

The Credibility of News in Saudi Arabia:  
A Comparative Study of Print Newspapers with Their Online  
Counterparts and Exclusively Online Newspapers among  
Saudis

**By Abdullah Maqbul**

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**School of Arts and Media**

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# Contents

LIST OF TABLES _____	VI
LIST OF FIGURES _____	VII
ABBREVIATIONS _____	VIII
ABSTRACT _____	IX
DEDICATION _____	X
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS _____	XI
CHAPTER ONE _____	1
INTRODUCTION OF THE THESIS _____	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION _____	1
1.2 BACKGROUND OF NEWS CREDIBILITY FIELD _____	1
1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM _____	3
1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS _____	6
1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES _____	6
1.6 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK _____	7
1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY _____	7
1.8 RESEARCH WORLDVIEW _____	7
1.9 RESEARCH STRATEGY _____	8
1.10 THESIS STRUCTURE _____	8
CHAPTER TWO _____	12
UNDERSTANDING THE INFLUENCE OF AUDIENCE CHARACTERISTICS ON THE CREDIBILITY PERCEPTIONS OF AND RELIANCE ON NEWS _____	12
2.1 INTRODUCTION _____	12
2.2 BACKGROUND TO MEDIA CREDIBILITY _____	12
2.3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CREDIBILITY AND RELIANCE ON MEDIA _____	18
2.4 CREDIBILITY OF PRINT AND ONLINE NEWS IN THE WESTERN AND MIDDLE EAST SOCIETIES _____	23
2.5 DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS INFLUENCING CREDIBILITY PERCEPTIONS _____	31
2.6 CONCLUSIONS _____	54
CHAPTER THREE _____	58

<b>UNDERSTANDING AN APPROPRIATE TOOL FOR INTERPRETING THE OUTCOMES OF SOCIAL CATEGORIES ON MEDIA CREDIBILITY AND RELIANCE</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>3.1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>3.2 RESEARCH CONCERNING THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL CATEGORIES ON EVALUATING MEDIA</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>3.3 THE MOST USED THEORIES TO UNDERSTAND THE PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY AMONG SOCIAL CATEGORIES</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>3.4 UNDERSTANDING THE PROPOSED TOOL FOR INTERPRETING THIS STUDY “SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY”</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>3.5 THE KNOWLEDGE GAP</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>3.6 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>3.7 CONCLUSION</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>UNDERSTANDING THE JOURNALISM SCENE IN SAUDI ARABIA</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>4.1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>4.2 BACKGROUND OF SAUDI ARABIA</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>4.3 OVERVIEW OF THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF SAUDI REGIME AND SAUDI MEDIA</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>4.4 THE SAUDI JOURNALISM SCENE</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>4.5 INTERNET USE IN SAUDI ARABIA</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>4.6 CONCLUSION</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>CHAPTER FIVE</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>RESEARCH METHODOLOGY COMBINING QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE APPROACHES IN STUDYING SAUDI AUDIENCES</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>5.1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>5.2 RESEARCH DESIGN</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>5.3 PHILOSOPHY OF THE RESEARCH</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>5.4 RESEARCH APPROACH</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>5.5 RESEARCH STRATEGIES</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>5.6 CHOICES</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>5.7 TIME HORIZONS</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>5.8 SAMPLING</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>5.9 DATA COLLECTION METHODS</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>5.10 DATA ANALYSIS</b>	<b>123</b>

<b>5.11 PROCEDURES</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>5.12 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>5.13 RESEARCH ETHICS</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>5.14 CONCLUSION</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>CHAPTER SIX</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>INVESTIGATING HOW THE CREDIBILITY PERCEPTIONS OF AND RELIANCE ON THE TARGET SAUDI NEWSPAPERS DIFFER AMONG SAUDIS BASED ON THEIR SOCIAL CATEGORIES</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>6.1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>6.2 GENERAL DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS:</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>6.3 THE SAUDI AUDIENCES' GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE CREDIBILITY OF – AND THEIR RELIANCE ON – THE GIVEN NEWSPAPERS</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>6.4 THE INFLUENCE OF INDIVIDUAL PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SAUDI AUDIENCES ON THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF A PARTICULAR NEWSPAPER'S CREDIBILITY</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>6.5 THE INDIVIDUAL INFLUENCE OF PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SAUDI AUDIENCES THEIR PATTERNS OF RELIANCE ON A PARTICULAR NEWSPAPER</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>6.6 CONCLUSION</b>	<b>170</b>
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS TRACKING SAUDI AUDIENCES' INTERPRETATIONS OF THEIR PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>7.1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>7.2 THE INTERVIEW SAMPLING</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>7.3 THE INTERVIEW SAMPLE PROFILE</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>7.4 INTERVIEW PROCESS AND ANALYSIS</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>7.5 DISCUSSION OF THE DEVELOPED THEMES IN TERMS OF THE PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY OF THE GIVEN NEWSPAPERS AMONG THE FOUR SOCIAL CATEGORIES</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>7.6 THE DOMINANT WAY OF OBTAINING LOCAL NEWS AMONG THE FOUR SOCIAL CATEGORIES</b>	<b>190</b>
<b>7.7 THE INFLUENCE OF THE FOUR DOMINANT SOCIAL CATEGORIES ON FORMING THE CREDIBILITY CRITERIA BASED ON THE FOUR CREATED THEMES</b>	<b>194</b>
<b>7.8 CONCLUSION</b>	<b>196</b>
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT</b>	<b>198</b>

<b>DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS REGARDING THE SAUDI DOMINANT SOCIAL CATEGORIES ON THE TARGET NEWSPAPERS</b>	<b>198</b>
<b>8.1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>198</b>
<b>8.2 Q1- WHAT ARE SAUDI AUDIENCES’ GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE CREDIBILITY OF – AND THEIR RELIANCE ON – THE GIVEN NEWSPAPERS?</b>	<b>198</b>
<b>8.3 Q2- HOW DO THE INDIVIDUAL PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SAUDI AUDIENCES AFFECT THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF A PARTICULAR NEWSPAPER’S CREDIBILITY?</b>	<b>204</b>
<b>8.4 Q3- HOW DO THE INDIVIDUAL PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SAUDI AUDIENCES AFFECT THEIR PATTERNS OF RELIANCE ON A PARTICULAR NEWSPAPER?</b>	<b>210</b>
<b>8.5 Q4- HOW DO THE SHARED MEANINGS HELD BY SAUDI AUDIENCES SHAPE THEIR CREDIBILITY CRITERIA FOR THE GIVEN NEWSPAPERS?</b>	<b>213</b>
<b>8.6 CONCLUSION</b>	<b>231</b>
<b>CHAPTER NINE</b>	<b>232</b>
<b>CONCLUSIONS: DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL PRESS IN SAUDI ARABIA</b>	<b>232</b>
<b>9.1 THE INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>232</b>
<b>9.2 THE STUDY OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>232</b>
<b>9.3 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY</b>	<b>238</b>
<b>9.4 RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS</b>	<b>240</b>
<b>9.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY</b>	<b>241</b>
<b>9.6 FUTURE RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>244</b>
<b>9.7 CONCLUSION</b>	<b>246</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>247</b>
<b>APPENDIX A</b>	<b>296</b>
<b>QUESTIONNAIRE INSTRUMENT</b>	<b>296</b>
<b>APPENDIX B</b>	<b>305</b>
<b>SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT</b>	<b>305</b>
<b>APPENDIX C</b>	<b>307</b>
<b>PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET &amp; CONSENT FOR QUESTIONNAIRE</b>	<b>307</b>
<b>APPENDIX D</b>	<b>315</b>
<b>PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET &amp; CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW</b>	<b>315</b>
<b>APPENDIX E</b>	<b>324</b>



## List of Tables

<i>Table 1: The impact of personal factors on media credibility and reliance</i>	56
<i>Table 2: A Research Framework that underpins the social identity through exploring credibility of and reliance on newspapers by Saudi audiences</i>	79
<i>Table 3: Different regulations among print and exclusively online newspapers</i>	93
<i>Table 4: Elements of research design</i>	103
<i>Table 5: Layers of research design</i>	104
<i>Table 6: Research Framework underpinning the research questions based on the application of Social Identity Theory by exploring the credibility of and reliance on newspapers among Saudis</i>	114
<i>Table 7: Reliability across newspapers, credibility measure</i>	132
<i>Table 8: Frequency and percentages for all demographic information</i>	137
<i>Table 9: Overall credibility means on each newspaper</i>	141
<i>Table 10: Credibility means of newspapers and Mann-Whitney U statistics for gender</i>	144
<i>Table 11: Credibility means of newspapers and Mann-Whitney U statistics for regions</i>	147
<i>Table 12: Credibility means of newspapers and significance statistics based on participants' age</i>	149
<i>Table 13: Credibility means of newspapers based on participants' income categories</i>	151
<i>Table 14: Credibility means of newspapers based on the level of education</i>	153
<i>Table 15: Credibility means of newspapers based on the employment status</i>	156
<i>Table 16: Credibility means of newspapers based on religiosity level</i>	158
<i>Table 17: Reliance means of newspapers and Mann-Whitney U statistics for gender</i>	161
<i>Table 18: Reliance means of newspapers and Mann-Whitney U statistics for region</i>	162
<i>Table 19: Reliance means of newspapers based on the participants' age</i>	163
<i>Table 20: Reliance means of newspapers based on the participants' income</i>	165
<i>Table 21: Reliance means of newspapers based on the participants' education</i>	166
<i>Table 22: Reliance means of newspapers based on the participants' employment type</i>	167
<i>Table 23: Reliance means of newspapers based on the participants' religiosity levels</i>	169
<i>Table 24: Interviewees' demographic profiles</i>	172

## List of Figures

<i>Figure 1: Religiosity on 10 points scale</i>	<b>138</b>
<i>Figure 2: Number of participants (%) reading and relying on each newspaper where EO refers to exclusively online newspapers, P refers to print newspapers and OC refers to the online counterparts of print</i>	<b>139</b>
<i>Figure 3 Thematic map of initial codes</i>	<b>179</b>
<i>Figure 4 Final thematic map</i>	<b>180</b>



## **Abbreviations**

**EO newspaper:** Exclusively online newspaper

**ISPs:** Private internet service providers

**ISU:** Internet Service Unit

**KACST:** King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology

**KSA:** Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

**OC newspaper:** Online counterpart of print newspaper

**P newspaper:** Print newspaper

**Q1,2,3,4,5:** Research questions

**SIT:** Social identity theory

**STC:** Saudi Telecom Company

**UAE:** United Arab Emirates

**UK:** United Kingdom

**USA:** United States of America

## Abstract

The credibility of news outlets in the eyes of their readers is a cornerstone of their ability to exist and persist in the media landscape. With the growth of the Internet, the nature of the newspaper sector has altered radically. Online provision, now sitting alongside - and to a significant extent dominating - traditional print-based news, calls forth the need to re-examine and understand the nature of newspaper credibility. Academic work to date has placed particular focus on understanding the potentially changing nature of credibility in Western contexts, from Western analytical perspectives. Considerably less work has been focused on the Middle East, and work on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in particular, is sparse. It is the consequent gap in knowledge that this research project seeks to contribute to closing. The case of KSA is particularly interesting in that the use of online media for creating, disseminating and consuming information has shown very strong growth.

Evidence gathered in the research through the deployment of a mixed methods approach was analysed through the application of framework derived from Social Identity Theory and the concepts of media credibility and reliance in order to answer the project's research questions. Quantitative research was based on a questionnaire aimed at gathering evidence to ascertain how personal characteristics influence the stated credibility and reliance of respondents on 18 Saudi local newspapers (6 print with their 6 online counterparts and 6 online exclusively newspapers). Qualitative research, based on a semi-structured interview, explored in detail with a selected sample of questionnaire respondents, their credibility perceptions in order to establish shared meanings that shape the credibility criteria evident in the questionnaire data. From this analysis, through the application of Social Identity Theory, four social categories were found to be associated with the Saudi audiences in terms of their perceived credibility of news outlets. Age, gender and religiosity levels were found to be important factors in shaping these four dominant social categories. The findings led to the presentation of recommendations for news stakeholders and future research.

Key words: *Saudi Arabia, newspapers, Social Identity theory, media credibility, media reliance*

## **Dedication**

To my beloved grandfather, Sadeah who was not educated but taught me how to overcome life's difficulties to achieve success through patience, and my beloved mother Fathia who always encourages and inspires me to do outstanding things in my life by offering me her blessed prayers. To my father, sisters and brothers who show me their love and encouragement to achieve my targets. To my helpful wife who always supports me by showing me the positive side of every experience. To my sweet children who make me do hard things to make their future shining.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction of the Thesis

### 1.1 Introduction

The aim of this research is to explore the audience-related factors that influence the credibility perceptions of and reliance on a range of Saudi print and online newspapers. The research also concludes by providing empirically derived recommendations to academics for future research work and to the press industry for how to develop news content in Saudi Arabia. Thus, this research focuses on investigating the credibility criteria of Saudi local newspapers from the perspective of the reader in order to better understand how Saudi social groups based on their categories evaluate the selected newspapers' credibility. This will also show to what extent the credibility criteria of these social categories correlate or diverge with the outcomes from previous research on newspaper credibility.

This chapter outlines briefly the core focus of this research. It sets out the importance of the topic and describes the research problem and the research questions that arise from it. The chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis chapters.

### 1.2 Background of News Credibility Field

This research concentrates on investigating newspapers' credibility in Saudi Arabia and also the social categories of the Saudi audiences assessing this issue. In the field of journalism, credibility has been a principal research topic, starting with early studies by Hovland and his colleagues in 1951 (Jacobson, 1969). Later research studies indicate that media products vary for the different types of media and environments (Esser & Hanitzsch, 2012; Pintak, 2014; Würtz, 2006).

In recent years, access to local news has become much easier since the information can be readily obtained through multiple platforms, especially with the advancement of the internet (Ghannam, 2012; Huang, 2009; Tandoc & Johnson, 2016). The internet provides users with a broad platform on which to engage in interpersonal transactions, in addition to access to a variety of content, which pushes media consumers to use online news media more

than offline media such as print newspapers (American Press Institute, 2017; Kim, 2006). Thus, the majority of online newspapers have become available through several online accounts on social media networking sites, including Twitter (Pew Research Center, 2018d).

Online newspapers for both international and local news is one of the platforms provided by the internet in Middle Eastern societies (Internet World Stats, 2014; Swasy, Tandoc, Bhandari, & Davis, 2015). This gives the enthusiastic audiences in Arabian Gulf societies the opportunity to keep up with news and information online (Ziani, Elareshi, & Gunter, 2015). In Saudi Arabia, adults aged 19 to 35 years are most likely to consume internet services (Simsim, 2011). The people in this age bracket comprise the majority of Saudi Arabia's population, according to The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (2012).

In addition, research indicates that internet usage in Saudi Arabia has grown massively from 1 million Saudi users in 2001, and around 4.7 million in 2007, to 15.8 million users in 2012 (Alsaedy, 2015). Recently, internet usage by Saudi citizens has seen massive growth as two-thirds of Saudi Arabia's population have been reported as internet users (Internet World Stats, 2018). Furthermore, 61% of Saudis use their mobiles to keep up with news (Ziani et al., 2015).

Credibility has been reported as an essential characteristic of news among journalism professional bodies (Hafez, 2002; International Federation Journalists, 1986; Radio Television Digital News Association, 2015; Society of Professional Journalists, 2014). Thus, credibility plays a significant role in increasing news consumption by consumers, primarily because it increases audience loyalty (Oyedeki, 2007), because it facilitates insight into the quality of communication and the reputation of news providers (Kovačić, Erjavec & Štular, 2010; Lee, 2018; Usher, 2018).

Several studies have explored the issues of reliance on and credibility of newspapers in the Western and Eastern world (Chiagouris, Long, & Plank, 2008; Metzger & Flanagin, 2008; Wilson, Leong, Nge, & Hong, 2011). They have confirmed that there is a relationship between people's backgrounds and their perceptions of newspapers' credibility and, from this,

their reliance on them. However, there is little research reporting on the issues of credibility and reliance in relation to Saudi newspapers, whether online or print.

The importance of studying newspapers' credibility today derives from the high levels of news consumption from online news platforms, including news websites and social networking sites such as Twitter. This is despite the higher probability of online news outlets to contain non-credible news (Fairbanks, Fitch, Knauf, & Briscoe, 2018). In relation to that, while news credibility rates have increased in some Arabic countries, both in print and online, the news credibility rates in Saudi Arabia and Jordan have declined massively (Dennis, Martin, & Wood, 2017). Moreover, the freedom of print and online newspapers in Saudi Arabia has declined recently as the country's rating for press freedom fell from 165 out of 180 in 2016 to 169 out of 180 in 2018 (Reporters without Borders for Freedom of Information, 2018b).

On the other hand, internet usage has increased in Saudi Arabia, not only by the young but also by older audiences (Aljabre, 2013). Kutbi (2015) stated that Saudi internet users aged 18 to 29 years old represent 89%, and those aged 30 to 49 years old represent about 83%, of Saudi users of social networking sites. Recently, Saudi news audiences have shown their tendency to consume news from private news organisations rather than from government news organisations (Dennis et al., 2017). There is no doubt that all the media outlets in Saudi Arabia are under government control, including newspapers (Almania, 2018) and internet media such as social networking sites, particularly Twitter and Facebook (Taylor, 2016).

In fact, credibility was reported as an influential driver for news audiences to select a suitable news outlet. However, the issue of non-credible news is more of a challenge for online outlets and platforms than it is for printed news outlets, which highlights the importance of focusing on news credibility research from the audience's perspective.

### **1.3 Research Problem**

The literature review points to the rise of online news, including online newspapers and online social media networking sites; this poses a big challenge to print news such as print newspapers (Fortunati, Taipale, & Farinosi, 2015). Recent research has explored whether and

how the growth of online news has affected news credibility (Milianny, 2013; Sabbeh & Baatwah, 2018).

Recently it has been reported that on the social networking site “Twitter”, Saudi audiences generate about 33% of the Arabic world’s tweets each day from the total of 27.4 million per day, and these are mostly for news content (Sabbeh & Baatwah, 2018). Thus, Saudi active users represent the highest number of Twitter users from Arabic countries (Salem, 2017). This shows the great consumption of news through Twitter among Saudis but little if anything is known about how the Saudi newspapers are perceived in terms of credibility by Saudis. Thus, Twitter usage can complement Saudi print newspapers with their online counterparts and exclusively online newspapers, or it can be a replacement for them, either entirely or partially.

Thus, some researchers called for a focus on Arabic countries, including Saudi Arabia, when studying newspaper credibility by focusing on particular news outlets (e.g. one local print newspaper versus another local print newspaper) or by focusing on the audiences’ personal characteristics (e.g. young versus old or male versus female) (Al-Jaber, 2012; Alotaibi, 2016; Elareshi & Gunter, 2012; Milianny, 2013).

Particularly with regard to religiosity, which is a personal factor relating to the news audience, researchers have called for future research focusing on religious societies to investigate of the influence of religiosity with other personal characteristics on news evaluation (e.g. age, gender, education) (Golan & Kioussis, 2010; Milianny, 2013). Although most previous credibility research has focused on this issue in some Western societies, Arabic societies have some differences in their characteristics in terms of their economics, development and kind of governance (Al-Qarni, 2004; Johnson & Fahmy, 2010). Given that Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam, it is considered to be the most religious country among the countries with a majority of Sunni Muslims (Al-Rasheed, 2013; Ezzi, Teal, & Izzo, 2014). According to Alnajrani, Bajnaid, Elyas and Masa’deh (2018), Saudi newspapers are greatly influenced by Islamic restrictions.

Therefore, the lack of press freedom in Saudi Arabia can influence all the print newspapers with their online counterparts and exclusively online newspapers (Alzahrani, 2016). However, while print newspapers are extensively regulated, the same regulations



cannot be applied to exclusively online newspapers due to the nature of the internet. This shows the importance of studying the credibility perceptions of Saudi audiences, and consequently their reliance on newspapers, as some studies have linked reliance with perceived credibility (Hamdy, 2013; Johnson & Kaye, 2004).

The increase in internet users in Saudi Arabia year upon year may present a big challenge to print newspapers. Thus, it was reported that the number of Saudi internet users increased from 11 million in 2010 (41% of the entire population) to 24 million in 2016 (74% of the entire population) (The ITU Telecommunication Development Sector, 2016). According to Alotaibi (2016), Saudi audiences move to online newspapers because they view online news as more credible, because it is not subject to government restrictions as print newspapers. In Saudi Arabia, this is more of a driver for online news than the desire to obtain news through a form of advanced technology.

On the other hand, print newspapers gained the trust of Saudis before the news was available on the internet. Thus, the online newspapers can play a different role to that of the print newspapers and this can influence Saudi people's perceptions regarding the trustworthiness of print newspapers (Alhomoud, 2013). This also points to the likelihood of Saudi audiences employing different credibility criteria for Saudi newspapers. For example, the verification of news providers can increase the credibility of news providers in societies with high levels of press freedom. However, this issue can be different within the Saudi context as the verified news providers can face government penalties.

In fact, this section shows the need to investigate newspapers' credibility among Saudis in order to understand their credibility criteria, considering that the outcomes from this research focus on a very restricted news context, that of Saudi Arabia. This pinpoints the knowledge gap that this study aims to fill.

This research therefore sets out to develop a research frame by understanding the factors that affect newspapers' credibility and the reliance of their audiences on them. It thus investigates the influence of the audience's personal characteristics on the newspapers' credibility and reliance within the Saudi context by engaging elements of the Social Identity Theory as an assistant tool for interpreting the study's outcomes.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

The following research questions shaped the study's exploration and explanation of the credibility of traditional and online news:

Q1- What are Saudi audiences' general perceptions of the credibility of – and their reliance on – the given newspapers?

Q2- How do the individual personal characteristics of Saudi audiences affect their perceptions of a particular newspaper's credibility?

Q3- How do the individual personal characteristics of Saudi audiences affect their patterns of reliance on a particular newspaper?

Q4-How do the shared meanings held by Saudi audiences shape their credibility criteria for the given newspapers?

## **1.5 Research Objectives**

This aim of this research is achieved through the realisation of the following objectives:

1. To critically evaluate the literature on news credibility and reliance concepts in media studies.
2. To conduct a literature review of Western and Middle Eastern newspaper credibility and online news credibility studies to identify the audience-related factors that affect the credibility and reliance of print newspapers with their online counterparts and exclusively online newspapers.
3. To critically evaluate theoretical work on shared meanings and perceptions amongst different social groups.
4. To extend the understanding of credibility and reliance through the shared meanings among social groups in terms of the Saudi local newspapers through a research framework.
5. To draw recommendations for newspaper audiences and stakeholders to improve the reliance and credibility of Saudi print and online newspapers.

## **1.6 Research Framework**

This project develops its research framework firstly by drawing up the most influential personal characteristics with regard to newspapers' credibility and reliance, alongside the dimensions measuring newspapers' credibility from previous studies of newspapers' credibility and reliance (see Chapter Two).

Secondly, after discussing the most applied theories when studying credibility, in order to understand the situation properly, the proposed theory as an assistant tool for interpreting the outcomes of this study (Social Identity Theory) (see Chapter Three).

The framework integrates the credibility and reliance dimensions with the influential personal factors and the elements of Social Identity Theory, including categorising, identifying and comparing (see Chapter Five). This research framework helped this study to answer the research questions. Consequently, this study in quantitative phase aims to determine the perceived credibility of and reliance on the given newspapers by the Saudis to reveal the dominant social categories. Then it sets out to explain the existent perceived credibility through the qualitative phase by comparing the credibility criteria of the Saudi social categories with each other.

## **1.7 Research Methodology**

This study employs the mixed-methods approach, which applies qualitative and quantitative techniques. The essence of the mixed-methods approach is that it enables the researcher to benefit from the advantages of quantitative methodology, including a bigger sample size and objective outcomes, and the advantages of the qualitative method, including hearing the audience's interpretations and explanations about the research issue in order to overcome any misunderstandings, and obtaining clear views from the respondents.

## **1.8 Research worldview**

This research employs the mixed-methods approach, and the pragmatism worldview has been recommended by a number of scholars as a philosophy that can serve research that combines an objective and subjective side (Azorín & Cameron, 2010; Cameron, 2009; Creswell, 2014a; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill,

2015). Pragmatism gives the power to the research inquiry over the research philosophy so it considers what works when answering the research questions rather than forming the research based on the philosophy's assumptions (Azorín & Cameron, 2010). Thus, pragmatism is associated with "freedom of inquiry" which means that it gives higher freedom to the research results, which in turn satisfy the research questions (Morgan, 2014).. The main advantage of pragmatism is that it can work as a combination of positivism and interpretivism, giving the highest priority to the research question for determining the research philosophy, which can be achieved by combining different approaches (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). This points to the main orientation of pragmatism, which takes attention away from the methodological questions to the research questions (Creswell, 2014).

## **1.9 Research strategy**

This research employs two methods: quantitative and qualitative methods. The qualitative method was based on a questionnaire aimed at gathering evidence to investigate how personal characteristics influenced the perceived credibility of, and reliance on, 18 Saudi local newspapers (6 print newspapers with their 6 online counterparts and 6 exclusively online newspapers). The qualitative method was based on a semi-structured interview, which explored in detail the credibility perceptions of a selected sample of questionnaire respondents, in order to establish shared meanings that shape the credibility criteria evident in the questionnaire data.

## **1.10 Thesis Structure**

This thesis consists of nine chapters. In addition to the current chapter, the thesis moves from the theoretical base to the empirical work through different stages. Finally, the thesis finalises this project with the discussions and conclusions as below. A brief summary of each chapter is presented below:

**Chapter Two: *Understanding the Influence of Audience Characteristics on the Credibility Perceptions of and Reliance on News***

This chapter develops an understanding of the media environment and the relationship between ‘credibility’ and ‘reliance’, with the intention of identifying the factors that impact the credibility and reliance of print and online newspapers. The chapter identifies the gaps in the literature in relation to newspaper studies in the Middle East, with a particular focus on Saudi Arabia, and it looks at how personal characteristics of newspaper audiences impact upon their perceptions of reliance and credibility. Then, in order to develop the research framework, it concludes by establishing from past studies the dimensions used for measuring the credibility of and reliance on newspapers and the personal-related characteristics that have the most influence on these two constructs.

### ***Chapter Three: Understanding an Appropriate Tool for Interpreting the Outcomes of Social Categories on Media Credibility and Reliance***

This chapter provides an understanding of the theories that have been applied to news credibility in order to show which is the most relevant for this study. It shows the differences between these theories then it justifies the application of the Social Identity Theory in this research as an assistant tool for interpreting the study’s outcomes because this study focuses on the similarities between individuals who belong to one social group, in terms of their credibility perceptions of local print newspapers, their online counterparts and exclusively online newspapers in Saudi Arabia. Then, it shows the knowledge gap to explain how Social Identity Theory is suitable for interpreting the outcomes of this subject. Finally, it presents the elements of Social Identity Theory in the research framework that are supplied in Chapter Two (credibility and reliance concepts and the influential personal characteristics) in order to answer the research enquiries.

### ***Chapter Four: Understanding the Journalism Scene in Saudi Arabia***

This chapter provides a contextual background of Saudi Arabia’s history by focusing on religious influence on Saudi society. It explains briefly the relationship between religious scholars and the regime leaders. Then it provides some insights into the media scene and internet usage in Saudi Arabia. Also, the chapter gives a brief history of the press institutions, both print and online. In addition, it illustrates some differences between the Saudi journalism regulations for print newspapers and online newspapers.

## **Chapter Five: *Research Methodology Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches for Studying Saudi Audiences***

This chapter presents the research methodology in terms of the research design. It explains the philosophical considerations to justify employing the mixed-methods research approach. It illustrates how the pragmatism philosophy guides this research as it supports the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in the research. Also, this chapter highlights the research process, including the development of the research framework, identifying the procedures of the collection and analysis of the two data sets in order to achieve the research aim by answering the research questions.

## **Chapter Six: *Investigating How The Credibility Perceptions of and Reliance on The Target Saudi Newspapers Differ Among Saudis Based on Their Social Categories***

This chapter presents the quantitative results generated from the study questionnaire. The results gained from the participants are shown in tables and textual descriptions. It is structured based on the research questions as the target of this chapter is to address research questions One, Two and Three. The analysis of the questionnaire was based on variables, as explained in this chapter. It shows how the findings of this chapter guided the second data collection by allowing the researcher to target the dominant social categories that were identified from the questionnaire.

## **Chapter Seven: *Qualitative Data Analysis Tracking the Interpretations of Saudi Audiences for Their Perceived Credibility***

This chapter is based on the generated dominant social categories from the questionnaire analysis in Chapter Six. It also presents the sample profiles of the dominant social categories. Thus, it targets the dominant social categories in order to answer the fourth research question and to explain perceived credibility in the questionnaire phase by looking for shared meanings in credibility criteria among the members of each identity. It explains and shows the thematic analysis of the interviews to interpret how the participants perceived the credibility of the given newspapers.

## **Chapter Eight: *Discussion of the Findings of the Saudi Dominant Social categories with regard to the Target Newspapers***

This chapter discusses the research findings from Chapter Six and Chapter Seven in order to gain a better understanding of the main outcomes of this research and whether they correlate with or diverge from previous studies. It is structured around the research questions to guide the understanding of the main outcomes. It also provides brief evidence from the research indicators to illustrate the main outcomes relating to the research questions.

## **Chapter Nine: *Conclusions: Developing A Professional Press in Saudi Arabia***

This chapter reflects on the research process to accomplish the research objectives and illustrate the research's contributions and how it has addressed the knowledge gap. It also presents the implications that can be drawn from this research, and the limitations that were imbedded in this research. To help with further research on this subject, this chapter also shows some unexpected issues that arose, showing how they were treated in order to achieve the research goal. As a main part of the research aim, this chapter in the final step presents recommendations for future research and future development in the Saudi press.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Understanding the Influence of Audience Characteristics on the Credibility Perceptions of and Reliance on News

#### 2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to develop an understanding of the media environment and the relationship between ‘credibility’ and ‘reliance’, with the intention of identifying the factors that impact on the credibility and reliance of print and online newspapers. This chapter identifies the gaps in the literature in relation to newspaper studies in the Middle East, with a particular focus on Saudi Arabia, and how personal characteristics of newspaper audiences impact upon their perceptions of reliance and credibility.

#### 2.2 Background to Media Credibility

The issue concerning ‘*media credibility*’ is a longstanding one as it is considered to be the main element of the journalism code of ethics regarding the news production. It has been mentioned frequently by many journalism professionals and organisations (Hafez, 2002; International Federation Journalists, 1986; Radio Television Digital News Association, 2015; Society of Professional Journalists, 2014).

Research has attempted to explore this area in the literature, but there seems to be no tangible agreement on whether or not the communicator is the primary factor influencing an audience. For example, Hovland and Weiss (1951) conducted one of the earliest studies that attempted to pinpoint the link between a *media source* and its effect on the *concept of credibility*. By studying *credibility* through their previous studies on source prestige, the researchers established that *source credibility* is a vital factor in determining whether or not an audience accepts a new message. In addition, these scholars suggested that credibility is underpinned by trustworthiness (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Since then, many studies have followed this tradition, focusing on individuals as information sources in the background of a group or public speaking (Choi, Watt, & Lynch, 2006; Flanagin & Metzger, 2000; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Mackay & Lowrey, 2011; Mao, 2003; Wilson et al., 2011).



According to Oyedeji (2007), credibility plays a significant role in increasing news consumption by consumers, primarily because it increases audience loyalty. Thus, because it facilitates insight into the quality of communication and the reputation of news providers, the authority of news has constituted a major research topic in mass media (Kovačić et al., 2010; Lee, 2018; Usher, 2018). Non-credible news increases in online news because of the greater ability of non-professionals to provide input compared to print news (Fairbanks et al., 2018). Notably, past studies of news credibility have focused on three areas in the media environment, namely source, message and media. These studies have aimed to understand how the audience perceives these dimensions, and what factors affect their perceptions (Hellmueller & Trilling, 2012; Sundar, 1999).

'*Source credibility*' studies focus on the persuasive characteristics of the news provider or presenter, including speakers or writers. They have tended to centre on several characteristics associated with news and information, including trustworthiness, knowledge, attractiveness and dynamism. '*Message credibility*', on the other hand, concentrates on aspects of the news or information such as content, language, delivery and message structure. According to Metzger and Flanagin (2008), these elements affect the '*message credibility*' while '*media credibility*' is concerned with comparative examinations of different media channels, for example, print newspapers versus online newspapers, or old media (such as television, radio, and print newspapers) versus new media (such as social media platforms, blogs and online newspapers). The reader will note that the latter constitutes the focus of the present study.

With these considerations in mind, this study seeks to establish the credibility perceptions of Saudi audiences towards the print newspapers with their online counterparts and exclusively online newspapers in Saudi Arabia. Accordingly, it is important to develop an in-depth understanding of the credibility levels of the news sources, including print and online newspapers, that are most consumed by the Saudi media audiences. Hence, it is the purpose of the following section to draw on the literature review in order to develop an understanding of the concept of credibility.

### **2.2.1 Definitions and Dimensions of Media Credibility**

Traditionally, the exploration of mass media credibility has mainly focused on the credibility sources collectively, such as print news versus online news, regardless of the types of print or online outlets, although later research has highlighted variations in consumer perceptions regarding the credibility of different media channels (Keib & Wojdyski, 2018; Kruikemeier & Lecheler, 2018).

Credibility and trust have accompanied one another in media news research due to the overlap between these two terms. Thus, the debates of understanding credibility and trust in the media news field come from interrelations between the two terms. This has led some scholars who focus on news credibility or news trustworthiness to use these two terms interchangeably (Tate, 2011; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003; Lee, 2018). Thus, these scholars used the both terms when referring to the meaning of belief.

However, some of the scholars dealing with credibility and trust in the context of news differentiated between these two terms. Some research pointed to credibility as a term focusing on perceived credibility based on audience characteristics, while pointing to trust being the term used when focusing on the characteristics of media news. From this perspective, trust can be understood as a concept based mainly on medium qualities, while credibility can be constructed based on the audience's personal characteristics and perceptions (Hellmueller & Trilling, 2012). For example, some research assigns trust with issues relating to objectivity, such as news qualities, while credibility is assigned with issues relating to subjectivity, such as audience age and gender, etc. (Elareshi & Gunter, 2012). Thus, focusing on the perceived credibility of newspapers from the audience perspective can be associated with subjectivity to a much higher degree than with objectivity.

On the other hand, some researchers assume trust as the foundation of credibility. From this perspective, credibility is understood as a result of the total trust. Therefore, some research has used trust as a component containing several dimensions that lead to full credibility. For example, Hovland and Weiss (1951) point to trustworthy and expertise as the two main components of credibility. This perspective may consider credibility as a sign of trust (Liu & Bates, 2009; Pornpitakpan, 2004). However, these two components have not

received adequate investigation in terms of their validity (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). This led credibility researchers in the media field to become interested in identifying other dimensions that can influence credibility, including accuracy and fairness, etc. (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). Thus, most of the credibility researchers in the news outlets field have treated trust as a dimension beside other dimensions that lead to perceived credibility.

However, the unclear differences between the terms ‘credibility’ and ‘trust’ led researchers to settle on no consensus regarding the related dimensions of credibility (Hellmueller & Trilling, 2012).

Relevant dimensions related to news standing include accuracy, concern for the community, bias and separation of the presenter’s opinion from the presented fact (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). They also involve believability, clarity, and trustworthiness of expertise (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2005; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; McGrath & Gaziano, 1986; Mehrabi, Ali, & Abu-Hassan, 2013; Thorson, Vraga, & Ekdale, 2010). Therefore, ‘*media credibility*’ has been identified as a complicated and multi-faceted construct (Golan & Baker, 2012). Given its multidimensional meanings, credibility has been defined and measured in several ways (Gaziano, 1987; Lee, 1978). Previous studies on credibility showed no consensus regarding the most suitable dimensions of credibility because it has been defined differently. Thus, the most plausible way of selecting the proper dimensions of credibility is to start from the credibility definition, as the definition can be the driver of understanding the relevant dimensions of credibility, then to move on to the appropriate dimensions of credibility.

In fact, researchers used credibility rather heavily when investigating to what extent audiences believe the newspapers to be credible or trusted (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Kiousis, 2001). This points to believability as the centre of credibility (Bucy, 2003; Jahng & Littau, 2016; Johnson & Kaye, 1998, 2010a; Xie & Zhao, 2014). According to Hellmueller and Trilling (2012), a number of media researchers focusing on media credibility have determined credibility in the light of believability. This increases the consensus towards believability as the essence of credibility among a number of the researchers focusing on newspapers credibility. However, despite agreement among some researchers about determining believability as the core meaning for credibility, they have different perspectives regarding how credibility can be defined by believability. Thus, three main related definitions

exist. Bucy (2003) defined media credibility as “perceptions of a news channel’s believability”, while Meyer (1988) used the definition of Webster’s New College Dictionary, which defined credibility as “offering reasonable grounds for being believed.” However, McCroskey and Young (1981) defined media credibility as “a believing attitude of a person towards media.” Believing is understood as holding the belief that the news is true. This definition is clear and focuses on the perceptions of believability of the news from the audience’s perspective, although the definitions of Bucy and Meyer come mainly from the media perspective, which is not the focus of this study. In other words, the focus of this study is to concentrate on the audience’s perceptions of credibility in terms of the target newspapers, so perceived credibility from the media perspective is not related to the focus of this study. This definition is further supported by the call of Coleman, Anthony and Morrison (2009) to build a definition of credibility based on audience perspective.

Therefore, this study adopts McCroskey and Young’s definition throughout the thesis when referring to audiences’ perceptions of newspapers credibility. Meyer (1988) developed five dimensions to measure credibility based on understanding the essence of credibility as relating to believability, as detailed in Chapter Five. The next section will therefore look into the importance of credibility to media development.

### **2.2.2 Credibility and Media Development**

The proliferation of the internet, in view of the tools it has given rise to, has been an important means of evaluating news credibility (Mehrabi, Abu-Hassan, & Ali, 2009; Sabigan, 2007). Thus, numerous media consumers around the world have become media producers and consumers at the same time (Fairbanks et al., 2018). This was mentioned by Bruns (2007, 2016b, 2016a) as so-called “produsage” which refers to both production and usage. Carr, Barnidge, Lee and Tsang (2014) speculated that some research regards the increase in citizen journalism as an indicator of distrust of the public media, which includes print newspapers. Carr et al., (2014) defined citizen journalism as participatory journalism where citizens participate and cooperate in activities with mainstream media. This has contributed to the emergence of a concept in which citizen journalism is viewed as a fact checker (Bruns, 2007).

Consequently, the landscape for news has become increasingly complicated. In particular, as mentioned previously, the development of digital technology has introduced a new platform for transmitting news and given rise to the multidimensional concept of news credibility. News media was previously operating in a distinct market sphere in the same way that traditional channels such as print newspapers and broadcast news had done, yet it now finds itself competing for news consumers online. For instance, in the study by Dennis, Martin, and Wood (2013) on appetites for established, local news versus the new platforms available online, the authors reported that the traditional news sources face very stiff competition from the new modes. This is because online news has multimedia features (Tran, 2015). These multimedia features may lead the competition between print and online news into difficult situations. Thus, in this context, the reputation that consumers attribute to a given news source has developed into a branding issue (Greer, 2003).

As a result of these changes, some characteristics linked to online news sources have been found to influence consumers' perception of credibility. As an example, the lack of authoritative information, such as the date of publication and time on a news website, could mean that the complete information is regarded as unconvincing (Kovačić et al., 2010). According to Chiagouris et al. (2008), website design and ease of use have affected the credibility of online news. However, Fogg et al. (2003) and Chiagouris et al. (2008) argue that online users evaluate news sites' credibility depending on the elements that they consider to be important. Thus, the audiences will evaluate the news websites' credibility based on the elements related to the credibility criteria in the audiences' eyes. However, these credibility criteria can be different from one audience to another.

On the other hand, the emergence of new media, fuelled by the internet, as a crucial news and information source has generated renewed interest regarding the manner in which media credibility is understood. More so, the internet involves several characteristics that are not applicable to conventional media (Metzger & Flanagin, 2008). It can therefore be observed that early studies have increasingly turned their attention to such dimensions as website design characteristics, news story layout, source attributions and site genre (Appelman & Sundar, 2016; Ferebee, 2007).

In particular, features such as news story design were traditionally not an issue, but the advent of the internet has raised valid questions concerning this concept (Greer, 2003). However, although the technological features available online can somewhat affect perceived credibility between print and online outlets, the quality characteristics of news can affect the news provided using the same technological features, for example when comparing one online news website with another (Lowry, Wilson & Haig, 2014).

Despite the attractiveness of online news media, which is enhanced by multi-faceted factors that print newspapers cannot employ (Ahmed, 2011), it is important that media suppliers develop an in-depth understanding of the factors that influence the newspapers' credibility, rather than attracting the audience's attention through different media tools as with the online newspapers. This has led news credibility researchers to study the behaviour of audiences associated with the perceived credibility of newspapers (Coleman et al., 2009).

Thus, the next section explores the relationship between credibility and the reliance on newspaper outlets, and the factors that influence consumers' perceptions of each. This understanding assisted with examining the impact of these factors on the Saudi media landscape, which operates within a unique cultural setting.

### **2.3 The Relationship between Credibility and Reliance on Media**

The past literature has established that the credibility of news outlets is related to how frequently citizens use them (Johnson & Kaye, 1998; McCracken, 2011). Thus, the tendency to perceive a medium as credible or otherwise is based on a citizen's reliance on it.

Metzger and Flanagin (2008) outline that scholars have shown an increased interest in the internet, primarily because it has emerged as an increasingly influential tool in society. In particular, research has investigated the differentiation between the felt credibility of online news and the information derived from classical news media platforms such as print newspapers (Speakman, 2011). To date, research on internet credibility has had somewhat mixed results (Tandoc, 2018), with research suggesting that the internet is perceived to be more credible than print newspapers (Choi et al., 2006), while another study showed a big decline in print newspapers' credibility after internet usage increased (Sun, 2014). Several explanations have been offered by Sun for internet sources' credibility, including the

advantages associated with this medium (which include the ability to have up-to-date and timely information) and audience-related factors such as the audiences' frequent usage and ideological orientation.

On the other hand, some researchers have claimed the opposite by insisting that internet-based sources of news and information are less credible (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000; Kovačić et al., 2010). However, other researchers differentiated between the online news presented by social media networking sites and online news organisations in terms of credibility so online news organisations received higher credibility (Tandoc & Johnson, 2016; Tandoc, 2018). These different outcomes can be related to the different credibility criteria of news audiences employed by researchers.

Metzger and Flanagin (2008) speculate that the internet has materialised as perhaps the most vital instrument in people's lives regarding communication as well as access to information. Today, the average person increasingly relies on online platforms to receive news and knowledge, and it seems that there is no escaping this phenomenon as everyday gadgets are becoming even more integrated into our daily lives. This has coincided with heightened concern regarding the quality of online information sources.

Thus, based on the influence of reliance on the perceived credibility, online information seekers can be confused by online information due to the higher probability of being exposed to non-credible news compared to those who consume news from filtered media outlets such as print newspapers (Schweiger, 2000). For example, the internet space has seen a considerable increase in the number of rogue users over the years, and some users take to this medium just for fun (Chung & Yoo, 2008). Weblogs, as an example, have emerged as a primary component of the internet, and many people have come to rely on these platforms (Johnson & Kaye, 2004; Mackay & Lowrey, 2011). For instance, personal blogs raise credibility issues because they are developed, owned and operated by individuals solely for their own interest. It can be said that these channels are concerned with proliferating personal agendas, and the reliance on these personal blogs may sway opinion in one way or the other. Kim and Johnson (2009) speculate that the influence of blogs has surpassed its readership, especially given that leading news people are known to use prominent blogs for different kinds of stories.

However, previous studies addressing the internet and the credibility of platforms such as blogs have indicated that the perceived credibility of these channels among users is increasingly based on factors such as blog reliance, user demographics, political attitudes and information type. This aligns with the conclusion drawn by Papacharissi (2011), who claims that media blogs as a sub-genre have emerged successfully because of their credibility. This conclusion is based on the understanding that journalists have an added advantage in that they can access information quickly and, moreover, are professionals. In essence, authors of these blogs are less likely to engage in bias or to share groundless information (Cook, 2013). This brings us to the all-important concept of source credibility, which relates to the judgements made by perceivers regarding a communicator's believability. McCracken (2011) suggests that blog credibility increasingly draws on source attributes when examining information on the internet.

The implication is that the credibility of internet sources is in large part influenced by the perceptions of a user. This could explain why internet heavy users display the tendency to perceive social networking channels as more credible than the internet light users (Johnson & Kaye, 2014). According to Johnson and Kaye (2000), for instance, bloggers believe that news and information in blogs is more credible than other media. This is based on reasons such as the ability of individual bloggers to operate outside the set media agenda or government influence altogether. Moreover, internet users who rely on blogs tend to perceive them as increasingly credible (Johnson & Kaye, 2015). Thus in another study, reliance on blogs was a strong indication of blog credibility, so heavy users of blogs gave those blogs high scores on credibility (Johnson, Kaye, Bichard & Wong, 2007).

Studies have also established that reliance on traditional news media such as print newspapers can be used to predict the credibility of their online counterparts (Johnson & Kaye, 2000). In South Korea, while reliance was an influencing factor in predicting credibility for print newspapers more than their online counterparts, print newspapers and online newspapers were rated as less credible than other online sources, including online news websites (Kim & Johnson, 2009).

However, there are mixed findings concerning the effects of internet reliance on the credibility of internet sources, as reported by Beaudoin and Thorson (2005) and Tsfaty and



Cappella (2005), who found that news consumption and reliance do not serve to predict perceptions of news credibility. This is also supported by a study stating that 88% of Russians described television news as their main source of news, while 31% of the respondents stated that they were misled by the television news (Gatehouse, 2016). This shows the potential gap between what news the audiences rely on and how they perceive its credibility. Hence, reliance on information from internet sources requires further investigation. Furthermore, the motivation to read online newspapers is not only derived from the online publication's characteristics but also from other factors related to reader characteristics (Grosser, Hase & Blobaum, 2016). Even though non-credible news can be more strongly associated with internet news than print news, the ITU Telecommunication Development Sector (2016) showed a rapid increase of internet usage among different countries. This may point to the reliance of news consumers on the internet for obtaining news. This has increased the research focus on news credibility these days with the increase of online news to look more for unseen issues of credibility (Fairbanks et al., 2018).

In the literature, an unexplained negative relationship between the reliance on print newspapers and the perceived credibility of online independent news websites and online television has emerged. For example, the greater the number of print newspapers a person reads, the lower the level of perceived credibility for both online independent news websites and online television, while the more people read online newspapers, the more the credibility of local print newspapers is lowered (Speakman, 2011). Thus, the previous situation can be understood as the unexplained negative relationship between the reliance on a particular news outlet and the credibility of another news outlet, maybe because of audience-related factors.

According to Deuze (2008), focus has shifted from studying media outlets to studying the audience's influence on media outlets as the audiences around the world hold different views of the credibility of media outlets. As a result, future research should extend the focus of online journalism to include the audience as the primary element, because their role has transitioned from just readers of print news to producers and participants in online news (Aljasir, 2015; Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009). In addition, Chung and Yoo (2008) report that having internet skills is one of the main factors influencing the use of online newspapers. This includes the indication that users with good internet skills use the internet more than

users with a low level of skills, meaning that researchers should explore the motivations associated with an audience's consumption of a specific online newspaper.

It is noteworthy that credibility research suggests that the reliance on a newspaper influences the degree to which it is perceived as credible by consumers (Waal & Schoenbach, 2008), while others have denied this argument altogether (Armstrong & Collins, 2009b). The suggestion is that users of a particular type of media are increasingly likely to perceive it as credible. Armstrong and Collins (2009b) also note that studies have examined the likelihood of certain newspaper consumers providing positive evaluations of these news sources. Indeed, this perspective indicates that newspapers remain one of the most credible news information sources, as recent research has shown that news audiences in America are more inclined to trust newspaper news (27% confidence) than television news (24% confidence) (Lee, 2018).

A range of studies contend that newspapers epitomise credibility in most consumers' eyes (Lee, 2018; Swift, 2017; Zhang, Zhang, & Zhou, 2017). This understanding, however, fails to account for the way in which some users find a certain form of media more credible than others do. Indeed, these findings generate a dilemma for scholars attempting to compare the public viewpoints of news material created by mainstream news companies, as well as by citizen journalists. On the other hand, previous studies showed no consensus regarding the influence of reliance on the perceived credibility, which may point to the influence of news audiences on both the perceived credibility and reliance.

As a result, this study intends to investigate the reliance on and credibility of both print and online newspapers independently in order to illuminate whether the personal characteristics of the Saudi audiences affect their reliance on the given newspapers and their credibility perceptions of the same newspapers similarly or differently.

The next section presents a review of previous credibility studies in the West and Middle East to facilitate insight into the interlinked factors of credibility. The author outlines how these factors have impacted media consumers' perceptions, and media credibility studies pertinent to the Saudi Arabian context are explored.

## **2.4 Credibility of Print and Online News in the Western and Middle East Societies**

The literature reveals as it is shown in this section that most studies addressing news credibility and reliance have been undertaken in some Western countries (Dugan, 2015; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Golan & Day, 2010; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Johnson & Kaye, 1998, 2014; Lee, 2011; Lee, 2018). However, due to the universal nature of the internet, along with the fact that different countries have varying media environments, cultures and values, it has been appropriate to conduct more research on the credibility of news media in a wider range of countries to find general influential audience-related factors. Furthermore, a country's culture and press environment have a significant effect on the evaluation of the credibility of news media sources, which is relevant when Western and Middle Eastern media concepts are considered. As will be evidenced in this section, the Middle Eastern cultural context, as well as the press environment, increasingly influences the way in which news media sources and credibility are understood.

This is because of the overarching factors underpinned by sociocultural dimensions, including religion, news production, media houses, agenda-setting and the dissemination of information. Concerning the rather skewed perceptions of Arabs and Muslims in the Western world, it can be said that the existing literature has not captured the issue of media credibility in the Middle East world in an optimal way, despite some efforts by Western scholars to provide fair and objective assessments (Golan & Kioussis, 2010; Johnson & Fahmy, 2010; Nisbet, Saldaña, Johnson, Golan, & Day, 2017).

Therefore, this section conducted a review of Western and Middle Eastern studies in relation to the credibility and reliance of online and print newspapers.

### **2.4.1 Online and Print News Credibility Studies in Some Western Societies**

This section explores the main news credibility studies that have been carried out in some Western and Middle Eastern societies in order to find the main subjects that show how credibility perceptions are influenced by audience-related factors.

Based on the final view of the previous debate between news credibility scholars, who did not attribute the perceived credibility of newspapers to the reliance on the news but to audience-related factors, as explained earlier in this chapter, the view of news credibility scholars shifted to conclude that reliance influences credibility alongside other motivations, but not on its own (Johnson & Kaye, 2009, 2010a; Johnson et al., 2007). This was also explained by showing the gap between the 88% of Russians in research who described television as being their main source of news, while 31% perceived television news as misleading (Gatehouse, 2016). On the other hand, half of the respondents in a UK study stated that they listen to radio news, while 75% of the respondents said they perceive radio news as credible (Burns, 2018). This supports the view that high credibility is not necessarily followed by high reliance, as well the view that low credibility is not necessarily associated with low reliance.

From this point onwards, other researchers started to explore the factors that could affect news audiences to rely on news outlets, regardless of credibility. For example in the United States of America (USA), the convenience of using a news outlet has more influence on a young audience's use of a media news outlet than its credibility (Chiagouris et al., 2008; Jarvis, Stroud & Gilliland, 2009). The need to obtain news for guidance/information at times of elections drove news audiences to obtain their news from news outlets that were not perceived as highly credible (Johnson & Kaye, 2015). Conversely, negative impressions about news' negative mood and the decrease of its credibility were reported as the main reasons for news audiences' avoidance of news in different world regions, including European and Asian countries, in which the highest avoidance of news occurs in Turkey and the lowest avoidance in Japan (Nic, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2017). This points to the importance of news credibility besides other factors in the eyes of news audiences. Thus, credibility researchers moved on and looked at other factors that influence perceived credibility, regardless of reliance.

Some researchers focus on the nature and features of print and online media in order to explore whether they have any influence on the perceived credibility of newspapers. According to Fortunati et al. (2015), Italian students still perceived print newspapers as having unique characteristics, but they stated that these newspapers required more development to

compete with online newspapers. Also, it was stated by the executive editor of digital news at *The Guardian* in the United Kingdom (UK) that the increase of online news should be taken seriously by print newspapers, as news publishers cannot be successful if they do not acknowledge the choices made by audiences who feel passionate about consuming news through technologies (Ciobanu, 2016). Credibility of news has been reported as the first influential factor that makes any online news outlet appealing (Scott, 2017). Thus, news audiences are attracted to news from online outlets which they perceive as credible.

News, whether in print or online, can be perceived differently from one society to another, including the credibility of such news. For example, although Finland has not received the highest scores for press freedom (Reporters without Borders for Freedom of Information, 2018a), it received the highest news credibility among a number of European countries including the UK and Germany (Fletcher & Park, 2017). Also, when a study compared the answers of respondents from Finland, Spain, the USA and the UK regarding to what extent they perceive the credibility of news in general, less than half of the respondents from the USA and UK perceived their news to be of high credibility, while over half of the respondents from Finland and Spain perceived a higher credibility of news in general (Nielsen & Graves, 2017).

When comparing news media outlets from different countries among their audiences, the situation can be seen differently based on their regions. For example, online news videos were more appealing to Asians than for Americans and Europeans (Nic, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2018). The differences between media environments and audiences among the world's countries can lead to different patterns of news consumption and news evaluation in terms of perceived credibility. According to Silver (2019), the news media in UK has different characteristics compared to other Western European countries.

Xu's (2012) study in China showed that location (i.e. rural versus urban residents) has a significant influence on perceived credibility. In the USA, the residents of Texas gave their local newspaper higher credibility than a national newspaper (Speakman, 2011). In Singapore, 19% of the respondents described print newspapers as their main source of news, while only 4% of the respondents from South Korea and Taiwan described print newspapers as their main

source of news (Nic et al., 2017). This suggests that every audience can be a unique case so generalising the credibility perceptions from one audience to another may not be useful.

On the other hand, online newspapers' characteristics are different to those of printed newspapers. According to Chung, Nam, and Stefanone (2012), the features of online news sources including hypertextuality, interactivity, and multimediality; these were studied in order to determine their influence on news credibility, but it was reported that they had no influence on news credibility. These findings may point to the generally conflicting indicators that exist between online reports, consumers, and the high rates of print information credibility (Metzger, Flanagin & Zwarun, 2003; Porter, Anderson & Nhotsavang, 2015). This is because in certain cases, online newspapers may be regarded as more attractive than print newspapers due to their technological features (Alhomoud, 2013), while paper publications are sometimes regarded as more credible because of their experience and reputation (Armstrong & Collins, 2009b).

Recently in the USA, the news audiences gave newspapers (including print and online newspapers) higher credibility than television news and internet news (Swift, 2017). The circulation of print newspapers has dropped massively (Pew Research Center, 2018c). Also, in most European countries, the circulation of print newspapers is struggling with the competition of online news which is growing rapidly (Nic et al., 2017). This can affect the revenue of the newspapers. The revenue of print newspapers in Denmark has dropped 14% in 2018, while the audiences of print newspapers in Norway were reported to be the most willing to pay for print newspapers in Europe (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, & Nielsen, 2019). The increase of online or print can be influenced by several factors but perceived credibility may be a prominent factor. The increase in news media outlets and platforms can also be at the expense of other news media outlets in some cases, possibly indicating an increase in other news outlets instead of print newspapers. However, comparing online news media in general with print news media in general is no longer recommended by researchers, as recently several different online news outlets received different credibility perceptions (Kruikemeier & Lecheler, 2018).

The difference in cost between print newspapers and online news outlets can have an influence on news audiences to choose between these two options. According to Oliver

(2008), the BBC in the UK is not able to reach news audiences from low income levels which may point to income level being an influential factor among news audiences. Recently, income levels have not only been shown to influence the consumption of online news outlets but also the consumption of news through print newspapers in the USA (Anderson, 2018). According to Granger (2019), the rate of paying for online news was 9% among UK news audiences and 16% in the USA. The average for UK, USA, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Denmark, Japan and Finland was 11%. Thus, based on the potential influence of income level on news consumption which in turn can potentially influence perceived credibility, income level can be an influential factor on the perceived credibility of news outlets from which news audiences consume their news.

Some research has combined credibility with gender in order to look at the differences between males and females and their beliefs about the credibility of news outlets. Thus, among Hungarians, gender was shown to have a significant influence on the perceived credibility of given news outlets (Fodor, Jackel, Csiszarik-Kocsir & Medve, 2013). It has also been shown that the usage and evaluation of news are influenced by consumers' gender (American Press Institute, 2014). However, in Spain, gender showed no influence on the credibility perceptions of newspapers (Fernandez-Planells, 2015). This points to how some personal characteristics may not influence the perceived credibility of newspapers in some societies despite their influence in other societies.

Age can also influence consumption of news and consequently the perceived credibility of it. It was reported that younger groups were found to pay more for online news than older audiences across 25 countries from Europe, South and North America, as well as Korea and Japan, and those under 45 years old showed different news consumption behaviours than older individuals (Nic et al., 2018). On the other hand, among 25 American, European and Asian countries, print newspapers were reported as being the main source of news among older audiences aged 35 years old and over (Nic et al., 2017). The different consumption between younger and older groups may point to different credibility perceptions. For example, in the UK, those under 30 years old showed lower credibility perceptions than those over 50 years old towards the BBC (Walker, 2018). Also, the ways of obtaining news was reported differently among mixed audiences from the USA and UK: respondents aged 35

and over obtained news mainly through television, while those aged under 35 got their news through their phones (Newman et al., 2019). Thus, age can have different reflections on news consumption and the perceived credibility of the news.

The literacy levels of news audiences can affect their news consumption and the perceived credibility of news. Among 18 countries from America, Europe and Asia, it was found that the literacy level of news affects news consumption, so the audiences with high levels of news literacy showed higher inclination to consume news from print newspapers at 34% compared to audiences with low levels of literacy, who showed a tendency to use print newspapers at 20% (Nic et al., 2018). According to Volkmer (2010), literacy levels influenced the critical evaluation of audiences in Germany regarding newspapers. Thus, the levels of literacy was reported to have a significant influence on the perceptions of the news credibility (Grosser et al., 2016). This suggests that the literacy levels of news audiences can influence the selection of news outlets and the perceived credibility of news outlets, including print and online newspapers.

In America, political ideology has a large influence on perceived credibility (Johnson & Kaye, 2010b; Stroud & Lee, 2013). Johnson and Kaye (2010b) found that American conservative participants were more inclined to perceive online newspapers as credible compared to liberal participants. In addition, liberal participants perceived local newspapers as more credible than conservative participants did (Yamamoto & Nah, 2018). According to Silver (2019), the perceived credibility of news and news consumption in the UK are influenced by the audience's ideology. In South Korea, the ideological orientations of Korean audiences influence the perceived credibility of print newspapers (Lee & Hahn, 2014).

Focusing more on other ideologies in America, it was found that perceived news credibility was influenced by religious ideology. Mormons perceived all the given news outlets as low in credibility due to their political bias and liberal media orientation (Golan & Baker, 2012). It has been shown that some news media in the UK is supplied by an ideological content that feeds Islamophobia (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010). This can consequently maximise the gap between British Muslims and these news outlets. Other researchers have investigated this point in news credibility research in order to explore whether the pre-existing attitudes of doubters and non-believers affected their perceived credibility of the news (Carr et al., 2014).



The influence of religious ideology was reported to extend the differences between secular newspapers and religious newspapers in Turkey (Hortaçsu & Ertürk, 2003). Thus, religious ideology can be an influential factor on the perceived credibility of newspapers among their audiences.

#### **2.4.2 Online and Print News Credibility Studies in Middle East Societies Including Saudi Society**

In the Middle East, an insufficient number of credibility studies has been carried out. Some research theorises that the level of government control of newspapers is likely to affect the newspapers' credibility (Salman, Ibrahim, Hj.Abdullah, Mustaffa & Mahbob, 2011; Wilson et al., 2011).

Having said that, it is important to recognise that a relatively small body of research has addressed the credibility and reliance of print and online newspapers in Middle East contexts. One of the first studies focused on television news channels that presented two different perspectives (Western and Middle Eastern) so the credibility perceptions were influenced by these two perspectives. The researchers recommended conducting new credibility research in the Middle East as the Middle Eastern culture is different to the culture in the West (Johnson & Fahmy, 2010). The credibility perceptions of particular news titles influences the Saudi public sphere by Saudi audiences. However, the previous study did not explore what and how audience-personal-related factors impact on the credibility perceptions of and reliance on the range of newspapers in this study, nor how credibility criteria can be defined differently based on audience-personal-related factors (Alotaibi, 2016). Recently, credibility research pointed to religiosity as an influencer of news credibility in Lebanon (Nisbet et al., 2017). However, the influence was inconsistent as three religions were studied. This points to the need for future research to focus on each religion separately, as the influential factors are different for each religion.

This is a critical consideration in view of Johnson and Fahmy's (2010) and Sabbeh and Baatwah's (2018) comments that Western countries are different to Middle Eastern countries, especially Arab countries (such as Saudi Arabia), with respect to their media environments and cultures. It is also pertinent to note that several studies have outlined the insufficient

explorations that have been undertaken to address the credibility of online newspapers versus print newspapers in the Saudi context (Al-Jaber, 2012; Elareshi & Gunter, 2012; Miliany, 2013).

The past literature on news credibility in Arab countries implied that news sources were somewhat controlled by regimes and, in this way, they served to constrict their news agendas as well as their presentational styles (Al-Qarni, 2004). Thus, the slight difference in government control between the print and online newspapers may account for Saudi Arabian audiences' different perceptions of news credibility among print and online newspapers (Alotaibi, 2016). Al-Jaber (2012) opines that credibility plays a vital role in media utilisation in the community because individuals tend to depend on channels they find provide them with truthful knowledge as well as information.

Recently in the United Arab Emirates, it has been reported by Jiang (2017) that local newspapers are perceived as the most credible compared to television, radio and social media. This is despite the fact that the usage of social media in this country is the highest among Arab Gulf countries as stated by Jiang. However, research reveals that news media credibility generally decreased in Saudi Arabia from 73% in 2013 to 69% in 2015 compared to the news media credibility in Tunisia, which increased from 23% in 2013 to 39% in 2015, and in the United Arab Emirates which also increased from 73% in 2013 to 87% 2015 (Dennis, Martin, & Wood, 2015). The differences between these three Middle Eastern countries can be understood in the light of the World Press Freedom Index in which Saudi Arabia was ranked 172 out of 180 – compared to Tunisia at 72, and United Arab Emirates at 133 (Reporters without Borders for Freedom of Information, 2019). Thus, in a news environment where the news media is controlled by the government, the rates of news outlet usage may not reflect their credibility rates.

In summary, these studies of print and online newspapers demonstrate that the characteristics of print and online newspapers showed lower effect on the perceived credibility than the audiences' characteristics did. Thus, the influence of news-audience-related factors such as location, age, literacy, gender and religious ideology on the perceived credibility of news was higher and clearer than the influence of newspaper-related characteristics while these audience-related-factors may impact on news audiences around the world differently.

The most commonly employed method for all of the cited studies in this literature review was the quantitative survey. This method can only show the patterns of credibility; it is unable to interpret these patterns to explore the reasons behind these scores. It is clear that there is a lack of studies on newspapers' credibility within a highly religious context such as Saudi Arabia, and a lack of studies exploring news audience's criteria for evaluating news credibility using a qualitative approach, methodologically. This research focused extensively on audience-related characteristics (age, gender etc.) and go beyond quantitative indicators of perceived credibility in order to understand news audiences' perceptions of credibility through a qualitative approach.

In addition, the literature shows that no previous studies have determined the credibility perceptions as well as the credibility criteria among Saudis towards particular local print and online newspapers. Likewise, it is important to know whether Saudis consume print or online news because of credibility or other factors, including freedom, availability, cost and ease of use. Therefore, given the importance of these issues and of Saudi Arabia as a key political and economic entity, this study focuses on the credibility and reliance of online and print newspapers in Saudi Arabia, taking into account its unique culture, level of government control and level of religiosity. To assist with this research, the remainder of this chapter focuses extensively on the attributes of news consumers and how their personal factors may impact their reliance on and their perceived credibility of the news providers. Ultimately, this understanding helps to evaluate these factors in the Saudi context.

## **2.5 Demographic Factors Influencing Credibility Perceptions**

This study focuses on the credibility of print and online newspapers from the audience perspective, thereby highlighting that it is vital to consider which personal factors may affect the credibility perceptions of media consumers. In addition, it is important to outline which situations may be affected to a greater or a lesser degree by those personal factors.

The news media and journalism revolve around credibility. With the emergence of websites that provide news online, journalism practised in conventional media, such as print newspapers, has witnessed an increase in the number of rivals in the news environment (Pew Research Center, 2018d). In this sense, questions have been raised as to how typical

journalism in traditional news media might react to the new players in the press setting. As such, most of the participants who are contacted when measuring in media fields adopt a negative stance towards the internet (Stoop, Kreutzer & Kircz, 2013). Moreover, the responses from journalists in classical media to online journalism will play a fundamental role in shaping the further advancement of journalism in the new media setting. Because of their different capabilities, most journalists who work in traditional media as print press regard it as more credible, and vice versa (Kovačić et al., 2010).

However, the new features of online media have not been accounted for as part of the trustworthiness criteria in media research (Chung et al., 2012). On the other hand, an investigation carried out regarding online journalism revealed that non-journalism blogs, such as citizen blogs, were perceived credibly by university students from mass communication classes – more so than online newspapers. This also included journalism blogs, so the news from news institutions was perceived as less credible than the news from other general blogs that were not affiliated with media organisations (Mackay & Lowrey, 2011).

Perceptions of journalists regarding news credibility may be affected by their work experience, such that they value the story of the journalism sector, whether in print journalism or online journalism, and this seems like a subjective opinion (Chan, Lee, & Pan, 2006; Kovačić et al., 2010). In addition, print advertising was compared with online advertising in terms of effectiveness, but there was no big difference between these two media outlets despite their different characteristics (Schwaiger, Cannon & Numberger, 2010). This drives the credibility research to go beyond this stage by engaging news audiences in studying the credibility of print and online newspapers. Thus, the responses from those who favour strongly the consumption of traditional media and online media will play a fundamental role in shaping the further advancement of journalism in both settings.

Authority perceptions are not entirely dependent on the news means or its quality, in that they also depend on the news consumers, who understand information differently depending on their cognition (Choi et al., 2006; Lee, 2018). Accordingly, it is vital to compare how credibility perceptions are affected differently based on personal factors, such as sexual characteristics, age, earnings, education and religiosity. Hence, an acknowledgement of these factors is essential when studying opinions about a research phenomenon (Marvez, 2008). In

this regard, Fox (2009) points out that religiosity can make a religious audience evaluate media outlets differently, regarding what they believe.

Moreover, religiosity emerges as a valid sphere for media predictability studies because religion is known to involve masses as well as to shape their socio-cultural values and attitudes. As explained later, this includes the fact that religiosity as a demographic factor is of particular significance to intercontinental studies in decidedly religious communities such as Saudi Arabia (and other countries in which the majority of their population are Muslims) (Mackay & Lowrey, 2011; Martin, Martins, & Naqvi, 2018). However, most studies of news credibility have focused on factors other than the religiosity factor. Thus, it is vital to start with the main personal factors in most credibility studies, which have considered the different perceptions of media credibility among females and males.

### **2.5.1 Gender and Credibility Perceptions**

Males and females showed positive attitudes regarding news consumption so no differences exist between the sexes in terms of the percentages of individuals who do not like following the news (American Press Institute, 2014). Thus, in the case of learning, both men and women report relatively higher enjoyment levels from consuming news and they are both likely to report watching, reading, or listening to an in-depth portion of the news in the current, breaking or previous week's news. Also, a study in Spain showed no influence of gender on the perceived credibility of newspapers (Fernandez-Planells, 2015).

However, some past studies on media credibility revealed that men and women hold different critical attitudes towards the news media platforms (Johnson & Kaye, 2000). American females showed higher perceptions of credibility towards online news sources than males did (Lee, 2018), while males have been shown to rank local print newspapers as more credible than their female counterparts (Armstrong & Collins, 2009a). Chung and Yoo (2008) highlighted the fact that gender was one of the main factors influencing the use of online newspapers among Americans. However, in a study focusing on over 25 nationalities including Asians, Westerners and Arabs, gender showed no influence on the perceived credibility of the target newspapers (Jiang, 2017). Also, despite the stable level of news media

credibility in the eyes of Australian respondents, the females showed a higher tendency to avoid news due to its negative impact (Nic et al., 2017).

The different patterns of news consumption and news utilisation that arise from gender differences may point to the possibility of gender-based perceptions of news credibility. It is important to consider that the distinction in media consumption between the two genders may be affected by their credibility perceptions of print news or online news. The high inequality between males and females in certain societies can maximise the differences between these two groups. Research points to the high inequality between males and females in Saudi Arabia (Aljasir, 2015; Miliany, 2015). In relation to that, the Saudi context can be useful for exploring the impact of gender on the perceived credibility of and the reliance rates on the given newspapers. Therefore, this study plans to target Saudi males and females.

### **2.5.2 Age and Credibility Perceptions**

The age issue is a crucial one because the young generation represents the largest demographic group in Saudi Arabia's population, as will be detailed in Chapter Four. To be more specific, this section is concerned with outlining the ways in which internet technology relates to young people's information seeking and source evaluation patterns.

Young people are commonly referred to as digital natives and gurus of the internet (Valcke, Bonte, De Wever & Rots, 2010), and this stems from the fact that the millennial generation has never experienced the world without modern information and communication technologies. This group of digital natives is noticeably more technologically well-informed than past generations, and its members have extensive knowledge regarding the use of computers and mobile phones (Nic et al., 2018). This has meant that the population is aware and conversant with alternative techniques of finding information, which has made them information players.

A notable desire reported by print newspaper readers in the 1980s was to shift to exclusively online newspapers when they became affordable (Heikkinen & Reese, 1986). Thus, the young generation is inclined to consume news through online news outlets, more so than other ages (Kit & Teng, 2010). Nevertheless, soft news, including music, entertainment, celebrity, lifestyle and fashion news, has been highlighted as preferable for the young

generation when considered in relation to political, government, society, business and technology news (Ha, Yoon, & Zhang, 2013). In addition, the literature evidences that most of the information contained within newspapers whether online or print can be classified as hard news (Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr & Legnante, 2011).

Metzger and Flanagin (2008) claim that the young generation desires readily accessible information, and this is notably one of the primary characteristics associated with the internet. This is also evidenced by the fact that the digital natives group forms a major proportion of the online social media community, and they use this channel to find news in a range of American, European and Asian countries (Nic et al., 2018). This is reflected in some of the approaches used by students in their information search patterns. According to Ha et al. (2013), who examined a sample group of American citizens, online news was preferred by the heavy users of social networking sites, who were mostly young. The same situation was reported globally by Newman et al. (2019) among different audiences from a range of European, American, and Asian countries; the younger generation showed higher consumption of news through online news outlets and platforms than the older participants, and unlike the older respondents, younger people rely mainly on social media networks for obtaining news. Thus, university students in Singapore who used social media frequently were more inclined to perceive the news presented by news organisations as credible, compared to news presented through social media networking sites (Tandoc, 2018). This points to a gap between the perceived quality of news and how frequently the news is consumed. According to Wilson et al. (2011), young individuals aged 18-23 years old in Malaysia described print newspapers as one of the most favoured news sources, but they consumed news through online outlets more frequently. Recently, it was reported that print newspapers are the main source of news among older audiences aged 35 years old and over in a range of countries across the Americas, Europe and Asia (Nic et al., 2017).

Given the nature of the present digital age, the learning process cannot escape these resources, and young people are encouraged to use the internet to access and collate as many sources of information as possible. Moreover, they apply self-taught techniques in which they look at the design of a website (Metzger & Flanagin, 2008). It must be noted that an analysis of the design of a site is rather broad because an individual explores many characteristics,

including publication date, author, site affiliations and others. Furthermore, a sizeable number of American undergraduate students who were media users increased their trust of news outlets based on social recommendations by people who were perceived as quality opinion leaders (Turcotte, York, Irving, Scholl & Pingree, 2015). This concept relates to the two-step flow theory (Meraz, 2011), which pays attention to the news interpretation flowing from the opinion leaders to the followers of media. As such, these news audiences' function as the go-to people when learners are evaluating the information they find; however, this concept is not related to this study. However, differences among young groups in different countries still exist. For example, it has been shown that the young in Brazil discuss news and politics through WhatsApp at 18% compared to only 2% of young UK respondents, and 5% of young UK individuals reported using podcasts for news compared to only 1% of young people in Singapore, the Netherlands, Sweden and Norway (Newman et al., 2019).

College students' common strategies for validating online news include evaluating the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the news, assessing the news to determine whether it is factual or subjective, and cross-referencing data with several sources (Metzger et al., 2003). College learners born after the 1980s have had a life that has been increasingly exposed to technologies, including computer screens, televisions, and films, and this is an important fact to consider (Aljasir, 2015). Moreover, American college students stated that determining the credibility of online information was much harder (at 41%) while the difficulty of evaluating the credibility of online or print sources in general for course work was approximately 26% (Head & Eisenberg, 2010). The younger generation was shown to consume more news through social networking sites than other ages (Ha et al., 2013), while social networking sites were perceived as less credible than newspapers (Johnson & Kaye, 2015). Thus, the younger generation can evaluate news credibility differently from the older generation. For example, among audiences in the UK, the BBC was reported as the top most credible online news outlet (Newman et al., 2019). However, young respondents under 30 years old showed lower credibility perceptions than those over 50 years old towards the BBC (Walker, 2018).

In addition, while the online world may attract audiences to move away from news in the traditional world such as print newspapers, this is not totally successful because a considerable difference exists between news media and the news and content they disseminate



(Alzahrani, 2016; Fortunati et al., 2015). The question of whether a certain news organisation deserves to be heard is ultimately dependent on the quality of the news it releases and its trustworthiness (Lee, 2011). Thus among South Koreans, the majority of university students (approximately 70%) read newspapers three times a week or more, with the main reason for this being the belief that it helps in their daily life (Stockwell, 2006), while this tendency may not reflect the attitudes of young Koreans these days as Koreans showed the lowest perceived credibility in Reuter's survey compared to American, European and Asian countries towards print and online news providers (Nic et al., 2018). Thus, the attitudes and credibility perceptions of news consumers towards news providers can change over time but differences between young and old generations exist. For example, young people aged under 35 years old in the US, UK, France, Italy, Spain, Ireland, Norway, Finland, the Netherlands and Japan showed less tendency towards the use of print newspapers for checking in with news in the morning at 4%, compared to 9% of those over 35 years old (Newman et al., 2019). Thus, the attitudes of young people towards print newspapers differ significantly from the older group. The perceived credibility of the news outlets can affect the attitude of the audience toward the news outlet.

Moreover, Rieh and Hilligoss (2008) stated that American university students depend on their predictive opinions and expectations for evaluating news credibility, so they are influenced more by their expectations than by credibility evaluations. Thus, a significant number of Korean university students refer to the recommendations of others, such as friends, to ensure that they choose the right website or the correct information (Biddix, Chung, & Park, 2011). This leads to an important question, which is how the older generation evaluates news credibility.

It is noteworthy that the definition of credibility may be perceived differently by different media consumers (Duerden, 2010). As such, the nature of the audience evaluating the news sources affects the trustworthiness criteria. In a study involving news journalists in Slovenia, the researchers aimed to explore their perceptions and measures for evaluating news outlets, and it was found that the main criteria for perceiving credibility was outlet reputation, which is in turn derived from the reporters and editors (Kovačić et al., 2010).

Concerning understandings of credibility, it is essential to note that a digital divide prevails in matters regarding news habits. While a considerable number of young Americans show a keen interest in news online, this is notably dissimilar to the older generations, who still have a preference for print news (Pew Research Center, 2008). Thus, the young generation not only consumes online news, but it also uses leading technologies for news sharing, dissemination and criticism.

In the American context, 50% of young people consume news from online media outlets, compared to 29% of older people; correspondingly, the percentages for print newspapers are 5% and 23%, respectively (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel & Shearer, 2016). The same pattern was reported among a range of European countries including the UK, Sweden, Germany, and Finland (Newman et al., 2019). The influence of age on news consumption can be extended beyond print and online news outlets to also the different ways of obtaining online news. Young people aged 18-24 years old in the US, the UK, France, Italy, Spain, Ireland, Norway, Finland, the Netherlands, and Japan showed that their first daily news check is through social media networking sites at 57% compared to those who are over 35 years old at 29%. Those over 35 years old reported that their first daily news check was through direct news websites at 39% compared to those aged 18-24 at only 23% (Newman et al., 2019). Additionally, age and the perceptions of the credibility of online mainstream news has been shown to be negatively correlated, as young participants rated online mainstream news as the most credible (Chung et al., 2012). Moreover, many older adults typically rely on press, radio and television for the news as opposed to their younger counterparts, who mostly rely on their mobile phones.

Adults aged between 18 and 29 years tend to search for news using their mobile phones. Differences also prevail in the habits of individuals aged between 18 and 29, compared to those aged from 30 to 39 years (American Press Institute, 2014). However, when looking at the younger generation among different countries, age can influence each society differently. For example, the mobile notifications from news sources among the young increased in the UK from 3% in 2014 to 20% in 2019, and increased in Finland from 5% in 2014 to 7% in 2019 (Newman et al., 2019).

By comparing the media audiences in several Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Egypt, a study found a large difference in the consumption and reliance on online news between the younger generation (aged from 18 to 24) and the older generation (aged 45 years or older) (Dennis et al., 2015). Notably, the researchers in the previous study found that the older generation consumed and relied more on print news outlets, while the younger generation was inclined to access news and rely on news access through online outlets and platforms.

Overall, Americans receive print news in considerable numbers every seven days, although distinctions exist among the different age groups. Seventy-five percent of individuals aged over 60 years read news from print sources, compared to 47% for 18- to 29-year-olds, 55% for 30- to 39-year-olds, and 61% for 40- to 59-year-olds) (American Press Institute, 2014). In this sense, it is apparent that the older generations are satisfied with the print news, which may be an indicator for trusting print news sources more (unlike the case of the young generation). This is because trusting the news can serve as a considerable part of the satisfaction derived from a news source. However, American university students regard the print newspapers as more credible than the internet despite their high internet usage, which interestingly demonstrates that they have greater trust in the media outlets they use the least (McCracken, 2011). It has been shown that there is an association between the usage of a media outlet and its perceived credibility, but studies tend to focus on this association as a concept and fail to investigate the direction of the influence. However, it has been demonstrated in the Netherlands that the usage of social networking sites has no influence on their perceived credibility by their users (Kruikemeier & Lecheler, 2018).

Regarding age credibility perceptions, therefore, many adults show a fondness for print sources or other types of traditional media for news (Newswire, 2010). However, the previous study showed also a growing use of online news sources, which means that accessing news by conventional means is highly preferred by those aged 55 years and above in the US – 81%, compared to 57% for the younger generation aged 18 to 34. Thus, the young gave internet news sources a higher credibility rating than their older counterparts, who in turn rated the credibility of traditional media higher than the younger generation (Armstrong & Collins, 2009b; Johnson & Kaye, 2000). Nevertheless, the younger generation is defined by

its widespread adoption of online sources, with the key conclusion in this respect being that the older generation is oriented towards print sources while the younger generation tends to consume online news, but the perceived credibility may not be attached to the consumed news outlets in all societies.

In fact, there is a lack of examination in the field of credibility criteria of young versus old newspaper audiences. Thus, this study asked Saudi participants of different ages ranging from 18 years old to those over 65 about the credibility perceptions and reliance rates on the given newspapers, as well as asking the respondents about their criteria for evaluating news credibility.

### **2.5.3 Income and Credibility Perceptions**

Income is a major force that can influence the degree to which an individual considers a print or online news source to be credible. Different levels of family income in any society invariably correspond to distinct ways of living, and this highlights the importance of gaining insight into the ways in which high-income and low-income individuals consume and perceive news.

Regarding high-income individuals in the US, 74% of this group has been shown to consume online news, while only 34% of low-income individuals have been shown to consume online news (Jansen, 2010). Indeed, internet use among members of high-income households is relatively high both at home and at work. In the United Kingdom, low income level was reported to be an influential factor on news consumption through online news outlets (Oliver, 2008). Recently, income level was reported to influence the consumption of both online news outlets and print newspapers in the USA (Anderson, 2018). This is suggestive of the fact that high-income individuals in a community are more likely than their low-income counterparts to have higher news consumption of news with other information.

A crucial point to note here is that the top earners in American society have not abandoned conventional media channels. Jansen (2010) notes that high-income populations turn to television and print media to access news and other information. This is especially pertinent for local news, where 76% of top earners in communities watch local and national news on television, while 51% access local news from print newspapers (Jansen, 2010).

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that income is associated with the ways in which a large number of Americans follow the news. Even though the young generation used social networking sites the most, their usage by the older generation was found to increase from one year to another, which may indicate that news consumers with a high income shift from online news outlets to others (Johnson & Kaye, 2014). On the other hand, individuals associated with high income levels in Brazil were more likely to consume news through online platforms (Nic et al., 2017). However, the influence of income level was not proven in Germany, so individuals with low and high income levels showed similar patterns towards consuming news through news websites (Nic et al., 2018).

Another notable difference associated with income level is the nature of the story type the individual is interested in. For instance, as noted by the American Press Institute (2014), high-income individuals were more interested in seeking political news (at 61%) compared to their low-income counterparts (35%).

Additionally, 98% of individuals with annual incomes of over US\$100,000 reported reading, watching or hearing news several times in their daily activities, while individuals with annual incomes of under US\$50,000 reported this at 87% (American Press Institute, 2014). In the UK, research reported that consuming news from the BBC was an obstacle for UK news audiences associated with low income levels (Oliver, 2008). Hence, seeking news from news outlets notably declines with a reduction in income level.

The desire to search for news using search engines, therefore, reduces when income level falls (Chan et al., 2006). This can affect the usage of particular news outlets which showed a correlation with the newspapers' credibility (Kiouisis, 2001). However, income levels can influence societies differently. The amount paid for online news was reported differently among a range of world countries, so the average rate of paying for online news was 11% in the UK, USA, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Denmark, Japan and Finland; the rate was only 9% among the news audiences in the United Kingdom and 8% in Germany, but this rate increased considerably in Norway at 34% and Sweden at 27% (Granger, 2019). Low-income individuals rated 24-hour TV news platforms – for instance, Fox News, CNN or MSNBC – as more credible than high-income individuals did (American Press Institute, 2014). In view of these considerations, it is important to recognise that the correlation between

these factors does not necessarily imply causation. This is especially pertinent given the results of a study in Slovakia indicating that income had no influence on the credibility perceptions of media consumers (Vilčeková, 2015).

In fact, there is no consensus about the impact of income level on news credibility or news consumption. The individuals with high income levels may have a higher probability to choose their news outlets based on perceived credibility in some societies, but this probability may not be available to those individuals with low income levels. For example, some online newspapers in particular societies are not free, while all online newspapers may be free in some societies such as Saudi Arabia. This can extend the probability among Saudi individuals with both low and high income levels to choose what news outlets to consume from based on other reasons – including perceived credibility, but not because of a shortage of money. Therefore, income level may influence some societies more than others in terms of the perceived credibility of and reliance on newspapers, keeping in mind that the ‘paid for’ internet service can be also an issue with news consumers associated with low income. From this consideration, this study plans to target respondents from different income categories starting from 1000 SR to over 15000 SR to cover most of the low and high income categories.

#### **2.5.4 Education Level and Credibility Perceptions**

The standard of education attained significantly impacts the way in which individuals follow news and is thus an illustration of the extent of authority they direct towards the news. As previously noted, the credibility of news outlets is perceived by the majority of news audiences as a prominent factor when selecting a news provider. Research revealed that only 11% of individuals holding a high school qualification or less stated that they accessed daily news information online, while in college graduates this rose to 44% (Pew Research Center, 2008). Approximately 95% of Americans with a college-level or a graduate school degree reported reading, watching and hearing news daily or numerous times in seven days (88% and 83%, respectively) (American Press Institute, 2014). The influence of educational levels can be extended beyond how much highly educated individuals consume news to what news outlets they tend to consume from. Thus, literacy level was shown to have an impact on news consumption among audiences from a range of countries worldwide, so the audiences associated with high levels of news literacy showed a stronger inclination to consume news

from print newspapers at 34% compared to the audiences associating with low levels of literacy who showed a tendency to consume from print newspapers at 20% (Nic et al., 2018).

Individuals who have attained a higher educational qualification are much more likely to report that they have read, viewed or listened to in-depth coverage during the previous seven days, compared to those with minimal educational qualifications (American Press Institute, 2014). According to Anderson (2018), it was evident among Americans that high education levels showed a correlation with print newspaper credibility while lower education levels showed a correlation with internet news. In addition, in Malta people with higher educational qualifications were inclined to trust news from traditional sources, including television and print newspapers, more than the online news (Mao, 2003), and Turkish individuals with higher educational qualifications consumed political news more than people with lower educational qualifications (Sönmez, 2013).

Additionally, attaining an education is also related to the issue of where Americans source their news. Overall, approximately 73% of those who had completed college or graduate school reported that they sourced their news from newspapers, compared to 66% of those who had completed college or high school, and 48% of those who had failed to complete high school (American Press Institute, 2014). Furthermore, highly educated individuals are likely to receive information from print or online magazines (46%), with this percentage dropping to 35% and 22% for high school or below and non-high-school qualified individuals, respectively. Thus, it has been demonstrated that secondary school students in Malta rated print newspapers as having low credibility at 10% compared to the more highly perceived credibility of print newspapers at 18% by those who held a university qualification or above (Mao, 2003).

Contrarily, less-educated people in Slovenia accessed internet news in general more frequently than highly educated people (Kovačić et al., 2010). However, the higher frequency is not necessary to be aligned with the high quality of news. Recently, audiences with high education levels from the US, the UK, Germany, and South Korea showed higher engagement with news quality than those with lower educational levels (Nic et al., 2018). For example, audiences in the UK associated with higher levels of education indicated a 35% rate for

obtaining news through reputable sources compared to only 20% of those who are associated with lower levels of education (Newman et al., 2019).

Overall, regarding the level of education, it is apparent that it also contributes to trustworthiness perceptions among individuals consuming either print or online content. For most highly educated people, their chances of consuming news from print sources are high, thereby indicating that the level of credibility is elevated. They also gather information from other online sources, although at a significantly lower rate. From this perspective, it is evident that among highly educated individuals, the consumption of news from print sources is significantly higher than it is for online sources. Where it is higher, this is compared to individuals with low levels of educational qualifications as stated in previous studies.

However, it is important to recognise that education may be affected by the audience's culture, and this is a dimension that is embedded within their educational curriculum. Moreover, media news outlets can be influenced by educational level in different ways from one society to another due to the different applied restrictions to the news industry in each country. For example, Newman et al. (2019) state that among audiences from the UK and Germany, more highly educated individuals evaluate news credibility generally more positively than those who are associated with lower educational levels. However, individuals in Slovakia with higher education levels showed lower confidence in news media generally than those with low education levels (Vilčeková, 2015). The news industry in Saudi Arabia is subjected to highly restricted regulations, as detailed in Chapter Four. Therefore, this study targets Saudis who have been educated to various levels, from high school diploma or lower up to PhD qualifications, to understand the extent to which educational level can impact on the perceived credibility of and the reliance on the given newspapers.

### **2.5.5 Location and Credibility Perceptions**

News media environments can play a big role in influencing the credibility perception of and reliance on newspapers and other news media outlets. Thus, the area where the study is carried out can be influenced by the loyalty of news audiences towards a particular news source based on its location – besides, of course, other factors – so loyalty can be for a news source based on its location, nationality, or type. For example, it was reported that being more



loyal to news consumption from print newspapers was associated negatively with the news through social media networks as a news platform – Facebook in particular (Chen, 2017). Print newspapers in Saudi Arabia started online versions not only to get a larger audience but to retain their loyal readers as well (Alzahrani, 2016). According to Fortunati, Deuze and de Luca (2014), the frequent readership of a particular newspaper can be a part of the reader's loyalty toward the newspaper. Thus, the news credibility of a news source can be influenced by the loyalty of the audience toward the news source (Lovas, 1992).

Moreover, news audiences in some societies may rely more on a news outlet than other societies. There are some commonalities between European countries in terms of press freedom, as most of them were ranked satisfactorily in this regard (Reporters without Borders for Freedom of Information, 2019). However, the differences between the credibility perceptions of news audiences in some of these countries do exist. For example, although audiences who pay for print newspapers in Denmark have decreased massively, the audiences paying for print newspapers in Norway still remain high (Newman et al., 2019). This does not mean these differences are caused by audiences' loyalty towards the news sources in these societies; rather, it means that loyalty can be one of several reasons leading to these differences. Also, when looking to other issues in terms of selected news outlets, differences can also be seen from one country to another. For example, in Singapore there are favourable attitudes towards print newspapers, but the situation has been found to be different among news audiences in South Korea who have less favourable attitudes towards print newspapers (Nic et al., 2017).

Research focusing on news credibility across a range of countries including Australia, Brazil, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States revealed differences among the audiences in these countries. News credibility was high in Finland at 68.1% and in Germany at 60.2% compared to 34.2% in Spain and 32.2% in the United States (Fletcher & Park, 2017). Thus, the loyalty of news audiences towards news brands was regarded as one of the influential factors influencing news credibility among a number of countries (Newman et al., 2019).

It has been found that even the different locations inside a country can also influence the credibility perceptions of newspapers based on their reputable situations and the loyalty

of the audiences towards these newspapers. For example, credibility perceptions were different between residents from the countryside and urban areas (Xu, 2012). Also, the Texas local newspaper received higher credibility from Texas residents than a given national newspaper (Speakman, 2011). Thus, it was reported that news credibility was influenced by audience loyalty (Calvo-Porrall, Martinez-Fernandez, & Juanatey-Boga, 2014).

Therefore, as some of the newspapers in this study are based on two main regions in Saudi Arabia which can affect the perceived credibility of each region's newspapers, the study targets audiences from these two regions to explore to what extent location can impact on the credibility perceptions of and reliance on the given newspapers.

### **2.5.6 Ideologies and Credibility Perceptions**

Ideologies can be embedded in different practices in a society. According to Silver (2019), the news was reported in the UK to be consumed and can be perceived in terms of credibility differently based on the audience ideology. Ideologies came from the shared ideas and beliefs among a social group based on social, political or religious bases (Dijk, 2004). Thus, across Germany, Sweden, the UK, Denmark, France, Netherland, Spain and Italy the ideology of populist views influenced the perceived credibility of news media negatively (Silver, 2018). However, some ideologies can be famously visible in some societies while other ideologies may be seen in others.

An ongoing debate can be found in the literature regarding the issue of how media outlets can be affected by politics. Politics is often the main subject of the news and it is therefore assumed that people evaluate the credibility of news media outlets based on their political stance and whether or not it is acceptable to the consumer. Consumers can also be divided into politically interested or disinterested users. This is not the reality of news because local media outlets are characterised by updated news that is not all related to politics but also to national and local events (Hafez, 2011). In the past, researchers have identified a relationship between the consumption of media and political opinions (Kaye & Johnson, 2002). There was a relationship between use time and political interest, so politically interested users who had a heavy reliance on the internet viewed online newspapers as more credible (Johnson & Kaye, 2000; Metzger & Flanagin, 2008).

Furthermore, online newspapers were consumed by politically interested readers more (at 43.3%) than print newspapers (at 31.2%) (Johnson & Kaye, 2010). Again, this can be explained by the manner in which agenda-setting is conducted for print media and online news sources. This is rooted in the understanding that the more citizens depend on the media, the more they judge it to be credible. Indeed, individuals in the previous study perceive their consumed information and news sources as the most credible, and this indicates that the more individuals visit online sources, the more they are likely to rate web credibility as high.

Nevertheless, Kaye and Johnson (2002) speculate that political attitudes are capable of influencing media perceptions, and this is because research has indicated that online users are more often than not politically interested. This agrees with the longstanding understanding in which credibility is not attached to the source of information. As indicated by Kim and Johnson (2009), **conservatives** might see traditional newspapers as more credible than online independent newspapers, while liberals may hold the opposite view. This can be related to the orientation of the news outlets, so **liberals** value the liberal outlets and **conservatives** value the conservative outlets more than other characteristics of the news. However, the pattern of conservatives towards the credibility of print newspapers was reported differently in a recent study among Americans in which conservatives gave print newspapers lower credibility (Yamamoto & Nah, 2018). This can be explained by the change in the agenda-setting of the print newspapers from time to time and from one place to another.

Moreover, not only do political attitudes affect consumers' attitudes towards media, but they also affect the media products that are offered to consumers. For example, Kuwaiti newspapers are influenced by politics as the liberal newspapers, not feeling obliged to conform with government restrictions, provide more political cartoons than the conservative newspapers, which may indicate the distinct desires of seeking freedom or maintaining regulations (Alkazemi & Wanta, 2015).

For better understanding, Metzger and Flanagin (2008) state that credibility should combine both political factors and social factors, which may together explain the judgement of the consumer, specifically when research regarding credibility is conducted in a context associated with a lack of democracy. It must be noted that media users are influenced by these dimensions at will, and consumers within a region can show differences in their judgement of

media authority. Metzger and Flanagin (2008) add that scholars have speculated over the approaches that media users apply in determining the trustworthiness of various platforms. These models, however, agree that the degree to which channels such as websites are scrutinised for their trustworthiness is dependent on consumers' ability to evaluate the message and the medium used. This also includes consumers' motivation to ensure that the information and news received is accurate as well as credible. For instance, online entertainment users may not engage in evaluating the credibility of a website as long as they are sufficiently entertained (Johnson et al., 2007; Metzger & Flanagin, 2008). Conversely, those users who are naturally more inclined to access accurate information, such as online political users, are likely to engage in a rigorous procedure of site analysis regarding the verification of the author's popularity and qualifications, as well as the ability to refer elsewhere to validate the information.

Another pertinent finding is that credibility perceptions among American adults regarding news sources are influenced by pre-existing attitudes towards politics and media news, as sceptics and non-sceptics (Carr et al., 2014). A relationship was observed between the perceived authority of a political blog and interaction with it. As such, consumers with high reliance and increased interaction perceived greater credibility than those with just high reliance but low interactions (Kim, 2012).

On the other hand, it was stated that pre-existing opinions, such as political scepticism, have a considerable influence on the way in which a user will evaluate trustworthiness for different types of media (Carr et al., 2014). Blogs have been used heavily by the American audience because of their independence and their unique news. In addition, many blogs are associated with mainstream news organisations, and this is an orientation that traditional news media are far away from achieving. Thus in the aforementioned study, the percentage of participants interested in the news was approximately 67.8% while the percentage interested in politics was approximately 64.9% (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). Thus, the opportunity for the readers of online news to interact with the subject matter and the author may contribute to increased credibility (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). In the UK the influence of any pre-existing opinions of political orientation had an effect on the perceptions of news media credibility, regardless of the source type or the degree of reliance on it. Here, the respondents without

populist views exhibited higher credibility perceptions toward the news media in general at 43% compared to the respondents with populist views at 26% (Pew Research Centre, 2018b). Moreover, the influence of ideology can be more obvious in one society over another. In relation to the previous study in the UK, the respondents from Germany showed a clearer result so the audience without populist views gave news media higher perceived credibility at 78% compared to the audience with populist views at 47% (Pew Research Center, 2018a).

However, since online information is increasingly mainstreamed, government trust predicts high authority for government media, as in China (Xu, 2012). As a result, people who trust their government will rank the institutionalised media as highly credible, despite their knowledge or suspicions of censorship, as in China. It was established that the authority of online news could be predicted through trust in the government. A study on blog credibility indicated that political factors, such as political environment, political interests and election attention, served as effective indicators of blog trustworthiness because of their in-depth information. As such, blogs are perceived to provide information that cannot be found through traditional news sources such as print newspapers and news media organisations (Johnson et al., 2007). Thus, the availability of greater quantities of information with online news outlets effectively motivates news consumers to shift from print news outlets to online news outlets (Johnson & Kaye, 2009).

According to Stroud and Lee (2013), the political interests of conservatives and republicans versus those of liberals and democrats had a considerable influence on the degree to which a user would evaluate a news website as credible. However, the previous studies were conducted during presidential elections and campaigns with politically interested users, while political factors cannot be applied to this current study because of the Saudi government's regulations. This means that Saudi people who practise politics informally through discussions with friends, relatives or online dialogues cannot engage officially in a formal way with political issues that contradict the government's views. However, religious ideology can be an influential factor in Saudi Arabia based on its status among Muslims around the world as it has the birth place of the Prophet Mohammed and the two holy cities of Mecca and Al Medina.

### ***2.5.6.1 Islamic Ideology***

When evaluating the credibility of media sources, religiosity also serves as a significant predictor. It controls societies with a majority of Muslims, serving as an ideology that is used to decide what to accept or ignore, as well as how to evaluate anything in Muslims' lives, including media. Thus, Islamic religion in societies with a majority of Muslims plays an important role in shaping Muslims' beliefs and perceptions (Dennis et al., 2015; Eissa, 2013). However, it is essential to note that religions, just as is the case with the media, are areas worth examining regarding mass communication since they are well investigated.

Religiosity has served as a central research topic in the psychological literature. It refers to two main features: first, a dispositional level, which points to conceptual religious beliefs, spiritual happiness and religious engagement; and second, a practical level, which relates to religious practices such as spiritual guidance, religious coping and the performance of religious prayers (Rusu & Turliuc, 2011). Nevertheless, it has been stated that despite the influence of religion on religious people, the research focusing on religion as an important variable for shaping society has been limited by a number of difficulties. One prominent difficulty is the inherent sensitivity of the topic in certain communities, irrespective of their religious status (Alsaedy, 2015; Christiano, Swatos & Kivisto, 2003).

One hundred and ninety nations were engaged in a study concerning the relationship between the religious nations and non-religious nations, along with their indicators of press independence, and one important fact revealed was that societies with a majority of Muslims were associated with less press freedom (Connolly-Ahern & Golan, 2007). Some correlations between the media consumption habits of highly spiritual consumers versus those with a low level of religiosity were explored in relation to the field of the press.

In Turkey, where the majority of population are Muslims, 872 university students were surveyed to determine the nature of the correlation between individual religiosity and political participation. A negative correlation was found, as a low level of religiosity increased political participation, while a high degree of religiosity reduced participation in political practices (Sönmez, 2013).

Additionally, by studying the relationship between news exposure and religiosity levels, a negative correlation has been observed such that an increase in religiosity is correlated with a decrease in information exposure (Marvez, 2008). Thus, high religiosity affects highly religious people, even in societies where most of the citizens are Muslims, in terms of their engagement with the political participation in news consumption, unless they feel that the media outlets are framed with an Islamic orientation, which they believe (Moaddel, 2010).

Moreover, highly religious people reduce their engagement with news media outlets when they feel that these news media outlets do not serve their Islamic orientation; they do so in order to protect themselves from the influence of these news media outlets. For example, a study based in Kuwait indicated that highly religious participants were less affected by social networking sites than those with low religiosity levels, primarily because religious people in societies with a majority of Muslims assume that the internet hosts secular media outlets (Almenayes, 2014). However, an important distinction to note is that the inclination to use media outlets or to refrain from exposure to news is associated with Muslims as individuals rather than Muslims as larger Islamic units.

Another example is that, the Muslim Brotherhood, Ansar Allah or the Houthis, Islamist groups of different orientations and the Supporters of Shari'a, namely Al-Qaeda, have not only engaged with media in Yemen but have also influenced the Yemeni media (Eissa, 2013). Such an outcome has arisen because each Islamic group thinks that their group is the only valid one for protecting Islam, interpreting and applying Islamic laws, and leading their country towards the correct Islamic perspective (Eissa, 2013). Furthermore, in the Egyptian elections of 2005, the Muslim Brotherhood gained 20% of the seats compared to other political groups, which won only 2%. Thus, the competition between the Muslim Brotherhood as a political party and the National Democratic Party, which held power at that time, was significant and tense (Shehata, 2007).

In Malaysia, Darul Arqam is an Islamic movement, and when it was established its primary goal was to spread Islamic learning (Abu Bakar, 1981). In this way, a central objective of the movement was to ensure that mosques were full of people coming to pray. After their success, however, they went beyond this plan and engaged in further Islamic

activities, thereby changing the society so that it conformed to Islamic laws, in line with their interpretation of God's sayings (Koran) and the Prophet's sayings (Hadith) (Abu Bakar, 1981). Thus, it can be seen how highly religious people may participate heavily with media outlets when the media outlets can help them to spread their beliefs. Otherwise, they may be largely disengaged.

In Saudi Arabia, the Wahhabism Movement is renowned as a way of representing and interpreting Islam (Abedin, 2002). The Wahhabism Movement can be labelled as an ascetic Salafi approach, based on its Islamic understanding and the application of Islamic principles to life issues, starting with an individual as a Muslim and then moving on to the society, organisations and government as Islamic institutions. Its influence has touched Saudi society and culture in its entirety, including local media, education and daily activities, as it clearly states what is forbidden and what is not forbidden (Schanzer & Miller, 2012). The Wahhabism Movement was the religious orientation of the military for the founder of Saudi Arabia, King Abdul-Aziz, and it has built a positive reputation since that day in 1932 (see Chapter Four).

In fact, the twenty-first century is a new stage for religious people, where faithful supporters have gained more strength than secular supporters because of new technology; notably, technology has enabled religious people to access audiences that in the past were out of their reach. As such, the present situation of Wahhabism with technology is stronger than its previous situation, because its influence can be internationalised (DeMuth & Levin, 2008). Thus, it can be seen that the attitudes of highly religious people in societies with a majority of Muslims, who participate in politics less than people with lower religiosity rates, inspire the question of how the religiosity dimension can affect news media evaluation, as news media outlets are loaded heavily with political news and issues (Gazzaz, 2006). In addition, the case of news media outlets in Saudi Arabia, taking into consideration the influence of the Wahhabism Movement, can be affected greatly by religiosity, which encourages this research to explore this influence in terms of credibility and reliance for the given newspapers.

Religion is acknowledged as one of the essential factors that influences an individual's life and the life of a society through history. The majority of religiosity studies, which examine the effect that religiosity has on different aspects of personal life, have proceeded from the



Christian perspective, but this viewpoint is clearly distinct from those of other religions (Abdel-Khalek, 2010).

However, the effect of spirituality may be diverse from one culture to another, depending on the levels of religiosity and the understanding of religion. In a study comparing Kuwaiti college students with American college students in terms of religiosity, the indicator of high religiosity was more closely associated with the Kuwaiti college students than it was with the American college students (Abdel-Khalek & Lester, 2015). People in different cultures have been influenced by religions differently; Muslims are influenced by Islam not only in their physical behaviour but also in terms of their psychological health, as it is commonly thought that Islam is a treatment for depression (Abdel-Khalek, 2013). This means that in societies with a majority of Muslims, culture and Islam cannot be separated (Davids, 2016). This is because religiosity has diverse meanings and can have different effects in Islamic and Christian cultures. These differences can be attributed to variance regarding the role of religion in societies with a Muslim majority. However, cultural traditions and norms attributed to Islamic rules can also influence societies with a Muslim majority differently based on the different understanding of Islamic rules and teachings among these societies.

The investigation of levels of religiosity in one study revealed different credibility rates for newspaper news versus network television news, as high levels of spirituality were associated with high trust in paper-based variants and low trust in network television (Golan & Day, 2010). However, Golan and Day (2010) did not link the results with the sample demographics, and this is a crucial consideration because other studies on media credibility reviewed in this chapter have revealed demographic factors. This is a primary variable for predicting media trustworthiness, depending on the media outlets studied, and the media environments or cultures where the samples are selected.

In another study concerning the influence of religiosity on the perceived credibility of media outlets, the researchers reported evidence of an interrelationship between the credibility perceptions of the media landscape in the Arab states and levels of religiosity (Golan & Kioussis, 2010). However, this was based on secondary data from Moaddel and Karabenick (2008), who studied Islamic fundamentalism, so most of their scale items addressed the importance of God and the Prophet, and were not able to differentiate between people's levels

of religiosity in Saudi Arabia. This is because most people, irrespective of their level of religiosity, strongly agree with these aspects of the faith. Accordingly, this study explored whether the respondents' religiosity levels influence their evaluation of news credibility. Therefore, the motivation for this study is to bridge this knowledge gap by ascertaining Saudi Arabian people's views on the credibility of print newspapers as well as online newspapers. The investigation of the given newspapers among Saudis cannot isolate the influence of religious ideology from the perceived credibility of and the reliance on the target newspapers. Thus, this study targets Saudi from different levels of religiosity to have a variety of religious patterns.

## **2.6 Conclusions**

The news media, irrespective of the distinction between traditional or new media, is built on credibility. The concept of credibility, as seen here, is rooted in particular qualities that audiences from all backgrounds attach to news and information. This includes such characteristics as credibility, which relates to the manner in which individuals believe something. With the materialisation of the internet and its adoption as a news platform, questions have arisen over which areas can be trusted to provide credible information. Many traditional media companies are introducing online platforms through which they can disseminate news, while other news companies specialise in online content only.

In this case, different perceptions have emerged concerning the credibility of news organisations in relation to age, gender, education level, income level, location and religiosity and the societies where the studies are done. The differences between the results of the studies reviewed in this chapter pertaining to print versus online newspapers may be due to several reasons, such as government trust, freedom, availability, cost, convenience and the environment in which credibility is studied. Here, a critical consideration is that consumers of news use a range of factors to evaluate the credibility of the information they are presented with.

Thus, the personal factors of Saudis that influence the credibility of and reliance on local newspapers in Saudi Arabia, whether online or print, need to be explored, thereby deriving a comprehensive understanding from the audience's perspective. Furthermore, many

of the previous studies in Western and Middle Eastern contexts have focused on comparing media outlets that have widely disparate features, for example, comparing television with radio or the internet.

To develop a close understanding of news media credibility, however, it was useful to compare the news media outlets that are intimately related in terms of their features and work processes, which involves comparing several print newspapers with several online newspapers.

It is also notable that a considerable number of the previous studies have concentrated mostly on the young generation. As it is clear to the reader, a sample of undergraduates from different universities cannot reflect an entire society. This provides a motivation for engaging a diverse group of participants from these societies in future work, thereby providing the opportunity to develop a better appreciation of newspaper readers' credibility perceptions and, moreover, how they evaluate newspapers' credibility.

Existing literature features relatively little examination of the perceptions and implications of newspapers among Saudi audiences. This represents a gap that the present study seeks to fill. Furthermore, in the research cited above, whether in Western societies or Middle East societies, most of the researchers have employed only survey techniques for data collection, as a quantitative method. The limitations of this method restrict their findings, as the survey process hinders the collection of rich, in-depth and detailed data. This is due to the use of closed-ended questions, which are appropriate for applying a quantitative method, such as a questionnaire, but not a qualitative method, such as interviews.

This research focused on an examination of how these individual characteristics impact the perceptions of credibility and consequent reliance on print and online newspapers. Therefore, Table 1 presents a summary of findings that have been derived from the literature regarding the relationship between the personal factors of audiences, media credibility and reliance. Each of these was taken into consideration when exploring the perceptions of credibility and reliance held by Saudi audiences with respect to Saudi newspapers in Chapter Six.

**Table 1: The impact of personal factors on media credibility and reliance**

Personal Factor	Tendencies	Exploratory Questions
Gender	-Men rely on print newspapers more than women, whereas women rely on online newspapers. Also, print newspapers are perceived credible by men more than women while women are less critical of online newspapers than men.	-What is the impact of personal factors on the credibility and reliance of Saudi Arabian print newspapers with their online counterparts and exclusively online newspapers?
Age	-Older age groups rely on print newspapers more than online newspapers, whereas younger groups rely on online newspapers. Also, online news is perceived to be credible by young people more than it is by old people.	
Income	-High-income audiences rely on print newspapers more than low-income audiences. Also, print newspapers are perceived credible by high-income people more than by low-income people.	
Education	-Highly educated audiences rely on print newspapers more than less-educated audiences. Also, print newspapers are perceived to be credible by highly educated people more than by poorly educated people.	
Location	-Locals rely on their local newspapers more than non-locals. Also, locals give their local newspapers more credibility than non-local newspapers.	
Religious tendencies and ideologies	-Highly religious audiences rely on print newspapers more than moderately religious audiences. Also, moderately religious people trust news print and online newspapers more than highly religious people. Highly religious	

	audiences have different standards for evaluating credibility than moderately religious audiences.	
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However, the literature reviewed in this chapter has demonstrated that the impact of personal factors varies based on the differences between media environments. Given that Saudi Arabia is different to other Middle Eastern and Western societies in terms of its cultural and religious tendencies, it is reasonable to expect that these factors will have a different impact on the perceptions of Saudi audiences regarding newspapers' credibility and reliance, compared to audiences in other countries. This calls for an understanding of social group behaviours in societies. Ultimately, this will facilitate a deeper understanding of how these cultural and religious tendencies impact the perceptions of social groups in Saudi Arabia, and this will be the focus of the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

# **Understanding an Appropriate Tool for Interpreting the Outcomes of Social Categories on Media Credibility and Reliance**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to develop an understanding of the studies that have been applied to investigate the differences between social categories in terms of evaluating news credibility, then viewing the most used theories to understand the social categories' differences in order to select the most appropriate theory to be used as a tool for interpreting the differences between Saudi social categories in this study. This research mainly focuses on the similarities between individuals who belong to one social group regarding their credibility perceptions of local print, their online counterparts, and online exclusive newspapers in Saudi Arabia.

### **3.2 Research Concerning the Influence of Social Categories on Evaluating Media**

The increased proliferation of online media has led to a significant shift in relation to social construction, as some social categories are structured differently in real life than in online worlds. In reality, this is because individuals join or engage with already-existing social categories, while in the online world, they have an opportunity to reshape existing social clusters or create entirely new social categories. Therefore, in this context, this section reviews the main findings of the studies concerning the differences among social categories in relation to media evaluations by media active audiences, then points to the knowledge gaps that this study aims to fill.

At first, the media audiences' perceptions of sports reporters' credibility on television were affected by the sports reporters' gender (Ordman & Zillmann, 1994). In contrast, Baiocchi-Wagner and Beham-Morawitz (2010) found that the sports reporters' gender did not influence the credibility perceptions of the audience significantly, as it had been shown to in a previous study. Also, research revealed that gender had a significant influence on the

different evaluations regarding their communication through social media networking sites among social categories – males had more negative evaluation rates than females (Barker, 2009). Thus, social categories can influence media audiences' perceptions of credibility differently, depending on the media content, the time of study and the sample characteristics. In addition, the gender factor may affect evaluation in some societies more than in others, such as Saudi society versus some Western societies.

Media scholars have studied ethnicities to explain intergroup associations. This is because group members tend to identify with what they perceive to be their norms and culture. A study was conducted focusing on how American, German and British groups were different for evaluating entertainment series on television, but the indicators were not clear as they had many similarities, which was unexpected (Trepte & Krämer, 2007). Furthermore, in earlier research, Mastro (2003) and Mastro, Behm-Morawitz and Kopacz (2008) suggested that in-groups favour interpretations found in the television portrayals of ethnic in-groups, as opposed to out-groups. In this context, the study of McKinley, Mastro and Warber (2014) found that media images are likely to be judged by female users based on their social in- or out-groups; this was true for female Latinas in the United States of America but this was not the case for female whites, therefore some social categories may have more influence on evaluating media than other groups in a society.

In contrast, research of race focused on exploring how race (black versus white) affects people's selection of news stories, which in turn reinforces their social categories (Appiah, Knobloch-Westerwick & Alter, 2013). Furthermore, research revealed that various community groups, including African Americans, Latinx, Indians and Vietnamese people, used different expressions based on their different social categories through online media interactions (Grasmuck, Martin & Zhao, 2009).

However, the study of Trepte and Krämer (2007) was based on questionnaires which, as with many studies engaging the differences between social categories, failed to explore the interpretations of social categories regarding their differences. On the other hand, the study of Appiah et al. (2013) was based on a lab experiment, which caused clearer outcomes but the sample in both studies comprised only the young generation (university students). They may have many commonalities because of world connectivity, which integrates cultures

throughout the online world. Thus, even if the indicators of the sample actions are similar, this does not mean that the attached interpretations of the sample should be similar. Perloff (2014) stated that current media research uses the social approach to demonstrate how media content creates new social categories, but each group research should be dealt with as a unique indicator without generalisation, as some influential social categories are more visible and stronger in some societies than in others.

Correspondingly, Bennett (2012) has argued that the media invades social, political and cultural spheres to influence consumers to join or oppose particular social categories. Thus, social categories can be affected by the differences between media organisations and environments, which may imply new perceptions of media outlets, including the press, among consumers.

In terms of the ethical dimension, media-related research conducted by Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010) points to the research of social categories as a step to explain how the media exacerbates social tensions, for example between Muslim and non-Muslim groups. In this case, it is an unmistakable fact that the media plays a vital role in defining the manner in which these intergroup relations are perceived in the viewers' eyes (Manago, Graham, Greenfield & Salimkhan, 2008).

With regard to age, media research has studied the actions and interactions of social networking sites (Facebook and Instagram) to investigate the influence of social categories on the actions and interactions with the content of social networking sites (Fujita, Harrigan & Soutar, 2018).

Ideologies have been an interesting area of social categories research as they can affect the standards of individuals for evaluating any content, depending on which social categories they belong to. Alexander (2005) investigated several religious groups, the two main ones being Muslims and Christians. This research was the result of international tensions between America and the Arab world, and it aimed to trace the origin of the conflict. The findings show that the social group influence of Lebanese participants impacts their evaluations when asked to compare Lebanese and American cultural status. Participants who identified with Arab, Palestinian or Muslim social groups rated the social position of the USA as lower.



Social Identity Theory was therefore engaged in research to investigate the strength of some social categories when evaluating news; it revealed that a conservative group had the strongest influence between the study's social categories, including the liberal group, therefore ideology groups play a major role in the evaluation of the news (Devine, 2015).

In fact, previous studies have shown the significance of some characteristics that influence social categories including gender, ethnicity, age and ideology with regard to media audiences' evaluations of media outlets, as well as their usage patterns. These were found to differ depending on the audiences' social categories.

### **3.3 The Most Used Theories to Understand the Perceived Credibility among Social Categories**

The field of media theories in relation to news credibility has been engaged with two theoretical approaches – the passive audience approach and the active audience approach (Blumler, 1979; Miller, 2005). The passive audience approach includes theories that study the influence of media on media audiences; these view audiences as powerless. An example is the medium theory, which has been applied to explore source credibility by focusing on the medium features and elements and how these elements affect the audience's perceptions of credibility (Chiagouris et al., 2008; Lowry et al., 2014); how the news structure of the news media outlet affects the audience's perceptions of news credibility (Appelman & Sundar, 2016; Chung, Kim, & Kim, 2010; Sundar, 1999); how the credibility of the media outlet and the media outlet reporters affect the audience's perceptions of news credibility (Sabigan, 2007); and how advertising in news media outlets affects their credibility among audiences (Greer, 2003). The two-step flow theory was associated with this approach to explore how people's perceptions of the credibility of the news are influenced by opinion leaders (Meraz, 2011; Turcotte et al., 2015).

Diffusion theory has been applied to investigate the influence of online news elements on the audience's perceptions of website credibility, including news processing (Metzger et al., 2003), while the two-way-communication theory has been applied to differentiate between the perceived credibility of different media outlets through the feedback that audiences provide to some media outlets (Porter et al., 2015).

Also, the priming theory has been applied in credibility research to show how media news outlets affect audiences' evaluations of news credibility. The audience members are primed with standards that they should apply when assessing news credibility, therefore their evaluations of credibility will differ depending on the news outlet that they are most exposed to (Bucy, D'Angelo & Bauer, 2014).

Some credibility research has applied a mix of theories from the two credibility theoretical approaches, in order to explore how some audience factors and news media outlet factors influence credibility perceptions. For example, the exposure theory has been used to study how the credibility of the news is affected by audiences' exposure patterns (Armstrong & Collins, 2009b; Nisbet et al., 2017); the social cognitive theory has been employed to explore how audiences' perceptions of credibility are affected by the audiences' intentions towards news media outlets, as well as media efficacy (Shen, Lu, Guo, & Zhou, 2011); and the prominence-interpretation theory has been applied to determine how the prominence and interpretation of news websites affect their perceived credibility (Chiagouris et al., 2008).

On the other hand, the active audience approach includes theories which assume that media audiences have the power to influence media, and that they are enabled to choose the media they want and carry out the actions they choose. For example, the uses and gratifications theory has been used to study news credibility (Al-Jaber, 2012; Johnson & Kaye, 2010a; Tsftati & Cappella, 2005); the secularisation theory has been employed to explore the credibility perceptions of religious groups, as these perceptions are based on their pre-existing beliefs about modern societies and technologies, including media outlets (Golan & Baker, 2012); the encoding/decoding theory has been applied to link audiences' credibility perceptions with their interpretations – audiences perceive the credibility of media outlets differently because of their different interpretations and understandings, which depend on their decoding of the meanings that were encoded by media outlets (Byrum, 2014). Selective exposure theory has been applied to news credibility to show how audiences choose to consume the news and evaluate its credibility depending on their preferences (Melican & Dixon, 2008). Finally, Social Identity Theory has been successfully applied in news credibility research to explore how the shared patterns of news credibility are formed by particular social categories, as will be detailed in this chapter.

However, the literature review about credibility dimensions showed how specific news media outlets were perceived differently in terms of their credibility, mainly based on audiences' different demographic characteristics particularly as social categories; this fits with the active audience approach. Thus, the passive audience approach is not related to the target of this research and it does not answer the research questions. Furthermore, mixing passive and active audience approaches may lead to conflicting outcomes and a failure to answer all of the research questions, so a suitable approach for this study is the active audience approach.

From the active audience theories, Ruggiero (2000) claims that the uses and gratifications theory is a better fit when studying how audiences use new technology or when comparing two or more different media outlets or platforms that have large differences in their features, such as television versus radio or print newspapers, or old versus new media (Facebook and Twitter). This theory can also help study how the new technology gratifies audiences in general, regardless of its components. However, the current study focuses on the components of print and online newspapers that have been used for a long time; it does not explore what people do with media (uses and gratifications) but what people believe about media credibility perceptions among social categories (Martin et al., 2018). Thus, the uses and gratifications theory is appropriate for studying media outlets in general, regardless of their subjects, which is not the case in this study as this study concentrates on the news subjects in print and online newspapers (Al-Jaber, 2012; Johnson & Kaye, 2010a; Tsfaty & Cappella, 2005).

Secularisation theory is not the suitable choice for this study because this theory deals with all religious groups as if they have one position towards media, regardless of the differences between media outlets. Therefore, this theory is unable to investigate a religious group's perceptions when a media outlet partly follows the religious group's beliefs (Golan & Baker, 2012). The encoding/decoding theory is in some respects suited to studying the credibility perceptions of media audiences, but it is not the preferred theory because it considers two sides: the encoder (media) and the decoder (audience). It therefore explores the techniques used by media providers and combines them with the audience's interpretations of these techniques, which can lead to a misunderstanding on either of the two sides because they are not symmetrical.

In addition, the selective exposure theory may not answer questions related to news credibility because the link between high credibility rates and the selective exposer may be not accurate. For example, it has been mentioned in some research that news consumers may believe what they do not prefer and prefer what they do not believe (Metzger, Hartsell & Flanagin, 2015).

Thus, the theory which can be the most appropriate tool for this study is one that can interpret the credibility perceptions between individuals as social categories, focusing on a specific media outlet (newspapers) with a specific subject (news), among Saudi social categories. The theory that fits these criteria is Social Identity Theory, which can be used as a tool to interpret the credibility perceptions of newspapers among social categories – this is explored further in this chapter.

In fact, Chapter Two concluded that individuals' social identifiers such as age, gender, income, location, educational attainment and religious ideologies have an impact on their media choices and their perceptions of the credibility of and reliance on printed and online newspapers. As mentioned earlier, there are a number of theories that can explain the influence of news media on news consumers in terms of credibility perceptions or exploring mixed credibility perceptions from the news media angle and from the news consumers; however, these theories are not relevant to this study because they do not focus on the differences in credibility perceptions from the audience angle amongst individuals as social categories. Thus, a social identity approach might be able to help understand the differences between these social categories in terms of the credibility perceptions of and the reliance on online and print newspapers in Saudi Arabia. The next section provides some background of Social Identity Theory to develop a better understanding about this tool in terms of its dimensions.

### **3.4 Understanding The Proposed Tool for Interpreting This Study “Social Identity Theory”**

According to Tajfel (1982), the social identity theories increasingly operate at a conceptual level, serving to transform the meanings associated with identity in psychology. Tajfel highlights the sociality of the construct in several ways, including the conception of social identity as a relational term; essentially, it defines people's identities as functions of

their similarities, as well as any differences with their peers. Additionally, social identity is a construct that is shared with others, and which can provide a foundation for shared social action. As Tajfel has demonstrated, social identity involves certain dimensions, including communication. Tajfel also demonstrated that the cornerstone of the social identity approach involves examining the ways in which psychological dimensions are played out independently of social contexts. Rather than applying psychology to displace other explanations that concern human actions, Tajfel's approach aims to account for how and when social structures - as well as belief systems - influence an individual.

Previous research shows that there are two main theories underpinning the social identity family theory, as explained below:

a. ***The self-categorisation theory*** focuses on the conditions or characteristics that lead to an individual's categorisation of themselves in a particular social faction (Brown, 2000). As such, the self-categorisation theory involves an exploration of self-identity-related issues, in which the personal factors defining members of a social category are understood (Lange, Kruglanski & Higgins, 2012). However, the self-categorisation theory is not relevant to this study, as it focuses on individuals as individuals.

b. ***Social Identity Theory*** focuses on the relationships between individuals within a society, as part of an in-group or out-group, in order to compare 'we' versus 'they'. The self-categorisation theory, on the other hand, focuses on people as separate selves - comparing 'I' with 's/he' (States & Burke, 2000). Unlike the self-categorisation theory, this approach examines individuals as groups within society, and plays a significant role in societies as it is useful both for interpreting the behaviours of individuals and groups relative to an in-group or out-group, and for exploring how societies regulate different social categories depending on the individual culture and context (Hogg & Reid, 2006).

As such, the Social Identity Theory involves a focus on social phenomena that link people together. This includes understanding the pivot between society and the individual. It can be said that people categorise themselves as belonging to a group and that this can change them. Individuals begin to perceive themselves and in-group members in terms of

the typical dimensions that characterise the group. These aspects can include the beliefs, as well as the roles, at the core of the team.

Therefore, the main objective of this study is to explore how social categories influence the common credibility criteria and the common patterns of reliance among Saudis on the given newspapers. Social Identity Theory was used as a tool to interpret the different results between social categories based on the personal characteristics (identified in Chapter Two) of audiences in Saudi Arabia in terms of their perceived credibility of and reliance on print and online newspapers.

### **3.4.1 Dimensions of Social Identity Theory**

The concept of social identity has become one of the most important foundations that influence the formation of people's understanding about who belongs to the same culture. People's perceptions across all societies are shaped by identity affiliations; thus, people of every culture accept ideas that support their characters and are likely to reject ideas that do not support their characters (Deaux & Martin, 2003). The main objectives of Social Identity Theory include the *categorisation* of the social categories in a culture, i.e. the *identification* of the groups to which individuals belong and comparing in-groups' membership (Barreto & Ellemers, 2003). The latter refers to the *comparisons* between the group's members towards their group, while the term 'out-groups' refers to comparisons between the group's members and other social groups' members (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Thus, individuals' actions within their groups are mediated by socially shared meanings between the group members. These concepts will be further explained in section 3.4.3 of this chapter, to identify the most relevant category for this research.

Tajfel (1970) established Social Identity Theory in the 1970s while conducting an experiment with groups on rewards and penalties, whereby unprecedented favouritism was apparent between in-groups. The findings showed that the study subjects showed a tendency to reward unknown in-group persons more than out-group ones. It then follows that Social Identity Theory highlights the differences between personal and social identities as mentioned earlier. This research, however, is not concerned with the personal identity of newspaper

audiences but investigates the shared meanings amongst different social categories in terms of their perceived credibility of and their reliance on online and print newspapers.

In addition, this theory is a helpful relevant tool to this study as the media audience can be categorised as an ‘in-group’, with associated personal factors including gender, age, education, occupation, region or religiosity engagement. At this point, individual views can be said to mirror, as well as define, the groups with which one identifies.

### **3.4.2 Definition of Social Identity Theory**

Tajfel defined the social identity principle as a concept that refers to the collective beliefs of groups to which individuals either belong or do not belong (Tajfel, 1974). In addition, numerous researchers have employed Tajfel’s definition of Social Identity Theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Durrheim, Quayle, Tredoux, Titlestad & Tooke, 2016; Hogg, Abrams, Otten & Hinkle, 2004; Mastro, 2003). Thus, this study adopted this definition with some changing regarding the common beliefs while the rest is compatible. In other words, this study focuses on exploring the interpretations which maybe different than the beliefs regarding the credibility of and reliance on the target newspapers among the study sample. While this Tajfel’s definition concerns the common beliefs among social groups, the study concerns the common interpretations.

Social Identity Theory is increasingly focused on the relationship between individuals and social clusters, emphasising the commonalities with the groups to which they belong, as well as the non-commonalities with the sets to which individuals do not belong (Tajfel, 1982). Social Identity Theory’s basic principles contend that people are motivated to develop positive characteristics that imbue them with a feeling of safety and enhance their self-worth.

### **3.4.3 The Core Elements of Social Identity Theory**

This section aims to explain the main elements of Social Identity Theory, which guides the process of using this theory as an interpreter tool for the study results, as explained below:

#### ***a. Categorisation Element***

Social categorisation is a subjective process through which individuals in a society categorise themselves and others into social categories, in a manner that is meaningful to the

classifier (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy & Flament, 1971). Social categories are categorised based on similarities or dissimilarities between social categories, such as women versus men or Muslims versus Christians, to focus on shared meanings and to ignore factors that are not related to the group. These could include meanings or actions that do not represent their in-group identity (Ellemers, De Gilder & Haslam, 2004).

Accordingly, Ellemers et al. (2004) argued that social categorisation involves the notion that in many situations, individuals organise information by cataloguing people into sets. This provides them with an opportunity to focus on common characteristics that are of significance to the situation at hand. This aligns with the objective of this study, whereby the subjects of the research were catalogued according to their common attributes into sets of 'in-groups' according to their personal characteristics such as age, gender, level of education etc., as mentioned previously in Chapter Two.

However, this study looks for the categorisations that Saudi audiences can fall into, in order to investigate the influence of social categories on the perceived credibility of and reliance on the given newspapers. This is an important point for this study, which attempts to catalogue the subjects of this research based on the audience categorisations, such as their degree of religiosity.

### ***b. Identification Element***

According to Jenkins (1992), social identification is a crucial process by which people define themselves and identify commonalities with others to reinforce a sense of belonging to specific social categories. On the other hand, Ellemers et al. (2004) present a meaningful definition of social identification that involves information concerning social categories and the self. In other words, social identification is conceived of as a person's preference to see themselves as a delegate of the group. This helps a human being to understand the representative group characteristics as self-descriptive, as well as leading them to take up different norms as their guiding principles for behaviour.

According to Ellemers et al. (2004), people can belong to compound groups, and the qualified degree to which they view themselves as belonging to one of these groups can be determined. Even though this study agrees with Ellemers et al., particularly when categorising



the respondents of this study according to their compound groups, this study only focuses on the dominant social categories in order to evaluate their perceptions of online and print newspapers.

In fact, the social identification element is important when exploring what social category the individuals in a society identify themselves to belong to. However, little research has been conducted on why those individuals identify themselves with certain social categories, as most individuals may identify themselves with high-status social categories whether they share the groups' views or not (Donoso & Ribbens, 2010). This research drew on these concepts by calling for the subjects of this study to identify their own perceptions of their religious and social status.

### *c. The Comparisons Element*

Social Identity Theory proposes that individuals compare their in-group's beliefs or attitudes with out-groups to maintain a cohesive social identity, as well as concluding that their group's differences are unique.

Ellemers et al. (2004) characterised social comparison as a process of understanding the social categorisations that are invested with meaning. While individuals may have a relatively clear idea of the array of characteristics applied to a group, proponents of Social Identity Theory assert that social comparisons with other groups determine the features that define a social category in certain scenarios (Treppe & Krämer, 2007). These characteristics were used in this study to distinguish social categories in the KSA compared with other social categories that are the subjects of this study.

Nonetheless, research shows that religious, national and ethnic groups should be examined in studies of intergroup comparisons, as they are the most useful groups to use when determining the influential factors that affect intergroup comparisons (Brown, 2000). Accordingly, this study has identified religion and national groups in addition to other personal factors (see Chapter Two) for the categorisation of the intergroup comparison in relation to newspaper reliance and credibility perceptions.

On the other hand, the norms that are applied by the members of a group versus another group have not been the focus of attention in past research (Donoso & Ribbens, 2010). Moreover, comparisons between social categories, without having real values and norms to use, can lead to unreal comparisons. Therefore, this study analysed the norms and criteria of the participants, categorised according to their perceptions of newspapers' credibility and reliance.

Moreover, the importance of employing Social Identity Theory as interpreter tool in this study is based on the relationship between individualism and collectivism. As such, social categories have a more significant influence in a collectivist culture than in a more individualist society (Gundlach, Zivnuska & Stoner, 2006). Saudi Arabia (which is the focus of this study) has been labelled a collectivist country as it values the collective role more than the individual role. Its ranking for this concept is comparatively higher than that for individualism (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).

In addition, collectivism versus individualism refers to the importance and power of individuals in countries such as Saudi Arabia, in which the (male or female) individual is a member of a group or even a family (Hofstede et al., 2010). Thus, collectivism can be stronger than individualism when individuals value the group's interests more highly than personal interests. In addition, some Middle Eastern countries value the role of groups to a greater extent than the role of individuals compared to some Western countries (Alexander, 2005). These differences shape the media perceptions of the social categories, credibility and reliance, which were taken into consideration during this study.

#### **3.4.4 Social Identity Theory - Capacities and Limitations**

Social Identity Theory has been widely applied in several disciplines, yet it is primarily rooted in social and psychology studies. As outlined previously, the importance of the hypothesis is rooted in Social Identity Theory, which targets individuals as groups and personalities forming societies. Previous research has detailed the assumptions and implications of Social Identity Theory in order to present a road map for how this theory can analyse how social categories influence the society differently and the implications for in- and out-group membership and how social categories have been applied in research.

However, it is clear from the literature that despite the useful contributions of Social Identity Theory, critical issues remain, as explained below:

- **Bias** – It has been argued that Social Identity Theory increases in-group bias (Brown, 2000; Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990). However, the relationships between the in- and out-group members are indicators of what occurs in reality - whether it is unbiased or biased - so that research can unearth the true reality (Hewstone, Rubin & Willis, 2002). Thus, bias between groups in competitive conditions was found to be higher than in conditions of interdependence, where there is a big difference – i.e. it was higher when out-group members were black people than when out-group members were white people (Taylor & Moriarty, 1987). In conclusion, social categorisation is an approach used to understand social categories as they already exist, rather than to generate new ones (Tajfel et al., 1971).

However, the nature of human groups is increasingly dependent on the strength of bonds between members. Yet the implication is that bias may emerge for different reasons, and researchers use weak measures that do not show consistent outcomes (Hewstone et al., 2002). Bias may also take the form of intergroup predisposition, ranging from prejudice through typecasting and discrimination, as well as disproportion. Indeed, previous studies have not developed a perfect model to reveal explicit measures for exploring the bias between social categories, so the claim of bias has been built on unclear indicators (Crisp & Beck, 2005). One criticism levelled at Social Identity Theory is that a clear majority of studies in this area are concerned with weaker forms of bias. This tends to reveal a blueprint of inconsistent responses across various courses that can sometimes be linked to perceivers reaching a concession between the desire to examine their group favourably, and the need to maintain a perception of fair-mindedness.

However, this part (the evaluation of out groups is not related to the focus of this study so there was no risk of bias towards certain newspapers in this research. This is because this study is focused on the influence of personal characteristics of individuals on their perceptions of the print with the online counterparts and the online exclusive newspapers.

- **Deprivation** - It has been claimed that Social Identity Theory can create a sense of deprivation or poverty. However, this is not the case (Hocking, 2015). Rather, it highlights feelings of deprivation that have become apparent to researchers, meaning that Social Identity Theory only explores what currently exists (Brown, 2000). However, Brown (2000) emphasises that this is not supported by 14 previous studies concerning social identity principles. Hence, the correlations between social identity and group discrimination are small. Instead, social identity helps people in societies to develop positive perceptions about themselves and their social categories.

Additionally, a sense of deprivation can be the result of an individual being socially isolated, rather than being a social member of a social category (Hampton, Sessions, Her & Rainie, 2009; Jenkins, 2008). Moreover, Tajfel's examination of Social Identity Theory does not show that in-group members are prejudicial about out-group members. Instead, they tend to favour their in-group members. It has also been highlighted that the favouritism indicator is higher in a group condition than in an individual state (Durrheim et al., 2016). In fact, Social Identity Theory is an application that can track and reveal the social identities in any society, regardless of whether those identities are positive or negative. This, however, is not a concern for this study, because it does not take into consideration the psychological factors and feelings behind the influence of in-groups' social membership on the given newspapers but it focuses on their perceptions towards the credibility of the given newspapers.

- **Depersonalisation** - Turner, Oakes, Haslam and McGarty (1992) criticised Social Identity Theory for its tendency towards depersonalisation by maximising the importance of the in-group members – regardless of their individuality. Moreover, the concept of self-categorisation involves a sort of individualism in which a person views themselves and focuses on individual characteristics. Hence, Social Identity Theory overrides personal attributes for group attributes, meaning that the target is group, rather than individual, identification (Hogg et al., 2004). Other scholars, in defence of this issue, pointed to the importance of the group role, asserting that the individual role can be different depending on social consensus and related issues. Integrating several voices and opinions can generate different outcomes, which are generated only by group members, not individuals (Postmes, Spears, Lee & Novak, 2005).

However, this defence is insufficient, since these scholars assume that the group is more important than any individual member. Hence, the group voice is louder than any member of the same group. Therefore, some social categories become important due to their membership of a particular group, just as some fans support a sports team because some people in higher social positions also support this team. Moreover, the main criticism of this theory has been its tendency to cast members who belong to a group as akin to one another and dissimilar to those of a different group. Thus, Social Identity Theory does not intend to increase the importance of groups in a society over individuals but looks at a society from another angle which can be associated with the main trends of the dominant shared meanings in a society. In fact, this research considers the individuals' characteristics and perceptions, which are associated with their memberships of certain social categories, without depersonalising their individual characteristics.

### **3.5 The Knowledge Gap**

The studies of social categories focused on investigating the differences related to social categories, rather than the differences related to individuals, to understand how people – as members of social categories – influence their societies.

#### **3.5.1 General Context Mainly from Western**

Starting from the research which was done in Western, most of research regarding the credibility of and reliance on news has focused on exploring the credibility perceptions and the reliance scores without offering interpretations towards these attitudes among the audiences as it was shown in Chapter Two. For example, Speakman (2011) stated that the high readership for online news has led to perceptions of low credibility for local newspapers. However, his research does not explain this result, which may be related in some ways to the readers' ideology, which can greatly influence social categories. Unlike the young among 25 American, European and Asian countries, print newspapers were reported as being the main source of news among older audiences aged 35 years old and over (Nic et al., 2017). The difference between the young and old in terms of the news consumption may point to different perceived credibility. For example, in the BBC in the UK, received lower credibility

perceptions from those under 30 years old than those over 50 years old (Walker, 2018). Also, the ways of obtaining news was reported differently among the audiences from the USA and UK so the respondents aged 35 and over obtained news mainly through television compared to those aged under 35 who get the news through their phones (Newman et al., 2019).

Thus, there is a need to study audiences' perceptions of news credibility through their social categories because how society shapes individuals' beliefs, and credibility assessment standards, cannot be isolated from research as their influence is embedded in individuals' reality (Metzger, Flanagin & Medders, 2010).

Thus, as mentioned, Tajfel (1974) established this approach through what he called Social Identity Theory referring to the principle of shared beliefs within an in-group's membership. This study applied this approach with referring to the shared perceptions and interpretations of the newspapers' credibility among the respondents instead of the shared beliefs. Thus, the shared meanings in this study are linked to social categories which can be products of people's collective history.

Shared meanings not only shape social categories as an outcome; they also explore how social constructions are developed as a process (Gonzales & Hancock, 2008; Riesch, 2014). These shared beliefs have been developed and are shaped by the social history of culture, from the past to the present, in virtually all societies. Thus, people's actions within their social categories are mediated through socially shared meanings between the group members, rather than between those who are members of the same cluster.

From its inception, this theory was based on an understanding of individual self-perception and it was dependent on the categories they identified themselves with. As such, Social Identity Theory has to be applied mostly as an outcome of group membership (Doosje, Spears, & Ellemers, 2002). Thus, the presented overview of Social Identity Theory as it has been applied to media studies, tracking audiences' evaluations of media outlets, points to the major findings of Social Identity Theory as they relate to media research. In this context, scholars acknowledge that social development is increasingly dependent on interrelations between groups (Markovic, 2015). Thus, there is a tendency for individuals to be part of social categories (Durrheim et al., 2016). From this consideration, demographic factors play a major

role in shaping social categories, and even the number of children in a family can influence attitudes towards the in-group's membership (Bodenhausen, Kang, & Peery, 2008).

Moreover, people from different ethnicities in one group are likely to have different attitudes towards group membership owing to their different cultures (Chen, 2012). According to Huddy (2001), social identity research has paid less attention to the differences between group members who have different characteristics. However, shared meanings are formed by everyone's interests (Shapiro, 2010). Despite the unlimited motivational reasons for people to be part of social categories, there has been insufficient focus on the meanings that shape social categories – an area that should be explored in future research (Deaux & Burke, 2007). Moreover, employing a social identity approach in different cultures will not replicate previous findings due to cultural differences (Perloff, 2014; Trafimow, Triandis & Goto, 1991).

Deaux (2000) argues that the factors that form social categories from birth, such as gender, differ from later-formed groups – such as doctors versus engineers. Still, the shared meanings associated with different personalities or characteristics, based on their social categories, have been recommended as an area for research (Carter, 2013; Jones & Volpe, 2011). Moreover, analysing the shared meanings of different personalities or characteristics using Social Identity Theory can help obtain deeper insights where specific situations may affect a social group more than other social categories in the same context.

Media scholars have focused on the social category approach to describe group norms (Hogg and Reid, 2006). Babran (2008) noted that media research implies that modern culture is propagated in virtually all media formats, including news organisations. This usually encourages media research to increasingly use Social Identity Theory to explain group norms through popular culture in developing societies in the East, such as in Middle Eastern societies.

In this context, media credibility research employing Social Identity Theory has been associated with unsatisfactory outcomes. Thus, media research on the audience's influence on media should go beyond engaging a signal personal characteristic such as gender or age of a particular group, and include more personal characteristics (Papacharissi, 2011; Wang, 2017). Moreover, most previous research has focused on the attitudes participants hold towards some issues based on their social categories, rather than focusing on what explanations they hold for those attitudes towards the target issues.

Therefore, the perceptions of the credibility of media outlets should not be isolated from the social context as the audiences' judgements of media credibility will be under social influence in such a way that shared opinions are associated with similar personalities (Metzger et al., 2010). Thus, the evaluative standards of active audiences are shaped by social cultures (Neuman & Guggenheim, 2011; Yamamoto & Nah, 2018), so media active audiences are influenced by the online and offline social cycles that they live with or are close to (Ahn, 2011; Walther, 2009). According to Giles (2016), social categories are an essential part of society's cultures and they influence and are influenced.

The positive meanings of any social practice or product can be a sign of what those meanings signify to the individuals in a society, which in turn will increase the engagement of these individuals with any social practice protecting those valued meanings (Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2014). This led recent research to recommend focusing on the explanations behind audiences' perceptions of news media credibility through their common meanings (Pjesivac, Geidner & Cameron, 2018).

In fact, the majority of Western research throughout the literature regarding the credibility of and reliance on news provided some attitudes of the audiences in terms of credibility reliance. However, there is lack of interpretations for these attitudes towards the credibility of and reliance on news.

### **3.5.2 Saudi Context**

There is insufficient understanding of news credibility perceptions among social categories in Saudi Arabia using Social Identity Theory. This led researchers to point to the insufficient explorations that have been undertaken to address the credibility of online newspapers versus print newspapers in the Saudi context (Al-Jaber, 2012; Elareshi & Gunter, 2012; Milianny, 2013).

The usage of Internet has arisen among Saudis (Sabbeh & Baatwah, 2018), while getting news through online forms increased rapidly among Saudis compared to other Arabic countries (Salem, 2017). According to Al-Jaber (2012) the news consumption was higher among young Saudis at 71.1% compared to young consumers in Bahrain at 65.5% and Qatar at 63.8%. However, it is not known if the high news consumption of young Saudis is related to the



perceived credibility or not. This points to the importance of looking at the credibility perceptions of and reliance on news among Saudis. According to Alotaibi (2016) the news credibility was revealed as a core element that influence the news consumers in Saudi Arabia. However, it remains unclear whether demographic factors, such as male versus female and young versus old, as well as high versus moderate religious adherence, create shared meanings similar to the credibility rates.

The majority of research focusing on social categories regarding the investigation of media credibility has shown little if any research applying Social Identity Theory as a tool to interpret the audiences' perceptions of media credibility, either qualitatively or quantitatively. A qualitative approach such as interviews would allow the participants to explain their credibility perceptions freely, instead of forcing them to choose from limited options in a questionnaire; this leads to unclear outcomes or conflicting outcomes that need clear interpretations and explanations.

Therefore, this study investigates the explanations of Saudi participants regarding their credibility perceptions towards six print newspapers with their six online counterparts, and six exclusively online newspapers, in order to explain the credibility criteria that the audience applied. The credibility criteria were examined in terms of the participants' personal factors or characteristics in order to gain insights into how the shared meanings of their social categories are influenced by these personal factors or characteristics.

The uniqueness of this research lies in the combination of an exploration of Saudi audiences' criteria for evaluating print newspapers, their online counterparts, and exclusively online newspapers, while simultaneously explaining how these criteria are shaped by their different shared meanings depending on the audience's personal characteristics. However, as has been shown by the relevant literature, previous studies have rarely explored the shared meanings behind perceived credibility afforded to a newspaper compared with other newspapers. Nor has previous research explored whether those shared meanings can be affected by a variety of personal characteristics that in turn shape social categories – specifically in the Saudi context. Hence, this study constituted one of the first attempts to conduct this type of research in Saudi Arabia. Only newspapers rating highest in terms of

credibility and those strongly associated with particular personal characteristics were included in this investigation.

Using Social Identity Theory and its constructs (categorising, identifying and comparing) to interpret the credibility of the news among Saudi online and print newspapers has great potential. This offers an opportunity to bridge the gap in the literature in terms of how the shared meanings of social groups are affected by demographic factors, such as gender, age, education, occupation, income, location and level of religiosity. However, ethnicity is not applicable to this study as all of the participants are Saudi citizens.

Thus, the literature review in Chapter Two led the categorising phase so this study uses the social categorisations that showed high influence on the perceived credibility of newspapers among the past studies. This approach is valuable for determining the ways in which credibility is perceived between Saudi print and online (online counterparts of print and exclusively online) newspapers (see Table 1).

Thus, the second phase of applying Social Identity Theory as a tool to investigate the interpretations of the respondents is to identify the respondents with the dominant social categories based on their credibility perceptions regarding the given newspapers (see Table 2). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the social categories can be explored through identifying their commonalities, so investigating the credibility perceptions of the 18 newspapers among Saudis assists the exploration of their commonalities to identify their dominant social categories. Thus, these social categories are associated with particular newspapers in terms of credibility perceptions. This means the personal characteristics that share mutual credibility towards the given newspapers are a potential part of social categories. This calls the third element of using Social Identity Theory which is to compare the shared meanings among generated social categories using the interview method. The generated social categories are based on the commonalities towards the perceived credibility of the given newspapers in the questionnaire method.

Social Identity Theory was a strong assistant tool in carrying out this investigation, as it helped to answer the research questions which trace which social categorisations have a potential influence on the perceived credibility of the given newspapers, which of these

influential social categorisations the respondents identify themselves with in terms of perceived credibility, and how the social categories of the respondents (generated from the influential social categorisations) affect their credibility criteria.

Only the most influenced newspapers out of the entire 18 print and online publications by the audience-related factors in terms of credibility and reliance in the questionnaire analysis form the basis of the qualitative study to explore the credibility criteria. This was attained through the analysis of the influence of demographic factors such as age, gender, education, income, location, and level of religious beliefs on the perceived credibility of the given newspapers. Only respondents from the dominant social categories on the perceived credibility of the given newspapers in the questionnaire phase were included in the interview phase, as they are likely to have a strong relationship with their social categories in terms of their shared meanings.

### 3.6 Research Framework

Table 2 below draws together the products of the critical analysis of the literature conducted in this and the previous chapter into the research framework. This framework is used in conjunction with the empirical evidence gathered in the course of the research, to help provide a better understanding of audience perceptions of media newspapers in the KSA.

**Table 2: A Research Framework that underpins the social identity through exploring credibility of and reliance on newspapers by Saudi audiences**

Research Framework	Evaluative Factors	The Basis Enquiries of Empirical Investigation for The Research Questions
Social Identity Elements	Categorisation	-What social categorisations can influence Saudi audiences in terms of evaluating the newspaper's credibility?
	Identification	-How do Saudi audiences identify themselves with the provided categorisations in terms of the credibility and reliance regarding the given newspapers?
	Comparisons	-What are the shared meanings among Saudi social categories in relation to their criteria of credibility on the given newspaper?

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter briefly explored the research concerning the differences between social categories in media research and pointed to the most used theories in studying media credibility from the active audience perspective to propose the most appropriate tool for interpreting the credibility perceptions of the Saudi social categories. Then it justified the proposed theoretical tool for the study, which was Social Identity Theory, before explaining the social identity approach and showed how Social Identity Theory is the most relevant framework for this study, categorising its components and elements and how these have played a role in this research. Therefore, this explanatory framework was developed from the findings from Chapters Two and Three and guide the methodology of this study in order to evaluate the perceptions of credibility and reliance related to Saudi print and online newspapers in order to answer the main research questions, as detailed in Chapter Five.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Understanding the Journalism Scene in Saudi Arabia**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to provide an understanding of the rules that shape the press scene in Saudi Arabia, and the differences that exist between print and online newspapers. It also aims to provide an understanding of the cultural landscape of the Kingdom's leadership. Therefore, because this study engages the Saudi audience as the target for evaluating the credibility of eighteen newspapers, including six print newspapers, their six online counterparts and six exclusively online newspapers, it is appropriate to provide some background information about Saudi Arabia first. Thus, the cultural landscape of the country is discussed in order to gain a better understanding of the media scene in Saudi Arabia and to explore the development of Saudi culture.

Next, the influence of Islam is discussed in order to explore its role in Saudi society, and how subjects are debated between people who are highly religious and those who are not. The subsequent section will explore the differences between print and online newspapers in Saudi Arabia in terms of government policy concerning printing and publication in the journalism sector. Following this, the Saudi journalism scene will be discussed, including the print and online newspapers that are examined in this study. Then, the internet service in Saudi Arabia will be explored as well as internet filtering by the government, which reflects government policy regarding the websites that are accepted in Saudi Arabia and those that are not.

#### **4.2 Background of Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia is the largest of the Gulf Arab countries (Arabic Peninsula) and one of the largest and most influential Arab countries at a local and global level amongst its neighbouring countries of Oman, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan and Yemen (Saudi Arabia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). Most officials in higher positions are appointed by the King of Saudi Arabia or by the Crown Prince. The only elections are for the municipal council (Saudi Arabia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). This shapes the power

of the government over all organisations in Saudi Arabia, including media organisations. This can also influence the appointing of chief editors of all the Saudi local newspapers as these appointments should have the government's approval to be official (Ministry of Culture and Information, 2001).

Saudi Arabia is one of the largest countries producing oil, which shapes the country's influence over other countries (Yamani, 2010). Thus, oil has been the main component of Saudi Arabia's economy since it was found at the end of the 1930s (Zayani, 2012). Moreover, 75% of the Saudi government's revenues come from oil investment (Ben-Mansur, 2013). Concern over the oil market in the future has been a big issue among elite Saudis. This has led the Saudi government to draw up Vision 2030, which is a plan that ends in 2030 to protect income sources and reduce the country's dependence on oil as a major resource (Salman, 2018). Thus, the introduction of Vision 2030 is a response to some voices within the country that were raised in favour of new investments (Akhbaar, 2017; Shar, 2017). Media investment was one of the new recommended investments. For example, many voices urged investment in the media sector, such as opening cinemas prior to Vision 2030, which in turn would enhance investment in the media industry (Dahlan, 2016). The call to create new investments in order to reduce the country's reliance on oil came before Vision 2030, but Vision 2030 shifts this call from people's hope to the government's desire.

The population of Saudi Arabia stands at 31,015,999, including non-Saudis who represent about 10,241,093 or one-third of the entire population (General Authority for Statistics of KSA, 2015b). Moreover, the General Authority for Statistics of KSA (2015) indicates that the young generation represents the biggest percentage of the entire Saudi population. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is divided into 13 administrative regions, while each region is divided into a number of cities, which differs from one region to another. However, half of the population of Saudi Arabia lives in the central and western regions. This study's target sample will be taken from these regions.

### **4.3 Overview of the Cultural Landscape of Saudi Regime and Saudi Media**

To understand the media scene in Saudi Arabia, the leadership base of modern Saudi Arabia should be understood. The establishment of Saudi Arabia was based on the association

between the Islamic reformer Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab and the political leader Muhammad Al-Saud, who used religious sentiment to unite people under one authority and one leader instead of various tribes (Wynbrandt, 2010). These tribes possessed different levels of wealth, different mores and different military forces, but the religious factor influenced people in this area far more than tribal or economic differences, and religion is often the only effective commonality between Arabian tribes (Abedin, 2002). Therefore, religion was the key factor that helped the first leader of Saudi Arabia to unite people from different tribes into one nation under one flag. This led religious understanding to be the driver prohibiting some practices in Saudi Arabia. Media outlets were not isolated from this process.

The Saudi media scene has been progressing since the development of Saudi economics in 1945, achieved by the investment in oil. This is when the Saudi government started modernising the country despite objections from religious people. Nonetheless, the process was slow (Shobaili, 1971). Protecting Saudi Arabia is understood in terms of religion. Thus, the Saudi government has integrated religious values and teachings into all of the country's policies. Saudi media has been censored by the Saudi government since the beginning; it established the press in the late 1920s to maintain Islamic beliefs and national beliefs, which must not be separated (Shobaili, 1971). Newspapers understood that in order to maintain the country's authority, the alliance between Saudi leaders and well-known Saudi Islamic scholars needed to be upheld, so criticising the Islamic religion, the royal family or the Saudi government is prohibited in Saudi journalism (Almaghlooth, 2013).

The Saudi government started the media by establishing the Saudi press in the late 1920s. The first newspaper was called Umm Al-Qura and it was the official newspaper of the Saudi government (Alzahrani, 2016; Shobaili, 1971). This was followed by the launch of Saudi radio by a royal decree in late 1948, while the first station for broadcasting was created in 1949 (Milianny, 2013). Saudi television was introduced in 1965 and this was a difficult move for Saudi Arabia because of the difficulties posed by some religious people in the country (Gazzaz, 2006). Thus, the media is understood differently by more hard-line religious people and less conservative people in Saudi Arabia. More hard-line individuals view the media as a source of evil and as secular, while less conservative people view the media as something that can be both good and bad, depending on the content (Wynbrandt, 2010).

Thus, most of the online debating among Saudis through online forums and social media networking sites is between highly religious people and less religious people or liberals (Al-Saggaf, Himma & Kharabsheh, 2008). This points to how understanding religion's principles empowers the ideas in a society. For example, when Saudi Arabia started improving some services by implementing changes in different sectors, including media between the 1970s and 1980s, the unexpected incident involving Juhayman happened. Juhayman was described as a radical religious person at that time; he took aggressive action against the Saudi government in the Holy Mosque in Mecca, which all Muslims around the world respect (Wynbrandt, 2010). This led most Saudis and other Muslims around the world to support the government's decision to fight this kind of radicalism. There is a shared understanding among most of the world's Muslims, including Saudis, that no bad actions will take place at the Holy Mosque, and such actions can never be justified or accepted under any circumstances (Zayani, 2012).

Following this, all traditional media were accepted by most Saudis, while print newspapers were later preferred over Saudi television and radio (Al-Makaty, Boyd, & Tubergen, 1994). However, the arrival of the internet received some resistance in Saudi Arabia, which led to a delay in the connection of internet services in Saudi Arabia (this will be detailed later) (Warf & Vincent, 2007).

The core beliefs of Islam are largely accepted by Muslims, such as the five pillars of Islam, for example prayers, while there are minor beliefs that can be interpreted differently based on different Islamic schools of thought, such as the veil and music, whether they are forbidden (*haram*) or not forbidden (*halal*) (El-Menouar, 2014). Thus, each school can have more or less conservative followers (El-Menouar, 2014). This creates different understandings of Islamic rules and teachings.

#### **4.3.1 Islamic Ideology in Saudi Society**

As previously mentioned, Islamic ideology has had a big influence on Saudi society since the beginning of Saudi Arabia in 1932 when it was united as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Yamani, 2010). Thus, any innovation or new subject may result in a serious debate between those who are highly religious and those who are not, depending on their



interpretations. For example, women driving, women uncovering their faces and giving cinemas the permission to enter the Saudi market are all issues that have been subject to much debate in recent years (Fadaak & Roberts, 2018). This is because some cultural taboos have been thought of as religious taboos, while in reality they are just cultural taboos, such as women driving cars (Althiabi, 2017).

Opening cinemas is the most recent issue to divide Saudi society into two groups. The first group, which includes people who are not highly religious, supported the idea of opening cinemas (Alserami, 2018), while the second group, including people who are highly religious, objected to the this new idea (Dahlan, 2016). In 2017, a large number of Saudis bought tickets, about 400,000, for cinemas online, excluding those who bought offline from Bahrain, which is the closest Arabic Gulf country (Akhbaar, 2017).

On the other hand, the grand mufti of Saudi Arabia, who is the leader of the Islamic Senior Scholars, stated that opening cinemas is a form of corruption as it leads to forbidden things (Aljazeera Media Network, 2017). Accordingly, this topic became a subject of further debate by the General Authority for Entertainment (Shar, 2017). Recently, the government allowed cinema investors to start cinema businesses in Saudi Arabia so most of the Saudi newspapers provide cinema news as if it is normal practice (Aljeead, 2017; Alnajdi, 2018; Alserami, 2018; Okaz Newspaper, 2018). However, some topics such as rape and drugs cannot be discussed in most of the Saudi newspapers because of the influence of highly religious Saudis (Alnajrani et al., 2018). Thus, the government and religious forces control Saudi society together, but the government force is dominant (Almania, 2018). This points to how the final decision about debatable issues in terms of Islamic rules in society is made by the Saudi government (Schanzer & Miller, 2012). It is therefore anticipated that such debates will continue in Saudi Arabia, particularly around media channels and products, because of the influence of Islamic ideology, until the government publishes its rule. Thus, research concerning Saudi people must consider this factor.

#### **4.4 The Saudi Journalism Scene**

Journalism proficiency is shaped by cultures more than by knowledge. This has prompted scholars to study journalism practices within different cultures (Mitchelstein &

Boczkowski, 2009). However, journalists around the world have not reached an agreement about the values and norms of practising journalism. This encourages researchers investigating journalism to focus on cultural differences because these differences may result in different audience evaluations of media (Deuze, 2005).

As mentioned earlier, Saudi media outlets are censored by the Saudi government in terms of political concerns and religious concerns (Kutbi, 2015). This includes internet news media such as social networking sites (Martin et al., 2018). According to Almaghlooth (2013), print newspapers are subject to more direct censorship by the government than exclusively online newspapers, which use self-censorship in order to protect their work and newspapers from any unwanted actions by the Saudi government. However, exclusively online newspapers have less restrictive regulations than the print newspapers with their online counterparts due to the nature of the internet (Alotaibi, 2016). Criticising the Islamic religion, the royal family or the Saudi government is prohibited in Saudi journalism (Al-Saggaf et al., 2008; Almaghlooth, 2013). This leads to the so-called red lines regarding religious and national values that no one should go beyond, while the rest can be regarded as the space of freedom (Alzahrani, 2016).

However, the government limits the freedom of all media outlets according to Islamic rules and values, and government regulations have been created to maintain the country in line with the Ministers' Council of 1982 (Hafez, 2002). It might be understood that the permitted freedom in Saudi media can be related to their understanding of Islam so any forbidden issue cannot be part of the permitted freedom. Thus, the Saudi government holds the obligation to provide only the freedom that fits in with national and religious values (Alzahrani, 2016; Ministry of Culture and Information, 1982).

The level of freedom in societies with a majority of Muslims can be a complicated issue as some Muslims, particularly highly religious people, may think that Western freedom does not fit their societies. This concept may be related to the available freedom in most Islamic societies, which were reported as having low levels of freedom (Connolly-Ahern & Golan, 2007). Thus, Islamic rules regulate all individual and societal issues in Muslim societies (El-Menouar, 2014). Hence, this study examines the local available newspapers in Saudi Arabia including six print newspapers with their six online counterparts and six exclusively

online newspapers, in order to explore how the reliance and credibility of all types is perceived by Saudi audiences and to evaluate the role that personal factors, including religiosity, play in perceiving and evaluating credibility.

#### **4.4.1 Saudi Print Newspapers with their Online Counterparts**

The Umm Al-Qura newspaper was the first newspaper established in the late 1920s when all the Saudi tribes were united under the authority of the recent Saudi Arabia establisher; several years later it became known as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Alzahrani, 2016; Shobaili, 1971). The number of active newspapers in Saudi Arabia has varied since its establishment as an independent country due to a lack of funding, especially during World War II (Alotaibi, 2016). For example, the Al-hijaz newspaper was first published formally in 1908, while Umm Al-Qura was the official government newspaper at the start of the Kingdom (Alzahrani, 2016).

In addition, Saudi print newspapers underwent three types of ownership, starting with individual ownership in 1946 (Althiabi, 2017). After this, in 1959, there was a move to merged ownership, after which individuals were required to merge in order to own a newspaper. The final stage occurred in 1964, after which the government withdrew all individuals' rights to own newspapers as individuals, so all the newspapers became owned by organisations (Althiabi, 2017). Thus, during the three stages of newspaper ownership, newspapers have undergone some changes regarding their names and their regulations, while some of them do not exist today for unknown reasons, for example the Al-hijaz newspaper.

In relation to that, there is no doubt that these newspapers cannot work independently outside the government's frame, even though these Saudi newspapers are owned by organisations (Althiabi, 2017). Thus, there is insufficient information regarding the individuals who own the press organisations in Saudi Arabia. Most newspapers in the country, whether they are print or exclusively online newspapers, reveal some information about the editors-in-chief or the editors who are not necessarily owners (Aljazeera newspaper, 2019; Almadina newspaper, 2019; Alriyadh newspaper, 2019; Alwatan newspaper, 2019; Alyaum newspaper, 2019; Okas newspaper, 2019). For example, it has been reported that the owners of these organisations were awaiting government approval, so the first owner of *Okas* as an

individual was Ahmed Abdul-Ghafor Attar, who was not comfortable with the way owners were selected and he finally resigned (Alotaibi, 2016). Regarding the owners of *Okas*, it was reported that there are about 29 members who own the *Okas* organisation (Wikipedia, 2019). Even though Alotaibi (2016), Althiabi (2017) and Alzahrani (2016) are the most recent studies relating to Saudi press, the names of these 29 members are not available in their work.

However, regarding the orientation differences among the six print newspapers with their online counterparts, *Alwatan* print newspaper and consequently its online counterpart was reported to be a representative of the liberal orientation in Saudi Arabia (Al-Qarni, 2004). Thus, *Alwatan* has received several confrontations from highly religious Saudis because of its news and discussions of certain cultural and religious issues from a new perspective, which was understood to be related to a more liberal orientation (Alzahrani, 2016). Thus, religiosity levels are expected to influence the credibility perceptions of and reliance on *Alwatan* print newspaper with its online counterpart. However, the rest of the target print newspapers with their online counterparts may not be as exposed to the influence of religiosity levels, as they are more oriented towards traditional cultural and religious issues. Although six print newspapers were included in this research, there are about eight establishments publishing local daily newspapers written in Arabic in Saudi Arabia:

- Makkah Establishment for Printing and Information, established in Makkah in 1964. It publishes *Alnadwa*, which changed its name to *Makkah* in 2013.
- Almadina Press Establishment, established in Jeddah in 1964. It publishes *Almadina*.
- Alyamama Press Establishment, established in 1964 in Riyadh. It publishes the newspaper *Alriyadh*.
- Aljazirah Press, Printing, and Publication Establishment, established in Riyadh in 1964. It publishes the *Aljazirah* newspaper.
- Albilad Press and Publication Establishment, founded in 1964 in Jeddah. This organization publishes *Albilad*.
- Okaz Organisation for Press and Publication, founded in 1965 in Jeddah. It publishes the *Okaz* newspaper.
- Dar Alyawm Press and Publication Establishment, established in 1965 in Dammam. It publishes the *Alyawm* newspaper.

- Assir Press and Publication Establishment, established in Abha in 2000. This organization publishes the newest print newspaper in Saudi Arabia, *Alwatan* (Almaghlooth, 2013).

Most of the print newspapers started to produce their online counterparts between 1997 and 2003 (Alzahrani, 2016). However, only six counterparts are related to this research. The dates of their establishment are as follows: the *Aljazirah* online counterpart 1997; the *Alriyadh* online counterpart 1999; the *Alwatan* online counterpart 2000; the *Okas* online counterpart 2001; the *Alyawm* online counterpart 2002; and the *Almadina* online counterpart 2003 (Alzahrani, 2016). The date of the first production of the *Albilad* online counterpart is not known, and the *Makkah* online counterpart was the last established, in 2014. However, the print newspapers and their online counterparts are similar in the news they select, their coverage and presentation, as they follow the same lines and restrictions. Some Saudi journalists have pointed to the low freedom in all Saudi media outlets as an obstacle to improving the Saudi press (Alotaibi, 2016).

The online counterparts of the print newspapers have a number of small differences compared to the print versions. For example, they update their news frequently to compete with the exclusively online newspapers. For example, the online counterparts of the print newspapers are still strictly regulated by the print press regulations as they belong to the same organisation, so any penalty from the government can apply to both versions (Alotaibi, 2016). However, the interactivity in the comments of the online counterparts were an advantage of this version over the print ones (Alotaibi, 2014). On the other hand, it has been stated that print newspapers publish exclusive news stories in their versions of the newspapers. For example, it was reported that the *Almadina* newspaper provides, in the print version, about 10% of the unprovided news in the online counterpart so as not to lose its status among the Saudi readers of print (Alzahrani, 2016). Therefore, the differences between the print newspapers and their online counterparts may be related to the types of news – the online counterparts have more updated and recent news, while the print versions provide some additional news that is not published online but they follow the same regulations.

Accordingly, the popularity of print newspapers has risen due to their relationship with officials and organisations; they receive government support as they are affiliated to the

government orientation and controlled by the Saudi government (Alzahrani, 2016). This helps print newspapers with their online counterparts to cover the government exclusive news besides additional topics, such as social issues, sports, advertisements and economics, attracting an audience that prefers some print newspapers over others. This may explain the importance of print newspapers for Saudis in Saudi Arabia (Dennis et al., 2017). Moreover, the development of these newspapers has been continually shaped by technical innovations and even changes in design. According to Almaghlooth (2013), print newspapers in Saudi Arabia are still in good shape in terms of sales and circulation, but online newspapers are strongly competitive. Thus, this study will consider print newspapers in Saudi Arabia as a competitor to online newspapers in terms of credibility and reliance and will explore both variables.

#### **4.4.2 Saudi Exclusively Online Newspapers**

Exclusively online journalism was launched several years after the internet was connected to Saudi Arabia in the 1990s (Alotaibi, 2016). Individuals started launching exclusively online newspapers in Saudi Arabia in 2004. However, just as in the situation regarding the ownership of print newspapers, there is a lack of complete information regarding the owners of the exclusively online newspapers; the only known information relates to the main founders of some exclusively online newspapers such as *Sabq*, *Alweeam* and *Twasul*. However, the founder of each exclusively online newspaper is not the only owner of the newspaper, as each exclusively online newspaper must have at least three owners. In this point, the visible founders of all exclusively online newspapers are not part of the royal family. For example, the founder of *Sabq* is Ali Alhazmi (Alotaibi, 2016); however, this does not mean he has no associations with people in powerful positions, but these associations cannot be proven.

The interesting thing here is that these exclusively online newspapers have worked for many years despite being available for free, so it is still unknown who supports them financially besides their small amount of advertising, but the visible founder can be representative of the newspaper's orientation. According to Alotaibi (2016), the *Sabq* exclusively online newspaper was more closely linked to highly religious Saudis, while *Alweeam*'s exclusively online newspaper matched more closely with liberal Saudis. Liberal

Saudis can be part of the moderate religious Saudis. However, the *Twasul* exclusively online newspaper has a more restricted news frame which is more favourable to highly religious people in Saudi Arabia. For example, when looking at the website of *Twasul* (<https://twasul.info/>), which is expected to be favoured by the highly religious, compared to *Alweeam*'s website (<https://www.alweeam.com.sa/>), which tends to be favoured more by moderate respondents, then search both websites for a single word such as 'woman', the outcomes can be very different – images of unveiled women can be seen in some of *Alweeam* articles, but not in *Twasul*'s news. Thus, religiosity levels can affect the credibility perceptions of and reliance on *Sabg*, *Twasul* and *Alweeam* exclusively online newspapers differently.

Since then, their numbers have increased rapidly as they are not directly censored by the Saudi government, despite several attempts by the Ministry of Culture and Information to regulate them (Almaghlooth, 2013). As a result, the Saudi government has ordered that all online newspapers must be licenced by the Ministry and must submit to government censorship. Research has estimated the number of exclusively online licenced newspapers in Saudi Arabia to be around 750 newspapers (Alzahrani, 2016).

However, adding this control would minimise the differences between the exclusively online newspapers and the print newspapers with their online counterparts, and limit the news that exclusively online newspapers could cover. Thus, exclusively online newspapers still have more freedom to choose which local news to present, while of course not crossing the red lines by criticising the government or the main religious and cultural standards (Althiabi, 2017). Thus, this element of freedom does not mean that exclusively online newspapers can go beyond the red lines, but they are free to focus on different news and topics rather than concentrating on the official news. This is shown by the lack of freedom of the press in Saudi Arabia, where none of the media outlets are allowed to criticise the Saudi government (Almania, 2018).

Additionally, licenced newspapers could lose some of their audiences or be suspended if they do not follow Ministry rules. Thus, despite the high estimated number of licenced exclusively online newspapers, many of them have been closed due to the difficulties they encountered, including lack of funds and freedom (Alotaibi, 2016). The regulations for exclusively online newspapers were implemented relatively late (as discussed below). Hence,

this study considers exclusively online newspapers in Saudi Arabia as a challenger to print newspapers' credibility and dominance.

#### **4.4.3 Government Policy on Print with Their Online Counterparts versus Exclusively Online Newspapers**

As mentioned above, all Saudi media including exclusively online newspapers are under government control. According to the Ministry of Culture and Information (2000), the media policy in Saudi Arabia is based on two types of rules, which in turn are related to each other in the following ways:

- a) Media policy must follow Islamic rules, which promote the understanding of Islamic values and teachings (Ministry of Culture and Information, 1982, 2000).
- b) Media policy must obey government rules as required by Islamic teachings (Ministry of Culture and Information, 1982).

Therefore, protecting Islamic values will help to protect the country, and protecting the country will in turn protect Islam because Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam (Wynbrandt, 2010). This shows the complex interrelation between the values of the government and religion as the press regulations lead to the understanding that protecting the regime's values is part of religion's duty, while protecting religious values is part of the regime's duty (Ministry of Culture and Information, 1982, 2018). This has led research to describe the Saudi regime as the only theocracy regime among the six countries of the Arabic Gulf Cooperation Council (Duffy, 2014). However, the regime's rules are dominant over religion's rules (Almania, 2018). Moreover, (within the Saudi context) the media should have freedoms based on the frame of Islamic and government rules (Ministry of Culture and Information, n.d). Thus, any freedom beyond these rules (Islamic and government) is against Islam.

Accordingly, one of the main forms of media in Saudi Arabia, journalism, is influenced by Islamic and government rules. However, there was a long period of time between the implementation of regulations for print newspapers (Ministry of Culture and Information, 2001) and those for exclusively online newspapers (Ministry of Culture and Information, 2018). This can be understood as result of the short history of exclusively online



newspapers or to the difficulty of controlling exclusively online newspapers. Accordingly, the European Saudi Organisation for Human Rights (2018) stated that the implemented regulations for the Saudi online press try to minimise the available freedom online, in order to align online newspapers with print newspapers. Thus, even though all print and exclusively online newspapers are under government control, there are still some small differences between print and exclusively online newspapers in terms of government regulations, as explained below in Table (3):

**Table 3: Different regulations among print and exclusively online newspapers**

	<b>Print Newspaper Regulations</b>	<b>Exclusively Online Newspaper Regulations</b>
1	Thirty citizens at least must apply to establish one print newspaper	Three citizens at least must apply to establish one exclusively online newspaper
2	The founders of a print newspaper must receive government approval before starting their newspaper	The founders of an exclusively online newspaper must start their newspaper at least one month prior to applying for government approval
3	The founders must present evidence of owning a property to register their print newspaper	The founders must present evidence of owning a mail address for the exclusively online newspaper
4	There must be a board of members whose number is not less than eight and whose responsibility is to monitor the regulations of the print newspaper to ensure they are in line with the media policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	The director of the exclusively online newspaper is responsible for the regulations of the exclusively online newspaper
5	The print organisation is not allowed to produce any publications other than the one approved by the government	The exclusively online organisation is permitted to post their exclusively online press in any online form under the exclusively online newspaper's name
6	The founders of the print newspaper have the right to nominate the director and	The founders of the exclusively online newspaper must introduce the director and

	editor-in-chief of the print newspaper, but the Ministry of Information has the right to approve or refuse this appointment	editor-in-chief of the exclusively online newspaper upon registration
7	The registration licence can vary depending on the documents provided by the print newspaper and their evaluation by the Ministry of Information	The registration licence will be for three years, and when it is due to expire, the director should re-register for another three years and so forth

(Ministry of Culture and Information, 2001; Ministry of Culture and Information, 2018)

From the previous table it can be seen that the regulations for print newspaper organisations are stricter than those for exclusively online newspaper organisations. For example, the requirements of establishing a newspaper are easier for print newspapers than for exclusively online newspapers. However, with regard to freedom of expression, both print newspapers with their online counterparts and exclusively online newspapers encounter the same restrictions (Simon, 2011).

#### **4.5 Internet Use in Saudi Arabia**

The internet has had a large impact on the culture of the people in Saudi Arabia. This can be aligned with the increase education among all Saudis. Illiteracy among the population in Saudi Arabia aged over 10 years old is reported at 7%, so the literacy indicator points to 93% (General Authority for Statistics of KSA, 2016). This means that educated Saudis now represent the majority of the Saudi population. Thus, this study targets educated respondents. This section seeks to review the development of Saudi Arabian internet access. Saudi Arabia was connected to the internet relatively late. In the early 1990s, Tunisia (1991) and Kuwait (1992) became the first Arab countries to be connected to the internet. Subsequently, other Arab countries followed: Egypt and the United Arab Emirates in (1993), Jordan and Saudi Arabia in (1994) – though the Saudi internet service took a little longer to become public – and finally, other Arab countries such as Syria, Iraq and Libya in the late 1990s (Warf & Vincent, 2007). Even though Saudi Arabia was connected relatively late, research has established that it has developed its internet capabilities rapidly (Al-Ghaith, Sanzogni, & Sandhu, 2010; Sait, Al-Tawil, & Sanaullah, 2007).

It was reported recently that around one third of Twitter's tweets which mostly contain news come from Saudi audiences (Sabbeh & Baatwah, 2018). This may point to the importance Saudis place on obtaining news, which leads active Saudi users to become the highest users of Twitter among the Arabic countries (Salem, 2017). However, while this high usage of online news consumption through Twitter among Saudis is acknowledged, little if anything is known about how the Saudi print newspapers with their online counterparts and exclusively online newspapers are perceived in terms of credibility by Saudis. Thus, the high news consumption from Twitter can be aligned with relatively high news consumption from Saudi print newspapers with their online counterparts and exclusively online newspapers, or it can be at the expense of news consumption from these newspapers. Even though Twitter is a platform that can be used for several reasons, including news, newspapers are news sources which are expected to be influenced by news consumers. This leads the focus of this study to engage with the target Saudi newspapers. According to Al-Jaber (2012), news consumption is higher among young Saudis at 71.1% compared to young audiences in Bahrain at 65.5%, and Qatar at 63.8%. Also, Saudis revealed that the introduction of online news decreased their news consumption of print newspapers. However, it is not known if the high news consumption of young Saudis comes from any of the target online newspapers, or whether the high news consumption is related to perceived credibility or not.

In the context of news credibility, even though Saudi Arabian government institutions were connected to the internet in 1994, the full-scale introduction of the internet was first realised in the late 1990s when King Fahd gave official approval for the project. The requirements for internet service providers in Saudi Arabia were regulated by the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST) (Milianny, 2013). The KACST was given the responsibility of overseeing internet service provision in Saudi Arabia using international providers of internet services from the US, Canada and France (Milianny, 2013).

In 1998, the Saudi government granted permission for private companies to provide internet services. At the start, permission was only given to a few companies. In 1999, the government of Saudi Arabia granted permission for the public to access internet services through these service providers. Public access was not limited, but the internet system in KSA was set to limit the kind of information the public could access. For instance, explicit sexual

material or information on terrorist groups was labelled as dangerous or harmful by the Saudi government.

Currently, internet services are broadly classified into three levels: private internet service providers (ISPs); the National Backbone, which is the Saudi Telecom Company (STC); and the link to international services under the internet Service Unit (ISU). Therefore, all potential internet users must subscribe through registered commercial ISPs (Al-Qarni, 2004). This process can be characterised as information filtering by the Saudi government as it helps the government practise some form of censorship of online content for all citizens, companies, government agencies and universities. Thus, despite the delay in accessing the internet and difficulties of the government's monitoring, many young Saudis have become heavy internet users (Kutbi, 2015).

Filtering internet content, particularly news, can be understood differently by the Saudi government and the Saudi audiences. Thus, government understands this filtering process as a protective measure for Saudi internet users, while Saudi users may see this process as indicating low levels of trust (Malki, 2015). The blocking of certain websites may raise users' motivation to access the blocked sites in illegal ways. Some Saudis have used proxy servers from other countries such as Bahrain to achieve this (Warf & Vincent, 2007). For example, the *Elaph*, the first Saudi exclusively online newspaper, has been blocked for a long time due to its coverage of political issues to provide a wider range of political views, while the *Sabq* and *Alweeam* exclusively online newspapers have been blocked several times due to their coverage of sensitive issues such as those relating to security (Alotaibi, 2016). This increased self-censorship among all Saudi newspapers but with more care taken by the online news providers who may try to offer new news topics due to their short history of experience. Thus, after being blocked three times, the *Sabq* editor-in-chief stated that they learned how to avoid being blocked (Alotaibi, 2016). Despite the number of blocked websites remaining unknown, the main reasons for blocking are known to relate to immoral topics or issues (e.g. sexual content) alongside endangering of Islamic religion or government rules (Althiabi, 2017; Kutbi, 2015).

Even though the internet is filtered or censored by the government in Saudi Arabia and some other Arabic countries, it has impacted Arabic politics in a way that traditional

media, such as print newspapers, television and radio, could not. This is because the government has more control over traditional media than over internet media such as online newspapers (Al-Qarni, 2004). Thus, many Saudis go online with unreal personal profiles to obtain the news they want with more freedom and less risk (Aljasir, Woodcock, & Harrison, 2013; Guta & Karolak, 2015).

In fact, Saudi Arabia's process of implementing internet services has been relatively slow. Perhaps this was necessary for the country to ensure that the national telecommunication infrastructure could be modified to handle the increased internet load. Moreover, the Saudi Arabian authorities wanted to implement mechanisms in an attempt to safeguard against internet misuse. This was meant to ensure that the national values and beliefs of Saudi society, such as Islamic beliefs, were upheld (Al-Qarni, 2004).

Therefore, the internet provides new forms of media for people who are not satisfied with traditional media, making it a big competitor for Saudi media. There is a strong need for media news institutions such as print and online newspapers to explore what the Saudi audience is looking for, specifically in terms of credibility and reliance, as the internet can provide people with more news with less restrictions.

#### **4.5.1 The Tendencies of Saudis towards Internet News**

Credibility is the heart of news and it may affect the audiences' engagement with particular news outlets. This motivates news researchers to explore the factors that affect news credibility. Thus, the credibility of the news published in various forms of mass communication, especially online versus print newspapers, has already been considered in many studies in some Western countries, as detailed in Chapter Two (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2005; Carr et al., 2014; Cassidy, 2007; Chiagouris et al., 2008; Chung et al., 2012; Fogg et al., 2003; Golan & Baker, 2012; Greer, 2003; Hilligoss & Rieh, 2008; Johnson & Kaye, 1998, 2010; Johnson & Kaye, 2010; Johnson et al., 2007; Johnson & Kaye, 2000, 2004, 2009; Kim, 2012; Lee, 1978; Metzger et al., 2003; Metzger & Flanagin, 2008; Oyedeji, 2007; Sabigan, 2007; Sundar, 1999; Tsfati & Cappella, 2005).

However, the level of freedom may affect the media scene, so some media outlets may receive higher credibility in some Western societies than in some Middle East societies. Thus,

Twitter's news recently received lower credibility than the news from the news institutions in Dutch society, which has more freedom than most of the Western world (Kruikemeier & Lecheler, 2018). This was not the case with Saudi society, as Twitter has been shown recently to be the main platform of news for Saudis (Sabbeh & Baatwah, 2018). Thus, despite the importance of internet news to Saudi audiences who undergo higher restrictions in traditional news outlets, particularly print newspapers, minimal research has been done on this issue in the Saudi Arabian context (Al-Jaber, 2012). Moreover, the internet is assumed to be an alternative platform to traditional media (Al-Saggaf & Simmons, 2015). Further, it is considered more efficient in terms of providing up-to-date news and interactivity amongst news audiences, especially the young.

As a result, young people choose the new medium over the older media; thus, they can receive news updates instantly and can interact with news providers and with other news readers in various ways. When they access the internet, Saudis spend more time online accessing news than general information. Accessing news is their primary online activity (Sait et al., 2007). From other research in the Saudi context, it has been established that there has been steady growth in the influence that online newspapers have over print newspapers with regard to how newspapers are perceived by the Saudi audience. However assessing the credibility of these sources remains essential (Almaghlooth, 2013; Dennis et al., 2013).

Further, Mehrabi et al. (2009) pose the question of whether people are using the internet at the expense of traditional forms of mass communication, as many consider the use of new technology as a novelty. Novelty is a powerful factor among the Saudi Arabian youth: some young people may use new technologies not because they offer a very high quality of news but because they are new (Al-Jaber, 2012). As a result, the internet's novelty and its attractiveness may obscure evaluations regarding its credibility. Mehrabi et al. (2009) maintain that new technology has the potential to prompt people to turn their backs on traditional forms of news media, such as print newspapers. However, the technology used for providing news may affect news audiences when the news credibility is perceived by the audiences to be similar for online news forms and traditional news forms, as in some Western societies.

This raises the subsequent problem of the credibility of online news as previous studies have pointed to the high tendency of Saudi audiences towards the consumption of online news, from both exclusively online newspapers and other online news outlets. In addition, all print newspapers in Saudi Arabia have online versions, including an active version and a printable, readable copy of the print version (Alzahrani, 2016). Thus, while newspapers in Saudi Arabia are famous for their print versions, they also have online versions, which may provide them with a big opportunity to attract Saudi audiences. if they can ensure high credibility and satisfy their audience's needs.

According to Sait et al., (2007), Saudi Arabian audiences spend more than 40 hours a week accessing the internet, including young people. Thus, the number of Saudi internet users is rapidly increasing (Alshahrani, 2016). Moreover, the majority of internet users in Saudi Arabia are under 35 years old (Martin et al., 2018). Education levels have been reported as having different influences on internet users regarding their usage of the internet (Althiabi, 2017). Thus, Saudi individuals who use the internet frequently are likely to be young with high school education or a diploma, Bachelor or Master's degree. This can be explained by the high level of news consumption among educated Saudi audiences, so university students and young audiences holding a Bachelor degree consume more news than those with a lower level of education (Dennis et al., 2015). The use of the internet is spreading increasingly rapidly amongst males compared to females, and more among the younger generation than in the older population (Aljabre, 2013).

In addition, the gender factor is more noticeable in some media forms than others (American Press Institute, 2014). Thus, it might be understood that females may not go online as much as males because of privacy concerns, while young people's high engagement with the internet can be explained by its novelty and ease of use. However, the case can be different when the internet users hold unreal personal profiles. Thus, it has been reported that some Saudi females use nicknames, hide their personal images and hide their family names (Guta & Karolak, 2015). This means that privacy concerns may affect the real personal profiles rather than the unreal personal profiles.

Furthermore, gender has been described as a significant predictor for media credibility (Golan & Kioussis, 2010). In addition, it has been shown that gender and age have correlations

with credibility (Robinson & Kohut, 1988). As a result, this study tried to engage with males and females aged 18 and over. From past research, one study differentiated between older users and young users and found that the older users used the internet more for cultural purposes, while the young users used it for chatting and entertainment (Simsim, 2011). However, internet users tend to evaluate internet news more carefully when they are looking for serious information, such as medical information, than when they are looking at entertainment information (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000). Despite this, among university students in Saudi Arabia, the most common daily online activity is checking for news updates (Sait et al., 2007). Thus, most of the participants in Saudi Arabia are motivated to find news on the internet rather than via print newspapers in order to make decisions on important issues and to judge the government (Al-Jaber, 2012). Recently, young audiences aged 18-24 years old were shown to consume more online news than older audiences (Dennis et al., 2017). Therefore, people's social categories may impact their choices and their reliance on news.

Western research, however, seems to be divided on this topic. One study argues that internet technology will soon grow and, as a result, decrease the usage of old forms of media (Meyer, 2009). In contrast, several studies suggest that the mass media, including television and newspapers, are still the main sources of news among the young generation, so there is no indication that printed newspapers are being replaced by news websites (Chyi & Chadha, 2012; Sabigan, 2007; Yuan, 2011). However, in Saudi Arabia, literature on the effect of the internet on traditional mass media is minimal (Al-Jaber, 2012). This research project intends to close this gap in the literature, as it analyses the emergent behaviour of Saudis in terms of how they perceive the credibility of online news sources, such as exclusively online newspapers, compared with more traditional sources, such as print newspapers with their online counterparts, based on their social categories.

## **4.6 Conclusion**

It was noted through studies concerning the news consumption among Saudis that some similarities exist between the factors that influence the audience's perceptions of print and online media. Bearing in mind the most influential personal factors influencing newspaper audiences regarding credibility and reliance (detailed in Chapter Two), this chapter confirmed the importance of social categories in Saudi society where the media environment has highly



restricted government and religious rules. Moreover, applying the social identity elements (as described in Table 2, Chapter Three) of the participants can help explain the credibility perceptions and reliance among Saudis, taking into consideration how Islamic religiosity may impact Saudi audiences' perceptions of credibility and their reliance on print and online newspapers.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Research Methodology Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches in Studying Saudi Audiences**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Research methodology is an important part of this thesis. It explains the design of the study based on the philosophy of the research and its objectives, in order to set out the most appropriate methods to undertake the research. This enables the researcher to answer the research questions mentioned in Chapter One.

This chapter therefore discusses the need for a methodology to address research questions one, two and three by exploring the audiences' perceptions of credibility and their consequent reliance on the given print newspapers with their online counterparts and exclusively online newspapers. The fourth research question is addressed by interpreting the audiences' perceptions of credibility regarding the given print and online newspapers by investigating the shared meanings among the audiences' interpretations. Therefore, this chapter discusses the overall research design and introduce the research stages that connect the research framework to the empirical work.

#### **5.2 Research Design**

Research designs are an essential step when conducting empirical research as they contain the elements of the research plan that can properly facilitate the research process and achieve the research objectives through the research questions, considering mainly the research's nature, inquiry and sample (Creswell, 2009). There are three main contributions to considering research design in the literature.

The first one was developed by Crotty (1998) and it concerns four elements: epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods, as shown in Table (4). Crotty argues that the research design should answer four questions: (1) what epistemology informs the research? (2) what theoretical perspective lies behind the methodology in

question? (3) what methodology governs our choice and use of methods (4) what methods do we propose to use?

**Table 4: Elements of research design**

<b>Research Design Scopes</b>	<b>Description</b>
Epistemology	Concerning the knowledge theory that is implied in the theoretical perspective such as objectivism and subjectivism “How to know what we know?”
Theoretical perspective	Concerning the philosophical worldview, such as positivism and interpretivism.
Methodology	Concerning the tactics that will bridge the research methods to the final findings.
Method	Concerning practices and procedures such as surveys or interviews.

(Crotty, 1998)

The second approach research design was proposed by Kagioglou, Cooper, Aouad and Sexton (2000), who narrowed it down to only three levels: the research philosophy, the research approaches and research techniques. The research philosophy concerns the research’s pre-understanding and it guides the selection of the research approaches and research methods. The research approaches include the nature of the research such as testing existing theory or establishing new theory while research techniques include the tools of the data collection and data analysis.

The third design, which contains three additional levels, was created by Saunders et al., (2007). The third research design includes the first research design (Crotty, 1998) and the second research design (Kagioglou et al., (2000). The uniqueness of the third design comes from its details, which in turn cover all the aspects of the previous two designs, as well as facilitating the research processes including research philosophy, research approach, research

strategy, research choices, research time horizons and research tactics with practices, as explained in Table (5). Therefore, this study was guided by the third design.

**Table 5: Layers of research design**

<b>Research Design Scopes</b>	<b>Description</b>
Philosophies of Research	Research philosophies concern ways of thinking such as epistemology, ontology and axiology, which drive the research philosophy such as positivism, interpretivism, objectivism, and subjectivism to explore knowledge through research based on the philosophy's assumptions. Research philosophy includes the person's assumptions about how s/he views the world.
Approaches of Research	Concerns the deductive approach which is based on existing theory or the inductive approach which is based on generating new theory or developing an existing theory.
Strategies of Research	Concerns tactics such as survey, case study and experiment.
Choices of Research	Concerns one method or mixed methods.
Time Horizons of Research	Can be cross-sectional or longitudinal.
Research Tactics and Practices	Concerns data collection and data analysis.

(Saunders et al., 2007)

### **5.3 Philosophy of the Research**

The research philosophy is the base that shows the nature of knowledge and how the world is viewed (Saunders et al., 2007). Thus, in social science studies the research philosophy is inclined to study social issues by taking into consideration the fact that subjective assumptions are more likely than objective assumptions (Yardley & Bishop, 2010). There are three main ways of thinking regarding research philosophies; these are epistemology, ontology and axiology, as explained below:

- Epistemology, where the thinking is about the ways of gaining knowledge, such as truth and belief, so it can be understood as a theory of knowledge (Rescher, 2003; Tennis, 2008).
- Ontology, where the thinking is about certain entities such as substances so it can be understood as a theory of reality (Holden & Lynch, 2004).
- Axiology, where the thinking is about values such as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ so it concerns “the judgments of values” (Saunders et al., 2007).

Thus, all the previous ways of thinking are influenced by the research philosophy (worldview) (Johnson et al., 2007). Moreover, the research philosophy shapes the research processes from the beginning until the end. One important consideration for selecting the research philosophy is the research’s nature and goal, which can be understood by the philosophical principles and theoretical assumptions of the scientific research among natural science research and social science research (Moon & Blackman, 2014).

For example, there two opposite known philosophies that are called positivism and interpretivism. When it comes to research, positivism can deal properly with quantitative methods based on experiments or exact measures as mostly done in scientific research, while interpretivism can assist research that has a subjective orientation such as that seeking interpretations of human behaviour (Neuman, 2014). More so, the interpretivism worldview is more appropriate when the research engages the participants as active actors to seek their opinions about a social phenomenon and to explore their views and interpretations subjectively (Willcocks, Sauer, & Lacity, 2016). However, some research philosophies may help detached qualitative research or detached quantitative research separately, but when it comes to combining quantitative and qualitative research in one study, there is a need for another philosophy that can support both methods based on the research’s nature and objectives (Creswell, 2014).

The focus on social phenomena is based on the research orientation as objective research focuses on studying social phenomena to explore social laws and behaviours while subjective research looks for the meanings that are attached to human experiences (Yilmaz, 2013). Moreover, research that explores only interpretations and meanings behind participants

as social actors needs a subjective philosophy such as interpretivism (Saunders et al., 2015). However, this points to the missing side when each worldview is conducted separately.

Thus, a number of scholars have shown the importance of applying mixed approaches objectively and subjectively when studying any phenomenon related in some ways to a social context (Bowen, Rose, & Pilkington, 2017; Creswell, Shope, Clark, & Green, 2006; Johnson, 2006). Thus, the main research objectives in this research are related to filling the knowledge gap by exploring the audiences' credibility perceptions and reliance patterns and explaining their perceived credibility through their interpretations. The missing side of each approach inspired philosophical studies to look for a philosophy that can support studies related to a social context. Thus, the pragmatism worldview has been recommended by a number of scholars as a philosophy that can serve research concerning a social context to work successfully by combining the research's objective side and its subjective side (Azorín & Cameron, 2010; Cameron, 2009; Creswell, 2014; Johnson et al., 2007; Saunders et al., 2015).

Pragmatism gives the power to the research inquiry over the research philosophy so it considers what works when answering the research questions rather than forming the research based on the philosophy's assumptions (Azorín & Cameron, 2010). Thus, pragmatism is associated with "freedom of inquiry" which means that it gives higher freedom to the research results, which in turn satisfy the research questions – more so than the other philosophies (Morgan, 2014). Additionally, pragmatism was adopted from the Greek word "pragma" which means 'actions' so it focuses on the research from the practice and practical dimensions (Pansiri, 2005). The main advantage of pragmatism is that it can work as a combination of positivism and interpretivism so pragmatism argues that the research question has the highest priority for determining the research philosophy, which can work possibly by combining different approaches (Saunders et al., 2007). This points to the main orientation of pragmatism, which takes attention from the methodological questions to the research questions, so pragmatism considers that the world is not an independent unity (Creswell, 2014).

Although pragmatism has been developed by Dewey out of the assumptions of other philosophies, Dewey proposed five practical steps to benefit from guiding the research through the pragmatism worldview as follows:

- 1- Admitting the case as a problem;
- 2- Determining the importance of one method over other methods for defining the research problem;
- 3- Improving the possible actions to respond to the research problem;
- 4- Assessing the likely actions based on their likely outcomes;
- 5- Implementing the likely expected actions to address the research problem (Morgan, 2014).

This research project sought to determine the influence of the newspapers' audiences on evaluating the newspapers' credibility and relying on the newspapers. This inquiry was based on the lack of investigation regarding the shared meanings among the news audiences who perceive newspapers as credible as named in this study as the knowledge gap.

Moreover, this issue becomes problematic when the research focuses on the Saudi context as the limited freedom and the restricted religious orientation in Saudi Arabia may motivate Saudi audiences to hold different credibility criteria and reliance patterns to those that have been found in research on societies with high levels of freedom.

This led this research to focus on the audiences' perspective as this is the proper way to explore how they deal differently with the newspapers' credibility and their reliance on them. The credibility criteria can be explored through the interview by looking for the shared meanings among the target social groups in this study. Thus, credibility perceptions which were gained in the questionnaire phase mean the extent of giving the target newspapers credibility scores ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree with the provided credibility statement while the credibility shared meanings which were gained in the interview phase mean the credibility standards that are held by the target social groups which can explain their credibility scores in the questionnaire phase.

However, the reliance patterns were included only in the questionnaire phase to explore how far or close the reliance patterns to the credibility perceptions which have been mentioned by a number of studies in the literature review. The questionnaire phase (credibility perceptions and reliance patterns) needs an objective approach. The interview phase (shared meanings of credibility) as the second task in this study needs a subjective approach.

According to Creswell (2014), pragmatism paves the way for researchers with mixed approaches to apply different research methods with different forms of collecting and analysing the data. Working properly and purposely in empirical research, particularly within a social context without the restricted roles of other philosophies has given a good advantage to pragmatism (Morgan, 2014). Thus, in this study, the credibility perceptions and the reliance patterns can be explored properly through an objective method such as a questionnaire, which will provide the rates of credibility and reliance in numbers. On the other hand, the audiences' interpretations of the found credibility perceptions and reliance patterns needs a subjective approach such as interviews, which can help to uncover the audiences' voices and views regarding the research inquiry.

This study sought to apply work from the study of social identity – specifically social identity theory – in order to help the researcher to answer the research questions, which were set to explore the influence of the Saudi social categories on the credibility perceptions and reliance patterns, and to explain the perceived credibility through the credibility criteria of the dominant social categories. This points to the social context that surrounds this study. Such understanding of research philosophies leads the researcher to meet the planned objectives and create valuable outcomes.

## **5.4 Research Approach**

There are two well-known approaches in research – deductive and inductive – which are based on the way of driving the research from the beginning to the end, mostly in terms of data collection. Deductive refers to applying and assessing existing theories, going from the top to the bottom, while inductive refers to generating new theories, going from the bottom to the top (Berg, 2001). Thus, the deductive approach is based highly on testing existing theory (theory-driven) while the inductive approach is based on exploring new in-depth understanding in order to generate new concepts (data-driven) (Yardley & Bishop, 2010).

However, there is a third approach, called 'abductive' (Richardson & Kramer, 2006). Some scholars call it a mixed approach as it contains both deductive and inductive approaches (Berg, 2001). The abductive approach refers to assessing and applying an existing theory by



extending its frame to generate additional assumptions that can lead to new research to produce a new frame with the used theory (Yardley & Bishop, 2010).

Applying mixed approaches can benefit from the advantages of both the deductive and inductive approaches (Willcocks et al., 2016). Therefore, this study is based on the third approach (a mix of deductive and inductive) that is the so-called abductive approach. It applies a research framework (as it is detailed later in this section, see Table 6) containing an existing theory, along with other variables as additional elements that were drawn up from the entire literature review in order to extend the subject's understanding with the purpose of contributing to knowledge. Thus, regarding the elements of the Social Identity Theory, the first and second elements (categorisation and identification), alongside with the variables of credibility and reliance, answered the first three research questions while the third element answered the fourth research question as follows:

**Q1** What are Saudi audiences' general perceptions of the credibility of - and their reliance on - given newspapers?

**Q2** How do the individual personal characteristics of Saudi audiences affect their perceptions of a particular newspaper's credibility?

**Q3** How do the individual personal characteristics of Saudi audiences affect their patterns of reliance on a particular newspaper?

**Q4** How do the shared meanings held by Saudi audiences shape their credibility criteria for the given newspapers?

Mixed-approach research designs have been considered differently based on the main research category that the study belongs to. Thus, there are three categories of research studies: explanatory, descriptive and exploratory (Gray, 2014). The explanatory category, as stated by Gray (2014), is where the research is concerned with explaining the relationships between variables or explaining the attitudes of the participants towards the research problems. The descriptive category is concerned with providing more details about the research phenomenon but the exploratory design is used when the research explores a new phenomenon about which little is known (Neuman, 2014; Saunders et al., 2007). Additionally, Maxwell (2005) added a new type of research type, the interpretative type, when you explore

a subject with some known information to know the unknown information and to interpret the new knowledge with the already known knowledge from past studies. However, this type can be related mostly to the explanatory category.

Moreover, the interpretive pure type can be related to any category based on the main aim of the research. Thus, the main aim of this current research is to investigate the credibility perceptions and reliance patterns of Saudis towards the given newspapers then to explain their credibility perceptions in terms of their shared meanings, which leads to us nominating the explanatory category as a proper category for this study.

There are two types of mixed research approaches regarding the time over which the research methods are implemented. The first one is called concurrent research where the mixed approaches are used in the same period of time, while the second one is called sequential research, where one approach starts then when it is completed the other method begins (Cameron, 2009). The sequential mixed research was adopted for this research as the main aim of the second research approach is to build on the first research approach, so combining them in the same period of time does not help to answer the research questions or achieve the research objectives.

The consideration of which approach the research should start with and which method the research should conclude with depends on the research type, e.g. explanatory versus exploratory. Thus, the explanatory approach starts with the quantitative approach followed by the qualitative method, while the exploratory starts with the qualitative method followed by the quantitative method (Creswell et al., 2006). This shows the main aim of each type, whether it is to explore or to explain.

It can be an advantage of mixed research methods when the research starts with the quantitative method and ends with the qualitative method as the latter can clarify any unanswered questions about the research phenomenon (Neuman, 2014). One of the main benefits of combining the quantitative method with the qualitative method is to let each method complement the other (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, this study adopted the explanatory research design for several reasons, as follows:

- a. This subject (the credibility perceptions and the reliance patterns of Saudis in terms of the given newspapers) has not been investigated in Saudi Arabia so this design can help this research to determine how credibility perceptions and reliance patterns are influenced by the personal characteristics of Saudis.
- b. This design helps the research to hear the voices of the participants in terms of interpreting the found credibility perceptions of the audiences.
- c. This design gives the research a higher chance of answering the research questions completely as the last phase provides an open strategy to ask the interviewees about any unanswered issues related to the research subject.

Therefore, the mixed research approach is usually based on at least two methods. The methods are selected according to the research questions. Thus, the next section discusses the selected research methods.

## **5.5 Research Strategies**

The third scope of research methodology is to differentiate between the research strategies and provide justification for the research strategies that are applied in this study. The research strategies are based on the research goal and answering the research questions. The research strategies that can be applied based on the research goal are as explained below:

- Experiment, where the research is concerned with causal relations between particular variables. This is used mostly in scientific research (Yardley & Bishop, 2010).
- Survey, where the research is concerned with studying the frequency of a particular phenomenon in order to answer the questions of who, what, where and how many. This type of strategy is associated mostly with the deductive approach (Neuman, 2014).
- Case study, where the research investigates a particular phenomenon through its rich context, as mostly done with explanatory research and exploratory research (Hancock, Ockleford, & Windridge, 2009).
- Action research, where the researcher does research to find a research issue rather to focus on a particular issue or problem that he encounters, such as looking for implications of organisational change in an organisation (Saunders et al., 2007).

- Grounded theory, where the research uses some observations and insights to help develop a new understanding about a particular phenomenon. This strategy is used mostly with the inductive approach (Kelly, 2016).
- Ethnography, where the researcher becomes a part of the phenomenon's context to live the phenomenon as it is over a long period of time so the researcher may trace events or people over a long time to study the phenomenon (Hancock et al., 2009).
- Archival research, where the research is concerned with studying some records about a particular phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2007).

This study explores the perceptions of credibility and consequent reliance on national print and online newspapers by Saudi audiences (deductive survey) as well as explaining the found credibility perceptions from the questionnaire by exploring the shared meanings between the participants in terms of their social groups (inductive interview).

## 5.6 Choices

There are two well-known research strategies: quantitative and qualitative as mentioned earlier in the research approach. The quantitative strategy is appropriate when the research is focused on obtaining data through well-defined variables with limited options for answering (Neuman, 2014). On the other hand, the qualitative strategy is appropriate when the research targets the participants by giving them questions with unlimited answers, in order to explore their views regarding a social or particular issue (Kelly, 2016).

However, there is a hybrid method called mixed methods, which refers to the use of both quantitative and qualitative strategies. This can in turn assess or apply the existing theory (with a quantitative strategy) and contribute to the development of an additional research framework (with a qualitative strategy) (Creswell, 2009). The theory is used for this study just as a tool to interpret the questionnaire outcomes regarding the influence of social categories on the credibility perceptions of and reliance on the given newspapers. This approach can fit the quantitative strategy. On the other hand, the qualitative strategy in this context is complementary to the quantitative strategy, so credibility perceptions and credibility criteria which are the main focus in the qualitative phase are interpreted based on the four dominant social categories. This approach alongside the use of social identity theory helps to provide

the possible influential categorisations to the respondents to let the respondents identify themselves with the proper categories, then compare the answers to finally provide the dominant social categories (in the quantitative phase) which guide the created themes (in the qualitative phase). Thus, in some cases mixed methods are better than applying only one method because the research outcomes can be extended higher with mixed methods than when employing only one method (Gray, 2014).

As established in the literature review (Chapter Two), most of the studies concerning audiences' perceptions of news credibility are quantitative. Furthermore, the majority of literature linked to the research framework benefiting from social identity theory has been done by applying a quantitative strategy. However, quantitative methods present a limited number of ideas, depending on the number of responses and the audience type, compared with qualitative methods, especially when looking for definitions and explanations from the audience (Berg, 2001). Thus, the research strategy is selected based on the research goal – whether it is to test existing knowledge, to generate new knowledge or to combine examining extant theory and generating new concepts about the research phenomenon (Holden & Lynch, 2004).

Additionally, Berg (2001) points out that quantitative methods have the advantage of involving a larger sample than qualitative methods, as well as being able to measure specific factors. Quantitative methods are therefore more suitable for measuring with closed questions, while qualitative methods are appropriate for exploring with open-ended questions (Kelly, 2016).

This encourages this study to use both strategies in order to explore the audiences' attitudes towards credibility and reliance and explain their perceived credibility through their interpretations. This combination is called “complementary” as one method is based on the other (Cameron, 2009). Applying the mixed methods in the way of the complementary to answer the four research questions is detailed in the research framework (see Table 6).

Therefore, a sequential strategy is used in this study by applying the mixed- methods approach in order to have a clear insight into how Saudis perceive newspapers' credibility and

how much they rely on the given newspapers. This allows the researcher to explore the credibility criteria that the dominant Saudi social categories hold.

**Table 6: Research Framework underpinning the research questions based on the application of Social Identity Theory by exploring the credibility of and reliance on newspapers among Saudi audiences**

<b>Research Framework</b>	<b>Evaluative Factors</b>	<b>The Basis Enquiries of Empirical Investigation for the Research Questions</b>	<b>Processing Task</b>	<b>Target</b>
Credibility elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unbiased</li> <li>- Tell the whole story</li> <li>- Accuracy</li> <li>- Trust</li> <li>- Fairness</li> </ul>	How do the Saudi social categories influence the perceived credibility of the 18 national KSA newspapers based on the combined five elements of credibility?	<b>1- Literature Review</b>  Scale measuring credibility perceptions	Extracting credibility scale for the questionnaire phase
Reliance elements	Degrees	-To what extent do Saudi social categories influence reliance on the given newspapers?	<b>2- Literature Review</b>  Scale measuring reliance degree	Extracting reliance scale for the questionnaire phase
Social identity elements	Categorisation	-What social categorisations can influence Saudi audiences in terms of evaluating a newspaper's credibility?	<b>3- Literature Review:</b>  Finding the potential influential personal on credibility perceptions: Gender, age, education, income, employment, region and religiosity levels	Extracting the personal factors that are likely to influence the perceived credibility among the Saudi participants for the questionnaire phase
	Identification	-How do Saudi audiences identify	<b>-4- Questionnaire phase</b>	<b>Answering the research questions:</b>

		themselves with the provided categorisations in terms of the credibility of and reliance on the given newspapers?	Finding how the respondents identify themselves in terms of the social categorisations with the overall credibility perceptions and reliance patterns	<p><b>First, Second and Third:</b></p> <p>Q1- What are Saudi audiences' general perceptions of the credibility of - and their reliance on - given newspapers?</p> <p>Q2- How do the individual personal characteristics of Saudi audiences affect their perceptions of a particular newspaper's credibility?</p> <p>Q3- How do the individual personal characteristics of Saudi audiences affect their patterns of reliance on a particular newspaper?</p>
	Comparisons	-What are the shared meanings among Saudi social categories in relation to their criteria of credibility for the given newspapers?	<p><b>5- Interview phase</b></p> <p>Comparing the credibility perceptions and criteria among the dominant social categories</p>	<p><b>Answering the fourth research question:</b></p> <p>Q4-How do the shared meanings held by Saudi audiences shape their credibility criteria for the given newspapers?</p>

## 5.7 Time Horizons

Research projects are categorised in terms of timeframe as cross-sectional research or longitudinal research, depending on the period of time spent studying and collecting data. In cross-sectional research, a particular subject is studied over a particular period of time, while in longitudinal research, a particular subject is studied over several periods of time (Saunders et al., 2007). However, studying something over different periods of time is difficult so a lower number of studies tend to employ this type of research timeframe (Neuman, 2014).

Therefore, this study is cross-sectional due to the limited time available for collecting the data and the limitations inherent within PhD programmes. The research questions can also be answered, and the research objectives therefore achieved, with a cross-sectional timeframe.

## **5.8 Sampling**

Accessing the right sample for the research can reduce the chances of being wrong (Gray, 2014). Thus, the sample should be representative of the entire population of the study context (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). There are different sampling techniques classified as probability and non-probability techniques. The former is further divided depending on how highly the sample is random, for example simple random, systematic, stratified and cluster sample (Berg, 2001). Non-probability sampling techniques are classified according to how little the sample is randomised, for example quota sample, purposive sample, self-selection sample, snowball sample and convenience sample.

The research questions and objectives consider the selected sample so if the research requires a sample with varying characteristics, non-probability sampling techniques would help to achieve the research objectives better than probability techniques (Saunders et al., 2007). Additionally, a snowball sampling strategy is recommended when the researcher looks for various classes among the target sample (Berg, 2001).

Thus, in this study the sample was obtained via the snowball strategy so that the researcher could reach a sample with varying characteristics with regard to age, gender, education, employment, income, region, and religiosity levels. This was important as this study looks for the influence of social categories on the credibility perceptions and the reliance patterns of the given newspapers. The participants were identified by asking academics for volunteers. The universities contacted were the King Abdulaziz University and University of Jeddah in the western region and Alimam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University and King Saud University in the central region.

Therefore, a Saudi educated audience aged over 18 years was the target sample for this research. This age group was targeted because according to the last census in 2010, people aged between 20 and 39 years old comprise around two-thirds of the entire Saudi population (General Authority for Statistics of KSA, 2015b). According to Ziani et al., (2015), Saudi



Arabia, the same as the three other Gulf Cooperation Council countries, has a large number of university students. This study targets educated people aged 18 years old and over, because it was reported that most Saudis aged 18 years old or over fall into these two educational levels (high school or less and Bachelor degree). The participants from these two educational levels therefore represent the highest numbers of respondents compared to other educational levels (General Authority for Statistics of KSA, 2016). According to the General Authority for Statistics of KSA (2015), Saudi individuals with a Bachelor's degree represent the highest percentage of the Saudi labour force at 35.5%, followed by individuals who have obtained a high school diploma or equivalent at 34.4%.

A sample that is representative of the entire population should not only be chosen based on its characteristics, but also on the accepted number according to research standards. Thus, the total population of Saudi nationals in the regions covered by the survey is approximately 15 million. The online sample size calculator (available at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/sample-size-calculator/>) estimated that with a population of 15 million, to obtain responses with a 99% confidence level, and a 5% margin of error, the minimum sample size is 666 for the quantitative method phase (questionnaire).

Consequently, if at least 666 participants provided a complete set of answers to the questionnaire, then (a) we can say with confidence that the percentage of the population who would pick the same answers would be about 99%; and (b) if 50% of the respondents picked an answer then we can say with confidence that if the same question was asked to the entire population then between 45% (50-5) and 55% (50+5) would also have picked that answer. Although the number of participants who were students was higher than the other types of employment status, this can be related to the highest educated groups having either high school education or less, or a Bachelor degree. However, the study sample gained was higher than the target sample as the size was 737, which reduces the margin of error from 5% to 4.8%, which provides better results.

For the qualitative phase (interview), the interviewees were identified by asking six professors and lecturers in the same universities in the western and central regions to each find six participants who had already participated in the questionnaire phase in this. This meant that a total of 36 people were invited to take part in the interviews. The selection of the

interview sample was based on the personal characteristics that showed the highest influence on the dominant social categories in the questionnaire outcomes, as detailed in Chapter Seven.

Thus, the 36 interviewees were chosen in order to investigate further the main trends unearthed from the questionnaire results in terms of the credibility perceptions regarding the associated newspapers with the four dominant social categories. This was achieved by addressing the fourth research question to explore the shared meanings regarding the questionnaire indicators among the target social categories (see Table 6 in this chapter). Thus, the characteristics of the four social categories were the conditions of eligibility for participating in the interviews, as detailed in Chapter Seven.

## **5.9 Data Collection Methods**

This section explains how the research data was collected and analysed through two research methods. First, the quantitative method discovered the Saudi audience's credibility's perceptions and reliance's patterns with regard to the given print and online newspapers. This was performed by distributing an online questionnaire through different Saudi professors in four different universities in the central and western regions of Saudi Arabia. The online tool 'Survey-Monkey' was employed because the internet service in Saudi Arabia can be reached by the majority of people.

Second, the qualitative research method followed the quantitative method and it comprised of conducting interviews with Saudis from the central and western regions. The participants were identified by asking for volunteers who had already participated in the online questionnaire. Thus, the interviewees were chosen by contacting academics at the King Abdulaziz University and University of Jeddah in the western region and at Alimam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University and King Saud University in the central region as it is detailed in Section 5.11.

This selection guaranteed the participation of an educated sample, which this study planned to engage. The interviewees were filtered based on the characteristics of the dominant social categories that had been identified in the questionnaire phase (see Chapter Six). This enabled the researcher to obtain accurate interpretations regarding their credibility perceptions to find the credibility criteria of the dominant social categories for the given newspapers.

### 5.9.1 Quantitative Method

The quantitative method comprised the distribution of an online questionnaire to 737 volunteers in the two biggest regions in Saudi Arabia in order to investigate their credibility perceptions and reliance patterns for the given newspapers. Thus, this study explains how gender, age, education, income, occupation, region and religiosity levels affect Saudi audiences in terms of credibility perceptions and reliance patterns for the 18 given newspapers. The perceived credibility of the newspapers and the reliance on newspapers were therefore considered as dependent variables in this study, while gender, age, education, income, occupation, region, and religiosity levels were independent variables.

First, this study considers credibility as believability of the audiences towards news media outlets (McCroskey & Young, 1981). Despite the discussions in documented literature concerning the different dimensions of credibility measurement for the press, this research used a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree, containing these five items: Fair, Accurate, Unbiased, Tell the whole story, and Can be trusted. These were generated by Gaziano and McGrath (1986) and developed by Meyer (1988) in order to achieve the overall analysis of the believability (credibility) of news in Saudi Arabia in terms of the given newspapers (see Appendix A).

In addition, this study involved six Saudi local print newspapers with their six online counterparts and six Saudi local exclusively online newspapers, which have been ranked by Alexa.com as the following:

- Print newspapers: *Alriyadh* print newspaper, *Okas* print newspaper, *Aljazirah* print newspaper, *Almadina* print newspaper, *Alyaum* print newspaper, and *Alwatan* print newspaper.
- Online counterparts of print newspapers: *Alriyadh* online newspaper, *Okas* online newspaper, *Aljazirah* online newspaper, *Almadina* online newspaper, *Alyaum* online newspaper, and *Alwatan* online newspaper.
- Exclusively online newspapers: *Sabq* exclusively online newspaper, *Almarsd* exclusively online newspaper, *Mapnews* exclusively online newspaper, *Kolalwatn*

exclusively online newspaper, *Alweeam* exclusively online newspaper, and *Twasul* exclusively online newspaper.

Second, the reliance on online media has been measured in past studies in several ways. For example, some researchers measured the reliance by the number of days participants were connected with media, the number of hours spent using online sources, or the number of times the internet was accessed (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2005; Johnson & Kaye, 1998). However, a number of studies have used self-description of how much the participants rely on media by describing their usage as (1) *none* to (4) *a lot*, or from (1) *never rely on* to (5) *heavily rely on*, or from (1) *do not rely on at all* to (7) *heavily rely on* (Cassidy, 2007; Golan & Day, 2010; Hamdy, 2013; Johnson & Kaye, 2004; Mehrabi et al., 2009; Wanta & Hu, 1994). Thus, this study used a five-point Likert scale from (1) *never rely on* to (5) *heavily rely on* because the number of days, the number of visits or the number of hours may not indicate the reliance clearly and may not fit print newspapers (Johnson & Kaye, 1998).

Third, demographic factors such as gender, age, education, income, and occupation were measured as the following. Gender was female and male while age was 1/ *18-29 years old*, 2/ *30-41 years old*, 3/ *42-53 years old*, 4/ *54-65 years old*, 5/ *more than 65 years old* (Hamdy, 2013). Monthly income was measured from 1/ *1000- less than 4999 SR*, 2/ *5000-9999 SR*, 3/ *10000-14999 SR*, 4/ *15000 or more SR*, 5/ *not specified* (Almogbel, Begg, & Wilford, 2015). Education ranged from 1/ *High School*, 2/ *Diploma after High School*, 3/ *Bachelor's degree*, 4/ *Master's degree*, 5/ *PhD degree*. Occupation ranged from 1/ *Unemployment*, 2/ *Student*, 3/ *Employment in government sectors*, 4/ *Employment in Private Sectors*, 5/ *Retired* (Almogbel et al., 2015).

Fourth, as was mentioned in the literature review, Saudi Arabia is labelled as the most religious Islamic country (Al-Qarni, 2004; Golan & Kioussis, 2010; Moaddel & Karabenick, 2008). However, Al-Qarni (2004) stated that not all people in Saudi Arabia possess the same level of religiosity as some of them are highly religious while others are moderately religious. Thus, the highly religious people in Saudi Arabia are known clearly by their opinions towards Islam, which are related to an old and traditional interpretation, while moderately religious people may accept new opinions and new interpretations if they feel persuaded by logical evidence (Alnajrani et al., 2018).

For example, the ban on some contentious issues has recently been lifted by Saudi Islamic scholars who are known to be not conservative, but more secular, progressive, liberal, or modernist. Such activities include listening to music, letting women driving cars, letting women uncover their faces, and smoking. According to El-Menouar (2014), issues such as listening to music or sex segregation, which are seen by Islamic conservatives as secularism consequences, should be understood as an essential part of religiosity in Islam. A small number of studies concerning levels of religiosity or conservativeness has been conducted in Islamic contexts but most of them have been carried out in non-Islamic countries and they have used measures that can differentiate between diverse religions or different contexts in order to measure the engagement of high and low religiosity practices in general (El-Menouar, 2014; Golan & Baker, 2012; Moaddel & Karabenick, 2008).

The religiosity scales used in the aforementioned studies may not give accurate results when used with Saudi citizens. Most of these scales measure religiosity through the frequency with which people practise religious acts, without taking into consideration how individuals view themselves. Therefore, on such scales the majority of Saudi people would be defined as highly religious but this does not reflect the reality, as some are highly religious and some are moderately religious (Kucinkas, 2010).

As a result, this study used a self-rated scale for religiosity levels, which asked the participants to indicate the degree of religiosity they consider themselves to have, from 1 to 10, with 1 being *moderately religious* and 10 being *highly religious* (Abdel-Khalek, 2010; Pintak, 2014; Sönmez, 2013). Thus, the self-rated scale was more appropriate for the Saudi context because of its flexibility and the sensitivity of this topic in Saudi Arabia. According to Abdel-Khalek (2009), the self-rated scale of religiosity showed a high validity when it was applied in the Saudi context. The aforementioned study also stated that this scale clearly indicated Islamic religiosity in highly religious contexts.

### **5.9.2 Qualitative Method**

For the qualitative method, this research interviewed members of each of the dominant social categories that had been revealed through the data analysis of the questionnaire (see Chapter Six). Thus, four social categories were found to influence the credibility perceptions

and reliance patterns for the given newspapers. Therefore, this study carried out interviews with 36 participants from the western and eastern regions with different personal characteristics based on the characteristics of the dominant social categories (see Chapter Seven).

As previously explained, the interview sample was selected by contacting professors and lecturers at the universities in the two regions. To obtain useful data for the topic, the research posed a variety of questions that met the research objectives. First, the discussions started by asking the participants to answer demographic questions about gender, age, education, occupation and income, and to rate their religiosity level from (*1-moderately religious*) to (*10-highly religious*). Asking the interviewees about the demographic characteristics was done to firstly confirm the previous outcomes of the questionnaire and secondly to help identifying interviewees with the credibility perceptions found in the questionnaire phase.

Then the participants were asked some introductory questions to familiarise them with the topic of the study. The questions were general such as – do you read newspapers? do you use the internet? what newspapers do you read? The subsequent questions were based on the main research question, which was planned to be answered through the interview (the fourth research question). This question focused on defining the credibility criteria associated with the four dominant social categories of the given newspapers by seeking the reasons why the members of a social category gave high or low credibility perceptions in the questionnaire phase to particular newspapers. This was processed by answering main sub-questions such as: why do you give the highest credibility to a particular newspaper and the lowest credibility to a particular newspaper? If you hear conflicting news from the newspapers that you rate as highly credible, which one do you believe and why? (see Appendix B)

The answers to the previous questions and the rest (see Appendix B) helped to answer the fourth research question. The interview answers were classified as answering one of four questions (see below), leading to the fourth research question being answered based on the shared meanings among the members of each of the dominant social categories (see Chapter Seven). The classifying questions in Chapter Seven to guide the answer to the fourth research question are as follows:

- What are the most influential personal characteristics relating to the four dominant social categories?
- How are the developed themes created by the four dominant social categories?
- What is the dominant way of obtaining local news among the four social categories?
- How do the four dominant social categories influence the credibility criteria based on the five created themes?

Thus, the main aim of the interviews was to explain the criteria for credibility perceptions associated with the given print, online counterparts and exclusively online newspapers in the Saudi context, as these have not been explored in the majority of credibility research (Armstrong & Collins, 2009; Golan, 2010; Johnson & Kaye, 2009).

## **5.10 Data analysis**

This section explains the two analysis approaches applied in this study to ensure the understanding of the results based on the nature of each data set.

### **5.10.1 Quantitative data analysis**

The questionnaire data analysis was performed by SPSS software in terms of all descriptive and inferential statistics.

Descriptive analysis helped to answer the first research question - Q1- What are Saudi audiences' general perceptions of the credibility of and their reliance on the given newspapers? Descriptive analysis showed the distribution of the results in terms of Frequency (N) and Percentages (%) of the participants across the answers. This is calculated for the demographic details and for credibility and reliance measures. Furthermore, the credibility measures were ranked based on the total agreement (agree + strongly agree) to determine which of the newspapers received the highest credibility, based on each measure and also overall.

On the other hand, the inferential analysis included a number of non-parametric inferential statistics (e.g. Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal Wallis and Chi-Square test) (Gibbons & Chakraborti, 2003; Sheskin, 2000), to explore the influence of various demographic details

(e.g. gender, region, age etc.) on the reliance levels and credibility of each newspaper, as well as each of the categories (print, online counterpart and exclusively online). For example, the Mann-Whitney U test is appropriate when the independent variable has two categorical groups, such as females versus males in the gender variable, while the Kruskal Wallis test can be utilised when the independent variable has more than two categorical groups, such as the income variable levels.

The data in this study was judged to be non-parametric, as it followed an ordinal scale (García, Molina, Lozano, & Herrera, 2009; Sheskin, 2000).

. The choice of non-parametric tests is based on whether the assumptions of the data fit the non-parametric tests (Derrac, García, Molina, & Herrera, 2011). Hence, it was judged that non-parametric inferential statistics were best suited to this study. This type of analysis assisted this research to answer the second and third research questions - Q2- How do the individual personal characteristics of Saudi audiences affect their perceptions of a particular newspaper's credibility? and Q3- How do the individual personal characteristics of Saudi audiences affect their patterns of reliance on a particular newspaper? The detailed results of the analytical statistics are shown in Chapter Six. The analysis was carried out for each newspaper separately to determine any differences between the social groups in terms of credibility of and reliance on the given newspapers, which cannot be seen if the researcher deals with the given newspapers as groups (i.e. print group, online counterpart group and exclusively online group). Thus, as all the Saudi newspapers as mentioned earlier are controlled by the government, the differences between the news in these newspapers are minor. This points to the importance of getting closer to each newspaper through analysis to explore how the social categories interact with these differences, even if they are minor.

### **5.10.2 Qualitative data analysis**

The interview analysis was conducted by applying thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as identifying the repeated patterns and meanings from the target qualitative data. The repeated patterns and meanings create the themes, which can address the research questions (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Thus, this type of analysis has become a trusted tool for qualitative analysis (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013).



There are six recommended steps when conducting thematic analysis: (1) familiarising yourself with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing potential themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, the first step is about reading the data several times to understand its details while the second step is about looking for codes that can be used to categorise some ideas together. The third step is looking for the themes, which can link some of the generated codes together under one theme, then the fourth step is trying to fit the rest of the data under the created themes to make sure that these themes reflect the target data. Step five focuses on creating definitions and names for the final created themes in order to produce the final report and answer the last main research question. This question pertained to the shared meanings among the four social categories for the credibility indicators of the questionnaire in terms of the given print newspapers with their online counterparts and the exclusively online newspapers.

Thus, after the interview data had been transcribed and translated, the accuracy of the translation was confirmed by two media professors, both fluent in English and Arabic. Following this, Microsoft Word 2016 was used to present the data under headings that correlated with the interview structure, including the target categories. Each heading was shortened based on key words and the reasons for high or low credibility, and the key words were used as headings in QDA Miner Lite software, utilising different codes to count the frequency. Each participant's data was entered under each heading, using short codes that corresponded to the interview prompts.

Moving back and forth during the thematic analysis between the study cases at each stage of the analysis can increase the consistency between the developing content (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). This can be applied to both the developed codes and themes during the thematic analysis.

Thus, it can be more useful to move between the cases during the stages of analysis to compare the differences between them. According to Alhojailan (2012), linking ideas and opinions within the data set during the proposed analysis frame can be possible.

The greatest advantage of using thematic analysis is its flexibility in dealing with different situations at the same time, whether this happens vertically between the six steps of

analysis or horizontally between the target groups and cases under the analysis. According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), the thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke is understood as a proposed outline, but not a restricted frame. Thus, adhering the thematic analysis outline to more restrictions can reduce its advantage in handling different situations and content because of its high flexibility. In addition to this, the six steps of thematic analysis do not necessarily need to be conducted linearly (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

Therefore, this study follows the recommendation to move between the four social groups during each analytical step in order to identify the differences between the social groups and to avoid repeating their similarities. This was done first by providing the possible influential categories in the questionnaire instrument based on the literature findings, then sending the questionnaire to the target sample to let them identify themselves within the categories. After this, the respondents' answers to the questionnaire were analysed to find the dominant social categories, which totalled four. Next, the researcher moved on to the interview instrument by selecting the interviewees based on the four dominant social categories to interpret their credibility perceptions and credibility criteria based on their four categories. The respondents were divided and placed into each social category based on the similarities found in the questionnaire results. This method can lead to more consistency among the created themes towards the research focus.

In order to generate the initial codes, issues mentioned by a minimum of three interviewees needed to be manually identified. Put simply, at this stage the themes were driven by data rather than theory. The main focus during the analysis is to look for the causes relating to the credibility criteria among the members of each social category, regardless of whether these causes increase or decrease the newspapers' credibility. This helped to gain a clear understanding of the credibility criteria of each social category.

Thus, this study was guided by the aforementioned six steps of the thematic analysis as the outcomes of this analysis, detailed in Chapter Seven, from the initial generated thematic map to the final themes. This helped this study to explore the shared meanings among the target Saudi social groups towards the credibility criteria in order to answer the fourth research question.

## 5.11 Procedures

Regarding the questionnaire, this study used the online tool WhatsApp to firstly distribute the questionnaire to four groups of professors and lecturers from central and western regions. Then it was planned to distribute the questionnaire to their students in order for them to participate as well. Following this, the questionnaire link was given to three other educated people outside the university, at least one of which should be a woman, one should be an old family member and one a non-family member holding a Master's degree or PhD but not working at the same university. These groups included around 427 professors, lecturers and students from central and western regions, so this was expected to be the fastest way of collecting the study data. In this way it was planned to reach a sample of 1281 so the required sample of 666 could be reached even if only half of this number was received.

However, this strategy did not help as the outcome was about 100 participants, which was only about 15% of the entire required sample size (666). After this, the researcher used another strategy, which was to contact privately around 60 professors and lecturers from the central and western regions who were known to the researcher. The number of participants increased to 200 participants, which was about 30% of the study's required sample.

Finally, interpersonal relations were invested in order to reach the required number, so the researcher contacted just two professors from the western region and one professor and four lecturers from the central region. As a result, in a short time the target sample was gained. Interpersonal relations in Saudi Arabia are very powerful and influential so people may like to help more when they have a close relationship with the person who needs help. People in collectivist cultures value their group and the group members more than out-group members. Thus, in Saudi Arabia, if a group member receives support from other members in the same group, he is expected to give back this support to the same group members (Michelle, Usman, & Treff, 2008). It was stated by Cassell and Blake (2012) that in Saudi Arabia the decisions about who to hire and fire mostly depend on relationships. Thus, after using this strategy, 737 respondents, representing about 110% of the target sample, were recruited so this strategy helped the researcher to reach more than the target sample.

As mentioned earlier, the quantitative method utilised an online questionnaire administered and designed through Survey-Monkey, which also helped with sending the questionnaire link to the target professors and lecturers from the western and central regions. Thus, the snowball strategy was applied by giving the link to the students from each professor and lecturer to participate first. Then each student was asked to pass the link to three people who consume print or online local newspapers or some of them.

This study followed the university ethical regulations when inviting the participants to take part in this study, as explained in section 5.10. A guideline for completing the questionnaires and the interviews, including the consent form and the study information sheet, was provided to the participants in order to address any misunderstandings that might arise (see Appendixes C and D). Statistical analysis was conducted in order to establish the trends in credibility perceptions among Saudi audiences in Saudi Arabia (see Chapter Six).

For the qualitative approach, the academic staff who were engaged in the questionnaire phase were contacted, with a view to recruiting 18 interviewees from each region.

After selection of the interviewees, the academics from these universities were asked to provide a list of emails to be contacted by the researcher. The researcher sent an email to the chosen interviewees containing the research information sheet and a proposed schedule of interview times to be selected by each interviewee. All the information was sent to the interviewees in Arabic as it is their first language. Three days were allowed for receipt of the first responses from different respondents in order to assign them with the time frame of two weeks. The process was repeated four times until the required sample size (36 interviewees) was achieved. The 36 interviewees included 12 females (old and young), 12 moderately religious males (six old and six young) and 12 highly religious males (six old and six young).

There was three days to receive the first responses from different respondents in order to assign them with the time frame of two weeks. The process has been done four times till the proposed sample (36 interviewees) was complete. All the interviews were done by the researcher and were face-to-face except for the males from the central region and the females from both regions. The exception of males from the central region was because the long

distance between their region and the researcher's region which can cost unoffered time and money while the exception of females from the both regions was because of their requests to not have the interview face-to-face due to gender segregation and cultural restrictions. Thus, the male interviewees from the central region were interviewed by Skype, while the male interviewees from the western region were interviewed face-to-face. However, the females from both regions were interviewed by WhatsApp due based on their desires due to the gender segregation.

All of the interviewees needed to have already participated in the questionnaire so the academic staff who helped to recruit the interview sample were asked to choose respondents who had already participated in the questionnaire. After the interviews were complete, the researcher asked two media professors (at King Abdul-Aziz University), who are both fluent in English and Arabic, to translate the transcripts of the interviews in order to ensure the accuracy of the translation.

## **5.12 Validity and Reliability**

The validity (accuracy) refers to how accurately the measurement tool measures what it is supposed to measure and reliability (consistency) refers to whether the results would be consistent if the study were replicated. Both are main concerns for researchers (Creswell, 2009). Research validity has two categories: internal validity, which points to the chance of errors throughout the research process, and external validity, which points to the chance of the research outcomes being generalised.

It should be noted that the probability of achieving perfect validity and reliability in most research studies is not high (Neuman, 2014). This is because increasing the internal validity could be achieved at the expense of external validity. The requirements of internal validity with regard to the research elements may be very difficult to meet; for example, using an artificial setting such as a laboratory may decrease the external validity as the sample cannot be maximised (Yardley & Bishop, 2010).

According to Polit and Beck (2010), external validity is complicated for both quantitative research and qualitative research as it needs to be extrapolated to the research issue. This can be complicated because every research finding is embodied in the same

research context, so studies can focus on the same issue but see some differences between their findings, even if the differences are small, because the contexts of these studies may not be identical. Thus, the main goal of this current research, as one of the first attempts to focus on the credibility criteria among Saudi social categories in terms of the given newspapers, is to provide rich information for further research rather than to generalise findings that can be reached after a number of studies within the same context in order to gain a better understanding of the issue in Saudi Arabia. This leads the researcher to consider increasing the internal validity.

Most researchers try to increase the internal validity and reliability through different practices based on their studies' situations. Some practices for improving the validity and reliability can only be applied to quantitative research because it is based mostly on objective processes, including statistical processes, while this is not the case with qualitative research (Polit & Beck, 2010). Thus, researchers point to the validity and reliability of quantitative research as being higher than that of qualitative research (Bashir, Afzal, & Azeem, 2008). Additionally, quantitative research is highly based on frequencies or correlations among variables, which may be not applicable in qualitative research that is highly based on meanings and explanations among themes.

This does not mean that the subjectivity in qualitative research cannot be validated, but rather it needs different procedures to improve its validity and reliability (Golafshani, 2003). Thus, while reliability is used with quantitative research, qualitative research scholars prefer to apply credibility as reliability is related to measurements (Bashir et al., 2008).

Therefore, the validity and reliability are related to several elements of the research processes throughout the research journey from the research questions and the research methods to the instruments for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2009). However, the main element associated with improving the research validity is the research instrument and its procedures (Bashir et al., 2008; Kelly, 2016). Thus, the researcher should consider the proper procedures for improving the validity and reliability of the research.

It has been recommended that applying mixed methods can enhance the validity and reliability of the research (Bashir et al., 2008). Therefore, mixed methods can play a

supplementary role in the research inquiry as each method can display the extent to which it supports the other method, which leads to confirmation (Creswell et al., 2006).

Also, participant review has been recommended as a strategy for interviews that can prevent the interviewer from misunderstanding or misinterpreting the responses (Maxwell, 2005). Thus, in this study, all of the interviewees received their interview transcript at the end of the interview to check their answers. However, the male interviewees received the interview transcript physically while those who had a Skype interview including males from Central region and the female interviewees from both regions received the interview transcript electronically (through WhatsApp) due to the long distance to Central region for males and gender segregation for females in Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, as was mentioned in the ethical section, two referees (assistant professors) who speak Arabic and English fluently were invited to check the accuracy of the interview transcripts by reading the original transcript (in Arabic) and the translated transcript (in English). This was necessary because the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews were in Arabic as Arabic is the main language for the study sample. The interviews were conducted by the researcher while the translation was done by the two professors.

Maximising the number of participants or the studied cases in the research can develop its validity and reliability as the repeated outcomes can reflect the reality, which minimises the chance of being wrong when concluding (Gray, 2014). Also having a representative sample can improve the study's inferences (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). Thus, some researchers recommend the snowball sampling technique despite it being considered as a non-probability sampling technique when the researcher seeks a sample with different characteristics as this can help to achieve the research objectives better than probability techniques (Berg, 2001; Saunders et al., 2007). Thus, the researcher in the current study engaged a larger sample than strictly required; in the quantitative method the received sample was 737 while the required sample was 666 and the number of interviewees was also high as 36 individuals were interviewed.

Also, the sample was gained by the snowball strategy to reach a sample with different characteristics such as age, gender, education, employment, income, region and religiosity

levels. This was important as this study explores the influence of social categories on the credibility perceptions and the reliance patterns of the given newspapers. Also, all the questionnaire participants had the right to withdraw to ensure that they were not forced to participate. To determine how well the questionnaire was understood, a pilot study was conducted by the researcher with ten Saudi males and females from the Saudi Club in Manchester. This helped the researcher to amend some words to fit the Saudi society.

Also, researchers are encouraged to report the validity from previous studies in the field and conduct a reliability test (Creswell, 2009). One of the best-known reliability tests is Cronbach’s Alpha (Meyer, 1988; Neuman, 2014). Reporting the validity and reliability from the past studies of the research issue leads the researcher to explore the instrument’s reputation in the field, which can show whether the instrument is valid and reliable. The five items used in this study (Fair, Accurate, Unbiasedness, Tell the whole story, and Can be trusted) have been rated greatly in terms of validity and reliability by several studies so they are reliable for measuring newspapers’ credibility (Hellmueller & Trilling, 2012; McComas & Trumbo, 2001; Meyer, 1988; West, 1994).

Thus, this current study as part of the analysis investigated the internal reliability of each newspaper’s credibility. The reliability was tested using Cronbach’s Alpha, which measured for the consistency between Fairness, Completeness, Accuracy, Unbiasedness and Trust for each of the newspapers totally. As can be seen in Table (7) all newspapers showed a good level of reliability, with a score of at least 0.74. This signifies that each newspaper’s credibility (on a scale of 5) is considered reliable.

**Table 7: Reliability across newspapers, credibility measure**

Credibility of each news paper	Cronbach’s Alpha
Sabq exclusively online newspaper	0.839
Okas online counterpart	0.869
Alriyadh online counterpart	0.817
Okas print newspaper	0.850



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Twasul exclusively online newspaper	0.789
Almadina online counterpart	0.768
Alriyadh print newspaper	0.798
Almadina print newspaper	0.788
Alwatan online counterpart	0.740
Alweeam exclusively online newspaper	0.764
Almarsd exclusively online newspaper	0.770
Aljazirah online counterpart	0.790
Aljazirah print newspaper	0.775
Alwatan print newspaper	0.754
Alyaum online counterpart	0.778
Alyaum print newspaper	0.762
Mapnews exclusively online newspaper	0.757
Kolalwatn exclusively online newspaper	0.841

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### 5.13 Research Ethics

Research ethics are a necessary aspect of research when human subjects are engaged in research, in order to ensure the safety of the participants. This study complied with the ethical regulations of the University of Salford. It received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Panel prior to starting the data collection (No# AMR1617-03, see Appendix E).

Since this study was conducted in Saudi Arabia where the Arabic language is mainly spoken, the questionnaire questions and the questions for the semi-structured interviews were

sent to two referees (assistant professors) specialising in Arabic and English translation and journalism, in order to ensure the accuracy of the proposed questions for this study.

Every participant for the questionnaire or interview received an information sheet combined with the informed consent form (online for the questionnaire and for those who participated in the interview online and by hand for the face-to-face interviews) before participating in this study (see Appendixes C and D). Also, every participant was told that s/he had the right to withdraw from participation at any point. This was done by giving the questionnaire participants an online sheet while in the interviews the interviewees were told verbally.

All information collected about the participants during the data collection phase of the study are kept strictly confidential, and the names and addresses of the participants were removed from the collected data, as promised to the participants.

Thus, the data were collected as follows:

- Personal participant information is anonymous and given a research code, known only to the researcher.
- Hard paper/taped data is stored in a locked cabinet, within a locked office, accessed only by the researcher.
- Electronic data is stored on a password-protected computer, where the password is known only by the researcher.
- The data will not be used for future studies.

## **5.14 Conclusion**

The abductive approach guided the selection of mixed methods in this research, as was detailed earlier. The applied research strategies in this study (questionnaire and interview) were necessary to answer the research questions through the research framework, which needed quantitative and qualitative methods. Additionally, collecting both sets of data by applying the cross-sectional basis was needed to accomplish the research objectives.

Thus, the interview data (the second phase) was complementary to the questionnaire data (the first phase) as the chosen interviewees had already participated in the questionnaire. This way of organising the collection of the data sets helped to answer the research questions properly.

Thus, this chapter detailed the generating process of the two data sets, which are presented in Chapter Six (the questionnaire analysis) and in Chapter Seven (the interview analysis).

## CHAPTER SIX

### Quantitative Analysis

#### Investigating How The Credibility Perceptions of and Reliance on The Target Saudi Newspapers Differ Among Saudis Based on Their Social Categories

##### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of the quantitative data attained from SPSS. It starts first with describing the profiles of the respondents. The second section provides the results that answer the first research question, exploring the Saudi audiences' general perceptions of the credibility of and their reliance on the given newspapers. The third section focuses on the results that answer the second research question regarding how the individual personal characteristics of Saudi audiences affect their perceptions of a particular newspaper's credibility. The fourth section comprises the results that answer the third research question, demonstrating how the individual personal characteristics of Saudi audiences affect their patterns of reliance on a particular newspaper.

##### 6.2 General demographic details:

Descriptive analysis is applied in this section to show the distribution of the results in terms of Frequency (N) and Percentages (%) of participants across the answers. A total of 737 individuals took part in this study; there were 464 (63%) males and 273 (37%) females. Participants' ages varied across five categories: 48.7% were aged between 18 and 29 years old; 33.2% were aged between 30 and 41 years old; 12.2% had an age between 42 and 53 years; 3.3% had an age between 54 and 65 years, and finally 2.6% were aged over 65 years.

The participants' **monthly income** was assessed in four categories: the majority of the participants (51.4%) had a monthly income between 1000 and 4999 Saudi Riyals due to the government support for university students who represented the highest percentage in this study by giving them 1000 Saudi Riyals monthly, while 19.3% had an income of 10000-14999

Saudi Riyals; 16.2% had an income of 5000-9999 Saudi Riyals and, finally, 13% had a monthly income of more than 15000 Saudi Riyals.

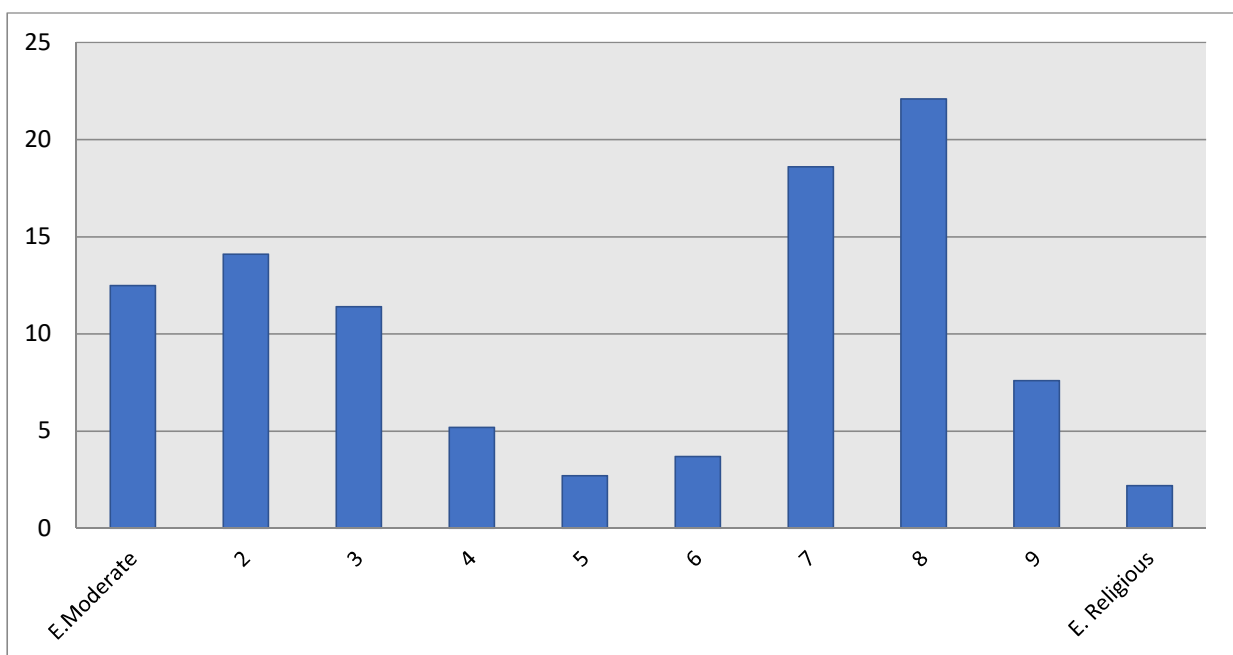
In terms of **education** level, the largest group of participants (42.9%) had a Bachelor’s degree, and 34.7% had a High School qualification or less. Also, 13.2% had a Master’s degree, 6.4% had a diploma and 2.8% had a PhD degree. As for **employment** status, 44.8% were students, followed by 27.8% who were employed in public (governmental) sectors, while 13.7% were employed in the private sector. Beyond this, 8.1% stated that they were unemployed, and finally 5.6% were categorised as retired. Participants lived in two main **regions** of Saudi Arabia, with 62.3% living in the Western region and 37.7% living in the Central Region (see Table 8).

**Table 8: Frequency and percentages for all demographic information**

<b>What is your gender?</b>		
	Frequency	Valid Percent
Female	273	37
Male	464	63
<b>What is your total monthly income?</b>		
	Frequency	Valid Percent
1000-4999 Saudi Riyals	359	51.4
5000-9999 Saudi Riyals	113	16.2
10000-14999 Saudi Riyals	135	19.3
15000 or more Saudi Riyals	91	13
<b>What is your highest level of education?</b>		
	Frequency	Valid Percent
High School or less	256	34.7
Diploma after High School	47	6.4
Bachelor degree	316	42.9
Master’s degree	97	13.2
PhD degree	21	2.8
<b>What is your employment status?</b>		
	Frequency	Valid Percent
Unemployment	60	8.1
Student	330	44.8
Employment in Government sectors	205	27.8
Employment in Private sectors	101	13.7

Retired	41	5.6
<b>In which part of Saudi Arabia do you live?</b>		
	Frequency	Valid Percent
Central Region	278	37.7
Western Region	459	62.3

The participants' level of **religiosity** is illustrated in Figure (1). It is clear that there are fewer participants around the medium points of 4, 5 and 6 and the rest can be considered as either highly religious or very moderate in their religious beliefs.



**Figure 1: Religiosity on 10 points scale**

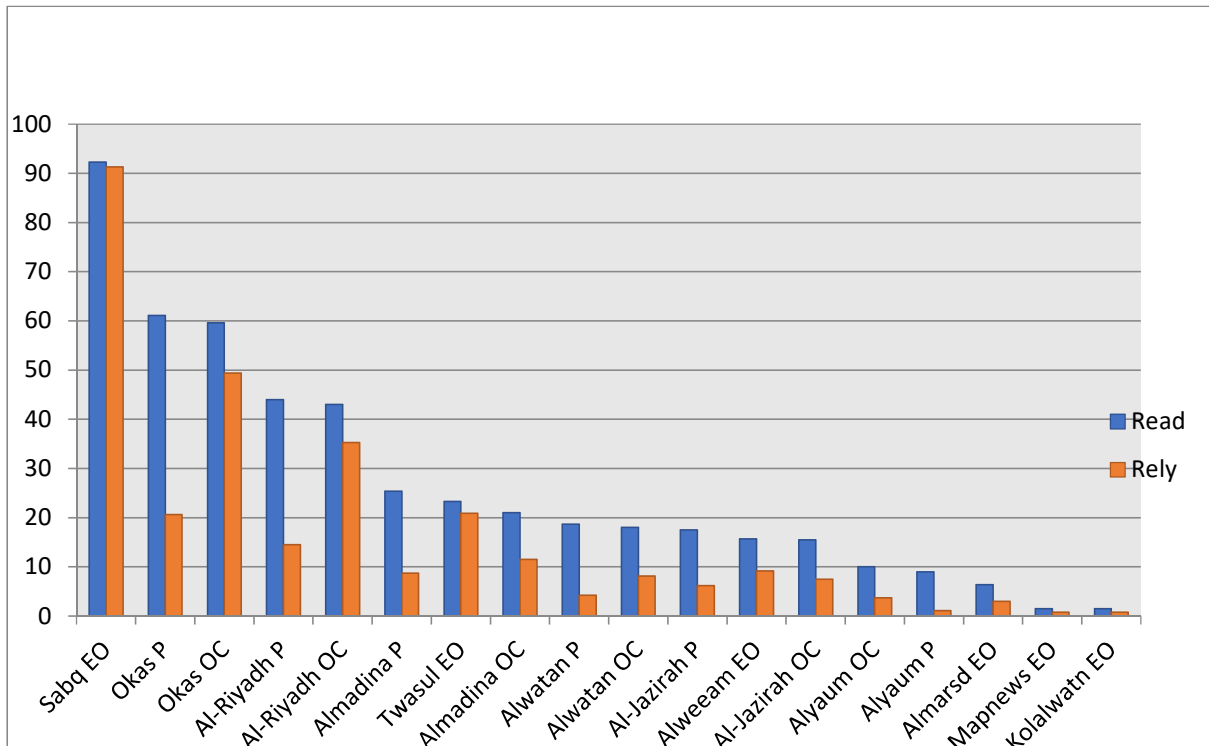
### **6.3 The Saudi Audiences' General Perceptions of the Credibility of – and Their Reliance on – the Given Newspapers**

The first research question involved the exploration of general scores for the newspapers' credibility and how much readers relied on the newspapers they read, in order to establish an understanding about the status of each given newspaper among the Saudi readers. Thus, this section applies descriptive analysis to show the distribution of the results in terms of Percentages (%) of participants across the answers to rank the given newspapers based on

credibility perceptions and reliance patterns. Furthermore, the credibility measures were ranked based on the total means of credibility scale to determine which of the newspapers have received the highest credibility, overall.

**For reliance**, the reliance item for newspapers was combined with the reading item to ensure that the reading was associated with the reliance of the participants. The participants were given a list of the newspapers in Saudi Arabia that were either print, their online counterparts or available exclusively online. They were asked to tick each of the newspapers they *read*, in a separate question to tick the newspapers they *rely on* and how much they *rely on by using* a Likert-five-points-scale (where 1, *Never rely on* and 5, *Heavily rely on*) as it is detailed latter in the reliance section. Figure (2) illustrates the frequency (in percentages) of the most read and the most relied upon newspapers among all the participants.

It is clear that the Sabq online exclusive was the most read (92.3%) and the most relied upon (91.3%). The Okas print version (61.1%) was the second most-read paper, although it was relied upon by only 20.6%, and thirdly the Okas online counterpart was read by 59.6% and relied upon by 49.4%.



**Figure 2: Number of participants (%) reading and relying on each newspaper where EO refers to exclusively online newspapers, P refers to print newspapers and OC refers to the online counterparts of print**

The Al-Riyadh print newspaper was read by 44% of the participants and relied upon by 14.5%, compared to its online counterpart, which was read by 43% and relied upon by 35.3%. Figure (2) shows that all of the newspapers were associated with higher scores for reading than for reliance, indicating the participants evaluated newspapers they already had experience with.



**For credibility**, the credibility of newspapers within Saudi Arabia was assessed using a scale of five dimensions as explained in Chapter Five, including Fairness, Accuracy, Unbiasedness, Completeness and Trustworthiness. Each newspaper in Table (9) reflects a major aspect of credibility after calculating the total of credibility five dimensions by using a Likert-five-points-scale (where 1, *Strongly disagree* and 5, *Strongly agree*).

In this part of the analysis, all of the participants' means of credibility scores for each newspaper are collated in Table (9) in order to gain an understanding of the overall perceived credibility of all the newspapers among the Saudi audiences in general. In doing so, the total credibility across all five major elements was calculated along with their means and percentages of the participants associated with each newspaper. All of the newspapers were then ranked based on the total credibility means.

From this table, it can be concluded that the most credible newspaper is Sabq online exclusive (M= 4.37, N= 89.92%). In second place, and by a large margin, came the *Okas* online counterpart (M= 3.61, N= 55.38%) and the *Alriyadh* online counterpart (M= 3.35, N= 39.98%). These can be judged as the top three most credible newspapers in the perception of the sample respondents. However, the *Sabq* online exclusive is the most credible. The least overall credibility was given to the *Alyaum* print newspaper (M= 2.78, N= 5.62%), followed by the *Alwatan* online counterpart (M= 2.73, N= 14.72%), while the least credible newspaper was found to be the *Alwatan* print newspaper with (M= 2.66, N= 10.66%).

**Table 9: Overall credibility means on each newspaper**

Newspaper	Total Credibility	
	Means	Percentage of Respondents
Sabq only online exclusive newspaper	4.37	89.92%
Okas online counterpart	3.61	55.38%
Al-Riyadh online counterpart	3.35	39.98%
Okas print newspaper	3.29	30.78%
Al-Riyadh print newspaper	3.18	22.98%

Almadina online counterpart	3.10	23.22%
Twasul online exclusive newspaper	3.06	24.86%
Almadina print newspaper	2.99	16.82%
Al-Jazirah online counterpart	2.90	12.9%
Al-Jazirah print newspaper	2.89	11%
Almarsd online exclusive newspaper	2.87	12.28%
Alweeam online exclusive newspaper	2.84	16.14%
Alyaum online counterpart	2.83	9.46%
Kolalwatn online exclusive newspaper	2.79	7.16%
Mapnews online exclusive newspaper	2.78	6.7%
Alyaum print newspaper	2.78	5.62%
Alwatan online counterpart	2.73	14.72%
Alwatan print newspaper	2.66	10.66%

The investigation of reliance patterns and credibility in this section (the first research question's results) revealed that the reliance ranking of the given newspapers was not aligned with the credibility ranking of the same newspapers, regardless of the influence of personal characteristics. For example, 15 out of 18 newspapers were ranked differently in terms of the credibility and the reliance rankings, namely: *Twasul* online exclusive, *Okas* print, *Al-Riyadh* print, *Almadina* online counterpart, *Alweeam* online exclusive, *Almadina* print, *Al-Jazirah* print, *Al-Jazirah* online counterpart, *Alwatan* print, *Alwatan* online counterpart, *Alyaum* online counterpart, *Almarsd* online exclusive, *Mapnews* online exclusive, *Alyaum* print and *Kolalwatn* online exclusive. This means not all the newspapers were ranked identically in credibility and reliance based on their scores.

Additionally, in terms of the credibility ranking and the reliance ranking, the *Sabq* online exclusive was ranked as the first newspaper (by a large margin), consistently showing higher scores of credibility and reliance. The second newspaper was the *Okas* online counterpart, and thirdly was the *Alriyadh* online counterpart. At the other end of the scale, it was judged that *Alyaum* print newspaper, the *Alwatan* online counterpart and the

*Alwatan* print newspaper were the least credible while *Alyaum* print, *Mapnews* online exclusive and *Kolalwatn* online exclusive were the least relied upon by the respondents.

In fact, it could be reasonably argued that credibility was only high for the *Sabq* online exclusive and the rest of the newspapers showed relatively modest or even low credibility in the perception of the sample respondents.

## **6.4 The Influence of Individual Personal Characteristics of Saudi Audiences on Their Perceptions of a Particular Newspaper's Credibility**

This section involves the illustration of how the personal characteristics of Saudis affect their perceived credibility with regard to a particular newspaper. As noted earlier in Chapter Five, this study involved six Saudi local print newspapers with six online counterparts and six Saudi local online newspapers:

- Print newspapers: *Al-Riyadh* print, *Okas* print, *Al-Jazirah* print, *Almadina* print, *Alyaum* print, and *Alwatan* print.
- Online counterparts of print newspapers: *Al-Riyadh* online, *Okas* online, *Al-Jazirah* online, *Almadina* online, *Alyaum* online, and *Alwatan* online.
- Online exclusive newspapers: *Sabq* online exclusive, *Almarsd* online exclusive, *Mapnews* online exclusive, *Kolalwatn* online exclusive, *Alweeam* online exclusive, and *Twasul* online exclusive.

### **6.4.1 Gender Impact on Credibility Perceptions:**

The Mann-Whitney U test was used to measure whether there is a significant difference between males and females when measuring credibility items collectively. The credibility of each newspaper was based on the mean of each publication's score for the overall credibility. The gender effect was calculated using the Mann-Whitney U test, and it was evident that significant gender differences were found in the credibility of various newspapers. Significant gender differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) were found when measuring the credibility of 10 newspapers (or versions of newspapers) (see Table 10). For seven of the

newspapers, males rated their credibility higher than females; these were: *Al-Riyadh* print, *Al-Riyadh* online counterpart, *Okas* print, *Okas* online counterpart, *Almadina* print, *Almadina* online counterpart and *Twasul* online exclusive.

However, the females allocated significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) higher credibility scores to the *Alwatan* print, the *Alwatan* online counterpart and the *Sabq* online exclusive (see Table 10). For example, females showed significantly higher credibility for the *Alwatan print* ( $M=2.78$ ) and *Alwatan* online counterpart ( $M=2.83$ ) than males did for the *Alwatan print* ( $M=2.58$ ) and *Alwatan* online counterpart ( $M=2.66$ ).

For the rest, no significant differences between males and females were found.

For the version type (print newspapers collectively, online counterparts collectively and online exclusively newspapers collectively), this part assesses the differences between genders based on the perceived credibility of the three versions of the newspapers under investigation. The credibility of the three versions is based on the average credibility of the print newspapers, their online counterparts and exclusively online content. Using Mann-Whitney U tests, it was clear that gender has a significant effect at  $p < 0.05$  on all the three versions. Male participants scored the credibility of print newspapers and their online counterparts significantly higher ( $p < 0.05$ ), while females indicated that exclusively online news content was highly credible ( $p < 0.05$ ) (see Table 10). For example, males showed significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) higher credibility for print ( $M=3.02$ ) and online counterparts collectively ( $M=3.16$ ) than females did for print ( $M=2.85$ ) and online counterparts collectively ( $M=2.96$ ). However, females showed significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) higher credibility for online exclusive newspapers ( $M=3.16$ ) than males ( $M=3.09$ ).

**Table 10: Credibility means of newspapers and Mann-Whitney U statistics for gender**

	Gender	Means	Wilcoxon W Sum of Ranks	Mann- Whitney U	Z	Sig. (2- tailed)
Al-Riyadh print newspaper	Female	2.94	88798	51397	-4.43	0.000

	Male	3.32	183155			
Al-Riyadh online counterpart	Female	3.08	83305.5	45904.5	-6.338	0.000
	Male	3.51	188647.5			
Okas print newspaper	Female	2.99	82611.5	45210.5	-6.672	0.000
	Male	3.47	189341.5			
Okas online counterpart	Female	3.28	77061	39660	-8.589	0.000
	Male	3.81	194892			
Al-Jazirah print newspaper	Female	2.82	98861.5	61460.5	-0.698	0.485
	Male	2.93	173091.5			
Al-Jazirah online counterpart	Female	2.85	98223	60822	-0.932	0.351
	Male	2.93	173730			
Almadina print newspaper	Female	2.85	92765	55364	-2.949	0.003
	Male	3.08	179188			
Almadina online counterpart	Female	2.92	88217	50816	-4.591	0.000
	Male	3.20	183736			
Alyaum print newspaper	Female	2.77	99174	61773	-0.589	0.556
	Male	2.79	172779			
Alyaum online counterpart	Female	2.81	98131	60730	-0.973	0.331
	Male	2.85	173822			
Alwatan print newspaper	Female	2.78	110083.5	53989.5	-3.426	0.001
	Male	2.58	161869.5			
Alwatan online counterpart	Female	2.83	106619.5	57453.5	-2.152	0.031
	Male	2.66	165333.5			
Sabq online exclusive newspaper	Female	4.62	118889	45184	-6.789	0.000
	Male	4.22	153064			
Almarsd online exclusive newspaper	Female	2.90	101135	62938	-0.147	0.883
	Male	2.85	170818			
Mapnews online exclusive newspaper	Female	2.81	101339	62734	-0.225	0.822
	Male	2.77	170614			
Kolalwatn online exclusive newspaper	Female	2.84	102352.5	61720.5	-0.604	0.546
	Male	2.76	169600.5			
Alweeam online exclusive newspaper	Female	2.89	101853	62220	-0.41	0.682
	Male	2.81	170100			
Twasul online exclusive newspaper	Female	2.95	89280	51879	-4.202	0.000
	Male	3.13	182673			
Print newspapers collectively	Female	2.85	86503.5	49102.5	-5.123	0.000

	Male	3.02	185449.5			
Online counterparts collectively	Female	2.96	80200.5	42799.5	-7.369	0.000
	Male	3.16	191752.5			
Online exclusive newspapers collectively	Female	3.16	106824	57249	-2.188	0.029
	Male	3.09	165129			

#### 6.4.2 Region Impact on Credibility Perceptions:

Participants were recruited from two locations within Saudi Arabia, the Western and Central Regions. The location/region differences across variables were measured using the Mann-Whitney U test to investigate the significance influence of the region factor on the perceived credibility among Saudis.

Utilising the Mann-Whitney U test to measure differences across locations when looking at the credibility of each newspaper revealed that the Central Region showed significantly higher credibility at ( $p < 0.05$ ) for the *Al-Riyadh* print, *Al-Riyadh* online counterpart, *Aljazirah* print and *Aljazirah* online counterpart, which are published in the same region (see Table 11). For example, respondents from the Central Region showed significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) higher credibility for *Al-Riyadh* print ( $M = 3.67$ ) than the respondents from the Western Region ( $M = 2.88$ ).

On the other hand, the participants in the Western Region showed significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) more credibility for the *Okas* print, *Okas* online counterpart, *Almadina* print, *Almadina* online counterpart and *Alwatan* print, which are published in the same region excluding *Alwatan* print (see Table 11). For example, respondents from the Western region showed significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) higher credibility for *Okas* print ( $M = 3.50$ ) than the respondents from the Central region ( $M = 2.96$ ). No significance was found between the rest, which were either print with their online counterparts from these two regions or exclusively online newspapers.

For the version type (print newspapers collectively, online counterparts collectively and online exclusively newspapers collectively), location differences were assessed using the Mann-Whitney U test when looking at the credibility of the three versions. It was evident that the participants from both locations, the Central and Western Regions, showed no significance ( $p>0.05$ ) in their credibility for all the three versions (see Table 11).

**Table 11: Credibility means of newspapers and Mann-Whitney U statistics for regions**

Credibility	Region	Means	Wilcoxon W Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Z	Sig. (2-tailed)
Al-Riyadh print newspaper	Central	3.67	134576	31807	-11.828	0.000
	Western	2.88	137377			
Al-Riyadh online counterpart	Central	3.98	147012	19371	-16.096	0.000
	Western	2.98	124941			
Okas print newspaper	Central	2.96	78377.5	39596.5	-8.877	0.000
	Western	3.50	193575.5			
Okas online counterpart	Central	3.11	67864	29083	-12.549	0.000
	Western	3.92	204089			
Al-Jazirah print newspaper	Central	3.17	121330.5	45052.5	-6.951	0.000
	Western	2.72	150622.5			
Al-Jazirah online counterpart	Central	3.17	123647	42736	-7.785	0.000
	Western	2.74	148306			
Almadina print newspaper	Central	2.72	83978	45197	-6.857	0.000
	Western	3.16	187975			
Almadina online counterpart	Central	2.74	75532	36751	-9.882	0.000
	Western	3.32	196421			
Alyaum print newspaper	Central	2.79	103314.5	63068.5	-0.275	0.783
	Western	2.78	168638.5			
Alyaum online counterpart	Central	2.83	101211	62430	-0.51	0.610
	Western	2.84	170742			
Alwatan print newspaper	Central	2.58	97082	58301	-2.009	0.045
	Western	2.70	174871			
Alwatan online counterpart	Central	2.66	98091.5	59310.5	-1.637	0.102
	Western	2.77	173861.5			

Sabq online exclusive newspaper	Central	4.34	98903	60122	-1.371	0.170
	Western	4.39	173050			
Almarsd online exclusive newspaper	Central	2.80	97480	58699	-1.881	0.060
	Western	2.91	174473			
Mapnews online exclusive newspaper	Central	2.75	99619	60838	-1.103	0.270
	Western	2.80	172334			
Kolalwatn online exclusive newspaper	Central	2.76	99606.5	60825.5	-1.108	0.268
	Western	2.81	172346.5			
Alweeam online exclusive newspaper	Central	2.85	103432.5	62950.5	-0.311	0.755
	Western	2.84	168520.5			
Twasul online exclusive newspaper	Central	3.12	105633	60750	-1.115	0.265
	Western	3.03	166320			
Print newspapers collectively	Central	2.98	104621.5	61761.5	-0.731	0.465
	Western	2.95	167331.5			
Online counterparts collectively	Central	3.08	103506.5	62876.5	-0.331	0.741
	Western	3.09	168446.5			
Online exclusive newspapers collectively	Central	3.10	101770	62989	-0.291	0.771
	Western	3.13	170183			

#### 6.4.3 Age Impact on Credibility Perceptions:

The participants' ages were divided into five categories, hence a Kruskal Wallis test was used to measure the impact of age on the perceived credibility.

When assessing each newspaper's credibility, age was found to have a significant effect ( $p < 0.05$ ) on the credibility of *Al-Riyadh* print, *Al-Riyadh* online counterpart, *Okas* print, *Okas* online counterpart, *Aljazirah* print, *Aljazirah* online counterpart, *Almadina* print, *Alyaum* online counterpart, *Alwatan* print, *Alwatan* online counterpart, *Sabq* online exclusive and *Twasul* online exclusive (see Table 12). For example, the respondents with age categories 30-41, 42-53, 54-65 and over 65 showed significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) higher credibility for *Okas* print ( $M=3.40$ ,  $M=3.64$ ,  $M=3.66$  and  $M=3.97$ ) than those aged 18-29 years old ( $M=3.07$ ).



Overall, it can be judged by performing a Kruskal Wallis test that the older age groups (those aged 30 and over) significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) saw the print versions as being more credible, except for the *Alwatan* print newspaper, which was perceived to be more credible by the younger age group (18-29 years old) (see Table 12). On the other hand, the younger participants (18-28 years old) rated most of the online counterparts and exclusively online versions as more credible than the older participants (see Table 12). For the rest, age was found to have no significant effect ( $p > 0.05$ ).

For the version type (print newspapers collectively, online counterparts collectively and online exclusively newspapers collectively), the Kruskal Wallis test was conducted to investigate the significant influence of age on the perceived credibility of the newspaper version type. Thus, age had a significant effect ( $p < 0.05$ ) on the credibility of print, their online counterparts and exclusively online content. The lowest credibility was associated with the older age group ( $> 65$ ) regarding the online counterparts and online exclusives, but they perceived print newspapers to be the most credible while the youngest age group (18-29) gave the exclusively online newspapers the highest credibility (see Table 12). For example, the respondents aged over 65 showed significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) lower credibility for online exclusive newspapers collectively ( $M = 2.77$ ) than those aged 18-29 years old ( $M = 3.16$ ).

**Table 12: Credibility means of newspapers and significance statistics based on participants' age**

	18-29 (359)	30-41 (245)	42-53 (90)	54-65 (24)	Over 65 (19)	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Al-Riyadh print newspaper	2.88	3.47	3.29	3.87	3.73	42.924	4	0.000
Al-Riyadh online counterpart	3.23	3.67	3.16	3.10	2.97	34.337	4	0.000
Okas print newspaper	3.07	3.40	3.64	3.66	3.97	37.603	4	0.000
Okas online counterpart	3.72	3.59	3.53	3.06	2.98	23.879	4	0.000
Al-Jazirah print newspaper	2.74	2.99	2.91	3.58	3.42	27.829	4	0.000
Al-Jazirah online counterpart	2.81	3.07	2.82	2.92	2.81	12.637	4	0.000
Almadina print newspaper	2.85	3.05	3.25	3.12	3.67	19.636	4	0.001

Almadina online counterpart	3.10	3.12	3.13	2.89	2.81	2.685	4	0.612
Alyaum print newspaper	2.77	2.81	2.79	2.73	2.68	0.343	4	0.987
Alyaum online counterpart	2.88	2.81	2.79	2.70	2.66	11.375	4	0.023
Alwatan print newspaper	2.78	2.54	2.63	2.19	2.44	26.896	4	0.000
Alwatan online counterpart	2.88	2.66	2.54	2.04	2.33	33.552	4	0.000
Sabq online exclusive newspaper	4.67	4.15	4.22	3.84	3.10	211.679	4	0.000
Almarsd online exclusive newspaper	2.91	2.83	2.87	2.76	2.72	5.813	4	0.214
Mapnews online exclusive newspaper	2.81	2.76	2.78	2.66	2.67	5.662	4	0.226
Kolalwatn online exclusive newspaper	2.83	2.76	2.76	2.66	2.69	6.324	4	0.176
Alweeam online exclusive newspaper	2.85	2.83	2.94	2.50	2.72	5.846	4	0.211
Twasul online exclusive newspaper	2.94	3.17	3.28	3.33	2.73	32.652	4	0.000
Print newspapers collectively	2.84	3.04	3.08	3.19	3.31	62.894	4	0.000
Online counterparts collectively	3.10	3.15	2.99	2.78	2.76	26.163	4	0.000
Online exclusive newspapers collectively	3.16	3.08	3.14	2.95	2.77	29.601	4	0.000

#### 6.4.4 Participants' Income Impact on Credibility Perceptions:

The participants' income was categorised into four categories. This section also utilises the Kruskal Wallis test to measure the impact of income on the participants' ratings of newspaper credibility. Thus, the Kruskal Wallis test showed that income had a significant effect ( $p < 0.05$ ) on the participants' perceived credibility of various newspapers: *Al-Riyadh* print, *Al-Riyadh* online counterpart, *Okas* print, *Okas* online counterpart, *Aljazirah* print, *Almadina* print, *Alyaum* online counterpart, *Alwatan* print, *Alwatan* online counterpart, *Sabq* online exclusive, *Almarsd* online exclusive, *Mapnews* online exclusive, *Kolalwatn* online exclusive, *Alweeam* online exclusive and finally *Twasul* online exclusive (see Table 13). No significant effect of income ( $p > 0.05$ ) was found on the credibility of the rest.

Thus, those in the high-income groups (10k and over, and 15k and over) revealed higher credibility perceptions for print newspapers, except *Alwatan* print (see Table 13). On the other hand, the lower income groups (1k-4999, and 5k-9999) showed higher credibility for various online counterparts and exclusively online newspapers (see Table

13). For example, respondents with high income categories (10k + and 15k +) showed significantly ( $p<0.05$ ) higher credibility for *Al-Riyadh* print (M=3.50 and M=3.67) than the respondents with low income (1k + and 5+) at (M=2.94 and M=3.23).

For the version type (print newspapers collectively, online counterparts collectively and online exclusively newspapers collectively), the Kruskal Wallis test was conducted to investigate the significant influence of income variables on the perceived credibility of the newspaper version type. Thus, it was shown that income had a significant impact ( $p<0.05$ ) on the overall credibility of all three types of newspapers: the perceived credibility of print was highest amongst those with the highest income, and for online counterparts and exclusively online newspapers it was highest for those with the lowest income (see Table 13). For example, respondents with a high income category (15k +) showed significantly ( $p<0.05$ ) higher credibility for print newspapers collectively (M=3.11) than the respondents with low income (1k +) at (M=2.88) while respondents with a low income category (1k +) had higher credibility for online exclusive newspapers collectively (M=3.17) than those who were in a high income category (15k +) (M=2.90).

**Table 13: Credibility means of newspapers and significance statistics based on participants' income categories**

	1K-4.9K Saudi Riyals (359)	5K-9.9K Saudi Riyals (113)	10K- 14.9K Saudi Riyals (135)	=>15K Saudi Riyals (91)	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Al-Riyadh print newspaper	2.94	3.23	3.50	3.67	32.196	3	0.000
Al-Riyadh online counterpart	3.24	3.38	3.61	3.41	11.581	3	0.009
Okas print newspaper	3.12	3.33	3.62	3.56	17.416	3	0.001
Okas online counterpart	3.72	3.57	3.64	3.30	13.662	3	0.003
Al-Jazirah print newspaper	2.77	2.89	3.00	3.21	11.479	3	0.000
Al-Jazirah online counterpart	2.84	2.96	3.03	2.90	4.635	3	0.201
Almadina print newspaper	2.88	3.04	3.17	3.19	8.168	3	0.043
Almadina online counterpart	3.13	3.08	3.16	3.01	4.304	3	0.230
Alyaum print newspaper	2.78	2.73	2.87	2.71	3.693	3	0.297
Alyaum online counterpart	2.88	2.75	2.86	2.70	12.676	3	0.005
Alwatan print newspaper	2.81	2.57	2.51	2.34	36.088	3	0.000

Alwatan online counterpart	2.90	2.69	2.55	2.29	39.833	3	0.000
Sabq online exclusive newspaper	4.62	4.24	4.06	3.83	180.677	3	0.000
Almarsd online exclusive newspaper	2.92	2.81	2.89	2.66	11.905	3	0.008
Mapnews online exclusive newspaper	2.82	2.74	2.80	2.62	11.435	3	0.010
Kolalwatn online exclusive newspaper	2.84	2.71	2.80	2.61	13.382	3	0.004
Alweeam online exclusive newspaper	2.89	2.88	2.85	2.58	8.311	3	0.040
Twasul online exclusive newspaper	2.96	3.04	3.32	3.14	25.895	3	0.000
Print newspapers collectively	2.88	2.96	3.11	3.11	36.525	3	0.000
Online counterparts collectively	3.11	3.07	3.14	2.93	11.646	3	0.009
Online exclusive newspapers collectively	3.17	3.07	3.12	2.90	35.185	3	0.000

#### 6.4.5 Participants' Education Impact on Credibility Perceptions:

The participants' level of education is a variable of five categories (from High School or lower to PhD). The impact of this variable on the perceived credibility of the given newspapers was measured through the Kruskal Wallis test.

Thus, the Kruskal Wallis tests revealed that education level had a significant impact ( $p < 0.05$ ) on the credibility level of various newspapers, namely: *Al-Riyadh* print, *Alriyadh* online counterpart, *Okas* print and *Aljazirah* print. Across all of these there was a significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) relationship between qualifications and credibility, with the participants with higher qualifications (Master's and PhD degrees) rating credibility higher than the rest (see Table 14). For example, respondents with Master's and PhD levels of education showed significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) higher credibility for *Okas* print ( $M=3.61$  and  $M=3.85$ ) than those with High School education or less ( $M=3.19$ ), Diploma after high school ( $M=3.27$ ) and Bachelor degree ( $M=3.25$ ).

A significant (but opposite) effect ( $p < 0.05$ ) was found when performing the Kruskal Wallis test for education with *Alyaum* online counterpart, *Alwatan* print, *Alwatan* online counterpart, *Sabq* online exclusive, *Almarsd* online exclusive, *Mapnews* online exclusive, *Kolalwatn* online exclusive and *Alweeam* online exclusive. Across all of these newspapers,

the participants with the lowest education level (High school or Diploma after high school with some with Bachelor degrees) rated credibility higher than those with higher qualifications (see Table 14). For example, respondents with High School education or less, Diploma after high school and Bachelor degree showed significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) higher credibility for *Alwatan* print (M=2.78) (M=2.81) and (M=2.65) than the respondents with Master's (M=2.38) and PhD levels (M=2.23).

Education level showed no significant effect ( $p > 0.05$ ) on the *Aljazeera* online counterpart, *Almadina* print, *Alyaum* print and the *Twasul* online exclusive while there was no big different influence of educational levels on the perceived credibility of *Okas* online counterpart and *Almadina* online counterpart.

For the version type (print newspapers collectively, online counterparts collectively and exclusively online newspapers collectively), Kruskal Wallis tests showed that the level of education has a significant effect ( $p < 0.05$ ) on the credibility of all three types of newspapers. It was revealed here that those with high qualifications (Master's and PhD degrees) rated print newspapers as the most credible (M=3.12 and M=3.20) compared to those with a lower education (High school, Diploma after high school and Bachelor degree) (M=2.89, M=2.95 and M=2.96). On the other hand, those with a lower education (High school, Diploma after high school and Bachelor degree) rated the credibility of online exclusive newspapers higher (M=3.18, M=3.18 and M=3.10) than those with high qualifications (Master's and PhD degrees) (M=2.99 and M=3.00). A similar pattern was found regarding the influence of education qualifications on the online counterparts (see Table 14).

**Table 14: Credibility means of newspapers and significance statistics based on the level of education**

	High School or less (256)	Diploma after High School (47)	Bachelor degree (316)	Master's degree (97)	PhD degree (21)	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Al-Riyadh print newspaper	2.94	3.14	3.19	3.61	4.00	24.083	4	0.000

Al-Riyadh online counterpart	3.20	3.49	3.32	3.69	3.85	23.388	4	0.000
Okas print newspaper	3.19	3.27	3.25	3.61	3.85	14.805	4	0.005
Okas online counterpart	3.82	3.66	3.45	3.56	3.80	30.936	4	0.000
Al-Jazirah print newspaper	2.75	2.72	2.92	3.15	3.24	10.204	4	0.037
Al-Jazirah online counterpart	2.81	2.80	2.92	3.13	3.00	4.559	4	0.336
Almadina print newspaper	2.91	2.98	3.01	3.15	3.14	2.708	4	0.608
Almadina online counterpart	3.18	3.08	3.03	3.07	3.23	11.562	4	0.021
Alyaum print newspaper	2.77	2.78	2.77	2.83	2.79	3.189	4	0.527
Alyaum online counterpart	2.88	2.84	2.80	2.87	2.76	12.758	4	0.013
Alwatan print newspaper	2.78	2.81	2.65	2.38	2.23	33.334	4	0.000
Alwatan online counterpart	2.89	2.90	2.69	2.41	2.29	35.200	4	0.000
Sabq online exclusive newspaper	4.62	4.40	4.33	3.94	3.91	118.073	4	0.000
Almarsd online exclusive newspaper	2.93	2.92	2.85	2.75	2.79	15.547	4	0.004
Mapnews online exclusive newspaper	2.83	2.85	2.76	2.70	2.74	16.406	4	0.003
Kolalwatn online exclusive newspaper	2.85	2.81	2.77	2.70	2.68	13.192	4	0.010
Alweeam online exclusive newspaper	2.88	3.03	2.85	2.67	2.72	15.448	4	0.004
Twasul online exclusive newspaper	2.99	3.08	3.06	3.20	3.20	7.484	4	0.112
Print newspapers collectively	2.89	2.95	2.96	3.12	3.20	26.193	4	0.000
Online counterparts collectively	3.13	3.12	3.03	3.12	3.15	13.342	4	0.010
Online exclusive newspapers collectively	3.18	3.18	3.10	2.99	3.00	28.869	4	0.000

#### 6.4.6 Employment Impact on Credibility Perceptions:

Participants' employment status was categorised as follows: unemployed, students, employed in governmental sector, employed in the private sector and retired. Differences between these categories were assessed using the Kruskal Wallis test, as it measures differences between three groups or more.

Thus, Kruskal Wallis tests showed that employment status had a significant impact ( $p < 0.05$ ) on the credibility level of various newspapers, namely, *Al-Riyadh* print, *Al-Riyadh* online counterpart, *Okas* print, *Okas* online counterpart, *Aljazirah* print, *Aljazirah*

online counterpart, *Almadina* print, *Alyaum* online counterpart, *Alwatan* print, *Alwatan* online counterpart, *Sabq* online exclusive, *Kolalwatn* online exclusive and *Twasul* online exclusive. Thus, those employed in government and private sectors and retired participants gave most of the print newspapers higher credibility scores than the unemployed respondents and students, except for *Alwatan* print newspaper, which received higher credibility scores from unemployed and student participants. For example, those employed in government and private sectors and retired participants gave the *Al-Riyadh* print higher credibility scores (M=3.36, M=3.61 and M=3.67) than the unemployed respondents (M=3.00) and students (M=2.91). The *Alwatan* print newspaper, on the other hand, received higher credibility scores from unemployed (M=2.85) and student participants (M=2.79) compared to those employed in government (M=2.51) and private sectors (M=2.48) and retired participants (M=2.52) (see Table 15).

On the other hand, the Kruskal Wallis test significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) revealed that those employed in government and private sectors and students gave most of the online counterparts higher credibility scores than the rest of the participants (see Table 15). For exclusively online newspapers, unemployed and student participants rated exclusively online newspapers as more credible than the rest of the participants, except the *Twasul* online exclusive newspaper, which received higher credibility from government and private employees and retirees (see Table 15). However, there were no significant differences between employment statuses when measuring the credibility of the rest.

For the version type (print newspapers collectively, online counterparts collectively and exclusively online newspapers collectively), employment status showed a significant impact ( $p < 0.05$ ) on the credibility of the three versions of newspapers. Print credibility was the highest for retired participants and government and private employees, while for online counterparts it was the highest for students and government and private employees, and for online exclusives it was highest for unemployed participants and students. For example, regarding the exclusively online newspapers, employees in government sectors,

employees in private sectors and the retired had lower credibility (M=3.01, M=3.01 and M=2.94) than the unemployed (M=3.22) and students (M=3.16) (see Table 15).

**Table 15: Credibility means of newspapers and significance statistics based on the employment status**

	Unemployment (60)	Student (330)	Employment in Government sectors (205)	Employment in Private sectors (101)	Retired (41)	Chi- Square		Asymp. Sig.
Al-Riyadh print newspaper	3.00	2.91	3.36	3.61	3.67	40.544	4	0.000
Al-Riyadh online counterpart	3.19	3.25	3.51	3.57	3.12	14.065	4	0.007
Okas print newspaper	3.11	3.10	3.35	3.77	3.70	41.448	4	0.000
Okas online counterpart	3.33	3.75	3.52	3.79	3.00	45.178	4	0.000
Al-Jazirah print newspaper	2.91	2.74	3.07	2.83	3.29	20.339	4	0.000
Al-Jazirah online counterpart	2.96	2.80	3.12	2.77	2.87	15.337	4	0.004
Almadina print newspaper	2.96	2.86	3.08	3.17	3.29	10.090	4	0.039
Almadina online counterpart	3.02	3.12	3.11	3.16	2.88	4.259	4	0.372
Alyaum print newspaper	2.87	2.76	2.80	2.77	2.78	1.824	4	0.768
Alyaum online counterpart	2.89	2.87	2.79	2.78	2.77	12.175	4	0.016
Alwatan print newspaper	2.85	2.79	2.51	2.48	2.52	34.193	4	0.000
Alwatan online counterpart	2.87	2.89	2.59	2.50	2.47	31.349	4	0.000
Sabq online exclusive newspaper	4.69	4.65	4.13	4.10	3.56	205.049	4	0.000
Almarsd online exclusive newspaper	2.98	2.90	2.85	2.78	2.82	5.117	4	0.276
Mapnews online exclusive newspaper	2.84	2.81	2.78	2.66	2.75	7.524	4	0.111
Kolalwatn online exclusive newspaper	2.85	2.83	2.79	2.65	2.73	9.613	4	0.047
Alweeam online exclusive newspaper	2.99	2.86	2.81	2.77	2.80	2.763	4	0.598
Twasul online exclusive newspaper	3.01	2.94	3.24	3.14	3.03	25.138	4	0.000
Print newspapers collectively	2.95	2.86	3.02	3.10	3.20	47.045	4	0.000
Online counterparts collectively	3.03	3.11	3.10	3.09	2.85	18.563	4	0.001
Online exclusive newspapers collectively	3.22	3.16	3.01	3.01	2.94	27.010	4	0.000



#### **6.4.7 Impact of Religiosity Levels on Credibility Perceptions: 5 Categories:**

Religiosity as a variable was recoded into five categories (where -1= Moderate and -5 = Highly religious). As an independent variable, its impact was measured using the Kruskal Wallis test.

Thus, religiosity as an independent variable showed a significant impact ( $p < 0.05$ ) on the credibility of five newspapers, namely *Alwatan* print, *Alwatan* online counterpart, *Sabq* online exclusive, *Alweeam* online exclusive and *Twasul* online exclusive. It was found that those with moderate religiosity (categories 1, 2 and 3) perceived *Alwatan* print, *Alwatan* online counterpart and *Alweeam* online exclusive as the most credible, while those with highest religiosity allocated the least credibility to all three (see Table 16). However, the Kruskal Wallis test revealed significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) that moderately religious (categories 1 and 3) individuals gave the *Sabq* exclusive online higher credibility than the rest who mostly belong to the higher religiosity categories.

On the other hands, for the *Tawsul* online exclusive, the highest credibility significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) was found among those in the highest religiosity categories 3 ( $M=3.12$ ), 4 ( $M=3.19$ ) and 5 ( $M=3.27$ ) compared to categories 1 ( $M=2.87$ ) and 2 ( $M=2.87$ ) (see Table 16). However, religiosity showed no significant effect ( $p > 0.05$ ) on the rest newspapers.

For the version type (print newspapers collectively, online counterparts collectively and online exclusively newspapers collectively), the level of religiosity showed a significant effect ( $p < 0.05$ ) on the credibility of the newspaper versions. For example, the respondents in the moderately religious category 1 ( $M=3.15$ ) showed higher credibility for online counterparts than the respondents in high religiosity categories 4 ( $M=3.04$ ) and 5 ( $M=3.04$ ) (see Table 16). No significant impact ( $p > 0.05$ ) of religiosity was found on the credibility of print newspapers.

**Table 16: Credibility means of newspapers and significance statistics based on religiosity level**

	1 (196)	2 (122)	3 (47)	4 (300)	5 (72)	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Al-Riyadh print newspaper	3.11	3.08	2.96	3.26	3.22	7.658	4	0.105
Al-Riyadh online counterpart	3.38	3.20	3.19	3.38	3.43	6.755	4	0.149
Okas print newspaper	3.23	3.19	3.21	3.33	3.47	7.139	4	0.129
Okas online counterpart	3.64	3.43	3.60	3.64	3.65	7.590	4	0.108
Al-Jazirah print newspaper	2.82	2.92	2.89	2.91	2.83	4.088	4	0.394
Al-Jazirah online counterpart	2.85	2.94	2.93	2.92	2.82	3.647	4	0.456
Almadina print newspaper	2.93	2.94	3.05	3.02	3.14	4.129	4	0.389
Almadina online counterpart	3.07	2.99	3.15	3.13	3.11	4.796	4	0.309
Alyaum print newspaper	2.75	2.78	2.86	2.80	2.78	2.430	4	0.657
Alyaum online counterpart	2.84	2.80	2.92	2.82	2.83	5.051	4	0.282
Alwatan print newspaper	3.07	2.94	2.78	2.32	2.38	85.119	4	0.000
Alwatan online counterpart	3.15	3.02	2.83	2.38	2.45	89.909	4	0.000
Sabq online exclusive newspaper	4.48	4.25	4.72	4.33	4.32	18.577	4	0.001
Almarsd online exclusive newspaper	2.89	2.87	3.06	2.83	2.88	2.996	4	0.558
Mapnews online exclusive newspaper	2.81	2.77	2.89	2.75	2.83	4.390	4	0.356
Kolalwatn online exclusive newspaper	2.72	2.78	2.94	2.74	2.82	5.355	4	0.253
Alweeam online exclusive newspaper	3.11	3.01	2.99	2.63	2.61	72.466	4	0.000
Twasul online exclusive newspaper	2.87	2.87	3.12	3.19	3.27	50.022	4	0.000
Print newspapers collectively	2.98	2.97	2.95	2.94	2.97	0.440	4	0.979
Online counterparts collectively	3.15	3.03	3.10	3.04	3.04	13.234	4	0.010
Online exclusive newspapers collectively	3.14	3.09	3.28	3.07	3.12	12.393	4	0.015

In fact, this section focuses on the results of the third research question. Thus, it presents the impact of various demographic characteristics on the perceived credibility based on the overall credibility of the given newspapers individually (based on a particular newspaper) and collectively (based on the version type i.e. print versus exclusively online). Indeed, age, gender, education, income, employment, region and religiosity levels were found to influence the perceived credibility of the given newspapers. Generally, the respondents' personal characteristics showed significant influence on the perceived

credibility of the given newspapers. Thus, the older age groups (30 years old and over), male respondents, respondents with higher income (10k + and 15k +), and higher levels of education (Master's degree and PhD), employees from government and private sectors, and retired respondents, perceived print newspapers as being the most credible, except the *Alwatan* print newspaper.

On the other hand, the respondents' personal characteristics displayed a significant influence on the perceived credibility of the given newspapers. Thus, the younger age group (18-29), male respondents, respondents with low income (1k +), and low levels of education (High school or less, Diploma and Bachelor degree), students and the unemployed, perceived online counterparts and online exclusive newspapers as being more credible.

However, the respondents with high religiosity (categories 4 and 5) showed lower credibility for most of the given newspapers than the respondents with moderate religiosity category (1 and 2), except the *Twasul* exclusively online newspaper. In terms of gender impact, female participants gave most of the newspapers lower credibility than males, except for the *Alwatan* print, *Alwatan* online counterpart and *Sabq* online exclusive newspaper. Also, the respondents from the Central Region gave the newspapers published in the same region (i.e. *Al-Riyadh* print and its online counterpart) higher credibility than the newspapers published in the other region (i.e. *Okas* print and online counterpart). There are common perceptions amongst some groups of the respondents who perceive the online counterparts and online exclusive newspapers to be more credible, and similarly there are common perceptions amongst the respondents who perceive the print newspapers as more credible. However, particular newspapers are associated with specific groups.

## **6.5 The individual Influence of Personal Characteristics of Saudi**

### **Audiences Their Patterns of Reliance on a Particular Newspaper**

This section inspects the influence of personal characteristics of Saudis regarding their reliance on a particular newspaper. As mentioned earlier, this study involved six

Saudi local print newspapers with six online counterparts and six Saudi local online newspapers:

- Print newspapers: *Al-Riyadh* print, *Okas* print, *Al-Jazirah* print, *Almadina* print, *Alyaum* print, and *Alwatan* print.
- Online counterparts of print newspapers: *Al-Riyadh* online, *Okas* online, *Al-Jazirah* online, *Almadina* online, *Alyaum* online, and *Alwatan* online.
- Online exclusive newspapers: *Sabq* online exclusive, *Almarsd* online exclusive, *Mapnews* online exclusive, *Kolalwatn* online exclusive, *Alweeam* online exclusive, and *Twasul* online exclusive.

However, as this research concentrates mainly on the influence of Saudis' personal characteristics on the credibility perceptions, this section includes only the significant results for reliance, in order to explore to what extent, the influence of personal characteristics on reliance is aligned with the influence of personal characteristics on the credibility perceptions in the previous section. Thus, any newspaper that is not influenced by personal characteristics will not be a part of this section.

#### **6.5.1 Impact of Gender on Reliance Levels:**

Participants' gender was tested for its effect on their level of reliance on each of the newspapers, through a Mann-Whitney U test. Thus, it was revealed that generally males significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) had higher reliance levels than females on the following newspapers: *Alriyadh* print, *Alriyadh* online counterpart, *Okas* print, *Okas* online counterpart, *Aljazirah* print, *Aljazirah* online counterpart, *Almadina* print, *Almadina* online counterpart, *Alyaum* online counterpart, *Alwatan* online counterpart, *Sabq* online exclusive, *Almarsd* online exclusive, *Alweeam* online exclusive and *Twasul* online exclusive (see Table 17). For example, males showed significantly higher reliance on the *Alwatan* online counterpart ( $M=4.14$ ) and *Sabq* online exclusive ( $M=3.62$ ) than females did with the *Alwatan* online counterpart ( $M=1.66$ ) and *Sabq* online exclusive ( $M=1.46$ ).

For the version type (print newspapers collectively, online counterparts collectively and exclusively online newspapers collectively), the Mann-Whitney U test

displayed the same pattern, so males had significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) higher levels of reliance on exclusively online ( $M=3.80$ ), online counterparts ( $M=3.71$ ) and print ( $M=3.87$ ) compared to females' reliance on exclusively online ( $M=1.74$ ), online counterparts ( $M=1.36$ ) and print ( $M=1.54$ ) (see Table 17).

**Table 17: Reliance means of newspapers and Mann-Whitney U statistics for gender**

	gender	Means	Wilcoxon W Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Z	Sig. (2-tailed)
Al-Riyadh print newspaper	Female	1.36	245.00	55.0	-6.850	0.000
	Male	4.18	5533.00			
Al-Riyadh online counterpart	Female	1.32	2764.50	994.5	-10.105	0.000
	Male	3.64	31688.50			
Okas print newspaper	Female	1.56	657.00	381.0	-5.963	0.000
	Male	3.69	10971.00			
Okas online counterpart	Female	1.40	7320.00	3042.0	-11.216	0.000
	Male	3.46	59110.00			
Al-Jazirah print newspaper	Female	1.75	29.50	19.5	-2.690	0.007
	Male	4.00	1051.50			
Al-Jazirah online counterpart	Female	1.12	55.00	19.0	-4.302	0.000
	Male	4.02	1485.00			
Almadina print newspaper	Female	1.50	63.00	42.0	-3.193	0.001
	Male	3.62	2017.00			
Almadina online counterpart	Female	1.29	304.00	151.0	-4.845	0.000
	Male	3.39	3351.00			
Alyaum online counterpart	Female	1.37	55.50	19.5	-3.108	0.002
	Male	3.63	322.50			
Alwatan online counterpart	Female	1.66	127.50	49.5	-4.864	0.000
	Male	4.14	1702.50			
Sabq online exclusive newspaper	Female	1.46	48268.50	12490.5	-17.485	0.000
	Male	3.62	178532.50			
Almarsd online exclusive newspaper	Female	1.60	30.00	15.0	-2.292	0.022
	Male	3.35	223.00			
Alweeam online exclusive newspaper	Female	2.37	120.00	84.0	-3.342	0.001
	Male	4.16	2226.00			
Twatul online exclusive newspaper	Female	1.55	259.00	88.0	-6.929	0.000

	Male	4.08	11676.00			
Online exclusive newspapers collectively	Female	1.74	48584.50	12806.5	-17.520	0.000
	Male	3.80	183636.50			
Online counterparts collectively	Female	1.36	18768.00	6207.0	-14.75	0.000
	Male	3.71	119307.00			
Print newspapers collectively	Female	1.54	1820.50	739.5	-9.314	0.000
	Male	3.87	29055.50			

### 6.5.2 Impact of Region on Reliance Levels:

The Mann-Whitney U test revealed that the region in Saudi Arabia (Central vs. Western) had a significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) impact on the level of reliance on two newspapers: the *Okas* online counterpart and the *Sabq* online exclusive. Thus, the respondents from the Central Region showed significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) higher reliance on the *Okas* online counterpart ( $M=3.50$ ) and the *Sabq* online exclusive ( $M=2.96$ ) than the respondents from the Western region ( $M=2.82$  and  $M=2.64$ ), (see Table 18).

**Table 18: Reliance means of newspapers and Mann-Whitney U statistics for region**

	Region	Means	Wilcoxon W Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Z	Sig. (2-tailed)
Okas online counterpart	Central Region	3.50	13762.50	7216.5	-3.082	0.002
	Western Region	2.82	52667.50			
Sabq online exclusive newspaper	Central Region	2.96	93851.00	48695	-2.194	0.028
	Western Region	2.64	132950.00			

### 6.5.3 Impact of Age on Reliance Levels:

Age as an independent variable of five levels was tested for its effect on the participants' reliance on each of the newspapers. Using the Kruskal Wallis test, it was shown that age had a significant effect ( $p < 0.05$ ) on the reliance level for *Al-Riyadh* print, the *Alriyadh* online counterpart, *Okas* print, *Okas* online counterpart, *Aljazirah* print, *Almadina* print, *Sabq* online exclusive, *Almarsd* online exclusive, and *Twusul* online exclusive. For example, the respondents in the age categories 30-41, 42-53 and 54-65

showed significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) higher reliance on the *Twasul* online exclusive ( $M = 4.13$ ,  $M = 3.60$  and  $M = 4.08$ ) than those aged 18-29 ( $M = 2.72$ ) and 65+ ( $M = 2.00$ ) (see Table 19).

For the version type (print newspapers collectively, online counterparts collectively and online exclusively newspapers collectively), the Kruskal Wallis test showed a significant effect ( $p < 0.05$ ) on the reliance level for exclusively online newspapers collectively, online counterparts collectively and print newspapers collectively.

Thus, the pattern of the means shows that, across all these newspapers, there seems to be a low level of reliance among those aged 18-29 years and those over 65 years old. This was also shown when combining the overall newspaper categories. For exclusively online newspapers, the lowest significant reliance ( $p < 0.05$ ) was found among the 18-29-year old ( $M = 2.33$ ) and the over 65s ( $M = 2.30$ ). The other age categories showed higher reliance: 30-41 years old ( $M = 3.72$ ), 42-53 years old ( $M = 3.29$ ) and 54-65 years old ( $M = 3.89$ ) (see Table 19).

**Table 19: Reliance means of newspapers and significance statistics based on the participants' age**

	18-29	30-41	42-53	54-65	Over 65	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Al-Riyadh print newspaper	2.00	4.23	3.57	4.16	2.55	30.17	4	0.000
Al-Riyadh online counterpart	2.66	3.65	2.55	4.25	2.00	26.88	4	0.000
Okas print newspaper	2.69	3.80	3.62	3.72	2.25	19.339	4	0.001
Okas online counterpart	2.76	3.41	2.65	3.00		11.536	4	0.009
Al-Jazirah print newspaper	3.40	4.17	4.25	4.22	2.14	11.61	4	0.021
Almadina print newspaper	2.58	4.33	3.60	3.40	1.88	19.883	4	0.001
Sabq online exclusive newspaper	2.40	3.17	2.88	3.52	2.60	36.618,	4	0.000
Almarsd online exclusive newspaper	1.88	3.87	3.40			8.906	2	0.012
Twasul online exclusive newspaper	2.72	4.13	3.60	4.08	2.00	20.711	4	0.000
Online exclusive newspapers collectively	2.33	3.72	3.29	3.80	2.30	37.213	4	0.000
Online counterparts collectively	2.71	3.53	2.60	3.62	2.00	31.096	4	0.000

Print newspapers collectively	2.66	4.13	3.76	3.87	2.20	38.75	4	0.000
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#### 6.5.4 Impact of Income on Reliance Levels:

Participants' income was measured in four categories. The Kruskal Wallis test was performed to investigate the influence of income categories on the reliance levels. Thus, it was found that the income variable has a significant impact on the reliance level of a number of newspapers. Income had a significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) impact on the reliance on *Alriyadh* print, *Alriyadh* online counterpart, *Okas* print, *Almadina* print, *Sabq* online exclusive, *Almarsd* online exclusive and *Twasul* online exclusive. For example, respondents with high income categories (5k+, 10k+, and 15k+) showed significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) higher reliance on *Sabq* online exclusive (M=2.82, M=3.38 and M=3.61) than the respondents with low income (1k+) at (M=2.40). Thus, the people in the income categories (5k+, 10k+ and 15k+) showed higher reliance on these newspapers than those in the first category (1k+) (see Table 20).

For the version type (print newspapers collectively, online counterparts collectively and online exclusively newspapers collectively), the Kruskal Wallis test showed a significant effect ( $p < 0.05$ ) on the reliance level on all the newspaper categories except the online counterparts. For example, respondents with a high income (15k+) showed significantly higher reliance on exclusively online newspapers (M=3.78) than the respondents with a low income (1k+) (M=2.42). Overall, it appears that those earning 1k-4999 Saudi Riyals are the least reliant on newspapers, while the other income categories showed the highest reliance on exclusively online content, online counterparts and print (see Table 20).



**Table 20: Reliance means of newspapers and significance statistics based on the participants' income**

	1K- 4.9K Saudi Riyals	5K- 9.9K Saudi Riyals	10K- 14.9K Saudi Riyals	=>15K Saudi Riyals	Chi- Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Al-Riyadh print newspaper	2.23	3.88	4.05	4.05	19.461	3	0.000
Al-Riyadh online counterpart	2.67	3.51	3.65	3.79	22.786	3	0.000
Okas print newspaper	2.69	3.78	3.89	3.57	12.913	3	0.001
Almadina print newspaper	2.60	4.18	3.82	3.28	8.055	3	0.045
Sabq online exclusive newspaper	2.40	2.82	3.38	3.61	55.770	3	0.000
Almarsd online exclusive newspaper	1.88	4.00	3.57	3.66	8.794	3	0.032
Twasul online exclusive newspaper	3.00	3.96	4.01	4.08	11.771	3	0.008
Online exclusive newspapers collectively	2.42	3.59	3.65	3.78	54.839	3	0.000
Print newspapers collectively	2.50	3.94	3.92	3.63	24.966	3	0.000

### 6.5.5 Impact of Education on Reliance Levels:

The Kruskal Wallis test was utilised to measure whether education, a variable of 5 categories, has an impact on the participants' reliance on newspapers. It was found that education had a significant effect on the reliance on *Alriyadh* print, *Alriyadh* online counterpart, *Okas* print, *Okas* online counterpart, *Sabq* online exclusive, *Alweeam* online exclusive, and *Twasul* online exclusive. For example, respondents with Master's and PhD levels revealed significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) higher reliance on the *Okas* online counterpart ( $M = 3.91$  and  $M = 3.50$ ) than High School education or less ( $M = 2.89$ ), Diploma after high school ( $M = 2.29$ ) and Bachelor degree ( $M = 2.84$ ). Thus, the Kruskal Wallis test showed significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) that those with Master's and PhD levels of education had the highest reliance on the previous newspapers (see Table 21).

For the version type (print newspapers collectively, online counterparts collectively and online exclusively newspapers collectively), the Kruskal Wallis test showed a significant effect ( $p < 0.05$ ) on the reliance level on all the newspaper categories. For example, respondents with Master's and PhD levels revealed significantly ( $p < 0.05$ )

higher reliance on online exclusive newspapers (M=4.09 and M=4.12) than High School education or less (M=2.75), Diploma after high school (M=3.04) and Bachelor degree (M=3.49). Thus, it seems that those with lower education levels (High School education or less, Diploma after high school and Bachelor degree) had the lowest reliance on most of the newspapers, while those with Master's and PhD levels of education had the highest reliance (see Table 21). This was also observed for overall exclusively online newspapers, online counterparts and print.

**Table 21: Reliance means of newspapers and significance statistics based on the participants' education**

	High School or Less	Diploma after High School	Bachelor degree	Master's degree	PhD degree	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Al-Riyadh print newspaper	2.64	3.33	3.71	<u>4.10</u>	<u>4.22</u>	9.959	4	0.041
Al-Riyadh online counterpart	2.71	2.50	3.12	<u>3.76</u>	<u>4.00</u>	19.285	4	0.001
Okas print newspaper	2.91	2.00	<u>3.59</u>	<u>3.96</u>	<u>3.25</u>	15.022	4	0.005
Okas online counterpart	2.89	2.29	2.84	<u>3.91</u>	<u>3.50</u>	19.292	4	0.001
Sabq online exclusive newspaper	2.55	2.29	2.68	<u>3.67</u>	<u>3.63</u>	42.630	4	0.000
Alweeam online exclusive newspaper	2.62	3.60	4.13	<u>4.28</u>	<u>4.33</u>	11.666	4	0.020
Twusul online exclusive newspaper	3.08	3.25	3.68	<u>4.33</u>	<u>4.40</u>	17.953	4	0.001
Online exclusive newspapers collectively	2.75	3.04	3.49	<u>4.09</u>	<u>4.12</u>	43.616	4	0.000
Online counterparts collectively	2.80	2.39	2.98	<u>3.83</u>	<u>3.75</u>	25.534	4	0.000
Print newspapers collectively	2.77	2.66	3.65	<u>4.03</u>	<u>3.73</u>	18.040	4	0.001

### 6.5.6 Impact of Employment on Reliance Levels:

Participants' employment as a variable of 5 categories was assessed relative to reliance on each of the newspapers. Overall it was evident through the Kruskal Wallis test that employment had a significant impact ( $p < 0.05$ ) on *Alriyadh* print, *Alriyadh* online counterpart, *Okas* print, *Okas* online counterpart, *Aljazirah* print, *Aljazirah* online counterpart, *Almadina* print, *Sabq* online exclusive, *Almarsd* online exclusive, and *Twusul* online exclusive. For example, employees in government sectors and private sectors had

significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) higher reliance on *Twasul* online exclusive ( $M = 4.02$  and  $M = 4.11$ ) than unemployed and students ( $M = 1.50$  and  $M = 2.88$ ). Thus, the employees in private and government sectors had the highest reliance on most of the previous newspapers compared to unemployed participants, students and retired participants (see Table 22).

For the version type (print newspapers collectively, online counterparts collectively and online exclusively newspapers collectively), the Kruskal Wallis test showed a significant effect ( $p < 0.05$ ) on the reliance level on all the newspaper categories. For example, regarding the online exclusive newspapers, employees in government sectors and private sectors had higher reliance ( $M = 3.68$  and  $M = 3.28$ ) than the unemployed and students ( $M = 1.70$  and  $M = 2.41$ ). Thus, it can be observed from the mean ranks that the unemployed participants had the lowest reliance on all newspapers, followed by students, whereas those who were in public and private employment seemed, on most occasions, to have higher reliance than the rest (see Table 22).

**Table 22: Reliance means of newspapers and significance statistics based on the participants' employment type**

	Unemployment	Student	Employment in Government sectors	Employment in Private sectors	Retired	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Al-Riyadh print newspaper	1.00	2.76	4.18	4.12	2.94	32.265	4	0.000
Al-Riyadh online counterpart	1.41	2.82	3.78	3.31	3.14	38.602	4	0.000
Okas print newspaper	1.50	2.65	3.87	4.22	2.85	34.521	4	0.000
Okas online counterpart	1.75	2.82	3.32	3.37	2.33	18.876	4	0.001
Al-Jazirah print newspaper	1.00	4.50	4.25	4.25	2.70	17.603	4	0.001
Al-Jazirah online counterpart	1.00	3.54	3.94	2.50	4.00	10.245	4	0.037
Almadina print newspaper	2.00	2.53	4.08	4.23	2.27	18.841	4	0.001
Sabq online exclusive newspaper	1.60	2.54	3.23	3.23	2.82	58.051	4	0.000
Almarsd online exclusive newspaper	2.00	1.83	3.81	2.50		8.606	4	0.035
Twasul online exclusive newspaper	1.50	2.88	4.02	4.11	3.50	20.046	4	0.000

Online exclusive newspapers collectively	1.70	2.41	3.68	3.28	3.16	60.139	4	0.000
Online counterparts collectively	1.38	3.06	3.68	3.06	3.15	38.569	4	0.000
Print newspapers collectively	1.37	3.11	4.09	4.20	2.69	57.375	4	0.000

### 6.5.7 Impact of Religiosity on Reliance Levels:

To explore the impact of religiosity on the participants' reliance on each of the newspapers, the Kruskal Wallis test was performed to measure the differences between the five religiosity categories. Thus, religiosity levels showed a significant impact on various newspapers ( $p < 0.05$ ): *Alriyadh* online counterpart, *Okas* print, *Okas* online counterpart, *Aljazirah* online counterpart, *Almadina* online counterpart, *Alwatan* online counterpart, *Sabq* online exclusive, *Alweeam* online exclusive, and the *Twasul* online exclusive. It seems that the participants with moderate religiosity (categories 1 and 2) had higher reliance than those in high religious categories (4 and 5) (see Table 23). For example, those with high religiosity (category 5) possessed significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) less reliance on the Sabq online exclusive ( $M = 2.31$ ) compared to those who were moderately religious (category 1) ( $M = 3.41$ )

For the version type (print newspapers collectively, online counterparts collectively and exclusively online newspapers collectively), the Kruskal Wallis test showed a significant effect ( $p < 0.05$ ) of religiosity on the reliance level on exclusively online newspapers collectively and online counterparts collectively. For example, moderately religious participants (category 1) showed higher reliance on the exclusively online newspapers ( $M = 3.70$ ) and online counterparts ( $M = 4.11$ ) than the high religiosity (category 5) ( $M = 2.23$  and  $M = 2.79$ ). Thus, it appears that across all those significant outcomes, those in the lowest category of religiosity relied the most on newspapers (see Table 23).

**Table 23: Reliance means of newspapers and significance statistics based on the participants' religiosity levels**

	Moderate Religiosity				High Religiosity	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
	1	2	3	4	5			
Al-Riyadh online counterpart	3.51	2.73	1.91	3.00	2.47	15.290	4	0.004
Okas print newspaper	3.95	2.79	2.90	3.25	3.44	11.027	4	0.026
Okas online counterpart	3.92	2.69	1.91	2.51	2.32	74.350	4	0.000
Al-Jazirah online counterpart	4.63	2.60	1.50	3.15	3.40	10.971	4	0.027
Almadina online counterpart	4.50	2.88	2.25	2.55	3.00	18.830	4	0.001
Alwatan online counterpart	4.01	4.25	1.50	1.75		21.078	3	0.000
Sabq online exclusive newspaper	3.41	2.37	3.90	2.57	2.31	45.455	4	0.000
Alweeam online exclusive newspaper	4.03	4.44	2.00	1.00	1.00	17.123	4	0.002
Twasul online exclusive newspaper	3.66	2.10	2.66	3.95	3.40	13.914	4	0.008
Online exclusive newspapers	3.70	2.97	2.85	2.50	2.23	47.019	4	0.000
Online counterparts	4.11	3.03	1.81	2.59	2.79	62.966	4	0.000

In fact, this section answers the third research question, which focuses on the influence of personal characteristics on the reliance levels for the given newspapers. It can be concluded that the personal characteristics showed influence based on the significant results extracted from the previous tables in this section.

Thus, in general, it was evident that the youngest age group (18-29 years old) relied little on newspapers, whereas other age groups relied on them more. With gender, females relied less on newspapers than males. Meanwhile, it seems that those with the highest income were most likely to have a higher reliance on newspapers. When considering education level, those with PhDs and MScs relied more on newspapers than the others. The results also illustrated that retired and unemployed participants showed less reliance than others. As for religiosity (as a categorical variable), those with the lowest point of religiosity (moderate) were more reliant on newspapers than the rest.

## 6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the results of the questionnaire to determine the personal factors of Saudis that influence the perceived credibility and reliance levels of the given newspapers, and to thus explore the dominant social categories. It was evident that the personal characteristics showed different influences on the perceived credibility than on the reliance levels, which suggests that credibility and reliance are influenced differently by the personal characteristics. Therefore, this chapter answered the first, second and third research questions as they were mentioned in the research framework in Chapter Five (see Table 6). The main outcome from this chapter is to find the dominant social categories that are considered in order to shape the target sample at the interview phase, while the questionnaire results shape the structural part of the interview, which is semi-structured.

This was done by investigating the demographic factors that influenced the perceived credibility based on their similarities and differences and considering the associated social categories. Thus, four social categories were found to influence the perceived credibility as follows:

- a. Older males (30 years old or over) with moderate religiosity levels, high income, high education, employed/retired, and from the two regions.
- b. Younger males (18-29 years old) with moderate religiosity levels, low income, low education, unemployed/students, and from the two regions.
- c. Males, regardless of age, with high religiosity levels, and different levels of income, education, and employed, from the two regions.
- d. Females, regardless of age, with different levels of religiosity, income, education and employment status, from the two regions.

These four social categories are therefore further evaluated by the qualitative method of data collection using semi-structured interviews, in order to explore the shared meanings of these groups with certain credibility criteria in Chapter Seven.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **Qualitative Data Analysis Tracking Saudi Audiences’ Interpretations of their Perceived Credibility**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

The main aim of this chapter is to explore the participants’ explanations of the four dominant social categories generated in the questionnaire phase (see Chapter Six) and how these influence their disclosed perceptions of the credibility of the newspapers under study in this research. This chapter aims to address how the shared meanings held by Saudi audiences shape their credibility criteria for the given newspapers differently. Thus, a question was set to be answered through the interviews in order to accomplish the study framework (see Chapter Five). This question was answered in this chapter through sub-headings to facilitate the interview analysis.

#### **7.2 The Interview Sampling**

The target sample for the interviews was chosen based on the participants’ personal characteristics, which comprised the four dominant social categories (see Chapter Five). Thus, these four dominant social categories were identified based on the personal characteristics that showed more influence on credibility perceptions for the newspapers under study. The four dominant social categories drawn up from the questionnaire analysis and associated with the patterns of credibility for the given print, online counterparts, and exclusively online newspapers are as follows:

- a. Older males (30 years old or over) with moderate religiosity levels, high income, high education, employed/retired, and from the two regions.
- b. Younger males (18-29 years old) with moderate religiosity levels, low income, low education, unemployed/students, and from the two regions.
- c. Males, regardless of age, with high religiosity levels, and different levels of income, education, and employment from the two regions.

- d. Females, regardless of age, with different levels of religiosity, income, education and employment status, from the two regions.

### 7.3 The Interview Sample Profile

At the end of the interviewing period in May 2017, 36 interviews had been completed (n = 36) comprising twelve females (n =12, 7 young and 5 old), twelve young males (n = 12, 6 moderately religious young and 6 highly religious young ) and twelve older males (n= 7, 2 highly religious old and 5 moderately religious old) with different demographic characteristics, including different ages and levels of religiosity. The profile details are illustrated in Table (24).

**Table 24: Interviewees' demographic profiles**

No	Gender	Age	Religiosity	Education	Employment	Income
1	Female	(1) 18-29	(4) High	(3) Bachelor	(2) Student	(1) 1K-4.9K
2	Female	(1) 18-29	(1) Moderate	(3) Bachelor	(2) Student	(1) 1K-4.9K
3	Female	(1) 18-29	(4) High	(2) Diploma	(2) Student	(1) 1K-4.9K
4	Female	(1) 18-29	(2) Moderate	(3) Bachelor	(2) Student	(1) 1K-4.9K
5	Female	(2) 30-41	(5) High	(3) Bachelor	(3) Gov Employee	(2) 5K-9.9K
6	Female	(2) 30-41	(2) Moderate	(3) Bachelor	(4) Priv Employee	(3) 10K-14.9K
7	Female	(2) 30-41	(4) High	(3) Bachelor	(3) Gov Employee	(3) 10K-14.9K
8	Female	(3) 42-53	(4) High	(5) PhD	(3) Gov Employee	(4) +15K
9	Female	(3) 42-53	(2) Moderate	(4) Master's degree	(3) Gov Employee	(4) +15K



10	Female	(3) 42-53	(5) High	(3) Bachelor	(4) Priv Employee	(3) 10K-14.9K
11	Female	(4) 54-65	(2) Moderate	(5) PhD	(5) Retired	(4) +15K
12	Female	(5) +65	(4) High	(3) Bachelor	(5) Retired	(3) 10K-14.9K
13	Male	(1) 18-29	(2) Moderate	(3) Bachelor	(3) Gov Employee	(2) 5K-9.9K
14	Male	(1) 18-29	(5) High	(2) Diploma	(4) Priv Employee	(1) 1K-4.9K
15	Male	(1) 18-29	(1) Moderate	(3) Bachelor	(2) Student	(1) 1K-4.9K
16	Male	(1) 18-29	(5) High	(2) Diploma	(2) Student	(1) 1K-4.9K
17	Male	(1) 18-29	(1) Moderate	(1) High School	(1) Unemployed	(5) Unspecified
18	Male	(1) 18-29	(4) High	(3) Bachelor	(2) Student	(1) 1K-4.9K
19	Male	(2) 30-41	(5) High	(3) Bachelor	(3) Gov Employee	(2) 5K-9.9K
20	Male	(2) 30-41	(2) Moderate	(3) Bachelor	(4) Priv Employee	(2) 5K-9.9K
21	Male	(2) 30-41	(4) High	(3) Bachelor	(3) Gov Employee	(3) 10K-14.9K
22	Male	(2) 30-41	(1) Moderate	(4) Master's degree	(4) Priv Employee	(3) 10K-14.9K
23	Male	(2) 30-41	(4) High	(4) Master's degree	(3) Gov Employee	(3) 10K-14.9K
24	Male	(2) 30-41	(2) Moderate	(3) Bachelor	(3) Gov Employee	(2) 5K-9.9K
25	Male	(3) 42-53	(5) High	(4) Master's degree	(3) Gov Employee	(4) +15K

26	Male	(3) 42-53	(2) Moderate	(4) Master's degree	(3) Gov Employee	(3) 10K-14.9K
27	Male	(3) 42-53	(4) High	(3) Bachelor	(4) Priv Employee	(3) 10K-14.9K
28	Male	(3) 42-53	(1) Moderate	(5) PhD	(3) Gov Employee	(4) +15K
29	Male	(3) 42-53	(5) High	(5) PhD	(4) Priv Employee	(4) +15K
30	Male	(3) 42-53	(2) Moderate	(3) Bachelor	(3) Gov Employee	(3) 10K-14.9K
31	Male	(4) 54-65	(4) High	(4) Master's degree	(3) Gov Employee	(4) +15K
32	Male	(4) 54-65	(5) High	(3) Bachelor	(5) Retired	(4) +15K
33	Male	(4) 54-65	(1) Moderate	(3) Bachelor	(3) Gov Employee	(4) +15K
34	Male	(5) +65	(5) High	(5) PhD	(5) Retired	(4) +15K
35	Male	(5) +65	(2) Moderate	(4) Master's degree	(5) Retired	(3) 10K-14.9K
36	Male	(5) +65	(4) High	(3) Bachelor	(5) Retired	(3) 10K-14.9K

#### 7.4 Interview Process and Analysis

The interviewees in each social category were asked during the interview about the newspapers which were influenced by their perceived credibility. Thus, during this analysis, the given newspapers meant only the given names for each social category, not all 18 newspapers. For example, all print newspapers, but mainly *Alriyadh* and *Okas*, were more influenced by the old moderately religious males while *Alwatan* print newspaper was influenced positively by females and young moderate males, and negatively by highly

religious males. Thus, from now on throughout the chapter, the given newspapers differ for each social category based on the impact found in the questionnaire outcomes.

The questionnaire, as mentioned in the previous chapter, presented the impact of various demographic characteristics on perceived credibility based on the overall credibility of the given newspapers individually (based on a particular newspaper) and collectively (based on the version type – i.e. print versus exclusively online). Thus, age, gender, education, income, employment, region and religiosity levels were found to influence the perceived credibility of the given newspapers. For example, the older age groups (30 years old and over), male respondents, respondents with higher income (10k+ and 15k+), higher levels of education (master's degree and PhD), employees from government and private sectors, and retired respondents perceived print newspapers as being the most credible, except the *Alwatan* print newspaper.

On the other hand, the younger age group (18-29), male respondents, respondents with low income (1k+), and low levels of education (high school or less, diploma and bachelor's degree), students and the unemployed perceived online counterparts and exclusively online newspapers as being more credible. However, the respondents with high religiosity (categories 4 and 5) showed lower credibility for most of the given newspapers than the respondents from the moderate religiosity category (1 and 2), except the *Twasul* exclusively online newspaper. Regarding gender influence, females gave most of the newspapers lower credibility than males, except for the *Alwatan* print, *Alwatan* online counterpart, and *Sabq* online exclusive newspaper. Also, the respondents from the Central Region gave the newspapers published in the same region (e.g. *Al-Riyadh* print and its online counterpart) higher credibility than the newspapers published in other regions (e.g. *Okas* print and online counterpart). There are common perceptions amongst some categories of the respondents who perceive the online counterparts and exclusively online newspapers to be more credible, and similarly there are common perceptions amongst the respondents who perceive the print newspapers as more credible. However, particular newspapers are associated with specific categories.

The main focus during the analysis is to look for the causes relating to the credibility criteria among the members of each social identity, regardless of whether these causes increase or decrease the newspaper's credibility. This helped to get a clear understanding of the credibility criteria for each social category.

The process of thematic analysis benefitted from the steps of Braun and Clarke (2006) and from the flexible approach that was recommended by Maguire and Delahunt (2017). Thus, the six steps were not necessarily linear. The analysis started by categorising the interviews into four main headings based on the four social categories, then by reading the interviews under each heading to become familiar with the data of each group in the Word software. During this phase, the researcher became familiar with the general attitudes about the given newspapers regarding their types and names. This step indicated that the majority of the social categories held negative views about the given newspapers in general, except the category of old moderately religious males. For example, the newspapers were described by females as not beneficial, and by the young moderately religious males as not valuable. However, the category of old moderate males stated that the given newspapers are good enough to read.

The researcher then moved on to the second step to look for initial codes under the subheadings. This was done by looking at the initial codes in the interviews of each social category. After completing the first social category, the researcher moved to the interviews of the second social category to conduct the same step, and consequently the rest of the four social categories followed the same process until the phase was complete. Moving between the four social categories within each phase (step) helped to find the most consistent codes with the research inquiry. A number of initial codes were found in each social category (see Figure 3), but the researcher reported only the codes found in at least three interviews in each social category, as this analysis looks only for the common meaning among each social category using QDA Miner Lite software to conduct repeated data reviews. For example, the first initial codes among the four social categories related to the words that signify less interest in reading these newspapers among the three social

categories including the females, the young moderately religious males, and the highly religious males. Thus, the codes for females and young moderate males showed no interest in the given newspapers because of missing news while the highly religious males showed more doubt regarding the given newspapers because of the newspapers perspective and frames. However, the old moderately religious males showed positive codes such as “*good to read*” and “*reputable*”.

The third phase was to look for themes based on the initial codes from the second phase. Thus, the theme which corresponds to low credibility perceptions among females regarding the given newspaper was “*lack of women’s issues and lifestyle news*” while the theme found among the highly religious males was “*the high coverage of artists’ news with low coverage of Islamic issues by whom not representing the right Islamic perspective*”, and this theme was attributed to their low perceived credibility of the given newspapers (see the initial themes in Figure 4). The theme which corresponds to low credibility perceptions among young moderately religious males regarding the given newspapers was “*lack of criticism regarding officials and culture*”. On the other hand, the theme corresponding to the high credibility perceptions of old moderately religious males regarding the given newspapers was “*providing the correct news of local, societal, sports, official and advertising issues*”.

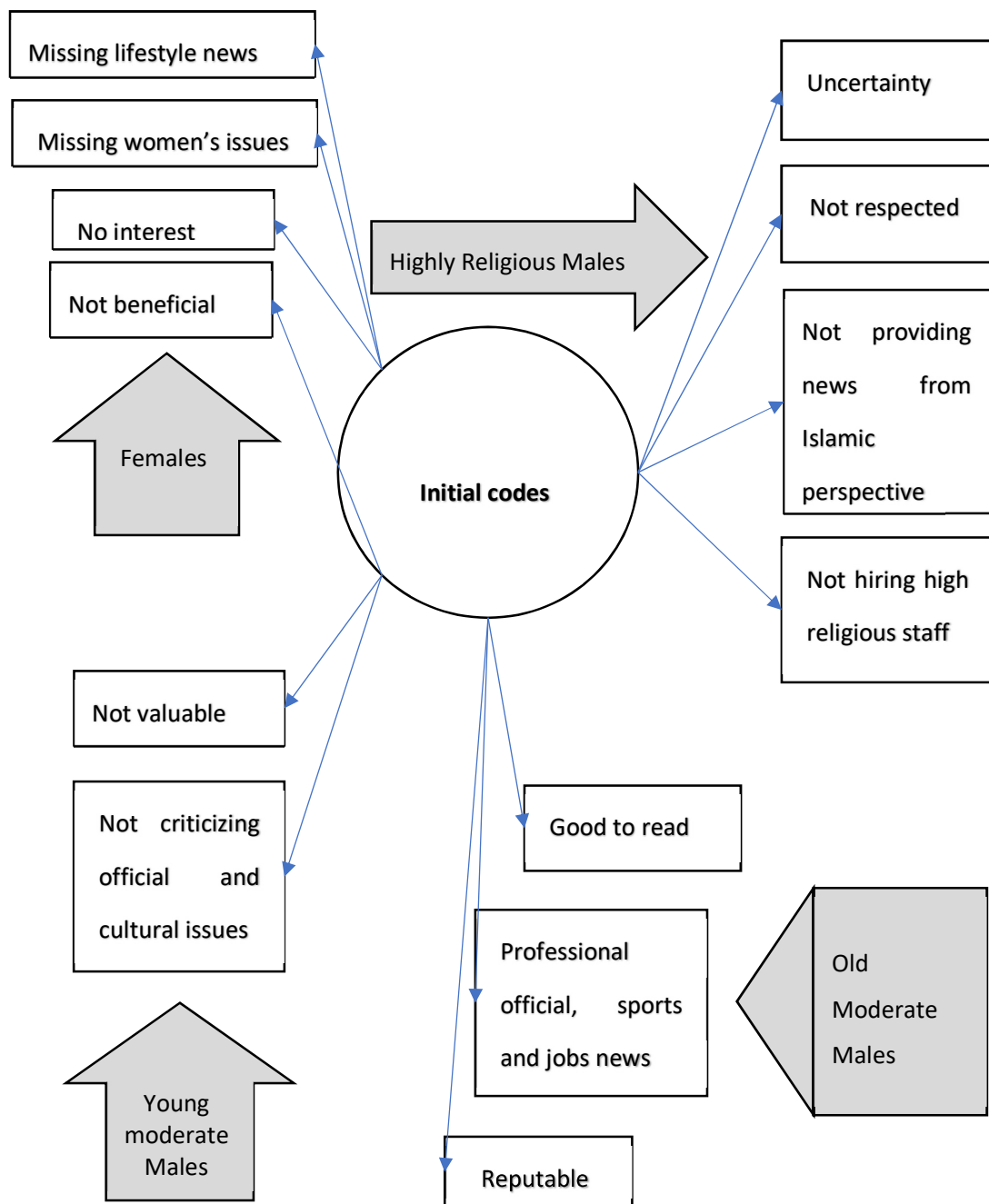
Moving on to the fourth phase was essential to review the generated themes in order to find consistent themes within the research inquiry. Thus, this phase helped the researcher to rethink the themes from the previous phase which had been changed by going back to phase two (the initial codes) and phase three (the created themes). This phase compared the interviewees’ initial codes and their codes used to describe Twitter, which helped to find the most possible themes for each social category. For example, when comparing the codes describing Twitter as the dominant news platform with the codes of the given newspapers as useless news sources, it was found that females and young moderately religious males are highly interested in news but the given newspapers are below their expectations. The theme for the highly religious males was not attributed only

to the news not covered by the given newspapers but also to the way of providing this news. On the other hand, the old moderately religious males showed high interest in the given newspapers which may be a reflection of their high credibility perceptions of print newspapers. This led the process of this analysis to successfully and adequately correspond to the research inquiry.

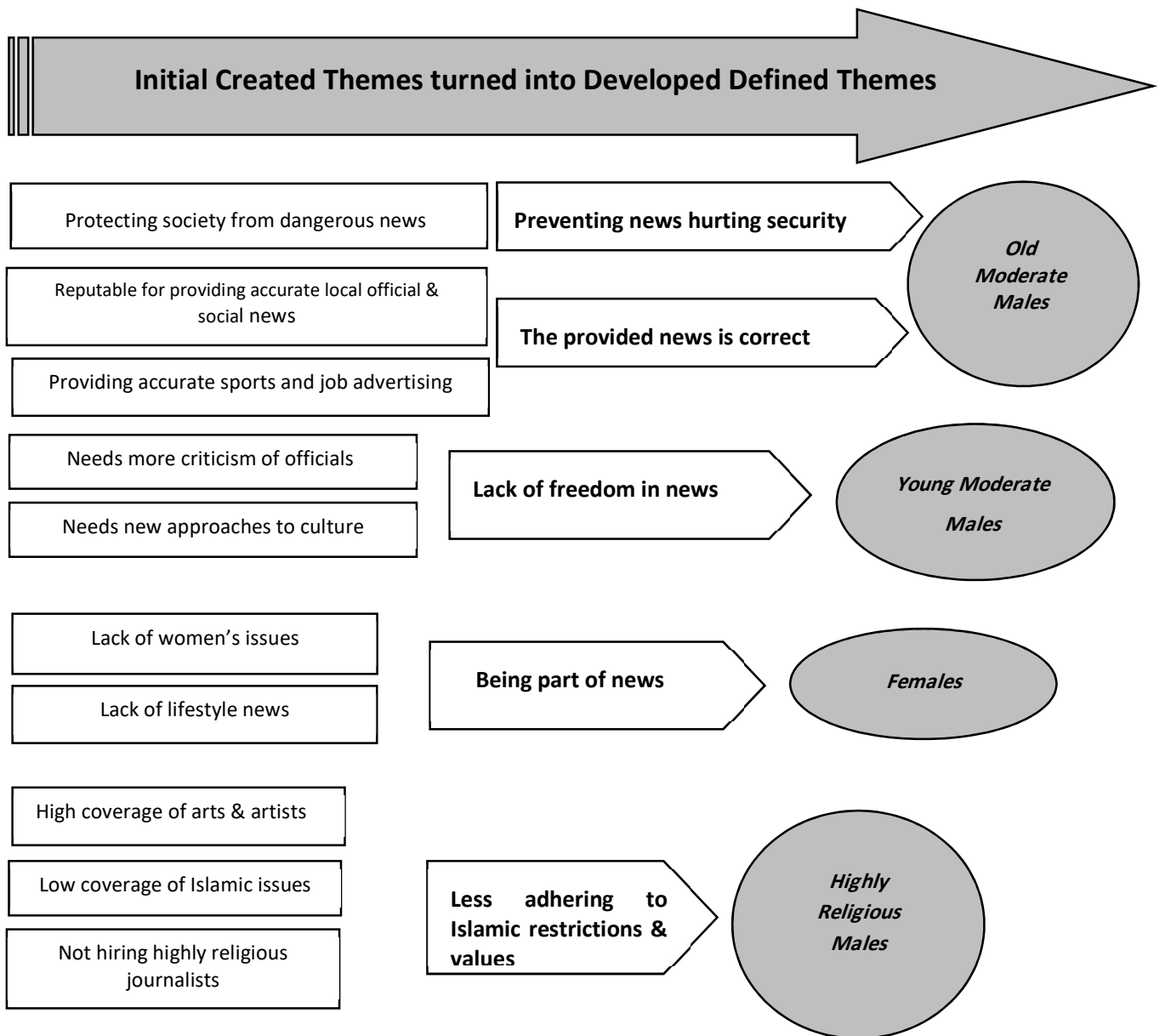
The fifth phase concerns defining the revised themes from the fourth phase. Here, five themes were found to influence the perceived credibility and credibility criteria among the four social categories. These are “*preventing the news hurting security*” and “*the provided news is correct*” for the old moderately religious males, “*lack of freedom in news*” was the defined theme for the young moderate males, “*being part of the news*” was the defined theme for females, and “*not adhering to Islamic restrictions and values*” was the defined theme for the highly religious males (see the defined themes in Figure 4).

The sixth phase concerns writing up, reporting, and discussing the developed themes to achieve a better understanding about how these themes correspond to the research inquiry. This was carried out in section 7.5.

Age, gender and religiosity were shown to have the most influence on the credibility perceptions of the given newspapers which formed the dominant four social categories. However, most of the credibility criteria can be related in general to the reputation of the evaluated newspaper or to some practices carried out by the newspaper. For example, the old moderately religious males stated that they perceived print newspapers as credible because of their reputation, which was due to their long history. On the other hand, the highly religious males stated that they perceived the *Twasul* exclusively online newspaper as credible because it does not publish pictures of unveiled women, etc., as is explained later in this chapter.



**Figure 3** Thematic map of initial codes



**Figure 4 Final thematic map**



## **7.5 Discussion of The Developed Themes in Terms of the Perceived Credibility of the Given Newspapers Among The Four Social Categories**

There were five main themes relating to the four dominant social categories. Thus, the themes “*preventing news hurting security*” and “*the provided news is correct*” were created through the analysis by old moderately religious males while the theme “*lack of news freedom*” was attained through the replies from the moderately religious young interviewees. On the other hands, the interviews with highly religious males revealed the theme “*less adherence to Islamic restrictions and values*” while the interview with females revealed the theme “*being part of news*”. Thus, this section explains how these themes were created by the four dominant social categories.

### **7.5.1 First Theme: Preventing the news hurting security**

The results of the questionnaire analysis, as mentioned in Chapter Six, showed that print newspapers were viewed as being highly credible, mostly by moderately religious male Saudis who belonged to average and older age groups (30 years and over).

Thus, most of the interviewees in the group of old moderately religious males assumed that there is some general news missing from the print newspapers in terms of news stories, but this helps to make these newspapers credible in their eyes. The missing news is understood by the old moderately religious males as a way of avoiding harmful news, protecting society from any risk. Preventing harmful news was described by this social category as a result of hiring highly qualified staff in print newspapers who take this practice seriously.

For example, interviewee 30 stated that: “*risky news cannot be found in print newspapers because the skilled staff take the responsibility towards protecting the society from it*”.

Thus, the interviewees in this social category thought of this avoidance of unsafe news as an unavailable practice in the exclusively online newspapers, which were less credible in their eyes. For example, this social category assumes avoiding harmful news is a successful process in print newspapers, but this practice is not possible for exclusively online newspapers:

*“print newspapers have already learned what exclusively online newspapers still face even if they have a huge young audience, because a young audience does not have a lot of knowledge of critical thinking”* (interviewee 34).

Interviewees 28, 29, and 36 pointed out that print newspapers are credible because of their care in hiring professional staff who are highly qualified and work in a regulated news industry. These qualified professionals are regarded as knowing how to take on the responsibility of covering any news issue seriously and how to apply cultural ethics when providing the news. Interviewee 25 described print newspapers as a news industry that not only cares about the quality of the news, but also cares about staff quality, while exclusively online newspapers can be described as a news industry that cares more about the news itself regardless of the news reporters because of the low gains of online newspapers (if any, as they are available online for free).

In fact, the old moderately religious males assume that only print newspapers prevent harmful news and they thought this process was successful because they have restricted regulations and qualified professionals.

### **7.5.2 Second Theme: The provided news is correct**

This theme was created to explain another theme from the old moderately religious males relating to their patterns of credibility for print newspapers and their online counterparts. The interviewees in this social category attributed their perceived credibility to the reputation of these newspapers which come from their long experience in the news industry and the process of treating news. It was thought that there was a smaller amount of inaccurate news in print newspapers compared to exclusively online newspapers, which

prioritise fast news over waiting for confirmation, while the nature of print newspapers gives them more time to confirm what is right and what is not.

Firstly, the interviews started with a sample of old and middle-aged interviewees (30 years and over) who were already associated with these patterns from the questionnaire. Interviewees 33 and 30 stated that they believed that the chance of being inaccurate in print newspapers was low because of their long experience of dealing with news. Interviewees 26 and 28 stated that print newspapers have had a long history, which has built up their reputation.

Secondly, interviewee 30 confirmed that the process of treating news in print newspapers is based on confirmed news. Interviewee 28 said:

*“Everything in the print newspapers can be trusted because of their difficult process for treating news; many errors can be caught every day in exclusively online newspapers because of their simple and fast way of treating news. So print newspapers care about quality more than quantity or speed, while exclusively online newspapers may care greatly about the quantity and speed of news.”*

Also, interviewee 35 stated that the *Okas* and *Al-Riyadh* print newspapers and the rest of the given print newspapers are trusted more because their priority is the truth, while exclusively online newspapers try to provide the news faster than print with less care for the certainty of the news: *“exclusively online newspapers can provide different news but they cannot compete with low rates of mistakes in print newspapers”*.

In fact, there was no doubt among old, moderately religious males about the reputation of print newspapers due to their useful ways for confirming the news and their experience in the news industry, which comes from their long history of work experience within the industry.

### **7.5.3 Third Theme: Lack of news freedom**

As mentioned earlier, young moderately religious males thought that exclusively online newspapers were more credible. Thus, through the interviews, this theme emerged as an explanation for the credibility perceptions in relation to exclusively online newspapers.

Indeed, young moderately religious males related their higher patterns of credibility for exclusively online newspapers, as well as their shift to social media networks (Twitter) for news, to the lighter restrictions on online papers, which led to more news about citizens and critical subjects such as criticising cultural issues: music, cinema and celebrity rather than official practices or the Saudi dominant culture. Thus, some issues have controversial views among Muslims from the past to the present, such as music and the veiling of women. Music is a debatable issue among Muslims who believe it should be forbidden and Muslims who believe it should not be forbidden.

First of all, for young moderately religious males, interviewees 13 and 15 pointed to exclusively online newspapers as a new way of presenting news without some of the restrictions that control print newspapers. Interviewee 13 said:

*“Exclusively online newspapers such as Sabq try to address news differently because the online world has unlimited options for getting news, so print newspapers will soon die if they do not change their policies, because their policies encourage them to ignore a lot of news regarding critical issues which force a lot of Saudis to go online, not only for online exclusive newspapers but also to social media networks such as Twitter.”*

Thus, the first difference between exclusively online newspapers – specifically *Sabq* – and the rest, including the print newspapers and their online counterparts, is how *Sabq* focuses more on the news of average citizens than the statements of officials, which are covered in print newspapers and their online counterparts to a great extent. For example, interviewee 15 said:

*“I consider the Sabq online newspaper to be the citizens’ newspaper while the Okas print newspaper can be described as the government newspaper because most of Okas’ news focuses on government organisations and officials who lead these organisations, and the officials have the higher space to present their voices over other citizens who can hardly get their voices heard.”*

In addition, the *Alwatan* print newspaper was perceived to be more credible by young moderately religious males. A number of the young interviewees explained that this tendency of young moderately religious males to prefer the *Alwatan* print newspaper was due to the

fact that it focuses on the criticism of several cultural issues that prevent Saudi society from being a modern society. Interviewee 13 stated:

*“Modern societies are associated with new opinions and new practices, so our society needs updating in some cultural parts to be modern but the process of updating the society is not against Islam, as some highly religious people think, because many problems in our society come from the traditional and cultural practices and beliefs but not from Islamic beliefs, which call for peace and tolerance.”*

Secondly, exclusively online newspapers not only focus on citizens more than on officials, but they also provide a critical voice to officials who are not supported by the government. For example, interviewee 24 said:

*“The officials who do not receive special support such as a university chancellor, hospital director or regional educational director, can be criticised in exclusively online newspapers more than in print newspapers and their counterparts, but the officials who receive special support from the government, such as royal family members, court judges and ministers, cannot be criticised in any of the given print newspapers, their counterparts or exclusively online newspapers because of the government regulations and restrictions. So Twitter can go beyond this stage but with anonymous accounts more than with non-anonymous accounts, because some known account holders have been jailed recently after posting some true tweets that are against the government restrictions.”*

Interviewees 20 and 24 said that officials are less protected online than in print, so print newspapers are a safe and comfortable place for officials. Interviewee 17 wondered what the main role of print newspapers is, because print newspapers always try to compliment people who are in positions of high power in order to benefit from them, while average citizens are not treated in the same way. Unlike print newspapers, exclusively online newspapers try to create their own ways of attracting the attention of Saudis who feel dissatisfied with print newspapers.

In fact, young moderately religious males are keen on news, so they thought that exclusively online newspapers, especially *Sabq*, were more credible than print newspapers and their counterparts. This is because of the slight differences between print press and exclusively online press, including the greater focus on citizens rather than officials and the lighter criticism of unsupported officials. However, most of the young moderately religious

males showed a great shift towards Twitter as a platform for obtaining news with fewer restrictions, even from anonymous accounts. Thus, *Sabq* has greater success in engaging a large audience than the rest of the given newspapers including print, their online counterparts, and exclusively online newspapers, because it has changed its priority to focus on citizens rather than on officials, although it still operates under Saudi press restrictions. In fact, the young moderately males were influenced by not only the quantity of news (unlimited news) but the type of news (criticising news), and the *Alwatan* print newspaper with its online counterpart presents criticisms but these are over cultural rather than government issues.

#### **7.5.4 Fourth Theme: Lower adherence to Islamic restrictions and values**

This theme was created by the highly religious males who perceived most of the given newspapers as less credible. Thus, they gave *Twasul* exclusively online newspaper the highest credibility compared to *Alwatan* print with its online counterpart, *Sabq* and *Alweeam* exclusively online newspapers which received the lowest credibility perceptions from the interviewees in this social category. This points to the unease felt by the highly religious males about the changes occurring in the news industry due to their religious principles.

The interviews revealed that the credibility criteria and credibility identification are significantly affected by Islam. This includes the standards of evaluation such as coverage of the arts, hiring (or failing to hire) highly religious staff, and the Islamic angle on news items. These standards can be related to newspapers' practices but not to the nature of the news outlets.

The first way that Islam has an impact can be seen in the overall indicators, as highly religious people of different ages reported lower credibility for most of the given newspapers. Thus, the cultural and social environment in Saudi Arabia shapes the way that people behave. According to interviewee 26, being part of Saudi society implies that “*every Saudi will be naturally affected by Islamic culture because of education and traditions but with different levels*”. In addition to the influence of Islam and culture on the evaluation of the given newspapers, Islam has an overarching influence on how people in Saudi Arabia perceive everything in their lives, including the media, led by people who may be considered by the

majority of Saudis to be moderately religious individuals. Thus, most religious interviewees explained that their low scores for credibility were related to the fact that news media did not follow Islamic rules exactly. There were two ways in which this was perceived.

First, this group indicated that the Islamic culture leads to social influences when evaluating media outlets, including online and print newspapers. Thus, the presentation of news in newspapers in general does not follow Islamic rules exactly, as they can be understood through Islamic teachings. According to interviewees 27 and 29, Islam in Saudi Arabia guides people's practices and activities, including what they read, watch or take part in; thus, as stated in the Islamic teachings, there are certain boundaries to be adhered to.

Interviewee 18 stated:

*“Most newspapers are representing liberals because they care about the government rules precisely, but they do not take the same care with Islamic rules, like putting pictures of unveiled women and presenting views against Islamic views or things said by people who are not knowledgeable in Islamic subjects or even by those who are not Muslims.”*

Second, interviewees 29 and 31, who were highly religious, revealed that the environment of the newspapers is not formed by Islamic frames as newspapers are not led by staff with an Islamic orientation. Thus, not hiring highly religious staff, or giving more space to news about arts than religious content, as well as giving some moderately religious staff the chance to cover Islamic news through non-Islamic views, led to an untrusted environment. Highly religious young interviewees showed a greater distrust for the given newspapers than the old, highly religious male interviewees. Interviewee 16 said that there is a big gap between what he has been taught and what is presented in the media, including newspapers, regarding Islamic values and rules. Interviewee 21 said newspapers try to attract more audiences without consulting Islamic scholars, who can identify whether the new practices and views are allowed in Islam or forbidden. For example, interviewee 23 indicated that he does not *“read any segment or portion of a material that is prohibited by Islam. I always put my religion interest first, then come the societal norms, values and traditions”*.

Thus, the interviews showed that the low credibility perceptions of the highly religious interviewees came from their perceptions of Islamic rules, and these led to them accepting or ignoring media outlets because of their practices. Some highly religious people think, judging by their objections to certain newspapers, that they are protecting Islam and society, while moderately religious people think that by accepting and cooperating with the newspapers, they present the right picture of Islam, which values tolerance.

In fact, the highly religious males showed that they evaluated the newspapers' credibility based on how the news content is formed from their Islamic perspective in terms of what to present, how to present it, and the news presenter (who presents).

#### **7.5.5 Fifth Theme: Being part of news**

Women viewed the given print newspapers and their online counterparts as not very credible. They viewed exclusively online newspapers – specifically *Sabq* – and other newspapers – namely the *Alwatan* print newspaper with its online counterpart – as more credible than the rest. Thus, this indicator points to women having a low level of interest in the news in print newspapers and their online counterparts.

Firstly, women's interests have a large influence on women's patterns of credibility for the given newspapers. Thus, the absence of women's interests affects women's explanations for their perceived credibility. Interviewees 1, 2 and 4 stated that they cannot evaluate the credibility of print newspapers because they miss a lot of the news that women want to read. Interviewees 5 and 7 said that print newspapers have low credibility in their eyes as they are not comprehensive, and they mentioned the *Twasul* online newspaper and *Sabq* as being somewhat credible because of the greater space given to citizens' issues. Interviewee 9 explained that women view print newspapers as not very credible, because they do not provide much news about women's subjects. She said:

*“Nothing attracts me to print newspapers and their online counterparts but some news in Sabq exclusively online newspaper satisfies some of my interests, but I have more trust more in Twitter and other social media networks because they have*



*different options of news which can be fed to news consumers by the news types they look for. The interests of Saudi women are still behind because of cultural obstacles.”*

Interviewees 5 and 6 complained about print newspapers due to their focus on male issues and activities more than those pertaining to females, which makes print newspapers useless for women. Interviewee 6 said:

*“Saudi women are presently around the half of the Saudi population and have their achievements which sometimes are more excellent than men, while in the print newspapers you can see male events and achievements. Even if the print newspapers present some things for women, these things only present a small space compared with males as well as lifestyle news which is not provided appropriately.”*

Moreover, some women interviewees related their low credibility scores for the given newspapers to the hard news they present, which may be preferred more by males than by females. For example, Interviewee 10 said:

*“After a long time reading some of the given newspapers, I chose to quit them because most of my experience with these newspapers is related to either boring or negative modes because of their types of news, so even some social women issues are discussed by men who cannot understand our preferences and needs which decreases their credibility in my eyes.”*

Secondly, most of the female interviewees related their low credibility scores to the male writers and reporters who discussed women’s issues on behalf of women. For example, interviewee 2 said:

*“I feel stress when reading the given print and online newspapers because males mostly discuss the issues and needs of Saudi women, so the newspapers not only let male writers and reporters focus on their own issues as males but also they give them our space and issues to talk about without us. So, I feel women are suffering from the absence of their issues and needs as well as the absence of their female representatives as writers or reporters.”*

Interviewee 6 said:

*“I feel disappointed when I see male staff in any local newspaper discussing my issues or needs as a woman, because they cannot understand my issues and needs more than myself, and males will not take care of a Saudi woman more than the woman herself, so their claims about women’s rights are biased.”*

In fact, women in the interviews viewed print newspapers and their online counterparts as not very credible, due to the fact that they were not satisfied with how these newspapers covered women's news and interests. They described print newspapers as male newspapers, because male issues, needs and interests are covered massively by them and they provide little in the way of women's interests – and what is presented is written by male staff, who discuss women's issues on their behalf. Indeed, the female interviewees stated, as mentioned earlier, that there is a big absence of women's viewpoints in the given newspapers, and that this absence is related to either the lack of discussion of female issues or the absence of female staff, which decreases the credibility in their eyes. This led most women to move from the given newspapers to social media networking sites – specifically Twitter – to get their daily local news, as discussed in the next section.

## **7.6 The Dominant Way of Obtaining Local News among the Four**

### **Social Categories**

Most interviewees, specifically moderately religious young males, highly religious young and old males, and females of different ages, showed a significant desire to obtain their local news from social media (specifically Twitter). Thus, most of them pointed to Twitter as a dominant platform of daily local news. However, this desire was higher among young females than among old females, and young moderately religious males had a greater desire than highly religious males to obtain news through Twitter. The aforementioned groups stated that Twitter had the credible news they needed. Thus, the adoption of Twitter and its practices were explored among the engaged four social categories in terms of credibility see Figure 5.

The first social category is the group belonging to the moderately religious young males. This social category revealed that they joined Twitter earlier than the other social categories. This joining happened earlier than 2010. As a result, this group of interviewees showed more passion for adopting Twitter. For example, interviewee 15 said:

*“I felt encouraged to use Twitter earlier as new technology may develop my life massively, so I welcome new technologies, new ideas and new opinions such as those provided in Twitter.”*

Indeed, most young moderately religious males stated that Twitter can be a trusted platform to provide news because of the large number of accounts that can be proven by web links, videos and pictures. Nonetheless, they pointed also to the news provided through unreal accounts as a factor that can force the real accounts and official accounts to reply to this news to tell the truth. Thus, some (but not all) accounts were reported by the interviewees of this social category as follows: @SaudiNews50 (unverified account), @No\_Rumors (unverified account), @KSA24 (unverified account), @spagov (verified account), @HashKSA (verified account), @wa6ani\_1 (unverified account) and @MBC24News (verified account).

The second social category is the group belonging to the young highly religious males. This social category stated that they joined Twitter later than 2011, as they mentioned through the interviews, which indicates a significant delay compared to the first social category (young moderately religious males). This delay was explained in the interviews as being due to the fact that the Islamic rules regarding new things were unknown. Interviewee 31 said:

*“As a Muslim, I should wait before using new things till Islamic scholars tell the Islamic view or the rule about this new application, whether it is allowed or not. Islamic scholars know more than others the essential principles of Islam which can differentiate between the accepted practices and the forbidden practices.”*

Thus, young highly religious male interviewees pointed to a conspiracy behind some technologies; they questioned the benefit gained by the Twitter establisher from providing people with a free network. This can be a reflection of their doubt about the newspapers, as mentioned earlier. For example, interviewee 23 said:

*“I ask myself, with all new free products, what their companies will get when they give them to people for free. If these are Saudi companies they may get some support from the government because they help the citizens of the same country, but if these*

*products belong for example to American companies, the inquiry about their intention will be brought up.”*

However, young religious males stated that the only Twitter accounts that are perceived as credible are the accounts of trusted highly religious people such as Islamic scholars and preachers, or the accounts that are followed by these trusted figures. These accounts included, among others, @No\_Rumors (unverified account), @HashKSA (verified account), @3ajel\_ksa (unverified account), @htksa (unverified account), @3ajel\_ksa (unverified account), @TAFRIT\_KSA (unverified account), @spagov (verified account), @naizaktv (unverified account) and @Mrbrary (unverified account).

This social category is the group belonging to the young female interviewees. This social category indicated that most joined Twitter later than 2013, so they were the latest social category to engage with Twitter. They explained that this delay was caused by their fears of cultural issues. They felt afraid of Twitter usage because of cultural boundaries. For example, interviewee 6 said:

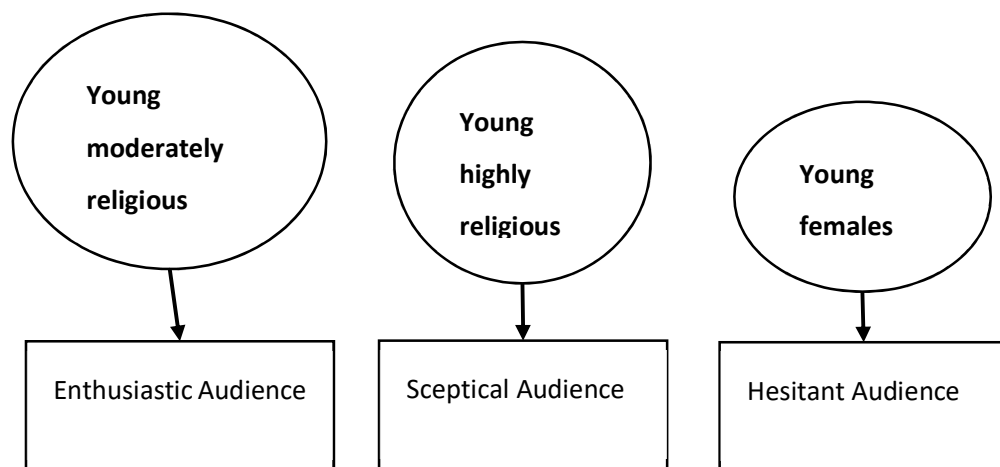
*“When Twitter was launched for the public in Saudi Arabia I was not comfortable about joining Twitter. It was not good for a girl to be a member of this application and other public applications, as this will lead to bad impressions about me by my friends and relatives or even any person who plans to marry me.”*

Interviewee 7 pointed to cultural differences for dealing with women’s mistakes:

*“I was very afraid to join Twitter because if this application has any ethical issues, my society will blame me more than any male in the same situation. Male mistakes are not blamed as harshly as women, especially when the mistakes relate to ethical issues. Reputation is the essential factor for a woman to get a good life in Saudi Arabia including getting married, so if the woman’s reputation is hurt, she will be in trouble with her relatives, friends and neighbours.”*

However, for the credibility criteria of Twitter accounts, young and old females pointed to their familiarity and their friendship with Twitter accounts as an indicator for perceived credibility. They reported a number of accounts for getting news from Twitter, including @SaudiNews50 (unverified account) and @HashKSA (verified account). Moreover, they stated that these accounts do not satisfy their needs and interests, so they

consume news about lifestyle and women's issues from different Arabic and foreign accounts belonging to the global fashion houses as they look more for soft news. Thus, the soft news in Saudi newspapers or Twitter accounts still receive insufficient attention.



**Figure 5: Thematic map illustrating the differences between Saudi audiences when joining Twitter**

Indeed, those three social categories showed different selections of the Twitter accounts which they perceive as credibility based on their different criteria for evaluating Twitter accounts in terms of local news. However, the credibility criteria of young moderately religious males were based on the reactions of officials and government organisations towards the posted news, while the credibility criteria of young highly religious males and females of all ages were based on their personal trust regarding the news accounts or the followers of those news accounts. Thus, moderately religious young males depended on accounts that could provide more details of local news than the print and online newspapers and they assume the corresponding of newspapers with the news from a

Twitter account as a sign of being credible, including any part of criticism towards officials and public organisations. However, highly religious males chose to follow trusted people, such as highly religious people, or people who were followed by highly religious people or Islamic scholars and preachers.

## **7.7 The Influence of the Four Dominant Social Categories on Forming the Credibility Criteria Based on the Five Created Themes**

This chapter set out to answer the fourth research question, explaining how the shared meanings held by Saudi audiences shape their credibility criteria for the given newspapers. Thus, based on the research framework mentioned in Chapter Five, this section targets the shared meanings among the members of each social category to determine their main criteria when evaluating newspapers' credibility.

### **7.7.1 First Social Category (old moderately religious males):**

Older, moderately religious Saudi males ranked print newspapers as the most credible. They attributed their credibility criteria for print newspapers to the low number of mistakes they contained, due to government restrictions and the reputation of the print press. Hence, government restrictions are understood by old moderately religious males as a process leading to credibility for print newspapers. These government restrictions can be understood as relating to the criticism towards the government and religious rules.

### **7.7.2 Second Social Category (young moderately religious males):**

Younger, moderately religious Saudi males identified themselves heavily in terms of credibility (based on the newspaper version) with exclusively online newspapers and Twitter, and just lightly with print newspapers or their online counterparts. Also, they particularly identified themselves (based on particular newspapers) with the *Sabq* exclusively online newspaper and the *Alwatan* print newspaper with its online counterpart.

In terms of credibility criteria, they attributed their credibility criteria for exclusively online newspapers to the quantity and details of the news, which can be provided to a greater degree in this type of newspaper, such as criticising officials and

cultural issues as well as providing real up-to-date news. Thus, young moderately religious males view government restrictions as an obstacle to the credibility of print newspapers.

### **7.7.3 Third Social Category (highly religious males including young and old):**

Highly religious Saudi males identified themselves in terms of credibility to a great extent with the *Twasul* exclusively online newspaper, while old and young highly religious males voiced great objections towards the *Alweeam* and *Sabq* exclusively online newspapers and the *Alwatan* print newspaper with its online counterpart. This is because the *Alwatan* print with its online counterpart and *Alweeam* exclusively online newspaper serve news from a liberal orientation, which can be too far removed from a highly religious orientation. *Sabq* exclusively online newspaper does not adhere to the restrictions required by highly religious males, as stated by the interviewees from this category.

For credibility criteria, highly religious Saudi males attributed their credibility criteria for the *Twasul* exclusively online newspaper to hiring highly religious staff, not covering news on arts and artists in detail, and covering mostly Islamic news and subjects from an Islamic viewpoint.

### **7.7.4 Fourth Social Category (females including young and old):**

Saudi females ranked exclusively online newspapers and Twitter as highly credible. Also, females with different levels of religiosity identified themselves with the *Twasul* and *Sabq* exclusively online newspapers and the *Alwatan* print newspaper with its online counterpart.

In terms of credibility criteria, they attributed their credibility criteria for exclusively online newspapers to their focus on citizens, including women. They viewed the space given to citizens, including women, regardless of their status, as the main credibility criteria of exclusively online newspapers, with a slight inclination towards the online counterparts of print. Also, they explained the low credibility that women give to the target newspapers as being due to the fact that the newspapers present news that does

not meet women's interests and needs, and they do not give female staff opportunities to present news from a female perspective.

However, the highly religious females identified themselves differently to the highly religious males (see third social identity). Thus, they identified the *Twasul* and *Sabq* exclusively online newspapers and the *Alwatan* print newspaper with its online counterpart as being highly credible, while the highly religious males awarded the highest credibility scores to *Twasul* and the lowest credibility scores to *Alwatan* and *Sabq*. Highly religious females viewed *Sabq* as most credible because it focused more on citizens and *Twasul* because it respects the Saudi culture, while *Alwatan* was perceived as credible because it provided views on women's issues and subjects.

## **7.8 Conclusion**

It was obvious through the interviews that the younger groups, including young moderately religious males, young highly religious males and young females, are interested in consuming local news, but they have different concerns regarding media outlets and news content. Young moderately religious males look for news with more details, which is not available in the given newspapers because of press regulations and restrictions in Saudi Arabia, while young highly religious males look for a restricted religious frame for forming local news.

On the other hand, young females were unsatisfied with the topics covered in the newspapers, as most of the news relates to male issues, interests and needs. The evidence suggested a view that males use their societal power to draw a picture of women's lives and what they should or should not do, or what they need and do not need.

Thus, young moderately and highly religious males and females pointed to social media networks (Twitter) as the dominant platform for providing local news over most of the given newspapers. In fact, only around one-third of the 18 newspapers in this study were perceived as highly credible by members of the dominant social categories, which points to



the dangerous situation that the majority of Saudi local daily newspapers will face in the near future. This situation is discussed in the next chapter (Chapter Eight).

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### **Discussion of the Findings Regarding the Saudi Dominant Social Categories on the Target Newspapers**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the debates of the findings obtained from the questionnaire results (Chapter Six) and the interview results (Chapter Seven) in order to compare the findings of this research with the previous literature review. This chapter is structured based on the four main research questions presented in Chapter One.

#### **8.2 Q1- What are Saudi audiences' general perceptions of the credibility of – and their reliance on – the given newspapers?**

Evidence of the general trends of credibility and reliance scores was highlighted in the questionnaire results (Chapter Six). Thus, the examination of the reliance and credibility scores revealed that they were influenced by the Saudi audience differently. For example, 15 out of 18 newspapers were ranked differently in terms of the credibility and the reliance rankings, namely: *Twasul* online exclusive, *Okas* print, *Al-Riyadh* print, *Almadina* online counterpart, *Alweeam* online exclusive, *Almadina* print, *Al-Jazirah* print, *Al-Jazirah* online counterpart, *Alwatan* print, *Alwatan* online counterpart, *Alyaum* online counterpart, *Almarsd* online exclusive, *Mapnews* online exclusive, *Alyaum* print and *Kolalwatn* online exclusive. This means that only three newspapers out of eighteen newspapers received similar positions among Saudis. This indicates that the reliance on the newspapers is not correlated with the perceived credibility of most of the given newspapers. This is supported by the claim of Beaudoin and Thorson (2005) and Tsftati and Cappella (2005) to not assume that the high credibility is associated with high reliance.

The general trends of the participants in terms of the credibility and reliance scores regarding the newspapers as version type (print version with its online counterpart version, and the online exclusive version) were that high credibility and reliance on print newspapers were associated with males aged 30 years old and over with moderate religiosity, and high credibility and reliance on exclusively online newspapers were associated with young males (18-29 years old) with moderate religiosity; females, regardless of their age and religiosity levels; and highly religious males. This suggests that the shift towards exclusively online versions is higher among most of the four dominant social categories. This indicates the difficult situation of the print version with its online counterpart.

Thus, it was evident that the top newspapers associated with the highest credibility and reliance of Saudis belonged to the categories of exclusively online newspapers and the online counterparts of print. This points to the difficulties faced by print newspapers, as the highest ranking for credibility (by a large margin) belonged to the exclusively online newspaper *Sabq*, while the printed newspapers showed relatively modest or even low credibility and reliance. For example, the first newspaper in the credibility ranking was *Sabq* exclusively online (89.92% average), while in second place, and by a large margin, came the *Okas* online counterpart (55.38%) and *Al-Riyadh* online counterpart (39.98%). These can be judged as the top three most credible newspapers. However, print newspapers came after exclusively online newspapers by a large margin.

Despite the long history of print organisations, which goes back to the 1960s, the *Sabq* exclusively online newspaper was established in 2007, so has a short history (Almaghlooth, 2013). Therefore, print newspapers may struggle to survive as the difference between the top-ranked paper (*Sabq* exclusively online newspaper) and the second (*Okas* online counterpart), as shown in Chapter Six, is bigger than all the differences between the rest.

This can be explained partly through the assumption that the decline in credibility and reliance scores is due to news audiences' attitudes towards news outlets controlled by the government; the audiences hold a low level of trust when the presented news is oriented towards the government ideology. For example, the perceived credibility of local newspapers was influenced significantly by the perceived trust in the government, according to the news audiences and their ideology (Yamamoto & Nah, 2018). Moreover, the newspapers with less government control are viewed as most credible (Xie & Zhao, 2014). Research has also explained that the different credibility rates between print newspapers and online newspapers in the Middle East are due to lower levels of government control over online news (Salman et al., 2011; Wilson et al., 2011).

However, this explanation cannot interpret this issue completely as most of the exclusively online newspapers have not received as high credibility perceptions as *Sabq*, while some print newspapers have also received high credibility despite ownership by the government. The Saudi government does not own these newspapers outright, but no individual can participate in any newspaper ownership without government approval. Most of the ownership of each newspaper has not been stated clearly in the Saudi context, as explained in Chapter Four. For example, around a quarter of the owners of *Okas* are known, with the remainder unknown – the total number of *Okas* owners is reported as being as high as 29 (Wikipedia, 2019). This suggests that some exclusively online newspapers received higher credibility because they provide some news that is not presented in the other newspapers, but it is not against the government's orientation.

Thus, despite the limited freedom in all the given newspapers, there seems space for the newspapers to practice their freedom. According to Alzahrani (2016), unlike the print newspapers and their online counterparts, the exclusively online newspapers are not owned by the government but all the Saudi newspapers are still monitored by the government. This can be explained by a young moderately religious interviewee who wondered “*what the main role of print newspapers is, because print newspapers always try*

*to compliment people who are in positions of high power in order to benefit from them, while average citizens are not treated in the same way”.*

Consequently, the shift of young moderate males with females and high religious males to online exclusive newspapers cannot be understood as part of getting news through technological news outlets instead of traditional ways such as print newspapers, because each print newspaper has an online counterpart; yet, the tendency toward the online exclusive newspapers is still higher.

Thus, the tendency of news audiences to shift from print newspapers to online newspapers may be seen in some Western societies but it appears that Saudi audiences not only move from print newspapers to online newspapers, but they also move extensively from both print and online newspapers to social media networking sites, particularly Twitter. The interviews evidenced that Twitter has become the main platform of news for three of the four social categories, as explained in section 7.6. This can extend the risky situation that print newspapers find themselves in to the other two versions of newspapers (online counterparts and exclusively online newspapers). This suggests that the credible news in the given newspapers is extended from news sources such as the given newspapers to a platform such as Twitter due to the low capability of censorship by the government.

This can be aligned with the rising news credibility rates in some Arabic countries – whether for print or online – but in Saudi Arabia and Jordan, news credibility rates have declined massively (Dennis et al., 2017). This can be explained by the decline in press freedom in Saudi Arabia, which received a score of 165 out of 180 in 2016 and 169 out of 180 in 2018 (Reporters without Borders for Freedom of Information, 2018b).

Thus, the exclusively online newspapers have more freedom than print newspapers (Al-Qarni, 2004). However, their freedom is restricted to choosing what news to present, but they cannot challenge the government or cross the red lines (Alhomoud, 2013). The red line can be related to criticising the government. This is shown by the lack

of freedom of the press in Saudi Arabia, where none of the media outlets are allowed to criticise the Saudi government (Almania, 2018).

Criticising government organisations or officials in Saudi Arabia through newspapers, whether print or online, is not acceptable unless they have received the government's permission to criticise certain officials or organisations (Althiabi, 2017). Some interviewees described these as 'unsupported officials'. Unsupported officials can be described as officials who do not have strong relationships with the people in power or they used to have these relationships but the people in power decided to fire them for unknown reasons. However, overall, print newspapers with their online counterparts are the newspapers that practise criticism the least. For example, a young moderate religious male stated that *"print newspapers will soon die if they do not change their policies because their policies encourage them to ignore a lot of news regarding critical issues"*.

In fact, media in Saudi Arabia, including social media on the internet, undergoes a very high level of monitoring from the Saudi government compared to other Arabic countries (Martin et al., 2018). Thus, freedom is an issue with Saudi consumers of news, which may not be the case for some Western societies as they have higher levels of freedom in both print and online newspapers (Reporters without Borders for Freedom of Information, 2018b). This suggests that more press restrictions lead to less press credibility, because these restrictions shape the press news by hiding certain details or reframing the news based on particular orientations.

Thus, the reliance and credibility scores of most of the given newspapers, detailed in Chapter Six, point to the difficulties that these face in Saudi Arabia. This can show how the credibility status of Saudi print newspapers with their online counterparts and exclusively online newspapers is different to newspapers in other societies, such as American society. According to Lee (2018), Americans are more inclined to trust newspaper news (27% confidence) than television news (24% confidence). However, newspapers in the UK were ranked in terms of credibility in fourth position after BBC

News, the ITV News channel, and Channel 4 News (Nic et al., 2018). Also, the most sold newspaper in Austria was ranked 12<sup>th</sup> in terms of credibility among online news websites and TV news channels (Newman et al., 2019). This points to the difficult situation of print newspapers, but this difficulty can be higher in one society over others which points to the importance of not generalising the patterns of credibility and reliance from one society to another. It can be seen how online news websites gain a large audience at the expense of print newspapers in different global societies, but the situation in Saudi society looks different as most of the given print newspapers with their online counterparts and the exclusively online newspapers received a lower range of credibility and reliance scores from the four social categories.

In relation to that, this study contributes towards obtaining a better understanding of newspaper credibility alongside Social Identity Theory. The unique contribution of this study comes from its coverage of a range of audience-related variables with a focus on one media scene, which can show clear and consistent results unlike a significant number of existing studies concerning the credibility perceptions of and reliance on newspapers. Thus, when investigating a range of audience-related variables regarding newspapers' credibility, there is a higher potential to have different credibility perceptions and criteria among the social categories which contributes to a better understanding of Social Identity Theory. This was obtained through showing how the shared credibility perceptions of social categories are not necessarily attached to shared credibility criteria among the same social categories. A number of the studies using Social Identity Theory to interpret the differences among social categories assume the shared scores of credibility and reliance on news media among social categories as evidence of the expected shared meanings among them; this may be not the case in reality, as demonstrated in this study.

Therefore, the main trends in the credibility scores and the reliance scores were different. This suggests that there is a low potential for correlation between the scores of credibility and the scores of reliance for most of the given newspapers. However, the range of low scores for credibility and reliance for most of the given newspapers indicates

the weak position of the given newspapers in the eyes of the Saudi audience, as discussed in the next two sections (8.3 and 8.4).

### **8.3 Q2- How do the individual personal characteristics of Saudi audiences affect their perceptions of a particular newspaper's credibility?**

The results attained from the questionnaire (in Chapter Six) showed how the personal characteristics affect the perceived credibility of Saudis regarding the given newspapers. Three factors (age, gender and religiosity levels) had the most influence on the credibility scores in the questionnaire. Thus, this study is responding to the demands of recently published research on the credibility of news media, which calls for scholars to treat the audiences' personal characteristics as predictors of news credibility (Lee, 2018; Yamamoto & Nah, 2018). However, this does not mean the other personal characteristics had no influence on the perceived credibility, but it means these three personal characteristics showed a higher impact on the perceived credibility of the given newspapers. In this section, only the newspapers that were associated with particular categories are discussed as the main focus of this section is to explain the influence of the four social categories on a particular newspaper in terms of its credibility.

Thus, the influence of age, gender and religiosity levels can be understood as a result of the tension between people within these categories to hold power over each other, such as the power of old people over young people, males over females, and the highly religious over the moderately religious in Saudi Arabia. These characteristics, as observed within a Saudi society, are shown in section 8.5. For example, Saudi Arabia is described as a patriarchal society because of gender differences in roles between males and females; as Hofstede et al. (2010) point out, these societies give males power over females.

Consequently, the newspapers that were most influenced by age, gender and/or religiosity levels were the *Sabq* exclusively online newspaper, the *Okas* and *Al-Riyadh*



print newspapers, the *Alwatan* print newspaper with its online counterpart, and the *Alweeam* and *Twasul* exclusively online newspapers.

For example, the *Al-Riyadh* and *Okas* print newspapers' perceived credibility was associated more heavily with old males than with young males or females of all ages, as were the rest of the print newspapers. These findings are consistent with previous research as young people give online news higher credibility than older people (Bucy, 2003; Choi et al., 2006; Metzger et al., 2003). Also, it has been reported that 5% of people aged 18-29, 10% aged 30-49, and 23% aged 50-64 consume news from print newspapers (Mitchell et al., 2016). Thus, the perceived high credibility of the print newspapers by the older generation was associated with their tendency to consume news from print newspapers (Armstrong & Collins, 2009b; Johnson & Kaye, 2000). However, the tendency of older females and older highly religious males to rate some online exclusively newspapers as having higher credibility over all the print newspapers requires another explanation.

The *Twasul* online exclusive newspaper can explain this situation, as it received higher credibility from the two groups (females and highly religious males). Female interviewees said they perceive the *Twasul* online exclusive newspaper as more comprehensive than most of the print newspapers, which makes it credible in their eyes. Also, the highly religious interviewees pointed to the *Twasul* online exclusive as the only newspaper adhering to the Islamic frame as they understood it (detailed in section 8.5).

The same situation can be seen when looking at the perceived credibility of the *Sabq* exclusively online newspaper and the *Alwatan* print newspaper with its online counterpart in the eyes of Saudi females compared to males. For example, females surprisingly exhibited higher credibility perceptions for the *Sabq* exclusively online newspaper with a mean of 4.62, while for the males this was 4.22. Moreover, most of the other newspapers were rated as credible by males.

Even though the general tendency of females to rate the credibility of the *Sabq* online exclusive newspaper more highly than the rest of the print newspapers with their

online counterparts is consistent with other studies regarding the attitudes of females towards the consumption of online news over print (Choi et al., 2006; Hasan, 2013; Lee, 2018), the attitudes of Saudi females towards the *Alwatan* print newspaper with its online counterpart may show the complexity of this tendency among Saudi females, as is explained later in section 8.5. This suggests that despite the different characteristics between the *Sabq* online exclusive newspaper and *Alwatan* print newspaper with its online counterpart, there is a commonality between females and young moderately religious males which makes *Sabq* and *Alwatan* credible in their eyes.

Thus, *Alwatan*'s print newspaper, as an exceptional case among the given print newspapers, needs different interpretations than those which exist in past studies concerning the print press in general. For example, the shift of young audiences from print newspapers to online newspapers can be understood as part of their age; the younger generation is inclined to consume news online, due to their preference for technology over traditional ways of receiving news (Ha et al., 2013; Kit & Teng, 2010; Metzger & Flanagin, 2008). However, the attitudes of young participants towards the credibility of the *Alwatan* print newspaper needs another interpretation. This suggests that there is a possible commonality of the target news in *Alwatan*'s print newspaper between the females and the young moderately religious males. Some young moderately religious male interviewees explained this as being due to the fact that the *Alwatan* print newspaper focuses on the criticism of several cultural issues that prevent Saudi society from being a modern society. The critical issues, as mentioned by the interviewees, are related to controversial issues such as music and women's veil, etc. These issues are understood differently among Muslims in terms of forbidden and unforbidden status but the problem in Saudi society is to support only one view, as Muslims hold differing views on issues such as these depending on the opinions of Islamic scholars and the societies in which people live. For example, a young moderately male interviewee justified his perceived credibility of *Alwatan* as it presents what can advance the Saudi society:

*“Modern societies are associated with new opinions and new practices, so our society needs updating in some cultural parts to be modern”.*

Thus, it was described that the *Alwatan* print newspaper operates differently to the other print newspapers as it provides some critical discussions about Islamic and cultural issues (Alzahrani, 2016). This may not be an issue with the government, but it is an issue with highly religious males (Fadaak & Roberts, 2018). This suggests that discussing cultural issues in a critical way was part of the news in *Alwatan*'s print newspaper. This means that this topic is not against the Saudi government while it satisfies females and young moderately religious males. For example, a female interviewee said, *“The interests of Saudi women are still behind because of cultural obstacles”*. This points to the extent to which the *Alwatan* print newspaper reduces these cultural obstacles, suggesting that the *Alwatan* print newspaper tries to get out of the traditional dress of cultural traditions to improve modernism in Saudi society, making *Alwatan* credible in the eyes of Saudi females and young moderately religious males.

However this modernism is not welcomed by the highly religious Saudis as they think that these changes reduce the value of Islamic power, which is the main distinction of Saudi Arabia (Fadaak & Roberts, 2018). This main distinction of Saudi Arabia in terms of Islam arises because Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam, and it contains the two main holy cities for all Muslims: Mecca (where the Prophet Mohammad was born) and Almadinah (where the Prophet Mohammad was buried) (Peace Be Upon Him) (Fahmy, 2018). For example, a highly religious male interviewee described this situation as:

*“Some newspapers such as Alwatan print and online counterpart newspapers try to change our society by calling for rethinking about some Islamic views to open the gate for discussion in order to send a message to Saudi society, telling them that these Islamic views can be understood differently, while they only try to manipulate these views to bring up their own views.”*

This suggests that discussing cultural issues in a critical way in *Alwatan*'s print newspaper with its online counterpart is the cornerstone for being credible in the eyes of females and young moderately religious males, and for not being credible in the eyes of highly religious males. However, the media policy in Saudi Arabia is based on protecting the national rules and Islamic rules. According to the Ministry of Culture and Information (1982), Saudi media policy is generated from Islamic policy that manages the constitution of Saudi society. This constitution is a combination of Allah's sayings (Qur'an) and the Prophet Mohammad's sayings (Sunnah) (Peace Be Upon Him) (Abedin, 2002; Abu Bakar, 1981; Basfar, 2007). The kinds of cultural issues that are discussed critically in *Alwatan* are discussed in section 8.5.

Hence, the highly religious males gave the lowest credibility scores to the *Alwatan* print newspaper with its online counterpart and to the *Alweeam* exclusively online newspaper. In their view, the most credible was the *Twasul* exclusively online newspaper. The low perceived credibility of the given newspapers in the eyes of highly religious males is consistent with the general negative attitude of highly religious people towards the media as a whole, as evidenced in past research (Almenayes, 2014; Marvez, 2008; Sönmez, 2013). However, this cannot be understood completely by the past research because Saudi society is more restricted to Islamic culture compared to other societies with the majority of Muslims, such as Turkish society. Not only that, but the *Twasul* exclusively online newspaper was an exceptional newspaper as it received the highest credibility from the highly religious males, as discussed later.

This suggests that religiosity levels have an impact on how the high religious audiences evaluate newspapers' credibility. This is consistent with the research pointing to how religiosity may influence religious audiences' evaluation of media credibility differently (Fox, 2009). This means there is a high potential for highly religious audiences to hold different ideas about the credibility of newspapers compared to the moderate religious audiences.

However, when looking at the case of females, including highly religious and moderately religious females, the situation becomes complex because even the highly religious females gave the *Alwatan* print newspaper higher credibility – contrary to the view of highly religious males. This does not mean that the females are not influenced by religiosity levels, but it may suggest that they are influenced by religiosity levels differently, so their credibility criteria for evaluating *Alwatan* may be unrelated to Islamic culture in Saudi society but to other concepts instead such as equality. This is supported by the research pointing to the significantly different influences of personal factors on audiences' perceived credibility of newspapers (American Press Institute, 2014; Fodor et al., 2013; Speakman, 2011; Xu, 2012; Yamamoto & Nah, 2018).

However, the influence of the religiosity factor on the perceived credibility of the news has not received adequate attention from researchers in the past. This can be related to the difficulty of this field as it is a sensitive topic in certain communities, irrespective of their religious status (Alsaedy, 2015; Christiano et al., 2003). This has led to an early call for a focus on religion's influence on news credibility (Golan, 2010). Hence, the credibility of several media outlets was perceived to be low by the highly religious audience (Golan & Baker, 2012). Still, the small amount of existent research on religiosity and media points to the fact that highly religious people have low levels of trust in, and consumption of, media as a whole (Almenayes, 2014; Sönmez, 2013).

In fact, it is evident that the newspapers were influenced by the dominant social categories based on their levels of discussing cultural issues in a critical way, so less discussion of cultural issues was a factor in credibility in the eyes of highly religious males, while more discussion of cultural issues was a factor in credibility in the eyes of females and young moderately religious males. However, the middle line between less and more discussion of cultural issues was associated with older moderately religious males as in the more balanced newspapers.

#### **8.4 Q3- How do the individual personal characteristics of Saudi audiences affect their patterns of reliance on a particular newspaper?**

The four social categories influenced Saudis' reliance on the given newspapers, but this was different to their perceptions of the credibility of these newspapers because the range of reliance scores on the given newspapers was lower than the range of credibility scores. This suggests that reliance on newspapers can be influenced differently to credibility. For example, highly religious males gave the highest credibility scores to the *Twasul* exclusively online newspaper, while *Twasul* was relied on more by moderately religious males than highly religious males.

However, past research concerning the influence of reliance on perceived credibility showed no consensus. For example, there was an attempt to use reliance as a predictor of credibility for the print newspapers (Johnson & Kaye, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004; McCracken, 2011). This view was explained by showing how the reliance on print newspapers had a higher impact than the reliance on online newspapers (Kim & Johnson, 2009).

On the other hand, some researchers point to the opposite. For example, it was reported by Beaudoin and Thorson (2005) and Tsfati and Cappella (2005) that the reliance on online news does not predict perceptions of news credibility. Subsequently, Armstrong and Collins (2009a) reported that reliance on a news media outlet does not affect its perceived credibility. This conflict was explained by the fact that the motivation to read online newspapers is not only derived from the online publication's characteristics, but also from other factors related to reader characteristics (Grosser et al., 2016). Therefore, other researchers on news credibility explored other factors that could influence credibility perceptions (Chung et al., 2010; Melican & Dixon, 2008).

Thus, this suggests that there are other reasons for news consumers to consume less news from the credible newspapers. In addition, non-credible news has been associated with internet news more than print news, but the reliance on the internet for news has increased rapidly. This is consistent with the current study, as the reliance on newspapers was rated differently to their credibility by Saudi audiences. Recently, research has suggested focusing on the credibility subject independently to investigate the unseen issues surrounding credibility (Fairbanks et al., 2018). This has been explained by a young moderate male:

*“I think even the mistakes that are spread more online than offline are an advantage of the online world because the majority of officials and organisations will be forced to correct the wrong details online or they will be responsible for the provided news”.*

This indicates that young moderately religious males have a reason other than credibility when relying on the credible newspapers less than the other online outlets or platforms for obtaining news such as Twitter, as revealed by most of the young moderately religious males. This was related to the investigation carried out by Tsfaty and Cappella (2005) to explain why some news consumers rely on news outlets which they do not trust; it was found that when the motivation of consumers to consume news is not related to their doubts towards media, then they may consume news from the news outlets which they do not trust.

The same situation happened in this context. Thus, the males' reliance was higher than the females' reliance on all the three types of newspaper (print, their online counterparts, and exclusively online newspapers) despite the high perceived credibility of particular newspapers among females. For example, females showed higher credibility for particular newspapers such as the *Sabq* exclusively online newspaper and the *Alwatan* print newspaper with its online counterpart, at the same time as showing lower reliance on all the newspapers than males.

However, the older age group (30 years old and over, excluding the oldest group 65+) showed higher reliance on the print newspapers and their online counterparts, including the *Al-Riyadh* and *Okas* print newspapers with their online counterparts. This is consistent with research pointing out that the consumption of news from online outlets is 50% among young people, compared to 29% among older people, while the news consumption from print newspapers is 5% for young people compared to 23% for older people (Mitchell et al., 2016).

In Saudi Arabia, a study found a large difference in the consumption of and reliance on online news between the young (aged from 18 to 24) and the old (aged 45 years or older) (Dennis et al., 2015). However, reliance is still not identical to credibility as the oldest group (65 years old and over) showed higher credibility for the print newspapers with a low reliance on print. This means that news audiences may rely less on a particular newspaper even though they hold higher credibility perceptions because a news platform (in this context Twitter, as discussed in section 8.5) can satisfy their needs more highly than the credible newspaper.

In fact, the reliance scores of most of the given newspapers were mainly lower than their credibility scores. Regardless of how different they are, this may point to the fact that the given newspapers are not perceived as main sources of news among most of the four social categories. Thus, the lower scores of reliance compared to the credibility scores suggest that despite the importance of credibility among news consumers, the news consumers tend to rely on other news outlets or platforms such as Twitter for several reasons including credibility, judging the offered news in press, forcing the officials to respond to Twitter's news but not limiting credibility. This means that reliance and credibility can be influenced differently based on personal factors and needs, more than they are influenced by each other.



## **8.5 Q4- How do the shared meanings held by Saudi audiences shape their credibility criteria for the given newspapers?**

It was evident through the previous research questions that the reliance scores seem to be irrelevant to the credibility scores of most of the given newspapers, while discussing cultural issues is a main factor when evaluating the credibility of the given newspapers. Thus, this section discusses the credibility criteria in the light of the debated cultural issues such as music, veiling of women, cinema, and gender segregation etc. as mentioned by the interviewees.

In general, the credibility scores of the given newspapers as detailed in Chapter Six suggest that the credibility criteria of the newspapers associated with particular social categories are highly likely to be different, despite some similarities among the credibility rates of some social categories. For example, the older moderately religious males tended to give the print newspapers, including the *Al-Riyadh* and *Okas* print newspapers, higher credibility than the other social categories. Not only this, but one of the interviewees with this social category said:

*“Everything in the print newspapers can be trusted because of their difficult process for treating news while many errors can be caught every day in exclusively online newspapers because of their simple and fast way of treating news. So print newspapers care about quality more than quantity or speed, while exclusively online newspapers may care about quantity and speed of news greatly”.*

Other interviewees in this social category justified their perceived credibility of these print newspapers as the newspapers have had a long history, which has built their reputation. Thus, when looking at interviewees’ words such as *“Everything in the print newspapers can be trusted because of their difficult process for treating news, a long history and built reputation”*, it can be seen how the members of this social category evaluate these print newspapers based on reputation. This is consistent with the fact that some news audiences view the reputation of the news outlet as part of its credibility criteria (Kovačić et al., 2010).

However, in terms of the other dominant social categories, three out of four gave most of the print newspapers lower credibility than the rest. This suggests that these three social groups hold different credibility criteria, so they showed less credibility for most of the given newspapers except for particular newspapers such as the *Sabq* exclusively online newspaper, the *Alwatan* print newspaper with its online counterpart, and the *Twasul* exclusively online newspaper. These newspapers can point to the influence of social categories on perceived credibility.

Thus, exploring the shared meanings of credibility regarding the given newspapers extends the understanding of these social categories. For example, despite the similar credibility scores that the *Sabq* exclusively online newspaper or the *Alwatan* print newspaper with its online counterpart received from females and moderately religious males, the shared meanings of the credibility criteria among these social categories were different. This suggests that the similar credibility scores of a particular newspaper are not necessary to have similar reflections among the target groups in terms of the shared meanings behind the perceived credibility.

It was found that discussing cultural issues was the main influential factor for a particular newspaper to be credible in the eyes of one social group and not credible in the eyes of another social group, as observed in the situation between females with young moderately religious males versus highly religious males in terms of the *Alwatan* print newspaper. For example, there were some voices from Saudi women requesting the cancellation of the male guardianship role which prevents women from carrying out particular actions or gain access to official services without the permission of their guardians (father, brother, or husband). This campaign started in 2016 and is associated with hundreds of hashtags, and has been running for more than 600 days up to now (Alabosh, 2018a). The guardianship role is understood to be generated from Islamic rules such as giving the control role to males over females in several religion and social practices (Althiabi, 2017).

Thus, this campaign faced significant objections from the highly religious males in Saudi Arabia as something against Islamic rules (Doaiji, 2017). Also, some moderately religious males may be unwilling to accept this request easily as it may reduce their power in society. However, this issue has been hugely debated in Saudi Arabia for a long time which suggests that the women's issues covered in the Saudi press are main topics for leading debates among Saudis (BBC, 2019). The highly religious males have the same reaction regarding the discussion of music or cinemas as well as women's veil in Saudi society.

The credibility criteria for the moderately religious males were related to the open-minded orientation of newspapers towards cultural and Islamic topics. Criticising cultural and Islamic issues in the eyes of young moderately religious males can be understood as a way of reducing the power of officials in society, so they look towards equality between citizens and officials. This can be seen in the words of interviewees from this social group: *"I perceived Sabq as a credible newspaper because it provides some critical news of officials who are not protected by the government"*.

On the other hand, Saudi females related their credibility criteria for both the *Sabq* and *Alwatan* newspapers to the equal space given to representing citizens' voices, including women, so they look for increasing the power of citizens to improve the equality between men and women. For example, a female interviewee expressed:

*"I consider the Sabq exclusively online newspaper as the citizens' newspaper while the Okas print newspaper can be described as the government newspaper because most of Okas' news focuses on government organisations and officials who lead these organisations"*.

This can be seen through the big campaign of Saudi women about the guardianship role in Saudi Arabia (Kutbi, 2015). Thus, both females and young moderately religious males look for equality, but they have different orientations as the females seem to look for equality with males while young moderately religious males seem to look for equality with officials.

This can be seen with the *Alwatan* print newspaper with its online counterpart among these two categories. For example, females justified their high credibility for the *Alwatan* print newspaper with the fact that it focuses more on women's issues and topics, despite their disagreement with some of its opinions. However, young moderately religious males justified their perceived credibility of the *Alwatan* print newspaper with the fact that it offers criticisms of some religious and cultural issues and topics. This can be related to topics targeting officials in Saudi society who are representatives of government roles or religious roles, because when a young moderately religious male criticised *Okas* negatively, he said "*Okas' news focuses on government organisations and officials who lead these organisations, and the officials have the higher space to present their voices over other citizens who can hardly get their voices heard*".

This is consistent in general with the inclination of the younger generation to consume news containing criticisms of different issues in society (Pew Research Center, 2008). However, the unlimited power of some officials in Saudi society may point to the higher need for criticism towards officials in Saudi society. This suggests that the credibility criteria of females and young moderately religious males are attributed to the feeling of inequality among these two groups in different ways. The feeling of inequality for the younger generation was consistent generally with Thompson (2017), and also the feeling of inequality among females was consistent generally with Miliany (2013).

However, the highly religious males based their credibility criteria on news that adheres to Islamic rules from an Islamic perspective as they understand it. This was only shown by the *Twasul* exclusively online newspaper, while they gave the *Alwatan* print newspaper with its online counterpart the least credibility. For example, a highly religious male said, "*Most of the given newspapers do not follow perfectly the Islamic rules and orientation*". This suggests that discussing cultural issues in a critical way is perceived by the highly religious males as failing to adhere to Islamic orientation.

Thus, highly religious males call for greater restrictions on the news in the given newspapers in order to fit the Islamic frame from their perspective, particularly the *Alwatan* print newspaper. This is consistent with the indicator of applying religious restrictions that influence the credibility criteria of highly religious audiences (Fadaak & Roberts, 2018). This can explain why highly religious people in societies with a majority of Muslims are inclined to refuse secularism regimes, which may lead them to accept the fact that they are not part of a democratic regime (Hashemi, 2009).

On the other hand, the older moderately religious males attributed their credibility criteria for the *Al-Riyadh* and *Okas* print newspapers to providing the right news for the right people. Thus, they do not have any objections to cutting out some news or details for security or national reasons.

Therefore, the four social categories pointed to different credibility criteria in this study. According to Duerden (2010), news credibility can be defined differently among news consumers. In this regard, the *Alwatan* print newspaper was a debated issue among three of these categories, despite their different credibility criteria. Thus, it can be understood that a big part of the discussed cultural issues in *Alwatan*'s print newspaper is related topics. These topics can satisfy females by allowing them to be part of the news equally to males and can satisfy young moderately religious males through equality with officials. However, these topics can dissatisfy the highly religious males as they think these topics reduce the importance of Islamic culture. This can be seen through their explanations of the orientation of the *Alwatan* newspaper. For example, a highly religious male said:

*“The Alwatan print and online counterpart newspapers present new voices about controversial issues in Islamic culture, such as mixing men with women in the workplace or letting women unveil their faces, to show that these practices are supported by Islam while these practices were two years ago forbidden in Islam”.*

The criticism mentioned by the moderately religious young males regarding *Alwatan* cannot be understood as a way of dealing with all news, because not all religious and cultural

issues can be criticised. According to Almanian (2018), one of the editors of the *Almadinah* print newspaper was fired because of his criticism of religious judges. In relation to that, some Saudi journalists in a number of the given print newspapers with their online counterparts stated that they excluded news stories about rape and drugs because of their fear of religiosity's influence on society, while some of them provided news about these issues under false names (Alnajrani et al., 2018). However, this concern for the influence of religiosity on Saudi society from Saudi audiences does not mean that the only factor reducing freedom of expression in Saudi Arabia is religious power. Rather, it shows that most of the journalists in the given newspapers provide news that has no issue with the government, but it has issues with highly religious society, so most of the given Saudi newspapers are on the side of the government.

Thus, the young moderately religious males may wish to decrease press restrictions with regard to targeting officials through criticising cultural and Islamic issues. Thus, some Islamic issues can be interpreted differently among Muslims, and some cultural issues are thought to be religious issues when they are in fact just traditions, as in the examples mentioned by a number of the participants about women driving or unveiling.

On this subject, the Saudi government understands that protecting the country could be done effectively based on religious orientation. Thus, the Saudi government has integrated religious values and teachings into all the country's policies. The Saudi media has been censored by the Saudi government since the beginning, by establishing the press in the late 1920s to maintain Islamic beliefs and national beliefs, which must not be separated (Shobaili, 1971). Publishers understood that maintaining the country's authority required maintaining the alliance between Saudi leaders and well-known Saudi Islamic scholars, so criticising the Islamic religion, the royal family or the Saudi government is prohibited in Saudi journalism (Al-Saggaf et al., 2008; Almaghlooth, 2013). This leads to the framing of some red lines regarding religious and national values that no one should go beyond, while there is freedom to report on other issues (Alzahrani, 2016).

With regard to the equality mentioned by females, this issue can be seen in other contexts in Saudi Arabia. For example, research has indicated different parental restrictions regarding media consumption, including watching television and using the internet, for Saudi females and males of the family – females face higher restrictions than males (Miliany, 2015). This point may reflect the Saudi females' feeling of inequality regarding the female presence in the given newspapers. In addition, a Saudi female interviewee stated that the unequal application of society's restrictions to females and males limits female knowledge and skills. She stated that her brother had more chances of developing his knowledge and skills because of his gender (Siraj, 2012).

Thus, inequality is not limited to only conceptual perceptions but it also affects positions and roles in society (Fahmy, 2018). For example, unemployment affects Saudi females more than males. The total number of unemployed Saudis in 2015 was 647,010; female unemployment was 416,432, while male unemployment was 230,578 (General Authority for Statistics of KSA, 2015a). Also, other educated Saudi females stated that they had higher levels of independence than their counterparts who had lower education (Hallila & Al-Halabi, 2018). Thus, the lower employment opportunities for Saudi females can lead them to have low levels of independence and high levels of dependence on males, such as a father, a brother or a husband, which maintains male power in Saudi society. According to Alfasi (2016), Saudi women need to be strong financially through getting a good education and valuable jobs which, in turn, will empower them in their society.

Saudi culture does not wish to impose this dependence on females; rather, it is considered that males should have higher ranking jobs than females because it is shameful for males to depend on females, but natural and culturally and religiously acceptable for females to depend on men. This may therefore have an impact on many practices among males and females in Saudi Arabia. The issue of inequality among females and males in Saudi Arabia affects society greatly, as it encourages families to feel happier having male children than having female children, as well as leading to the tendency towards tolerating males' mistakes more than females' mistakes.

However, this does not mean that females face inequality in all cases; research has revealed that inequality exists between Saudi girls and boys when they are outside, but inside their families they are treated equally (Almohaimed, 2014). In fact, understanding inequality between females and males is very hard as it can be visible in some cases and invisible in others, as it is rooted in cultural considerations. Some years ago, it was considered shameful for anyone to let others know the name of his mother or sister. This may have changed today in some cities or with certain people in Saudi Arabia, but this is not the case for everyone. However, it was reported that inequality is embodied extensively in Saudi culture, particularly between men and women (Miliany, 2013). This means most of the cultural traditions have been rooted in society's values for many years. This points to the long time and tremendous effort required to reform Saudi culture.

By considering that all of the given newspapers are known to be controlled by the government, it was noted that the Saudi participants, regardless of their social categories, attributed the news restrictions to the newspapers when they described the restrictions in a negative way, and attributed the news restrictions to the government when they described them in a positive way. For example, when older moderately religious males who perceived the print newspapers as credible talked about the press restrictions, they said, "*The government filters news to protect the society,*" or "*the news is censored by the government to prevent the society from non-credible and harmful news.*" However, the other social categories who rated the credibility of most print newspapers as low, attributed the press restrictions to the newspapers themselves but not to the government. This means that the press restrictions were attributed to the government only when they were described in a positive way.

This may be understood as a result of fear of the government or a belief that this kind of news is not demanded by the government, but at the same time it is not against the government. Thus, as an Islamic-related belief, some Muslims believe that objections against an Islamic country's ruler are not acceptable in Islam because these objections can cause sedition: '*fitnah*' (Abedin, 2002). Some Saudis may not hold this view, but they may feel



afraid of the freedom of expression or they may apply the well-known Islamic rule: “preventing evils has priority over bringing interests”.

However, females did not attribute the low presence of females in the given newspapers to the government as they think most inequality between males and females in Saudi Arabia comes from traditional and cultural obstacles (Janbi, 2018). Thus, some Saudi females pointed to the role of the word “shame” in Saudi society in relation to females. For example, going to a male doctor in a hospital can be considered shameful, but the shame is attributed to the female more than to the male (Hallila & Al-Halabi, 2018). Additionally, the low presence of females in the Saudi press is not only related to the provided news but also regarding the providers of the news, as unemployment among females is significantly higher compared to males. This point attracted the attention of the Saudi government who sought to look seriously into this issue, but the issue is still there and even employed Saudi women are still dominated by males in the mixed workplace (Varshney, 2019). In relation to that, no rates of Saudi female employment in the given newspapers has been found which can point the probability of lack of employment.

In fact, the credibility criteria of the four dominant social categories were influenced by the press restrictions. Thus, the highly religious males attributed their credibility to special restrictions by increasing the credibility of news attached to an Islamic frame and decreasing the credibility of news associated with the arts (e.g. music, singers, cinemas, and actors). In other words, older moderately religious males attributed their credibility criteria to the existing restrictions. On the other hand, young moderately religious males attributed their credibility criteria to the fewer restrictions on criticism, whether this be for officials or traditional things, while females attributed their credibility criteria to the fewer restrictions on females’ news and representation. This suggests that females, along with young moderately religious males, assume some concepts of liberty including equality as a factor in increasing credibility in the given newspapers.

Thus, internet access can be a challenge for news consumers in societies where access is restricted. It has been reported that access to local news has become much easier since the information is now readily obtained through multiple platforms, particularly with the internet (Ghannam, 2012; Huang, 2009; Tandoc & Johnson, 2016). A variety of news content is provided online by the internet through different platforms, including online newspapers (American Press Institute, 2017; Kim, 2006). This assists online newspapers to extend their news distribution beyond their main websites to engage with a larger audience by providing news through several online accounts on social media networking sites, including Twitter (Pew Research Center, 2018d).

This opens the way for news audiences in Arabian Gulf societies, including Saudi Arabia, to consume online news (Ziani et al., 2015). According to Simsim (2011), Saudis aged under 35 are more likely to consume news through the internet. Recently, it was stated that internet usage has increased considerably among Saudis, as two-thirds of Saudi Arabia's population have been reported as being internet users (Internet World Stats, 2018). Thus, research reveals that online news is shared by around three quarters (Dennis et al., 2015). Despite the high internet usage among Saudis, the online counterparts of the given print and exclusively online newspapers have received relatively low scores in terms of credibility and reliance. This points to the fact that Saudis consume their news online from other news platforms because Saudis cannot get access to every single website due to filtering of the internet by the government (Malki, 2015). For example, interviewees pointed to the uniqueness of the news obtained from Twitter compared to the given newspapers; this is explained further in the next section.

Liberty issues play a big role in shaping the credibility criteria of most of the social categories in Saudi Arabia. Thus, while the females and young moderate males value the focus on citizens' news and stories instead of officials concerning the equality between Saudis, the highly religious males value the addition of more restrictions to reduce liberty. The only difference between the female group and the young moderately religious male group was that the females tend to increase the power of citizens through the press focus on

them, while the young moderately religious males tend to increase the power of citizens through reducing the power of officials by exposing the officials to criticism. However, it was evident that only a few out of the eighteen newspapers received high credibility scores from the dominant social categories. This suggests that the given newspapers are not the main source of local news for most of the target social categories, as is discussed in the next section.

### **8.5.1 The Dominant Platform of News among Most Saudi Social Categories**

The research indicators showed a gap between the credibility scores and the reliance scores among most of the social categories, as discussed in sections 8.3 and 8.4. For example, the credibility of the *Sabq* exclusively online newspaper was higher but the reliance on it was lower for most of the target social categories. In another example, the credibility of the *Twasul* exclusively online newspaper was higher, although the reliance on it was lower among the highly religious males.

Saudi females, young moderately religious males, and highly religious males of all ages showed a big shift from the given newspapers towards social media networking sites, particularly Twitter as a platform, for obtaining credible news. It can be seen clearly that print newspapers with their online counterparts and the exclusively online newspapers in Saudi Arabia are losing the audiences of females and young moderately religious males as well as highly religious older and younger males. Thus, the restrictions on the given newspapers – whether many or few, and whether based on government rules or Islamic cultural rules – drove most of the social categories to shift to Twitter as a platform for obtaining credible news. For example, a young moderately religious male said: *“Filtering news in print newspapers forces a lot of Saudis to go online, not only for exclusively online newspapers but massively to Twitter”*. This is consistent with recent research pointing to Twitter in Saudi Arabia as the main platform of consuming and sharing news (Sabbeh & Baatwah, 2018). Therefore, these groups are inclined to consume

news from different Twitter accounts depending on their criteria for choosing the proper news accounts to follow, but these are not limited to the accounts of the given newspapers.

For example, young moderately religious males pointed to some accounts in Twitter, as mentioned in Chapter Seven, which are a mixture of unverified and verified accounts such as @SaudiNews50 (unverified account), @KSA24 (unverified account), @spagov (verified account), @HashKSA (verified account) and @MBC24News (verified account). On the other hand, young religious males mentioned Twitter accounts including @HashKSA (verified account), @htksa (unverified account), @3ajel\_ksa (unverified account), @TAFRIT\_KSA (unverified account), @spagov (verified account), @naizaktv (unverified account) and @Mrbrary (unverified account). The young males and females pointed to the following Twitter accounts: @SaudiNews50 (unverified account) and @HashKSA (verified account). Thus, it can be seen through looking at the previous Twitter accounts of the three social categories that the difference between them still exist. For example, @HashKSA (verified account) is shared between the three categories, while @sabqorg (verified account) and @SaudiNews50 (unverified account) are shared only by the young moderate males and the females. Also, some accounts are consumed only by highly religious males such as @twasulnews (verified account), @TAFRIT\_KSA (unverified account), @htksa (unverified account) and @naizaktv (unverified account). This may be a reflection of the different criteria that are held among these three categories. However, the interesting view across these three social categories that only two accounts belong to the given newspapers were mentioned by the interviewees as credible accounts which they follow. The first one was the account of *Sabq* exclusively online newspaper among females and the young moderately religious males. The second account was that of *Twasul* exclusively online newspaper among the high religious males. Thus, the competition is very hard between @sabqorg and @SaudiNews50 among females and young moderately religious males, even though @sabqorg is a verified account while @SaudiNews50 is an unverified account.

This suggests that the credibility criteria in this study can influence some news platforms similarly. It can also be seen that some of these accounts are not verified which

may indicate unverified accounts sometimes can be regarded as credible due to their not following the news agendas of the given newspapers. Even though the verification of any Twitter account can increase the account's credibility, the non-verification of some Twitter accounts has not impacted their credibility in the view of these Saudi categories. This may point to additional criteria of the credibility of the unverified accounts among the Saudi social categories. Also, the gap between the young moderately religious males and females is smaller than the gap between the females and the highly religious males, which may be related to their attitudes towards the reformation of Saudi culture and thinking. This view was part of the increase in the credibility of *Alwatan* print newspaper with its online counterpart among the young moderately religious males and females, and was also part of the decrease in the credibility of the same newspapers among the highly religious males.

Not only that, but some of these accounts provide a mixture of local news, international events or news, and opinions from the perspective of the account holder – whether the account is verified or unverified – while some also only present news that supports their ideology. For example, @htksa provides news from a highly religious perspective, and does not provide news about music concerts in Saudi Arabia. Thus, Twitter's news can be different from the news provided in the given newspapers. This is because the possibility of being an anonymous news provider on Twitter paves the way for some Twitter users to freely voice news and opinions.

This can be seen clearly when comparing a society of limited news (e.g. the Middle East context) with a society of unlimited news (e.g. some Western context). For example, in a Western society with high freedom levels in all media outlets, news consumers perceive the journalists who quote news from social media networking sites, including Twitter, to be less credible than the journalists who quote news from news websites (Kruikemeier & Lecheler, 2018). Moreover, in an Asian society with higher levels of freedom, news consumers see the news shared on social media networking sites by news organisations as more credible than the news shared by their friends, which shows the high levels of trust news audiences place in news institutions (Tandoc, 2018). This suggest that the

probability of news consumers in a society with limited freedom to perceive the news from social networking sites as credible is higher than in a society with more freedom.

The inclination of most social categories to turn to Twitter as the main platform of getting local news is consistent with the power of Twitter's news in Saudi society. Thus, some Saudi voices on Twitter have forced officials to respond to their enquiries and demands (Al-Saggaf & Simmons, 2015; Blas, 2018). This points to the influence of online media, including social networking sites, on the given newspapers, as they find themselves in a position of responding to what is said online in order to keep their audiences as best they can (Alzahrani, 2016).

Hence, all three of these categories mostly rely on Twitter for their daily news, looking at different accounts depending on their interests and trust. This indicator of the big shift in Saudi Arabia towards Twitter for obtaining the daily local news was demonstrated recently as it was reported that Saudi audiences generate about 33% of the Arabic world's tweets per day from a total of 27.4 million per day, with most of these looking for news content (Sabbeh & Baatwah, 2018). Thus, active Saudi users represent the highest number of Twitter users among Arabic countries (Salem, 2017). According to Althiabi (2017), topics perceived as taboo in Saudi society such as sex, religion, and politics are now discussed on Twitter. This suggests that most of the dominant social categories practice their liberty on Twitter.

An example of this, as discussed earlier, is the women's campaign against male guardianship in Saudi Arabia, which started on Twitter in 2016. After around hundreds days, stories of the campaign reached two of the most tightly controlled government newspapers, namely the *Okas* and *Alriyadh* print newspapers (Alfasi, 2016; Aljuhani, 2019). The Saudi government then announced a royal decree permitting all official organisations to serve women without their guardians (Alabosh, 2018b). This suggests that the Saudis from these social groups who moved extensively to Twitter for their daily news are more inclined to judge the news in the given newspapers based on Twitter's news. For example, the higher

chance of mistakes being found in news from online news platforms was valued by the young interviewees, as these mistakes can force a response from Saudi officials. This means the power of the given newspapers as governmental tools used for shaping Saudi society will soon be obsolete. According to Pollock (2018), the Saudi government's situation is difficult as they try to offer spaces of freedom for Saudis without democracy, which means that liberty is signaled but not practiced.

However, the differences between these social categories also can be seen in the context of Twitter. For example, even though these three social categories showed that they turn to Twitter as the main daily platform for obtaining local news, they joined Twitter at different times and their reasons for being early or late can explain the shared meanings of these three categories towards new things, including technology or societal changes, and their level of acceptance of new things or ideas. For instance, young moderately religious males mentioned their early engagement with Twitter, around 2010. Thus, they explained their earlier joining of Twitter as a part of their personal characteristics. For example, a young moderately religious male stated:

*“I felt encouraged to use Twitter earlier as new technology can develop my life massively, so I welcome new technologies, new ideas, and new opinions such as those provided by Twitter.”*

On the other hand, the female audience and the highly religious male audience described their late engagement with Twitter, around 2013, as a part of their personal characteristics. However, the personal characteristics affected these two categories differently. The attitudes of these three social categories may be not exclusive to Twitter but may be reflected in many aspects of their lives. For example, females and highly religious males were afraid to join Twitter to obtain the news. However, females' fear of joining Twitter came from cultural concerns. One female interviewee said:

*“When Twitter was launched for the public in Saudi Arabia I was not comfortable about joining Twitter. It was not good for a girl to be a member of this application*

*and other public applications, as this will lead to bad impressions about me by my friends and relatives or even any person who plans to marry me”.*

This confirms the feeling of inequality among females as they were afraid of cultural repercussions during the start of Twitter, although this kind of fear was not experienced among the young moderately religious males. This also explained the previous research pointing to the Saudi women’s tactics for protecting themselves from cultural obstacles when using social media networking sites, as they use nicknames, hide their personal images, and hide their family names (Guta & Karolak, 2015). Not only that, but some cultural obstacles prevent women from accessing some of their rights (Doaiji, 2017).

Another study revealed that most Saudi males and females try to hide their identities on social media networking sites as far as they can (Aljasir et al., 2013). This does not mean they are equal, because the situation when a Saudi female’s category is discovered can be different to that when a Saudi male’s category is discovered. Recently, using anonymous identities became more important in Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia, because the surveillance of the government is growing extensively (Martin et al., 2018; Reporters without Borders for Freedom of Information, 2018c).

Even though the highly religious males joined Twitter late, the same as the females, their concerns were different to those of females. Thus, the highly religious males justified their late joining of Twitter by citing religious concerns. For example, a highly religious male justified his late joining of Twitter thusly:

*“As a Muslim, I should wait before using new things till Islamic scholars tell the Islamic view or the rule about this new application, whether it is allowed or not. Islamic scholars know more than others the essential principles of Islam which can differentiate between the accepted practices and the forbidden practices”.*

This suggests that the females joined Twitter late because they were afraid of the repercussions from society, whereas the highly religious males joined Twitter late because



of their obligation to what they believe. This points to part of the feeling of inequality among Saudi females compared to males. This can be a main driver for women to speak out about their rights which have not been given to them because of cultural traditions (Human Rights Watch, 2016). On the other hand, the attitudes of the highly religious males in this context can be explained by the fact that religious rules regulate all individual and societal issues in Muslim societies (El-Menouar, 2014). However, this influence can be different based on how Saudi society is restricted with Islamic regulations and how these regulations are understood within the society. This leads some Muslims to feel doubts about the media outlets presenting the views of other, different societies.

This was the same situation for the late establishment of the print press in most Arabic countries as there were a number of negative impressions relating to religious concerns (Al-Jaber, 2012). This issue still affects Muslim societies as some individuals perceive media outlets that are owned by Westerners as being less credible, while others follow Western news and views (Nisbet et al., 2017).

Thus, Twitter can be seen as a refuge platform of obtaining news for these three categories, which clearly points to the threat not only towards the given print newspapers with their online counterparts, but also towards the exclusively online newspapers, including *Sabq*. This can be seen through the inclination of most Saudi audiences to seek news on Twitter, as in the findings of this study, and through the recent reports and indicators describing Saudi Arabian users as the highest users of Twitter for news in Arabic countries (Sabbeh & Baatwah, 2018; Salem, 2017).

Unlike the situation of the Saudi media, in countries where press freedom is high, such as in the United States of America, the challenge to print newspapers comes from online newspapers (Pew Research Center, 2018c). This suggests that the Saudi social categories who shifted to Twitter did so in order to look for different news from that which exists in the given newspapers. This different news includes topics not covered in the given newspapers

(Althiabi, 2017; Sabbeh & Baatwah, 2018), and more detailed news about the issues covered in the given newspapers (Alotaibi, 2016).

Thus it was reported that Twitter attracts Saudis to engage in conversation about changing policies in Saudi Arabia (Aljasir, 2015). This explains why social media networking sites, including Twitter, became the real world for political activists who express their disagreement with their governments and cross red lines in Arabic countries where there is little freedom of expression, including Saudi Arabia (Alnajrani et al., 2018; Blas, 2018). This suggests that there are two powers controlling Saudi society, namely the power of government rules, and the power of Islamic culture rules. However, the power of the government rules has become stronger than that of Islamic culture; this has been admitted by the new crown prince of Saudi Arabia, who attributed a number of negative cultural issues to the extremist views held mostly by highly religious people in the country (Pollock, 2018). This points to new reforms in Saudi Arabia regarding cultural or religious issues, but not political issues.

As a result, some Saudis have been arrested because of their tweets on Twitter (BBC, 2017). This has led many Saudis to take additional action such as deleting some of their tweets (Almaghlooth, 2013) and hiding their real identities (Aljasir et al., 2013; Guta & Karolak, 2015). Moreover, active Saudi users on online media, including Twitter, engage in personal censorship in order to remain safe from government penalties, because there is no clear guidance on cultural issues related to religious concerns or government concerns (Daoudi, 2018). This points to the continuous consumption of news through Twitter by Saudis despite the government's attempts to impose censorship for Saudi Twitter users.

In fact, Twitter was described by most of the social categories in this study as the alternative for most of the given newspapers. This suggests that the competition has moved from being between exclusively online newspapers versus print newspapers with their online counterparts, towards being between Twitter versus most of the given newspapers. This may point to different powers than government and Islamic cultural

rules that can influence the perceived credibility of news in Twitter among these social categories. Twitter's capacity to provide accounts from different orientations met the requirements of most Saudis, who also hold a variety of views and like to see this reflected in the news they read, leading to this significant shift in news consumption.

## **8.6 Conclusion**

This chapter assists the understanding of the main findings of Chapters Six and Seven by highlighting how the general trends of this study correlate or diverge with past studies to explain the situations of Saudi social categories in relation to their perceived credibility of and their reliance on the given newspapers.

It can be concluded that there is no correlation between the scores of credibility and the scores of reliance for most of the given newspapers. The application of cultural restrictions in the newspapers shapes the credibility criteria of the dominant social categories. This was done through discussing women's topics, which are controversial in the given newspapers. Most of the social categories have other reasons to move to Twitter besides credibility. Twitter has become the dominant alternative news platform for most of the given newspapers. Liberty needs have driven most of the social categories in Saudi Arabia to consume news through Twitter, which points to news freedom as a main factor influencing perceived credibility. The power of government rules has overtaken the power of Islamic culture rules, imposing new reforms of cultural traditions with less freedom in politics.

This chapter showed the main findings associated with the four social categories based on the research framework. Thus, this chapter demonstrates how the research questions benefitted from using mixed methods to explain the credibility perceptions of the questionnaire (quantitative method) through shared meanings attached to the credibility perceptions by the interviewees (qualitative method), as is detailed in the research framework (see Chapter Five).

## CHAPTER NINE

### **Conclusions: Developing A Professional Press in Saudi Arabia**

#### **9.1 The Introduction**

The previous chapter illustrated the findings associated with the four social categories following the line of the research framework. This chapter starts by recapping on the research objectives and highlighting the research contributions of the thesis, pointing to the future of the press in Saudi Arabia. Then the chapter ends by offering recommendations to academics for future research work and to the press industry for how to develop news content in Saudi Arabia.

#### **9.2 The Study Objectives**

This study aimed to explore the factors influencing audiences' perceptions of the credibility of and their reliance on print, online counterparts and exclusively online newspapers, and to provide empirical recommendations for Saudi press organisations in order to improve their credibility and the audiences' reliance on them in Saudi Arabia. This was achieved by accomplishing the study objectives as follows:

- 1. To critically evaluate the literature on news credibility and reliance concepts in media studies.**

This objective was to understand the background of news credibility, in order to continue from the points reached by past researchers (Choi et al., 2006; Flanagin & Metzger, 2000; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Mackay & Lowrey, 2011; Mao, 2003; Wilson et al., 2011). Thus, this objective was achieved by a critical evaluation of the main studies on credibility and reliance in Chapter Two in order to understand how these concepts have been addressed (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2005; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; McGrath & Gaziano, 1986; Mehrabi et al., 2013; Thorson et al.,

2010). This chapter looked at credibility meaning and definitions through the past research in order to decide which definition was suitable for this study and which dimensions were attached to this definition, to articulate the proper measure scale for newspapers' credibility in this study (Bucy, 2003; McCroskey & Young, 1981; Meyer, 1988). This was shown through the existing debate about the relationship between reliance and credibility (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2005; Johnson & Kaye, 2000; Kim & Johnson, 2009; Tsfaty & Cappella, 2005). Some scholars have found that reliance influences newspaper credibility, while others claim that reliance and credibility can be influenced differently depending on the audience's personal characteristics, which was what this study found.

For this objective, the researcher decided to deal with reliance and credibility separately, so the study dealt with these constructs as dependent variables. In fact, this strategy was valuable as credibility and reliance were influenced differently by the same social categories, and some showed higher credibility and reliance for the same newspaper. This was explained in Chapter Eight and may suggest that the audience's reliance on a particular newspaper is related to not only perceived credibility but other factors as well.

Therefore, gaining a base understanding of news credibility background and definitions was the result of achieving this objective.

**2. To conduct a literature review of Western and Middle Eastern newspaper credibility and online news credibility studies to identify the audience-related factors that affect the perceived credibility of and reliance on print newspapers with their online counterparts and exclusively online newspapers.**

The second objective was achieved by comparing the main credibility studies conducted in Western and Middle-Eastern societies, in order to understand how they regard the personal-related factors that influence newspaper credibility, whether in print or online. This confirmed that the background of news audiences greatly affects the

perceived credibility of news outlets (Chiagouris et al., 2008; M. J. Metzger & Flanagin, 2008; Newman et al., 2019; Nic et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2011). This drove the research process to look specifically at personal factors that had an influence on newspaper credibility perceptions from past research, whether in Western or Middle-Eastern societies. Thus, the researcher gained a better understanding of these factors (Golan & Baker, 2012; Golan & Day, 2010; Golan & Kioussis, 2010; Johnson & Kaye, 2009; Kim & Johnson, 2009; Speakman, 2011; Xu, 2012). This helped to create the first part of the research framework, which was extracted from the literature review with regard to this objective, in Chapter Two. It included the personal factors (age, gender, location, income, education, occupation and religiosity levels). Thus, by achieving this objective, a series of personal factors that possibly affect the perceived credibility of and the reliance on the given newspapers was extracted.

Also, this objective was reached by exploring this issue within a Saudi society (Al-Jaber, 2012; Alotaibi, 2016; Elareshi & Gunter, 2012; Miliany, 2013). This was detailed in Chapter Two as it was found that little research has been carried out in the Middle East on newspaper credibility, and most of the existing credibility studies applied only a quantitative method (questionnaires) (Cassidy, 2007; C. Chung et al., 2012; Johnson & Kaye, 2015; Stroud & Lee, 2013). Some personal characteristics have not received enough research, for example the religiosity factor (Golan & Baker, 2012; Golan & Kioussis, 2010). Thus, this study responded to the call to extend the focus on newspaper credibility (Gutsche & Hess, 2018; Usher, 2018) and to include an Islamic religious society, particularly Saudi Arabia; insufficient explorations have been reported that address the credibility of online newspapers and print newspapers in the Saudi context (Al-Jaber, 2012; Elareshi & Gunter, 2012; Miliany, 2013). From this objective the decision was made to employ mixed methods, including an exploration of the most influential personal characteristics, in order to provide a better understanding of credibility perceptions in a Middle-Eastern society (Saudi Arabia).

In fact, this objective was reached by identifying the personal factors that influenced the perceived credibility of the target newspapers in the eyes of their audiences.

### **3. To critically evaluate theoretical work on shared meanings and perceptions amongst different social groups.**

This objective was to find a suitable application for explaining the subject; not only exploring this subject within Saudi society but also developing an understanding of credibility in a religious society. This understanding can guide further research within other societies with the majority of Muslims. This was done by firstly reviewing the most used applications for studying this subject. Thus, there were two different perspectives on this subject: the media perspective (concerning the influence of media on an audience's credibility ratings) and the audience perspective (concerning the influence of audiences on media regarding this subject). For example, some applications relating to how media influences audiences include but are not limited to the medium theory, which focuses on the effect of a medium's features and elements on perceived credibility (Chiagouris et al., 2008; Lowry et al., 2014) and the two-step flow theory, which focuses on how opinions' leaders influence the perceived credibility of the news audiences (Meraz, 2011; Turcotte et al., 2015). However, this perspective was justified as not relevant to this study as this study concerns the influence of the audience's personal factors on the perceived credibility of the given newspapers.

Thus, the theories most used to understand this subject were reviewed, including but not limited to the uses and gratifications theory, which has been used to study news credibility (Al-Jaber, 2012; Johnson & Kaye, 2010a; Tsfati & Cappella, 2005); the secularisation theory (Golan & Baker, 2012); the encoding/decoding theory (Byrum, 2014); and the selective exposure theory (Melican & Dixon, 2008). Then, this objective was achieved by justifying the application of the Social Identity Theory as a relevant tool to assist this study for understanding the influence of news audiences on the perceived credibility of news. Thus, this study responded to the call to extend the understanding of shared meanings among social groups by using interviews instead of forcing the social groups to choose from limited views using only questionnaires, which has been the

method applied by the majority of social identity research related to media (Chen, 2012; Hu, Zhang, & Wang, 2017)

In fact, the call to extend the understanding of newspaper credibility by hearing from social groups through an open-ended method such as interviews helped to explain the research enquiry from the audience's perspective and it showed the suitability of interpreting the study's results by the Social Identity Theory. The elements of the theory were identified with the items of this subject in order to address the knowledge gap within Saudi society and to help to understand the differences between the social groups, which comprise the entire target audience, as detailed in Chapter Three.

In fact, achieving this objective helped to build the second part of the research framework and to answer the main research questions.

**4. To extend the understanding of credibility and reliance through the shared meanings among social groups in terms of Saudi local newspapers through a research framework.**

This objective was accomplished through the empirical work of the questionnaire and the interviews, including the selection and justification of the research methods (Bowen et al., 2017; Creswell et al., 2006; Johnson, 2006). Thus, the research methods were selected based on the research philosophy that fitted the research questions. Mixed methods were the most suitable, involving establishing the research problem, determining the strength of one method compared with other methods, developing the possible actions to respond to the research problem, assessing the selected actions and implementing the expected actions to address the research problem (Azorín & Cameron, 2010; Cameron, 2009; Creswell, 2014a; Johnson et al., 2007; Saunders et al., 2015).

Using mixed methods was an advantage of this study compared to other studies focusing on newspaper credibility from the audience's perspective as the research could then benefit from the advantages of the quantitative approach and the qualitative approach (Willcocks et al., 2016). Thus, this study responded to the call of past studies to not isolate the mixed-methods approach from research concerning some parts of the social context,



so that the research enquiry can be answered objectively and subjectively (Bowen et al., 2017; Creswell et al., 2006; Johnson, 2006). This was done firstly by extracting suitable scales for the questionnaire in order to answer the research questions associated with the quantitative approach (Almogbel et al., 2015; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; McGrath & Gaziano, 1986; Meyer, 1988). Therefore, this objective was first achieved by choosing and justifying the suitable methods to complete the research framework through the guidance of the research designs (as detailed in Chapter Five).

Then, the second part of achieving this objective was to apply the research framework through the empirical work, as in Chapters Six and Seven. Chapter Six contains the quantitative data analysis (questionnaires), which answers the first, second and third research questions associated with the deductive approach. However, Chapter Seven includes the qualitative data analysis (interviews), which answers the fourth research question associated with the inductive approach. Thus, the selection of mixed research methods helped to gain a better understanding of newspaper credibility among Saudis as the interview method complemented the questionnaire method by preventing misunderstanding and obtaining accurate clarification from the audiences themselves. For example, as detailed in Chapters Six and Seven, some of the social categories associated with similar credibility perceptions for particular newspapers in the questionnaire phase revealed different shared meanings for these newspapers during the interview phase.

This furthers our understanding of credibility perceptions as similar credibility scores are not necessarily associated with similar shared meanings among the social categories.

##### **5. To draw recommendations for newspaper audiences and stakeholders to improve the reliance and credibility of Saudi print and online newspapers**

This objective represents a major part of the main aim for this study – to contribute to the development of the press in Saudi society, which suffers from little research. This was done firstly by understanding the credibility perceptions and reliance scores that were

held by the Saudi social groups in the questionnaire phase in order to find the dominant social categories (see Chapter Six). This objective was further achieved by understanding how the credibility criteria of the dominant social categories in the interview phase responded to the already found credibility scores in the questionnaire phase (see Chapter Seven). This assessment led to a better understanding of the associations between the outcomes of the questionnaire and the interviews (see Chapter Eight).

This objective is accomplished in this chapter, based on the key findings drawn from Chapters Six and Seven. The recommendations are for academic work such as future research and professional work such as press development. The recommendations for future research include repeating this study to validate its outcomes as one of the first attempts to study this subject within Saudi society. Suggestions are also given to help future researchers overcome the limitations and difficulties of this study. On the other hand, the recommendations for the professional press include offering the most influential credibility criteria to newspapers audiences.

In fact, the first, second and third objectives helped this study to understand credibility definitions and dimensions, and the audience's most influential personal factors for the perceived credibility of newspapers. The fourth objective helped to build the base of this investigation and to complete the research framework by selecting and justifying the plan of empirical work and then implementing this plan. The research subject is based on the research frame. Thus, the outcomes of this study form the study's contributions regarding the perceived credibility of newspapers and the audience's reliance on them, particularly for Saudi Arabia and other similar societies, as explained below.

### **9.3 Contributions of the Study**

This thesis contributes to the field of newspaper credibility research practically, alongside the field of social identity research theoretically in the Saudi context and in similar societies in the Arabic world.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is one of the first studies to investigate Saudi newspapers' credibility and the audience's reliance on them, through interpreting their answers by the application of the Social Identity Theory among Saudis. This study expands the focus of previous studies concerning the credibility criteria of newspaper audiences from their perspective, specifically in the Arab world.

In this context, this research contributes to the debates among credibility scholars about how perceived credibility can be influenced differently according to the differences among social categories, which can hold different credibility criteria towards the target newspapers. Thus, new credibility criteria for newspapers were shown from different Saudi social categories.

On the other hand, this research contributes to the theoretical research by employing the Social Identity Theory in the investigation of perceived credibility in two phases as a tool of interpreting the study's results. The second phase (the qualitative approach) can complement the first stage in order to gain a better understanding of the audience's criteria for the newspapers' credibility. It is possible that the second phase explains and confirms the first phase, but it may also contradict it or add additional interpretations. This study contributes to credibility research by developing its framework, which may be a suitable framework for exploring the influence of social categories on newspapers' credibility in societies with the majority of Muslims.

This highlights the importance of combining the two mixed methods through the Social Identity Theory in order to see how the results of each method correspond with each other. This method helped journalism research to benefit from the perspectives of press audiences, who are the main target of press in societies. In this context, this study has gained valuable insights into which dominant social categories influence the credibility of and reliance on the given newspapers and how they do so, as well as determining the credibility criteria of the dominant social categories.

Thus, based on the substantial results of both methods, the audience's perspective showed further additional concepts related to evaluating newspapers' credibility, considering the difficulty and sensitivity of this subject in the Saudi context due to government and cultural concerns.

Therefore, this study is responding to a call for researchers to focus on news credibility within the Saudi context (Al-Jaber, 2012; Alotaibi, 2016; Elareshi & Gunter, 2012; Golan & Kioussis, 2010; Milianny, 2013). Still, there have been recent calls to seek the audiences' credibility criteria regarding news (Gutsche & Hess, 2018; Usher, 2018).

In fact, this study helps the Saudi press to consider the credibility criteria of the dominant social categories as well as helping future newspaper credibility research to investigate the audience's insights into the media restrictions that form the newspapers' credibility criteria among the Saudi dominant social categories.

#### **9.4 Research Implications**

A major conclusion of this research derives from its exploration of news audiences' shift from both print newspapers with their online counterparts and exclusively online newspapers to Twitter in order to obtain the daily news. Specifically, the given newspapers cannot retain the same news production, processes and standards if they want to serve Saudi audiences with local news. Three of these audiences have already called for a switch from these newspapers to social networking sites (Twitter). Thus, all of the given newspapers face a threat from Twitter, as social networking sites are their competitors. This may lead the newspaper audiences to not only make Twitter their dominant local news platform, but also to judge the newspapers' news by Twitter's news in the future if the newspapers do not survive.

Also, another important finding from the research is the credibility scale, which was drawn up from mainly some Western studies, and which needs to be adjusted from this research with the new criteria of Saudi audiences. Extending this in future research

may be undertaken to explore the same issues in other non-democratic societies with the majority of Muslims.

Adhering to Islamic rules was an action respected by most of the Saudi social categories as they considered Islamic rules to be an important part of their lives. However, different understandings of Islamic teachings and rules lead to different perceptions and attitudes towards the credibility of the given newspapers, as with other aspects of the participants' lives. Thus, while two categories (young moderately religious males, and females) attributed their credibility criteria to general and personal standards (freedom of press and being equally addressed by the press), the highly religious males attributed their credibility criteria to standards relating to religious concepts (staying away from taboos).

In fact, Islamic rules influence Saudi social categories differently based on their understanding of these Islamic rules in terms of forbidden or non-forbidden status. This different understanding has moved with them to the world of Twitter, but it may have different credibility criteria based on the additional features in Twitter that do not exist in the press.

## **9.5 Limitations of the Study**

### **9.6.1 Focus only on Local Newspapers**

This study was limited to local newspapers, while the local news is provided in several media outlets. The results of this research evidenced the importance of Saudi social categories when evaluating newspapers' credibility. While this can be a good start for looking at social categories when studying other media outlets, the dominant social categories with the given local newspapers in this study are not necessarily dominant with other media outlets or when combining national and international media outlets, whether these compared news outlets are in Arabic or in English. Citizens may support their national media outlets if they have a positive attitude towards their government when it comes to news that is against their political or cultural issues from other foreign media

outlets. However, when it comes to comparing between news channels owned by the government, such as *Alakhbaryia* and the private Arabic pan channels such as *Alrabia* and *Alhadath* news channels, the situation can be different as these two channels are too close to the government's orientation despite their different presentations of news, and *Alakhbaryia* can apply more restrictions which can partially satisfy audiences of a highly religious orientation. Thus, there is a big chance among the dominant social categories to differently impact the credibility perceptions of and reliance on these public and private TV news channels.

The Saudi social categories found in this study may also hold different news credibility criteria towards other Saudi media outlets such as radio or television, as their different components may lead to different standards. For example, the highly religious males highlighted the showing of unveiled women in the Saudi press as a practice that decreased newspapers' credibility, but this standard cannot be applied to the radio.

#### **9.5.2 Lack of Newspaper Credibility Research within Saudi Context**

This difficulty arose because of the lack of Saudi media research studies and the sensitivity of this topic in Saudi Arabia. The media research field has not received a sufficient number of studies because media schools are slow growing. This may be because this field is not considered important, especially among highly religious people, or it may be because this field cannot improve with its restrictions. The second reason for insufficient research on this topic in Saudi Arabia is the sensitivity of this topic in terms of the government and cultural rules, which may not help Saudi media research to be less biased.

#### **9.5.3 Lack of Access to Female Face-To-Face Interviewees**

The researcher planned to include females and males in the data collection, including the questionnaire phase and the interview phase, in order to investigate the influence of personal factors, including gender, on newspapers' credibility. Thus, there was no issue during the questionnaire phase. However, access to female interviewees

during the interview phase was very difficult as most of them were not happy to have face-to-face interviews because of cultural barriers. The data collection took place in 2017 when there were no voices calling for a decrease in segregation between females and males in Saudi Arabia. Thus, all the interviews with females were conducted over the phone and the respondents were not comfortable as they were not used to engaging in conversation with unfamiliar males, or due to other personal issues.

#### **9.5.4 The Sample Limits with Regard to the Employment and Location Factors**

It was reported in Chapter Six that the biggest number of participants in terms of employment categorisations fell in to the student category (44.8%). However, this may be a reflection of the distribution of the entire Saudi population as detailed in Chapter Five. This study targeted educated Saudis aged 18 years or older, as it has been reported that most educated Saudis aged 18 years old or over have high school education or less, or a Bachelor degree) (General Authority for Statistics of KSA, 2016). This is consistent with the research pointing to the fact that university students in Saudi Arabia represent a big number (Ziani et al., 2015).

In terms of location, the study engaged the sample from only two regions in Saudi Arabia (western and central). However, this was due to the high number of Saudi citizens in these two regions. Thus, the total population of Saudi nationals in the two regions covered by this research is approximately 15 million, which represents half of the entire population in Saudi Arabia (General Authority for Statistics of KSA, 2016).

In fact, the aforementioned limitations emphasise the need for future empirical work that can overcome the said limitations and advance the understanding of this topic. This also highlights the importance of this study as its uniqueness contributes to filling some of the knowledge gap in the literature about Saudi Arabia.

## **9.6 Future Research and Recommendations**

The accomplishment of this research offers several prospects for future studies. It is recommended that Saudi media researchers look at this topic in the future in order to validate its reliability based on the consistency of the research results and the results of future research. Replicating this research in the Saudi context may confirm the results of this study or add additional criteria as this current study is considered to be one of the first attempts to study this topic in the Saudi context. However, the rapid changes in Saudi Arabia regarding some government and cultural rules may affect social categories as well as the newspapers' credibility criteria.

Further research should also look into the differences between the given newspapers from the newspapers' perspectives to question if these differences are required by the government or if they are permitted by the government. Thus, if these differences occur because they are permitted by the government, there is a need to explore what other different types of news are permitted by the government.

It is recommended that future research studies the influence of Saudi social categories on other news outlets and platforms in Saudi Arabia, including how selective Twitter news accounts are influenced by the social categories in terms of credibility criteria, as well as comparing national news outlets with international news outlets. Twitter has been mentioned by most of the participating categories in this study as the dominant platform of Saudi local news.

Also, there is an urgent need to explore how verified Twitter accounts influence the perceived credibility of the accounts' news, as hiding identities is a popular action for many Saudi Twitter users due to monitoring. However, some Saudi verified Twitter accounts are followed by a large number of followers. This points to several opportunities for future research, to investigate whether Saudi social categories hold the same or different credibility criteria for verified Twitter accounts as unverified Twitter accounts, as some of the latter may still be perceived as credible because of censorship. However,



if some of the unverified Twitter accounts are perceived as credible, this means that there are other credibility criteria among the social categories, which can be a valuable area for research.

The findings of this study evidenced the fact that newspaper audiences have taken advantage of technology to not only obtain news from Twitter but also to judge the given newspapers by Twitter's news. Thus, the situation of the given newspapers is at risk and they are advised to benefit from this study by paying attention to the Saudi dominant social categories and satisfying their credibility criteria. The restrictions in the given newspapers impact their audiences negatively, so keeping these restrictions may lead to losing the rest of the newspapers' audiences. For example, most of the given newspapers are considered by females to be unfair because of the low presence of topics and issues that interest them, while the same was reported by highly religious males but in this case because of the high presence of certain news topics, pictures or videos (in online versions) which the highly religious males object to because of their religious orientation.

It is recommended that extensive research be carried out with a focus on how the inequality between Saudi females and males affects females' reliance on, and their perceived credibility of, other Saudi media outlets, particularly television, where females have a greater presence compared to local newspapers. It would be beneficial for future research on Saudi females to be conducted by a female researcher as this may be more convenient for Saudi female interviewees and it may enable the gathering of more details on this topic.

Thus, the female category is currently the main element for development in the Saudi press because the new orientation in Saudi Arabia is to try to give females more power and rights than before. Newspapers can therefore invest in this issue in order to satisfy the needs of Saudi females through the local newspapers. Satisfying the needs of Saudi females is not against the new orientation of the Saudi government and it may be acceptable by a large number of moderately religious males.

Finally, regarding the Saudi context, the existing literature on the Saudi press is still insufficient so there is an urgent need for more research in this area, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. It is very important that the religiosity factor is included in research within the Saudi context as adhering to Islamic rules was stated to be important by all the interviewees. They all stated that they respected Islamic rules but some of them said that some rules were perceived as Islamic rules while in reality they were cultural and traditional rules. Consequently, press research in Saudi Arabia is still fruitful and there are many opportunities to address the existing knowledge gaps in global knowledge.

## **9.7 Conclusion**

As this thesis has already pointed out, the developed framework for explaining perceived credibility through the interpretation based on the application of the Social Identity Theory can be used as a practical frame for understanding the influence of social categories in societies with the majority of Muslims on the perceived credibility of and reliance on print and online newspapers. The framework was developed by integrating the credibility and reliance dimensions with the Social Identity Theory through three stages as detailed in Chapter Five. The credibility criteria of the dominant social categories were produced by this frame.

In conclusion, this research has established through practical steps that the government restrictions imposed on the Saudi press, and cultural rules, greatly influence the credibility criteria of most of the dominant social categories with regard to Saudi print newspapers with their online counterparts and exclusively online newspapers. This suggests that relaxing and reforming the censorship based on the credibility criteria established here would increase newspapers' credibility among the dominant social categories.

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## Appendix A

### Questionnaire Instrument

Personal Characteristics:

1/ What is your gender?

- (1) Female ( )
- (2) Male ( )

2/ How old are you?

- (1) 18-29 years old ( )
- (2) 30-41 years old ( )
- (3) 42-53 years old ( )
- (4) 54-65 years old ( )
- (5) More than 65 ( )

3/ What is your total monthly income?

- (1) 1000-4999 Saudi Riyals ( )
- (2) 5000-9999 Saudi Riyals ( )
- (3) 10000-14999 Saudi Riyals ( )
- (4) 15000 & More Saudi Riyals ( )
- (5) Not specified ( )

4/ What is your highest level of education?

- (1) High School or Less ( )
- (2) Diploma after High School ( )
- (3) Bachelor degree ( )
- (4) Master's degree ( )
- (5) PhD degree ( )

5/ What is your employment status?

- (1) Unemployment ( )
- (2) Student ( )
- (3) Employment in Government sectors ( )
- (4) Employment in Private sectors ( )
- (5) Retired ( )

6/ In what degree of religiosity generally do you consider yourself whereas (1) is Moderate Religious and (10) is High religious?

- 1- ( )
- 2- ( )
- 3- ( )
- 4- ( )
- 5- ( )
- 6- ( )
- 7- ( )
- 8- ( )
- 9- ( )
- 10- ( )

7/ In which part of Saudi Arabia do you live?

- 1- Central Region ( )
- 2- Western Region ( )
- 3- Other Regions ( ) what ( )

### **Newspapers Section**

8/ Which newspaper do you mostly read?

- 1- *Alriyadh* newspaper. Print ( ) or Online ( )
- 2- *Okas* newspaper. Print ( ) or Online ( )
- 3- *Aljazirah* newspaper. Print ( ) or Online ( )
- 4- *Almadina* newspaper. Print ( ) or Online ( )
- 5- *Alyaum* newspaper. Print ( ) or Online ( )
- 6- *Alwatan* newspaper. Print ( ) or Online ( )
- 7- *Sabq* exclusively online newspaper. ( )
- 8- *Almarsd* exclusively online newspaper. ( )
- 9- *Mapnews* exclusively online newspaper. ( )
- 10- *Kolahwatn* exclusively online newspaper. ( )
- 11- *Alweeam* exclusively online newspaper. ( )
- 12- *Twasul* exclusively online newspaper. ( )

9/ Which newspaper do you rely on?

- 1- *Alriyadh* newspaper. Print ( ) or Online ( )
- 2- *Okas* newspaper. Print ( ) or Online ( )
- 3- *Aljazirah* newspaper. Print ( ) or Online ( )
- 4- *Almadina* newspaper. Print ( ) or Online ( )
- 5- *Alyaum* newspaper. Print ( ) or Online ( )

- 6- *Alwatan* newspaper. Print ( ) or Online ( )
- 7- *Sabq* exclusively online newspaper. ( )
- 8- *Almarsd* exclusively online newspaper. ( )
- 9- *Mapnews* exclusively online newspaper. ( )
- 10- *Kolalwatn* exclusively online newspaper. ( )
- 11- *Alweeam* exclusively online newspaper. ( )
- 12- *Twasul* exclusively online newspaper. ( )

10/ How much do you rely on the specified newspapers in question 8?

- 1- Never rely on
- 2- Rarely rely on
- 3- Sometimes rely on
- 4- Rely
- 5- Heavily rely on

11/ What are your perceptions of the given newspapers in terms of *Fair*?

	Newspapers	1-Strongly disagree	2-Disagree	3-Not specified	4-Agree	5-Strongly agree
1	<i>Alriyadh</i> print newspaper					
2	<i>Alriyadh</i> online counterpart					
3	<i>Okas</i> print newspaper					
4	<i>Okas</i> online counterpart					
5	<i>Aljazirah</i> print newspaper					
6	<i>Aljazirah</i> online counterpart					
7	<i>Almadina</i> print newspaper					

8	<i>Almadina</i> online counterpart					
9	<i>Alyaum</i> print newspaper					
10	<i>Alyaum</i> online counterpart					
11	<i>Alwatan</i> print newspaper					
12	<i>Alwatan</i> online counterpart					
13	<i>Sabq</i> exclusively online					
14	<i>Almarsd</i> exclusively online					
15	<i>Mapnews</i> exclusively online					
16	<i>Kolalwatn</i> exclusively online					
17	<i>Alweeam</i> exclusively online					
18	<i>Twasul</i> exclusively online					

12/ What are your perceptions of the given newspapers in terms of *Accurate*?

	Newspapers	1-Strongly disagree	2-Disagree	3-Not specified	4-Agree	5-Strongly agree
1	<i>Alriyadh</i> print newspaper					

2	<i>Alriyadh</i> online counterpart					
3	<i>Okas</i> print newspaper					
4	<i>Okas</i> online counterpart					
5	<i>Aljazirah</i> print newspaper					
6	<i>Aljazirah</i> online counterpart					
7	<i>Almadina</i> print newspaper					
8	<i>Almadina</i> online counterpart					
9	<i>Alyaum</i> print newspaper					
10	<i>Alyaum</i> online counterpart					
11	<i>Alwatan</i> print newspaper					
12	<i>Alwatan</i> online counterpart					
13	<i>Sabq</i> exclusively online					
14	<i>Almarsd</i> exclusively online					
15	<i>Mapnews</i> exclusively online					
16	<i>Kolalwatn</i> exclusively online					
17	<i>Alweeam</i> exclusively online					
18	<i>Twasul</i> exclusively online					

13/ What are your perceptions of the given newspapers in terms of *Unbiased*?



	Newspapers	1-Strongly disagree	2-Disagree	3-Not specified	4-Agree	5-Strongly agree
1	<i>Alriyadh</i> print newspaper					
2	<i>Alriyadh</i> online counterpart					
3	<i>Okas</i> print newspaper					
4	<i>Okas</i> online counterpart					
5	<i>Aljazirah</i> print newspaper					
6	<i>Aljazirah</i> online counterpart					
7	<i>Almadina</i> print newspaper					
8	<i>Almadina</i> online counterpart					
9	<i>Alyaum</i> print newspaper					
10	<i>Alyaum</i> online counterpart					
11	<i>Alwatan</i> print newspaper					
12	<i>Alwatan</i> online counterpart					
13	<i>Sabq</i> exclusively online					
14	<i>Almarsd</i> exclusively online					

15	<i>Mapnews</i> exclusively online					
16	<i>Kolalwatn</i> exclusively online					
17	<i>Alweeam</i> exclusively online					
18	<i>Twasul</i> exclusively online					

14/ What are your perceptions of the given newspapers in terms of *Tell the whole story?*

	Newspapers	1-Strongly disagree	2-Disagree	3-Not specified	4-Agree	5-Strongly agree
1	<i>Alriyadh</i> print newspaper					
2	<i>Alriyadh</i> online counterpart					
3	<i>Okas</i> print newspaper					
4	<i>Okas</i> online counterpart					
5	<i>Aljazirah</i> print newspaper					
6	<i>Aljazirah</i> online counterpart					
7	<i>Almadina</i> print newspaper					

8	<i>Almadina</i> online counterpart					
9	<i>Alyaum</i> print newspaper					
10	<i>Alyaum</i> online counterpart					
11	<i>Alwatan</i> print newspaper					
12	<i>Alwatan</i> online counterpart					
13	<i>Sabq</i> exclusively online					
14	<i>Almarsd</i> exclusively online					
15	<i>Mapnews</i> exclusively online					
16	<i>Kolalwatn</i> exclusively online					
17	<i>Alweeam</i> exclusively online					
18	<i>Twasul</i> exclusively online					

15/ What are your perceptions of the given newspapers in terms of *Can be trusted?*

	Newspapers	1-Strongly disagree	2-Disagree	3-Not specified	4-Agree	5-Strongly agree
1	<i>Alriyadh</i> print newspaper					

2	<i>Alriyadh</i> online counterpart					
3	<i>Okas</i> print newspaper					
4	<i>Okas</i> online counterpart					
5	<i>Aljazirah</i> print newspaper					
6	<i>Aljazirah</i> online counterpart					
7	<i>Almadina</i> print newspaper					
8	<i>Almadina</i> online counterpart					
9	<i>Alyaum</i> print newspaper					
10	<i>Alyaum</i> online counterpart					
11	<i>Alwatan</i> print newspaper					
12	<i>Alwatan</i> online counterpart					
13	<i>Sabq</i> exclusively online					
14	<i>Almarsd</i> exclusively online					
15	<i>Mapnews</i> exclusively online					
16	<i>Kolalwatn</i> exclusively online					
17	<i>Alweeam</i> exclusively online					
18	<i>Twasul</i> exclusively online					

## **Appendix B**

### **Semi-structured Interview Instrument**

#### **Demographic questions:**

1/ What is your gender?

2/ How old are you?

3/ What is your total monthly income?

4/ What is your highest level of education?

5/ What is your employment status?

6/ In what category of religiosity generally do you consider yourself where (1) is Moderately Religious and (10) is Highly religious?

#### **Introductory questions:**

1/Do you read newspapers?

2/ Do you use the internet?

3/ What newspapers do you read?

4/What version of newspapers do you read (print or online) and why?

#### **The subsequent questions:**

1/Which newspaper do you perceive as credible for getting daily news?

2/How do you judge the credibility of the given newspaper?

3/What examples do you remember of credible news and non-credible news?

4/Have you changed your perceptions about any of the given newspapers from the high credibility side to the low credibility side or vice versa, if so why?

5/What is provided by your credible newspaper but not others?

6/Why do you give the highest credibility for a particular newspaper and the lowest credibility for a particular newspaper?

7/If you hear conflicting news from the credible newspapers which one do you believe and why?

8/How do you define the credibility for your credible newspapers?

9/What are your criteria for evaluating news credibility?

## **Appendix C**

### **Participant Information Sheet & Consent for Questionnaire**

#### **English Sheet of Information**

##### **Study Title**

The Credibility of News in Saudi Arabia: A Comparative Study of Print Newspapers with their Online Counterparts and Online Exclusively Newspapers among Saudis.

##### **Invitation paragraph**

I would like to invite you to volunteer to take part in my doctoral research project as a respondent to a questionnaire. The purpose of my research is to discover whether the rise of online newspapers has changed Saudis' perceptions of traditional media. You will be one of 787 educated Saudi males and females surveyed in the most populous regions of the country: The Central region and Western region so you are invited to take part in this study.

Please take time to read the following information sheet on the project before deciding whether or not to take part in my research. Clicking the "Next" button below indicates that you are 18 years of age or older, and indicates your consent to participate in this questionnaire. The questionnaire should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. You are free to withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason. All information you provide will be kept in secured files by the researcher and will be anonymized to preserve confidentiality. I will let you know by email when my PhD dissertation has been completed and will give you the opportunity to read it, should you wish.

##### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The primary purpose of this study is to discover whether the rise of online newspapers have changed Saudis' perceptions of traditional media by applying qualitative and quantitative methods among 787 educated Saudi males and females (though the research is not a gender-based analysis) in the two regions of the highest population census. However, the women interviews will be conducted through phone because of gender segregation.

### **Why have I been invited?**

This study focuses on the credibility of print and online newspapers in Saudi Arabia among educated Saudis, so its target sample is planned to be educated Saudi citizens who are above 18 years old from Central region and Western region, so you are invited to take part in this study as a volunteer.

### **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide. We will describe the study and go through the information sheet, which we will give to you. By Clicking the "Next" button below you indicate that you are 18 years of age or older and indicate your consent to participate in this questionnaire. After, you will receive the questionnaire immediately. However, you are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

### **What will happen if I decide to take part?**

This study will conduct a questionnaire online about the patterns of consumption and rates of credibility for local print and online newspapers in Saudi Arabia which will take approximately 10 minutes so after your completion, all your information will be kept in secured files and will be anonymized for confidential reasons. After completing the entire research project, you can receive a link to your email by contacting the researcher to get access to the entire project including the questionnaire results.

### **What will I have to do?**



You should first read information sheet which is combined with the consent form then by Clicking the “Next” button below you indicate that you are 18 years of age or older and indicate your consent to participate in this questionnaire. After, you can start filling in the questionnaire online from your computer which will not take more than 10 minutes.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no anticipated risks to you if you participate in this study, beyond those encountered in everyday life.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

We cannot promise the study will help you but the information we get from the study will help to increase the understanding of the credibility of print and online newspapers in Saudi Arabia

**What if I have more questions?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should ask to speak to the researcher who will do his best to answer your questions:

The Researcher Name: Abdullah Maqbul

Phone (00447848687656 & 00966505241341)

Email (almaqbul@hotmail.com & a.m.a.maqbul@edu.salford.ac.uk)

The Research Supervisor Name: Dr. Carole O'Reilly

Email (C.OReilly@salford.ac.uk)

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential, and any information about you will be removed so the university will have your name and address removed so that you cannot be recognised.

**The data will be collected as follows:**

that it will be stored safely, giving the custodian and level of identification, for example:

- individual participant research data, such as questionnaires/interviews/samples/ will be anonymous and given a research code, known only to the researcher.
- hard paper/taped data will be stored in a locked cabinet, within locked office, accessed only by researcher.
- electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer known only by researcher.
- The data will not be used for future studies.
- The researcher and the supervisor will access to view identifiable data.

The data will be retained for about 3 years and then it will be disposed of securely.

**What will happen if I don't carry on with the study?**

If you withdraw from the study I will destroy all your identifiable samples/ tape recorded interviews, but we will need to use the data collected up to your withdrawal.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

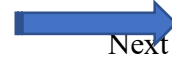
The results of the study will be available through the library of University of Salford. The participants will not be identified in any report/publication unless they have given their consent. If you have questions or want a copy or summary of this study's results, you can contact the researcher at the email address above.

## Who is organising or sponsoring the research?

Abdullah Maqbul, a PhD researcher.

Clicking the “Next” button below indicates that you are 18 years of age or older and indicates your consent to participate in this questionnaire.

Date: / / .



## ورقة المعلومات المتعلقة بالمشاركة باللغة العربية (Arabic Sheet of Information)

يرجى أخذ الوقت لقراءة ورقة المعلومات التالية قبل اتخاذ قرار المشاركة من عدمه في بحثي هذا. بالنقر على زر "التالي" أدناه يشير إلى أن عمرك 18 سنة من العمر أو أكثر، ويشير إلى موافقتك على المشاركة في هذا الاستبيان علماً بأن الاستبيان لن يأخذ من الوقت غالباً أكثر من 10 دقائق. أنت حر في الانسحاب من البحث في أي وقت، دون إبداء أسباب. وستبقى كل المعلومات التي تقدم في الملفات لدى الباحث مضمونة السرية و مجهولة المصدر. بالتواصل مع الباحث عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني عند الانتهاء من أطروحة دكتوراه تستطيع الحصول على فرصة قراءة نتائج الاستبيان إذا كنت ترغب.

### ما هو الغرض من هذه الدراسة؟

والغرض الرئيسي من هذه الدراسة هو اكتشاف ما إذا كان زيادة انتشار الصحف الإلكترونية غيرت من تصورات السعوديين حول وسائل الإعلام التقليدية من خلال تطبيق الأساليب الكمية والنوعية بين 787 من الذكور والإناث المتعلمين في السعودية (على الرغم من أن البحث لن ينتهج تحليل المعلومات على أساس نوع الجنس) في المنطقتين الأعلى تعداداً للسكان في السعودية.

## لماذا وجهت لك الدعوة؟

وتركز هذه الدراسة على مصداقية الصحف المطبوعة والإلكترونية في المملكة العربية السعودية بين المواطنين السعوديين المتعلمين فالطبقة المستهدفة هي طبقة المواطنين السعوديين المتعلمين الذين أعمارهم فوق 18 سنة من المنطقة الوسطى والمنطقة الغربية لذلك انت مدعو للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة كمتطوع

## ماذا سيحدث إذا قررت المشاركة؟

وهذه الدراسة تقوم بإجراء هذا الاستبيان على الانترنت للكشف عن أنماط الاستهلاك ومعدلات المصداقية للصحف المحلية المطبوعة والألكترونية في المملكة العربية السعودية والذي سوف يستغرق حوالي 10 دقائق، سيتم الاحتفاظ بجميع المعلومات الخاصة بك في ملفات مضمونة السرية ومجهولة المصدر

## ما الذي يجب أن أقوم به؟

يجب عليك أولاً قراءة ورقة المعلومات هذه وبعد ذلك بالضغط على زر "التالي" أدناه فإنك تشير إلى أن عمرك 18 سنة من العمر أو أكثر، وتشير إلى موافقتك على المشاركة في هذا الاستبيان. بعد ذلك يمكنك البدء في ملء الاستبيان على الانترنت من جهاز الكمبيوتر الخاص بك والتي لن تستغرق أكثر من 10 دقائق

## ما هي عيوب والمخاطر المحتملة من المشاركة؟

لا توجد مخاطر متوقعة لك إذا كنت تشارك في هذه الدراسة

## ما هي فوائد ممكنة من المشاركة؟

لا نستطيع أن نعدك بشيء محدد ولكن مشاركتك سوف تساعد على إتمام هذه الدراسة والتي بدورها ستساعد على زيادة فهم مصداقية الصحافة المطبوعة والإلكترونية في المملكة العربية السعودية

## ماذا لو كان لدي المزيد من الأسئلة؟

إذا كان لديك قلق حول أي جانب من جوانب هذه الدراسة، فعليك التحدث إلى الباحث الذي سوف يبذل قصارى جهده للإجابة على الأسئلة الخاصة بك

اسم الباحث: عبدالله محمد مقبول

الهاتف (00447848687656 و 00966505241341)

البريد الإلكتروني (almaqbul@hotmail.com & A.M.A.Maqbul @edu.salford.ac.uk)

البحوث اسم المشرف: الدكتور كارول أوريلي

البريد الإلكتروني (C.OReilly@salford.ac.uk)

**كيف سيتم حفظ معلومات المشاركة في هذه الدراسة لتكون سرية؟**

ستحفظ جميع المعلومات التي يتم جمعها عنك أثناء البحث في سرية تامة، وستتم إزالة أية معلومات عنك بحيث لا يمكن التعرف عليك.

وسيتم جمع البيانات على النحو التالي:

• سيتم تخزينها بشكل آمن على النحو التالي:

البيانات البحثية التابعة للمشاركين الأفراد سواء كانت: استبيانات / مقابلات / عينات / سوف تكون مجهولة - بدون أسماء وسيتم ترميز هذه المعلومات فقط لهدف إكمال البحث وهذه الرموز ستكون معروفة فقط للباحث

البيانات الموجودة على نسخ ورقية سيتم تخزينها في مكتب مغلق وآمن من الوصول إليها إلا من قبل الباحث -

يتم تخزين البيانات الإلكترونية على جهاز كمبيوتر محمي بكلمة مرور لا يعرفها إلا الباحث -

لن يتم استخدام هذه البيانات لدراسات مستقبلية -

الباحث والمشرف فقط يستطيعان الوصول إلى عرض هذه البيانات -

سيتم الاحتفاظ بهذه المعلومات فقط لمدة 3 سنوات، وبعدها سيتم التخلص منها بشكل آمن -

**ماذا سيحدث لنتائج هذه الدراسة البحثية؟**

وسوف تكون النتائج متوفرة من خلال مكتبة جامعة سالفورد في بريطانيا ولن يتم التعرف على المشاركين في أي تقرير / نشر قبل الحصول على الموافقة مسبقا على ذلك. إذا كان لديك أسئلة أو ترغب في نسخة أو ملخص لنتائج هذه الدراسة، يمكنك الاتصال بالباحث على عنوان البريد الإلكتروني أعلاه

بالنقر على زر "التالي" أدناه تشير إلى أن عمرك 18 سنة من العمر أو أكثر، وتشير إلى موافقتك على المشاركة في هذا الاستبيان

## **Appendix D**

### **Participant Information Sheet & Consent for Interview**

#### **English Sheet of Information**

##### **Study Title**

The Credibility of News in Saudi Arabia: A Comparative Study of Print Newspapers with their Online Counterparts and Online Exclusively Newspapers among Saudis.

##### **Invitation paragraph**

I would like to invite you to volunteer to take part in my doctoral research project as an interviewee to an interview. The purpose of my research is to discover whether the rise of online newspapers has changed Saudis' perceptions of traditional media. You will be one of 30 educated Saudi males and females interviewed in Western region which is one of the most populous regions of the country, so you are invited to take part in this study.

Please take time to read the following information sheet on the project before deciding whether or not to take part in my research. Signing this form below indicates that you are 18 years of age or older and indicates your consent to participate in this interview. The interview should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. You are free to withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason. All information you provide will be kept in secured files by the researcher and will be anonymized to preserve confidentiality. I will let you know by email when my PhD dissertation has been completed and will give you the opportunity to read it, should you wish.

##### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The primary purpose of this study is to discover whether the rise of online newspapers have changed Saudis' perceptions of traditional media by applying qualitative

and quantitative methods among 787 educated Saudi males and females (though the research is not a gender-based analysis) in the two regions of the highest population census. However, the women interviews will be conducted through phone because of gender segregation.

### **Why have I been invited?**

This study focuses on the credibility of print and online newspapers in Saudi Arabia among educated Saudis, so its target sample is planned to be educated Saudi citizens who are above 18 years old from Central region and Western region, so you are invited to take part in this study as a volunteer.

### **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide. We will describe the study and go through the information sheet combined with the consent statement, which we will give to you. Signing this form below indicates that you are 18 years of age or older and indicates your consent to participate in this interview. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

### **What will happen if I decide to take part?**

This study will conduct an interview about defining credibility and clarifying the patterns of consumption and rates of credibility for local print and online newspapers in Saudi Arabia of the aforementioned study questionnaire which will take approximately 15 minutes so after your completion, all your information will be kept in secured files and will be anonymized for confidential reasons. After completing the entire research project, you can receive a link to your email by contacting the researcher to get access to the entire project including the interview results.

### **What will I have to do?**

You should first read information sheet then sign it in the end if you decide to do so. After, you will be asked about the patterns of consumption and rates of credibility for



local print and online newspapers in Saudi Arabia as well as the credibility definition which will not take more than 15 minutes.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There are no anticipated risks to you if you participate in this study, beyond those encountered in everyday life.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

We cannot promise the study will help you but the information we get from the study will help to increase the understanding of the credibility of print and online newspapers in Saudi Arabia

**What if I have more questions?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should ask to speak to the researcher who will do his best to answer your questions:

The Researcher Name: Abdullah Maqbul

Phone (00447848687656 & 00966505241341)

Email (almaqbul@hotmail.com & a.m.a.maqbul@edu.salford.ac.uk)

The Research Supervisor Name: Dr. Carole O'Reilly

Email (C.OReilly@salford.ac.uk)

**Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential, and any information about you will be removed so the university will have your name and address removed so that you cannot be recognised.

The data will be collected as follows:

- that it will be stored safely, giving the custodian and level of identification, for example:
  - individual participant research data, such questionnaires/interviews/samples/ will be anonymous and given a research code, known only to the researcher.
  - hard paper/taped data will be stored in a locked cabinet, within locked office, accessed only by researcher
  - electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer known only by researcher
- The data will not be used for future studies.
- The researcher and the supervisor will access to view identifiable data.
- The data will be retained for about 3 years and then it will be disposed of securely.

**What will happen if I don't carry on with the study?**

If you withdraw from the study I will destroy all your identifiable samples/ tape recorded interviews, but we will need to use the data collected up to your withdrawal.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of the study will be available through the library of University of Salford. The participants will not be identified in any report/publication unless they have given their consent. If you have questions or want a copy or summary of this study's results, you can contact the researcher at the email address above.

**Who is organising or sponsoring the research?**

Abdullah Maqbul, a PhD researcher.

Signing this form below indicates that you are 18 years of age or older and indicates your consent to participate in this interview.

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## ورقة المعلومات المتعلقة بالمشاركة باللغة العربية (Arabic Sheet of Information)

يرجى أخذ الوقت لقراءة ورقة المعلومات التالية قبل اتخاذ قرار المشاركة من عدمه في بحثي هذا. بتوقيع هذا النموذج وإرساله أو الرد على الإيميل بالموافقة فأنت تشير إلى بالنقر أن عمرك 18 سنة من العمر أو أكثر، وتشير إلى موافقتك على المشاركة في هذه المقابلة علماً بأن المقابلة قد تأخذ من الوقت غالباً من 25 دقيقة إلى 45 دقيقة. أنت حر في الانسحاب من المشاركة في أي وقت، دون إبداء أسباب. وستبقى كل المعلومات التي تقدم في الملفات لدى الباحث مضمونة السرية و مجهولة المصدر. بالتواصل مع الباحث عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني عند الانتهاء من أطروحة دكتوراه تستطيع الحصول على فرصة قراءة نتائج المقابلة إذا كنت ترغب.

**ما هو الغرض من هذه الدراسة؟**

والغرض الرئيسي من هذه الدراسة هو اكتشاف ما إذا كان زيادة انتشار الصحف الإلكترونية غيرت من تصورات السعوديين حول وسائل الإعلام التقليدية من خلال تطبيق الأساليب الكمية والنوعية بين 787 من الذكور والإناث المتعلمين في السعودية (على الرغم من أن البحث لن ينتهج تحليل المعلومات على أساس نوع الجنس) في المنطقتين الأعلى تعداداً للسكان في السعودية.

**لماذا وجهت لك الدعوة؟**

وتركز هذه الدراسة على مصداقية الصحف المطبوعة والإلكترونية في المملكة العربية السعودية بين المواطنين السعوديين المتعلمين فالطبقة المستهدفة هي طبقة المواطنين السعوديين المتعلمين الذين أعمارهم فوق 18 سنة من المنطقة الوسطى والمنطقة الغربية لذلك أنت مدعو للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة كمتطوع.

**ماذا سيحدث إذا قررت المشاركة؟**

وهذه الدراسة تقوم بإجراء هذه المقابلة لتفسير استبيان الدراسة الذي سبق وشاركت فيه على الانترنت للكشف عن أنماط الاستهلاك ومعدلات المصداقية للصحف المحلية المطبوعة والإلكترونية في المملكة العربية السعودية ، سيتم الاحتفاظ بجميع المعلومات الخاصة بك في ملفات مضمونة السرية ومجهولة المصدر. أما إذا لم يسبق لك المشاركة في استبيان هذه الدراسة فإننا نعتذر إليك في عدم مناسبة مشاركتك في هذه المقابلة وشكراً.

**ما هو الغرض من هذه الدراسة؟**

والغرض الرئيسي من هذه الدراسة هو اكتشاف ما إذا كان زيادة انتشار الصحف الإلكترونية غيرت من تصورات السعوديين حول وسائل الإعلام التقليدية من خلال تطبيق الأساليب الكمية والنوعية بين 787 من الذكور والإناث المتعلمين في السعودية (على الرغم من أن البحث لن ينتهج تحليل المعلومات على أساس نوع الجنس) في المنطقتين الأعلى تعدادا للسكان في السعودية.

#### لماذا وجهت لك الدعوة؟

وتركز هذه الدراسة على مصداقية الصحف المطبوعة والإلكترونية في المملكة العربية السعودية بين المواطنين السعوديين المتعلمين فالطبقة المستهدفة هي طبقة المواطنين السعوديين المتعلمين الذين أعمارهم فوق 18 سنة من المنطقة الوسطى والمنطقة الغربية لذلك أنت مدعو للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة كمتطوع.

#### ماذا سيحدث إذا قررت المشاركة؟

وهذه الدراسة تقوم بإجراء هذا الاستبيان على الانترنت للكشف عن أنماط الاستهلاك ومعدلات المصداقية للصحف المحلية المطبوعة والألكترونية في المملكة العربية السعودية والذي سوف يستغرق حوالي 10 دقائق، سيتم الاحتفاظ بجميع المعلومات الخاصة بك في ملفات مضمونة السرية ومجهولة المصدر.

#### ما الذي يجب أن أقوم به؟

يجب عليك أولاً قراءة ورقة المعلومات هذه وبعد الرد على الإيميل بالموافقة أو توقيع هذه الورقة أدناه فإنك تشير إلى أن عمرك 18 سنة من العمر أو أكثر، وتشير إلى موافقتك على المشاركة في هذه المقابلة. بعد ذلك سيتم التواصل معك لتحديد الزمان والمكان المناسب لإجراء المقابلة.

#### ما هي عيوب والمخاطر المحتملة من المشاركة؟

لا توجد مخاطر متوقعة لك إذا كنت تشارك في هذه الدراسة.

#### ما هي فوائد ممكنة من المشاركة؟

لا نستطيع أن نعدك بشيء محدد ولكن مشاركتك سوف تساعد على إتمام هذه الدراسة والتي بدورها ستساعد على زيادة فهم مصداقية الصحافة المطبوعة والإلكترونية في المملكة العربية السعودية.

#### ماذا لو كان لدي المزيد من الأسئلة؟

إذا كان لديك قلق حول أي جانب من جوانب هذه الدراسة، فعليك التحدث إلى الباحث الذي سوف يبذل قصارى جهده للإجابة على الأسئلة الخاصة بك:

اسم الباحث: عبدالله محمد مقبول

الهاتف (00447848687656 و 00966505241341)

البريد الإلكتروني (almaqbul@hotmail.com & A.M.A.Maqbul @edu.salford.ac.uk)

البحوث اسم المشرف: الدكتور كارول أوريلي

البريد الإلكتروني (C.OReilly@salford.ac.uk)

**كيف سيتم حفظ معلومات المشاركة في هذه الدراسة لتكون سرية؟**

ستحفظ جميع المعلومات التي يتم جمعها عنك أثناء البحث في سرية تامة، وستتم إزالة أية معلومات عنك بحيث لا يمكن التعرف عليك

وسيتم جمع البيانات على النحو التالي

• سيتم تخزينها بشكل آمن على النحو التالي

البيانات البحثية التابعة للمشاركين الأفراد سواء كانت: استبيانات / مقابلات / عينات / سوف تكون مجهولة - بدون أسماء وسيتم ترميز هذه المعلومات فقط لهدف إكمال البحث وهذه الرموز ستكون معروفة فقط للباحث

البيانات الموجودة على نسخ ورقية سيتم تخزينها في مكتب مغلق وآمن من الوصول إليها إلا من قبل الباحث -

يتم تخزين البيانات الإلكترونية على جهاز كمبيوتر محمي بكلمة مرور لا يعرفها إلا الباحث -

لن يتم استخدام هذه البيانات لدراسات مستقبلية -

الباحث والمشرف فقط يستطيعان الوصول إلى عرض هذه البيانات -

سيتم الاحتفاظ بهذه المعلومات فقط لمدة 3 سنوات، وبعدها سيتم التخلص منها بشكل آمن -

**ماذا سيحدث لنتائج هذه الدراسة البحثية؟**

وسوف تكون النتائج متوفرة من خلال مكتبة جامعة سالفورد في بريطانيا ولن يتم التعرف على المشاركين في أي تقرير / نشر قبل الحصول على الموافقة مسبقا على ذلك. إذا كان لديك أسئلة أو ترغب في نسخة أو ملخص لنتائج هذه الدراسة، يمكنك الاتصال بالباحث على عنوان البريد الإلكتروني أعلاه

بالنقر على زر "التالي" أدناه تشير إلى أن عمرك 18 سنة من العمر أو أكثر، وتشير إلى موافقتك على المشاركة في هذا الاستبيان

**ما هي عيوب والمخاطر المحتملة من المشاركة؟**

لا توجد مخاطر متوقعة لك إذا كنت تشارك في هذه الدراسة

**ما هي فوائد ممكنة من المشاركة؟**

لا نستطيع أن نعدك بشيء محدد ولكن مشاركتك سوف تساعد على إتمام هذه الدراسة والتي بدورها ستساعد على زيادة فهم مصداقية الصحافة المطبوعة والإلكترونية في المملكة العربية السعودية

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البحوث اسم المشرف: الدكتور كارول أوريلي

البريد الإلكتروني (C.OReilly@salford.ac.uk)

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:وسيتم جمع البيانات على النحو التالي

• سيتم تخزينها بشكل آمن على النحو التالي:

البيانات البحثية التابعة للمشاركين الأفراد سواء كانت: استبيانات / مقابلات / عينات / سوف تكون مجهولة - بدون أسماء وسيتم ترميز هذه المعلومات فقط لهدف إكمال البحث وهذه الرموز ستكون معروفة فقط للباحث

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سيتم الاحتفاظ بهذه المعلومات فقط لمدة 3 سنوات، وبعدها سيتم التخلص منها بشكل آمن -

**ماذا سيحدث لنتائج هذه الدراسة البحثية؟**

وسوف تكون النتائج متوفرة من خلال مكتبة جامعة سالفورد في بريطانيا ولن يتم التعرف على المشاركين في أي تقرير / نشر قبل الحصول على الموافقة مسبقا على ذلك. إذا كان لديك أسئلة أو ترغب في نسخة أو ملخص لنتائج هذه الدراسة، يمكنك الاتصال بالباحث على عنوان البريد الإلكتروني أعلاه

# Appendix E

## The Ethical Approval



Research, Innovation and Academic  
Engagement Ethical Approval Panel

Research Centres Support Team  
G0.3 Joule House  
University of Salford  
M5 4WT

T +44(0)161 295 7012

[www.salford.ac.uk/](http://www.salford.ac.uk/)

31 October 2016

Dear Abdullah,

**RE: ETHICS APPLICATION AMR1617-03 – The Credibility of News in Saudi Arabia: A Comparative Study of Print Newspapers and Online Newspapers among Saudis**

Based on the information you provided, I am pleased to inform you that your application AMR1617-03 has been approved.

If there are any changes to the project and/ or its methodology, please inform the Panel as soon as possible by contacting [A&M-ResearchEthics@salford.ac.uk](mailto:A&M-ResearchEthics@salford.ac.uk)

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Newbery'.

Dr Samantha Newbery  
Chair of the Arts & Media Research Ethics Panel  
Lecturer in Contemporary Intelligence Studies  
School of Arts and Media  
Crescent House, CH210  
University of Salford  
Salford M5 4WT  
t: +44 (0) 161 295 3860  
[s.l.newbery@salford.ac.uk](mailto:s.l.newbery@salford.ac.uk)