



The impact of the “X” platform on the formation of the image of political events: A field study on the Jordanian academic elite

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to investigate the role of the X platform (formerly Twitter) in shaping the perceptions of political events among a sample of university professors in Jordan specializing in social sciences. Given the increasing dependence on digital platforms (particularly online social networks) for political information, these tools fulfil a crucial role in shaping the “mental image” of political events among educated and influential audiences. Based on the Media System Dependency Theory, the study explores the cognitive, affective, and behavioural impacts of using the X platform. Based on previous literature, a structured questionnaire was constructed with validation by academic experts for both semantic and relevance. Using a complete census, we distributed the questionnaire to all professors of social sciences at Jordanian universities across the three main regions: South, Central, and North. Of the 144 responses, 140 questionnaires, screened positive for completeness, were included in this analysis. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25 employing descriptive statistics to explore respondents’ demographic characteristics and usage patterns of the X platform. The results suggest that the platform is an integral aspect of political perceptions, with its interactive digital characteristics having a profound impact on respondents’ cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses to political content. The findings demonstrate the X platform as a direct tool for spreading political news and shaping public opinion, especially among the Jordanian academic elite. These results also fill a gap in the literature regarding the effect of social media on academic elites in Jordan and provide useful insights for researchers and policymakers regarding the digital role in political participation.

Keywords: *X-platform, image, image of political events, academic elite, Jordan*

INTRODUCTION

The X platform (formerly Twitter) has become one of the most powerful forces in today’s digital media ecosystem. And although it functions as a rapid channel for the mass diffusion of information and news, it plays a greater role in shaping public opinion and influencing perceptions not only of political topics but also, more broadly, of public events. Apart from greater immediacy, interactivity, and participatory communication features (Bruns & Burgess, 2015; Hermida, 2013), the platform differs from traditional media platforms in that it allows a greater range of multimodal resources (e.g., images, videos, audio clips, graphics) to be present. These features facilitate real-time tracking of political events and enable users to participate in debates around them (McGregor & Molyneux, 2020), making the platform a powerful mechanism for shaping public debate and political communication. In addition, like other digital media channels, X is a powerful force that shapes narratives of political conflict and events by elevating some issues and diminishing others.

This selective flow can influence how audiences interpret political changes and form judgments about political actors and events, particularly in contexts where rapid information exchange shapes public attitudes across countries (see, e.g., Chadwick, 2017). In this sense, the mental image of political events is understood as the stage on which individuals construct their perceptions, interpretations, and cognitive impressions through information and representation processes in media environments. And these mental images are shaped not only by personal experience, but mainly through media exposure, framing processes and the reiteration of a particular narrative and point of view. Consequently, digital platforms shape how people think about, interpret, and assess political phenomena. Drawing on this background, the current study aims to analyze how the X platform shapes the mental images of political events among the Jordanian academic elite. The target population of this study consists of a salient segment of opinion leaders who consume media content and engage in political discussions, making their opinions useful for a better understanding on how digital media platforms shape political perceptions at the social scale.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The discourse on X (heretofore Twitter) demonstrates an alluring and versatile influence on government policy, public understanding, and information dissemination across various contexts. Research in the United States, to a degree, the Pew Research Center’s 2025 report and Morales et al. (2025), focus on partisan differences in program habit and judgment, showing that Democrats are likely to view the spot as supportive of representative data, while Republicans often see theoretical bias; algorithm further augments polarized societies. At the political and guidance levels, studies reveal that X serves as a clever-idea tool for state players and governmental celebrities. Abdel Moneim’s work (2024) on Egyptian bureau reports, Haman’s work (2020) on the use of Twitter by state rulers during the COVID-19 pandemic, and Kasmani’s work (2019) on

the tweets of departed Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak, demonstrate that the platform allows actors to correspond directly with the public, bypassing the usual media channels.

In the Arab context, a range of studies focus on the role of X in shaping governmental knowledge and reliance on information. Al-Hajri and Al-Taher (2023) found that Twitter significantly contributes to the dissemination of governmental information among Kuwaiti academy scholars, while Al-Mutairi (2023) identified civil and governmental issues as the main topics among Saudi consumers. Al-Jazzaf (2022) explored Kuwaiti business-related establishments' confidence on Twitter regarding economic inclusion, while Ajwa (2021) examined Egyptian consumers' reliance on the platform for revelation and credibility. Jalal Ali (2024) focused on mocking governmental content among the Egyptian academic minority, contending that political ideas rule such discourse. These studies together show that Twitter/X functions both as a source of facts and as a medium that energetically shapes political understanding among educated and working audiences.

Further research investigates the platform action, containing moderation and computational studies. For instance, Pierri et al. (2023) checked account invention and delay patterns during main geopolitical occurrences, Fang (2021) applied argument displaying and society classification to resolve governmental event inclusion, while Becatti (2019) examined the consumption patterns on Twitter during the Italian elections. Tan and Firdaus (2023) proposed Social Publishing Political Information Dependency (SMPID), asserting that users' confidence in government information via television differs from established radio reliance and expands the scope of government information acquisition. Together, these studies show that X functions as both a channel for political facts and as a fundamental mediator that shapes public opinion.

Despite the extensive body of research examining scholars, general audiences, political actors, and governmental elites, limited attention has been paid to academic elites in Jordan. This group holds significant intellectual and political influence. Examining their engagement with political events through the X platform addresses an important gap in the literature and provides valuable insights into the elite-level understanding of digitally mediated political discourse.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Media system dependency theory as a theoretical basis for the study

From a theoretical perspective, this study is grounded in the media dependency model, a seminal framework in communication studies developed by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur in 1976. The main idea behind this model is that people get the information they need about events and realities solely through media channels. Moreover, this model emphasizes that people consume media for particular purposes: information, fun, and entertainment. Overall, the core assumptions of the model are as follows:

- Environmental stability or instability serves as a frame of reference for individuals, and as instability increases, they tend to depend more on communication and media tools.
- Shared norms and rules in environments where people must achieve their individual goals are increasing their dependence on the media.
- Differences in the extent of reliance on media among members of the audience are associated with differences in their personalities, situations and goals (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976).

Effects of media and communication

Cognitive effects

Cognitive effects in the context of the media dependency model relate to how media affects the consumer’s knowledge, understanding, and perceptions of a given event. This corresponds to media use during crises to reduce ambiguity, as people search for information and guidance amid uncertainties such as wartime or global disasters. Attitudes are developed as the media constructs public opinion by choosing ways and formats to present information, thereby creating perspectives and directing attention toward a specific topic (Fowler & Kam, 2007), an effect that is clearly observable during elections, disasters, or other high-impact events. Another cognitive effect is agenda-setting and prioritization, which describes how the media can prioritize certain topics over others in their coverage, framing issues in ways that place them above other potential issues, leading audiences to attend to these repeated topics over other matters. Lastly, values transmission means using the media to communicate and reinforce shared values and norms in society, allowing communities to maintain and spread their value systems (Hijab, 2010; Makkawi & Al-Sayed, 1988).

Emotional effects

Emotional effects pertain to the media’s impact on feelings such as love, hatred, fear, or empathy. Media content can strongly shape emotional responses by evoking reactions that influence perceptions of events, people, or social groups (Hijab, 2010).

Behavioural effects

Behavioural effects describe the actions individuals take or avoid based on their cognitive and emotional engagement with media content. One prominent behavioural effect is activation, which occurs when exposure to media information motivates a person to act in accordance with what they have learned or felt through media channels. In essence, behavioural effects are the observable manifestations of prior cognitive and emotional influences (Makkawi & Al-Sayed, 1988).

X-platform and forming the image of political events

Mental image

Before we show what is meant by mental image in the world of politics or political mental image, it is necessary to highlight the first time the term appeared. The American

journalist, Walter Lippmann, was the first to address the issue of image in his famous book, *Public Opinion*, which was first published in 1922. In his book, Lippmann pointed out that the world we live in cannot be directly perceived by senses alone and argued for man to explore it through imagination. Thus, he learned to see with his mind and to imagine a large part of this world that he cannot see or touch with his hand or perceive with his other senses. Man gradually begins to create images in his mind that he cannot create with his senses, and Lippmann says: “ This mental image of the external world is a simplified representation of an unreal environment” (1922).

Therefore, it can be said that man lives in two different worlds, one of which is close, but Samlandic, the environment in which he receives information about himself directly through his traditional senses. The other world is the larger world that is distant but not directly perceivable by the senses, as information about it is obtained through means of transportation, communication, and social interaction. Hayakawa (1939) called this world the transformed world (the reported world), that is, it directly contradicts the world that man perceives. The image of this transformed world consists of a period that passes through the stages of human growth and development (Hayakawa, 1939). Boulding believed that human behaviour depends on the image he has created in his mind, and that, accordingly, any change in that image necessarily requires a behaviour change: “The nature of images is critical to how they are shaped and how they change” (Boulding, 1956).

According to Scott (1966), an image consists of three basic elements in the human mind: the first is the set of cognitive features a person can mentally perceive, and the second is the emotional element related to inclination or readiness toward something. The third element is the behavioural component of a set of practical responses to the thing the person deems appropriate, based on the qualities he holds in mind. Psychologist Alport argued that “people make big generalizations if they get some facts, even if those facts are small” (Chomsky, 2002). The term mental image, as analysed in the previous literature, appears to represent an idea, value, or impression of a particular thing and, at the same time, a specific perception and meaning (Polat & Arslan, 2015).

As for the definition of the mental image, Webster’s Dictionary defines it as every mental perception shared by members of a specific group, expressing the group’s perception of a specific person or thing (Webster, 1977). Jean Merrill defined it as follows: “The general impression formed of the state, government, and country, which is a system of ideas, opinions, and inclinations” (1962). In scholarly work, mental image is defined as the perception that resonates in the mind as a result of a response to an alarm clock, so that it is more like a reaction caused by the occurrence of a specific behaviour witnessed by the individual, or by experiencing an event or hearing a word that has something to do with the ideas and information contained in that mind and previous experiences (Malkawi, 2017).

Political mental image

Political mental image is one of the latest types of mental images in regard to dealing with the public in research and social and psychological studies. If public relations plays

an important role in shaping the mental image of different organizations and bodies, they also play the same role for political parties and personalities across different societies (Ajwa, 1977). As an essential element of the political mental picture, political events are defined as incidents or occurrences that attract the attention of a large group of people. Political mental image can also encompass everything related to the world from a political perspective, including wars in regions, elections in specific countries, and various political matters occurring across the world (Malkawi, 2025).

X Platform

Twitter was founded in 2006 by Jack Dorsey as a social networking platform for microblogging. By 2023, the platform had approximately 1.3 billion users worldwide. In April 2022, the company was acquired by Elon Musk, who later announced on July 23, 2023, the rebranding of the platform and the replacement of its well-known logo with the letter “X” (Abdel Moneim, 2024).

Although digital media platforms share several common characteristics, the X platform has become particularly influential in the dissemination of political news and the coverage of political events. One of its main advantages lies in its ability to provide immediate and real-time communication, enabling users across the world to share and access information rapidly during major political developments and breaking news events. For example, reports about the China earthquake circulated on Twitter before they were broadcast by CNN, highlighting the platform’s growing role as a primary source of information for journalists and traditional media organizations (Habib, 2012).

In addition, journalists and media professionals use the platform extensively to publish updates, monitor public conversation, and detect new stories (Tandoc & Johnson, 2016), meaning that messages are aimed at users who already have established audiences. Two aspects are of paramount importance when discussing the digital features specific to the platform itself, such as tweets, hashtags, retweets, mentions and replies from a technical point of view. Firstly, users on the X platform operate in an environment which allows near-instant information broadcasting (see Schwartz et al., 2018). These technological affordances enable individuals to not only consume information, but also to become active respondents in the circulation and construction of political meaning. Thus, the X platform can be characterized as a social networking service where users publish short messages and engage with others in real time (Conway et al., 2015), creating an active digital ecosystem with deep ramifications for the production, dissemination, and consumption of political information.

METHODOLOGY

Research problem

Based on the notion that the X platform, as a means of digital media, can significantly form the mental image of political events, the research question formulated is as follows: What is the impact of the X platform in forming the image of political

events from the point of view of the Jordanian academic elite? In addition, there is another subset of questions that can be added within the scope of the research problem: What are the patterns of the Jordanian academic elite's use of the X platform? What are the levels of influence of the X platform in shaping the image of political events in the minds of the Jordanian academic elite? What is the most influential digital feature of the X platform in shaping the mental image of political events from the perspective of the Jordanian academic elite?

Significance of study

This study is significant because it looks at the impact of a means of communication and media of great importance in the current era, where digital media has become one of the most important forms of media, namely the X platform. The study also examines mental image formation specifically, in the field of politics which has been largely understudied.

Objectives of study

1. Understanding the patterns of the Jordanian academic elite's use of the X platform.
2. Understanding the levels of influence of the X platform in forming the image of political events in the minds of the Jordanian academic elite.
3. Understanding the most influential features of the X digital platform in shaping the image of political events from the point of view of the Jordanian elite.

Research questions

1. What are the patterns of the Jordanian academic elite's use of the X platform?
2. What are the levels of influence of the X platform in shaping the image of political events in the minds of the Jordanian academic elite?
3. What are the most influential features of the X platform in shaping the image of political events from the point of view of the Jordanian elite?

Research hypotheses

1. There is a statistically significant relationship between the image of political events and the effects (emotional, cognitive, behavioural) of the X platform during the image-formation process.
2. There is a statistically significant relationship between the image of political events and the features of the X platform (news, video, interviews, photos, investigative reports, audio, articles, reports, cartoons) during the image-formation process.

Population and sample of study

The study population comprised university professors in social sciences at all Jordanian universities. The research team distributed the study questionnaire to professors from all faculties and departments of Social Sciences in Jordanian universities (3 main regions: The South, the Central region, and the North) to ensure

a comprehensive representation. A total of 144 questionnaires were returned, from which incomplete responses were excluded and 140 valid questionnaires were retained for statistical analysis. The respondents were chosen using a purposive sampling method guide, which is widely used in social science research to include individuals whose characteristics and experiences reflect those of interest and being studied (Patton, 2002). A well-structured questionnaire was constructed by reviewing previous studies and relevant literature regarding media dependency and political communication. A panel of academic experts then reviewed the content for overall clarity, relevance and appropriateness of all items.

Maintenance of content validity through expert feedback was employed to refine the instrument into its final version. Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was calculated to assess reliability, yielding a high value of 0.956, indicating excellent internal consistency among the items and confirming that the instrument is appropriate for statistical analysis, as it reflects the targeted constructs well. Data were analysed with SPSS version 25.0, and descriptive statistical methods (frequencies and percentages) were used to describe user demographic characteristics and their usage pattern on the X platform. Such insights were crucial for gaining an analytical depth into how professors across Jordan’s regions and disciplines within social sciences engage with digital media in the process of perception formation, particularly for political events (Goodwin et al., 2018).

Research tool

Data were collected for three dimensions using a digital questionnaire. The first section collected demographic data on the respondents, including their academic discipline, university affiliation, and regional location in Jordan. The second section explored the usage pattern of X, specifically Jordanian academic elite’s reliance on and engagement with the platform (their consumption of political news and information). These were complemented by emerging parallels within classical and contemporary literature regarding digital media’s role in spreading information, shaping public discourse, and shaping political perceptions on how it spreads information (Bennett & Segeberg, 2012; Dahlgren, 2005; Prior, 2007).

This study replicated and/or adapted existing questionnaire items developed in prior studies. The constructs for patterns of use was guided by Afifi (2013) and Malkawi (2024), while the section that examined the nature and extent of X’s influence on the mental image of political events was based on Al-Aythawi (2015) and Salah al-Din (2001). Finally, items to assess the X platform’s digital features and technological affordances were adapted from Al-Dulaimi (2011) and Malkawi (2025). The third section looked at the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural effects of X on political image formation, grounded in the Media System Dependency Model framework (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976) (Figure 1).

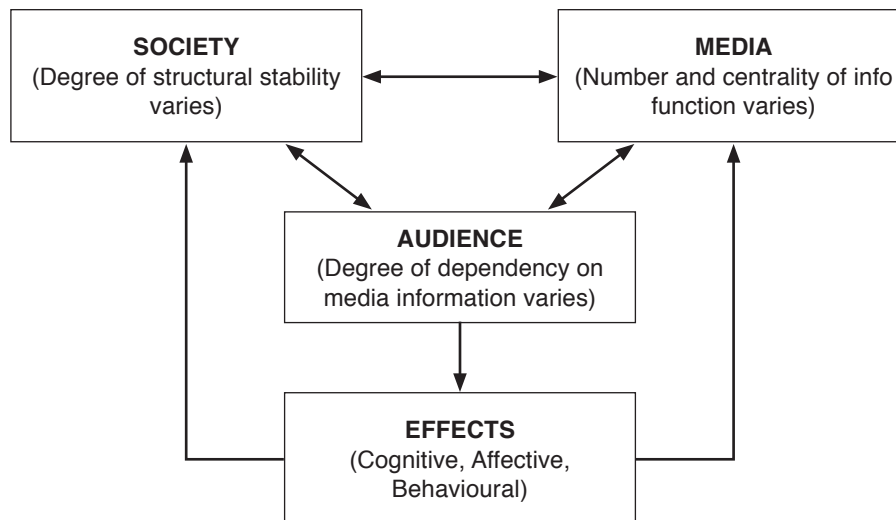


Figure 1. The Media System Dependency model

This model categorises media effects into three: Cognitive (knowledge and perception), Affective (feelings and attitudes), and Behavioural (execution of actions and participation). The questionnaire items were based on this framework to ensure theoretical soundness and empirical relevance. All questions used a five-point Likert-type scale (from strongly disagree, 1 to agree strongly, 5) to collect responses. The questionnaire was designed to fulfil all the study objectives and was evaluated by subject-matter experts to assess its clarity, relevance, and appropriateness for the targeted Jordanian academic elites.

Statistical methods

The study employed a range of statistical methods to analyse the collected data using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were calculated to examine respondents' demographic characteristics and engagement patterns on the X platform. The internal consistency of the study instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a high reliability coefficient of 0.956, indicating excellent stability of the questionnaire. Additionally, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used to assess the strength and significance of relationships among key study variables, providing insights into the influence of the X platform on the mental images of political events among the Jordanian academic elite.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As shown in Table 1, the study sample of academics comprised 102 (72.9%) males and 38 (27.1%) females. As for academic experience, the largest percentage was among those with more than 15 years of experience, with 72 individuals (51.4%). As for academic rank, the largest number was assistant professor at 50 (35.7%).

Table 1. Demographics of study sample

Gender	Frequency	%
Males	102	72.9
Females	38	27.1
Total	140	100
Age		
25–34	23	4.16
35–44	16	11.4
45–54	43	30.7
More than 55 years	58	41.4
Total	140	100
Academic Experience (years)		
Less than 5	19	13.6
Between 5 and 10	35	25.0
More than 10	14	10.0
15+	72	51.4
Total	140	100
Academic Rank		
Professor	22	15.7
Associate Professor	27	19.3
Assistant Professor	50	35.7
Lecturer	41	29.3
Total	140	100.0

Table 2 indicates that the majority of respondents used the X platform for more than three hours per day (51.4%), while the remaining used for one to two hours per day.

Table 2. Daily use of the X platform by respondents

	Frequency	%
Less than an hour	0	0
1 – 2 hours	68	48.6
More than 3 hours	72	51.4
Total	140	100

This result aligns with Afifi (2013) who found that university professors in northern Jordan rely on electronic journalism and digital media in general to access various information and news.

Table 3 shows that the main reason respondents use the X platform to keep abreast with political events is “ It presents many political viewpoints “ with a frequency of 126 (35.6%), followed by “ I trust the political information provided “, presented by a frequency of 67 (18.9%).

Table 3. Reasons for using the X platform to follow various political events

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Shows political news quickly	20	5.6
It presents many political viewpoints	126	35.6
Displays news in audio, image, and video	4	1.1
It provides information that other platforms do not provide	44	12.4
It has many political sources	26	7.3
Provides plenty of adequate political analysis	39	11.0
I trust the political information provided	67	18.9
Honesty in the political information provided	28	7.9
Total	354	100

This result is consistent with Jalal Ali's (2024) study, which found that most of the content on the X platform was focused on politics, indicating that Twitter's original purpose was dissemination of news and politics.

Table 4 shows that among the digital features of the X platform, "Long Tweets" had the highest mean score for shaping the mental image of political events, with a mean of 3.98. This was followed by video content (mean = 3.88) and images (mean = 3.80). The feature with the lowest influence was digital news reporting, which had a mean of 3.55.

Table 4. The contribution of X's digital features in shaping the mental image of political events

Digital feature of X	Frequency	AVT	AVG
Digital news	140	3.63	.953
Digital cartoons	140	3.59	.785
Digital interviews	140	3.67	.779
Digital photos	140	3.80	.891
Digital investigative reporting	140	3.60	.927
Audio clips	140	3.63	1.04
Long tweets	140	3.98	.959
Digital news reporting	140	3.55	1.04
Videos	140	3.88	.873

In regard to the influence of the X platform, Table 5 shows that cognitive effects was the highest (3.21%), followed by behavioural effects (3.10%), while affective effects was the lowest (3.03%). For cognitive effect, the statement, "provided me with new information about political events that I did not have before" received the highest response (3.64%), followed by "it provided me with comprehensive information and details about political events and facts"(3.40%).

Table 5. Cognitive, affective and behavioural effects as a result of the X platform in the formation of political image

Effects of X	Frequency	AVT	AVG
Cognitive effects	140	3.21	.425
It removed my ambiguity and confusion regarding some political issues.	140	3.07	.720
It introduced me to some current political events that other platforms had overlooked.	140	3.05	.627
It contributed to my knowledge of the role played by many political events	140	2.87	.812
It provided me with new information about political events that I did not have before.	140	3.64	.689
It provided me with comprehensive information and details about political events and facts.	140	3.40	.928
Affective Effects	140	3.03	.549
It satisfied my cognitive curiosity about political issues and events.	140	2.88	.778
It contributed to my gaining value regarding some issues.	3.10	.867	140
It made me feel afraid and anxious as a result of the wars and conflicts taking place.	140	2.85	.844
I contributed my support for some political events and my condemnation of others.	140	3.15	.779
It made me feel apathetic and emotionally dull due to the many conflicts and wars.	140	3.03	.817
Behavioural effects	140	3.10	.629
Push me to participate in the political process and get involved in it	140	2.92	.848
Comment on news and information related to political events	140	2.67	.789
Discuss news related to political events with family and friends	140	2.68	.823
Share news related to political events via my pages	140	3.36	.930
Explain many political events in university lectures	140	3.37	.985

This finding is consistent with Tan & Firdaus (2023), who found that the emergence of the Internet and new media not only led to the expansion of existing media systems but also provided new sources of reliance on information (political information). This finding also corroborates with Ajwa and Ali (2021), who found that a large percentage of their study sample used Twitter to obtain news in general.

Regarding behavioural effects, the majority of responses selected was “Explain many political events in university lectures” (average = 3.37), followed by “Share news related to political events via my pages” (average = 3.36). As for emotional effects, the top two were “I contributed to my support for some political events and my condemnation of others” (Average = 3.15) and “It contributed to my gaining values regarding some issues” (average 3.10).

Outcome of study hypotheses

There is a statistically significant relationship between the image of political events and the effects (emotional, cognitive, behavioural) of the X platform during the image

formation process. The Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the respondents' perception of political events and their views on the effects of the X platform. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. The relationship between political image formation and the effects of the X platform

Name		Full effects	Cognitive effects	Affective effects	Behavioural effects
Political	Pearson Correlation	0.337***	.282	.273	.298
Events	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	.001	<.001
	Total	140	140	140	140

Table 6 demonstrates the following:

- There is a positive low-level relationship ($r=0.337$) between the image of political events and effects of X in general ($p<0.05$).
- There is a positive low-level relationship ($.282^{**}$) between the image of political events and cognitive effects of X where ($p<0.05$).
- There is a positive low-level relationship ($.273^{**}$) between the image of political events and emotional effects of X where ($p<0.05$).
- There is a positive low-level relationship ($.298^{**}$) between the image of political events and behavioural effects of X where ($p<0.05$).

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed that there is a statistically significant relationship between the image of political events and the features (news, video, interviews, photos, investigative reports, audio, articles, reports, cartoons) of the X platform during the image formation process (Table 7).

Table 7. The relationship between image of political events and features of the X platform

		News	Post	Reports	Verification	Interviews	Caricature	Videos	Voice	Picture
Political	P	.344**	.124	.052	.193	.108	.146	.270	.154	.277
Events	S	<.001	.145	.546	.022	-.206	.085	.001	.070	<.001
	Total	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140	140

In general, there is a positive low-level relationship between the image of political events and X platform features ($p<0.05$).

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the collected data suggests that the X platform is particularly influential among Jordanian academic elites in shaping their perceptions of political events. The respondents actively engaged with the platform, orienting to and interpreting discussions, as well as consuming political information.

Cognitive effect

According to the Media System Dependency theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976), using X as a source of timely, concrete information about political events led respondents to build organized mental representations of the current situation. This is consistent with Tan and Firdaus (2023), who noted that social media’s access to political information has led to a greater reliance on political information, and with Kasmani (2019), who explained how Twitter posts can influence how users perceive political leaders and events. Our research shows that X is not just a means for transmitting information; it is also an important tool for building knowledge with educated audiences.

Emotional and behavioural effects

Respondents reported that the immediacy, interactivity, and multi-format nature of the content on X made political issues more emotionally relevant to them. This finding complements Al-Hajri and Al-Taher (2023) as well as Al-Mutairi (2023), who reported that social media enhances emotional responses to political events. Behavioural effects — sharing, commenting, and distributing political content — were observed, clarifying how the platform actively shapes users’ actions and engagement with political discourse. These results are consistent with Morales et al. (2025) and the Pew Research Center (2025), which found evidence of a relationship between perceptions and behaviours regarding political events and social media use.

Usage patterns and digital affordances

Findings also show that respondents definitely used X to thematically track unfolding political events. The platform’s unique digital dynamics — the combination of text, images and video, along with algorithmically curated content — played a major role in shaping how respondents understood and prioritized political information. This aligns with the findings of Abdel Moneim (2024), Haman (2020), and Al-Jazaf (2020), who found that social media serves as a primary news source and shapes the public understanding of politics.

Notably, the study effectively merges past studies of X’s impact on political elites or general audiences with the more specific academic milieu in Jordan, demonstrating how exposure to X is associated with the formation of political mental image, thus filling a gap in the existing literature. Scholarly elites in Political Science, International Relations, and Media Studies, all consume information through X and build perceptions based on it. These findings build on earlier insights about social media’s role in political communication by demonstrating how it directly influences knowledge, attitude, and behaviour among a small but powerful segment of society (and, in turn, their reporting).

Implications for theory

The study supports the premise of the Media System Dependency Theory and suggests that media tool dependency has implications for cognitive, emotional, and behavioural outcomes. It also illustrates the double-edged role of X as both a contributor to the

creation of a political event and an active negotiator of how it is mentally constructed, thus strengthening this platform's importance in digitally mediated political discussions.

Practical implications

For policymakers, journalists and educators, the study highlights the role of digital platforms in shaping elite perceptions. The potential of X to shape political knowledge and discourse is real-time and salient. Additionally, the study emphasizes the necessity for future research to explore how digital features can be intertwined with information credibility and how users interpret them in a socially sensitive context.

The study concludes that X plays a significant role in spreading political news and in shaping cognition/emotion, and behaviour among Jordanian academic elites, indicating its importance for elite perception formation in contemporary political communication.

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