engagement due to disinterest or news fatigue. The youngest and oldest groups show greater attention to credibility verification, aligning with the findings of Valenzuela et al. (2017) and Correa et al. (2010). Generally, the results indicated that self-perceived credibility competence in the UAE is high, while the correlation with commentary is weak and insignificant.

Limitations, conclusion, and implications

Limitations

The study uses a non-probability convenience sample. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to the larger Emirati or Arab expatriate population. Relying on self-reported data introduces the risk of social desirability bias, especially when questions address credibility-checking skills. Furthermore, the study concentrates on specific platforms and may not reflect emerging trends on newer apps.

Conclusion

Despite the study's limitations, the findings can contribute to the growing body of research on news-sharing behavior by examining the roles



of source credibility and user commentary among Arabs in the United Arab Emirates. The findings reveal that Smartphones emerged as the primary tool for sharing news, underscoring the interplay between mobile access and socialized news flows. Also, social media has become a dominant source of daily news. Although commentary often accompanies shared news, it does not consistently indicate essential liability or credible verification, highlighting the risk of performative sharing in digital spaces. Demographic differences influenced the frequency and patterns of news sharing, as well as the assessment of credibility.

As social media continues to play a central role in information dissemination, understanding audience behavior becomes essential for maintaining trust, accuracy, and meaningful public engagement. Policymakers, educators, and platform designers should collaborate to develop targeted interventions that promote greater consumption and sharing of news, emphasizing users' empowerment to assess and comment on content thoughtfully. In an era when misinformation can spread rapidly through peer-to-peer channels, fostering genuine media literacy and intelligent commentary practices is essential to support informed digital citizenship and maintain the integrity of the online information environment.

Implications for newsroom management in the UAE

The results carry several implications for newsroom managers in the UAE, particularly as they navigate the challenges of sustaining credibility and engaging digitally active audiences. The strong self-confidence reported by social media users suggests opportunities for newsrooms to reinforce verification habits through targeted messaging, educational initiatives, and platform-specific campaigns. Newsrooms can partner with universities and youth programs to promote responsible sharing practices. Newsrooms should design content that encourages informed responses and engagement. Providing context boxes, key-source highlights, and verification prompts may help shift users from expressive to analytical commentary. Although visual platforms, such as Instagram and Snapchat, foster confidence, they still have weaker verification behavior. Newsrooms can adapt by producing short, visually compelling content that includes built-in credibility markers, such as clear sourcing, timestamps, or verification labels, to meet users where they are on their preferred platforms without compromising accuracy. Moreover, as users rely heavily on peer cues and personal networks, visible fact-checking steps and clear corrections can enhance trust. Newsrooms can also highlight their verification routines to differentiate professional content from user-generated material. Age differences also underscore the importance of targeting younger audiences with visually engaging, mobile-first formats that incorporate credibility cues.



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