



MEDIA DEPENDENCY DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND TRUST IN GOVERNMENT: THE CASE OF BAHRAIN

Hussein Khalifa Hassan Khalifa

Assistant Professor at Radio and Television Department,
Faculty of Mass Communication, Cairo University, Egypt

ORCID iD: 0000-0002-9260-480X

ABSTRACT

Trust in government indicates a general perception of the government's competence in dealing with crises effectively, which impact political stability. Grounded in the media system dependency theory, this study examines the impact of traditional and new media dependency on trust in government in the context of Bahrain. Therefore, this study proposes to fill this gap by providing empirical evidence leading to advancement in the understanding of media role during covid-19 in enhancing trust in government. To achieve this, the questionnaire was distributed electronically by using google forms. A sample of 463 Bahrainis was selected using non-random sampling methods. The results of this study revealed that the Newspaper and Radio dependency have no impact in predicting trust in government during the covid-19 pandemic. Further, the findings showed a positive relationship between news website dependency and trust in government. However, the relationship was found to be negative between Television and social media dependency and trust in government.

Key words: Bahrain: COVID-19; Media Dependency; Trust in Government

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1. INTRODUCTION

People in modern societies in which they live are affected by many crises and situations, such as floods, fires, and terrorist attacks. Regardless of where a person lives, many types of crises have the potential to disrupt daily life. Two factors influence the reactions of people during crises, namely, who bears responsibility for the crisis, and the type of information that people receive about the crisis (Bakker M. H., Bommel, Kerstholt, & Giebels, 2018).

Trust in government during crises indicates a general perception of the government's competence in dealing with crises effectively. Trust in government is an important factor in

dealing with disasters. People with a high level of trust in government are more likely to cooperate with the government by following government instructions that relate to a rapid return to normal life after a crisis (Zhu, Liu, Kapucu, & Peng, 2020). And vice versa, as individuals who lose confidence in the government cannot cooperate with it.

The primary function of the media is censorship, which enables the public to perceive events and changes in their social environment, and the common consensus among citizens in the search for information will become a catalyst for social change. The knowledge, information, and opinions obtained from the media provide a basis for individuals to establish links with communities and social networks and participate in civic and public activities (Zhang & Zhong, 2020).

Based on this, many previous studies have examined the effect of the media on political phenomena. Such as the role of social media in stimulating the political participation of citizens via the Internet (Arshad & Khurram, 2020), Interactions between the government and the citizen via social media (Aladwani & Dwivedi, 2018). Some previous studies have employed the concept of psychological distance when studying citizens' use of e-government websites and social media accounts for the public sector (Porumbescu, 2016).

In light of crises, reliance on the media represents one of the most important tools and cognitive factors that are important and influence in society, as they have the ability to form knowledge and trends of public opinion on the various aspects of the crisis and its causes and the performance of government institutions regarding it as the main means in the field of producing information and knowledge that form the basis of responses Cognitive and emotional public opinion (Khalifa & Ahmed, The social responsibility of talk shows on Bahraini Television in dealing with the legislative authority's performance, 2020).

During the Corona pandemic, previous studies focused on some research phenomena, such as analyzing the content of news clips published on the Internet (Basch, et al., 2020). The phenomenon of "panic buying" was also studied as a result of news reports broadcast by the media during the pandemic (Arafat, et al., 2020). Some of these studies, especially in Bahrain, focused on the health aspects related to the pandemic, not the political aspects (Khalifa, 2020).

Empirical studies exploring the link between media dependency and trust in government, however, have produced inconsistent results. While some studies report a positive effect of media use on trust in government (Khalifa, 2020). Others find a negative effect (Khalifa, 2018) or there is little evidence to support the argument that Internet use is contributing to civic decline (Boulianne, 2009).

To addresses this discrepancy in the existing literature, we take a media system dependency (MSD) approach to the study of media activities and political trust. We advocate for the use of media indicators of political trust and maintain that dependency on media resources is more relevant than simple exposure metrics. Hence, the main purpose of this study is to explore the relationships between Newspaper, Radio, Television, News websites, Social media and trust in the government during the covid_19 Pandemic.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Media Dependency Theory

MSD was introduced in 1976 by Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur's. MSD posits that the control of the media system over sources of information and knowledge generates interdependence relationships between the media and social systems (the structural dependency of the media) and the relationships of individual dependency with the media dependency (Media individuality) (Lyu, 2012).

MSD is considered in its entirety an environmental theory as it focuses on the relationships existing between the different systems in the same society, based on the principle that society is a multi-system organic structure between "small and large systems" that interconnect and interact with each other in mutual relations. Among them is the relationship of the media with individuals, groups, organizations, social systems, institutions, and political entities (Abdulgaksoud, 2018).

Dependence can be defined as a relationship in which the ability of individuals to achieve their goals depends on the sources of information on which the media system depends. The theory is based on two basic pillars: the goals that individuals seek to achieve from their dependence on the media, whether they are personal or social goals, and the sources where the media is an information system that individuals seek to achieve their goals, and the media controls three types of information sources: Information gathering, coordination, and dissemination of information to reach the public (Al-Azazi, 2016).

According to the MSD, there are three main goals of relying on the media: Understanding; this objective includes processing information to know what is going on in the local and external surroundings and interpreting it, whether it is self-understanding, such as obtaining knowledge and experience that helps to understand and develop oneself or social understanding to know and understand the outside world. Orientation; includes interacting with individuals in society and dealing with new or difficult situations easily and easily, and directing the behavior of people towards taking specific decisions (Action-Oriented) or Interaction-Oriented to obtain a reaction on how to deal with new situations. In addition to playing, to contribute to getting rid of stress and boredom, whether it is solitary play, such as relaxation away from people, or social play, such as social companionship (Al-Samarrai, 2019).

The type and degree of audience dependence in modern society on information from the media depend on two basic conditions: Conflicts, changes, and instability in society; as the public's dependence on the media increases during crises, wars, accidents and disasters to find out more information and the degree of importance of the media as a source of information in society; Where dependence on the media is a feature that distinguishes societies to understand the surrounding social world and to undertake social behavior in a meaningful way as well as to escape to the world of imagination and entertainment (Nuri, 2020).

The MSD identifies a set of influences resulting from individuals' dependence on the media, which are as follows: Cognitive Effects; it is defined as Ambiguity, Attitude Formation, Agenda Setting, Enlargement of Belief, and the Promotion and Preservation of Values. Affective Effects; it is defined as fear, anxiety, desensitization, increased or decreased feelings of alienation (Morale & Alienation). Also, Behavioral Effects; and it is confined to two basic behaviors, namely activation, that is, the individual doing something as a result of exposure to the means, and it may be a positive beneficial or negative, harmful behavior, and lethargy (deactivation), that is, the media making the individual avoid doing the work (Al-Azazi, 2016).

The MSD is based on a set of main assumptions (Hamed, 2018):

- The degree of stability of the social system and its general balance varies as a result of continuous changes, and according to this difference, the need for information and news increases and decreases—correct interpretation of events.
- The social structure of the media (access to information, ease of use, etc.) has an effect on the motives for searching for information, as the degree of dependence on the media system prevailing in society increases in the case of a few other media channels

and reliance on it decreases in the case of alternative channels. For news and information.

- Individuals differ in the degree of their dependence on the media as a result of their disagreement on the goals they seek to achieve, whether they are personal or social, and the individual interests and needs related to obtaining information. These goals and needs are linked to demographic variables (gender, age, education, socio-economic level, in determining the strength of dependence on the media.
- The possibility of achieving the media message of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral influences increases when media systems provide distinct information services, and the effect increases in case of conflict and crises.
- The more media-dependent individuals are more likely to persuade and quasi-social interaction with others.

Based on similar premises, this study hypothesizes that:

H1. Newspapers dependency will predict trust in government.

H2. Radio dependency will predict trust in government.

H3. Television dependency will predict trust in government.

H4. News website dependency will predict trust in government.

H5. Social media dependency will predict trust in government.

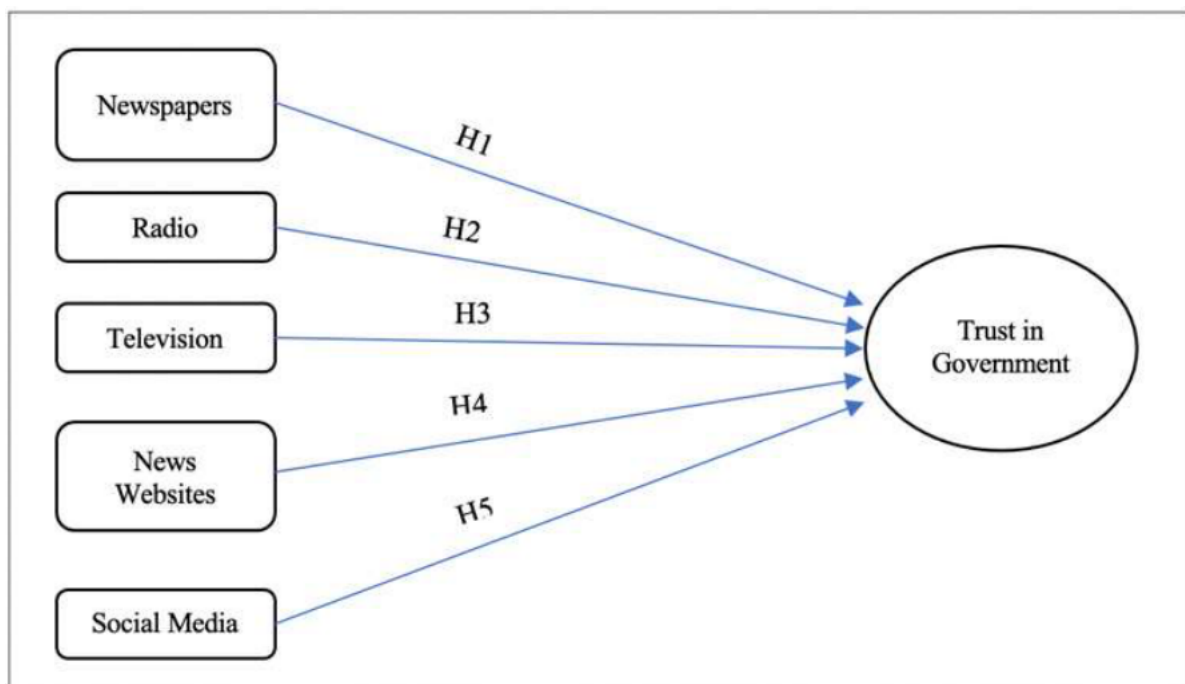


Figure 1 Theoretical Model of Media Dependency and Trust in Government

3. DATA AND MEASUREMENT

3.1. Sampling

The data analyzed below came from an online questionnaire in Bahrain, by using google forms, conducted in September 2020. According to the Information and eGovernment Authority in Bahrain, the population of Bahrainis in 2020 has reached 702.000 (iga.gov.bh, 2020). Due to the unavailability of the sampling frame, and not seeking to generalize the results, self-selection, and convenience non-probability sampling techniques were applied.

The questionnaire was distributed by mail, social media, and WhatsApp groups of friends and acquaintances of the author with a request to further disseminate it to include as many participants as possible. A total number of 463 Bahrainis completed the online survey. Table 1 contains further details about the characteristics of respondents.

Table 1 Analysis of answers on demographic characteristics

Demographic element	Characteristics	Numbers	Percentage
Gender	Male	236	51
	Female	227	49
Age	18-29	220	47.5
	30-44	177	38.2
	45-and above	66	14.3
Education	High school incomplete	89	19.2
	High school graduate / Diploma	110	23.8
	Bachelor's degree	228	49.2
	Postgraduates (Master/ PhD)	36	7.8

3.2. Operational definitions and measures

All measurement items used in this study were adopted from prior studies and adapted to fit the COVID_19 context. Specifically, Newspapers dependency is defined as the degree to which one relies on the medium of one's first choice to meet the goals and needs (Li, 2014). The measure of newspaper dependency was adopted from (Li, 2014) which was adapted from (Ball-Rokeach, 1984), and (Grant, 1996). It includes six items based on the statement: during COVID_19 pandemic, I rely on newspapers to (1) make decisions; (2) understand and interact with others; (3) set up personal goals; (4) understand the society; (5) relax and enjoy my life; (6) understand media's role in society. The answers were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In this study, Cronbach's α for newspaper dependency was 0.83. Radio dependency was measured by using the same scale of newspaper dependency where the newspaper was replaced by radio. In this study, Cronbach's α for radio dependency was 0.85. Television dependency was measured by using the same scale of Newspapers dependency where the newspaper was replaced by television. In this study, Cronbach's α for television dependency was 0.86. News website dependency was measured by using the same scale of Newspapers dependency where the newspaper was replaced by news website. In this study, Cronbach's α for news website dependency was 0.87. Social media dependency was measured by using the same scale of newspapers dependency where the newspaper was replaced by Social media. In this study, Cronbach's α for Social media dependency was 0.89. Trust in government: the measure of trust in government was adopted from (Bakker M. H., Bommel, Kerstholt, & Giebels, 2018) study where trust was measured by using three dimensions: "competence, openness, honesty and expertise", and "concern and care". Respondents were asked to what extent they characterize the government as, for example, helpful, sincere, intelligent, skillful, accurate and credible during COVID_19 pandemic. Therefore, a trust scale was created by averaging the scores on these three dimensions. In this study, Cronbach's α for trust in government was 0.91. A higher score on this scale means more trust in the government.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 shows direct impacts for the variables included in the model. The estimated coefficients provided support for three out of the five hypotheses of this study. The exception was H1 which posited that there was no effect of Newspaper dependency in predicting trust in government during covid-19 pandemic in Bahrain ($\beta = 0.093$, Sig= 0.057, $p > 0.05$). Also, H2

posited that there was no effect of Radio dependency in predicting trust in government ($\beta = -0.009$, Sig= 0.86, $p > 0.05$). As assumed by H3 to H5, trust in government was predicted by Television dependency ($\beta = -0.115$, Sig= 0.033, $p < 0.05$), News websites dependency ($\beta = 0.247$, Sig= 0.000, $p < 0.05$), and the Social media dependency ($\beta = -0.195$, Sig= 0.000, $p < 0.05$). The regression model was fitted. The model explains (0.77) of variance with trust in government and was found to be significant ($F = 7.66$, sig= 0.000). When the betas of the Television, News websites, and Social media are compared, television measured -0.115, News websites measured 0.247, and social media measured -0.195, which signifies that news websites have a stronger impact on trust in government than social media and television. Also, it indicates that television and social media have a negative impact on trust in government than news websites. To verify the existence of the mentioned relationship, a multi collinearity test was carried out. The results revealed that the VIF factor of the model was (1.1, 1.4, 1.4, 1.4, 1.3), indicating the non-existence of multi-collinearity problems. Thus, the results indicate the following relationship for trust in government with Television, News websites, and Social media (Table 2). Trust in government= (-0.115 television) + (0.247News websites) + (-0.195social media) + error term.

Table 2 Multilevel Regression Coefficients Predicting Trust in Government

Predictors	R ²	F	Sig	Beta	Sig	VIF factor
Newspaper				0.093	0.057*	1.1
Radio	0.077	7.66	0.000	-0.009	0.86*	1.4
Television				-0.115	0.033*	1.4
News websites				0.247	0.000*	1.4
Social media				-0.195	0.000*	1.3

* $p < 0.05$

For additional analysis, as shown in Table 3, to examine the relationship between gender, education, and age, and trust in government regression analysis was employed. The three variables (gender, education, and age) were used as independents variables with trust in government as a dependent variable. The regression model was fitted. The model explained (0.91) of variance with trust in government and was found to be significant ($F = 15.33$, sig= 0.000). The results revealed that gender ($\beta = -0.098$, Sig= 0.030, $p < 0.05$), and education ($\beta = 0.288$, Sig= 0.000, $p < 0.05$) were significant predictors of trust in government while age ($\beta = 0.078$, Sig= 0.085, $p > 0.05$) was not a significantly predictor of trust in government. When the betas of the gender and education are compared, gender measured -0.098 and education measured 0.288, which signifies that education has a stronger impact on trust in government than gender. Also, it indicates that gender has a negative impact on trust in government than education. To verify the existence of the mentioned relationship, a multicollinearity test was carried out. The results revealed that the VIF factor of the model was (1.01, 1.01, 1.03), indicating the non-existence of multi-collinearity problems.

Table 3 Multilevel Regression Coefficients for the Additional Analyzing

Predictors	R ²	F	Sig	Beta	Sig	VIF factor
Gender				-0.098	0.030*	1.01
Education	0.091	15.33	0.000	0.288	0.000*	1.01
Age				0.078	0.085*	1.03

* $p < 0.05$

5. CONCLUSION

Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur's explained that the social system has become more complicated, as the public in modern society depends on the media for news. Reliance on specific media

outlets for news has become a critical variable in understanding the media's effects. Trust in government is an important factor in dealing with crises. People who have a high level of trust in the government are likely to cooperate with the government by following government instructions that relate to a quick return to normal life after crises, and vice versa, as individuals who lose confidence in the government cannot cooperate it. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between Newspaper, Radio, Television, News websites, Social media dependency, and trust in the government during the covid_19 Pandemic. SPSS was used to analyze and interpret the data. It was found that Newspaper and Radio dependency have no impact in predicting trust in government during covid-19 pandemic. A positive relationship has been found between news website dependency and trust in government. However, the relationship was found to be negative between Television, and social media dependency and trust in government.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research has been carried out in Bahrain with a non-probability sample of respondents, and hence the results cannot be generalized. Further, it examined five independent variables. Therefore, there can be future studies to investigate the same issue with a probability sample, whether in Bahrain or in other Arab countries. Also, it will be fruitful to explore the relationship between media dependency and trust in government, e.g., political efficacy, political engagement, and political ideology.

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