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THE ROLE OF LEBANESE ELECTRONIC JOURNALISM IN SHAPING PUBLIC ATTITUDES DURING POLITICAL CRISES: A FIELD STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines audience exposure to Lebanese electronic newspapers during political crises, their level of reliance, and changes in following opinion articles. It also explores the influence of cultural and political factors on public attitudes. Using a descriptive-analytical approach, a questionnaire was administered to 400 respondents (January–April 2025), and data were analyzed using SPSS. Findings show that electronic journalism has stronger cognitive and emotional effects than behavioral impact, which remains limited. Moreover, public attitudes are shaped by exposure, trust, political affiliations, and crisis context. Therefore, the study concludes that electronic journalism plays a key role in shaping perceptions and recommends enhancing media literacy.

KEYWORDS: Electronic Journalism, Public Attitudes, Political Crises, Media Effects, Media Dependency, Lebanon.

1. INTRODUCTION

The media constitutes a key factor in shaping political attitudes, as its role extends beyond merely transmitting information to influencing patterns of thinking, constructing viewpoints, and guiding behavior. Its importance becomes even more pronounced during political crises, when uncertainty increases and competing narratives multiply, making audiences more susceptible to media content.

Within this context, electronic journalism has emerged as an influential media actor in shaping political attitudes, owing to its wide reach, rapid dissemination of content, and its capacity for real-time interaction with audiences. The nature of the digital environment has also contributed to strengthening interpretative and analytical discourse, particularly through opinion articles, which play a central role in articulating political positions.

Against this background, examining the role of the media in shaping political attitudes becomes particularly significant in the Lebanese context, which is characterized by diverse political and sectarian affiliations. Amid the escalation of recurring political crises, media content becomes an active factor in shaping public perceptions of the nature of these crises, interpreting their causes, and influencing audiences' positions toward political actors and proposed solutions.

The theoretical framework of this study draws on Media Dependency Theory, which explains the relationship between exposure to media content and the formation of political attitudes within a context marked by the interaction of multiple attitudinal dimensions. This relationship becomes especially evident during periods of political crisis, when the demand for information and interpretation tends to increase.

Accordingly, this study seeks to analyze the role of Lebanese electronic journalism in shaping audience political attitudes during crises. It does so by examining the relationship between exposure to opinion articles and levels of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral influence, as well as by identifying the extent to which audience orientations converge with or diverge from the prevailing media discourse.

Chapter I: Theoretical And Methodological Framework

This chapter constitutes a foundational entry point for the study, as it situates the reader within the scientific and methodological frameworks upon which the research is based. It outlines the conceptual, theoretical, and procedural dimensions

guiding the investigation of the role of Lebanese electronic journalism in shaping audience attitudes during political crises.

1. Research Problem

Media outlets play a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions of political issues, particularly during periods of crisis characterized by heightened uncertainty and the proliferation of competing narratives. With the expansion of digital transformation, electronic journalism has become one of the most prominent sources of political information and analysis. This development has strengthened its presence in audiences' daily lives and increased exposure to its content during political crises.

Within the Lebanese context, where the political environment is marked by divisions and multiple affiliations, the influence of electronic journalistic content on audience attitudes remains a complex issue shaped by several factors, including prior political affiliations, levels of trust in media institutions, and patterns of media exposure. Despite the abundance of opinion discourse in electronic newspapers, its role in shaping public attitudes during crises is still not fully clear.

Therefore, the problem of this field study centers on the need to measure the level of influence exerted by Lebanese electronic journalism on audience attitudes during political crises. This is explored by examining the relationship between exposure to opinion articles, the degree of reliance on them, and the orientations adopted by the audience. In light of this, the central research question guiding the study is formulated as follows:

What role does electronic journalistic coverage play in shaping the attitudes of the Lebanese audience during political crises?

2. Research Questions

Building on the main research problem, a set of research questions is proposed:

- What role do cultural and political variables among the Lebanese audience play in shaping their attitudes toward political crises through electronic newspapers?
- What is the level of audience exposure to the electronic newspapers included in the study sample compared with other media outlets?
- To what extent does the audience rely on electronic journalism as a primary source of information during political crises?
- How does the level of respondents' exposure to political opinion articles in electronic

newspapers change during periods of political crises?

- How does electronic journalism contribute to shaping audience attitudes toward political crises?

3. Research Hypotheses

In light of the research problem and its guiding questions, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

- There is no statistically significant relationship between respondents' marital status and their patterns of reading opinion articles in electronic newspapers.
- There is a statistically significant correlational relationship between the audience's level of education and the extent to which they read opinion articles in electronic newspapers.
- There is a statistically significant relationship between the rate of audience exposure to electronic newspapers and the degree of reliance on them as a primary source of information during political crises.
- There is a statistically significant relationship between the emotional component formed among respondents during political crises and the extent to which their attitudes correspond with the discourse of electronic newspapers.
- There is no statistically significant relationship between respondents' political affiliation and the level of behavior resulting from their reading of opinion articles in electronic newspapers.

4. Significance

The significance of this study can be highlighted through several scientific and methodological aspects, which can be summarized as follows:

- Contributing to filling a research gap resulting from the limited number of Arabic and international studies that have addressed the topic of this research, within the scope of the researcher's review.
- Providing methodological value by focusing on measuring the audience's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral attitudes and examining the nature of their interaction with electronic journalistic content during periods of political crises.
- Addressing contemporary political issues that directly affect Lebanese society and carry clear implications for its political, economic, social, and humanitarian conditions.
- Opening new research horizons for scholars in

the fields of media and communication, and encouraging the conduct of similar studies that contribute to enriching scientific knowledge and developing the Arabic media scholarship.

5. Objectives

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- To analyze the role of cultural and political variables among the Lebanese audience in shaping their attitudes toward political crises through electronic newspapers.
- To measure the level of exposure of the Lebanese audience to the electronic newspapers included in the study sample and compare it with their exposure to other media outlets.
- To determine the degree to which audiences rely on electronic journalism as a primary source of information during political crises.
- To track changes in respondents' exposure to political opinion articles in electronic newspapers during periods of political crises.
- To examine the extent to which electronic journalism contributes to shaping the attitudes of the Lebanese audience toward political crises.

6. Key Concepts

The researcher defines the main concepts upon which the study is based as follows:

• Role:

In the media context, the concept of role refers to the nature of the contribution made by a media outlet within the public sphere through its participation in constructing meanings related to public issues and highlighting certain aspects of them, thereby influencing how audiences perceive and evaluate these issues (Biddle, 1986, pp. 89-91).

Operationally, role in this study refers to the extent to which Lebanese electronic newspapers contribute to shaping audience positions toward the political crises addressed in this research.

• Attitude Formation:

Attitude formation refers to the process through which an individual's positions toward a particular issue are shaped as a result of interaction with surrounding cognitive and emotional inputs. These positions gradually develop into a relatively stable framework that guides judgments and evaluations regarding that issue (Mousa, 2020, p. 18).

In this study, attitude formation refers to the nature of the positions expressed by the Lebanese audience toward political crises in light of their exposure to the content of electronic newspapers, as

reflected in their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions.

• **Audience:**

In media studies, the audience is defined as a social group composed of individuals who are exposed to shared media content within a specific temporal and spatial context, and who differ in the degree of their interaction with this content according to their experiences and social and political backgrounds (McQuail, 2010, p. 398).

Within the scope of this study, the term audience refers to Lebanese individuals who follow electronic newspapers and are exposed to their content related to political crises.

7. Summary of Previous Studies

This section presents the most prominent studies that have examined the relationship between digital media and audience attitudes during political crises, with the aim of identifying the position of the current study within the existing body of research.

- The study by **(Mohammad Kheir, 2022)** explored the role of Jordanian electronic journalism in shaping university students' attitudes toward the 2016 parliamentary elections. The research adopted a survey approach through a questionnaire administered to a random sample of 350 students during the period from August to November 2016. The findings indicated that electronic newspapers contributed to enhancing political awareness among (58.3%) of the students, while (68.4%) reported reconsidering their electoral positions, reflecting the influence of electronic journalism on political attitudes during the election period.

- The study by **(Zaid Salman & Jawdat Mohammed, 2022)** focused on analyzing the role of Iraqi electronic news websites in shaping journalists' attitudes toward the parliamentary elections held on October 10, 2021. The researchers applied the survey method using a questionnaire distributed to a purposive sample of 480 journalists between March 1 and April 1, 2021. The findings revealed a significant rise in reliance on electronic news websites amid electoral uncertainty. These platforms helped (70%) of respondents interpret the course of the electoral process, while (55%) displayed signs of professional polarization, and (75%) considered them a primary source of news.

- The study by **(Mustafa Ali & Shukriya Al-Siraj, 2021)** investigated the role of Iraqi electronic journalism in shaping the attitudes of the Baghdad public toward local political issues during the period from January 2017 to December 2018. The research employed the survey method through an electronic

questionnaire distributed to a sample of 400 respondents selected using the snowball technique. The results demonstrated that coverage focused mainly on security and political crises (46.2%), followed by corruption and political conflict issues (39.5%). The findings also indicated higher levels of audience engagement during periods of tension, with (60.7%) of respondents acknowledging that their attitudes were influenced by the published content.

- **(Angie Baraka, 2021)** analyzed audience attitudes toward the coverage of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam crisis on electronic news websites. The objective was to measure followers' positions and identify the actors most influential in shaping them during the period from January 2020 to December 2021. The researcher used the survey method through an electronic questionnaire administered to a purposive sample of 300 Egyptian respondents. The results showed the predominance of utilitarian motivations for following the issue (65%), along with a high level of reliance on electronic journalism as a news source (68%). Moreover, (63%) of respondents expressed generally positive attitudes toward the published coverage.

- **(Christine Sami, 2020)** highlighted the role of French electronic journalism in shaping public attitudes during several domestic and international political crises experienced by France between January 2018 and December 2019, including the Yellow Vest protests and various diplomatic and taxation-related tensions. The researcher adopted a survey design using a questionnaire administered to a random sample of 500 readers of electronic newspapers. The findings revealed a predominance of negative attitudes (59.4%), compared with (32.6%) neutral and (8%) positive attitudes. The study also identified a statistically significant correlation between higher levels of exposure to electronic newspapers and increased levels of anxiety and pessimism toward political crises.

- The study by **(Mohammad Obeidat, 2017)** investigated the role of Jordanian electronic journalism in shaping public attitudes toward corruption issues during the period from January to December 2016, by examining the relationship between exposure to related media content and the level of knowledge about these issues. The research employed the survey method through a questionnaire administered to a random sample of 400 Jordanian followers. The findings indicated that the escalation of the crisis increased levels of media follow-up among (68.2%) of respondents and enhanced knowledge among (62%), while an

emotional impact emerged in the form of feelings of dissatisfaction among approximately (50%). However, the behavioral effect remained limited.

- The study by **(Zainin Abed Al Salam, 2017)** explored the impact of electronic journalism on shaping Malaysian public attitudes during the governmental crisis that occurred between July 2015 and April 2016, which was followed by the “Yellow Shirts” protests. The research relied on a survey approach using a questionnaire administered to a purposive sample of 480 citizens. The results showed that electronic newspapers, particularly independent ones, played an active role in influencing public opinion. (72.3%) of respondents reported increased follow-up of these platforms, (65.2%) acknowledged that their political attitudes were influenced by their content, and (58%) indicated that their understanding of the nature of the crisis had improved.

- The study by **(Laura Sudulich, Matthew Wall & Leonardo Baccini, 2016)** analyzed the impact of exposure to digital news on shaping Irish citizens’ attitudes toward the European Union during the political crisis preceding the national elections in Ireland between January and February 2011. The study adopted the survey method through a questionnaire administered to a random sample of 1,000 voters. The findings revealed that individuals with high exposure to news on local websites expressed more critical attitudes toward the European Union (64%), while (58.4%) tended to vote for parties opposing European policies, reflecting the influence of digital media on shaping political attitudes and voting behavior during crises.

- **(Abu Bakr Al-Salhi, 2015)** highlighted the role of news content in electronic newspapers in shaping the attitudes of Egyptian university students toward government performance during the period from July 2013 to June 2014, in the context of the political transformations following the events of June 30. The researcher used the survey method through a questionnaire administered to a purposive sample of 450 students. The results indicated high levels of exposure to reliable content (62%), and that electronic journalism contributed to raising political awareness among (58.7%) of respondents, alongside a noticeable emotional impact, while the behavioral effect was limited to symbolic forms of interaction through the internet.

- The study by **(Rabab El-Gamal, 2012)** examined the role of electronic news websites in shaping the knowledge and attitudes of Egyptian expatriates toward political events in the post-January 25 Revolution period, between February 2011 and

December 2013. The research employed the survey method through a questionnaire administered to a purposive sample of 550 Egyptian expatriates in Saudi Arabia. The study found a clear relationship between reliance on electronic journalism and higher levels of political knowledge (67.4%), in addition to a noticeable emotional influence, whereas the behavioral impact was largely limited to symbolic participation within the digital sphere.

Commentary On Previous Studies

The previous studies that addressed the field-based dimension share a common focus on measuring the role of electronic media in shaping audience attitudes during political crises, particularly with regard to the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Most of these studies revealed a relationship between the intensity of exposure to digital content and the level of attitude adoption, while this influence was often mediated by factors such as the degree of trust in the media outlet and political affiliations. Methodologically, these studies generally fall within the scope of descriptive research, relying primarily on the survey method and questionnaire instruments to analyze audience responses during specific time periods.

Within this framework, the current study intersects with these efforts in terms of both methodology and research tools. However, it distinguishes itself by focusing on the Lebanese context during a period characterized by overlapping political crises, while attempting to link patterns of exposure to electronic journalism, the degree of reliance on it, and the cultural and political factors influencing audience attitudes. Previous studies have contributed to clarifying the research problem, formulating its hypotheses, and identifying its variables and theoretical framework, thereby strengthening the position of the present study within the literature addressing the influence of digital media in politically divided environments.

8. Media Dependency Theory

Media Dependency Theory is employed as an explanatory framework to analyze the nature of the relationship between audiences and media outlets during periods of political crises. The theory was formulated by the American communication scholars Melvin DeFleur and Sandra Ball-Rokeach in 1976, based on an ecological perspective that views society as a system of interconnected structures, among which the media system operates through relationships of mutual dependence with individuals and institutions (Loges, 1994, p. 6). The theory

assumes that the influence of media increases in proportion to the extent to which individuals rely on it to satisfy their cognitive and social needs, particularly in contexts characterized by complexity or instability (Stanley & Dennis, 2003, p. 156).

This reliance becomes particularly pronounced during periods of crisis and uncertainty, when individuals seek to reduce ambiguity and obtain explanations for unfolding events (Kitt, 2009, pp. 5–6). DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989, p. 74) classified the effects of media dependency into three main dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral, ranging from the formation of knowledge and attitudes, to the stimulation of emotions, and ultimately to patterns of activation or passivity. In this regard, the theory provides a suitable framework for explaining the relationship between the intensity of political crises and the increased reliance of audiences on media outlets as a primary source of information (Mekawy, 2009, p. 164).

9. Methodological Procedures

The methodological procedures of the study involve defining its type and the research method employed, in addition to clarifying the study population and sample, the data collection instruments, the procedures for ensuring validity and reliability, and the statistical techniques used for data analysis.

A. Type Of Study And Method Used

This study falls within the scope of descriptive research, as the researcher adopted the survey method, using a questionnaire form to collect field data from the Lebanese audience. The aim was to measure their level of exposure to electronic newspapers and the degree of reliance on them during political crises.

B. Study Population and Sample

The population of the field study consists of the Lebanese audience that follows electronic newspapers included in the study sample. The researcher selected a random sample of 400 respondents to measure the level of exposure to political opinion articles, the degree of reliance on these newspapers, and their role in shaping attitudes toward political crises.

C. Data Collection Tools

The study relied on a questionnaire as the main tool for collecting data from a large sample of the Lebanese audience, given its suitability for the nature of the research and its ability to provide quantitative

data that helps answer the study's questions. The questionnaire included 24 questions distributed across three sections: respondents' demographic data, patterns of exposure to electronic newspapers, and the evaluation of their coverage of political crises and their role in shaping attitudes. The instrument was reviewed by several specialized academic experts to ensure its clarity and appropriateness, and it was distributed and collected electronically through the Google Forms platform.

D. Validity and Reliability Procedures

The questionnaire form was subjected to validity and reliability procedures in accordance with established methodological standards to ensure the accuracy and credibility of its results in measuring the phenomenon under investigation.

• Validity Procedures

The questionnaire was presented to a number of expert reviewers specialized in media and scientific research in order to evaluate its items and verify their clarity and precision, within the framework of face validity. Based on their comments, the necessary modifications were made, including the reformulation and reorganization of certain items to ensure the instrument's suitability for application.

Content validity was also established through the construction of the questionnaire based on the theoretical framework of the study-particularly Media Dependency Theory-while benefiting from relevant previous studies. This helped ensure the consistency of the questionnaire items with the research objectives, questions, and hypotheses.

• Reliability Procedures

The reliability of the questionnaire instrument was examined using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient according to the following statistical formula (Field, 2018, p. 49):

$$\alpha = \frac{k}{k-1} \left(1 - \frac{\sum s_i^2}{s_t^2} \right)$$

To measure the degree of internal consistency, the test-retest method was applied to a pilot sample representing (10%) of the total field sample, equivalent to 40 respondents out of 400. The questionnaire was first administered on February 13, 2024, and then reapplied to the same participants two weeks later to verify the stability of responses.

The procedure produced the following values:

- α : Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient= 0.86

- k : Number of questionnaire items= 12

- $\sum s_i^2$: Sum of variances of the questionnaire items= 17.76

- s_t^2 : Total variance of questionnaire scores= 82.5

Accordingly, the reliability coefficient is

considered statistically high, indicating a strong level of internal consistency and the reliability of the research instrument.

E. Statistical Analysis Tools

The study data were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), employing both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques appropriate to the nature of the variables and their measurement levels.

These techniques included:

- Frequencies and percentages to describe the characteristics of the sample and the distribution of variables.
- Chi-Square Test of Independence (χ^2) to measure the significance of differences and relationships between nominal and ordinal variables and to test the study hypotheses.
- Spearman's Correlation Coefficient (ρ) to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between ordinal variables.

Chapter II: Results

This chapter presents the findings of the field study in the context of addressing the research questions and testing its hypotheses, based on the data collected through the questionnaire.

1. Results Of the Field Study

This section presents the findings of the field study, which are organized into a set of interconnected themes. These include the respondents' demographic characteristics, their level of exposure to electronic journalism in Lebanon, and their evaluation of how Lebanese electronic newspapers address political crises. This structure enables an analysis of patterns of media follow-up and the extent of their influence on audience attitudes.

A: Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

This axis presents the demographic and social characteristics of the study sample in terms of gender, age, educational level, geographical distribution, and political affiliation.

The main findings can be summarized as follows:

- **In terms of gender**, the findings indicate that females constituted the majority of the study sample at (65.3%), compared with (34.7%) males. This result reflects the increasing engagement of Lebanese women in the digital media sphere and their growing interest in public affairs.

- **With regard to age**, the (28 to less than 38 years) group ranked first with (31.8%), followed by the (18

to less than 28 years) group, while the proportions gradually declined among older age groups. This pattern highlights the predominantly youthful nature of the audience of electronic journalism, whereas older groups appear less involved, partly due to their relatively stronger reliance on traditional media outlets.

- **As for marital status**, the single category ranked first with (39.5%), followed by the married category at (29.3%), while the remaining proportions were distributed among the divorced and widowed groups. This distribution suggests that individuals who are not bound by family responsibilities tend to follow media and political affairs through electronic platforms more actively.

- **Concerning educational level**, the university education category constituted the largest share of the sample at (24.3%), followed by primary education at (21.3%), while respondents with postgraduate education represented (18.2%), and the remaining categories recorded lower percentages. These results demonstrate the diversity of educational backgrounds among the audience of electronic journalism, with a noticeable presence of individuals possessing academic qualifications that enable them to engage with the analytical nature of media content.

- **From a geographical perspective**, the sample was primarily concentrated in Beirut (21.5%), followed by South Lebanon (16.8%) and Mount Lebanon (14%), while lower proportions were recorded in other governorates. This distribution reflects a stronger presence of electronic journalism in areas characterized by higher population density and more developed media infrastructures. It also indicates its ability to transcend technological and social disparities and function as a national source of information and public debate.

- **Finally**, regarding political affiliation, the largest proportion of respondents (42.7%) reported supporting political parties without formally joining them, compared with (33%) who neither support nor belong to any party, while only (24.3%) indicated formal party membership. This pattern reflects a transformation in the nature of partisan affiliation toward a more symbolic or ideological dimension rather than direct organizational membership, suggesting a decline in traditional party loyalty in favor of relatively independent political orientations without active involvement in party structures.

B: Respondents' Exposure to Electronic Journalism in Lebanon

This axis seeks to analyze patterns of respondents'

exposure to Lebanese electronic newspapers by examining the regularity of their media follow-up, identifying the motivations and reasons behind such exposure, and assessing the degree of their reliance on these platforms during political crises. It also explores their reading behavior and level of engagement with opinion articles published in these outlets. The findings are presented as follows:

- **In terms of exposure to electronic newspapers during political crises**, the results indicate that the category “sometimes increases” ranked first at (46.5%), followed by “always increases” at (31.5%), and “rarely increases” at (22%). These findings suggest that Lebanese electronic journalism has become a primary source for following political news during crises, while continuing to function as a complementary medium rather than a full substitute for other media outlets. This aligns with the findings of (Mustafa Fares Ali & Shukriya Kokaz Al-Siraj, 2021).

- **With regard to motivations for exposure**, the speed of news delivery ranked first at (14.2%), followed by the multiplicity of media formats-such as images, videos, and interactive links-at (13.2%), while other motivations appeared at lower levels. These results highlight the functional nature of electronic journalism as a fast and efficient source for tracking developments, while emphasizing that strengthening trust and enhancing interactivity remain essential for consolidating its position as a reliable information source.

- **Concerning the most followed newspapers**, audience attention was concentrated on three main platforms: An-Nahar, Al-Akhbar, and Al-Jomhouria, whose combined follow-up rates exceeded (95%) of the sample, compared with lower proportions for other outlets. This reflects the concentration of the digital media landscape within a limited number of influential platforms, as audiences tend to follow newspapers that align with their political orientations and backgrounds, thereby mirroring patterns of polarization and division within the Lebanese public sphere.

- **Regarding the frequency of exposure in the context of political crises**, approximately (45.7%) of respondents reported that their follow-up “sometimes increases,” while (35%) indicated that it “always increases,” compared with (19.3%) who stated that it “rarely increases.” This distribution reflects a tendency among the Lebanese audience to intensify their engagement with electronic journalism as crises escalate, given its ability to provide rapid updates and immediate analysis. These findings are consistent with the majority of

previous research in this field.

- **As for reliance on electronic newspapers as a primary source of information during crises**, the audience demonstrated a moderate-to-high level of dependence. Approximately (47%) reported relying on them “sometimes,” compared with (29.5%) “always,” while the “never” category remained limited at (23.5%). This indicates that electronic journalism has become a key source of information and political analysis during crises, without fully replacing other information sources. These results are consistent with the findings of (Zaid Salman & Jawdat Mohammed, 2022) and (Angie Baraka, 2021).

- **In relation to reading political opinion articles**, a substantial proportion of the audience engages with them at varying levels. The “sometimes” category ranked first at (40%), followed by “always” at (32.8%), while “rarely” accounted for (27.2%). This distribution confirms that analytical articles remain highly present in the digital sphere, despite the growing influence of breaking news and social media platforms.

- **From the perspective of reasons for limited engagement with opinion articles**, the data indicate that the primary reason among respondents who read them “rarely”-representing (27.2%) of the sample-is the perception that these articles reflect personal opinions rather than in-depth analysis, as reported by approximately (24.8%). This is followed by a preference for alternative information sources (21.8%), as well as difficulties related to complex language and style (19%). These findings underscore the need to improve opinion articles by strengthening their analytical depth and objectivity, simplifying their language, and diversifying presentation styles to better suit digital audiences.

- **Regarding motivations for reading opinion articles**, the leading factors included following specific journalists’ views, exploring diverse political perspectives, and forming personal opinions on political issues, each accounting for approximately (18%). Other explanatory and analytical motivations ranged between (12%) and (16%). These findings suggest that opinion articles serve a function that extends beyond information delivery, providing a space for analysis, deepening political understanding, and contributing to the formation of public opinion.

- **In terms of reading styles**, the results show that reading the full article is the most common approach at (26.8%), followed by quick reading at (25.2%), and reading only the headline and introduction at (23.8%), while other methods recorded lower percentages. This distribution reflects varying levels

of audience engagement with opinion articles, ranging from in-depth reading to rapid consumption, depending on factors such as political interest, available time, the nature of the event, and the degree of alignment between the content and the reader's orientations.

- **Finally**, concerning interaction patterns with opinion articles, (45.4%) of respondents limit their engagement to reading only, followed by sharing articles on social media at (25.7%), and privately sharing links with friends at (22%), while other forms of interaction appeared less frequently. This indicates that readers tend to treat opinion articles primarily as a source of knowledge and attitude formation without overt public engagement, highlighting the need for electronic newspapers to enhance interactive features and encourage participation in public debate.

C. Respondents' Evaluation of Electronic Newspapers' Coverage of Political Crises in Light of Media Dependency Theory

This axis focuses on analyzing six interrelated dimensions, including the ranking of interest in political crises, the characteristics of opinion articles, their contribution to shaping respondents' attitudes, the reasons behind their limited influence, the degree of alignment between audience orientations and newspaper positions, and finally the comparative outcomes at the cognitive and emotional levels and their behavioral implications. The findings are presented as follows:

- **In terms of the ranking of interest in political crises**, the findings show that the Beirut Port explosion ranked first, with (63.2%) of respondents identifying it as the most important crisis. It was followed by the government paralysis crisis at (32.5%), the presidential vacuum at (20.5%), and finally the maritime border demarcation crisis at (17.2%). This pattern indicates that public interest in political crises is closely linked to the extent of their direct impact on daily life and social security.

- **Regarding the characteristics of opinion articles**, sharp criticism dominated the coverage of both the Beirut Port explosion and the presidential vacuum crises at approximately (22%), and was also evident in the government paralysis crisis at (20.5%). Meanwhile, selectivity and bias were most apparent in the maritime border demarcation crisis at (19.3%). This reflects a tendency toward a contentious and polarized media discourse, consistent with the findings of (Christine Sami, 2020).

- **With respect to the ability of opinion articles to influence attitudes**, the government paralysis crisis

ranked first at (47.3%), followed by the Beirut Port explosion (43%), the maritime border demarcation crisis (35%), and the presidential vacuum (32%). This suggests a notable capacity of opinion articles to shape public attitudes, albeit to varying degrees depending on the nature of the crisis.

- **As for the reasons behind the limited influence** reported by (21.8%) of respondents, these are primarily related to issues of trust and objectivity. In the Beirut Port explosion crisis, lack of alignment with readers' orientations and the perception of articles as personal opinions reached (21.5%). In the government paralysis crisis, political misalignment accounted for (22.1%). Weak analytical depth was most prominent in the maritime border demarcation crisis at (23.6%), while in the presidential vacuum crisis, the perception of articles as personal opinions reached (28.8%). This indicates that the influence of opinion articles is contingent upon both the nature of the crisis and the perceived objectivity of the analysis.

- **In terms of the degree of alignment between audience orientations and the positions of electronic newspapers**, the "always" category ranked highest in both the Beirut Port explosion and government paralysis crises. In Al-Akhbar, it reached (41.8%) and (42.5%), respectively, while in An-Nahar it recorded (48.5%) and (45%), and in Al-Jomhouria it reached the highest level at (56.2%). In contrast, the "sometimes" and "rarely" categories were more prominent in the presidential vacuum and maritime border demarcation crises. Overall, this indicates that electronic journalism in Lebanon plays a significant role in shaping political orientations, in line with the findings of previous studies.

- **At the cognitive level**, Al-Jomhouria stood out in the Beirut Port explosion and presidential vacuum crises, achieving the highest levels of "deep knowledge" at (41%) and (37%). Meanwhile, the level of "general knowledge" was most prominent in Al-Akhbar and An-Nahar during the Beirut Port explosion and government paralysis crises (Al-Akhbar: 38% and 42%; An-Nahar: 34% and 36.5%). This confirms the role of electronic newspapers in enhancing political understanding among the audience, consistent with the findings of (Mohammad Kheir, 2022) and (Rabab Al-Jamal, 2012).

- **At the emotional level**, emotional responses were most evident during the Beirut Port explosion crisis at (25%), while sympathy with the opposition was more prominent in the government paralysis and presidential vacuum crises at (30.9%) and (28.7%), respectively. In contrast, sympathy with authority appeared more clearly in the maritime

border demarcation crisis at (29.8%). This underscores the importance of the emotional dimension in media influence, aligning with the findings of (Mohammad Zain Obeidat, 2017) and (Zaid Salman & Jawdat Mohammed, 2022).

- **Regarding the behavioral dimension**, participation in protests was most prominent during the Beirut Port explosion crisis at (32%), while discussing issues with family and friends prevailed in the government paralysis and presidential vacuum crises at (35%) and (40%), respectively. Expression through social media was most evident in the maritime border demarcation crisis at (35.3%). These findings indicate that the behavioral impact of electronic journalism tends to take symbolic or virtual forms, consistent with the results of (Abu Bakr Al-Salhi, 2015) and (Mohammad Zain Obeidat, 2017).

- **Finally, in relation to Media Dependency Theory**, the field results demonstrate clear alignment with the assumptions proposed by DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach. The findings show that the Lebanese audience's reliance on electronic newspapers

increases with the escalation of political crises and instability. This reliance is reflected across the three dimensions emphasized by the theory-cognitive, emotional, and behavioral-highlighting the role of electronic journalism in shaping audience perceptions and responses during periods of crisis.

2. Hypotheses Testing

This section is devoted to testing the study hypotheses derived from the theoretical and methodological frameworks. The Chi-Square Test of Independence (χ^2) is employed to examine the significance of relationships and differences between variables, thereby facilitating the interpretation of patterns in the treatment of political crises in opinion articles published in electronic newspapers. Accordingly, the study hypotheses are formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 1: There is no statistically significant relationship between respondents' marital status and their reading styles of opinion articles in electronic newspapers.

Table (1): Distribution of Respondents by Marital Status and Their Reading Styles of Opinion Articles in Electronic Newspapers

Marital Status	Single		Married		Divorced		Widowed		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Reading the full article	45	28.5	30	25.6	20	24.4	12	27.9	107	26.8
Reading selected parts of the article	25	15.8	20	17.1	12	14.6	5	11.6	62	15.5
Quick reading	40	25.3	30	25.6	20	24.4	11	25.6	101	25.3
Reading the headline and introduction	35	22.2	25	21.4	20	24.4	15	34.9	95	23.7
Reading the headline only	13	8.2	12	10.3	10	12.2	-	-	35	8.7
Total	158	100	117	100	82	100	43	100	400	100
Chi-Square Test (χ^2)	Chi-square value (χ^2) = 9.05 Degrees of freedom (df) = 12 Critical values = 21.026p-value = 0.699 Cramer's V = 0.087									

Table (1) illustrates the distribution of respondents by marital status and their reading styles of opinion articles in electronic newspapers, thereby enabling the identification of dominant reading patterns across different social groups.

From a statistical perspective, the results demonstrate that the calculated value of the Chi-square test (χ^2) amounted to ($9.05 < 21.026$), which is below the critical value at the significance level ($p > 0.05$) with ($df = 12$). This suggests that there is no statistically significant relationship between respondents' marital status and their patterns of

reading opinion articles. Accordingly, the null hypothesis (H_0) was accepted and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was rejected.

With regard to the strength of the relationship, Cramer's V recorded (0.087), which represents a very low value, indicating a negligible effect of this variable on determining respondents' reading patterns.

Hypothesis 2: There is a statistically significant correlation between audience's educational level and the extent of their reading of opinion articles in electronic newspapers.

Table (2): Distribution of Respondents by Educational Level and Their Extend of Reading of Opinion Articles in Electronic Newspapers.

Extend of Reading	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Total
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Educational Level	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Primary	28	32.9	34	40	23	27.1	85	100
Intermediate/Vocational	25	33.8	30	40.5	19	25.7	74	100
Secondary/Technical Baccalaureate	23	32.4	29	40.8	19	26.8	71	100
University/Technical Excellence	32	33	39	40.2	26	26.8	97	100
Postgraduate Studies	23	31.5	28	38.4	22	30.1	73	100
Total	131	32.8	160	40	109	27.2	400	100
Chi-Square Test (χ^2)	Chi-square value (χ^2) = 0.438 Degrees of freedom (df) = 8 Critical values = 15.507 p-value = 0.999 Cramer's V = 0.02							

Table (2) examines the relationship between respondents' educational level and their frequency of reading opinion articles in electronic newspapers, facilitating an understanding of the nature of this association.

Statistical findings reveal that the calculated value of the Chi-square test (χ^2) stood at (0.438 < 15.507), which is substantially lower than the critical value at the significance level ($p > 0.05$) with (df = 8). This confirms the absence of a statistically significant relationship between respondents' educational level and their frequency of reading political opinion articles. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H0) was

accepted and the alternative hypothesis (H1) was rejected.

Regarding the strength of the association, Cramer's V registered (0.02), which reflects a very low value, implying that variations in educational level do not constitute a significant factor influencing the regularity of following this type of content.

Hypothesis 3: There is a statistically significant relationship between audience's level of exposure to electronic newspapers and their degree of reliance on them as a primary source of information during political crises.

Table (3): Distribution of Respondents by Level of Exposure to Electronic Newspapers and Their Degree of Reliance on Them as a Primary Source of Information During Political Crises.

Level of Exposure	Always		Sometimes		Rarely		Total	
Degree of Reliance	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Yes	70	50	40	21.9	8	10.4	118	29.5
Sometimes	50	35.7	110	60.1	28	36.4	188	47
Never	20	14.3	33	18	41	53.2	94	23.5
Total	140	100	183	100	77	100	400	100
Chi-Square Test (χ^2)	Chi-square value (χ^2) = 40.93 Degrees of freedom (df) = 4 Critical values = 9.488 p-value = 0.000 Cramer's V = 0.32							

The table above demonstrates the relationship between respondents' level of exposure to electronic newspapers and their degree of reliance on them as a primary source of information during political crises, thus enabling an assessment of how exposure intensity contributes to strengthening media reliance among respondents.

The statistical analysis indicates that the calculated value of the Chi-square test (χ^2) reached (40.93 > 9.488), which surpasses the critical value at the significance level ($p < 0.05$) with (df = 4). This confirms the presence of a statistically significant relationship between the rate of audience exposure to electronic newspapers and the degree of reliance on them as a primary source of information during

political crises. Accordingly, the null hypothesis (H0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H1) was accepted.

In terms of relationship strength, Cramer's V was found to be (0.32), indicating a moderate association. This implies that the level of exposure to electronic newspapers plays a noticeable role in increasing audience reliance on them as a source of information during political crises.

Hypothesis 4: There is a statistically significant relationship between the emotional component formed among respondents during political crises and extent of alignment between their attitudes and electronic newspaper discourse.

Table (4): Distribution of Respondents by Emotional Component and Extent of Attitude Alignment with Electronic Newspaper Discourse During Political Crises.

Extent of Alignment	Always		Sometimes		Rarely		Total	
Emotional Component	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%

Sympathy with the opposition	45	64.3	20	28.6	5	7.1	70	100
Sympathy with authority	60	60	30	30	10	10	100	100
Emotional response to newspapers	75	62.5	35	29.2	10	8.3	120	100
Feelings of indifference and frustration	15	23.1	20	30.7	30	46.2	65	100
Feelings of hope and reassurance	15	33.3	25	55.6	5	11.1	45	100
Total	210	52.5	130	32.5	60	15	400	100
Chi-Square Test (χ^2)	Chi-square value (χ^2) = 78.05 Degrees of freedom (df) = 8 Critical values = 15.507p-value = 0.000 Cramer's V = 0.31							

Table (4) depicts the relationship between respondents' attitude alignment with electronic newspaper discourse and the emotional component formed during political crises, facilitating the identification of patterns of emotional responses across different levels of correspondence.

The statistical results show that the calculated value of the Chi-square test (χ^2) amounted to (78.05 > 15.507), which exceeds the critical value at the significance level ($p < 0.05$) with (df = 8). This demonstrates the existence of a statistically significant relationship between the degree of alignment between audience orientations and the discourse of electronic newspapers and the resulting

emotional component during political crises. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H1) was accepted.

As for the strength of this relationship, Cramer's V reached (0.31), reflecting a moderate association. This highlights the extension of audience alignment with media content from the cognitive to the emotional dimension during political crises, in line with the assumptions of Media Dependency Theory.

Hypothesis 5: There is no statistically significant relationship between respondents' political affiliation and the level of behavior resulting from their reading of opinion articles in electronic newspapers.

Table (5): Distribution of Respondents by Political Affiliation and Level of Behavior Resulting from Their Reading of Opinion Articles in Electronic Newspapers.

Political Affiliation	Affiliated		Supporter		Not Affiliated		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Participation in demonstrations and protests	35	35.7	45	26.3	20	15.3	100	25
Participation in seminars and discussions	25	25.5	55	32.2	30	22.9	110	27.5
Discussing the crisis with family and friends	28	28.6	50	29.2	42	32.1	120	30
Expression through social media	10	10.2	21	12.3	39	29.7	70	17.5
Total	98	100	171	100	131	100	400	100
Chi-Square Test (χ^2)	Chi-square value (χ^2) = 29.28 Degrees of freedom (df) = 6 Critical values = 12.592p-value = 0.000 Cramer's V = 0.19							

Table (5) illustrates the relationship between respondents' political affiliation and the level of behavior resulting from reading opinion articles in electronic newspapers, providing a basis for assessing the extent to which political affiliation influences behavioral patterns associated with engagement with political issues.

The statistical evidence indicates that the calculated value of the Chi-square test (χ^2) reached (29.28 > 12.592), which exceeds the critical value at the significance level ($p < 0.05$) with (df = 6). This points to the presence of a statistically significant relationship between respondents' political affiliation and the level of behavior resulting from their reading of opinion articles in electronic newspapers. Accordingly, the null hypothesis (H0) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H1) was accepted.

Concerning the strength of the association,

Cramer's V recorded (0.19), indicating a weak association tending toward moderate. This suggests that political affiliation plays a partial role in shaping the behavior resulting from reading opinion articles.

2. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this field study revealed a statistically significant relationship between the audience's level of exposure to electronic journalism and the formation of their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral attitudes toward political crises. The results also indicated that the level of reliance on electronic newspapers increases as the intensity of crises escalates, which is consistent with the assumptions of Media Dependency Theory.

The findings further confirmed that the degree of influence varies according to the audience's level of trust in electronic journalism, their interest in

political affairs, as well as the nature of the crisis and the intensity of its developments. This underscores that the relationship between media and audience is a complex, interactive one, shaped by multiple cognitive and contextual factors that contribute to the formation of individual attitudes and positions.

Accordingly, electronic journalism in the Lebanese context can be viewed as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it plays a central role as a source of interpretation and in satisfying the need for information in times of uncertainty: on the other hand, it may contribute to reinforcing polarization within a politically divided environment. In light of this, the importance of further research into the mechanisms of interaction between media discourse structures and patterns of audience reception becomes evident, as it enhances the understanding of the dynamics of public opinion formation during political crises.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings reached by the study, a set of professional, academic, and research-oriented recommendations can be proposed as follows:

- Supporting media literacy programs to enhance the audience's ability to critically analyze digital content and to distinguish between objective information and ideologically framed narratives.
- Raising awareness among media institutions regarding the impact of digital coverage on shaping audience attitudes, particularly during periods of crises when individuals' reliance on media increases.
- Conducting analytical studies complementary to field research, with the aim of linking the characteristics of media discourse to patterns of its influence on the audience.
- Carrying out longitudinal studies that track changes in audience attitudes over extended periods, in order to assess the stability or transformation of media effects in relation to political and contextual changes.
- Expanding the scope of future research to include social media platforms as a complementary actor to electronic journalism in shaping public opinion

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