

Journalism in Kuwait: Journalists' Practices, Professional Values, and Perceived Roles

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Abstract

This study explores Kuwaiti journalists' perceptions of journalism as a profession and its role in society. It examines how journalists view different aspects of their practices, values, and roles. First, the study provides a general picture of how journalism is perceived by working journalists in Kuwait and its role in society. Second, it examines how journalists perceive their professional identity by assessing different aspects of their practices, functions, and professional values. In-depth in-person surveys were conducted with 37 Kuwaiti journalists using a forty-five-item questionnaire to develop perceptions towards their profession, values, ethics, and general outlook of Kuwait society. The results show that most Kuwaiti journalists are males and the majority hold a bachelor's degree. Moreover, 89.2% of surveyed journalists expressed their interest in additional journalism training. In terms of job satisfaction, more than two-thirds of journalists are reasonably satisfied with their job.

Keywords: Journalism, Kuwait, print newspapers, journalism ethics, media law, censorship

Introduction

The uniqueness of Kuwait, being the only country in the Gulf region with a "partly free" media system, according to Freedom House (2019), makes the role of journalism an exciting area for research. Since the 2006 press and publication law, the media industry changes and the political activity changes have redefined journalism and influenced journalists' practices.

The study explores newspaper journalists' practices, perceptions, and roles in Kuwait regarding professional values, ethics, demographics, skills, freedom, and public opinion. Further, this examination identifies journalists' perceptions of journalism's role in society, which can be incorporated into understanding the press system's impact on public opinion and evaluating news organizations' performance in informing the public. Further, the findings help compare results with similar studies conducted in the U.S., Europe, and the Arab countries. This is important in identifying similarities and differences among journalists' practices and values and whether improvements are needed.

Although recent scholarship concerning journalism in Kuwait has focused on journalists' ethics, technology, and Internet behavior, little research has been done to discover journalists' practices and perceptions (Alrajih, 2015). This study is noteworthy as it will extend journalism studies in the Gulf region in general and Kuwait. Although studies (Alrajih, 2017; Alqudah, Deehani, & Alajmi, 2020) have looked at journalism in

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Kuwait in terms of ethics and practices, there is a need to study journalists' perceptions of their role. Moreover, this study findings can be used as building blocks for future studies in journalism research in Kuwait and the region.

Literature Review

Media System in Kuwait: Kuwait is one of the smallest countries in the Middle Eastern region, strategically bordered on the East by the Persian Gulf and located between Iraq on the north and west and Saudi Arabia on the south and west. Kuwait has a land area of 6,880 square miles, a desert-like climate, and a population of 4.1 million, including approximately 30% Kuwaiti citizens and 70% non-Kuwaiti nationals (World Population Review, 2019). Although English is widely spoken, the official language of Kuwait is Arabic. The population is 85 percent Muslim, with Protestant and Catholic Christianity, Hindu and other religions combined accounting for the remaining 15 percent. The literacy rate for Kuwaitis is approximately 93.3 percent. Kuwait is viewed as the most democratic country in the region. Although known for its democracy, the country has gone through many challenges and political activism where freedom of expression and media freedom were top priorities. In the two last decades, Kuwait experienced many changes and political reform, and the government has agreed to review the press and publication law of 1961 and made it a priority. The new press and publication law passed after the parliament voted in favor of it in March 2006 (AFA, 2006).

The new law of 2006 has many highlights that provided several reforms, including the government's agreement to allow new daily newspapers after a ban for more than three decades (Anhri, 2006). Today, there are 11 daily Arabic newspapers and two daily English newspapers (Kuwait e-government, 2020). Despite that the law has allowed new newspapers to publish after years of license restrictions, newspaper publishers must obtain an operating license from the Ministry of Information. Although the new law no longer classifies press offenses as crimes in nature and offenders are charged with fines instead still, Kuwait has a strict media law. The press law of 2006 prohibits the publication of specific topics related to religion and the ruling family. Violating these bans can press criminal charges against the author.

In 2020, the National Assembly approved several amendments to the press and publication law of 2006. The new amendments were described as an important step that is supposed to be followed by more steps. The assembly agreed to lift the Ministry of Information control over publications and books imported to the country. The new amendment prohibits the publication of anything that stirs up sectarianism or tribal strife based on racism and demeaning between people (Almulla, 2020). Nevertheless, these amendments were seen as "not enough," vague and unclear.

Press System in Kuwait: Kuwaiti press emergence had a different circumstance than its Arab world counterparts, despite its late establishment in 1928 compared to the emergence of the first Arab newspaper in Egypt in 1828. The most striking points of difference are that Arab newspapers were established as vehicles for the governments' reform of religious and intellectual enlightenment, Kuwaiti press began independently (Al Rasheed & Chenoufi, 2008). Since its emergence in the 1920s and expansion in the 1960s, Kuwait's newspapers are individually owned by influential families in Kuwait, which allowed a wide range of opinion expression away from government control.

According to William Rugh's Arab media classifications study published in the 1970s (Pintak & Ginges, 2011), the Kuwaiti press is classified as a "diverse press." The term refers to a press system that is relatively free and reflects a diversity of views but is still

subject to subtle pressures (Pintak & Ginges, 2011). Newspapers face a vital pressure, which is not the government control over the media per se, but its owners' ties with government officials. Newspapers face pressure from their owners' relationships with government officials. The close relationship that elite families and newspaper owners have with the government makes it difficult to freely criticize the government due to shared interests and fear of losing economic benefits. Newspapers in Kuwait respect and follow the country's political strategies and principles, supporting the country's policy, especially when it comes to international affairs and relations.

Censorship: State ownership and control in Arab countries allow for domination of the media system under direct government supervision (Khazan, 1999; Amin, 2002). Nevertheless, even though the Arab world is a very diverse region that is often simplified into one homogenous and united culture, this geographic area of more than 20 countries is instead a melting pot of ethnicities, religions, cultures, political systems, and economies (Fandy, 2000). So, censorship is exercised differently within Arab countries, as various censoring and filtration methods are used in different countries. In Kuwait, journalists are diverse in their reporting and rank among the most outspoken and aggressive in the Middle East region (Freedom House, 2019). Nevertheless, they risk imprisonment under the 2016 cybercrimes law that criminalizes the dissemination of specific topics. Despite these laws, journalists avoid conflict with the government and practice a degree of self-censorship (Freedom House, 2020). In their study of Kuwaiti journalists' attitudes toward the media laws in Kuwait, Alqudah, Deehani, and Alajmi (2020) found that most of the respondents read the media law and pay great attention to it.

Moreover, a study reveals how freedom of speech is essential for a democratic country like India. Freedom of speech arguably covers the press's freedom, which remains integral in ventilating people's opinions. However, the sedition law, one of the laws, is a potential threat to the press freedom if it is blatantly misused. The sedition law is so that stringent space is scarce and questioned (Anand, 2017).

Politically speaking, Kuwait is the only "partly free press" in the Arab region (Freedom House, 2020). Although the partly free press in Kuwait means journalists can criticize the government and express their political opinions, still journalists who cross the "red lines" can be fined or imprisoned. Amin (2002) argues that censorship is tolerated in the Arab world and expected to be a civic responsibility. Moreover, this civic responsibility made journalists become protectors of the state and overly protective. The censorial culture among Arab journalists explains by Amin, is the result of Arab governments' media control over the years, which established responsible freedom among journalists. This responsible freedom is often associated with self-censorship against national security and anything that could be considered a threat to the ruling institution and their interests (Amin, 2002). Recent research has shown that even though Kuwaiti journalists indicated that media law restricts their freedom, they also believe that it positively affects society in general (Alqudah et al., 2020).

Another reason for censorship tolerance in Arab countries, as Amin (2002) argues, is cultural preservation in the Arab society. In the Arab world, people tend to defend their religion 'Islam,' traditions and culture; and censorship protects the public from offensive religious statements. The propagation of Islamic values was ranked high by journalists based on a survey of working journalists in Kuwait conducted in 1998 by AlRasheed (Pintak & Ginges, 2011). Another study found that Kuwait's journalists highly value their traditions and perceive observing social customs as one of journalism's core principles (Alrajhi, 2015).

Despite censorship practices from some Arab governments and the daily battles that journalists go through, it is misleading to think that journalists don't resist these pressures sometimes (Sakr, 2005). In Kuwait, journalists and the media enjoy considerable freedoms and have been aggressive in criticizing top government officials, including the Prime Minister (Seiasat, 2010). Findings from Arab journalists' study show that 84% of respondents entirely or partly agree that Arab media are becoming freer, with half of the respondents entirely or partially agreed that they were freer to do their job regardless of media ownership, corporate pressure, and government control (Pintak & Ginges, 2011).

Journalists in Kuwait: Studies have argued that Arab journalists struggle to define their mission (Pintak & Ginges, 2009). Research reveals that Arab journalists hold a high opinion of the news organizations they work for but are critical of the Arab news media (Pintak & Ginges, 2009). In Kuwait, journalists believe that the legislative atmosphere of the press work and society affects their journalistic work and quality (Alrajhi, 2015). In another study about journalism ethics in Kuwait, Alrajhi (2015) found that honesty, accuracy, honor, boldness, and strong personality are highly valued among journalists. Studies show that there were 155 print journalists in Kuwait as of 2006 (Abdulla, 2006). This includes print journalists working at the daily Arabic newspapers who receive a salary for journalistic work such as writing, editing, and interviewing. In 2015, Alrajhi (2015) found that 98 print journalists work in the newspapers' crime section. Nevertheless, this number included all journalists, Kuwaiti, and non-Kuwaiti.

Abdullah (2006) argues that Kuwaiti journalists accounted for 55.6 percent of print journalists' total population in Kuwait, while 15.4 percent were from Egypt. The rest of the respondents were from Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and other countries. This low percentage of Kuwaiti journalists in Kuwait is due to society's perception and news organizations' policies. First, journalism in Kuwait is not a prestigious job than other jobs, so it doesn't attract many qualified Kuwaitis. Second, newspaper organizations employ non-Kuwaiti journalists because they cost them less when it comes to salaries and compensations, and non-Kuwaiti journalists usually don't have the same job security as Kuwaitis tend to work harder, and that's what journalism is all about. Alrajhi's (2017) study of job satisfaction of working journalists in Kuwait found that wages, working atmosphere, and job tasks were among the top job satisfaction indicators. This migration of Arab journalists into the Gulf region created different journalism schools as there is the Egyptian school, the Palestinian school, and the Lebanese school. Each school of journalism applies different rules, writing styles, and editing.

Studies of journalism in Kuwait found that almost half of the respondents held a bachelor's degree, and 15.4 percent held a diploma. Ninety-two percent of the respondents were younger than 45 years old, and most were male journalists (Abdullah, 2006). These demographic findings are consistent with other results of Arab journalists' studies conducted by Pintak, Ginges, and Kirat's study of journalists in the United Arab Emirates (Pintak & Ginges, 2011; Kirat, 2011). Both studies showed that the majority of respondents were under 40 years old and more than half of the respondents in both studies were males and 80 percent of journalists in the United Arab Emirates were expatriates, which to some degree is consistent with the findings of journalism in Kuwait (Pintak & Ginges, 2011; Abdullah, 2006). There are multiple reasons why journalism is a dominantly male field in Kuwait and the Gulf region. Although education, regulations empower female journalists and the current free lifestyle in Kuwait, the societal outlook, cultural upbringing, and self-image discourages them (Dashti & Mesbah, 2016).

Kuwaiti journalists face many challenges that make journalism an unattractive field. The main obstacle that faces Kuwaiti journalists is vague and ambiguous media laws. Therefore, It is essential to understand the media system and censorship in Kuwait to explore how Kuwaiti newspaper journalists perceive journalism's role in society. The literature highlighted Arab journalists' perception of censorship and control and how it is tolerated and accepted as a form of civic responsibility. There is no available recent research on Kuwaiti journalists in specific and no recent journalism research as a job in Kuwait. The fact that expert journalists outnumber Kuwaiti journalists makes it noteworthy to study and highlight Kuwaiti journalists specifically as a minority group in their own country. It is essential to understand how the press and media system influence journalism and how it affects journalists and their perceived roles and values.

This study finds a noticeable gap in the literature that focuses on Kuwaiti newspaper journalists. This gap is that few Kuwaitis work on journalism and newspapers. Research usually looks at Kuwait's journalists as a homogenous group and does not explicitly study newspaper journalists considered a small group compared to Kuwaiti broadcast journalists. An interesting question would be what are Kuwaiti journalists' perceived roles and values? To understand better how Kuwaiti journalists perceive the role of journalism in society and to understand Kuwaiti newspaper journalists' roles; values; and ethics, these two general research questions are proposed:

RQ1: How do Kuwaiti newspaper journalists perceive journalism's role in society?

RQ2: What are Kuwaiti newspaper journalists' perceived professional roles and values?

Methodology

The study used an in-person survey method. A forty-five-item questionnaire was administered to Kuwaiti journalists working in all daily Arabic newspapers. Modeled on Weaver's surveys of American Journalists, the questionnaire adopted a similar method to determine Kuwait journalists' self-perceptions of their practices, roles, values, and ethics (Weaver et al., 2007). A pre-test was carried out to ensure clarity of language, validity, and reliability of measures. Previous research has looked into editors in chief in radio and television, working journalists' professional values, journalists' ethics, and social media's effect on journalists in Kuwait (Pintak & Ginges, 2011; Alqudah et al., 2020; Alrajhi, 2017). The study targetted 90 Kuwaiti journalists working in Arabic newspapers. Journalists working as a full-time or part-time job, who receive a salary for their work, including writing, editing, reporting, interviewing, and investigative story writers, were considered for the study. However, the researcher collected 37 responses for a 41 percent response rate. The lack of awareness of Kuwait's research studies' importance makes it challenging to persuade people to participate in research. A question about the most significant challenges to Kuwaiti Journalism was added, replicated from Arab journalists' study's question on most significant challenges to Arab journalism (Pintak & Ginges, 2011).

Findings

This survey's findings offer a detailed and current picture of the demographics, education, job satisfaction, roles, ethics, perceived impact of public opinion, journalists' practices, professional values, and freedom of Kuwaiti newspaper journalists.

Demographics: The journalists surveyed in this study are relatively young, as almost half of the surveyed population (48.6%) were in the age group 26 to 35 years. Most of the journalists surveyed are editors (N=23), followed by lead editors (N=5), and there are only three reporters (N=3) within the sample surveyed. The rest sample constituted editors-in-

chief (N=2) and analysts (N=4). The minimum years of work experience of the surveyed population considered for the study are nine years. More than half of the respondents (54.1%) have an independent political view, while 16.2% of respondents are liberal, and an equal percentage are conservative.

Education and Training: Among the surveyed population, most journalists (48.6%) hold a bachelor’s degree, 13.5% hold a two-year college diploma, and 13.5% hold a master’s degree. A small percentage of those holding a bachelor’s degree have a major in journalism (13.5%), 13.5% hold a degree in different degrees in mass communication subject. In comparison, 40.5% have other majors, including management, social sciences, law, engineering, history, geography, and political science. Concerning journalism training, 89.2% of journalists expressed interest in additional journalism training, although 75.7% responded that they took short courses, fellowships, or workshops since they became journalists. On the other hand, more than half of the surveyed journalists claimed that their news organizations don’t offer editing and writing training (64.9%).

Job Satisfaction: The majority of the surveyed population (70.3%) reasonably satisfied with their jobs, 16.2% said they were delighted, and only 2.7% said they were dissatisfied. In terms of salary, about 29.7% of those surveyed claimed to receive 501 KD to 700 KD per month (US\$1,503-\$2100), 21.6% receive 701 KD to 900 KD per month (US\$2,103-\$2,700). Regarding journalists’ evaluation of journalism jobs (Table 1), the amount of autonomy was rated the most important attribute (78.4%), followed by chance to develop a specialty (73%), editorial policies of the organization (67.6%), job security (64.9%).

Table 1. How important are the factors in judging a job? (in %, N= 37)

| Factors | Very important | Fairly important | Not too important |
|------------------------------------|----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Pay | 32.4 | 67.6 | 0 |
| Fringe benefits | 10.8 | 73 | 16.2 |
| Editorial policies | 67.6 | 27 | 5.4 |
| Job security | 64.9 | 27 | 8.1 |
| Chance to develop | 73 | 24.3 | 2.7 |
| Autonomy | 78.4 | 21.6 | 0 |
| Chance to get ahead | 43.2 | 37.8 | 18.9 |
| Chance to help people | 32.4 | 67.6 | 0 |
| Chance to influence public affairs | 59.5 | 40.5 | 0 |

Journalism Practice: Findings of reactions and comments show that journalists get on their work from people. More than half (56.8%) of surveyed journalists said they occasionally get reactions from news sources, 45.9% said they occasionally get reactions and comments on their work from people above them in their organizations. In comparison, 43.2% regularly get responses from readers. Responses indicate that 40.5% of surveyed journalists regularly do reporting, while only 5.4% never do so, and more than half (59.5%) cover a specific beat. The most common area Kuwaiti newspaper journalists cover was politics, followed by the sports section.

Professional Values and Perceived Impact of Public Opinion: To investigate the influence of Kuwaiti journalists’ conceptions of newsworthiness, they were asked to rate the importance of fifteen things that news media provide to its readers. Table 2 shows that the journalists ranked “to provide information to the public quickly” as most important (91% rated this factor as extremely important), followed by interpretation of complex problems (67.6%), concentrate on news that’s of interest to the broadest possible audience (59.5%).

Table 2. The Importance of news media on society (in %, N=37)

| | Extremely important | Quite important | Somewhat important | Not important | Missing values |
|--|---------------------|-----------------|--------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Provide information to the public quickly | 91.1 | 8.1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Provide analysis and interpretation of complex problems | 67.6 | 27 | 5.4 | 0 | 0 |
| Provide entertainment and relaxation | 21.6 | 27 | 35.1 | 16.2 | 0 |
| Investigate claims and statements made by the government | 27 | 48.6 | 13.5 | 10.8 | 0 |
| Provide analysis and interpretation of international developments | 24.3 | 51.4 | 24.3 | 0 | 0 |
| Stay away from stories where factual content cannot be verified | 32.4 | 29.7 | 27 | 10.8 | 0 |
| Concentrate on news that's of interest to the broadest possible audience | 59.5 | 35.1 | 2.7 | 2.7 | 0 |
| Discuss national policy while it is still being developed | 54.1 | 35.1 | 8.1 | 2.7 | 0 |
| Develop intellectual and cultural interests of the public | 48.6 | 29.7 | 18.9 | 2.7 | 0 |
| Be an adversary of public officials by being always skeptical of their actions | 40.5 | 43.2 | 10.8 | 5.4 | 0 |
| Be an adversary of businesses by being always skeptical of their actions | 37.8 | 35.1 | 21.6 | 5.4 | 0 |
| To set the political agenda | 18.9 | 54.1 | 18.9 | 8.1 | 0 |
| Give ordinary people a chance to express their views on public affairs | 56.8 | 21.6 | 13.5 | 8.1 | 0 |
| Motivate ordinary people to get involved in public discussions of important issues | 45.9 | 24.3 | 13.5 | 16.2 | 0 |
| Point people toward possible solutions to society's problems | 48.6 | 35.1 | 5.4 | 8.1 | 2.7 |

Journalists were asked about the most significant effect on their concept of newsworthiness on their day-to-day job. The most significant impact was the findings of readership or audience research (40.5%), followed by news sources (35.1%), supervisors (29.7%), public opinion polls, journalistic training, and local competing news media were all rated very influential by 27% (Table 3).

Table 3. Factors Influencing conception of newsworthiness (in %, N=37)

| Conceptions of newsworthiness | Not at all influential | Not influential | Neutral influential | Influential | Very influential |
|--|------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------|------------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Your peers or the staff | 2.7 | 10.8 | 45.9 | 32.4 | 8.1 |
| Your supervisors | 0 | 5.4 | 27 | 37.8 | 29.7 |
| Your friends and acquaintances | 5.4 | 18.9 | 29.7 | 29.7 | 16.2 |
| Your journalistic training | 0 | 10.8 | 29.7 | 32.4 | 27 |
| Findings of readership or audience research | 0 | 8.1 | 10.8 | 40.5 | 40.5 |
| News sources | 2.7 | 10.8 | 16.2 | 35.1 | 35.1 |
| Local competing news media | 2.7 | 10.8 | 24.3 | 35.1 | 27 |
| Wire services' budgets | 2.7 | 18.9 | 27 | 29.7 | 18.9 |
| Public opinion polls | 5.4 | 16.2 | 29.7 | 21.6 | 27 |
| Priorities of large newspapers | 10.8 | 8.1 | 27 | 40.5 | 13.5 |
| Priorities of independent online news or information sites | 16.2 | 16.2 | 24.3 | 40.5 | 2.7 |

Surveyed journalists agreed to (45.9%) that readers are more interested in breaking news than in analysis, and 21.6% disagreed. Conduct polls to learn citizens' priorities on issues was rated critical by the journalists (62.2%) when asked about their perceptions of their news organizations' role on a couple of issues. However, journalists in this study believe that the media are influential in shaping and forming public opinion. They were asked to rate the media's influence on a 10-point scale (with 10 indicating significant impact and 0 no impact at all). Journalists scored a mean of 8.35 on the media's impact on public opinion and a mean of 6.67 on how much media influence there should be on public opinion. The study found various influential factors were on their perceptions of journalistic ethics (Table 4). In terms of developing their concept and meaning of journalism ethics, respondents found day-to-day newsroom learning most influential (48.6%), followed by family upbringing (37.8%), and religious training (27%).

Table 4. The journalism ethics influence journalists (in %)

| Factors | Extremely Influential | Quite Influential | Somewhat Influential | Not Very Influential |
|---|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Teachers | 16.2 | 35.1 | 21.6 | 27 |
| Family upbringing | 37.8 | 48.6 | 5.4 | 8.1 |
| Religious training | 27 | 43.2 | 8.1 | 21.6 |
| Day-to-day newsroom learning | 48.6 | 37.8 | 8.1 | 5.4 |
| Senior reporters and editors | 21.6 | 48.6 | 27 | 2.7 |
| Publishers, owners, or general managers | 18.9 | 37.8 | 24.3 | 18.9 |
| Seminars on ethics for journalists | 10.8 | 29.7 | 40.5 | 18.9 |
| Web sources | 10.8 | 29.7 | 35.1 | 24.3 |
| Decisions of other news organizations | 16.2 | 29.7 | 40.5 | 13.5 |

Table 5 shows journalists' attitudes about controversial reporting practices that might generate ethical concerns. Respondents were asked whether they would not approve of the action or whether it would be justified on occasion. Findings show that 81.1% of the surveyed journalists would not support using re-creation or dramatization of news by actors, 78.4% would not approve disclosing the names of rape victims, and 67.6% would not approve paying people for confidential information. However, 64.9% of the respondents said that using confidential business or government documents without authorization is justified on occasion, and 56.8% said that making use of personal documents such as letters is also justified on occasion.

Table 5. The journalists' attitude towards ethical issues (in %, N=37)

| Ethical issues | Justified on occasion | Would disapprove | Not sure | Missing answers |
|---|-----------------------|------------------|----------|-----------------|
| Paying people for confidential information | 29.7 | 67.6 | | 2.7 |
| Using confidential business or government documents without authorization | 64.9 | 29.7 | 2.7 | 2.2 |
| Claiming to be somebody else | 27 | 64.9 | 5.4 | 2.7 |
| Agreeing to protect the confidentiality and not doing so | 27 | 54.1 | 13.5 | 5.4 |
| Badgering unwilling informants to get a story | 48.6 | 40.5 | 8.1 | 2.7 |
| Making use of personal documents such as letters and photographs without permission | 56.8 | 32.4 | 5.4 | 5.4 |
| Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information | 18.9 | 59.5 | 13.5 | 8.1 |
| Using hidden microphones or cameras | 35.1 | 59.5 | 2.7 | 2.7 |
| Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors | 13.5 | 81.1 | 2.7 | 2.7 |
| Disclosing the names of rape victims. | 10.8 | 78.4 | 5.4 | 5.4 |

Journalism Freedom: More than half of the surveyed journalists responded that if they have a good idea, they would more often than not be able to get the subject covered (59.5%), 64.9% answered that they more often than not have the freedom in selecting the stories they want to work on, and 70.3% of said more often than not have the freedom in deciding which aspect of a story should be emphasized. Regarding the most significant limitation on Kuwaiti journalists' freedom, the journalists' answers were mostly related to news organizations' political strategies, censorship, press laws, lawsuits against journalists, and press freedom. Respondents were asked to pick the most significant challenge that faces Kuwaiti journalism practice from a list of nine possible obstacles. Professionalism was rated the most significant challenge (29.7%), followed by ethics (24.3%), and government control (16.2%).

Discussion

The findings show that Kuwaiti newspaper journalists are young. This can be explained by the fact that journalism in Kuwait is a relatively new field, especially that up to 2006, only five newspapers were operating in Kuwait. As discussed previously, newspapers were established in the late 1960s. They were managed by non-Kuwaitis, so there is a new wave now, and the press and publication law has opened the doors for new newspapers and new journalism jobs for Kuwaitis. Reporters are not highly appreciated and are usually perceived as people doing "side jobs." More than half of the journalists surveyed have an independent political view because of their jobs as journalists, as they are obligated to be objective and dispassionate. Moreover, Kuwaitis, in general, are very conservative when it comes to

expressing their political orientation. An encouraging figure of the surveyed journalists held a bachelor's degree (27%). The majority of the surveyed journalists expressed an interest in additional journalism training, although they have taken courses and workshops before. This finding suggests that journalists are eager to learn more and have an interest in continuous journalism education. Half of the journalists surveyed are not members of the Kuwait Journalists' Association. This can be explained by the fact that they either don't want to be affiliated with a professional association or that their membership obligates them socially or politically. Based on Weaver et al. (2007) indicators of journalistic professionalism, newspaper journalists have a good extent of professionalism. In terms of job satisfaction, it seemed that they are satisfied with their job. Kuwaiti journalists evaluated jobs in their field based on autonomy and the chance to develop specialty and editorial policies. This means that journalism freedom is essential to journalists, and the amount of autonomy and editorial policies kind of go together as journalists seek more freedom and less interference. Kuwait journalists have rated the readership or audience research as the most significant effect on newsworthiness. Another important finding is the high encouragement for readership and audience research, reflecting the growing culture of educated journalists who believe in public opinion polls and research findings.

This study also shows that journalists' perception of the media's impact on shaping public opinion was pretty influential. They rated conducting public opinion polls as extremely important and put the media high on its influence in shaping and forming public opinion.

In terms of journalists' ethical practices and ethics, the most influential factors on Kuwaiti journalists' perceptions of ethics were the daily learning in the newsrooms, family upbringing, and religious training. This is supported by the findings of Al Rasheed's study conducted in 1998 on working journalists in Kuwait that found Islamic values were ranked high among Kuwaiti journalists. The findings said Kuwaiti journalists disapproved of news dramatization by actors, disclose the names of rape victims, pay people for confidential information, and consider these three as the most controversial reporting practices that might generate ethical concerns. These attitudes reflect Kuwaiti journalists' commitment to ethical norms. The findings support journalists' strong orientation with Islamic values as Islamic culture and religion encourage them to avoid fabrication and bribery. 67.6% of journalists did not approve of paying for confidential documents. This finding suggests that Kuwaiti journalists may not adhere to U.S. journalism's ethical values, at least in theory. Still, culture and traditions may have a great amount of influence on their ethical standards. Related to their perception of ethics, journalists were asked to pick the most significant challenge that faces journalism in Kuwait, and ethics was rated the second reason after lack of professionalism. This finding is partially supported by Pintak and Ginges's (2011) study on Arab journalists' professionalism, ethics, and journalistic corruption. In terms of freedom, findings show that journalists in Kuwait practice journalism with some freedom and power. On the other hand, journalists perceived censorship, news organizations' political strategy, and press law as their job limits. Recent research on Swiss journalists found that although journalists claim to have rather high reporting freedoms, the conceptions of their role performance do not correspond to their actual role performance in the news coverage (Raemy, Beck, & Hellmueller, 2019). Kuwaiti journalists perceive external factors such as political pressure and censorship as their press freedom limits, while they perceive internal factors such as professionalism and ethics as their main challenges.

Conclusion

Weaver, Willnat, and Wilhoit (2019) argue that significant changes have occurred in the journalism culture in the past few years, many of them due to rapid advances in computer technology and the rise of new forms of media. This study is essential to study the factors influence journalists and their perceived role, especially with the latest technology advancements in the Kuwait media sector. Findings suggest that Kuwaiti journalists perceive their role as reporters of information and news to serve a well-informed citizenry. This is consistent with the findings from a recent study of Iranian journalists, which found that journalists successfully act out their role as watchdogs, change agents, and educators even when working under political pressure (Ranji, 2020). The study also examined Kuwaiti journalists' professional roles and values. Findings revealed that journalists are generally satisfied with their jobs and occasionally get comments from the public. Kuwaiti journalists practice journalism professionally in terms of membership, education, and willingness to further journalistic training. Also, journalists emphasize research findings when evaluating newsworthiness as they depend on public opinion polls and results from readership and audience research. Journalists' ethics were mainly formed by their daily news practices, family, and religion. Press freedom is an essential issue for Kuwaiti journalists. This study shows that journalists regard censorship, news organization political strategies, and press laws as their primary journalistic limits. Also, journalists rated the amount of autonomy and editorial policies of news organizations as the most important factors for judging a job in their field. This means that journalists consider press freedom as a priority. Nevertheless, journalists expressed some freedom in their journalistic work.

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