

Evaluating journalistic routines in Kuwait: The use of information sources

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Abstract

This study investigates the use of information sources in Kuwait and the influence of ownership, newsroom size, and media type on the gatekeeping routines. Using a sample of 1,868 news articles from nine different news outlets, including television, radio, print, and online media, we examine the sources and actors present in the news coverage. The results of the study demonstrate the strong dominance of political sources in the construction of news, highlighting the crucial role of the government in shaping media content. The findings also support previous research that indicates top-down or elite actors have more privileged news access compared to non-elite actors such as citizens. Surprisingly, state-owned media outlets used fewer and narrower ranges of information sources compared to private media outlets. Additionally, a significant proportion of the news articles analyzed had no sources cited or presented unilateral coverage of the news. Likewise, our study challenges conventional assumptions about online media's role in promoting a greater diversity of sources and perspectives in news reporting. Our findings indicate that online media platforms do not necessarily enhance diversity in news reporting.

Keywords: Sources, gatekeeping, news, journalism, Kuwait,

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Literature review

Kuwait's media landscape has unique features that directly impact journalistic practices, routines, and responsibilities. Although Kuwait has historically been regarded as one of the freest Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the state still maintains strict control over the media (Dashti et al., 2018). Despite the 2020 right to access information law, the government still exercises significant control over the dissemination of information, which can impede journalists' work (Reporters Without Borders, 2022). According to the 2022 World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders, Kuwait ranks 158 out of 180 countries for press freedom. The country experienced a sharp drop of 53 places in just one year, currently ranking third among Gulf states after Qatar and the UAE. Human Rights Watch (2020) also reported that Kuwaiti authorities have used the penal code in recent years to prosecute journalists and activists for expressing their opinions or criticizing the government. This has led to a climate of self-censorship and limited freedom of expression in the country.

Journalists in Kuwait generally operate under the principle of "responsible freedom," which is a form of self-regulation that encourages communication professionals to report responsibly while also considering national security concerns and potential threats to the ruling institution and its interests (Amin, 2002). Alsalem (2021) even considers that a large part of the population tolerates censorship and considers it a form of civic responsibility. For fear of being targeted by authorities, journalists avoid reporting on issues that could be perceived as threatening to the government or ruling family. This can include issues related to politics, religion, and social norms, as well as national security and foreign relations.

In addition to self-censorship, there are also external pressures on journalists in Kuwait to adhere to government-approved narratives and refrain from covering issues that could be perceived as controversial. This can include pressures from government officials, political parties, and other influential figures in society (Reporters Without Borders, 2021). Despite these challenges, some journalists challenge government censorship by using social media and other digital platforms to share information and report on issues that are often censored by traditional media outlets. Wheeler and Mintz (2010) noted that Kuwaiti citizens view the Internet as a potential catalyst for political change, and recent usage trends indicate that social media are playing a crucial role in the latest political movements by facilitating political mobilization and discussions.

In recent years, there has been a profound transformation in the Kuwaiti media sphere, driven by rapid technological advancements. The emergence of new media platforms has posed challenges to the government's authority and control over both media content and its distribution, challenging the institutions within Kuwaiti society (Dashti et al., 2020). While digital media platforms are progressively supplanting traditional outlets, Kuwait continues to host 13 Arabic and two English daily print newspapers. Within the television landscape, both state-owned and private networks coexist (Murad, 2022). Even though private television networks were granted government authorization in 2004, state-owned channels continue to maintain dominance. To establish a private television station, new operators must obtain media licenses from the Ministry of Information and sign a consent form, committing to comply with the law and refrain from producing content that compromises public modesty (Alsalem, 2020). The Government oversees the broadcasting of nine diverse television channels, accessible through online streaming platforms. Over time, the private television stations in Kuwait, which

are owned by Kuwaiti business families, have become increasingly popular among Kuwaiti viewers due to their daily news broadcasts, documentaries, movies, talk shows, and late-night programs.

Regarding radio broadcasting, Kuwait offers nine state-owned specialized English and Arabic radio stations, all owned and managed by the Ministry of Information. Although private radio stations emerged in 2005, none have established their own news services. Instead, they predominantly focus on music, entertainment content, or cater to Kuwait's expatriate communities, broadcasting in languages such as English, Malayalam, and Hindi.

The relationship between journalists and news sources has frequently been examined through prevalent paradigms in media and communication theories, such as the propaganda model. This model posits a theory about the privileged access that powerful elites possess in relation to mainstream media and their influence over the news agenda (Matar & Taha, 2023). Existing literature has extensively examined various aspects of information sources in news reporting, including the balance between elite and non-elite sources, and the prevalence of political versus citizen sources. Studies conducted by Powers and Benson (2014), Mellado and Humanes (2015), and Humprecht and Esser (2018) have yielded inconclusive findings. While some research suggests a noteworthy rise in the inclusion of diverse voices in news content, others have discovered that despite changes in media, journalists, and audiences, a more pluralistic news landscape remains elusive, with official and political sources maintaining their prominence. However, much of the research on news sources continues to be constrained by Western-centric normative approaches to news and news production practices and the way journalists and the media source the news in Kuwait remains unexplored. The noteworthy decline in terms of freedom of expression in recent years makes it a case of special interest.

Despite the coexistence of private and public media in Kuwait, it would be incorrect to analyze the system focusing solely on the role of the state as a coercive power imposing its rules of media censorship. In the context of Arab media, the government and the market do not form a clear-cut dichotomy, as these two spheres are intricately connected through numerous personal and family connections (Miladi & Mellor, 2020). With the aim of better understanding the use of information sources by Kuwaiti media, as well as the influence of factors such as the newsroom size or the ownership structure, this study analyzed the news published by nine media outlets over the course of a year. The sample included four newspapers, two television channels, one radio station, and two online news websites. By examining how different actors and voices are represented in the news, we can acquire a deeper insight into how the media narrative is constructed and what factors influence it. This knowledge can help us critically evaluate gatekeeping routines in Kuwait and their influence on news production.

Navigating political and economic pressures

Journalistic professionalization involves adherence to a set of established canons, commonly known as routines, that guide the work of trained journalists. These canons serve to structure the news-making process and ensure that the news stories are presented in an accurate, informative, and balanced manner. In addition to the selection of news items, the decision as to which sources should be selected is a key aspect of gatekeeping practices (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Some key standards related to source selection include presenting multiple perspectives, fact-checking, using direct quotations, and minimizing the use of anonymous sources (Boeyink, 1990; Deuze, 2005; Duffy & Williams, 2011; Hallin, Manoff, & Weddle, 1993; Standaert, Hanitzsch, & Dedonder, 2019; Son, 2002).

Shoemaker and Reese (2014) introduced the Hierarchy of Influences model as a roadmap for identifying the forces impacting journalism practices and legitimizing the study of questions about where news comes from. The factors identified overlap with those outlined in Shoemaker and Vos' (2009) gatekeeping model. The model consists of five levels of analysis: the social system level, the social institution level, the media organization level, the routine practices level, and the individual level.

In countries with limited freedom of speech such as Kuwait, sources selection can be a complex and challenging process. Journalists must navigate through a range of pressures when deciding which sources to use in their reporting. Governments can censor journalists or shut down news outlets that report on sensitive issues. As a result, they may be forced to rely on a narrow range of government-approved sources or may have to use anonymous sources to protect themselves and their sources from retaliation.

Some scholars argue that media platforms play an important role in dynamics and journalistic practices. According to Brants (1998), newspapers are believed to possess superior qualities such as diversity, depth, and balance, whereas television includes a higher proportion of sources cited in their news compared to other platforms (Tiffen et al. 2014; Kleemans, Schaap, & Hermans 2017). The ownership structure also shapes the types of news they produce and their journalistic routines (Dunaway & Lawrence, 2015). The profit-making objectives of private or publicly traded outlets are negatively associated with substantive, issue-focused news (Hamilton, 2004; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). The constant pressure that private outlets face to cut costs and improve profitability also has an impact on the range or diversity of voices used in journalistic routines. For example, private media may rely more heavily on wire services or syndicated content rather than assigning reporters to cover stories in-depth. However, journalists working in

state-owned or subsidized media have to use particular sources or to avoid reporting on certain issues (Khazen, 1999). In such cases, journalists may have to work hard to maintain their editorial independence and integrity in the face of these pressures (Vine, 2017).

The news industry is currently undergoing a transformation due to various constraints, including changes in economic models and advancements in digital technology. There are multiple factors contributing to this transformation, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis was a decisive one. The health crisis had a significant impact on source selection in news reporting. Journalists had to rely heavily on official sources such as government agencies, public health organizations, and medical professionals due to the urgency and scale of the pandemic. At the same time, limited access to independent sources, particularly in-person interviews, made it challenging for journalists to get direct quotes and first-hand information. As a result, journalists relied more on secondary sources such as media sources supplement their reporting. Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has made it more difficult for journalists to find independent sources, and they have had to be vigilant in verifying information to maintain accuracy in their reporting (Perreault & Perreault, 2021; Sarelska & Jenkins, 2022; Tandoc, Cheng, & Chew, 2022).

Journalism routines in Kuwait

Kuwait's media system is an essential aspect of the country's society and culture, shaping citizens' values, beliefs, and opinions (Murad, 2022). Private companies established print media long before the government intervened, and newspapers have remained largely free from direct government control, protected by the country's constitution (Al-Sumait, Dashti & Kaposi, 2020). However, broadcasting remained under government management until the 2003 law opened the technology to private ownership and the opportunities afforded by free enterprise. Today, Kuwait enjoys a high degree of media saturation in both traditional and internet-based forms. However,

recent legislative moves have tipped the balance of power towards the government, and despite increased media access, Kuwait's media environment has seen fewer freedoms.

Most Kuwaiti media companies are owned by families that are members of the wealthy elite (Reporters Without Borders, 2021). But, also in its degree of institutionalization, the Kuwaiti media seems poorly professionalized. To start with, journalism suffers from a lack of recognition as a profession and is generally seen as being 'low prestige'. On other hand, the increase in demand for manpower, due to the growth in the number of media outlets, has encountered a problem: the shortage of qualified personnel (Selvik, 2011). Alhuntushi and Lugo-Ocando, (2022) also point out that the lack of preparedness is the first cause to explain the prominence of official sources over experts or civil society in Arab media.

Due to the low-income, most Kuwaitis prefer to work in local media on a part-time basis while they maintain full-time jobs in the government sector (Al-Rasheed, 1998, Dashti et al., 2018). The believe that journalism is not a suitable profession for Kuwaitis, especially for women, persists in the country (AlSalem, 2020). According to Mufarreh (2021), the barrier hindering the advancement of women journalists in the Gulf, often referred to as the 'glass ceiling', does not stem from their competence. Instead, it is a result of societal norms that tend to prioritize men over women in media appointments.

Women are permitted to work strictly on the margins of journalism, writing articles that do not require journalist experience, perhaps as part of a weekly column. This functions as a sort of compensation for not being able to work in real journalism, a way for outlets to avoid the accusation that women suffer from discrimination in the field (Mufarreh, 2021, para. 3)

Interestingly, although there are many non-Kuwaiti journalists working in Kuwaiti newsrooms, the active members of the Kuwaiti Journalists Association are typically individuals who hold Kuwaiti citizenship. This is because being a Kuwaiti citizen is a requirement for participating in the General Assembly meetings of the syndicate (Mellor, 2010). On other hand, Kuwaiti newspapers have undergone a shift towards amateurism since the press and publication law was modified in 2006 (Selvik, 2011). This change can be attributed to the sudden increase in the demand for manpower due to the growth in the number of newspapers, coupled with a shortage of qualified personnel. Another proof of the lack of professionalism is the absence of a public official list of journalists or a code of ethics (Onyebadi & Alajmi, 2023).

These constraints and obstacles have sparked the proliferation of autonomous media establishments operating independently of the Ministry of Information (Al-Anezi, 2021). These independent entities frequently offer alternative viewpoints and narratives that diverge from those presented by state-controlled media sources (Alsalem, 2020; Al-Qudah, Al-Ajmi, & Deehani, 2020). This diversification of voices has contributed to a richer media landscape within the region.

When analyzing the journalistic routines, professionals working in Kuwait use a wide variety of sources, both informal and formal, to obtain the required information. Moreover, the information gathered is mainly used for preparing news stories, features, personal knowledge, editing a news item, and preparing an article, and less so for preparing personality profiles, editorials, and columns (Anwar, Al-Ansari, & Abdullah, 2004). The number of in-house journalists who write original articles is small and most local reporters do not have degrees in mass media or journalism.

Although journalism is a source-driven practice, research on sourcing is relatively limited (Van der Meer et al., 2017). Exploring how Kuwaiti journalists and the media give voice to different actors can help us understand how news media narratives have been constructed. Given that the previous literature has not addressed the preponderance of specific information sources in Kuwait, we have transformed our goals into the following hypotheses and research questions:

H1: Print media outlets will exhibit a greater use of sources in their news coverage.

H2: Political sources are expected to predominate in Kuwaiti media news coverage.

H3: Outlets with larger newsrooms will tend to employ a greater number and a more diverse range of information sources in their news stories.

RQ1: Does media ownership influence the types of sources used in media stories?

RQ2: Does the media present a diversity of sources in the news coverage?

RQ3: Does the news present a diversity of sources' points of view?

Methodology

Sampling

A content analysis of the news published in nine media outlets in Kuwait from January 2 to December 31, 2020, was conducted as part of the second wave of the *Journalistic Role Performance* Project. The criteria used to select the sample were audience size, reach, and level of influence in agenda-setting, ensuring that the selected outlets represented the diversity of the country's media system as much as possible. Specifically, four newspapers (Al-Qabas, Al-Anbaa, Kuwait Times, and Arab Times), two television channels (KTV1 and Al-Rai TV), one radio station (Kuwait Radio One) and two online news websites (www.alshahedkw.com and alraimedia.com) were included in the final sample.

Table 1.

Media Sample

Outlet	Ownership	Language
Kuwait TV	Public	Arabic
Alrai TV	Private	Arabic
Kuwait Radio	Public	Arabic
Al Qabas	Private	Arabic
Al Anba	Private	Arabic
Arab Times	Private	English
Kuwait Times	Private	English
Alaan	Private	Arabic
alraimedia.com	Private	Arabic

Using the constructed week method, a stratified-systematic sample of two weeks was selected for each media outlet. The year was divided into two six-month periods. For each six-month period, we created a constructed week, randomly assigning starting dates on a Monday in January and a Monday in July. This procedure allowed us to include seven days in each six-month period for a total sample of 14 days during the year. The sampling unit was the most watched newscast for television channels, the most listened-to news program within each radio channel, the full issue of the selected newspapers for print media, and the entire homepage of the selected news websites (including the respective links) for online news media. Since website news are dynamic and change constantly, we therefore captured the homepages of the websites at two fixed points during the sampled days: once at 11:00 a.m. and once at 11:00 p.m.

The unit of analysis was the news item. A news item was defined as a set of contiguous verbal and, if applicable, audio and/or visual elements that refer to the same event, issue or person. Editorials, opinion columns, weather forecasts, horoscopes, movie (or other cultural) reviews, puzzles, social pages, and similar content on radio and TV were not included in this study. We excluded supplements, magazine and special features programs and headlines on

newspaper front pages and at the beginning of TV and radio newscasts. Content that was not produced by the staff of the respective newsrooms was also excluded. In the case of online media, we only coded news items that appeared on the extended home page by clicking on, and thereby opening, each of the relevant items. Items that included embedded video or audio clips were also coded. The corpus of news items was randomly divided among coders to reduce bias, and a post-test was conducted to ensure the reliability of the coding process. Our final sample consisted of 1,868 news stories from nine news outlets.

Measurements

We used four variables to measure different aspects of media coverage.

(a) Number of sources, defined as the total number of sources quoted in the story. If an organization or person is quoted, it is counted as one. If the same source is quoted twice, it is considered to be one source.

(b) Diversity of sources, defined as the inclusion of sources representing different reference groups in the society.

(c) Diversity of points of view, defined as the inclusion of different perspectives on an issue.

(d) Types of sources, defined as the different types of sources in the news story. Twelve categories were used to classify news sources: political, business, health, scientific and academic, police/security, anonymous, religious, civil society, citizen, media, sports, and celebrity sources.

Our study included as independent variables: the type of medium in which the news story was published, the news outlet, date of publication, language, size of the newsroom, and ownership.

Findings

Sources in news coverage

The statistical use of sources was measured for print ($M=1.68$; $SD=1.49$), online media ($M=1.55$; $SD =1.57$), television ($M= 1.11$; $SD =1.34$), and radio ($M= 0.92$; $SD= 1.07$) (Table 2). The results from the ANOVA analysis demonstrated the effect of the media type on the number of sources used ($F(3, 1864) = 19.664, p = .000, \eta^2 = .03$). However, Tukey’s HSD Test only found significant differences of print media compared to radio, and television outlets ($p < .001$, 95% C.I. = [0.76, 0.56]), and online media compared to radio, and television ($p < .001$, 95% C.I. = [0.62, 0.43]),

There was also a statistically significant difference between the outlets, as determined by one-way ANOVA ($F(8,1859) = 22.480, p = .000, \eta^2 = .08$). Kuwait TV ($M= .57$; $SD= .85, p < .001$) and Kuwait Radio ($M= .92$; $SD= 1.07, p < .001$) included significantly fewer news sources than all the other outlets, except for Alaan. Arab Times, an English print newspaper, used the greatest number of information sources, followed by Al Qabas and Arab Times (see Table 3). Of the total number of news stories in 2020, 65.2% include one or fewer sources of information. Hypothesis 1a stated that print media outlets will exhibit a greater use of sources in their news coverage. *This was not supported.*

Table 2.

Number of sources

Outlet	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Kuwait TV	.57	44	.718
Alrai TV	1.71	47	1.235
Kuwait Radio	.92	37	.862
Al Qabas	1.81	178	1.584
Al Anba	1.26	95	1.030
Kuwait Times	1.78	27	1.701

Arab Times	1.97	57	1.309
Alaan	1	67	1.043
alraimedia.com	1.78	121	1.554
Total	1.49	673	1.410

In our analysis of the most influential sources in Kuwaiti news, the data has revealed a predominant reliance on elite sources. Notably, political figures constitute the largest group, accounting for 32.4% of all authoritative voices in the news. Additionally, business representatives and media figures hold significant sway, representing 13% and 11.9% of these voices, respectively (refer to Table 3). Conversely, our study found that other source categories received notably less attention on a global scale. This includes sports figures at 4%, celebrities at 2.6%, and religious sources at 1.4%. Consequently, these findings provide strong support for hypothesis 2. However, it's essential to acknowledge that differences in source prominence across the four media platforms have emerged. Political sources were proportionally more important in radio and online coverage ($X^2 = 35.882, df=3, p < .001$), while radio and television gave more importance to health actors ($X^2 = 53.750, df=3, p < .001$). Business ($X^2 = 36.362, df=3, p < .001$) and anonymous sources ($X^2 = 54.217, df=3, p < .001$) were clearly more prominent in print and online media.

Table 3.

Sources by media platform

	Print	Television	Radio	Online	Total
Political *	31.5%	21.5%	46%	37.8%	32.4%
Business *	16.6%	7.4%	1.4%	13%	13%
Media *	19.6%	2.2%	0%	7%	11.9%
Anonymous *	12.5%	1.2%	0%	8.3%	8.6%
Health *	6.2%	17.8%	9.4%	4.7%	8.1%
Citizen	6.4%	7.7%	5.8%	7.6%	6.9%
Scientific/educational	7.3%	4.3%	2.2%	6.8%	6.3%
Police/Security	5.6%	4.3%	2.9%	5.3%	5.1%

Sport	3.9%	5.5%	0.7%	4%	4%
Civil Society	4.1%	5.5%	0%	4.9%	4.2%
Celebrity *	3.3%	0%	0%	3.6%	2.6%
Religion *	0.9%	2.2%	0%	2.3%	1.4%

* Significant differences ($p \leq 0.05$).

Newsroom size and ownership effects in the use of sources

The outlets in the sample were classified according to the type of ownership in private and state-owned (Table 4). The size of the newsrooms was also included as a variable, with the aim of analyzing the relationship between the number of journalists employed in every outlet with different routines, as is the case with the use of news sources. The media outlets were classified into three groups: small (less than 50 journalists in the newsroom), medium (50 to 200 journalists), and large (more than 200 journalists). Kuwait TV, Radio TV, and Al Anba were considered medium-sized outlets, whereas the rest were classified as small. The findings show that state-owned media used a significantly lower ($p < .001$) number of sources ($M = 0.73$; $SD = 0.970$) than private media ($M = 1.64$; $SD = 1.526$). Contrary to what could be expected, the medium size outlets included fewer sources in their news ($M = 0.98$, $SD = 1.006$, $p < .00$) than the smaller ones ($M = 1.73$, $SD = 1.607$, $p < .001$). Hypothesis 3 is not supported.

Regarding the use of sources, private outlets used political voices in more than two-thirds of their news items (33.5%, $X^2 = 5.078$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). By contrast, state-owned media coverage was less politicized in the used sources (26.9%, $p < .001$), leading to the inclusion of health sources (12%, $X^2 = 7.664$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). Private media also used significantly more business (14.9%, $p < .001$), media (14.2%, $p < .001$), anonymous (10.3%, $p < .001$) citizen (7.3%, $p < .001$), and sport (4.3%, $p < .001$) sources. As explained in the table below, the effect of outlet size is the opposite of what might be expected. Media outlets with smaller newsrooms used significantly more political, health, business, media, anonymous, and police sources.

Table 4.

Sources by ownership and size.

	Private outlets	State-owned outlets	Small size	Medium size
Political	33.5%*	26.9%*	25.7%*	6.8%*
Health	7.3%*	12%*	9.7%*	6.8%*
Business	14.9%*	2.9%*	13.5%*	1.6%*
Media	14.2%*	0.3%*	11.1%*	1.6%*
Anonymous	10.3%*	0%*	8.5%*	0.6%*
Citizen	7.3%*	4.9%*	6.5%	1.6%
Scientific/educational	7.1%	2.3%	5.3%	1.9%
Sport	4.3%*	2.3%*	4.2%	1.2%
Civil Society	4.6%	2.6%	2.7%	1.9%
Police/Security	5.8%	1.6%	3.1%*	0.6%*
Religion	1.6%	0.3%	1.5%	1.3%
Celebrity	3.1%	0%	1.5%	0.1%

* Significant differences ($p \leq 0.05$).

Sources diversity

The diversity of perspectives in journalism sourcing refers to seeking and presenting a range of opinions and viewpoints to provide a balanced and nuanced view of the subject matter. This approach helps avoid bias and ensures that the audience receives a more complete picture of the issue at hand. By actively engaging with a diverse array of sources, journalists can offer their audience a comprehensive understanding of complex issues, reflecting the pluralistic nature of society. This commitment to diversity in sourcing is pivotal in maintaining the integrity of journalism and upholding its role as a vital pillar of democracy.

The findings (Table 5) show that 77.1% of the news have no sources or present unilateral coverage. Regarding the diversity of points of view, only 18.7% of the news offers diverse sources' points of view about a particular issue. This finding underscores the prevalence of one-sided reporting or news articles that do not incorporate multiple perspectives on the given subject. Further analysis by media platform type highlights notable variations in sourcing

practices. Print media include in the news coverage a significant higher diversity of sources ($p \leq 0.05$) than television, online and radio platforms. Newspapers also present richer diversity than radio and television. When scrutinizing specific media outlets, Al Qabas and alraimedia.com emerge as notable examples. These platforms exhibit significantly greater diversity in viewpoints and types of news sources in comparison to other media outlets included in the study. The results also show that state-owned media presents a significantly lower diversity in terms of both sources and points of view ($p \leq 0.01$) than private outlets.

Table 5.

Sources and points of view diversity by media platform and outlet

	Multiple sources	Diversity of points of view
Kuwait TV	7.7%	1.8%
Alrai TV	33.3%	0%
Kuwait Radio	11.5%	9.4%
Al Qabas *	20.5%	38.6%
Al Anba	15.8%	18.4%
Kuwait Times	28.8%	6.3%
Arab Times	52.3%	10.6%
Alaan	10%	9.3%
alraimedia.com *	23%	34.1%
Print media *	27.5%	22.3%
Television *	20%	0.9%
Radio *	11.5%	9.4%
Online *	19.1%	26.8%
Private ownership *	25.6%	21.4%
Media ownership *	9.4%	5.2%

* Significant differences ($p \leq 0.05$).

Discussion

This study is based on a content analysis of 1,868 news stories from Kuwait, print, radio, television, and online media. It examines the use of news sources and the influence of the platform, outlet, newsroom size, and ownership on the level of diversity in the Kuwaiti media system. The sample was collected in 2020, which coincided with the covid-19 outbreak. The

lockdown measures imposed by the government at the beginning of March hindered journalists' movement and their ability to access reliable and credible data. These exceptional circumstances may have influenced the results of the present study.

The selections, evaluations, and representations of sources have been the main object of study in journalism research, and it is generally accepted that they are central players in the construction of information. According to our findings, print media outlets include a significantly greater number of sources in their news than radio and television, contradicting previous research (Tiffen et al. 2014; Kleemans, Schaap, & Hermans 2017). To perform their job with professionalism, journalists are expected to use multiple sources and present different points of view when reporting the news. This standard is considered an essential aspect of good journalism because it helps ensure that the information presented is accurate, objective, and comprehensive. This research confirms that, even within digital platforms, journalists tend to favor traditional voices over the internet's potential for presenting citizens sources. The study revealed that journalists extensively quoted government officials, demonstrating that "the practices of journalists and the traditions of news coverage continue to prioritize traditional voices and sources over others" (Knight 2012, 71).

Surprisingly, the two state-owned platforms, Kuwait TV, and Kuwait Radio, reported the lowest use of sources, even though they are less limited by the lack of human and economic resources that private outlets suffer. Journalists working in private companies usually need to publish their content as quickly as possible, which might prevent the performance of journalistic work that feature diverse representations of the world daily. However, the case of Kuwait is an exception since it is not possible to establish a direct relationship between the size of the

newsroom or the privileged position in terms of economic resources with a higher quality of the news stories.

Our study confirms the clear predominance of political sources in news coverage in Kuwait, which can be explained partly by the difficulty in accessing other types of sources because of the exceptional situation during the pandemic. The strong focus on political sources in Kuwait could also be interpreted as a common characteristic of the journalistic culture in the country, where the media privileges official political voices and actors. As previously explained by Alsalem (2020), the close relationship between elite families and newspaper owners and the government makes it difficult to freely criticize or even question political decisions due to shared interests and fear of losing economic benefits.

These results also support previous research on the privileged news access of top-down or elite actors, such as politicians and government institutions, compared to bottom-up or non-elite actors (Arafat & Porlezza, 2023; Gans, 2011; De Dobbelaer et al., 2018; Mellado, 2021, Wu, 2021). Another explanation for the intense use of elite sources in Kuwait, corroborated by Onyebadi and Satti (2022), is related to stressing deadlines. Due to these pressures, journalists prefer sources that do not need to pass the extensive process of reliability and believability checks. Notably, unidentified and media sources were attributed the most in private outlets, both print and online. This tendency to cite anonymous sources or other media may also be related to the lack of economic resources that affect media financed exclusively with advertising revenue.

Media diversity is considered crucial in fostering an open discussion of controversial topics, has long been debated in transitional democracies and hybrid regimes, and is often cited as a goal for quality journalism (Napoli, 2003; Waisbord, 2013). Contradicting the existing literature, Kuwaiti print media offers greater diversity in terms of sources and points of view.

The low level of media diversity present in radio and television news is linked to the fact that two of the three outlets analyzed are state-owned. The results of our study also show that online media is not clearly linked to a greater diversity of sources or perspectives. This finding does not support the common assumption that digitalization creates a more diverse space for the expression of new voices and news diversity (Mellado & Scherman, 2021).

This research has implications for the practice of journalism in Kuwait. The dominant influence of political actors, and the abuse of anonymous and media sources have cast doubt on the quality of the news. Overall, the media discourse during the first year of the pandemic in Kuwait is characterised by what Crabu et al. (2022) call the ‘political patronisation’ of science and medicine. This phenomenon refers to the role that politics plays in defining the frame of reference for providing its stamp of approval to public health measures. The monopoly exercised by government officials and other elites over news content during the COVID-19 pandemic is even more problematic because the health and safety of citizens are closely linked to their ability to access reliable and accurate information, which in turn can affect the evolution and consequences of the crisis.

It is important to highlight that professionalism is a problematic concept. Most scholars implicitly assume that Western-style journalism is a natural and inevitable world model. However, different contextual factors contribute to variations in how journalists and society in general perceive their role. In this sense, research has shown that journalists in developing and non-democratic countries are more likely to endorse official policies and present a favourable image of political and business leadership (Hanitzsch, 2011).

The journalistic production process reflects the pressures that journalists face and the choices that they make. Therefore, it is vital to analyse the relationship between journalists and

their sources because this can not only influence the narratives that are communicated to the public but also impact the experiences of the journalists themselves.

Conclusion

The production of news is a complex process that involves numerous decisions made by journalists, from determining what stories to cover, to deciding how to frame those stories, and ultimately, to disseminating them to the public. However, journalists do not work in a vacuum, and their decisions are often influenced by external factors, such as legal and cultural constraints. Sources provide journalists with information that is essential to produce news, but they also have their own agendas and interests that they seek to promote. Therefore, journalists must navigate a complex web of relationships and power dynamics to determine what information is relevant, accurate, and newsworthy.

Our study confirmed a predominance of political and elite sources in news coverage in Kuwait, which could be explained by the difficulty in accessing other types of sources during the pandemic, and the close relationship between elite families and newspaper owners and the government. The implications of such a disposition towards elite sources raise pertinent questions regarding the impartiality, depth, and diversity of news narratives. The intense use of official, media and anonymous sources in Kuwait can also be attributed to the emphasis on stressing deadlines and to the lack of economic resources. Online media did not show a clear link to greater diversity of sources or perspectives, contradicting the assumption that digitalization creates a more diverse space for news diversity. This finding suggests that even within digital media, editorial choices and contextual constraints continue to play a significant role in shaping news content, thereby emphasizing the complexity of the news production process in the digital age. Drawing from the empirical findings presented earlier, this research lends support to a

foundational concept within media and communication theories, particularly aligning with the Propaganda Model. It underscores the notion of power elites enjoying privileged access to mainstream media outlets, their influence over the news agenda, and, to a certain extent, the collaboration between journalists and powerful entities.

The apparent reticence of state-owned outlets to incorporate a variety of sources suggests potential pressures emanating from political affiliations and narratives. The term ‘responsible freedom’ often linked to self-censorship, is frequently misappropriated by journalists in Arab countries when addressing matters related to the country’s image or national interests. Usually, national security concerns encompass any perceived challenges to the ruling institutions and their interests. This includes critical discourse about religions or beliefs, Arab nationalism and its aspirations, cultural values, and national traditions. This observation underscores the need for an in-depth exploration of the institutional constraints and power dynamics in Kuwait that shape source selection and representation within state-controlled media entities.

Overall, the relationship between journalists and their sources is a critical aspect of the journalistic production process. Although the 2020 law on the right to access information in Kuwait was intended to enhance the effectiveness of journalists’ work, in practice, it is impeded by censorship regulations that limit journalists, bloggers, and online activists from discussing a broad spectrum of topics. A parallel issue arises with the cybercrime law that was implemented in January 2016. The issue of who possesses access to the media and the ability to voice their opinions bears significant political ramifications for the nation. Through an analysis of news sourcing practices in Kuwait, we can gain deeper insights into the pressures journalists encounter, the decisions they make, and ultimately, the influence of these choices on the narratives conveyed to the public.

Limitations

This study was conducted during the pandemic's first year, during which journalistic routines were also affected by the health crisis. One of the main limitations is the broad categorization of sources, which makes it difficult to understand the real influence of political sources on journalistic routines. To gain a better understanding of the role of different actors and voices in constructing the pandemic narrative in Kuwait, a more detailed analysis is required.

Additionally, exploring the criteria used by journalists when selecting information sources and their opinions regarding source selection would be beneficial.

Another important consideration is self-censorship, which may play a role in news coverage, even in Kuwait, which is traditionally known as the Gulf's least repressive country. Cultural context should also be considered a key element in the investigation. Most journalists in Kuwait are foreigners, making them more vulnerable, because their residency is linked to their work visas. Finally, more research is needed to understand how professional journalism models are connected to sources and issues.

Further research is needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role of sources, self-censorship, cultural contexts, and professional models of journalism in shaping news coverage. First, a detailed analysis of the should be undertaken, encompassing categorizations based on political affiliations, credibility, and expertise. This granular examination will provide insights into how various sources influenced journalistic narratives and routines. Simultaneously, investigating the criteria guiding source selection will illuminate the decision-making processes behind journalistic choices. Surveys, interviews, and focus groups with journalists could be employed to elicit opinions on these criteria and the challenges faced in selecting sources.

Second, a longitudinal study should be implemented to track the evolution of journalistic routines, source preferences, and self-censorship behaviors over multiple years, considering how the situation and changing journalistic practices interact. By addressing these directions, a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of sources selection, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of news coverage in Kuwait.

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