

THE ETHICS OF THE MEDIA PROFESSION IN THE WORLD BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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Received: 02/2024, Published: 03/2024

Abstract:

Professional and ethical standards act as a protective barrier against misinformation in media. When these standards erode due to various factors such as monopolies, deception gradually replaces credibility and objectivity. Deceptive practices present biased illusions as unbiased reality, often by omitting challenging facts and undermining the legitimacy of movements seeking change. The study aims to highlight the importance of journalistic ethics and their role in media work, examining their interaction with concepts like freedom, neutrality, and objectivity. It also addresses key factors such as political interference, financial influence, and ideology in shaping media content by drawing on international political events as examples that significantly impact global relations.

Keywords: Ethics in the media profession, neutrality, objectivity, Political Money, Crises.

Introduction

Ethical thinking is the cornerstone of journalistic work. Before writing a news story or publishing a picture, the journalist must consider all the issues that will arise from the publication of that news or image. Therefore, the journalists must study all available options, and adhere to ethical codes especially with the proliferation of unethical media practices in recent years. This has made it the subject of research and debate in various fields of knowledge, given the extent and impact of this phenomenon on the relationships between media and society, its various institutions, and between individuals, groups, and states.

Media practice during times of crises, wars, and conflicts weakens adherence to ethical standards. As long as the media is driven by external forces, we find these parties divided. Here, the media becomes a tool to be used to achieve tangible results on the ground, leading to the disappearance of journalistic ethics during conflicts. The conflicting parties engage in media work openly without adhering to any other rules, whether legal or ethical.

Media outlets exercise a degree of control and privacy over the information they present to their audience, showing them what they want them to see. They do not only dictate to the audience what events they receive but also how they receive and understand them, and in what context they can interpret them. Here, media outlets fall into the trap of falsification, losing their credibility and sparkle.

Adhering to the ethics of journalism, especially neutrality in reporting, has become one of the complex concepts that are difficult to implement. This concept sometimes varies depending on the cultural or ideological background or the worldview adopted by the journalist, as well as the environment in which their institution operates. There is a vast literature that has explored this issue, yet the debate continues, especially in light of the differences observed in the study of journalistic practices worldwide.

In the same context, many historical facts and evidence have proven that the ethics of journalism are valid only within the boundaries of the state. However, when the issue becomes a dispute between the state of the journalist or media institution and another state, objectivity and neutrality, which are the essence of journalistic ethics, become a myth. In such cases, the media institution and journalist are not obligated to present both sides of the conflict. The journalist automatically aligns with their country, and if they present the opposing country's perspective, they are deemed traitorous, unpatriotic, and not committed to serving their country. This has been confirmed by historical events such as the French media's handling of the Algerian liberation war, coverage of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, the Gulf War in 1990, the occupation of Iraq in 2003, and the Gulf Crisis in 2017. Through these historical events and evidence, the discussion about the necessity of adhering to the ethics of journalism is revived due to the significant flaw in the quality of media messages at that time, amidst the dominance of bias and ideology over various media practices.

From this problem statement, a set of questions arises, which we outline below:

- What is the meaning of the ethics of journalism?
- What are the boundaries of money and ideology in practicing journalistic ethics?
- What are the boundaries of freedom and objectivity in practicing journalistic ethics?
- What are the prominent examples of applying journalistic ethics in media practice?

The study aims to highlight the value and importance of journalistic ethics, as it constitutes a fundamental pillar in media practice in all its forms, especially at a time when media stories and news capture the public's attention. The study also aims to highlight the key influencers in applying the codes of ethics of the profession.

1. Introduction to Media Ethics

Codes of honor and professional ethics complement the rights and guarantees provided to communicators, reflecting and defining the rights and guarantees that must be provided to the society or the environment in which the communication process takes place, in the face of communicators. These codes crystallize the social and ethical responsibilities of media professionals towards the society in which they operate (Al-Jamal, 2001, p. 65). They also constitute a system of principles and standards to guide the behavior of journalists during their coverage of events, directing them to make decisions that align with the public function of media institutions and their role in society. They ensure the fulfillment of the public's rights to information and the management of free discussion, while minimizing the harm that can be caused to the public, individuals, or sources, and ensuring the freedom, dignity, and integrity of the profession and journalists (Al-Dulaimi, 2019, pp. 91-90).

The topic of media ethics is not new, although it may not have received significant attention in the past. It has been associated, albeit with primitive concepts, with the profession of journalism since its inception and has evolved through the stages it has gone through in different experiments from one country to another. However, it moved to the forefront in Europe in the mid-1970s after the Munich Declaration, becoming a controversial trend among professionals. It has since taken unprecedented dimensions in the last two decades, especially after journalism's deviation into major errors (Sadaqa, 2009, p. 8).

As for Arab countries, there are many media charters, regulations, or through what has been stated in Arab media ministers' conferences, which define the ethics of Arab media. Among the most important ethics of Arab media are the following:

- Publishing or broadcasting commercial expressions or terms implying vulgarity, i.e., far from insulting, cursing, or defaming others is not permissible.
- Publishing or broadcasting anything that may violate public morals or offend modesty in speech, action, or performance is not permissible.
- Publishing or broadcasting anything that may spread despair or a sense of defeat for individuals or society is not permissible.
- Publishing or broadcasting materialistic ideas and culture is not permissible.
- Publishing or broadcasting anything that may touch on religions and religious beliefs is not permissible.
- Publishing or broadcasting anything that may provoke conflicts, hatred, and the ignition of racism and sectarianism in society is not permissible (Abid, 2019, p. 136).

Claude-Jean Bertrand, a professor at the French Institute of Journalism at the University of Paris, says that most ethical rules for guiding journalists include the following three basic elements:

- Fundamental values: respect for life and human solidarity.
- Basic prohibitions: a journalist should not lie, cause unnecessary harm, or impersonate another person.
- Journalistic principles: such as accuracy, honesty, independence, and others (Quray'i, 2018, p. 393).

The academic John Merrill believes that media ethics deal with right and wrong, good and bad, the better and worse actions taken by those working in the field of journalism and media. Journalism itself cannot be ethical or unethical; it is the practitioners of media work who can be so. This means that attention is focused on professional standards and patterns of actions taken by media workers. Thus, ethical principles achieve two basic objectives: firstly, to create a kind of moral compass indicating the extent of deviation from the desired and preferred path in producing journalistic stories free from political, commercial, and non-commercial pressures, and avoiding publication out of favoritism or greed for money, and publishing stories based on independent investigation and according to their intrinsic importance. Secondly, ethical principles provide a practical guide to producing safe, sound, and credible journalism, fair dealing, and avoiding conflicts of interest and agendas (Al-Rajhi, 2020, p. 05).

Objectivity is a desirable quality for all journalists to the extent that the former executive editor of The Washington Post, Leonardo Daowney, refused to vote in the elections as a realization and affirmation of the principle of objectivity. However, many journalists now admit that complete objectivity is impossible to the point that the American Society of Professional Journalists dropped the word "objective" from its code of ethics in 1996 because journalists, like others, care about their work and have their own opinions. Claiming that they are completely objective suggests they have no values. Instead of the objectivity that was dropped from their code, American journalists agreed to be aware of their personal opinions so they can control them and ensure they do not influence their news reports. In other words, the news report itself should be impartial and fair (Quray'i, 2018, p. 399).

The issue of governing principles for media practice has attracted the attention of many global media institutions and networks, as well as local, regional, and international organizations that have held conferences to deepen awareness of media ethics. Many specialized entities have issued reports that illustrate the risks associated with non-compliance with media practice ethics.

Moreover, many civil institutions have included media ethics in their activities (Al-Rajhi, 2020, p. 05).

2. The Duality of Money, Politics, and Media Ethics

Human civilization is currently experiencing a significant transformation, represented by its interaction with three revolutions: the democratic revolution, the revolution of communication technology, and the information revolution. However, this transformation largely lacks justice, as it occurs in favor of advanced countries with all their colonial aspirations and interests. Media outlets have become powerful influencers and one of the most important sources of culture, yet they have also contributed to the fragmentation and distortion of awareness and the corruption of the mind. This occurred when they fell captive to international monopolies under fierce globalization. The capitalist system excels in concealing its practices in this field, as it appears superficially that free media is available to all. It even uses this liberal facade as a cornerstone of its sponsorship. However, this is only the external appearance; in reality, the media only represents the interests of one segment of society, namely those capable of funding the media through advertising. It is well known that major newspapers, radio stations, and television channels rely heavily or entirely on advertisers' money. Moreover, these major media institutions are often companies that operate according to capitalist logic. Thus, they cannot allow journalism that undermines them, and as a result, this capitalist system lacks sincere media (Sayed Ahmed, 2015, p. 21.20).

Since the 1980s, capitalism has encroached on various aspects of life, and the media has not been immune to this transformation. Values of competitiveness, efficiency, pleasure, and illusion dominated the social dimension, which liberal theorists claimed to be the essence of capitalist economy. Journalism lost its innate function in informing and educating, influenced by the end of the bipolarity, and the brutal shift towards the market economy. This change has shifted the profession's spirit towards measuring audience engagement, sales, advertising market share, and more entertainment. In other words, the quantitative profit indicator has become the primary concern of journalism (Ahdad, 2021, p. 46-45).

McNair believes that commercial pressures have forced media outlets to become more sensationalist. Robert Murdoch came to the British newspaper market in 1969 to further this trend, introducing the concept known as "3S": scandals, sex, and sports, which he used in *News of the World* and later in *The Sun*. He succeeded in increasing the circulation of these newspapers, leading European and American media to adopt what is known as the "Tabloidisation of News," meaning producing news using tabloid-style reporting (Taher, 2015, p. 116).

In the same context, Milton Friedman, an American economist, argues that the sole social responsibility of any media enterprise is to increase its profits. The owner of *The Wall Street Journal* stated: "The newspaper is private property not obligated to anything for its users, who have no authority over it at all. Therefore, it is not interested in any form of public service" (Bertrand, 2008, p. 37).

While media may appear free on the surface, direct and indirect funders dictate to media outlets and their employees, especially the editors, to adhere to their desires. It is evident globally that the media serves sources of power even at the expense of the poor, the struggling, and the oppressed. In recent decades, the media has become a sword hanging over people's heads, not in their hands (Qasim, 2015).

According to the researcher Abd Zaloum, informational capitalism has merged the power of money, media, and marketing sciences for goods and politicians. These elements, according to him, are called “The Three M's” because they all start with the letter M (Money, Media, Marketing). Consequently, the concept of money has been altered to become a commodity itself, pulsating in the computers of banks and financial companies. Brainwashing the masses became the primary function of this trio, making the media's role dominant. Therefore, financial institutions rushed to monopolize various media outlets, reducing the number of major media companies from 30 to 5 over the past two decades. When a journalistic delegation from the Soviet Union visited the United States in the 1980s, they asked how the American media machine could exert such control. They found the same message, the same content, in various parts of the United States and from all media institutions. They couldn't achieve this in the Soviet Union despite the media being controlled by our party. Thus, capitalism has lived on lies, wars, slavery, and the enslavement of nations, managed by a very few global money barons. They employed the media for years, owning and manipulating it through lies and rumors across various media platforms (Zalloum, 2009, pp. 18-17).

In the same context, Pierre Bourdieu calls on journalists and media institutions to refrain from adhering to market logic or succumbing to major industrial and financial groups. Instead, he suggests that they replace advertising revenues with state support and assistance, unaware that such a proposal would only replace market dependence with state dependence. Many studies have followed Bourdieu's trend, expressing the impossibility of journalistic independence due to its subjugation to political and economic fields. Some studies have categorized the levels of independence credibility, expressing phrases such as “true independent journalism” and “pseudo-independent journalism” (Benslimane, 2019, p. 81).

The American thinker Malcolm X says, “The media is the most powerful entity on earth,” and he also says, “If you're not careful, the media will have you hating the people who are being oppressed and loving the people who are doing the oppressing.” With this statement, Malcolm X illustrates the media's ability to deceive the masses and distort their collective consciousness by manipulating facts, making truth appear false and falsehood appear true. These processes of distortion and deception have increased exponentially with the ease of accessing information, especially with the rapid reliance on and development of media amidst the information explosion and tremendous technological advancements we have experienced recently (Al-Ta'ani, 2020, p. 93-92).

Researcher Dis Fredman concluded in his study on who sets media policies that there is a very limited and closed group that determines media policies. This seems understandable to those who understand how editors-in-chief and influential figures establish relationships with politicians and wealthy individuals and form closed circles. Often, interests intersect among them. Fredman says, “There is an agenda managed by a very cohesive and small group of individuals who were somewhat willing to listen, but only within very narrow boundaries of their own thoughts about what should be done. They have very clear standards and were willing to listen to strangers within those standards, but in the end, I believe it was more about pressure groups and public relations” (Khalil, 2018, p. 10).

Therefore, those who control the media must firmly separate their journalistic interests from their commercial interests. They are not allowed to suppress certain news or give undue importance to others for political, advertising, demagogic, or business interests in general (Bertrand, 2008, p. 66).

Regarding the impact of politics on media performance and the extent of its commitment to professional ethics, it is necessary to first describe the relationship between the political and media systems as a mutually influencing relationship. The extent of influence varies between the two parties according to the nature of their relationship, the form of the political system and its level of democracy, the political freedom enjoyed by the media in addressing political and social issues, the government's response to media feedback on issues, and its performance in those issues.

The media plays an important role in serving politics by confirming the legitimacy of governments or supporting and securing the interests of various groups, whether economic, political, religious, or social. The role of journalism varies from one country to another, depending on the level of freedom and democracy in the state, the political policies of the governing regimes in those countries, and the differences in their political, economic, and social situations, as well as their freedom and independence, and what they seek to achieve in terms of their goals and objectives (Al-Zahrani, 2015, p. 48).

The political authority has attempted to control the press, but political systems that adopt democracy and media freedom have failed to impose their control over the press. However, non-democratic governments have managed to control and direct the press according to the government's vision, imposing the authority's will on the press to stay within the framework set by the government. Consequently, this influences the readers' orientations and prioritizes the issues for them, which are adopted by the governments and sought to be adopted by the public (Al-Zahrani, 2015, p. 51).

3. Media Practice between Professionalism and Freedom

Media practice primarily revolves around accuracy in reporting news and responsible behavior towards it. Media is also considered an art and industry, utilizing auditory, visual, and written means to convey information to the receiving audience in the informational space or what constitutes the communication network among humans in human society.

More than half a century ago, precisely in 1925, the Committee on Freedom of the Press of the United Nations Economic and Social Council established the International Covenant for Journalists, to be a code of conduct for every individual responsible for investigating, reporting, broadcasting news, and disseminating information and monitoring it.

However, the media, in general, does not fully adhere to this covenant, as media institutions tend to be biased towards a political party (governmental or private) or subject to some financial authority. Journalists often fall into the trap of bias deliberately or unintentionally, especially in covering wars. There are many examples of this in the coverage of Western and Arab media of events such as September 11, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the rise of political Islam, and others (Munther, 2011, p. 56).

Wang tested the impact of four factors on differences in media coverage in six countries including America, the Soviet Union, France, Vietnam, Hong Kong, and China regarding the incident of the Chinese student protests in 1989. These factors included political ideological, diplomatic relations, cultural relations, and geographic proximity. He concluded that political ideology and diplomatic relations play an important role in the direction of media coverage, and that cultural relations do not necessarily result in positive news coverage. While the media outlets in capitalist countries described the incident as a brutal massacre and the Chinese government officials as bloodshedders, on the other hand, media outlets from socialist countries described the incident as a mere clash. They described the events as an armed operation and expressed their sorrow over the

incident, thus adding a degree of legitimacy to the Chinese government's decision to use force. It is clear that political ideology was a strong indicator and an important factor in influencing media coverage of external events (Istibrak, 2009, p. 60-59).

The media is supposed to be a fourth estate that exercises the role of a vigilant watchdog over people's interests, and the transmission of facts to them without distortion, forgery, or hypocrisy. However, it seems that this expectation is no longer realistic because the media everywhere in this world is no longer a free media serving all people, but rather it is mostly funded by influential or wealthy entities interested in promoting themselves or their ideas and policies (Qasim, 2015).

On the other hand, many researchers have focused on public opinion manipulation operations, not only by authoritarian regimes but also by the governments of democratic countries in collusion with media institutions. This includes writers with a critical view of Western and American policies in particular: Noam Chomsky, Remy Refael, Serge Halimi... All of them criticized American propaganda and employment efforts aimed at pushing public opinion towards bias in favor of military interventions abroad, as Chomsky and MacKesney revealed regarding the Vietnam and Iraq wars, while Serge Halimi and Dominique Vidal exposed the role of the media in justifying Western interventions. For them, these media outlets misled public opinion in addressing various conflicts worldwide in recent decades. Its alignment with French authorities confirms this collusion (Al-Farawi, 2021).

The decline of the media to the level of deceiving people includes the Western world as well as the Arab world because Western media is intellectually and culturally influenced by certain entities, capable of continuing to broadcast or print with the help of advertising trade practiced by journalists with major capitalist companies. These are media with political, social, and cultural positions that have a serious impact on their objectivity and desires to convey the image as it is to the general public. Western media mostly adopts predetermined positions on many issues, such as the Palestinian issue, the occupation of Iraq, and the liberation of humanity and Islamic thought, and often they are biased (Qasim, 2015).

Similarly, Robert Wicks, a media professor at the University of Arkansas, said in his book *Understanding Media Audiences* (2001): Media practitioners build their messages on their culture, beliefs, and positions, and their media messages reflect pre-existing positions that may affect the construction and content of the media message, and media institutions also influence the construction and orientations of the media message (Al-Bayati, 2012, p. 122).

David Shaw, one of the writers of the Los Angeles Times, said: For many years, the press has remained an institutional watchdog for criticizing other institutions in society, and has done so with all institutions except the press itself (Taher, 2015, p. 126).

Neutrality in news is a complex concept that is difficult to apply universally in global news reports, and this concept sometimes varies depending on cultural or ideological backgrounds, or what reflects the worldview adopted by the journalist, as well as the environment in which his institution operates. There is a huge body of literature that has explored this issue, yet the debate about it continues, especially in light of the differences observed in studying journalistic practices worldwide. BBC officials, according to Robin Marsh, former editor of the BBC radio program, *World at the Weekend*, said: They did not fully understand the meaning of neutrality, and found it difficult to apply this concept in practice. It is not surprising, then, that there are significant differences at times between news reports broadcast by different media outlets on a particular event,

as the coverage of many global events and conflicts can be a point of difference between different institutions. That is because the culture of news coverage varies from one country to another, depending on the news culture and editorial policy that determines the intellectual framework for journalists. However, despite this variation in news coverage among different channels, values such as neutrality, in all its descriptions and definitions, can constitute clear criteria that distinguish serious journalism from the noise filled by Internet sites (Al-Zarn and others, 2016, p. 70).

In our Arab world, there is a failure of media institutions to perform their role in shaping public opinion, analyzing events, and providing immediate and objective transmission of facts and positions, attributed to the fact that this media is still divided between two isolated and distant discourses:

1- An official government discourse laden with the fear of opposing opinions and burdened with the justification and defense of the ruler's policy and government, bound by a series of censorial laws and prohibitions.

2- A modest oppositional media discourse, with limited material and technical capabilities, but characterized by a high ability to criticize and aim to correct situations, without offering alternative programs and gaining the influence, power, and pressure groups in its favor. The few exceptions in this framework lie in some opposition models in several Arab countries that enjoy a kind of freedom of expression, in addressing government affairs, parliamentary life, corruption, governmental performance, and social and economic reality (Yakhlef, 2012, p. 12).

4. Professional Ethics in the Balance of Wars and Crises

In this study, we attempt to present a set of practical models that have had a significant impact on re-examining the extent to which professional ethics are applied in media practice, whether at the global or Arab level. Our choice includes the Gulf War of 1990, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, in addition to the Gulf Crisis of 2017, all of which witnessed extensive media coverage and significant audience engagement due to the size of media coverage and the way these events were dealt with. These events have prompted significant discussion regarding the adherence of international media to the standards and ethics of journalistic profession. Despite the magnitude of these events at the international level, the media's approach to these events itself constituted a prominent event of no less importance than the event itself.

4.1 The Gulf War 1990

Some believe that the actual obstacles that hindered the media from performing its journalistic function with credibility and professionalism during periods of crisis and conflict were primarily related to the nature of the connection between what is media-related and what is ideological. This includes both what constitutes a propaganda campaign aimed at rallying and mobilizing the masses to stand against those who provoke internal and external crises, especially those targeting national security and interests, and what appeared in the form of a utilitarian ideological project that views media material as marketable commodities. However, others believe that confining this relationship to this closed realm involves much simplification, considering that crises often do not have a specific form, color, or smell.

Whether we agree or disagree about the extent of the ideological dimension and its impact on media work and its nature, what cannot be disputed is the presence or absence of this dimension entirely. Crisis, by its very nature, often presents the media with difficult choices, making neutrality something relative, if not outright imaginary. It confines it to a narrow space where maneuvering becomes nearly impossible. On one hand, it is bound by its editorial policy, often imprinted with

political-ideological backgrounds that impose a certain pattern of dealing with events. On the other hand, it is required to fulfill itself and gain the trust of its audience eager to know the facts away from sensationalism and trivialization (Ferhi, 2007, pp. 336-335).

In the same context, the presence of the media in the Gulf War in 1990 turned into a symbolic presence rather than an active one, which raised the collective responsibility of journalists in the media and crisis management. Most of the American discourse receded within the framework of the US administration's strategy, which outlined the framework within which the media operated, to serve its goals and orientations. The regulatory measures planned and implemented by American military personnel, in a precedent-setting move in the history of wars, tightened control over American and Western media, directing their discourse in a way that made these media outlets deliberately or inadvertently involved in managing the crisis in favor of the coalition forces (Lamajed, 2013, pp. 163-162).

In the same vein, the French thinker Jean Baudrillard wrote an article titled "The Gulf War Did Not Take Place" after the end of the Gulf War, affirming that this war did not take place, but rather people watched a televised version of it. According to sociologist Giddens, this war between President Bush Senior and President Saddam Hussein was not like other wars in history. It was simply a televised spectacle, with the leaders of the two conflicting powers and tens of millions of viewers experiencing through the "hyper-reality" world depicted to them what was happening in the actual real world. The idea here is that the media, as it takes us from one war scene to another, determines our consumption pattern of war news and contributes to shaping our perception and knowledge of this war or that crisis, engineering our impressions and judgments about its details and parties, according to the media framework that it wants to fit into and promote (Bin Abdullah, 2014, p. 95).

CNN played a prominent role in the Gulf War, especially concerning news delivery to Iraq to influence the morale of decision-makers. It aired inflated news, instilled a sense of despair in its viewers, and disseminated false and misleading information to divert attention and obtain intelligence information for the benefit of the American plan. John Sununu, former White House Chief of Staff in the administration of former President George H. W. Bush during the Gulf War, said, "We do not need the CIA as long as we have CNN." In the same context, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, said: "It is no longer a secret to anyone that the images of CNN have become more influential on the decisions of any US president than the memoirs of his foreign ministers and advisors." Madeleine Albright, former US Secretary of State, mentioned that: "There are sixteen members of the Security Council, including five permanent members and ten belonging to the General Assembly, and the sixteenth member is CNN" (Sahari, 2017, p. 89).

The possibility of considering (deviation from reality) as the sole criterion for confirming the extent to which (politics) can influence the media message cannot be deemed inevitable. The media may risk its credibility and objectivity to a greater extent than what is required by political action. In other words, there is no pure (ethical) independence in employing professional standards with all honesty and trust. Even if we rely on (conscience) in the absolute sense, market operations through buying and selling positions will hinder the preservation of ethical duty in a pure and objective manner. Events have shown that all the standards and controls boasted by the media collapse once the temptation to achieve media scoops or news exclusivity arises. CNN fell into a deep abyss once again when it aired a picture of a bird supposedly dying due to oil contamination in

the Arabian Gulf in 1991. However, the channel's attempt to deceive viewers did not succeed, as viewers called to point out that the bird shown by the channel was not from the scorching deserts of the Arabian Peninsula but rather from the snowy Alaskan region, having died due to an oil spill from an Exxon vessel in Alaska, not as a result of Iraqi actions (Yassin, 2010, pp. 124-123).

In another example of CNN's departure from professional ethics, after CNN correspondent Peter Arnet contradicted the Pentagon's narrative, confirming that there was no evidence that the Iraqi milk factory targeted by American aircraft contained any facilities for producing weapons, the correspondent was silenced. The channel's management sent journalist Christian Amanpour to Baghdad instead, and she began to send reports that aligned with the agenda and laws of informational capitalism, thus becoming famous and wealthy (Zaloom, 1999, p. 311).

This issue is not limited to one channel but extends to many American media outlets, which have become the de facto spokespersons for the US government. This enabled them to mislead the American public about the overall objectives of the battle. Consequently, US forces monopolized information about the war, turning facts into lies and lies into truths for the war. They also convinced the American people that the war on Iraq was just, and the use of intimidation against Iraq was necessary, presenting it as a center of evil and terrorism (Al-Khadem, 2013, p. 347).

Discussing the neutrality and independence of American media faces significant criticism from media specialists and observers. Some of them consider dominant American media outlets to be members of the elite and business establishment. Edward Herman affirms that the media actually form the supporting arm of the ruling elite. They discuss and present issues within an acceptable framework, seeking accuracy in understanding the relationship between media coverage and US foreign policy. It must be noted that American media find it easier to support government foreign policy when this policy is in harmony with American cultural values of secular, liberal, and capitalist nature. Here, national interests intertwine with cultural values, making it easier for the media to play a role in shaping acceptance based on the ethical justification of directing foreign policy (Istibrak, 2009, p. 75).

4.2 The Occupation of Iraq 2003

For the invasion of Iraq by the United States in 2003, the media coverage by major media institutions did not differ much from the Gulf War of 1990. Amy Goodman raised her question about the American press coverage of the invasion of Iraq in 2003, condemning if we had state-run media in the United States, would we find any difference? According to her, government propaganda spread through major media outlets, from the selection of journalists to write praising articles, to the use of embedded reporters, and the presentation of flattering reports of authority, sent by reporters accompanying US forces in Iraq. So, where is the independent media? (John, Heather, 2017, p. 93).

Assessing the US television coverage of the war against Iraq, Edmund Ghareeb, a professor of Middle Eastern studies at American University in Washington and media analysis expert, said: "That coverage turned into a mixture of jubilation and expressing support for US forces with a sense of national sentiment at the expense of objectivity and journalistic professionalism often, and the exploitation of those feelings by the US government in manipulating and influencing television networks' coverage with the networks showing readiness to accept this governmental influence, according to him, the embedding of hundreds of journalists with US military units in Iraq aims to focus television networks' coverage on scenes of bombing and destruction, the immense military power, and the precise capabilities of smart weapons to hit their targets, while it became rare for

those networks to show images of civilian casualties or the human suffering of the Iraqi people due to the war. In a report published by the organization “Reporters Without Borders,” which accused the US-British coalition forces of showing disrespect for the work of independent journalists who did not join military units and preferred to work independently (Madi, 2003).

According to what Robert Fisk published in *The Independent* on 2003/2/25, the control of the Ministry of Defense over the media reached the point where CNN, CBS, ABC, and *The New York Times* agreed to have responsible officials from the US Marines in the newsroom of those networks in Atlanta to approve the draft reports of the correspondents before broadcasting or publishing them (Istibrak, 2009, p. 114).

Based on the above, we find that Gans identified the most important values applied by American journalists, which are (American ethnic centrality), meaning presenting the American interpretation of the event. Some researchers have used this term to describe the situation that makes the journalist tend to put the American lifestyle above everything else, even when covering foreign news, as the news of any country is evaluated according to the American standard.

Anderson and before him Carey concluded that cultural and ideological values work in the subconscious of journalists as filters when producing news content, which may seem objective, but at the same time encourages the identity of the dominant group. According to Bentez, Ziller, Cho, and McIntyre, news ethnicity appears more in the context of international news coverage, especially in times of crisis (Tahir, 2015, p. 122).

4.3 The Gulf Crisis 2017

The Gulf crisis between Qatar and the three countries (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain) is considered a link in a long series of disturbances and social, economic, and political repercussions affecting the entire region. The Gulf crisis, which escalated into a complete diplomatic and economic crisis of besieging Qatar, is primarily the result of escalating tensions between the parties, arising from clear differences in Qatari and Saudi economic and foreign policies at a time when there are social, economic, and political upheavals seeking to shape the future of the Middle East (Rasoul, 2019, p. 51).

The Gulf crisis began just two days after the Arab-Islamic-American Summit held in Riyadh on May 20 and 21, 2017, attended by the US President along with about 50 Arab and Islamic countries. Its announced goal was to combat terrorism and contain Iran. On the night of May 24, Qatar News Agency was hacked, and fabricated statements attributed to Qatar's Emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, were published during a military college graduation ceremony. This incident was used as a pretext to launch the crisis, meaning that in the absence of a reason for the crisis, a reason was fabricated in advance. Subsequently, an unprecedented media campaign targeting Qatar ensued, culminating in the announcement by three Gulf countries: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain, along with Egypt, to sever diplomatic relations with Qatar on June 5, 2017. These measures also included the closure of land, sea, and air ports, the prevention of transit through their territories and airspace, the prohibition of their citizens from traveling to Qatar, and the granting of a specified period for residents and visitors from their countries to leave Qatar. These actions were unprecedented in the Gulf states' dealings, or between them and another country, even in the most severe crises (Unit of Political Studies, 2020, p. 1).

Diplomatic relations were accompanied by programmed and pre-prepared media campaigns. What official and popular Doha found shocking was the media content promoted by politicians, media personalities, and writers on the screens of satellite channels funded by Saudi Arabia and the

UAE, lacking professionalism, drowning in fabrications and lies, and violating the sanctity of the country and its people in Qatar (Al-Tamimi, 2017, p. 08).

In a symposium organized by the Al Jazeera Center for Studies and Al Jazeera Mubasher, on June 16, 2020, regarding the long-term strategic implications of the ongoing blockade of Qatar since 2017, Qatari journalist Ilham Badr shed light on the role of the media in the Gulf crisis. She pointed out that this crisis began in the media before it started on political and economic levels, and it almost reached the military level. She explained that after hacking the Qatar News Agency, the outlines of the media strategy of the blockading countries became clear, based on demonizing Qatar and labeling it as terrorism, with all kinds of lies and fabrications used, and all tools employed, from social media to television series, songs, and tunes, to undermine all Qatari symbols.

Ilham Badr explained that Qatar, on the other hand, pursued a media strategy based on professionalism, avoiding indulgence in extravagance and vulgarity, clarifying facts, and preserving Arab, Islamic, and Gulf values and fraternal relations among peoples. Therefore, its media strategy succeeded while others failed to achieve their goals (Al Jazeera Studies Research Seminar, 2020).

The media campaign against Qatar, in its content and manner of direction, indicated that it was pre-programmed, and that the statements attributed to the Emir of Qatar on the hacked website were nothing more than a pretext for its launch. The media strategy of the four countries aimed to achieve a set of goals, namely: firstly, to prepare public opinion in the four countries to accept escalatory steps against Doha without convincing reasons; secondly, to instill doubt and fear among the Qatari people due to the economic and social effects of the escalatory steps; and thirdly, to demonize Qatar on the Arab and international levels (Political Studies Unit, 2018, p. 12).

However, the media campaign against Qatar and its Emir did not stop, and what was initiated by Al Arabiya and Sky News Arabia was quickly adopted by all Emirati and Saudi media outlets, including government and semi-governmental newspapers and TV stations on the same night. The Qatari Foreign Minister's Twitter account was hacked, and hackers posted news about Qatari decisions to sever relations with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt. Thus, there was not a single media outlet among those involved in the campaign against Qatar that published Qatar's official statement, which denied the attribution of statements to the Emir of Qatar or subsequent alleged statements by his foreign minister. It appeared that the media campaign was pre-planned, and its operators were waiting for the hacking operation of the Qatar News Agency to launch it.

The media campaign descended to unprecedented levels in the Gulf states' relations and the traditions of the region's peoples. The participation of official Saudi and Emirati media outlets indicated that the campaign was indeed launched on the orders of the highest levels of government in Saudi Arabia and the UAE (Group of Authors, 2017, p. 25).

Furthermore, the proliferation of fake news through media outlets exacerbated the Gulf crisis, posing a significant and alarming challenge for Gulf and Arab societies and various observers of the media scene, especially with the use of the Internet, which provided a place for rumor mongers and purveyors of false news.

The dissemination of fabricated news in the current Gulf crisis was not limited to social media platforms but extended to official media outlets, including print media and local and satellite TV channels, which fell into the trap of promoting news without verifying their accuracy from official sources. Against the backdrop of this crisis, the topics covered by Saudi, Emirati, and Bahraini media outlets varied, addressing social, political, and security issues, all with an element of excitement and misinformation (Group of Authors, 2017, p. 3).

Fabrication in the media represents one of the manifestations of propaganda, where it fabricates a news story or event that did not occur, attempting to disguise it as reality, promoting its agenda (lying), and its political agenda, in order to achieve the intended impact on the public and control public opinion (Group of Authors, 2017, pp. 38).

Misleading propaganda, in all its forms, not only poisons the masses but also goes beyond that to manipulate them, especially political propaganda; it is a dangerous weapon that requires confrontation, especially in our current era, where advertising and media communication methods have evolved. The global media conflict is at its peak between states, nations, and peoples (Younan, 2011, p. 118).

In this context, according to many observers and academics, Saudi and Emirati media outlets have only presented fabricated stories and fabricated statements to deceive the Gulf and international public opinion. The way the story was presented through the Qatari news agency after its infiltration, and the readiness of the media outlets of the blockade countries to interact with the manufactured news by hosting Saudi and Egyptian analysts to comment on its content without giving room for other opinions, and Qatar's continued denial of the fabricated story, and the insistence of the propaganda-promoting media outlets on ignoring this denial, and their continuous coverage of the repercussions of the story, and broadcasting all kinds of destructive and provocative propaganda, show that the manufactured events, which are intended to be compelling facts, represent nothing but the symbolic political reality that emerges or the desired reality that establishes fake political positions among the public according to the agenda of the propaganda (Group of Authors, 2017, pp. 39-38).

Therefore, the atmosphere of intimidation and terror created by the process of manufacturing fake news pushes towards besieging public opinion with an alternative discourse or narratives to confront the prevailing/competing discourse or the party it represents. This hypothesis establishes, in this context, the model of informational siege through the manufacture of fake news and its impact on public opinion, supported by three main factors:

- Individuals respond to feelings of fear and their motivations, and they may react positively or negatively to the atmosphere of intimidation created by the media, as well as warnings from fake news, thus being swayed by alternative narratives.
- Alternative narratives reinforce their arguments amidst public opinion through the massive dissemination of false data.
- The rapid spread of fake news, which generates a state of fear and terror among public opinion, characterized by the element of surprise (Ad-Dulaymi, 2018, p. 14-13).

The crisis in the Gulf has become a pretext for governments to utilize media to evoke nationalism, bolster support for authorities, and marginalize or ridicule opponents. These pretexts often involve interventions by the media in specific cases, which are often incorrect, provocative, and even fabricated. Authorities heavily rely on dominant media outlets, presumed to be “independent” (but complicit), to widely disseminate inaccurate and deceptive information. These pretexts provide an important framework for propaganda, portraying adversaries as natural aggressors, despite often being based on lies, yet still influencing public opinion (Jones, 2019, P 1390).

William Rugh divided Arab journalism according to its relationship with political systems into loyalty journalism, mobilization journalism, pluralism journalism, and Saudi journalism is not independent of government authority since its establishment. Therefore, it falls under the category

of absolute loyalty to the ruling regime. Even journalism in Qatar and the majority of Arab countries does not deviate from the same context defined by William Rugh (Al-Zahrani, 2015, p. 52).

In this regard, the Saudi media institutions, in terms of their structure and function, can be summarized in the fields of written journalism and television media, the following observations can be noted:

Firstly, most media outlets were directly or indirectly owned by a member of the ruling family, making Saudi media “princes' media” rather than societal media. It is affiliated with the Saudi state and one of its ideological apparatuses to affirm the dominance and continuity of the rule of the royal family members. This confirms that the general structure of this media is based on a state of centralization and monopolization that characterizes the Saudi perspective on media in its relationship with the state and society.

Secondly, these media models represent a purely Saudi perspective or perspectives aligned with it. Despite the chosen slogans such as “The Middle East: The First Arab Newspaper” and “Al Arabiya Channel: To Know More,” the general objectives of these experiments are determined by spreading and propagating the viewpoint of the ruling Saudi family and attempting to outline new frameworks for Arab public opinion, whether inside the Arab geographical borders or outside them, regarding issues concerning the Saudi Arabian situation or expressing the Saudi stance on major fundamental issues (Razzaq, 2018, p. 5).

Some circles believe that the driving force behind the current crisis is Qatar's insistence on maintaining an independent foreign policy. However, the roots of the crisis lie in Qatari media policies (Al Jazeera), which are seen as a fundamental pillar of Qatar's foreign policy and soft power (Fernandez, 2018, P 160).

According to the author Mohammed Al-Musfer, media outlets in the blockade countries exacerbate rifts among siblings and deepen wounds by invoking events dating back to the 19th century, as well as undermining values and moral principles today, painting the Gulf media landscape as rife with opportunists and exploiters in a crisis media environment (Al-Musfir, 2018, p. 29).

Al-Musfer believes that Qatari media, at all levels, has not stooped to compromising ethical values or attacking the dignity of the blockade countries, nor has it delved into family matters in those countries (Al-Musfir, 2018, p. 29).

While Saudi and Emirati-backed media portray this reality as an exposure of Qatar's treachery, Qatar, through its media apparatus, portrays its behavior as moderation in the face of "extremist" policies pursued by Gulf leaders echoing similar "extremist" trends in Washington and Tel Aviv. This media battle has exhausted Gulf media content, drowning its news coverage in mutual smear campaigns. This media confrontation has paved the way for serious initiatives to emerge, such as France 24 and Deutsche Welle Arabic, from France and Germany respectively (Mneimneh, 2019, p. 1).

The French news agency reported, quoting Khalid Al-Hroub, a professor of Middle Eastern politics and Arab media at Northwestern University, that “media has evolved from a propaganda tool to a military weapon for many countries in the region”.

A study by (Ajaoud, Elmasry), titled “When News is the Crisis: Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya Framing of the 2017 Gulf Conflict,” found that Al Jazeera's program “Al Haddad” and Al Arabiya's

program “Panorama” presented two different versions in their coverage of the Gulf crisis, with each channel adopting the position of its affiliated government (Ajaoud, Elmasry, 2020, p. 238).

According to a report by the French agency, as stated by Khaled Al-Haroub, professor of Middle Eastern policies and Arab media at Northwestern University, “The media has shifted from being a propaganda tool to a military weapon for many countries in the region” (Nassif, 2017, p. 3).

As Arabs say, “War begins with words,” and today the saying seems to be evolving into “War begins with media,” as the current Gulf crisis, with all its severity and magnitude, began with electronic penetration of Qatar's state news agency, targeted by some of its neighboring brethren in the conflict (Al-Hussein, 2017, p. 1).

Every country in the world, and indeed most major organizations and entities today, possess their own media tools, undoubtedly seeking to employ them to disseminate their political or activist views and solidify these views. However, this crisis has highlighted another concept beyond the political use of media: the aggressive use of media, which is extremely dangerous because political decisions can be altered or annulled by political decisions, whereas contracts entrenched at the individual or societal level cannot be erased by decree and will remain for a long time incalculable (Al-Khattab, 2017, p. 16).

5. Results

It can be said that theorists examining media practices in different societies, as well as those studying the relationship between media and power and political institutions, have largely failed to establish standards and criteria for explaining the behavior of media institutions and journalists during crises and wars. The four theories of the press (the power theory, the libertarian theory, the communist theory, and the social responsibility theory) did not address the problem of the relationship between the government and the media during times of crises and wars, nor did they address the relationship between journalists and authority under these circumstances. What can be said in this context is that media practice during times of crises and wars does not differ from one media system to another or from one political system to another. In these times, media becomes a mixture of public relations, war, psychology, propaganda, deception, and distortion, whether in democratic or dictatorial countries (Qirat, 2006, p. 160).

Today's journalism, as a fourth power, has become more of an illusion than reality because it has lost its independence and objectivity due to the web of relationships connecting its owners and journalists to centers of political, industrial, and military decision-makers. In most cases, it is conglomerates (economic and commercial) more than media and cultural institutions. There is almost no distinction between those producing ideas and those producing soap. It is driven primarily by the logic of profitability, seeking to reach the largest possible audience, with its content controlled by mind manipulation techniques. Therefore, one of the top critics described journalism in France as “a cursed profession” in his work: “Les Nouveaux Chiens de Garde” (The New Watchdogs), Paris, Liber, 1997 (Boumaiza, 2004, p. 89).

Therefore, the idea of the neutral, objective, observant, and critical journalist is not the most prominent feature in the information society era, as objectivity, which calls for conveying events to the public as they appear, is absent. At this point, the news that is supposed to happen naturally is closest to the heart of journalistic myth, because the only truth that can exist under the myth of objectivity is the truth that can be observed. As a result of the third power shaping the news, a gap

has emerged between the journalistic myth and the reality of news. It is now enough not to pose a real threat to the vitality of journalism, as we now know it (Filali, 2018, pp. 452-451).

According to the researcher and academic Mohammed Qirat, absolute objectivity in the media industry is a fantasy and a far-fetched idea. The concept remains relative and variable from one country to another and from one culture to another. Some see it not as complete objectivity but at least as a process, a stance, and a way of thinking. Objectivity is an ideal that any journalist in the world aspires to achieve, but realizing it in reality is not easy at all (Qirat, 2013).

The issue of neutrality raises a lot of controversy about the realism of the concept, especially in times of increased conflicts, where opinions and positions vary, and the arena becomes an open arena for various currents and trends to express themselves and convey their voice through their media platforms. This enters the media arena into a process of alignment and polarization, where each media outlet aligns itself to defend the viewpoint it owns (Farhi, 2014, p. 332).

If there is communication, there is inevitably ideology. If it is not explicit and clear, it is hidden in the communication message. Communication (techniques and content) does not arise in a barren environment or a sterile space, but rather is a product of a cultural and social context built in its form and meaning on specific self-representations and perceptions of the universe and life. The ideology of the media is a system of ideas expressed through the communication process, which includes the communicator and his way of using text, language, or images conveyed by the printed, audible, or visual media (Ben Saud, 2008, p. 15).

On the other hand, the principle of objectivity remains valid only within the boundaries of the state. However, when the issue escalates to a crisis or conflict between one state and another, objectivity becomes a myth and a fallacy. In such cases, media institutions are not obligated to present the viewpoints of both conflicting states. Journalists automatically tend to align themselves with one country, and if they present the perspective of the opposing country, they are viewed as traitors, unpatriotic, and not committed to serving their own country (Qirat, 2013).

This was confirmed by the Gulf crisis in 2017, which witnessed media attacks, fabrication of news, and systematic media manipulation, even to the extent of discussing symptoms, an unprecedented practice in Arab media. The current crisis has generated a media war among siblings within the political, geographical, and religious system, in addition to another conflict of a new kind, characterized by aggression and obstinacy displayed by writers, analysts, and journalists who use the media platform to attack their colleagues or friends in the profession. Even Western media, which often boasts of high professionalism and neutrality, is known to have political and ideological biases in many major media institutions (Qirat, 2013).

Despite the fragmentation and polarization and the dominance of ideology within the Arab or global media landscape, there are few exceptions in the media space. They are considered remnants of the fourth estate, resisting to provide meaningful, unbiased media services, free from ideological impurities and biases.

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