

WhatsApp As an Alternative Digital Media for Palestinians in Following Up the Israeli War on Gaza (2023-2025)

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore patterns of the public's reliance on the “Al-Haqiqa First” WhatsApp news community during the Israeli war on Gaza (2023–2025), to reveal the levels of trust and communication satisfaction associated with it, and to identify the types of news content the public prefers to follow. The study adopted a descriptive analytical approach using the field survey method, and data were collected through an electronic questionnaire administered to all 928 members of the Al-Haqiqa First WhatsApp news community via a comprehensive enumeration approach. A total of 161 valid responses were received and included in the statistical analysis. The results showed a statistically significant correlation between awareness of the importance of the news community and the level of trust in the content it provides, confirming the pivotal role of trust in promoting reliance on digital news platforms during crises. The results also showed that human content related to the suffering of civilians and genocide came at the forefront of the public's cognitive priorities, followed by political and military content. The study also revealed a tendency for the public to circulate news and information within nearby social circles rather than share them through public digital platforms. The study confirms the growing role of digital news communities via instant messaging applications as an influential source of information during wars and crises.

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Introduction

Over the past two decades, the media environment has undergone fundamental changes due to the rapid development of digital communication technologies and the spread of social media platforms and instant messaging applications, reshaping the patterns of news production, circulation and consumption.

Traditional media institutions are no longer the main source of information, but new forms of alternative digital media have emerged that have allowed the public to access, interact with and disseminate news immediately, especially in times of crises and conflicts in which the need for updated information and rapid interpretations of events is increasing. Particularly during crises and conflicts, social media platforms have

increasingly functioned as alternative sources of news by providing immediate information and eyewitness content, thereby strengthening audience reliance on digital communities despite persistent concerns regarding information credibility and verification (Musleh & Tanouh, 2022)

The Israeli war on the Gaza Strip during the period (2023–2025) was one of the most prominent crises in Palestinian, Arab and international media, due to the rapid political, military and humanitarian developments that heightened demand for news and field updates. Given the multiplicity of information sources and the varying media narratives related to the war, the public increasingly turned to digital platforms and instant messaging applications as alternative sources of information and news.

Nowadays, WhatsApp has become one of the most popular messaging platforms that transcend from personal communication to the modern-day news reporting landscape. Studies have shown that the application has been proven to be an effective tool for delivering news content and exchanging information rapidly and flexibly. It has also evolved into an important part of the media coverage of accelerated events. (Boczek & Koppers, 2020; Nyukuri, 2024). Other studies have shown that users rely heavily on news circulated through the application, despite their awareness of the dangers of misinformation, which reflects its growing role as a source of information during crises (Sinthiya, 2024).

Recent scholarship further indicates that individuals actively choose media platforms that fulfil their cognitive, identity-related, and socio-cultural needs rather than passively engaging with media content (Musleh, 2026). This perspective may help explain the growing dependence of Palestinians on WhatsApp-based news communities as alternative sources of information and interpretation, while simultaneously reinforcing collective identity and national belonging.

In the context of wars and conflicts, the importance of instant messaging applications emerges as communication spaces capable of transmitting information in an instant and influencing the public's perception of events. Studies have shown that WhatsApp communities contribute to forming collective perceptions and influencing public opinion during conflicts. The speed of information exchange, interaction and feedback within them enhances levels of communication satisfaction and the continued reliance on them (Akpan & Usadolo, 2025) (Ochieng, Muchunku, & Baya, 2025) as news sources. Recent studies have also shown the ability of digital platforms to produce alternative media narratives and influence public attitudes through direct coverage and human contents related to conflicts (Rizk, 2026) (NWOKEOCHA, 2024)

In the Palestinian environment, the importance of instant messaging applications increased with the outbreak of the war on Gaza. A study showed (Hamdan, 2023) that WhatsApp occupied an advanced position among news sources among Palestinian

journalists during crises. A study also revealed the high (Hussein & Awais, 2025) levels of dependence of the Palestinian public on digital platforms to obtain news and information related to the war.

Media dependence theory explains this communication behaviour by assuming that individuals' dependence on the media increases during periods of crisis and instability when information becomes an essential resource for understanding reality and interpreting events. Based on the assumptions of the media dependence theory, the escalation of ambiguity and uncertainty associated with the war on Gaza would increase the public's dependence on digital news communities, as they are key sources of information and interpretation, and are able to satisfy their cognitive, emotional, and behavioural needs considering crises and conflicts.

Despite the increase in studies that dealt with the use of instant messaging applications during crises and conflicts, most of them focused on WhatsApp as a communication tool or platform for news exchange, while studies that dealt with specialized digital news communities as alternative media systems are still limited, especially in the Palestinian context during the Israeli war on Gaza. Hence, the current study seeks to explore the patterns of public reliance on the "Al-Haqiqa first" news community via WhatsApp and analyse the levels of trust and communication satisfaction associated with it, the nature of favourite content and the patterns of interaction with its news content.

The scientific addition of the study is that it deals with a specialized digital news community as a model for alternative media during the war, and integrates the variables of dependence, trust, communication satisfaction, news preferences, and interaction within a unified theoretical framework based on the theory of media dependence, thus contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of digital news communities in times of crisis and conflict.

Literature Review

The current study is based on the Media Dependency Theory, which assumes that individuals' need for information increases the higher levels of ambiguity and uncertainty in the surrounding environment, which leads them to increase their reliance on means capable of providing the information and explanations necessary to understand current events. The importance of this hypothesis increases in times of wars and protracted conflicts, as information becomes a strategic resource that helps individuals interpret reality, form attitudes and make decisions.

Recent studies (Ball-Rokeach, 1985) have supported this trend, as a study showed the (Hussein & Awais, 2025) high levels of dependence of the Palestinian public on digital platforms and instant messaging applications during the Gaza war, while a study showed (Chamieh & El Takach , 2025) that WhatsApp has become one of the most prominent sources that users rely on to obtain news and instant updates during conflicts. A study also revealed (Hamdan, 2023) that WhatsApp ranked first among news sources among Palestinian journalists during crises, which reflects the consistency of these results with the assumptions of the dependence theory in explaining the media behaviour of the public in high-risk environments.

The application of Media Dependency Theory in the current study extends beyond reliance on WhatsApp as a communication application. Instead, this dependence was seen in the context of a generally unstable Palestinian communication landscape during the Israeli war on Gaza that featured communication infrastructure disruptions, information access challenges, and fierce media narratives. In such situations, dependency on digital news communities became a symptom of a wider relationship between the social crisis context, the media system and the rising demand for timely and credible information from the audience, consistent with the fundamental tenets of Media Dependency Theory.

The rapid digital transformations have led to the reshaping of the contemporary media environment, so that the role of the public is no longer limited to consuming content, but has become an active partner in its production, circulation, and reformulation of its meanings. This transformation has been reflected in the patterns of information circulation related to political and humanitarian issues. A study has shown (Maharani, 2024) that social media platforms have become a major source of information on the Palestinian issue and have contributed to expanding the reach of the Palestinian narrative to the international audience by overcoming the institutional and professional restrictions that often limit its presence in traditional media.

A study also showed (NWOKEOCHA, 2024) that the new media played a pivotal role in raising global awareness of the war on Gaza through instantaneous coverage of events and the dissemination of field content produced by citizens, journalists and activists. These results reflect the transformation of digital media from a mere channel for transmitting information to a space for producing narratives, meaning and influencing social and political perception.

At the heart of these transformations, WhatsApp has emerged as one of the most influential instant messaging applications in the circulation of news and information. The literature shows that the importance of the application is not only related to its widespread, but also to its ability to create communication networks and digital communities through which information flows continuously within environments characterized by high degrees of social proximity and trust. A study has shown (Hamdan, 2023) that Palestinian journalists rely to a high degree on news groups via WhatsApp to obtain news and follow rapid developments. A study also showed (Hussein & Awais, 2025) that instant messaging applications, especially WhatsApp and Telegram, came at the forefront of the platforms used to follow up the war on Gaza. These results support the findings of a study (Chamieh & El Takach , 2025) that confirmed that WhatsApp is no longer just a tool for personal communication but has become an integrated media space that combines access to news, social interaction and expressing positions related to national and humanitarian issues.

The literature also reveals the transformation of WhatsApp from a mere medium for the exchange of information to a part of the contemporary digital news system. A study showed (Boczek & Koppers, 2020) that media institutions began to view the application as an independent platform for the distribution of news content, and the development of publishing strategies commensurate with news consumption patterns through smart phones. A study also showed (Nyukuri, 2024) that WhatsApp has

become part of the operational structure of modern media institutions, as it contributes to accelerating the exchange of information and media materials and raising the efficiency of news coverage of accelerated events. These results indicate that the application is no longer just a tool for receiving news but has become part of the process of producing, circulating and formulating the associated discourse.

Despite these advantages, the literature confirms that the effectiveness of WhatsApp as a source of information is closely related to levels of trust and credibility. A study has shown (Frischlich, et al., 2024) that trust in content circulated within instant messaging applications is affected by multiple factors, including the credibility of the content producer, levels of social trust, (Sinthiya, 2024) and perceived privacy. A study also found that WhatsApp users give news circulated through the application relatively high levels of trust, despite their continued practice of verifying information before republishing it. In a related context, a study (Hussein & Awais, 2025) revealed a gap between high levels of reliance on digital platforms and levels of trust in them, as users resort to them to obtain news quickly, while maintaining a degree of caution about the credibility of some content circulated. This convergence of studies suggests that trust has become one of the key determinants of the public's continued reliance on digital news communities during crises.

The literature also shows that the impact of WhatsApp news communities is not limited to providing information, but extends to shaping perceptions, trends, and patterns of behaviour. A study has shown (Akpan & Usadolo, 2025) that WhatsApp communities play an important role in building collective perceptions and influencing public opinion during conflicts, through messages, photos, and contents circulating within digital groups. A study also showed (Rizk, 2026) that digital platforms have become able to produce alternative media narratives that influence audience trends through direct coverage and conflict-related humanitarian implications. These findings intersect with the findings of a study (NWOKEOCHA, 2024), which confirmed that the new media played a prominent role in raising awareness of humanitarian issues related to the war on Gaza and highlighting the suffering of civilians at the international level.

Trust in news content refers to the degree to which the public is convinced of the credibility of news and information circulated through a particular media outlet, and the extent to which they believe its accuracy, objectivity, and ability to represent events correctly. Trust is one of the key factors that determine the continued use of and reliance on digital news platforms, especially during crises and conflicts, as individuals tend to prefer sources that they see as more reliable (Hussein & Awais, 2025) and reliable (Sinthiya, 2024) (Frischlich, et al., 2024).

The success of digital societies is not limited to building trust and providing information but is also related to their ability to achieve communication satisfaction among users. A study showed (Ochieng, Muchunku , & Baya, 2025) that the communication characteristics provided by WhatsApp, such as the speed of information exchange, ease of interaction, feedback and low cost, contribute to achieving high levels of communication satisfaction, and that this satisfaction is an important factor in the continued use of the application and reliance on it. The study also showed that communication satisfaction is related to the ability of the platform

to satisfy the cognitive and social needs of users, which gives digital societies a greater ability to retain the audience during protracted crises.

Communication satisfaction refers to the degree to which individuals feel comfortable and accepted about the communication process and its results, and the extent to which the communication medium can meet their information, social and interactive needs. Communication satisfaction is related to factors such as the speed of access to information, the ease of interaction, the availability of feedback, the possibility of participating in the exchange of content, and the achievement of cognitive and social gratifications for users. Recent studies have shown that the communication features provided by WhatsApp, such as the speed of information exchange and continuous interaction between users, contribute to enhancing levels of communication satisfaction and continued reliance on the application during crises (Ochieng, Muchunku, & Baya, 2025). (Chamieh & El Takach, 2025)

Despite this research accumulation, a review of the literature reveals that most previous studies focused on WhatsApp as a means of communication or a channel for news exchange in general or dealt with trust, dependence and communication satisfaction separately. Some studies also focused on the professional uses of the application within media institutions or on its role in shaping public opinion and managing discourse during crises.

As for the studies that dealt with specialized digital news communities within WhatsApp as alternative media systems that perform integrated media functions, they are still limited, especially in the Palestinian context during the Israeli war on Gaza, which erupted following the events of October 7, 2023 between Israel and the Palestinian resistance factions in the Gaza Strip, and the wide-ranging political, security, humanitarian and media repercussions. Recent literature confirms that wars and armed conflicts represent high-intensity communication environments during which the public relies increasingly on media and digital platforms to obtain information and explanations and follow up on field developments on an ongoing basis (Rizk, 2026). (Hussein & Awais, 2025)

The literature also did not examine in an integrated manner the relationship between the motives for relying on these communities, the levels of trust and communication satisfaction associated with them, the nature of the news contents that the public prefers to follow, and the patterns of participation and re-circulation of their content during wars. From here, the current study begins to bridge this knowledge gap by analysing the experience of a Palestinian digital news community through WhatsApp, revealing the motives for relying on it, the levels of confidence and communication satisfaction associated with it, the nature of the contents followed by the public, and the patterns of participation and re-circulation of its news content during the war on Gaza.

The "Al-Haqiqa first" represents a model of a Palestinian digital news community that was created through WhatsApp with the aim of providing news, information and updates related to the Palestinian issue, with a focus on the speed of news transmission and limiting the circulation of misleading information. The nature of this community is consistent with the transformations observed by modern literature in instant

messaging applications, which indicate the transformation of WhatsApp from a tool for personal communication to a digital space for news circulation, building specialized news communities and shaping the discourse (Nyukuri, 2024) (Chamieh & El Takach , 2025) The "Al-Haqiqa First" news community does not rely exclusively on reposting content from other media outlets or digital platforms. Instead, it is managed by a network of 22 volunteers, spread throughout various governorates in the Palestinian region, who provide field information, updates and pictures, as well as on-site reports, especially in times of crisis and conflict. At the same time, the community republishes selected content from other media organizations and digital platforms while clearly attributing the original sources. Therefore, the community performs a dual role that combines original content production with content curation and redistribution, which reflects the hybrid nature of contemporary alternative digital media during wartime.

Alternative media refers to media platforms and initiatives that operate outside traditional media frameworks or offer different modes of news production and circulation, leveraging digital technologies and modern communication networks to reach and interact with audiences. Recent literature shows that alternative media has gained increasing importance during wars and crises because of its ability to produce parallel media narratives and provide rapid information flows beyond the constraints associated with traditional media (Darwish, 2021) (Alakklouk & Gülnar, 2023) (NWOKEOCHA, 2024) institutions.

The WhatsApp news community is a digital network of users formed within the WhatsApp application with the aim of exchanging news, information and updates related to a particular issue or event, taking advantage of the application's characteristics of the speed of content circulation, the possibility of creating digital groups and communities, and the direct interaction between members. The literature indicates that these communities have become part of the contemporary digital news structure and have contributed to reshaping the patterns of news production, consumption and interaction during crises and conflicts (Hamdan, 2023); (Boczek & Koppers, 2020) (Chamieh & El Takach , 2025)

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive analytical approach using the field survey method (Survey Research) for its suitability to study the patterns of public use of digital platforms and news communities through instant messaging applications, and to measure the levels of reliance on them, confidence in their content, and the associated communication satisfaction. This approach is considered one of the most used approaches in digital media research and the public, because it provides the possibility of describing the studied phenomenon, analysing the relationships between its variables, and extracting indicators related to users' behaviour and trends.

The study is part of Quantitative Research, which relies on collecting data from many respondents and analysing it statistically to test hypotheses and detect relationships between variables. The electronic questionnaire was used as a main tool for data collection, due to its suitability for the nature of the studied society that is active within a digital environment that relies mainly on WhatsApp, in addition to its efficiency in

reaching the respondents and collecting data within a specific period. This trend is consistent with a number of recent studies that dealt with reliance on digital platforms and instant messaging applications during crises and conflicts, which adopted the survey and electronic questionnaire method to measure usage patterns, levels of confidence and satisfaction (Ochieng, Muchunku, & Baya, 2025), and the effects associated with following up digital content. (Sinthiya, 2024)

Based on the above, the study focused on analysing a number of key variables related to the use of the digital news community under study, including the motives for relying on it to obtain information, the nature of news content of interest to the public, levels of confidence in the published content, and the communication satisfaction achieved from its use, as well as patterns of interaction, participation and re-circulation of news related to the Israeli war on Gaza.

The study community was represented by all the (928) participants in the Palestinian news community under study through WhatsApp during the period of implementation of the research. This community is one of the specialized digital communities that focus on publishing news, information and updates related to the Israeli war on Gaza, which makes it an appropriate environment to study patterns of reliance on digital news communities during crises and conflicts.

A comprehensive enumeration approach was adopted to ensure broad representation of the study population and enhance the generalizability of the findings. Thus, everybody among the "Al-Haqiqa First" members of the WhatsApp community was invited to participate in the survey, and all the participants of the survey were a part of the initial study population, even though the participation was voluntary.

There were 161 valid responses for a response rate of 17.3% (N = 928). The low response rate is due to the exceptional circumstances under which the study was carried out, during the Israeli war on Gaza. These included multiple displacements, curtailment of freedom of movement and multiple interruptions to electricity, internet, and communications services; all of which impacted the ability of participants to access and complete the online questionnaire. Furthermore, the voluntary nature of participation in online surveys typically results in less response than would follow-up efforts. All members of the target population were given an equal opportunity by disseminating the questionnaire link in the "Al-Haqiqa First" WhatsApp news community despite these challenges. After reviewing all returned questionnaires, the completed and valid questionnaires were kept for analysis and used as the final data for the study.

The demographic characteristics of the sample reflect the participation of individuals with high educational levels and diverse age and professional experiences, which provides a suitable base for exploring patterns of reliance on digital news communities and associated levels of trust and communication satisfaction during periods of conflict and crisis.

The questionnaire paragraphs were developed based on the theoretical literature and previous studies related to alternative digital media, instant messaging applications, and the theory of media dependence, in addition to studies that dealt with the levels

of reliance on digital platforms, trust in news content, communication satisfaction, and interaction with content during crises and conflicts, the most prominent of which are studies (Hussein & Awais, 2025), (Chamieh & El Takach, 2025) and (Ochieng, Muchunku, & Baya, 2025)

The study adopted the Five-Point Likert Scale to measure the attitudes of the respondents towards the questionnaire paragraphs, where the alternatives ranged between (1) strongly disagree and (5) strongly agree, allowing to measure the degree of agreement or disagreement with the statements related to the study variables in a quantitative manner that can be analysed statistically and test the hypotheses.

The study relied on IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 22) in data entry, analysis, and hypothesis testing. T-tests and one-way ANOVA were used to examine differences across demographic groups.

The results showed that the value of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was (0.82), a value that exceeds the statistically acceptable minimum stability (0.70), which indicates that the tool has a good degree of internal consistency, and confirms its validity for use in data collection and analysis. The self-validity of the tool was calculated by the square root of the stability coefficient, where its value was (0.92), a high value indicating the ability of the tool to measure the variables it was designed to measure with an acceptable degree of accuracy.

Study Hypotheses:

Based on the theoretical framework of the study represented in the theory of reliance on the media, and on the results of previous studies that dealt with the use of digital platforms and instant messaging applications during crises and conflicts, the study sought to test the following hypotheses:

The first hypothesis: There is a statistically significant correlation between the level of public awareness of the importance of the news community via WhatsApp as a source of news and information, and the level of confidence in news content related to the Israeli war on Gaza.

The second hypothesis: There are statistically significant differences in news contents that the public prefers to follow through the digital news community during the war on Gaza, in Favor of humanitarian, political and military contents compared to economic and social contents.

Hypothesis 3: The public tends to share and re-circulate war-related news and content within private social circles, such as family, friends, and co-workers or classmates, to a greater degree than across public digital platforms and spaces.

The fourth hypothesis: There is a statistically significant relationship between the speed of events and the level of satisfaction with the multimedia used in the digital news community, and the public's awareness of the credibility and balance of the news community in covering the events of the war on Gaza.

The fifth hypothesis: There are statistically significant differences in trust, communication satisfaction, and sharing behaviour according to respondents' demographic characteristics.

Findings

To identify the trends of the respondents towards the main study variables, arithmetic averages and standard deviations were calculated for the questionnaire paragraphs related to the motives of relying on the digital news community, the nature of the preferred news content, levels of confidence and communication satisfaction, in addition to the patterns of interaction and participation associated with the content circulating during the Israeli war on Gaza.

The results showed a clear discrepancy in the trends of the respondents between the different axes, as some news content emerged as more attractive to follow than others, and levels of confidence in the published content and satisfaction with the media used to provide it varied. The results also revealed different patterns of sharing and re-trafficking news content depending on the nature of social relationships and communication spaces in which users are active.

To facilitate the presentation and more accurate analysis of the results, the paragraphs were organized into four main axes: the motives for relying on the digital news community, the nature of the preferred news content, the patterns of interaction and participation, and the levels of confidence and communication satisfaction. The paragraphs within each axis were arranged according to arithmetic averages from the highest to the lowest, allowing them to determine the priorities and trends of the audience towards each of the variables of the study.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of the study sample (N=161)

Variable	Categories	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Age	18-22 year	2	1.24 %
	23-28 year	4	2.48 %
	28-35 year	16	9.94 %
	35-45 year	49	30.44 %
	45- 55 years;	55	34.16 %
	55 years and over	35	21.74 %
Gender	Male	142	88.20%
	Female	19	11.80 %
Education	Postgraduate	79	49.00 %
	Bachelor's	45	28.00 %
	Diploma	37	23.00 %
Total		161	100 %

Table (1) presents the demographic characteristics of the study sample (N = 161). The largest proportions of respondents belonged to the age groups 45–<55 years (34.16%) and 35–<45 years (30.44%). The composition of the male and female respondents was 88.2% and 11.8% respectively, which represents a distribution similar to the real

distribution of the "Al-Haqiqa First" community where males constitute about 85.5% of subscribers. This imbalance is thus not due to the sampling method, but to the nature of the study population. In terms of education, respondents with postgraduate degrees constituted the largest group (49%), followed by bachelor's degree holders (28%) and those with a diploma or lower qualification (23%). Nevertheless, the limited representation of female participants should be considered when interpreting and generalizing findings related to communication behaviour and interaction patterns.

Table 2

Motives for relying on the "Al-Haqiqa first" community

Motivation	Strongly agree	Agree	Medium	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
The speed of keeping pace with events and their developments	95 (59%)	25 (15%)	37 (23%)	3 (2%)	1 (1%)	161 (100%)
The group is close to my interests and desires	54 (33%)	83 (51%)	19 (12%)	4 (3%)	1 (1%)	161 (100%)

Table (2) shows the motives of the respondents' reliance on the digital news community during the Israeli war on Gaza. The results indicate that the speed of keeping pace with events and their developments came at the forefront of the motives for accreditation, as the percentage of strongly agreeing and strongly agreeing (74%), compared to (23%) who chose the intermediate grade, while the percentage of opponents did not exceed (3%). The results also showed that the proximity of the content to the interests and desires of the audience is a main motive for adoption, as the percentage of total agreement reached (84%), compared to (12%) who took a neutral position and (4%) expressed opposition.

In general, the results reveal that the reliance of the respondents on the news community is mainly related to two main factors: the speed of obtaining news and updates related to the war, and the relevance of the content to their information needs and interests, which reflects the importance of the time and content dimensions in explaining the patterns of reliance on digital news communities during crises.

Table 3

Arranging content and topics according to cognitive priorities

Type of content / item	Strongly agree	Agree	Medium	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Civilian Suffering and Genocide	%44	%45.5	%8.5	%2	%0
General Political Contents	%34	%49	%15	%1	%1
Enemy Losses	%30	%47	%20	%2	%1
Political and military analysis	%28	%48.5	%19	%4.5	%1
Reactions to the occupation massacres	%23	%53.5	%21	%1.5	%1

Palestinian resistance news	%29	%47	%21	%3	%0
Social content	%7.5	%28	%43.5	%13	%8
Economic Data and Information	%5	%27.5	%43	%17	%7.5

Table (3) shows the order of the news contents that the respondents prefer to follow through the digital news community during the Israeli war on Gaza. The results indicate that the contents related to the suffering of civilians and genocide came first with a total agreement rate of (89.5%), followed by general political contents by (83%). The contents related to the losses of the Israeli enemy ranked third by (77%), followed by the contents of the political and military analysis and the reactions to the massacres of the occupation by an equal percentage of (76.5%), then the news of the Palestinian resistance by (76%). The social and economic contents received the lowest levels of attention, as the percentage of total agreement reached (35.5%) and (32.5%) respectively, with a significant increase in the rates of neutrality and opposition. This reflects the public's focus during the war on the contents most related to the direct repercussions of the conflict, especially the humanitarian, political and military aspects, which formed the focus of its knowledge, in exchange for a relative decline in the follow-up of social and economic contents.

Table 4

Platform credibility, confidence dimensions, and technical features

Dimensions of trust and technical evaluation	Strongly agree	Agree	Medium	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The platform is an important resource to follow the war	%40.5	%49.5	%8	%1	%1
Satisfaction with the level of multimedia	%33	%55	%12	%0	%0
Trust what you publish on resistance news	%37	%51	%10	%2	%0
News of occupation losses is based on reliable sources	%39	%48	%12	%1	%0
Balanced, depoliticized treatment with a clear agenda	%36	%49	%11	%2	%2
Information is more accurate than other platforms	%31	%52	%15	%1	%1

The results of Table (4) indicate the high levels of confidence and positive evaluation of the digital news community under study, as all statements recorded overall agreement ratios exceeding (80%), which reflects a positive recognition of its news role during the Israeli war on Gaza.

The phrase "the platform is an important source for following the war" came in first place with a total agreement rate of (90%), compared to (8%) of the respondents who took a neutral position and (2%) only expressed opposition. This result indicates the central position that the platform occupies among its audience as a major source of

news and information related to war, which reflects the high levels of reliance on it during periods of crises and conflicts.

The phrases "confidence in what you publish about the news of the resistance" and "satisfaction with the level of multimedia" came in second place with a total agreement rate of (88%) each, which indicates the high level of confidence in the published news content on the one hand, and the satisfaction of users with the quality of the multimedia used in presenting the news on the other hand. The phrase "news of occupation losses based on reliable sources" ranked third with an agreement rate of (87%), which reflects a high awareness of the credibility of the information provided by the platform regarding the developments of the war.

As for the phrase "balanced and non-politicized processing with a clear agenda", it came in fourth place with a total agreement rate of (85%), followed by the phrase "information is more accurate than other platforms" with an agreement rate of (83%). Although these two statements recorded the lowest rates of agreement within this axis, they still reflected high levels of confidence and positive evaluation compared to the rates of neutrality and limited opposition.

In general, the results reveal a clear rise in the levels of trust, credibility and communication satisfaction associated with the platform, which indicates that the public's reliance on it is not only related to obtaining news and information, but is also affected by the perception of the quality of content, the reliability of the information, and the efficiency of the media used to provide it. These results also support the first and fourth hypotheses of the study, related to the relationship between trust in news content and awareness of the importance of the platform, and between satisfaction with communication media and the level of credibility perceived by the public.

Table 5

Behavioural Interaction (sharing and republishing the platform's contents)

Republishing and Sharing Trends	Strongly agree	Agree	Medium	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Resend content to relatives and family	%17	%42	%30	%9	%2
Resend content to friends and colleagues	%15	%46.5	%26	%10	%2.5
Republish to other forums and platforms	%7.5	%31	%28.5	%27.5	%5.5

The results of Table (5) show a discrepancy in the patterns of the respondents' interaction with news content through participation and republishing. The retransmission of content to friends and colleagues came first with a total agreement rate of (61.5%), followed by retransmission to relatives and family members by (59%). As for the retransmission of content through forums and other digital platforms, the lowest levels of agreement were recorded by (38.5%) accompanied by a relatively high rate of neutrality and opposition compared to the rest of the participation patterns. These results indicate that the circulation of news takes place more within close social

circles that are based on relationships of trust and direct communication, than on publishing through public digital platforms.

The results reveal that most respondents prefer the circulation of war-related news and information within close social circles rather than sharing it across public digital spaces. Differences between levels of agreement also show that direct interpersonal relationships represent the most common route for news content to be re-circulated, while levels of engagement decline as publishing expands to include public and open platforms.

Hypothesis Testing:

The first hypothesis: There is a statistically significant correlation between the level of public awareness of the importance of the digital news community as a source of news and information and the level of confidence in news content related to the Israeli war on Gaza.

The results of Pearson's correlation coefficient showed a statistically significant positive correlation between the perception of the importance of the news community and the level of confidence in the news content it provides. This result indicates that the public's high awareness of the importance of the news community is linked to the high level of confidence in the information and news circulating through it.

The second hypothesis: There are statistically significant differences in news content that the public prefers to follow through the digital news community during the war on Gaza.

The results of Friedman's test showed that there were statistically significant differences between the different news contents, as the human contents related to the suffering of civilians were at the top of the priority list, followed by the political and military contents, while the social and economic contents came in last place. This finding indicates that the public gives greater priority to content directly related to the course of the war and its humanitarian and political repercussions.

Hypothesis three: The public tends to share and re-circulate war-related news and content within private social circles to a greater degree than across public digital platforms and spaces.

The results were very clear with regards to sharing and reposting; sharing the content with friends, colleagues and relatives had higher scores than reposting across public digital platforms. This result suggests that people tend to share news in their immediate social circles, and that how information is shared in IM applications depends on personal relationships and mutual trust.

The fourth hypothesis: There is a statistically significant relationship between the speed of keeping up with events and satisfaction with the multimedia used in the digital news community and the public's perception of its credibility.

Pearson's correlation coefficient results indicated that the variables studied have statistically significant positive correlation, indicating that the more satisfied public was with the speed of news coverage and quality of multimedia, the higher the public's perception of the credibility of the news community. The results highlight the pivotal role of the professional and technical attributes of the digital content in building trust during crises and conflicts in the information sources.

The fifth hypothesis stated that there would be statistical significance differences in the respondents' trust, communication satisfaction and sharing behavior based on the respondents' demographic characteristics.

Table 6

Results of Independent Samples t-Test and One-Way ANOVA for Demographic Variables (N=161)

Targeted Construct	Demographic Variable	Test Type	Number (N)	Test Statistic (T/F)	p-value
Trust in Content	Gender	T-Test	142 19	1.12	0.263
	Age Group	ANOVA	161	2.14	0.095
	Educational Qualification	ANOVA	161	4.82	0.008
Communicative Satisfaction	Gender	T-Test	142 19	0.95	0.342
	Age Group	ANOVA	161	1.88	0.136
	Educational Qualification	ANOVA	161	3.91	0.014
Participation Patterns	Gender	T-Test	142 19	3.24	0.002
	Age Group	ANOVA	161	5.11	0.003
	Educational Qualification	ANOVA	161	1.05	0.371

The findings showed that there were significant differences between the levels of education in terms of trust and communication satisfaction in favour of respondents holding postgraduate qualifications. Girls also shared significantly more than boys and younger children shared significantly more than older children. There were no statistically significant differences found in the following comparisons. The results of this study indicate that there may be a connection between demographics and audience engagement in digital news communities in crisis situations.

Discussion

The study's findings revealed that the dependence of the public on the digital news community via WhatsApp during the war on Gaza is linked to their trust in the WhatsApp's news content. The findings revealed that there is statistically significant correlation between the important role that news community plays and trust in the information passed through it, suggesting that trust is one of the most important factors affecting continued reliance on digital platforms during crises. The dependence

should also be understood against the background of the communication context of the Gaza war that made the public more desperate for other and always available information sources. The use of WhatsApp may also be related to the limitations of communication in wartime, which strengthened its use as a source of information.

In wartime, people may trust digital news communities because of their sense of credibility, but also because of a sense of shared experiences and collective identity. Therefore, the high trust level found in this study needs to be understood in the context of the war, but not just as a measure of the verification of journalism.

This result is consistent with a study (Sinthiya, 2024) that showed that trust in news circulated through WhatsApp is a key factor in enhancing its use as a source of information. It is also consistent with the results (Frischlich, et al., 2024) that confirmed that the success of digital societies is not only related to the speed of news circulation, but to their ability to build sustainable credibility among users. This result can be explained considering the theory of media dependence, which assumes that individuals turn to media sources that they see as more able to provide them with reliable information that helps them understand events in conditions of uncertainty. Although theoretically expected, this finding confirms the importance of trust in sustaining reliance on digital news communities during wartime. It should be noted that perceptions of balanced coverage during wartime do not necessarily reflect journalistic neutrality in its strict professional sense. Instead, these perceptions might be influenced by shared identities, common experiences and dominant conflict narratives. Thus, the evaluation respondents expressed of the platform as balanced should be read as a perception of neutrality, rather than a real measure of neutrality, due to the wartime context.

It has also been found that the cognitive priority of the public was clearly established: the human contents including the afflictions of civilians and genocide were placed first; followed by the political and military contents and finally by the social and economic contents. This result is consistent with a study (Rizk, 2026) that showed that human narratives and direct coverage of human suffering are the most influential in attracting public attention during conflicts. It also agrees with a study that confirmed (NWOKEOCHA, 2024) that the content related to victims and the humanitarian repercussions of wars have a high priority in digital environments. This arrangement reflects the nature of the studied stage. During wars, the public tends to focus more on the contents directly related to the course of the conflict and its humanitarian and political effects than on social and economic issues.

Regarding patterns of sharing and re-transmission of content, the results showed that the public prefers to share news and information within close social circles, such as friends and relatives, to a greater degree than to re-transmit it through public platforms. This finding is consistent (Chamieh & El Takach, 2025) with my finding that WhatsApp enhances social ties and makes the circulation of information more effective within personal networks based on mutual trust. It is also consistent with findings (Akpan & Usadolo, 2025) that indicated that news communities via instant messaging applications rely heavily on direct social relationships, which explains the high levels of participation within private circles compared to open digital spaces.

This finding may also be interpreted considering the communication environment surrounding the Gaza war. The desire to share information in the private sphere of families and trusted social networks, instead of via digital platforms, could be seen as a form of digital self-protection in a highly sensitive conflict situation. A fear of being surveilled, limited in content and/or moderated by the platform can lead people to communicate in more trusted environments. In this context, WhatsApp seems to be used as a medium for information, and a relatively safe space to keep people connected during crisis.

However, in closed networks, communication needs to be perceived as a type of digital security and not as absolute, especially when dealing with information visibility and content moderation issues during wartime. Meanwhile, information can flow within the closed networks and limit the possibilities for source verification and contextualization, especially when content is shared back and forth among many users. Moreover, information sharing within close social networks does not necessarily translate into broader forms of public engagement, as such exchanges may primarily serve informational and emotional support functions during crises.

The results also showed a positive relationship between the speed of keeping up with events and satisfaction with multimedia and the perception of the credibility of the news community. This result is consistent with a study (Boczek & Koppers, 2020) that confirmed that the success of digital news platforms is related to their ability to provide fast, concise, and multimedia-supported content. It is also consistent with a study (Nyukuri, 2024) that showed that the speed of information circulation and the diversity of content forms are among the most important factors affecting reliance on instant messaging applications. This result is also supported by a study (Ochieng, Muchunku, & Baya, 2025) that linked communication satisfaction, the speed of information flow, and the ease of interaction and feedback. The preference for multimedia content may also reflect the adaptability of digital formats to constrained communication conditions during wartime.

This relationship reflects the interconnected nature of credibility and communication performance in digital news environments. In general, the results of the study confirm that digital news communities via WhatsApp have become performing media functions that go beyond simply transmitting news to building trust, setting follow-up priorities, and enhancing social interaction, which is consistent with the results of the study (Hamdan, 2023), (Hussein & Awais, 2025) which highlighted the growing importance of instant messaging applications as major sources of information during wars and crises, and their ability to form patterns of media dependence in environments characterized by high levels of ambiguity and instability.

The findings should be interpreted considering certain limitations. The study was conducted by a census method, but the response rate was influenced by the special conditions of the war at the time the data was collected. The sample was also predominantly male, and there was underrepresentation of females in the sample, which is characteristic of the targeted community. Moreover, the study was limited in scope to audience perceptions and behaviors and did not look at moderator practices or administrators' role in information flow within the community.

Conclusion

The results of the study showed that the digital news community via WhatsApp represents an important source of information and news during the Israeli war on Gaza (2023–2025), as it was found that there is a statistically significant correlation between the public's awareness of the importance of the news community and the level of confidence in the content it provides. The results also revealed that the motives for relying on the news community were mainly related to the speed of keeping pace with events and the appropriateness of the content to the interests of the audience.

The study showed that there are significant differences in the nature of the contents that the public prefers to follow, as the human contents related to the suffering of civilians and genocide topped the list of priorities, followed by the political and military contents, while the social and economic contents came in the last ranks. The results also showed that the public tends to share news and information within nearby social circles, such as friends and relatives, to a greater extent than through public digital platforms.

The results also revealed a positive relationship between the speed of keeping pace with events and satisfaction with multimedia and the perception of the credibility of the news community, which confirms the importance of communication performance and the quality of content in enhancing public confidence in digital news communities during periods of crises and wars.

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