

A Comprehensive Analysis of the Relationship Between Youth Trust in Mass Media and Media Use Patterns: Evidence from Young People in Nishabur

Majid Rezaeian¹, Seyed Ali Hosseini², Leila Hasani³

Received: 2025-08-08, Accepted: 2025-11-22

Doi: 10.22034/rcc.2025.2066366.1234

Extended Abstract

Purpose

Entering the age of communication has created new requirements for social life, and the media occupy a central position in the transmission of thoughts and ideas. Meanwhile, each media outlet seeks to strengthen its discourse, transfer its ideas to the audience, and weaken rival media; those media outlets that can earn greater audience trust can be sources of power and influence. Trust in the media is affected by various factors, including the role of media consumption. On this basis, it is expected that the more audiences use a media outlet, the more their trust in it will increase. The media can provide a platform for social transformations by using various methods of analyzing events and playing a role in agenda-setting. Therefore, research on the use of various media, especially in following news related to social unrest, is of special importance. The emergence of the 1401/2022 unrest in Iran affected the people of Nishabur, especially the youth of this city, as it did some other parts of the country. Given the widespread use of various media outlets, both domestic and foreign, among the youth of Nishabur, this study examines the extent of their engagement with four television networks—Iran International, BBC Persian, Manoto, and the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB)—and explores the relationship between their media consumption and the level of trust they place in these outlets.

Methodology

This research is descriptive in approach, applied in purpose, and quantitative in terms of measurement and analysis. The theoretical foundation of the study is based on the agenda-setting and uses and gratifications theories. The statistical population includes young people aged 18 to 35 residing in Nishabur County, whose number, according to statistics from the Governor's Office, is 75,200. From this population, 384 individuals were select-

1. Assistant Professor , Department of Cultural and Media Management, Faculty of Culture and Communication ,Soore International University,Tehran, Iran.

Email: rezaeian@Soore.ac.ir

 0000-0003-1365-564X

2. Master of Media Management, Faculty of Culture and Communication, Soore International University, Tehran, Iran.

Email: Alihosseini6613805@gmail.com

 0009-0001-6193-9551

3. Master of Executive Management, Strategic Orientation, Payame Noor University,Tehran, Iran. (Corresponding Author).

Email: leyla.hasani@gmail.com

 0009-0003-3409-2847

ed through a non-probability quota sampling method and were studied accordingly. For data collection, the survey method was employed using a researcher-made questionnaire, which was distributed in person among participants. To assess the validity of the questionnaire, face validity was used, and to evaluate its reliability, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was applied. Accordingly, after collecting the questionnaires, Cronbach's alpha was calculated separately for each set of media-related items, and since all coefficients were above 0.7, the instrument's reliability was confirmed. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS statistical software. In accordance with the research objectives, the analysis was carried out at two levels: descriptive analysis of the findings and hypothesis testing.

Findings

A review of the research findings indicates that the extent to which young people in Nishabur followed the news of the 2022 unrest through different media outlets was not uniform. Among these, the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) ranked highest in terms of usage, with a mean score of 2.20 on a 5-point scale. It was followed by Iran International with a mean of 2.08, BBC Persian with a mean of 1.84, and Manoto TV with a mean of 1.72, respectively. Moreover, a comparison of the mean scores for media trust among Nishabur youth revealed that, on a 1-to-5 scale, Iran International achieved the highest level of trust, with an average score of 3.24. This advantage was more evident in indicators such as news freshness (4.12), fulfillment of informational needs (3.81), clarity and comprehensibility of news (3.53), and the avoidance of contradictory reporting (3.24). After that, BBC Persian ranked second with a mean trust score of 2.95, Manoto TV third with 2.43, and IRIB last with a mean of 2.14. The results of the first hypothesis test—regarding differences in mean trust indicators among the four news networks—showed a statistically significant difference in trust levels across Iran International, BBC Persian, Manoto TV, and IRIB. The findings also revealed that, aside from indicators such as avoidance of contradictory or manipulated news, there were significant differences among the studied networks in most other dimensions, including honesty and transparency, impartiality, news timeliness, avoidance of exaggeration or censorship, comprehensibility, meeting audiences' informational needs, use of credible sources, and overall trust.

Regarding the second hypothesis, which examined the correlation between the extent of media use and the level of trust among Nishabur youth, the statistical results indicated a positive direct correlation in most cases, except for BBC Persian. In other words, the more frequently individuals used a particular medium, the more likely they were to trust its news content. This highlights the role of repeated exposure and direct engagement with news in shaping or reinforcing media trust. In interpreting these results, it can be concluded that trust in the media—considered a key indicator of performance—is closely tied to factors such as transparency, impartiality, and the ability to meet audiences' informational needs. Iran International, through its stronger performance in these areas, appears to have emerged as the primary source of information and trust for Nishabur youth, particularly regarding news related to the 2022 unrest. BBC Persian, despite its global reputation, was less successful in this regard. Furthermore, the observed positive correlation between media use and trust underscores the importance of sustained audience engagement in building and maintaining credibility. Overall, the findings suggest that credibility and trust constitute the fundamental pillars of media influence, and without them, even the widest outreach and accessibility cannot guarantee success.

Research limitations

Despite the significance of the topic of media trust—particularly with regard to news media—there has been limited theoretical discussion by scholars. Moreover, the lack of consensus on the concept of trust has made it difficult to clearly define the term and identify its components. This conceptual ambiguity has, in turn, led to challenges in determining valid indicators and developing appropriate measurement tools. For future research, it is recommended that, in addition to media consumption, other social factors influencing audience trust in various media outlets be examined. Furthermore, it is suggested that an independent study be conducted to investigate the reasons behind the relatively low levels of usage and trust among young people toward national media. Such research could help identify the underlying causes and propose strategies to attract larger audiences and enhance their trust. In addition, given the rapid expansion of social media platforms and their increasing use among young audiences, it is recommended that future studies explore the extent of social media consumption and the patterns of following news disseminated through these platforms.

Social implications

A review of the research findings indicates that respondents expressed a relatively low level of trust in the news content broadcast by the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB). Since this lack of trust may create space for the increased influence and presence of foreign media in shaping social developments, it is essential that strategies aimed at enhancing credibility and transparency in news presentation be prioritized. To strengthen public trust in national media, particular attention should be paid to improving honesty and clarity in reporting, maintaining impartiality, ensuring the comprehensibility of news, meeting audiences' informational needs, ensuring timeliness of reporting, and relying on credible and verifiable sources.

Originality

A review of prior research shows that while numerous studies have examined media trust and domestic unrest in Iran, no study has specifically explored the relationship between the level of media use and the degree of trust in the studied news outlets during the coverage of the 2022 unrest. Therefore, this study's focus on the correlation between media consumption and trust in the context of social unrest constitutes its main innovative contribution compared to previous research.

Keywords: Iran's Social Unrest, Media Consumption, Media Trust, News Coverage, News Media