



Attitudes towards news and satellite news media among Kuwaitis: An opinion polarization perspective *

Dr. Hesham M. I. Mesbah **

College of Arts Department
University of Kuwait

Abstract:

From which news medium can audiences acquire information best? To what extent does the news source affect receivers' feelings of knowing? Will the effect of a news source on confidence in knowledge stay over time? This study examines the effect of various news media on memory and awareness of learning. 120 communication students participated in this experiment which comprised four groups to examine the comparative effectiveness of electronic news media versus print media. One 300-word news story was presented to the four experimental groups. the results showed superior effects of the written news over televised news in terms of immediate memory and metamemory. When testing delayed memory, no significant differences were detected. The study attributed this lack of difference to the "sleeper effect"

1. INTRODUCTION

Media uses patterns in the Arab World have changed dramatically after Direct Broadcast Satellites (DBS) become actively in business. This phenomenon is more noticeable in richer Arab states, where the sight of DBS receivers on top of houses is very common. Thanks to satellite technology, more than one hundred television channels are available in several languages to audiences in the Arab World. Such rapid informational developments coincided with massive

This paper was received in December 2003 and approved for publication in May 2004.

* This paper was presented the 75th Annual Meeting of the Southern Political Science Association (ASPA), Atlanta, USA, November 7-10, 2002.

** Assistant Professor at Kuwait University, College of Arts, Department of Mass Communication.

political occurrences brought about by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. This initiated so many people to get "connected" with satellite channels in order to get exposed to live coverage and more up-to-date news sources. It also became very normal for Arab citizens to learn from a signal that traveled thousands of miles about what happened on their own soil. During the Gulf War, the people of Kuwait were adjusting their antennas to know about what was happening around them. The use of satellite channels for news and informational purposes was heightened during the Gulf War. Ten years after the war, Kuwaitis do have far more options than they had before. A multitude of entertainment channels are available along with general and/or news channels. Accordingly, the levels of news consumption through satellite channels is not expected to remain the same.

After the launch of Arabsat in 1985, many satellite channels were started in most of the Arab countries. It was hypothesized that such abundance of space transmission would enhance Arab-Arab news exchange and make Arab audience less reliant on foreign news media. A quick review of the press in Kuwait would reveal that some Arab satellite channels are accused of "fragmenting Arab solidarity" and "misguiding public opinion". Such negative attitudes of the Kuwaiti press towards

some Arab satellite channels might have been transferred to audience in Kuwait. This present study is discussing the findings of a survey of a sample of adult Kuwaiti nationals about their attitudes towards satellite TV channels. Interest in local and foreign affairs, involvement with television news, and reliance on other news sources are investigated and correlated with attitudes towards such channels. The study also explores how opinions polarize regarding Arab satellite channels in Kuwait. The study postulates that opinions will tend to positively polarize if an issue is perceived to relate to national self-interest. Audience research in Kuwait has given much emphasis on media use patterns and program choice. This study is important because it, first, examines attitudinal data and, second, investigates

how opinions polarize in a society not very much familiar with surveys and personal interviews.

Survey research in Kuwait

It becomes increasingly difficult to conduct social research in conservative societies. Home-to-home visits and telephone interviews by “strangers” are not a very common, let alone possible, practice in the Kuwaiti society. Theoretically, it is very convenient to draw a nation-wide probability sample in Kuwait. It is a small country, but not tiny. It is a city-country with just one area code number. Yet, it is not that easy at all. According to a Kuwaiti scholar, it is all but impossible to (randomly) locate female respondents (Al-Menayes, 1996, p.124).

Many reasons account for the difficulty of conducting survey research here in this area of the world. First, not all Arab populations are very well accustomed with the culture of “survey research”. In 1970, a population census was planned in Iraq, but it was cancelled for political reasons. People perceived that census as a preliminary step towards increasing taxes (Abd el-Rahman, 1976, p. 65). The first census was conducted in Kuwait in 1957, whereas the first official registration of births and deaths was started three years later (Al-Sobah, 1985, p. 15). Compared to some other Arab populations, Kuwaitis are newly introduced to surveys and systematic interviews. Biological statistics were implemented in Egypt in 1839. Syria and Lebanon adopted the same system in 1914 and 1929 respectively (Al-Sobah, 1985). Basic factual information was not accurately gathered in Kuwait at the beginning. People tended to use round figures instead of specific figures to report their ages.

That's why A. Al-Sobah suggests that accurate and reliable biostatistics in Kuwait was not available in Kuwait until after 1972.

Second, circles of social relations in Kuwait are tight in a way that strangers would be easily identified. Many Kuwaiti families live in big houses, or villas, surrounded by high fences. This structure creates further obstacles for interviewers to conduct home-to-home visits randomly. On the other hand, the tradition of telephone surveys is

neither acknowledged nor welcomed by so many Kuwaitis. In a telephone survey that aimed at exploring how mass communication graduates think about our department, only six questionnaires were completed out of 60 calls. Many respondents would get suspicious about the caller, or hang up on him abruptly. Kazan (1993) postulated that “choosing a random sample constitutes a serious problem in the (Persian) Gulf this is because there are no tax or voter rosters in most of these countries to allow for parameter selection in their populations” (p. 117). This might not be the case in Kuwait, however. An accurate and up-to-date record of Kuwaitis and residents is available by the Public Authority of Civil Information. The problem in Kuwait is not how to draw a random sample, but it is how to get access to the selected respondents.

Accordingly, most of survey research in Kuwait was conducted using traffic sample or convenience samples. This has been the dominant sampling technique in both audience and consumer research done in Kuwait since the early seventies. In his Masters thesis in 1971, F. Morad used a sample of one hundred shoppers who have been interviewed accidentally on the spot (Morad, 1971). Samy et al. used a similar sampling technique to study cooperatives in Kuwait in 1974. In 1980, Abu Goma justified the use of a Traffic sample in his study according to the lack of population parameter from which to draw a probability sample (Goma, 1980). Audience research in Kuwait equally relied on convenience samples. This area of research had been limited in scope due to, according to El-menayes, the non-commercial nature of local television. There was no motivation for “measuring television preferences to help price spot advertising (Al-menayes, 1996, p. 125). In 1979, the Ministry of Information sponsored a survey to explore audience attitudes towards the launch of Kuwait television's second channel (Ragheb & Haddad, 1979). Another convenience sample of the general public was also employed in this study.

The nineties witnessed a quantitative surge in audience research in Kuwait. Y. Mohammad cites 6 studies that were conducted by newspapers between 1992 and 1997 (Y. Mohammad, 1999). The size of samples used in these studies ranged from fifty to one thousand

respondents. Two studies did not report sample size. All studies, however, used the technique of accidental sampling. In his own study, Y. Mohammad used a quota sample of 400 Kuwaitis who were interviewed mostly in shopping and recreation areas. He examined the possibility of conducting mail survey, but he came up with a significantly low response rate. In a previous study, Al-menayes selected a convenience sample of Kuwaiti citizens 18 years or older. The selection represented the geographic and population distribution of Kuwait. Another group of studies used school and/or university students as a target population (Algordy & Moawad, 1996; Al-Najran, 1998; Abd El-Galeel & Moawad, 2000). Again, accidental interviewing was the most agreed upon tool of data gathering.

In addition, foreign researchers were interested in conducting various surveys and opinion polls in Kuwait during the nineties (Boyd, 1993; Mytton & Eggermann, 1993; Tessler & Nachtway, 1996). Similar sampling techniques were also followed in these studies. Shah et al. (1998), however, managed to draw a random sample of 615 married and non-pregnant Kuwaiti women. They obtained a listing of all districts and sub-districts in the Capital and Jahra governorates from the Public Authority for Civil Information. They also obtained the name of the household head and the address for each household. Surprisingly, the study reported very low response rates (2 percent in the Capital, and 4 percent in Jahra) although it tackled some sensitive issues such as the use of contraceptives. Respondents were less suspicious about such foreign researchers and, hence, were less reluctant to host them and fill out questionnaires. This is consistent with such pro-western atmosphere that became prevalent in Kuwait after the Iraqi invasion and the Desert Storm.

Attitudes towards news media

Various levels of displeasure with news media have been documented in communication research. In a study that used a national sample of 3,184 American adults, national media were described as “biased” and “sensational”. Negative words outnumbered positive words describing national media 52 percent to 30

percent. Displeasure with the national news media doesn't, however, translate onto lower believability for specific news organizations (The Pew Research Center, 1998). Cable channels were ranked higher than newspapers as an immediate source for breaking news. CNN is the single outlet most often mentioned for national, international, and health news. Lind argues that as "critics provide evidence that the TV news audience is not very well served, surveys of TV news viewers show that viewers are increasingly dependent on TV news" (Lind, 1995, p. 360). Izard related the American public's trust of the mass media to "their evaluation of how well the news media live up to (the public's) expectations" (Izard, 1986, p. 247). In an earlier telephone poll conducted by the Washington Post, interviewees perceived news media as generally knowledgeable and more trustful than government officials (Susman, 1981).

Gallup conducted a series of polls about whether the audience perceives news organizations as straight or often inaccurate. In 1985, 38 percent of the respondents evaluated news organizations in the States as often inaccurate. The percentage of such negative evaluation kept rising from 38 percent in 1985 till it reached 65 percent in 2000 (Gallup, 2001). This deteriorating credibility of broadcast media was attributed to human factors compared to newspapers whose credibility is affected by institutional factors. Newhagen and Nass (1989) found that respondents base their perception of credibility or confidence in a newspaper on its performance as an institution, while they base their perception of credibility of TV news on the performance of an aggregate of on-camera personality. Izard found that the greater proportion of negative responses come from the South, with the North States producing the greatest proportion of favorable responses. In an earlier study, Becker et al. (1978) found that ideology and party affiliation are related to criticism of the press. They found that conservatives and Republicans were more likely critical of the way the press handled the Watergate investigations than Liberals and Democrats.

In Kuwait, many Kuwaitis do not appreciate their local mass media. In his doctoral dissertation, Mohammad (1998) examined how

often the Kuwaiti audience contact local newspapers and television. He found that sixty percent of the sample have never contacted any Kuwaiti newspaper before, whereas seventy percent have never contacted Kuwait television before. On the other hand, news and drama are two types of programs Kuwaiti viewers watch most. In another study, Al-menayes came up with similar results. fifty two percent of the sample reported that they relied on MBC (Middle-East Broadcasting Corporation), a non-Kuwaiti satellite station, for information and public affairs. Sixteen percent said they relied on a foreign satellite channel for news, but they did not name particular channels. Only 13 percent of this Kuwaiti sample relied on Kuwait TV for new. The author predicted that had it not been for the language barrier, the viewership scale would tip in favor of foreign stations like CNN and BBC (Al-menayes, 1996, p. 129). When it comes to television program preference, Al-menayes found that news is the most watched type of programs on television. Al-gordy and Moawad (1996) found also that news was ranked first among all television programs watched by high school and college students in Kuwait.

Previous studies did not explore, however, the particular characteristics of Kuwaitis who are more critical of news media. With such wide availability of satellite channels in Kuwait, channel preferences are expected to be more scattered or less clustered. In addition, the political frustration Kuwaitis experienced during and after the second Gulf war might have stirred up higher levels of skepticism towards some Arab satellite channels. Accordingly, Kuwaitis' negative attitudes will tend to be more clustered, whereas positive attitudes towards satellite news media will tend to be more dispersed.

Opinion Polarization

Public opinion, as an aggregate of individual attitudes, has a distributional property. Opinions towards any given social or political issue vary along a continuum from complete agreement to complete disagreement. According to DiMaggio et al., public opinion on an issue can be characterized as polarized to the extent that opinions are

diverse, “far apart” in content, and relatively balanced between the ends of the opinion spectrum. Public opinion is also polarized insofar “as people with different position on an issue cluster into separate camps, with locations between the two modal positions sparsely occupied” (DiMaggio et al., 1996: 694). Consequently, polarization refers to the extent of disagreement, not to the ways in which disagreement is expressed.

DiMaggio et al. stipulate that polarization is both a state and a process. According to them, “polarization as a state refers to the extent to which opinions on an issue are opposed in relation to some theoretical maximum. Polarization as a process refers to the increase in such opposition over time”. We focus here on polarization in the former sense. Level of interest is one of the factors that initiate opinion polarization towards an issue. Either positive or negative attitudes are more prevalent among interested voters, whereas uninterested voters would fall in the middle range of neutrality. According to Badassare and Katz, (1996, p. 150), interest in politics, political extremity, intention to vote, voting experience in past election, attention to the election will increase an individual's willingness to speak out on political topics. The researchers hypothesized that repeated expression of an attitude has been shown “to make that attitude become more accessible, more important, and more extreme”.

By the same token, interest in news is expected to correlate with attitudes towards news media. Viewers who are more interested in either local or foreign affairs will tend to be more evaluative, or critical so to speak, of news media. Viewers who score lower on the rate of interest in news would be more neutral or less knowledgeable of the items on the scale measuring attitudes towards news media. In addition, interested viewers would be more attentive to what should be done to improve the quality of TV news. Expressed otherwise, viewers with higher levels of interest in public affairs might be more active cognitively to yield more suggestions about how to improve the quality of their local TV news service.

Research Questions & hypothesis

Based upon the previous discussion this article purports to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What are the satellite channels Kuwaitis rely on for news and foreign affairs?

RQ2: What do viewers believe should be done to improve the quality of their national satellite channel?

RQ3: What are the underlying distributional properties of Kuwaitis attitudes towards news and news channels?

- In addition, this study seeks to test the following research hypothesis:

RH: Higher levels of interest in international news positively correlate with active evaluation of the quality of TV news.

Methodology

A survey study was designed using a convenience sample of Kuwaiti nationals 18 years or older was selected and interviewed in March 2001. Interviewers were given instructions about proportionate distribution of gender and age. They made face-to-face interviews with pedestrians in the six governorates of Kuwait. Four hundred 19-item questionnaires were successfully completed and reviewed. The sample was 48% males and 52% females. This gender distribution in the sample is very similar to the population distribution, as males account for 49.5%, while females account for 50.5% of the Kuwaiti population. The mean age in the sample was 34.86 years and the median was 35 years. The range of age in the sample was 52 (Min = 18 years, Max = 70 years).

Measures. Interest in local and international affairs was measured by asking respondents to rate their interest in each of those two areas with answers ranging from 1 “not interested” to 3 “very interested”.

Attitudes towards Arab satellite channels were measured using a 5-point-Lickert —type scale. Respondents were required to indicate to what extent they agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

- The news service provided by Arab satellite channels made me more aware of so many issues and events.
- Arab satellite channels are the main source I rely on for world news.
- Arab satellites harmed the political relations between some Arab countries.
- My interest in politics was increased thanks to the Arab satellite channels.
- When I search for unbiased and truthful news, I turn to foreign news media.

Besides, respondents were asked to rate satellite news channels in terms of four attributes: neutrality, immediate news coverage, composure and non-use of exaggerated excitement, and truthfulness of news. Respondents willingness to subscribe to free satellite channels in case their transmission is restricted to subscribers only was also identified. A similar 5-point scale was employed to measure Kuwaitis attitudes towards establishing a new satellite TV channel specialized in news.

Attitudes towards news were identified through exploring how frequently respondents watch TV news in an average week.

Active evaluation of the news service provided by Kuwait satellite TV was measured using an open-ended question. Respondents were asked to provide their own suggestions about how to improve the quality of Kuwait satellite TV. To facilitate coding, responses were content analyzed by the author. A sample of responses was coded by another coder¹ (intercoder reliability coefficient = .88). To facilitate statistical analysis, each respondent was assigned a score based on the number of suggestions they have provided. The score ranged from 0 (no suggestions) to 6 (denoting 6 suggestions).

Respondents were also asked about the other news sources they use to know about international events.

Demographic variables, such as sex, age, and education, were coded and used in the final analysis of data. Gender variable was coded a dummy variable to be incorporated in a regression equation.

Results

RQ1: What are the satellite channels Kuwaitis rely on for news and foreign affairs?

Use of satellite TV channels is prevalent among the sample. Eighty one percent of the interviewees reported that they watch news on satellite channels. Males are significantly more conspicuous viewers of TV news compared to females ($X^2 = 13.29$, $DF = 1$, $p = 0.01$). Kuwaitis rely on a multitude of satellite channels to learn about international news. Respondents reported 17 different satellite channels. Table 1 displays the top five channels that Kuwaitis mainly rely on for foreign affairs.

Table 1
Satellite Channels Kuwaitis Mainly Rely on for International News

Channels	%
Al-jazeera	31%
CNN	21%
MBC	21%
Kuwait	10%
Dubai	6%

A love-and-hate relationship between Kuwaitis and Al-jazeera channel has always existed. Many a time this channel was accused of being more favorable of the Iraqi regime and biased against Kuwait. Kuwaiti press usually portrays a negative image of this Qatar-based and operated satellite channel. Yet, the data revealed that the newly established Al-jazeera (1995) is the satellite channel Kuwaitis most often rely on for international news. Al-jazeera was ranked first in terms of immediate news coverage by 32 percent of respondents. When asked about the most balanced or unbiased station, Al-jazeera was mentioned by only 4 percent of respondents.

Despite the language barrier, CNN came in the second ranking along with MBC. In comparison between MBC and CNN, it was

shown that 19 percent of viewers who rely mainly on MBC watch news most of the week, whereas 25 percent of viewers who rely mainly on CNN watch news daily. The results indicate that CNN would have been the most watched satellite channel had it introduced an Arabic language service in the region.

The data also revealed that Kuwaitis are more reliant on "Gulf" satellite channels for foreign news. Four of the above five channels belong to four different Gulf States. Despite the British colonial heritage in this region, the BBC received a very low percentage of preferences (2%). The emergence of CNN as a notable news channel during the second gulf war made it widely relied upon all over the Arab countries.

RQ2: What do viewers believe should be done to improve the quality of their national satellite channel?

Using the technique of unaided recall, respondents identified what they think could be done to improve Kuwait satellite TV news quality. Eighteen percent of news viewers in the sample were not able to generate any suggestions for improvements and/or changes. Males represent 37% of those who did not generate any suggestions, while females represent 63%. A total of 590 suggestions were coded and categorized into 17 categories. Table 2 presents a ranking of these proposed improvements.

Respondents used a somewhat general approach to suggest how to improve the news quality of their national satellite TV station. More emphasis is directed towards manpower. Suggestions in this category included more training of news staff, inception of "new blood", and hire staff on the basis of proficiency not nepotism. The main concern for the sample is related to live coverage of events, however. Not only did 16 percent of those who responded to this question directly suggest speedy on-air news coverage, but also 13 percent suggested the use of hi-tech equipment to facilitate news coverage. Respondents favor more world news compared to local news. News formats do not represent a main concern for interviewees. Only 1 percent introduced the idea of presenting other news formats such as documentaries and news programs. Only 10 respondents suggested privatization of the researched medium. Ninety percent of them were males.

Table 2
Rank Ordering of Suggestions to Improve
Kuwait Satellite TV Quality

Suggestions	Counts	%
Use of professionals	117	20%
Speedy on air coverage	92	16%
Accuracy/neutrality	75	13%
More correspondents	41	13%
Budget/equipment	32	7%
More world news	28	5%
In depth analysis	25	5%
Freedom, no censorship	15	4%
More newscasts/time	11	3%
Privatization	10	2%
No repetition/less time	9	2%
Special unit for news	8	2%
Documentary/news programs	8	1%
Innovation/no imitation	7	1%
Local issues	7	1%
Interesting/exciting news	6	1%
Others2	25	4%
Total	590	100%

RQ3: What are the underlying distributional properties of Kuwaitis attitudes towards news and news channels?

Table 3 displays the different percentages of agreement and disagreement with the statements measuring attitudes towards Arab satellite channels.

Table 3
Attitudes towards Arab satellite TV channels

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
The news service provided by Arab satellite channels made me more aware of so many issues and events	34%	48%	11%	5%	2%	0%
Arab satellite channels are the main source I rely on for world news	17%	28%	20%	25%	10%	0%
Arab satellites harmed the political relations between some Arab countries	37%	36%	17%	9%	1%	1%
My interest in politics was increased thanks to the Arab satellite channels	15%	34%	23%	23%	5%	0%
When I search for unbiased/truthful news, I turn to foreign news media	32%	27%	22%	16%	4%	0%

Kuwaitis are very well aware of the informational impact of the recently established Arab satellite channels. Eighty two percent of news viewers in the sample think that these channels added to their knowledge of current affairs. The second highest clustering of percentages in the table pertains to respondents' evaluation of the negative impact of those channels on Arab-Arab relations. Seventy three percent of respondents think that some Inter-Arab political relations were harmed by these new mass media. This statement also yielded the lowest percentage of "strongly disagree" responses (1%). It is possible that respondents had Al-jazeera in mind when responding to that statement. The study coincided with different political tensions between Qatar and Egypt. It was mentioned in the press that Egypt was not comfortable with the way Al-jazeera handled Egypt's political standing towards the Palestinian issue. Al-jazeera was the only Arab

satellite channel that broadcast some Palestinian demonstrators tearing up the Egyptian flag along with the pictures of Mubarak, the Egyptian president. The Kuwaiti press also used to backlash Al-jazeera "biased" presentation of the Kuwaiti political affairs.

The third highest clustering of responses was of a negative nature. Fifty nine percent of respondents perceive foreign news media as more truthful and less biased than Arab satellite media. Foreign news media are looked upon as more professional and less biased. Kuwaiti's past experience with CNN during the gulf war partially accounts for such attitude. On the other hand, the feeling of the superiority of Western civilization could be deeply rooted in many Arabs' conceptualization of the world. This feeling is reflected when it comes to comparing between "us" to "them". The results, however, show that this feeling is not very prevalent among the sample. Twenty percent of respondents did not see foreign mass media as more truthful, whereas 22% had neutral opinions regarding the same issue.

Opinions towards Arab satellite channels are clustered on the side of agreement rather than polarized. Percentage of disagreement with either positive or negative statements was very low. This indicates that the strengths and weaknesses of Arab satellite channels are not of a disputable nature among the sample. The very low percentage of "don't know" answers strongly supports this conclusion. A substantial percentage of "neutral" opinions existed, however. Interest in foreign affairs is expected to explain the distributional properties of these responses. The chart below shows the distribution of opinions according to level of interest in foreign politics.

Chart 1 shows that those who are very careful of learning about international affairs have the highest percentage of "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree" responses, whereas they have the lowest percentage of "neutral" responses to all five statements. On the other hand, the percentage of neutral responses among those who are not interested at all in foreign affairs is the highest in all of the five charts. The potential for opinion polarization tends to be higher among interested respondents. Overall, however, the data show a dispersed distribution of responses rather than a polarized one.

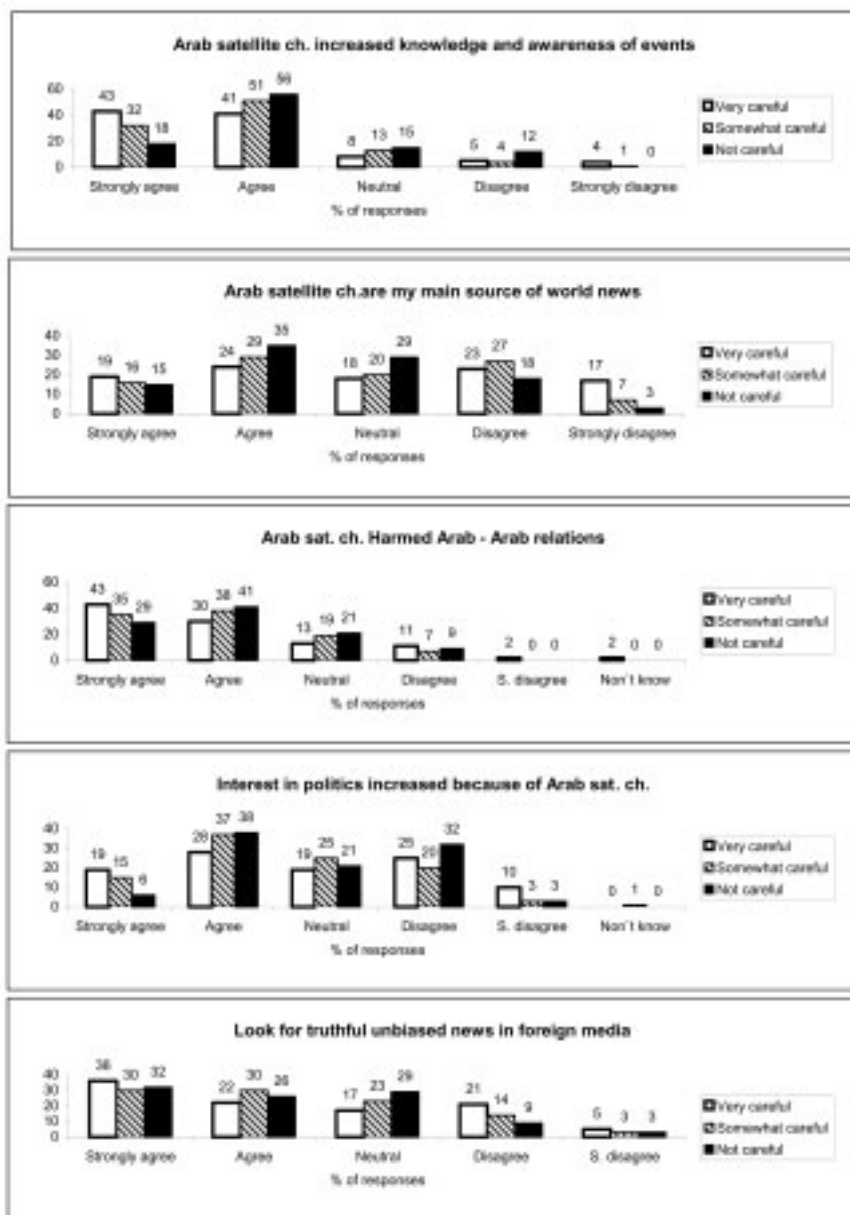


Chart 1
Distribution of opinions according to level of interest

RH: Higher levels of interest in international news positively correlate with active evaluation of the quality of TV news.

The scores of interest in foreign and local news were aggregated and correlated with every respondents' total number of suggestions for improving news quality in Kuwait satellite channel. A significant correlation was detected ($r = .19$, $p = 0.01$), and the null hypothesis that active evaluation of news television is not related to interest in local and foreign affairs has been rejected.

In addition, active evaluation of the quality of Kuwait satellite news was regressed on education, gender, age, frequency of watching TV news, interest in news, and intention towards subscribing to satellite news media. The table below displays how these factors explain variance in active evaluation of news.

Table 4
Multiple Regression Analysis of Active evaluation of News Quality

Factors	Active evaluation (beta)
Education	.16**
Gender (male)	.17**
Age	-0.09
Frequency of new viewing	.11
Interest in news	.14**
Intention to subscribe	.03
R ²	.12
Adjusted R ²	.10
**p < 0.01	

The data in Table 4 suggest that male Kuwaitis with more years of education and higher levels of interest in local and foreign affairs are more significantly involved with satellite TV news. The low value of R² indicates that there are other inherent factors that determine an individuals active involvement with broadcast news. Availability of other news media, prior knowledge, family communication patterns,

affinity with the world of broadcast media, and political participation are all but a set of factors that might determine an individuals level of involvement with TV news.

On the other hand, respondents were highly receptive (72%) to the suggestion of establishing a new Kuwaiti satellite station specialized in news. Again, interest in foreign news significantly correlated with attitudes towards this suggestion ($X^2 = 26.24$, $DF = 8$, $p = 0.001$). Respondents with higher levels of interest in foreign affairs are strongly for the idea of introducing a new Kuwaiti satellite news service. Neutral and opposing responses were more prevalent among less interested respondents. Taking into consideration this high value of degrees of freedom (8), the relationship between the two variables was relatively strong (Contingency coefficient = .28).

Discussion

It is quite evident that a high percentage of Kuwaitis use satellite channels for informational purposes and not merely for entertainment. Thanks to this emerging technology of Direct Braodcast Satellite, the informational environment in the Arab region witnessed very significant changes. The Arab World is now being introduced to Arab citizens more differently. Many taboos are now being breached and tackled by satellite media. CNN vigorously reported on circumssission in some Arab countries. Democracy in the Arab World and the ligitimacy of different regimes in the region were also handled by other satellite channels. Viewers became more reliant on these media for news. this might explain the low ratio of “dont know” responses in this present study. Respondents do co-exit with satellite media. They watch these stations, and they sometimes talk with others about what they saw or wait to see on a particular satellite channel. In other words, respondents actively process information about such media and, consequently, have developed clearer perception about the advantages and pitfalls of these stations.

Opinions were not particularly polarized towards Arab news media. Instead, opinions either positively or negatively clustered. There was a high percentage of agreement with positive and negative statements. Although the tradition of surveys is not deeply rooted in the Kuwaiti

culture, respondents showed familiarity with the Lickert-type scales used in the questionnaire. The topic of the study is of less critical or sensitive nature. This might have helped make respondents less reluctant to respond. On the other hand, opinion polarization was less apparent in responses, as the topic is not of a controversial substance like political or socioeconomic matters. Further research is called for to investigate the distribution of opinions towards disputable issues in the Kuwaiti society such as relations with the United States, granting women their political rights, and female education. Opinion polarization was slightly more apparent among respondents interested in politics, however.

The findings offer support for the hypothesis that interest in local and foreign affairs partially explains cognitive activity regarding TV news. Respondents with higher levels of interest were more willing and capable of generating more suggestions to improve the news quality in Kuwait satellite channel. Other predictors of cognitive activity towards the news business are level of education and gender. Respondents provided a wide array of suggestions to improve the quality of TV news. The human element was a main concern for so many viewers. This finding is consistent with Newhagen and Nass (1989) who found that viewers base their perception of credibility of TV news on the performance of news personnel. In this sense, the study might have practical implications for the TV news industry in Kuwait. Not only do Kuwaitis seek more professional news staff, timely news coverage, and accurate reporting, but they also seek to see a Kuwaiti CNN or Al-jazeera. The study showed that there is an almost agreed upon demand for introducing a new Kuwaiti satellite news service. This might be due to the fact that the Kuwaiti identity was jeopardized during the Iraqi invasion. Accordingly, there might be a subconscious tendency to look for ways that would assert the Kuwaiti identity and presence.

Notes

- 1 Mahmoud Abd El-Naby. An Assistant professor at the Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, Kuwait University.
- 2 This category includes: Interrupt programs by breaking news; less ads; no reliance on other satellite channels; cooperate with embassies; Arabic-Islamic issues; conduct research; be alert about timing of newscasts; present counter news (against Iraq); and consider successful examples of satellite stations.

References

- Abd El-Galeel, A. & Moawad, M. (2000). The association of Kuwaiti youth with satellite TV channels. *The Arab Journal for humanistic sciences*, 71, 158-177.
- Abd el-Rahman, Asaad. (1976). Suitability of Western social science research methods for conditions in the Arabian environment. *Journal of social science*, October, 3, 62-75. [Arabic]
- Abu Goma, N. (1980). Measuring consumers loyalty in Kuwait to the co-op logo and its effect on purchase decisions. *Journal of gulf and Arabian Peninsula studies*, 62, 263-307. [Arabic]
- Al-Gordy, N, Moawad, M. (1996). The standing of the youth towards reading daily newspapers in Kuwait. *Journal of gulf and Arabian Peninsula studies*, 82, 53-91. [Arabic]
- Al-Menayes, Jamal. (1996). Television viewing patterns in the State of Kuwait after the Iraqi invasion. *Gazette*, 57, 121-134.
- Al-Najran, T. (1998). *Internet adoption and use Kuwait University students: New medium, same old gratifications*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The Ohio State University.
- Al-Sobah, Amal. (1985). Biological statistics in Kuwait. *Journal of gulf and Arabian peninsula studies*, October, 44, 11-45. [Arabic]
- Baldassare, M. & Katz, C. (1996). Measures of attitude strength as predictors of willingness to speak to the media. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 73:1, 147-158.
- Becker, L. F., Cobbe, R. E., & Sobowale, I. A. (1978). Public support of the press. *Journalism Quarterly*, 55, 421-430.
- Boyd, D. (1993a). *Broadcasting in the Arab World: A survey of the electronic media in the Middle East*. 2nd edition. Ames: Iowa State University press.
- DiMaggio, P., Evans, J., & Bryson, B. (1996). Have Americans social attitudes become more polarized? *American Journal of sociology*, 102:3, 690-755.
- Gallup. (2001). Communication polls. [Online]. Available: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/indicators/indmedia.asp>

- Kazan, F. (1993). *Mass media, modernity, and development: Arab states of the Gulf*. Westport, CT, London: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Izard, R. S. (1986). Public confidence in the news media. *Journalism Quarterly*, 63, 247-255.
- Lind, R. A. (1995). How can TV news be improved?: Viewer perceptions of quality and responsibility. *Journal of broadcasting & electronic media*, 39, 360-375.
- Mohammad, Y. (1999). *Kuwait television audiences: Motivations and behaviors*. Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of South Carolina: College of journalism and mass communication.
- Morad, F. (1971). Motives for buying from grocery stores, supermarkets, and co-ops in Kuwait. *Unpublished M.A. thesis*, Kuwait University, Faculty of commerce. [Arabic]
- Mytton, G. & Eggermann, M. (1993). The role of international radio as a source of news in some middle-eastern countries during Gulf crisis. In: G. Mytton (ed.), *Global audiences: Research for worldwide broadcasting*. London: John Libby, pp. 170-200.
- Newhagen, John and Nass, C. (1989). Differential criteria evaluating credibility of newspapers and TV news. *Journalism Quarterly*, 66, 277-284.
- Ragheb, M. E., Haddad, Y. (1979). *A pilot study on the opinions of certain categories of citizens on the establishment of a second television channel*. Kuwait: Ministry of Information. [Arabic]
- Samy, M., Bazaraa, M., Souod, R. (1974). An exploratory study about co-ops in Kuwait. *Journal of social science*, October, [Arabic]
- Shah, N., Shah, M., & Radovanovic, Z. (1998). Patterns of desired fertility and contraceptive use in Kuwait. *International family planning perspectives*, 24 (3), 133-148.
- Susman, B. (1981). *Washington Post*, August, 16, A1-A2.
- Tessler, M. & Nachtway, J. (1996). Islam and attitudes toward international conflict. *Journal of international conflict*, 42 (5), 619-636.
- The Pew Research Center for People and the Press. 1998 media consumption. [Online]. Available: <http://www.people.press.org/medsec5.htm>