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RECEIVED 08 December 2024

ACCEPTED 06 February 2025

PUBLISHED 26 February 2025

## CITATION

Shamseldien FM, Abdelkareem ANY,  
Okela AH and Aseda MAST (2025) Young  
Emiratis' uses and gratifications of mobile  
news and storytelling.  
*Front. Commun.* 10:1541747.  
doi: 10.3389/fcomm.2025.1541747

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# Young Emiratis' uses and gratifications of mobile news and storytelling

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This study examines the mobile news and storytelling consumption patterns of young Emiratis, employing the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) to elucidate their motives and favored platforms. UGT asserts that individuals deliberately choose media to satisfy specific needs, emphasizing gratifications such as information, entertainment, and social interaction. The study indicates a notable trend among young Emiratis who select mobile devices for news and storytelling, with 95.3% of respondents identifying mobile phones as their primary source. Data was gathered from 400 students using self-reported surveys, supplemented by five focus group discussions consisting of six to eight students each from Al Wasl University. The findings reveal that 82.6% of participants expressed a strong interest in mobile news and storytelling. The dimension of interactivity emerged as a significant source of gratification and is strongly associated with storytelling consumption. The results underscore the considerable influence of mobile devices on the media consumption habits of young Emiratis and suggest opportunities for enhancing interactive storytelling in digital journalism.

## KEYWORDS

media consumption, mobile news, storytelling apps, UGT, young Emiratis

## 1 Introduction

The prevalence of mobile devices has profoundly altered how individuals, especially young people, obtain news and storytelling globally from smartphones via news applications or social media platforms (Wang, 2017). In the UAE, where mobile devices are progressively acknowledged as the primary source of information (Saad and Hamza, 2021), it is essential to examine the motivations behind this shift. Studies indicate that young people are increasingly using mobile applications for news consumption and interacting with content in a reciprocal, interactive, and socially engaged way (Incollingo, 2018; Okela, 2019). About 90% of individuals aged 15–29 in Egypt access news via mobile phones, predominantly through social media platforms (Okela, 2019). This rise corresponds with global trends, suggesting that mobile devices have emerged as the primary source of news for several individuals, surpassing traditional media devices (Chan-Olmsted et al., 2013; Struckmann and Karnowski, 2016). Consequently, news portals must deeply understand the young generation to provide suitable services (Wang, 2017).

Additionally, Digital storytelling enables young Emiratis to articulate their identities, safeguard their cultural heritage, and reconcile tradition with modernity. Emirati youth, mainly active on Instagram and TikTok, amalgamate oral histories and poetry with

international digital trends to construct hybrid identities (Ali and Moussa, 2022; Zidan and Mellor, 2023). This participatory engagement enables users to engage with content, remark, and remix narratives, thereby establishing a dynamic storytelling loop that reflects both individual and collective narratives. Platforms also enable rapid access to mobile news, which intersects with digital storytelling as youth frequently employ current events to structure their narratives or create culturally relevant content (Ayish, 2021). According to Moreno-Almeida and Banaji (2019), mobile news consumption enhances real-time storytelling, enabling users to critically engage with and react to prevalent topics specific to their cultural and social sphere.

The UGT elucidates how young Emiratis engage with digital storytelling and mobile news to fulfill specific needs such as information-seeking, cultural expression, entertainment, and social connection. According to this theory, audience behavior is motivated by active choices to consume media that satisfies individual needs, such as gaining cultural validation or social belonging (Raven and O'Donnell, 2010). Emirati youth utilize mobile news platforms to cultivate and manage their identities through engagement with global and local narratives. Social media platforms' comments enhance the interplay among storytelling, news, audience engagement, likes, and shares, facilitating self-expression and social recognition (Ali and Moussa, 2022; Zidan and Mellor, 2023). These connections illustrate the impact of digital storytelling and mobile news consumption on the narrative and self-representation of Emirati youth.

Although there is increasing literature on mobile news usage, scarce research examines mobile news consumption concerning the young Emiratis' gratifications. Previous research has sought to assess trends in mobile media usage; nevertheless, there exists a research gap concerning the motivations and experiences of young Emiratis within the context of the UGT. The UGT clarifies that individuals intentionally select to interact with media to fulfill information and entertainment needs or build social connections (Littlejohn and Foss, 2010). This study seeks to fill the research gap by investigating the uses and gratifications linked to news consumption on mobile devices among young Emiratis, focusing on interactivity, surveillance, social value, and escapism as the four dimensions of user gratifications.

This research seeks to fulfill three objectives: (1) to clarify the motivations driving young Emiratis' use of mobile news; (2) to assess the influence of social media on news content consumption; and (3) to examine how the motivations for mobile news consumption among young Emirates correspond with the different aspects of the UGT. This research aims to provide deeper insights into the dynamics of mobile news consumption among young Emiratis and to provide implications for mobile journalism.

## 2 Theoretical background

The three primary parts of the UGT related to mobile news and storytelling platforms are information-seeking, entertainment, and social connection. Interactivity and customization are the main features that affect these gratifications; interactivity enhances users' engagement and autonomy and makes them more immersed. It fulfills users' entertainment needs by allowing their participation in the narrative through swiping non-linearly (Jacobson et al., 2018; Tremayne, 2008). Mobile users are motivated by the timely, diverse, exclusive, or original news content provided by news apps (Guo, 2024). Mobile devices enable

consumers to be constantly connected to the Internet. Consequently, they alter the reception of information by faster access, greater timeliness, and new media consumption contexts (Wolf and Schnauber, 2015).

Mobile-specific features such as portability, push alerts, and the capacity to engage with content in diverse environments optimally fulfill situational gratifications for information-seeking and immediacy (Van Damme et al., 2015; Wolf and Schnauber, 2015), enable users of rapid and widespread sharing of news, thereby serves a variety of purposes, including the following: remaining socially connected, seeking information, presenting oneself positively, helping others, changing others' opinions, and for entertainment (Anderson, 2024). Siakalli et al.'s (2015) study revealed that mobile social media users fulfill escape and entertainment gratifications, and mobile use for news purposes is correlated with surveillance. Consequently, the following research question and hypothesis are posited:

RQ1: What gratifications do young Emiratis derive from consuming mobile news and storytelling?

H1: There is a significant relationship between mobile news and storytelling consumption among young Emiratis and their gratification dimensions, including information-seeking, entertainment, social connection, and convenience.

## 3 Literature review

### 3.1 Reconstructing boundaries between news and storytelling

The digital transformation and increasing integration of the media environment have profoundly reshaped media practices. Research shows that critical elements of the high-impact paradigm shift are the ongoing modification of media work (ways of gathering, editing, and producing news), rearrangement of the relationships between media, their audience, and their sources (Burgess and Hurcombe, 2019; Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2019; Nah and Chung, 2020), as well as the transformation of the media organizations, the business practices, and the models. Media content and storytelling have faced fundamental challenges. Approaches from across disciplinary backgrounds emphasize various components of this transition, but each underlines the current blurring of media boundaries. In this context, researchers interpret changes in media as boundary work or even a boundary struggle (Carlson, 2015; Boesman and Meijer, 2018). The transformation mentioned has affected the external and internal boundaries of media as a profession and a practice: the ideologies and politics of media, the professional roles and norms, the ways of constructing news narratives, and, among others, the traditional hierarchy of media genres (Carlson, 2015).

One of the most significant fields in which this boundary work occurs is the increasing participation of the media audience. The digital media environment provides more opportunities for audience members to participate in journalistic workflows than ever before. Current forms of audience contribution, such as citizen media, personal blogs, crowd-sourced stories, collective interviews, comments, content ranking, forums, journalist blogs, polls, and social networking, have evolved into new forms of storytelling, creating a fresh narrative style within the field of digital literature. These

interactive and participatory elements are increasingly woven into the news production processes of online newspapers and websites.

In media work, the term storytelling has become multifaceted, being used to name both a specific media genre (such as narrative or transmedia journalism) and a media practice (Boesman and Meijer, 2018). In the latter sense, it is often seen as the opposite of, or at least something different from, truth-seeking. According to a study among newspaper journalists, “*newsmakers and storytellers—experienced as roles, identities, or positions—differ in their preparation and presentation practices when making news stories*” (p. 18), while both strategies are seen as responses to the emergence of online news. Storytelling as practice has always been an integral part of media work. In previous centuries, journalists often used literary elements in their writings. However, because of the professionalization of journalism, “*the narrative style of news articles was replaced with a neutral and objective style*” (Van Krieken, 2018, p. 1). Under the influence of New Media, storytelling returned to newsrooms in the 1960s and 1970s by applying literary techniques, such as point-of-view writing and scene-by-scene reconstructions. These techniques encourage immersive reading experiences involving the audience in the described scenes (Van Krieken, 2018).

Vázquez-Herrero et al. (2019) examine how media outlets utilize Instagram Stories. Their study aims to identify the strategies employed by media on this platform and to explore the features of adaptation and innovation that enhance its use. The researchers investigated whether Instagram Stories are being leveraged as a news distribution channel and the types of content, topics, resources, and purposes for which media employ this feature. Their findings “*show that the media are producing ephemeral stories for Instagram with the main purpose of adapting their news contents to the functionalities of this platform and the users’ preferences*” (p. 2). Thus, news today can be delivered through traditional methods of straightforward information dissemination, such as TV, radio, and print journalism, or engaging storytelling narratives. This dual approach allows media to adapt content to conventional audiences and digital users’ interactive, story-driven preferences. This practice has been further expanded by the widespread use of mobile devices and social media apps, which allow for greater interactivity and accessibility in news consumption. As a result, storytelling narratives are now more integrated into how news is delivered across various digital platforms.

Consequently, portability is a defining characteristic of modern communication media, particularly in the context of mobile technologies. Integrating advanced wireless networking and miniaturized devices has transformed personal computing into a mobile-centric paradigm, allowing users to communicate seamlessly across various environments (Havinga and Smit, 2000). Today, users use various mobile devices, such as mobile phones, tablets, and laptops. Mobile phones are the most widespread technology in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), especially among young people. In early 2024, 20.96 million cellular mobile connections were active in the UAE, equivalent to 219.4% of the total population (Kemp, 2024).

Mobile devices have become integral to daily life. Recent statistics on Internet usage indicate that news and storytelling consumption predominantly occurs online, with mobile devices as the primary access point (Rowley, 2015). In contemporary society, mobile devices are ubiquitous, and the mobile app ecosystem is vast and steadily expanding. As of January 2017, over 3 million applications were available on the Android platform, with more than 1,300 new applications added daily.

Similarly, the Apple iPhone platform offered approximately 2.2 million applications. 2015 iPhone app downloads reached 25 billion, while Android app downloads surpassed 50 billion (Dogtiev, 2018).

Today, mobile users can access real-time news and storytelling anywhere and anytime through various means, including browsing mobile websites, installing news and storytelling applications, and messaging service notifications (Westlund, 2015). News and storytelling consumption increasingly occurs across several devices, particularly mobile devices, which have introduced multiple options, transforming how audiences engage with news and storytelling. This transition has allowed users to easily follow and obtain news (Van Damme et al., 2015). The adoption of mobile news and storytelling has followed the rapid adoption of mobile devices. Approximately nine out of 10 users consume news and storytelling via mobile, especially young people, who prefer mobile phones as the greatest tool for breaking news (Shearer, 2021). Most university students (72%) confirmed that they access news and storytelling via mobile applications (Alsridi, 2018). Accessing news and storytelling while on the go is crucial for mobile news and storytelling consumption (Schmitz Weiss, 2018). Simultaneously, prominent news and storytelling organizations (e.g., Al Jazeera, BBC Arabic, etc.) have launched their mobile applications to push breaking news and stories and more specific functions and facilitate direct interaction with users. Accordingly, the following research question and hypothesis are posited:

RQ2: What are the reasons young Emiratis prefer or avoid using mobile devices for news consumption, what are their primary sources for accessing news and storytelling?

H2: Young Emiratis who frequently use mobile devices are likelier to consume news and storytelling than those who use mobile devices less frequently.

H3: Young Emiratis who engage in high-intensity Internet use are more likely to consume mobile news and storytelling content than those who engage in low-intensity Internet use.

## 3.2 Research gap

This study ambitions covering the gap in research on the unique ways the publics engage with storytelling on mobile platforms because even though previous studies generally focus on media consumption habits, there is hardly any research investigating the storytelling techniques and interactivity used to capture and maintain user interest. This aims to investigate how young Emiratis interact with storytelling components in mobile news applications because they study the interactivity, emotional connection, and cultural relevance defining user experiences in this context. This will add valuable insight into the effective integration of storytelling in mobile journalism to meet audience preferences and needs in the UAE.

## 3.3 Research methodology

The study uses an analytical descriptive method to measure and describe young Emiratis’ news and storytelling gratifications. This

quantitative research method attempts to collect quantifiable information for statistical analysis of the young Emiratis' mobile and other media consumption for storytelling.

### 3.3.1 Ethics approval for research tools

The University of Kalba (UKB) Research Ethics Committee approved the study. Before participation, the participants provided written informed consent to participate in this study after explicitly articulating the voluntary nature of participation, guaranteeing the confidentiality of all responses, specified that data (from the online survey and focus group discussion) would be utilized exclusively for research purposes, and conveyed the participant's freedom to withdraw from the study at any moment. All discussions were recorded solely for research reasons, with access restricted to the study team. The ethical framework emphasizes the rights and wellbeing of participants during the study process.

### 3.3.2 Participants

An online questionnaire was distributed to a random sample from Al Wasl University (AWU) in Dubai between October 15th and December 20th, 2023, participants across nine other programs in three wastes as undergraduate (BA) and six postgraduate programs, at an age range of 17–35. Furthermore, AWU is a nonprofit organization and thus accessible to higher education. Most of the scholars, particularly over 90%, are Emirati, with 90% studying without fee payments, while the others pay <50%. This allows Emiratis from any socioeconomic background to pursue educational opportunities without financial limitations, rendering AWU a unique space for equitable education. Although this study focuses on social sciences and humanities students, rather than a mixed bunch of applied sciences students, thus remains a very strong point of this study. Research is carried out on students already involved in fields that stress critical thinking, communication, and media studies and therefore is beneficial because such a population produces relevant and meaningful data. Because of the nature of their undergraduate curriculum and programs, social sciences and humanities students are more likely to engage with news, storytelling, and digital media as part of their academic and professional development. This, in essence, creates an ideal opportunity for examining mobile news consumption and digital storytelling trends. For these and other reasons, AWU forms an ideal place for the investigation of mobile news consumption and storytelling trends amongst young Emiratis. The institution's student characteristics predominantly embrace Emiratis, from social sciences and humanities programs, hence offering a focused sample of the research which boosts the validity of the outcome.

### 3.3.3 Focus group discussions

To better understand the motivations and experiences of young Emiratis in their consumption of news and storytelling through mobile devices, focus group discussions were held with a selected group of students from AWU. The study primarily looked at how various types of content and platforms meet different needs and desires. A purposive sampling strategy was used to choose participants for the five focus groups, guided by filtering questions. The filtering questions assessed students' media consumption patterns, with a particular focus on the differences between traditional digital news and storytelling platforms. Then, the researchers invited participants who demonstrated active engagement with digital media. Ethical considerations were rigorously

applied, which included obtaining written informed consent from all participants, ensuring their voluntary participation, and ensuring their identity's anonymity throughout the research process. Then, each group contains six to eight students, to ensure diversity in terms of gender, and academic discipline. A semi-structured guide facilitated open-ended discussions on motivations for consuming mobile news and storytelling, preferred platforms, and emotional or social gratifications from storytelling consumption.

### 3.3.4 Data collection and analysis

For the online questionnaire, there 426 students participated; after incomplete questionnaires were excluded, 400 responses were analyzed by using SPSS version 25. A total of 381 students consumed news and storytelling through smartphones (95.3%), while 19 did not use mobile devices for storytelling (4.7%). Among the participants, 51.2% were male and 48.8% were female. The mean age of responders was 19.5 years. Participants, on average, spend 90 min daily (with a range of 60–180 min) on mobile Internet browsing and 26 min (varying from 5 to 90 min) accessing stories on their smartphones. Moreover, 71% of participants who follow news and storytelling get their stories from social media apps via smartphones.

For the focus group discussions, the researchers employed the structured approach detailed by [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#) to analyze the focus group data through thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the gratifications of news and storytelling consumption. This approach entails the following steps: familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and generating the final report. The analysis identified three primary themes: (1) The use of mobile devices for news and storytelling, (2) The reasons for consuming mobile news, and (3) The gratifications that young Emirates derive from mobile news and storytelling applications. The research team identified these themes through an iterative process of categorization and discussion, thereby guaranteeing the consistency and reliability of the data's interpretation.

### 3.3.5 Measures

The questionnaire consists of two sections: the first assesses news and storytelling and other storytelling sources, while the second evaluates gratifications derived from news and storytelling. This section consists of 12 questions designed to assess (interest in news and storytelling, sources of storytelling, internet usage, duration of internet use, internet use for storytelling consumption, duration of storytelling consumption via the internet, storytelling applications, mobile devices as sources of storytelling, and motivations for acquiring stories through mobile devices).

The News and Storytelling Gratifications Scale is a 27-item, five-point Likert scale that evaluates four dimensions of gratifications related to news and storytelling: interactivity, surveillance, social connection, and escape. Participants assess each item on a scale from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Some aspects of this measure are derived from prior research, notably studies conducted by [Siakalli et al. \(2015\)](#), [Leung and Wei \(2000\)](#), and [Westlund \(2015\)](#) (see [Appendix 1](#)).

### 3.3.6 Reliability of measures

The reliability of the News and Storytelling Gratifications Scale was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha. Its high-reliability coefficient



of 0.927 indicates internal solid consistency. Table 1 presents the reliability estimates for each dimension of the gratifications scale.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Research questions results

#### 4.1.1 RQ1: what gratifications do young Emiratis derive from consuming mobile news and storytelling?

To address the Research Question (RQ1), the researchers calculated the mean scores and percentage distributions for each item on the gratifications scale (Table 2) illustrating that over half of the respondents (52.2%) strongly agreed with the interactivity dimension of mobile news and storytelling gratifications, particularly valuing the ability to “skip ads and go directly to what [they] need to watch or read.” Additionally, 54.3% of respondents agreed with the social connection dimension, noting that mobile news provided “something to talk about with others.” Notably, the highest average score of 4.38 within the interactivity dimension reflects respondents’ appreciation for the option to “share and disseminate news with friends.” Overall, the mean scores for each gratification dimension were as follows: interactivity (4.28), surveillance (4.12), social connection (3.95), and escape (3.78). These findings suggest that interactivity and social connection are particularly significant drivers of mobile news engagement among young Emiratis, indicating a strong preference for features that facilitate immediate information sharing and social connection. Additionally, the relatively lower score for escape gratification implies that, while entertainment is a factor, it may not be the primary motivation for mobile news consumption in this group.

The focus group sessions produced significant insights that clarified the factors driving young Emiratis’ involvement with mobile news. Participants demonstrated a significant appreciation for the interactivity provided by mobile platforms, with one individual remarking, “I greatly value the ability to bypass advertisements and access the content I desire directly; it enhances my experience considerably.” Moreover, numerous participants highlighted the social connection of mobile news, indicating that it offers them subjects for discourse with peers. A participant stated, “Mobile news provides topics for discussion with my friends; we frequently share interesting articles in our group chats.” The debates underscored the importance of information sharing, as another participant commented, “The ability to disseminate news instantaneously maintains the vibrancy and engagement of our conversations.” The focus groups corroborated the questionnaire results, indicating that interaction and social connection are primary factors influencing mobile news engagement among young Emiratis.

TABLE 1 Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients.

Dimension	No. of items	Reliability
Interactivity	9	0.792
Surveillance	9	0.887
Social connection	4	0.857
Escape	5	0.879

Furthermore, focus groups have revealed a notable inclination toward character-driven storylines with local cultural references, as the stories remind them of their experiences, as participants mentioned. Quantitative survey data indicated that 71% preferred stories with interactive elements like polls and quizzes, significantly increasing their engagement levels. Comparative analysis showed that users spent more time on stories containing multimedia elements than traditional text articles. These results prove the necessity of integrating good storytelling techniques within mobile news platforms that best present the audience among young Emiratis.

#### 4.1.2 RQ2: what are the reasons young Emiratis prefer or avoid using mobile devices for news consumption, what are their primary sources for accessing news and storytelling?

To answer the research question (RQ2) the researchers calculated the percentage of respondents to the questionnaire items, the results indicated that the mobile phone is the predominant medium for news and storytelling. Specifically, 95.3% of respondents stated that they consistently utilize their mobile devices to access storytelling content, whereas 4.7% of participants express a preference against consuming news and storytelling using mobile devices for several reasons (refer to Table 3).

Moreover, the focus group discussions indicated that young Emiratis prioritized the convenience of obtaining news on mobile devices as a crucial element in their selection of these platforms. University students observed that the capacity to obtain updates at any time, primarily via social media platforms such as Facebook, augments their participation in current events. One participant remarked, “I appreciate the ability to comment on articles and share them with my friends; it enhances my sense of involvement.” This corresponds with quantitative statistics indicating a significant preference for social media as a news source.

The findings indicate that young Emiratis consider mobile devices convenient for accessing news and storytelling content. To understand why mobile devices, dominate as a preferred medium, the university students were asked about specific reasons for choosing mobile as their primary source of news and storytelling. The top reasons mentioned include the effortlessness of accessing news and storytelling anywhere and anytime (53.02%) and the ease of following news and storytelling content on mobile (51.18%) (see Table 4).

Complementing the quantitative data, focus group results indicated that participants appreciated the convenience of accessing news on the go. One participant remarked, “I can check the news anytime during my day—whether on campus or waiting in line in restaurants.” This accessibility is a crucial factor for mobile news consumption.

Mobile devices have emerged as the most common news and storytelling source among young Emiratis, surpassing desktop and laptop computers and traditional devices such as TV and print. Approximately 99.3% of Young Emirati university students report using mobile phones for news and storytelling, compared to 9% who use tablets, 18% who access news and storytelling using a desktop, and 15% by laptops. Additionally, 43% of university students obtain news and storytelling from TV, while 6% rely on print media.

Sampling data for a shorter period, from September 4 to 25, 2023, provides insights into recent trends or specific patterns in media usage that might be less apparent in annual data. This focused sample allows

TABLE 2 Distribution of responses to the mobile news and storytelling gratifications scale.

Items		Very disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree		Average	%
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%		
Interactivity	1	0	0	0	0	27	9.6	175	45.9	179	47.0	4.37	87.4
	2	0	0	0	0	60	21.4	187	49.1	134	35.2	4.14	82.8
	3	6	2.1	3	1.1	47	16.7	184	48.3	141	37.0	4.15	83
	4	0	0	3	1.1	38	13.5	146	38.3	194	50.9	4.36	87.2
	5	0	0	6	2.1	28	10	148	38.8	199	52.2	4.38	87.6
	6	0	0	3	1.1	34	12.1	148	38.8	196	51.4	4.37	87.4
	7	3	1.1	0	0	37	13.2	163	42.8	178	46.7	4.3	86
	8	0	0	0	0	61	21.7	160	42.0	160	42.0	4.2	84
	9	0	0	6	2.1	44	15.7	157	41.2	174	45.7	4.26	85.2
Surveillance	10	0	0	6	2.1	63	22.4	154	40.4	158	41.5	4.16	83.2
	11	3	1.1	0	0	44	15.7	170	44.6	164	43.0	4.24	84.8
	12	3	1.1	4	1.4	45	16	181	47.5	148	38.8	4.15	83
	13	0	0	3	1.1	40	14.2	192	50.4	146	38.3	4.22	84.4
	14	13	4.6	21	7.5	108	38.4	135	35.4	104	27.3	3.7	74
	15	0	0	12	4.3	69	24.6	183	48.0	117	30.7	3.97	79.4
	16	3	1.1	9	3.2	46	16.4	165	43.3	158	41.5	4.16	83.2
	17	0	0	0	0	51	18.1	184	48.3	146	38.3	4.2	84
	18	3	1.1	0	0	31	11	175	45.9	172	45.1	4.31	86.2
Social connection	19	3	1.1	13	4.6	43	15.3	207	54.3	115	30.2	4.02	80.4
	20	3	1.1	7	2.5	55	19.6	192	50.4	124	32.5	4.06	81.2
	21	6	2.1	16	5.7	96	34.2	152	39.9	111	29.1	3.77	75.4
	22	3	1.1	19	6.8	71	25.3	141	37.0	147	38.6	3.96	79.2
Escape	23	6	2.1	3	1.1	77	27.4	156	40.9	139	36.5	4.02	80.4
	24	9	3.2	26	9.3	95	33.8	136	35.7	115	30.2	3.69	73.8
	25	9	3.2	21	7.5	67	23.8	149	39.1	135	35.4	3.92	78.4
	26	19	6.8	36	12.8	97	34.5	101	26.5	128	33.6	3.63	72.6
	27	24	8.5	30	10.7	93	33.1	114	29.9	120	31.5	3.62	72.4

TABLE 3 For these reasons, users do not prefer mobile devices as a source of news and storytelling.

Reasons to avoid news and storytelling consumption by mobile device ( <i>n</i> = 19)	Freq.	%
In general, I do not care to follow news and storytelling	13	68.4
Getting news and storytelling via other sources (e.g., TV and storytelling papers) is enough.	16	84.2
Reading news and storytelling via a tinny screen is exhausting for me.	16	84.2
I need more time to read news and storytelling when I use my mobile.	11	57.9
I prefer to spend time with my favorite game rather than watching/reading news and storytelling	6	31.6

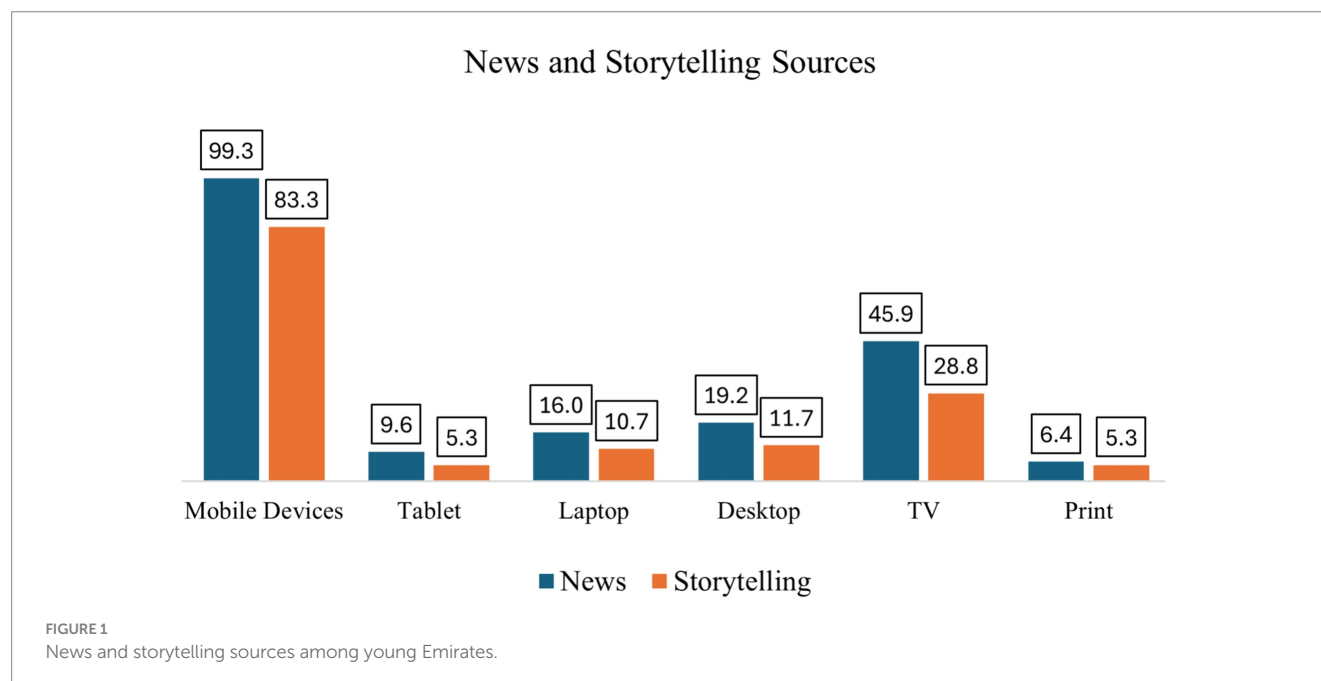
us to observe if there have been shifts in news and storytelling consumption preferences among young Emiratis within a concentrated timeframe, potentially revealing the impact of new media habits, recent events, or trends that could be obscured in year-long averages. In the past weeks (September 4–25, 2023), 99.3 and 83.3% of young Emirates used mobile devices to get news and

storytelling, respectively, and university students used other devices with lower consumption (see Figure 1).

The qualitative insights that the focus group discussions provided significantly improved the quantitative results of the study. All participants acknowledged the significance of mobile devices in their news consumption. One participant stated, “My mobile is my essential

TABLE 4 Reasons for using mobile phones for news and storytelling.

Reasons to use mobile as a source of news and storytelling ( <i>n</i> = 381)	Freq.	%
It is easy to get news and storytelling anywhere, anytime	202	53.02
Simplicity to pursue news and storytelling	195	51.18
I can customize news and storytelling according to my interests	151	39.63
I can follow news and storytelling while practicing other activities	129	33.86
Various mobile apps for news and storytelling	124	32.55
I can easily share and comment on news and storytelling	117	30.71
Mobile phone news and storytelling is free	90	23.62



source for news; I can access updates at any time, whether in class or socializing with friends.” Others echoed this sentiment, emphasizing mobile news access’s convenience and immediate nature. A participant asserted, “I previously relied on television for news, but I now find myself browsing social media feeds,” suggesting a shift in preference toward digital sources. One participant indicated, “I obtain most of my news from Facebook; it is where I observe global events.” The discussions suggested that social media, particularly Facebook, is a primary news source. In general, the focus groups corroborated the questionnaire findings, illustrating the impact of mobile devices and social media on the news consumption and storytelling practices of young Emiratis.

Findings indicate that smartphone users depend more on social networks for news and storytelling. Approximately 47% of smartphone users obtain news and storytelling via social network applications. Applications like Instagram and Snapchat are critical sources for news and consume and produce stories by young people; 24% through newspaper applications, 12% from television news and storytelling channel applications, 10% utilize search engines for news and storytelling, and merely 7% of young Emiratis access news and storytelling applications (e.g., Nabd and Rasd) (see Figure 2).

## 4.2 Hypothesis results

### 4.2.1 H1: there is a significant relationship between mobile news and storytelling consumption among young Emiratis and their gratification dimensions, including information-seeking, entertainment, social connection, and convenience

A positive correlation was established between young Emiratis’ mobile news and storytelling consumption and the gratifications dimensions, encompassing Interactivity, Surveillance, Social connection, and Escape, all significant at the 0.01 level ( $p < 0.01$ ). The Spearman correlation coefficients for these dimensions were 0.260 for Interactivity, 0.237 for Surveillance, 0.215 for Social Connection, and 0.166 for Escape (refer to Table 5). The findings indicate that, although all dimensions of gratifications correlate positively with mobile news and storytelling consumption, Interactivity and Surveillance exhibit a stronger association, suggesting that young Emiratis are primarily driven by features that facilitate active engagement and timely information access. The diminished correlation for Escape indicates that, while some

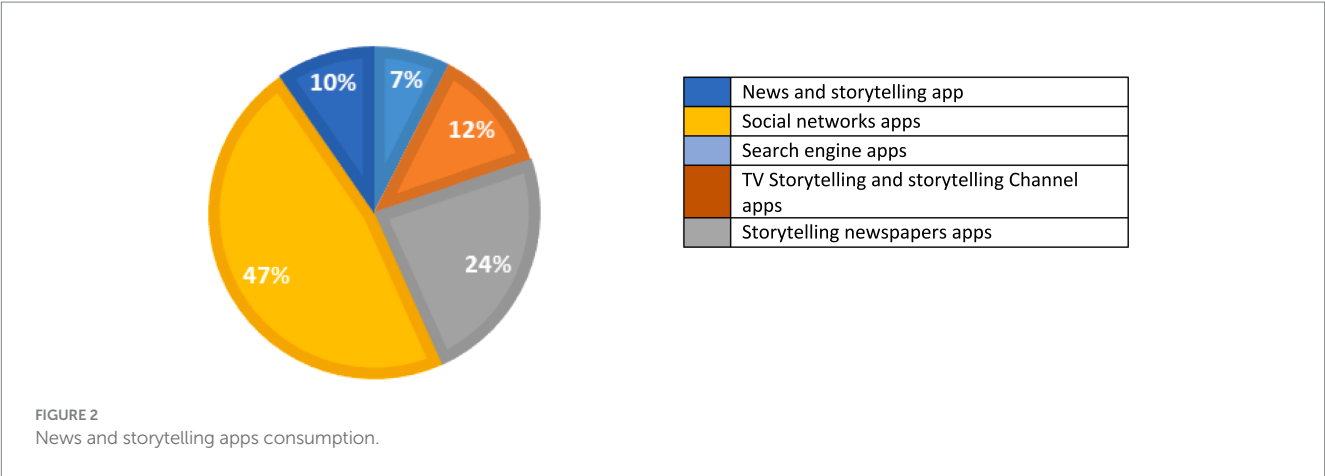


TABLE 5 Correlations between mobile news and storytelling use and young Emiratis' gratifications.

Variables	Gratifications				Hypothesis outcome
	Interactivity	Surveillance	Social connection	Escape	
Mobile news and storytelling consumption	0.260**	0.237**	0.215**	0.166**	Supported

\*\**p* < 0.01.

TABLE 6 Correlations between mobile use and news and storytelling consumption.

Variables	News and storytelling consumption	Hypotheses outcomes
Mobile use	0.398**	Supported

\*\**p* < 0.01.

individuals utilize mobile news as a diversion, it is not as primary motivation as other gratifications.

The focus group discussions offered a deeper understanding of the correlation between mobile news consumption and internet usage among young Emiratis. Participants recognized a distinct correlation between their engagement with mobile news and their online behaviors. A participant pointed out, “I spend much time online, and I notice that the more I use the internet for news, the more I find myself checking my phone for updates.” An additional participant stated, “When I am looking for news, I always go straight to my apps; it feels more immediate and relevant than anything else.” This underscores the significance of mobile devices in providing expeditious access to information, which is consistent with the discovery that interactivity and surveillance are the primary gratifications that motivate engagement. Additionally, one participant declared, “I may peruse the news when I wish to unwind, but my primary objective is to locate stories that I can either share online or engage in conversation with my peers...”

4.2.2 H2: young Emiratis who frequently use mobile devices are likelier to consume news and storytelling than those who use mobile devices less frequently

Table 6 illustrated a significant positive correlation between mobile use and news and storytelling consumption among young Emirates (*r* = 0.398). This suggests that heavy mobile users of young Emiratis are heavy mobile news and storytelling consumers.

4.2.3 H3: young Emiratis who engage in high-intensity internet use are more likely to consume mobile news and storytelling content than those who engage in low-intensity internet use

The results of (Table 7) indicated a positive correlation between internet use, internet use specifically for news and storytelling, and mobile usage with young Emiratis' consumption of mobile news and storytelling, all significant at the 0.01 level (*p* < 0.01). The Spearman correlation coefficients were calculated as 0.140 for general internet use, and 0.479 for internet use for news and storytelling.

5 Discussion and conclusion

The study's results offer significant insights into how young Emiratis consume news and storytelling on mobile devices, what motivates them, and the content types they are interested in. The findings reveal a significant preference among young Emiratis for reading news and storytelling-related content on their mobile devices, especially smartphones. It was found that 95.3% of participants use mobile phones as their main source of information, suggesting that the portability and accessibility of mobile technology significantly influence media consumption behaviors in this generation (Alsriddi, 2018); this result contradicts the findings of Van Damme et al. (2015), which indicated that most news



TABLE 7 Correlations between internet use, and internet use for news and storytelling consumption.

Usages	News and storytelling consumption	Hypotheses outcomes
Internet use	0.140**	Supported
Internet use for news	0.479**	Supported

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

consumers primarily depend on traditional media outlets for information, utilizing internet mobile services only in particular situations.

The results suggested that the primary motivation for young Emiratis to use mobile devices is to obtain news immediately and on time. 82.6% of university students are interested in mobile news and storytelling, emphasizing the importance of immediacy. This finding aligns with [Okela \(2019\)](#) research on the increasing reliance of young people on mobile applications for real-time information. Furthermore, the findings report that the interactive features of a mobile machine are a prime source of gratification, especially in the consumption of storytelling, indicating Young Emiratis as active consumers looking for an interactive experience that would enable them to engage with content actively. This demonstrates growing trends in digital media focusing on interactivity in user engagement and satisfaction ([Burgess and Hurcombe, 2019](#)).

Social media has a significant influence on news consumption. The findings reveal that 71% of participants predominantly obtain news and stories through social media applications. This result underscores the crucial influence of social media as a central instrument in how young Emiratis get news content and interact with it. As social media gradually has become the medium for gathering information, it has also evolved into the stage for social interaction and community sharing regarding shared stories ([Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2019](#)). According to the results, young Emiratis thus consider social media a source not only of information but also for interaction and association, emphasizing the social side of news consumption.

The study found that young Emiratis seek specific gratifications when consuming mobile news or storytelling. Participants indicated types of consumption for entertainment, social connections, and convenience, which concur with the UGT in that individuals select their media according to their needs ([Littlejohn and Foss, 2010](#)). The desire for escape that storytelling provides to this audience is exciting, which suggests that stories offer immersive experiences to the audience. As digital storytelling evolves, media producers must realize that storytelling must be designed for information and emotional-societal engagement.

Consequently, such findings are relevant to mobile journalism practices. Young Emiratis increasingly gravitate toward interactive storytelling content, so there is an opportunity for innovations in storytelling styles by journalists and media organizations. Content designers will raise user engagement and satisfaction using mobile application multimedia components and interactive elements. This is particularly important given the current digital evolution, which has failed with traditional news formats in finding younger audiences.

Additionally, popular storytelling apps like Instagram and Snapchat are available. These apps are now important news delivery platforms, enabling users to engage in real-time with narratives.

Furthermore, the transience of these services encourages high frequency, with users attracted to them just because the immediacy and interactivity they offer are enough to keep them coming back for more. Also, popular news organizations have altered their content strategies to explore and penetrate new areas in which immersive storytelling experiences inspire young audiences. As mobile devices further monopolize the media, understanding the dynamics of storytelling applications will gradually become important for any media producers to capture the attention and, in turn, get young Emiratis interested.

In conclusion, this study emphasized the complex dynamics of mobile news consumption and storytelling among young Emiratis. The findings emphasize the essential function of mobile devices in enabling information access while also underscoring the significance of interactivity and social involvement in influencing user experiences. As media consumption progresses, comprehending these motives will be crucial for formulating effective methods that appeal to youthful audiences in the UAE and worldwide. Building on these findings, this study has several important implications for practice and future research, for instance, the great influence of interactivity as a means of fulfillment emphasizes the need for digital journalism to develop and include more interactive storytelling aspects. Media companies aiming at younger audiences, especially in the UAE, should consider creating participative, interesting, mobile-friendly material to align with the preferences of this group. To improve user experience, this can involve including multimedia storytelling, comment sections, and polls.

Furthermore, the results might guide educational institutions regarding young adults' media consumption patterns. These revelations could be used by colleges to create media literacy initiatives allowing students to actively interact with mobile news and storytelling platforms. Training in digital storytelling and content development could also help young Emiratis to become active participants in the media scene.

### 5.1 Future research

Future research could expand the range of mobile news and storytelling apps examined, considering both social network and news-specific apps (e.g., Nabd, Rasd) that emphasize the immediacy and accessibility of mobile news. It may also be valuable to explore variations in mobile news consumption among young Emiratis based on these app types. Integrating the Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) Theory alongside UGT could provide insights into the factors driving mobile news adoption. UGT clarifies the motivations and gratifications influencing media consumption, whereas DOI Theory provides a framework for analyzing the adoption and dissemination of innovative news and storytelling formats and platforms among young people.

Furthermore, DOI Theory could be employed to examine the phases of adoption. Research on news credibility and comparisons between mobile and computer-based news consumption via social network apps could further enrich our understanding of this demographic's media behavior.

## Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

## Ethics statement

The University of Kalba (UKB) Research Ethics Committee approved the study. Before participation, the participants provided written informed consent to participate in this study.

## Author contributions

FS: Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis. AA: Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Data curation, Formal analysis, Software, Supervision. AO: Data curation, Project administration, Resources, Software, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Supervision. MA: Data curation, Formal analysis,

Funding acquisition, Methodology, Software, Validation, Writing – original draft, Investigation, Resources.

## Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

## Generative AI statement

The author(s) declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

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## Appendix 1 Mobile news and storytelling gratifications scale items

### *Interactivity*

1. I can control the way I interact with content on mobile apps.
2. Mobile apps respond quickly to my touch inputs and commands.
3. Mobile apps allow me to communicate directly with others (e.g., comments or shares).
4. I feel that Mobile apps provide a personalized experience based on my interests.
5. Mobile apps let me easily share and disseminate news with my friends or on social media.
6. Mobile apps support real-time interactions, like live updates or discussions.
7. I skip ads and go directly to what I need to watch or read.
8. I can choose what type of content I want to see on my Mobile apps.
9. I can interact with multimedia formats (e.g., videos and infographics) effectively on Mobile apps.

### *Surveillance*

10. I use Mobile apps to stay informed about current events and breaking news.
11. Mobile apps are my primary source of reliable news and information.
12. I trust Mobile apps to provide accurate and timely updates about issues I care about.
13. Using Mobile apps helps me stay aware of what is going on locally and globally.
14. The information I found on Mobile apps satisfies my curiosity about specific topics.
15. I feel up to date after browsing through the news on Mobile apps.
16. I rely on Mobile apps for real-time news alerts and push notifications.
17. Mobile apps allow me to investigate and explore topics in-depth when I'm interested.
18. I check Mobile apps frequently to ensure I'm not missing out on important updates.

### *Social connection*

19. I use Mobile apps to find something to talk about with others.
20. Mobile apps allow me to share news or content with friends or family easily.
21. Mobile apps help me stay socially connected by giving me content to talk about with others.
22. I feel that Mobile apps enhance my ability to connect with others over shared interests.

### *Escape*

23. I use Mobile apps to relax and take my mind off stress.
24. Scrolling through Mobile apps helps me kill time when I'm bored.
25. Mobile apps provide an enjoyable distraction from my daily routine.
26. I like using Mobile apps when I need to unwind or do something entertaining.
27. Mobile apps are easy to use and convenient when I want a quick mental break.