Sustainable News Businesses through Ethical and Quality Journalism: The Role of Media Brand Reputation

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Abstract: This study investigates the determinants of consumers' intention to subscribe to paid digital news by examining the roles of content utility, perceived quality, ease of payment, and promotion, with media brand reputation shaped by ethical and quality journalism a moderating variable. Grounded in the News Subscription Motivation (NSM) framework, the research addresses a gap in understanding how ethical journalism and brand trust influence subscription behavior in the context of Indonesia's evolving media landscape. A quantitative approach was employed using PLS-SEM on data collected from 220 digital news consumers in Greater Jakarta. Constructs were measured using multi-item 7-point Likert scales and analyzed with SmartPLS 4. Findings indicate that content utility, perceived quality, and payment ease significantly enhance subscription intention, while promotion shows no direct effect. Media brand reputation strengthens the impact of content and quality, and moderates the effect of payment convenience, but does not influence the relationship between promotion and intention. These results highlight that ethical journalism and brand credibility amplify consumers' intention to subscribe. The study offers theoretical contributions to subscription motivation research and practical implications for sustaining journalism aligned with SDG 16, emphasizing transparency and trust.

Keywords: News Subscription; Media Brand Reputation; Digital Journalism; Sustainable News Businesses; PLS-SEM.

1. Introduction

The rapid growth of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the global and national media landscape. The widespread adoption of the Internet and mobile devices has led to a shift in consumer preferences from traditional media like newspapers and magazines towards digital platforms, which are valued for their practicality, immediacy, and interactivity. This shift has led to a significant decline in print media circulation and altered the advertising revenue structure, which is increasingly dominated by major tech companies, such as Meta and Alphabet (Jonathan Low, 2023; Paula Parisi, 2023). Understanding the impact of these transformations on the sustainability of traditional media and the integrity of journalistic work is crucial.

Indonesia's digital transition has accelerated, leading traditional media companies to embrace digital platforms with paid subscription models in response to declining print circulation and advertising revenue figures (Agus Setiawan, 2023); Adel Andila Putri, 2023). Despite efforts to maintain journalistic integrity, media outlets face substantial pressure to attract digital audiences, sometimes compromising virality accuracy (Immorlica et al., 2024) Understanding the factors influencing consumers' intentions to subscribe to paid online news is of great urgency, as subscription revenues have become a critical component of the media industry's survival and sustainability.

Previous empirical studies have highlighted several key determinants influencing subscription intentions, including content utility, perceived quality, payment convenience, and promotional strategies (Chen & Thorson,2024); Groot Kormelink, 2023); Goyanes et al., 2021). Additionally, brand reputation, built upon journalistic ethics, significantly impacts consumer decisions to subscribe to digital news platforms (Wijaya et al., 2022; Elliot, 2020). However, the proliferation of misinformation and fake news on digital platforms has further eroded public trust in online news sources, fostering a "post-truth" environment where emotions and personal beliefs often override objective facts (Reynolds, 2018). This erosion of trust poses substantial challenges to media organizations and

obstructs efforts to achieve SDG16, advocating for public access to credible information, institutional transparency, and press freedom (UNESCO, 2024).

Extensive research into consumer behavior towards digital subscriptions has yet to close a significant knowledge gap, particularly regarding how a media brand's reputation for ethical journalism affects the interplay between established factors (content value, perceived quality, ease of payment, and promotions) and consumers' intentions to subscribe. The urgency of exploring the subscription intention variable lies in its critical role in determining the future viability of media organizations during shifting consumer behaviors and declining trust. As media business models increasingly rely on direct consumer revenues rather than traditional advertising, understanding consumers' subscriber intentions is paramount to ensuring the industry's economic stability and maintaining journalistic standards.

This study uses a contemporary theoretical approach, based on Chen & Thorson (2024) News Subscription Motivation (NSM) framework, to identify the key variables that influence consumer decisions regarding digital news subscription payments. The framework identifies nine core motivational dimensions, including content utility, journalism quality, affordability, convenience, paywall triggers, surveillance, good citizenship, brand reputation, and supporting journalism.

This research focuses on five key variables derived from the NSM framework: content utility, perceived quality, ease of payment, promotion, and brand reputation. These variables were selected because they represent essential drivers of consumer decisions to subscribe to paid online news, consistent with Chen & Thorson's findings that quality, utility, and brand trust are central to subscription motivation.

Furthermore, this study emphasizes that media brand reputation, as adopted from NSM, is not merely a perceptual construct but also reflects ethical journalism practice. According to Wijaya et al., (2022) ethical reporting practices—including content coherence, contextual accuracy, and logical integrity—play a significant role in shaping media brand reputation. Their findings reveal that media organizations that consistently uphold ethical standards in news production are more likely to cultivate a strong, trustworthy image in consumers' eyes. Truthful data presentation and manipulation avoidance are identified as critical elements that foster consumer trust and reinforce brand reputation in the digital media environment.

Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by empirically examining these relationships using an extended Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) framework. This study develops variables that are moderated by media brand reputation, encompassing content utility, perceived quality, ease of payment, and promotional effectiveness. By comprehensively exploring these dimensions, this research seeks to provide valuable theoretical insights and practical implications, enabling digital media platforms to sustainably attract and retain subscribers while upholding high journalistic standards.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations: TPB and NSM

Understanding consumer intention to subscribe to paid online news can be examined using classical consumer behavior theory and contemporary motivation frameworks Ajzen. I. (1991) theory of planned behavior (TPB) states that three constructs drive behavioral intention, which is the primary predictor of actual behavior: attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. In the context of digital news subscription, attitudes reflect consumer evaluations of subscribing, subjective norms involve perceived social pressures, and perceived behavioral control refers to the ease or difficulty of subscribing (Ajzen. I., 1991)

Chen & Thorson (2024) NSM model provides a detailed perspective on the motivation of consumers to pay for news. Unlike traditional Uses and Gratifications theory, NSM specifically addresses consumers' willingness to financially commit despite the availability of free alternatives. NSM highlights dimensions such as content utility, journalism quality, affordability, convenience, paywall triggers, good citizenship, and brand reputation. Integrating NSM with TPB offers a comprehensive framework: NSM identifies specific motivational factors, whereas TPB elucidates the cognitive mechanisms that convert these motivations into behavioral intentions.

2.2 State-of-the-Art Research on Digital News Subscriptions

Recent research underscores significant challenges facing the digital news industry, notably low conversion rates from free users to paying subscribers. The Pew Research Center (2025) found that only approximately 17% of adults pay for digital news. Information overload and misinformation intensify consumer hesitancy. Accuracy and credibility are critical factors influencing subscription decisions, as audiences increasingly prioritize trusted sources during concerns about misinformation (Reuters Institute, 2023, 2024).

Technological and marketing strategies have a profound impact on subscription rates. Simplifying payment processes can significantly increase conversion rates by minimizing transactional friction (Reuters Institute, 2020). Promotional strategies, such as discounts and loyalty programs, are effective in attracting and retaining subscribers (Nieman, 2024; Nic Newman, 2024) However, promotional overuse can dilute perceived value, necessitating careful strategic balancing between incentives and PCV.

2.3 Determinants of the Subscription Intention

Several key variables influence consumer subscription intention: content utility, perceived quality, ease of payment, promotional strategies, and media brand reputation.

Content Utility: This refers to the practical usefulness, relevance, and added value consumers perceive in paid content. Research indicates that content providing unique insights and practical applications significantly increases subscription intentions, especially during information overload (Chen & Thorson, 2024; Groot Kormelink, 2023b).

Perceived Quality: Consumers' subjective evaluations of news accuracy, depth, and credibility strongly predict subscription intentions. High perceived quality enhances consumer trust and reduces uncertainty regarding subscription value (W. Chen & Thorson, 2021a)

Ease of Payment: Simplified payment processes enhance consumers' perceived control, thereby increasing their likelihood of subscribing. Frictionless checkout processes and flexible payment options significantly reduce barriers and positively impact subscription rates (Reuters Institute, 2020; Vara-Miguel et al., 2023).

Promotion: Promotional incentives, such as discounts and free trials, effectively convert consumer interest into subscription actions. Promotional strategies significantly increase subscription intentions by lowering initial financial and psychological barriers (Culpepper, 2025; Nieman Lab, 2025) (L. Chen, 2023).

Brand Reputation: Media brand reputation involves consumer perceptions of credibility and journalistic integrity. A strong brand reputation directly enhances consumer WTP by serving as a signal of trust, which is particularly critical in combating misinformation (Nic Newman, 2024; Wijaya et al., 2022; W. Chen & Thorson, 2024).

2.4 Research Hypotheses

Based on the existing literature, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

- H1: Content utility positively influences subscription intention.
- H2: Perceived quality positively influences subscription intention.
- H3: Ease of payment positively influences subscription intention.
- H4: Promotional strategies positively influence subscription intention.
- H5: The media brand reputation moderates the relationship between content utility and subscription intention.
- H6: Media brand reputation moderates the relationship between PQ and subscription intention.
- H7: Media brand reputation moderates the relationship between ease of payment and subscription intention, potentially weakening the effect.

- H8: Media brand reputation moderates the relationship between promotional strategies and subscription intention, thereby strengthening the brand's effect.

2.5 Theoretical Framework: Integration of the NSM and TPB

The theoretical framework combines NSM and TPB to provide a comprehensive explanation for consumer intentions regarding digital news subscriptions. NSM highlights specific motivations, including content utility and perceived quality, which mainly drive consumer attitudes and decisions to pay for news content. Ease of payment enhances perceived behavioral control (PBC), promoting ease and reducing friction in the subscription process. Promotional strategies directly influence intentions by incentivizing initial subscription behaviors. Media brand reputation acts as a moderating variable that amplifies or diminishes the impact of other determinants based on consumer trust and social influence.
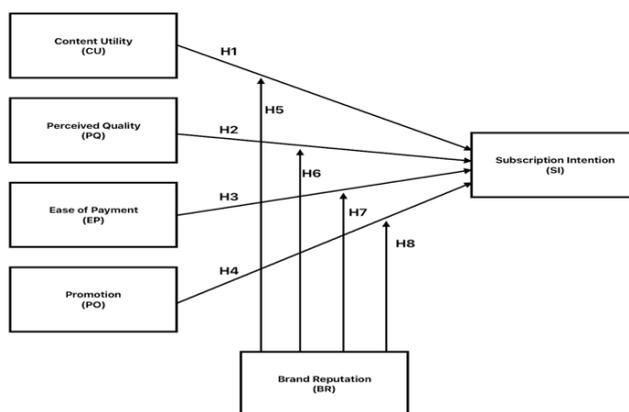

Figure 1. Theoretical framework

This integrated approach provides a holistic understanding of NSM and TPB. Such a comprehensive framework allows researchers and practitioners to effectively develop targeted strategies to increase consumer subscriptions and ensure the sustainability of digital media platforms.

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design utilizing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to investigate the relationships between Content Utility, Perceived Quality, Ease of Payment, Promotion, and Subscription Intention, with Brand Reputation as a moderator. The design focused on predictive causal relationships among constructs (See Appendix 1 for the of variables used in the questionnaire).

The research targeted digital news consumers in Indonesia's Greater Jakarta metropolitan area (Jabodetabek), selecting respondents through purposive non-probability sampling. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed between June 7 and June 28, 2025. Inclusion criteria were age between 17–55, frequent access to online news, and recent experience with paid news subscriptions or trials. A total of 220 valid responses exceeded the minimum requirement determined through inverse square root analysis for PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2022)

Data were collected using an online questionnaire, employing multi-item scales adapted from existing literature for each construct measured on a 7-point Likert scale. The analysis involved evaluating both the measurement and structural models through SmartPLS 4. Measurement validity and reliability were assessed by composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity (HTMT). Structural model evaluation included path coefficient significance tests, R^2, f^2 effect sizes, predictive relevance (Q^2), and moderation testing via product indicator approach to analyze Brand Reputation's interaction effect on Subscription Intention.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Result

4.1.1 Respondent Profile and Statistics

The survey included **220 respondents** who met the inclusion criteria. The respondents were predominantly male (**72%,** n = 158), with females accounting for **28%** (n = 62). The biggest age category consisted of people aged 35-44, making up 40% of the participants (n = 88). The next groups included individuals aged 25-34 years (27%, n = 59), 17-24 years (15%, n = 34), 45-54 years (11%, n = 25), those over 55 years (4%, n = 9), and those under 18 years (2%, n = 5). Most respondents had undergraduate degrees (**55%,** n = 121), followed by postgraduate degrees (**26%,** n = 57), diplomas (**14%,** n = 31), and high school or equivalent (**5%,** n = 11). Most of the participants had incomes between IDR 4 and 7 million, representing 38% of the total (n = 84), followed by 28% (n = 62) who earned between IDR 7 and 10 million, 15% (n = 32) who earned between IDR 1.5 and 4 million, 9% (n = 20) who earned between IDR 10 and 15 million, 7% (n = 15) who earned more than IDR 15 million, and 3% (n = 7) who earned less than IDR 1.5 million.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for each research construct. Means on a 1–7 Likert scale ranged between 3.73 and 4.29, with a standard deviation of approximately 1.1, indicating moderately positive perceptions. Brand **Reputation** scored highest (M = 4.29, SD = 1.13), while **Content Utility** scored lowest (M = 3.73, SD = 1.04). **Subscription intention** was moderately rated (M = 3.82, SD = 1.14), reflecting neutral-to-positive attitudes.

Table 1. Respondent Demographic Profile and Descriptive Statistics.

Demographic Variable/Construct	Category/Construct Name	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean (M)	SD
Gender	Male	158	72	-	-
	Female	62	28	-	-
Age	<18	5	2	-	-
	17–24	34	15	-	-
	25–34	59	27	-	-
	35–44	88	40	-	-
	45–54	25	11	-	-
	>55	9	4	-	-
Educational Level	High School/Equivalent	11	5	-	-
	Diploma (D1–D3)	31	14	-	-
	Undergraduate	121	55	-	-
	Postgraduate	57	26	-	-
Monthly Income (IDR)	<1,500,000	7	3	-	-
	1,500,001–4,000,000	32	15	-	-

	4,000,001–7,000,000	84	38	-	-
	7,000,001–10,000,000	62	28	-	-
	10,000,001–15,000,000	20	9	-	-
	>15,000,000	15	7	-	-
Research Constructs	Content Utility	-	-	3.73	1.04
	Perceived Quality	-	-	3.90	1.12
	Payment Ease	-	-	3.99	1.12
	Promotion	-	-	4.03	1.12
	Brand Reputation	-	-	4.29	1.13
	Subscription Intention	-	-	3.82	1.14

4.1.2 Measurement Model

All constructs demonstrated strong convergent validity and reliability. **Indicator loadings (outer loadings)** exceeded the recommended 0.70 for 22 of the 24 indicators (*Figure 2*.). The two indicators with slightly lower loadings (0.68–0.69 for one item each in Perceived Quality and Promotion) were retained because their constructs still met the Average Variance Extracted criterion. **Average variance extracted (AVE)** values ranged from 0.544 to 0.683, all of which were above the 0.50 threshold, confirming that each construct captures at least 50% of the indicator variance. **The composite reliability** was high for all constructs (ϱ_c = 0.824 to 0.896), exceeding the cutoff of 0.70 (*Table 2*.). This indicates that the measures have good internal consistency. The findings further supported discriminant validity, with all Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios for the various constructs being significantly below the 0.90 benchmark (with a peak HTMT ratio of 0.416), indicating that each construct is distinct from the others in practical terms.
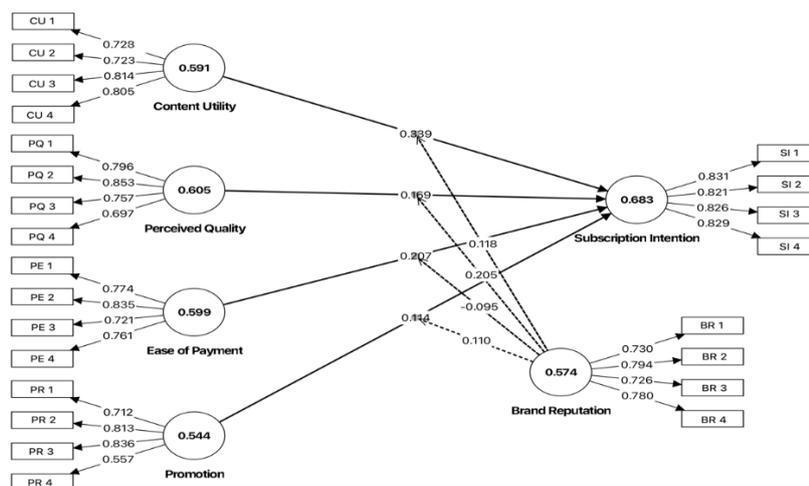

Figure 2. Outer Loading

All Composite Reliability (ρ_c) values exceeded 0.70 and all AVE values exceeded 0.50, indicating adequate reliability and convergent validity for each construct. Cronbach's α values were all above 0.70. Outer loadings were >0.70 for all indicators except two slightly below 0.70, which were retained as AVE criteria were met. HTMT ratios between constructs were all below 0.90 (max = 0.416), supporting discriminant validity.

Table 2. Reliability and convergent validity of constructs.

Construct	Cronbach's α	Composite R (ρ_c)	AVE
Content Utility	0.846	0.87	0.591
Perceived Quality	0.769	0.86	0.605
Payment Ease	0.782	0.83	0.599
Promotion	0.786	0.82	0.544
Brand Reputation	0.753	0.85	0.574
Subscription Intention	0.755	0.90	0.683

All Composite Reliability (ρ_c) values exceeded 0.70 and all AVE values exceeded 0.50, indicating adequate reliability and convergent validity for each construct. Cronbach's α values were all above 0.70. Outer loadings were >0.70 for all indicators except two slightly below 0.70, which were retained as AVE criteria were met. HTMT ratios between constructs were all below 0.90 (max = 0.416), supporting discriminant validity.

4.1.3 Structural Model Results

The structural (inner) model was evaluated using path coefficients, explained variance (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). The model explained $R^2 = 0.350$ of the variances in the Subscription Intention endogenous construct, which is considered a moderate explanatory power (between 0.25 and 0.50) by conventional standards. The adjusted R^2 was 0.323, indicating minimal penalty for the model's complexity. According to Hair et al. (2022), in the context of consumer behavior research, an R^2 value of 0.350 can be regarded as substantial, as behavioral constructs often involve multifaceted influences that are difficult to predict with very high precision.

The predictive relevance of the model was assessed for the main endogenous construct. The **Stone–Geisser Q^2** value for subscription intention was **0.350**, indicating medium predictive relevance. This positive Q^2 suggests that the model has appreciable power to predict the out-of-sample data of the dependent variable. In fact, the obtained Q^2 (0.350) falls in the range of a medium predictive capacity (0.15–0.35) and is well above the zero threshold. This result, combined with the moderate R^2, implies that the model strikes a good balance between explanatory power and predictive accuracy, with no evidence of overfitting.

Table 3 summarizes the **path coefficients (β),** t-statistics, and p-values for each hypothesized relationship. All three content-related predictors exhibited significant positive effects on Subscription Intention. Specifically, **Content Utility** had a strong positive association with Subscription Intention (β = 0.339, t = 6.661, p < 0.001). **Perceived quality** also showed a positive and significant effect (β = 0.169, t = 2.662, p = 0.004), as did **Payment Ease** (β = 0.207, t = 3.856, p < 0.001). In contrast, the direct effect of **promotion on subscription intention** was not statistically significant (β = 0.114, t = 1.355, p = 0.088), indicating that promotional efforts did not have a reliable direct impact on subscription intention

Table 3. Structural model path coefficients and significance tests.

Relationship (Hypothesis)	β	t-value	p-value	Support?
Content Utility → Subscription Intention (H1)	0.339	6.661	<0.001	Yes
Perceived Quality → Subscription Intention (H2)	0.169	2.662	0.004	Yes
Payment Ease → Subscription Intention (H3)	0.207	3.856	<0.001	Yes
Promotion → Subscription Intention (H4)	0.114	1.355	0.088	No
Brand Reputation × Content Utility (H5)	0.118	2.075	0.019	Yes
Brand Reputation × Perceived Quality (H6)	0.205	2.695	0.004	Yes
Brand Reputation × Payment Ease (H7)	–0.095	1.657	0.049	Yes
Brand Reputation × Promotion (H8)	0.110	1.639	0.051	No

All significant paths correspond to **medium or small effect sizes**. The largest contribution came from **Content Utility** ($f^2 = 0.172$), which constitutes a medium effect. The effects of perceived quality and payment ease, while significant, were smaller (f^2 in the small range, all above 0.02). The non-significant promotion path had a negligible effect size ($f^2 < 0.02$, effectively negligible). Overall, the combination of predictors achieved moderate explanatory power for Subscription Intention ($R^2 = 0.350$) without multicollinearity issues, as variance inflation factors were within acceptable limits (VIF < 5 for all predictors, not tabulated).

4.1.4 Moderation Analysis Results

The study also examined four hypothesized moderation effects with simple slope analysis of brand reputation on the relationships between the other predictors and SI. Three interaction terms yielded statistically significant outcomes. A statistically significant positive effect was found for the interaction between brand reputation and content utility ($β = 0.118$, $t = 2.075$, $p = 0.019$), indicating that the effect of content utility on intention is amplified at higher levels of brand reputation. Likewise, **Brand Reputation × Perceived Quality** was significant ($β = 0.205$, $t = 2.695$, $p = 0.004$), indicating a moderating effect on the quality–intention link. The interaction between brand reputation and payment ease was also statistically significant, with a negative coefficient ($β = –0.095$, $t = 1.657$, $p = 0.049$), which suggests that higher brand reputation slightly diminished the positive impact of payment ease on intention. In contrast, the **Brand Reputation × Promotion** interaction was not significant ($β = 0.110$, $t = 1.639$, $p = 0.051$). This suggests that brand reputation had no significant impact on the effect of promotion on subscription intention. All significant moderation effects had **small effect sizes** (f^2 ranging approximately 0.03–0.09), which, although modest, were above the minimum threshold ($f^2 > 0.02$) for retaining a moderator in the model. Thus, the data supported six of the eight hypothesized relationships (including direct and moderating paths), providing robust empirical support for the proposed model.

4.2 Discussion

The findings largely validate the proposed model, with six of eight hypotheses supported. Perceived quality, content utility, and ease of payment had a significant positive impact on subscribers' intent to subscribe, whereas promotion did not have a significant direct effect. A brand's reputation was a critical context factor: a well-established news brand amplified the positive effects of content usefulness and journalistic excellence, decreased reliance on payment convenience, and had no significant influence from promotional activities. These results have important theoretical and practical implications for digital news subscription strategies.

First, as a predictor, the strength of content utility confirms that the perceived value of news content is a primary driver of subscription intention. Readers are more willing to pay when content is relevant, in-depth, and provides exclusive insights that free sources do not. Previous research indicates that this discovery is consistent, with Chen

and Thorson's (2024) study revealing that content utility explained approximately 38% of the variation in subscription decisions. Our results align with the perspective of Uses and Gratifications, in which audiences actively seek media that meet their informational needs. They also reinforce the NSM framework (Chen & Thorson, 2024), which posits content value as central to motivating paid subscriptions. News organisations should invest in high-quality, useful content, such as in-depth analyses or solution-focused reporting, in order to boost perceived value and validate subscription fees. Consumers are significantly more inclined to commit financially when they perceive concrete benefits from the content (e.g., actionable knowledge or exclusive information) (Kiesow, 2024; Azzahro et al., 2020).

The perceived quality of news was a substantial positive factor influencing the intention to subscribe. This discovery supports the idea that journalistic quality and credibility are crucial in turning readers into paying subscribers. It echoes prior studies showing that audiences place a premium on news content accuracy, depth, and trustworthiness (Goyanes, 2020; Urban & Schweiger, 2014). W. Chen & Thorson (2021b) dan (Costera Meijer, 2022)observed that perceived quality (e.g., accuracy, thoroughness, and reputable sourcing) strongly predicts WTP for news, reducing consumer uncertainty. Readers gravitate toward outlets with proven editorial standards of misinformation. Our results support this trend: higher perceived quality boosts subscribers' confidence that the service is worth paying for. Theoretically, this aligns with the idea that quality functions as a "value signal" in consumer decision-making (Fisher et al., 2023; W. Chen & Thorson, 2021b) Maintaining rigorous journalistic standards and transparency should be a top priority for news providers, as this helps build the trust needed for audiences to invest in a subscription. A reputation for consistent, high-quality reporting thus becomes a competitive advantage in the digital subscription market.

The role of **transactional factors** in subscription intention is mixed. As expected, **the ease of payment** had a significant positive effect on the intention of subscribers to subscribe. This result is consistent with consumer behavior theories (e.g., perceived behavioral control in the TPB) and confirms that payment process friction reduces barriers to purchase. Consumers are more likely to follow through when the act of subscribing is quick, convenient, and secure (Vara-Miguel et al., 2023). Chen & Thorson (2024) similarly emphasize that seamless payment processes—from diverse payment options to one-click transactions—enhance the perceived value of paid news services and encourage subscriptions. Investing in user-friendly payment systems (e.g., clear pricing, multiple payment methods, and safe and efficient checkouts) can tangibly increase conversion rates.

However, promotional incentives (such as free trials, discounts, or loyalty programs) (L. Chen, 2023)did not significantly influence subscription intention in our study. This nonsignificant finding contradicts some industry evidence that promotional offers spur trial subscriptions. For example, in a developing country news context, discounts increased paid conversion odds by more than threefold (Xu et al., 2025) Research suggests that solely relying on marketing strategies is unlikely to achieve long-term subscription goals unless the content's value or the brand's credibility has already been established. Promotional campaigns might prompt short-term experimentation (sign-ups during a discount period) but appear insufficient to drive sustained intention without underlying quality or credibility of content. For news outlets, this implies that promotions should be coupled with substantive value delivery, while they can be useful in attracting attention; otherwise, any uptick in subscriptions may be temporary.

Brand **reputation** significantly influenced the aforementioned factors. Consistent with the literature, a reputable news brand serves as a powerful trust signal that alters how audiences respond to content, quality, and payment convenience. Our moderation analyses showed that when a news platform's brand reputation is high, the positive effects of content utility and perceived quality on subscription intention become even stronger. In other words, valuable content and high-quality journalism drive subscriptions most effectively in the context of a trusted, well-regarded media brand. This pattern resonates with Wijaya et al., (2022) who observed that strong media ethics and credibility foster a positive brand image that fosters consumer trust. Further development of the NSM framework demonstrates that a brand's level of trust influences the significance of practical benefits, such as easy payment, with a highly trusted brand able to mitigate minor transaction issues but a less trusted brand unable to do so, and there was no significant correlation between a company's reputation and its promotional activities. A respected brand acts as a risk-reduction cue for consumers, theoretically making them more comfortable paying for its content by signalling reliability. Conversely, we found that brand reputation *negatively* moderated the effect of ease of payment on intention, i.e., the easier the payment, the more it boosts subscription intention *for lesser-known or lower-reputation brands*. Even if the payment process is not extremely convenient for an established, trusted news

brand, loyal readers may still subscribe due to their strong brand confidence (Açikgöz et al., 2024).

However, for a newer or less reputable outlet, simplifying the payment process can play a more crucial role in winning subscribers (since the brand itself does not automatically engender trust). This insight expands on the NSM framework, demonstrating that the significance of practical conveniences, such as the ease of payment, is influenced by a brand's level of trust: a strong brand can compensate for minor transactional issues, whereas a weak brand cannot, and no significant interaction was found between a company's reputation and its promotional offers. Our initial assumption was that a well-established brand wouldn't require intense advertising efforts, possibly because these efforts could tarnish a reputation brand's image, but our findings revealed no significant impact. In fact, the coefficient hinted at a positive interaction (though not significant), suggesting that promotions do not harm high-reputation brands and might even slightly help. One interpretation is that even quality-focused news organizations can use promotions without eroding consumer trust (Ibrahim et al., 2021). However, such promotions' influence remains marginal in the presence of strong content and brand loyalty. Our initial assumption was that a well-known brand wouldn't require intense advertising efforts (or that such efforts might actually undermine a high-end brand's image), but our findings revealed no significant impact.

These findings reinforce and refine existing theories of consumer behavior in the media. They provide empirical support for the NSM framework and related theories by confirming that perceived content value and quality are the core drivers of paid subscription intention. We extend prior work by demonstrating the nuanced role of brand reputation as both an amplifier of content/quality effects and a buffer that can offset the need for transactional incentives. The moderating role of brand reputation illustrates the interaction between consumer trust and traditional adoption factors (utility, quality, convenience), connecting research on media brand trust (Wijaya et al., 2022) and subscription motivation. Promotional efforts with limited success also contribute to theoretical understanding by indicating that external incentives may be less effective than internal motivations in news subscription contexts, differing from certain marketing-based models that prioritize rewards. **These conclusions have substantial real-world effects for news media directors, highlighting the need to give priority to content quality and trustworthiness in order to boost subscriptions.** Investments in exclusive, high-utility content and unwavering journalistic quality will pay off in increased willingness to subscribe, especially when coupled with building a strong, trustworthy brand image.

Upholding ethical standards and consistency not only enhances brand reputation (Wijaya et al., 2022) but also tangibly increases each piece of valuable content's effectiveness in converting readers. The results of the study emphasize that for news media managers, maintaining content excellence and credibility should be their top priority in order to increase subscriptions. Instead, promotions will yield better results when the audience already perceives high value in the product. In sum, a strategic focus on delivering quality content and earning public trust, combined with user-friendly access, will most effectively sustain and grow a digital news platform's paying subscriber base. This study's insights thus offer a roadmap aligning with both consumer motivation theory and real-world media business sustainability.

5. CONCLUSION

This study addresses the research gap concerning the drivers of paid news subscription intentions in digital media, revealing that enhanced content value, high journalistic standards, and seamless payment processes are the primary factors significantly increasing subscription intention, while price promotions alone are insufficient without a strong brand reputation. These findings emphasise the need for news organisations to prioritise high-quality, exclusive content and trustworthy service not only to address low subscription uptake but also to enhance business sustainability and public trust in digital journalism. News organisations' top priorities should encompass producing high-quality content and offering a dependable service, thereby allowing them to address low subscription rates and enhance business stability and public trust in digital journalism. The study recommends expanding its scope to cover more subjects and demographics, using a blend of research techniques to achieve a more thorough insight into consumer motivation, and integrating new elements, such as algorithmic trust and digital literacy, into future investigations. Such directions will enrich scholarly understanding and practical strategies for advancing sustainable, trustworthy news subscription models.

Acknowledgment

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Appendix 1

Variable	Indicator	Operationalization	Item Statement	Scale
Content Utility Groot Kormelink (2023), Chen & Thorson (2024)	CU1	News content provides information that can be directly applied in daily life	The news content on this platform is directly applicable to my daily life.	Likert 1–7
	CU2	Each article offers new insights not easily found in free sources	Every article provides new insights that are not easily found in other free sources.	Likert 1–7
	CU3	The coverage is in-depth, helping users understand issues comprehensively	The coverage of topics on this platform is in-depth, enabling me to understand the issues thoroughly.	Likert 1–7
	CU4	Content helps users make important decisions with more confidence	The content helps me make important decisions with more confidence.	Likert 1–7
Perceived Quality O'Brien et al. (2020), Meijer (2023)	PQ1	The editorial process ensures rigorous fact-checking	The editorial process on this platform ensures every news item is rigorously fact-checked.	Likert 1–7
	PQ2	News sources used are credible and reliable	The news sources used by this platform are credible and reliable.	Likert 1–7
	PQ3	News coverage is balanced and unbiased	The news coverage presented is balanced and free from bias.	Likert 1–7
	PQ4	The visual and design quality of the news is high	The visual and design quality of the news on this platform is excellent.	Likert 1–7
Payment Ease Groot Kormelink (2023), Borchgrevink-Brækhus & Moe (2023).	PE1	Various convenient payment methods are available	The platform provides various convenient payment methods.	Likert 1–7
	PE2	Payment process is simple and fast	The payment process is simple and fast.	Likert 1–7
	PE3	Subscription fee information is clear and transparent	Information about the subscription fees is clear and transparent.	Likert 1–7
	PE4	There are secure and trustworthy payment options	There are secure and trustworthy payment options available.	Likert 1–7
Promotion Artero & Zapata (2021)	PR1	Attractive discounts or special offers are provided	The platform offers attractive discounts or special offers.	Likert 1–7
	PR2	Free trial period is available before paid subscription	A free trial period is available before starting a paid subscription.	Likert 1–7
	PR3	Loyalty programs are available for regular subscribers	Loyalty programs are available for regular subscribers.	Likert 1–7
	PR4	Promotional information is communicated clearly and transparently	Promotional information is communicated clearly and transparently.	Likert 1–7
Brand Reputation Chen & Thorson (2024), Wijaya er al. (2022)	BR1	The media brand is well-known and has a positive image	The media brand is well-known and has a positive image.	Likert 1–7

Variable	Indicator	Operationalization	Item Statement	Scale
	BR2	The platform is recognized for journalistic integrity and ethics	The platform is recognized for journalistic integrity and ethics.	Likert 1–7
	BR3	The media outlet is regarded as a trusted source of information	The media outlet is regarded as a trusted source of information.	Likert 1–7
	BR4	The brand is associated with professional and quality journalism	The brand is associated with professional and quality journalism.	Likert 1–7
Subscription Intention Chen & Thorson (2024), O'Brien et al. (2020)"	SI1	Intend to subscribe to paid news content on the platform in the near future	I intend to subscribe to paid news content on this platform in the near future.	Likert 1–7
	SI2	Willing to recommend the paid news platform to others	I am willing to recommend this paid news platform to others.	Likert 1–7
	SI3	Consider paid news subscription as a priority	I consider paid news subscription as a priority.	Likert 1–7
	SI4	Plan to continue subscribing to the paid news platform	I plan to continue subscribing to this paid news platform.	Likert 1–7