PRESS FREEDOM IN SAUDI ARABIA WAR REPORTING:

A CASE STUDY OF THE GULF AND YEMEN WARS

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This study examined press freedom in Saudi Arabia coverage in two study periods, which are the Gulf and Yemen wars. Six Saudi newspapers, which represent Saudi regions, have been content analyzed. They are: A*l Riyadh, Al Yaum, Al Nadwah, Mecca, Okaz,* and *Al Jazirah*. The major questions are: What are the most salient issues Saudi newspapers dealt with in their editorials during the study period? What are the differences between the two periods of study? And what are the differences between the editorial features of the Gulf and Yemen wars? The normative theory-press freedom theory was conducted for this study. The results support the lack of press freedom during the Gulf War. In contrast, some newspapers have significantly improved their performance during the Yemen War, using a higher level of press freedom.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, audiences have built a strong connection toward legacy media as a trusted source of news. According to Lipschultz (2017), the most significant concept in media is audience trust (p. 286). This trust lasts as long as the media plays its role and achieves the interests of its followers. These days, with the expanding use of technology and the emergence of electronic newspapers, printed newspapers have been challenged to survive at the level of influence or even existence. One of the most important features of electronic newspapers is that the reader believes they have a higher level of freedom than printed newspapers (Mueller & Kamerer, 1995).

Press freedom is one of the most important dilemmas facing journalists around the world. In the United States, for example, the First Amendment to the nation's Constitution protects journalists from prosecution (Nye, 2006, p. 160), but in many other countries there are no laws to protect journalists, which curtails the ceiling of press freedom. For fighting authoritarian regimes and to help media to have its right of freedom, Freedom House, which was founded in 1941 before the Cold War, was established (Pomerantsev, 2019, p. 95). Also, the Reporters Without Borders organization was founded in 1985, specifically for the purpose of achieving freedom of information and the press (Reporters Without Borders, n.d., a). These two organizations contribute to the protection of press freedom globally and provide periodic reports explaining the state of freedom for each country. According to Çizakça (2011), the Middle East has the lowest level of the press freedom globally (p. 139). In consequence, it is worth noting that the freedom of press in the Middle East is being re-examined especially after the rapid political changes in the region, such as the Arab Spring.

Statement of the Problem

Saudi Arabia has a monarchy, meaning that the government intervenes by supervising, executing, reviewing, and accounting for all internal and external actions. Therefore, Saudi Arabia has no laws protecting the right to free expression because criticizing anything is criticizing the government that controls everything (Petkova & Bromley, 2019, p. 37). Freedom House report claims Saudi Arabia is a "Not Free" country; in fact, its score is 7/100 (Freedom House, 2019). Therefore, many intellectuals and journalists in Saudi Arabia believe that among the most important needs of the Saudi press is that of enjoying a higher freedom ceiling than it currently has. Also, the Saudi freedom report, presented by Reporters Without Borders, mentioned that there is no press freedom in Saudi Arabia, and the Saudi journalists are working under high governmental surveillance (Reporters Without Borders, n.d., b).

Justification

For Saudis, the press was the only source of official and general information regarding on what was happening in Saudi Arabia. In fact, before the era of social media, Saudis did not believe any other source than the press, which led to the press having a very strong influence on the Saudi public, including shaping their opinion and their views about which sources are qualified as a credible source; Nowadays, although the Saudi public can access news from various international sources and websites, they hesitate to believe these news stories until they read them in print newspapers, since they consider the other sources as fake (Alghamdy, 2011; Berger, 2013; Al-Dmour, et al., 2015). Therefore, from this point, the Saudi newspapers have gained importance as the control of Saudi newspapers has a direct impact on the direction of internal public opinion.

Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders reports indicated that there is no press freedom in Saudi Arabia. However, after the Saudi Arabian government launched its vision, which is called Saudi Vision 2030, the former minister of media in Saudi Arabia, Dr. Awwad Al-Awwad, in an annual meeting of Saudi journalists said that the Saudi Vision 2030 supports media diversity and supports a change in its targeting from the local public to an external audience. Al-Awwad explained that the Saudi Vision 2030 supports journalists by giving them the power to develop their media work and seeks to improve Saudi Arabia's rating in terms of press freedom (Alloam, 2018). This statement marks a new era for the Saudi press.

After a thorough search of previous studies on this subject, no research that investigated the press freedom of Saudi newspapers specifically could be found. Previous studies have discussed the agenda of Saudi media, motivations of using media, and expectations toward using media in Saudi Arabia, but no one discussed the press freedom. This study represents a new area of research in journalism, one that may potentially make positive contributions to its field, especially with regard to newspapers in the country.

<center>Purpose and Approach</center>

This study explores the history and reality of press freedom in Saudi Arabia. War coverage was chosen as a case study because it is the most directly related event to the government through which freedom of the press is evident. The first period was the Gulf War, and the second period was the Yemen War, which coincided with the beginning of Saudi Vision 2030, was chosen. The journalists were instructed by the government to use their freedoms to advance their journalistic work.

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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was first established in 1744 by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Prince Muhammad bin Saud, after which it was dissolved in 1818 by the Ottoman army led by Mohammed Ali Pasha. For 67 years, the second Saudi state existed, which was from 1824 to 1891 (Guidère, 2012, p. 312- 348). In 1932, the Kingdom was re-established by Abdulaziz bin Saud. The Kingdom is a total monarchy, and it was founded as an Islamic nation. The official and only religion in Saudi Arabia is Islam. According to the General Authority for Statistics, in December 2018, the population of Saudi Arabia was 33,413,660: Saudi nationals were 20,768,627 while non-nationals were 12,645,033 (2019). Saudi male citizens represented 50.9%, and female citizens represented 49.1% of the citizens. Saudi Arabia remained a poor country when the visits of pilgrims to Mecca was its only foreign income source. Today, it is a modern and rich country with the second largest source of petroleum in the world, comprising 22.1% of the oil reserves on the planet. Also, the production costs for its oil are the lowest in the world. Saudi Arabia contains five regions: the center, where the capital, Riyadh, sits, the north, south, east and west, where influence from the surrounding countries in terms of customs, traditions, culture and even genealogy can be seen. In the south, for example, many norms in common with Yemen, such as dress code, dialect, social customs and folklore, exist.

According to Bowen (2015), after rising world demand for oil at the end of the twentieth century, Saudi Arabia's economy rose and received great attention from Western countries (p.144). On the other hand, Saudi Arabia has gained the utmost importance in the Eastern countries, especially the Islamic countries, owing to the presence of Mecca and Medina, the

Islamic holy cities of Muslims. Saudi Arabia has become a regional and global focus because of its economic and religious importance, as well as its geographical location in the middle of Asia and Africa.

The Septemper 11,2001 terror attacks on the World Trade Center Twin Towers and on the Pentagon had a profound impact on Saudi Arabia's domestic and foreign policies. Bowen (2015) points out that the events of September 11 caused a great shock to Saudi Arabia, as 15 of the 19 terrorists were Saudi citizens (p.160). Many of the counter-media, such as Al-Jazeera Channel, have contributed to Saudi Arabia's responsibility for these terror attacks, thus losing the leading role it played as a reference for Islamic countries (Omri, Mekhoukh & Benchioukh, 2014). As a result, Saudi Arabia had harnessed all its energies, including Saudi's media which is government-owned, to defend Saudi Arabia and to make clear the government and people's innocence of that terrorist act.

Saudi Arabia still retains its economic position, which is important to the West, and religious status, which is important to many countries in the Middle East. Due to these two factors, Saudi Arabia holds global attention on its internal issues and details concerning both the government and society.

<div align="center">Saudi Vision 2030</div>

On April 25, 2016, the Saudi government launched its Vision 2030 as the first declared vision in the history of Saudi Arabia. The vision focused on the post-oil plan, meaning the time when oil production might decline and could no longer be relied on as the economic driver of the country, and the privatization of many sectors of the state. Also, the Saudi government sought to define the general orientations and objectives of Saudi Arabia in order to reach advanced levels in all fields, including the media (National Transformation Program 2020, 2016). Many analysts

and researchers have provided detailed studies and reviewed this vision, and their views have diverged. In his analysis of the vision, Jacob F. Kirkegaard, from Peterson Institute for International Economics that located in Washington D.C and focused on international economics, believes that Saudi Vision 2030 is doomed to fail because it ignores basic social problems and focuses on improving the economy and Saudi Arabia's reputation abroad; also, he added that there are still many doubts about the standards of transparency and freedom that the Saudi government will pursue and seek to implement (Kirkegaard, 2016).

On the other hand, Abdulhameed Alamri, a famous Saudi economist and financial analyst, believes that the existence of a strategic vision announced by the government is a positive thing, which is the first of its kind in the history of Saudi Arabia. However, there are many important key objectives that this vision lacks, such as improving the education and health sectors, as well as developing the media, raising the scope of its freedom and defining its objectives (Alamri, 2016).

The freedom of the press was not detailed in the programs or objectives of the declared vision, so some journalists asked the former minister of media in Saudi Arabia, Dr. Awad Al-Awad, in an annual meeting of Saudi journalists. He said that the Saudi Vision 2030 supports media diversity and supports a change in its targeting from the local public to an external audience. Al-Awwad explained that the Saudi Vision 2030 supports journalists by giving them the power to develop their media work and seeks to improve Saudi Arabia's rating in terms press freedom. Although the Saudi press is labeled as "Not Free," some intellectuals and journalists in Saudi Arabia believe that among the pressing needs of the Saudi press is to enjoy a higher freedom ceiling than it currently has (Alloam, 2018).

Legacy Media in Saudi Arabia

Media have existed in Saudi Arabia since 1924 when Um Al-Qura newspaper was established as the first official weekly newspaper to publish the country's decisions and statements pertaining to the citizens and the government of Saudi Arabia. Then, radio started broadcasting in the nation in 1949, with six radio stations, which were owned by the government. One of the most significant transformations in the history of Saudi media was in 1965, when official TV of Saudi Arabia started broadcasting from a station in Riyadh, the capital city, and a station in Jeddah. The first time that Saudi Television broadcast in color was in 1974.

According to Hammond (2007), for purpose of self-protection from external threats, Saudi Arabia has controlled the Arab media since the occurrence of the Gulf crisis. Indeed, Saudi Arabia launched the Middle East Broadcasting Corporation, Orbit, a broadcasting network, and the Arab Radio and Television entertainment network, immediately after the Gulf crisis. Also, although Saudi Arabia is one of the primary markets for Arab satellites in the Middle East, it is not allowed for private TV stations to be run or invested in inside of Saudi Arabia (Saudi Arabia profile, 2013). As mentioned above, a Freedom House report listed Saudi Arabia as a "Not Free" country. The current government policy of Saudi Arabia is one of the primary reasons for the overall low degree of freedom, according to the report.

Press in Saudi Arabia

After *Um Al-Qura* newspaper was established, *Al-Bilad* was established in 1932 as the country's first daily newspaper. Essentially, the Saudi press historically crossed through three different development stages (Amer, 2014); the first stage, called individual journalism, started in 1932 and continued until 1958. During this stage, the Saudi press published articles primarily reflecting government thoughts and opinions rather than objective news. *Al-Bilad* also was

established. The second stage started in 1958 and was known as the stage of merging the

newspapers. Through this stage, different newspaper companies merged with each other, a

process which reduced the several newspaper companies into one company for each region. The

development of press organizations was the third stage, which has been operational since 1963. It

is one of the significant movements toward change in the Saudi press industry because the press

became more organized through allowing the institutions to be owned and operated by a number

of citizens depending on the organization of media institutions. This occurred after the second

stage, during which the government owned the press.

As previously mentioned, the Saudi press has generally been the only source of

information regarding what happens in Saudi Arabia for various reasons. The press in Saudi

Arabia has had a tremendous influence on society because of its history, which has spanned

decades.

Newspapers in Saudi Arabia

Today in Saudi Arabia, there are 15 daily newspapers, which were created by royal

decree. In their coverage of sensitive news such as that relating to human rights or political

conflicts, Saudi newspapers resort to following the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), which was

operated by the Saudi government until May 28, 2012, when it transformed from government

ownership to an independent authority supervised by the Saudi Ministry of Media, making it

independent of government resources (Saudi Press Agency, n. d) However, that does not mean it

is still controlled by the government because the SPA has an independent board of directors who

make the press laws and regulate pertaining of the Saudi press. Also, the Saudi Journalists

Association focuses its work on issuing permits for journalists, organizing and supervising their

work through an independent board of directors that issues laws and instructions to its employees (Saudi Journalists Association, n.d).

In the 1970s, Saudi newspapers came to global prominence with *Asharq Alawasat*, a pan-Arab newspaper printed in multiple locations around the world that sells 235,000 daily copies. This paper enjoys government benefits and subsidies in the form of daily bulk sales to government of up to 5,000 copies, which are distributed to ministries and government offices (Shoult, 2006).

Press Freedom in Saudi Newspapers

The term freedom of the press is one of the most important topics that are constantly analyzed and debated in studies related to journalism or mass communication. The definitions of press freedom go back to the 1644 with John Milton's Areopagitica. He opposed government interference in licensing and censorship of newspapers (Milton, 1644, p. 1). According to Weaver (1977), after World War II, the definitions of press freedom have focused on geopolitical constructions, especially on the importance of freeing the media from government control. In the present era, the press freedom definitions have focused on the need for newspapers to grant their independence from governments and that the media seek to achieve equality and freedom among members of society (Curran, 1996; Price, 2002).

Although Saudi Arabia was established as a conservative state based on an alliance between the Islamic religion and the monarchy (Berger, 2013), it has recently introduced many radical changes that have led to a great moderation in its internal and external policy and dealings (Picard, 2018). While talking about press freedom in Saudi Arabia was prohibited, recent developments at the political and social level required researchers to conduct field studies to measure the extent of press freedom (Aljasir et al., 2017).

According to Adams (1994), during World War II, the U.S. military closely censored all reports that came from the front, so if reporters broke the rules, they were sent back to the U.S. (p. 9). Clearly, war reporting is a vital lens through which to examine press freedom in any country because it is directly related directly to the government.

## The Gulf War

Throughout the Cold War, Iraq stressed the establishment of diplomatic relations with the USSR, and provided direct support to many Arab armed groups, which threatened the national security of Israel (Muse, 2018). Therefore, under President Saddam Hussein, Iraq had developed tense relations with the United States of America and with its neighboring countries, due to its stated enmity with Israel. On December 29, 1979, the United States officially declared Iraq as a terrorist supporter country, and it continued to be on this list until 1982, and it was relisted in 1990 then removed again in 2004 (Rennack, 2018).

According to Helen (1988), after the bloody war between Iran and Iraq from 1980 to 1988, which left about one million dead and losses estimated at US $400 billion, President Hussein forced tried to force Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to forgive the debts that Iraq owed to the two countries, but they refused (Muse, 2018). The collapse of oil prices and Kuwait's and Saudi Arabia's unwaiver of debts have had a major impact on Iraq's economic conditions, prompting President Hussein to consider it a kind of economic war (Cleveland & Bunton, 2009), thus President Hussein reinstated historical differences with Kuwait, declaring Kuwait to be the 19th Iraqi state. This was a long-running dispute since Iraq's declaration of independence from the United Kingdom in 1932, when Iraq declared that Kuwait's territory is a part of Basra province.

In July 1990, Iraq took its first official steps against Kuwait, filing a formal complaint to the Security Council explaining how Kuwait manipulated oil prices to harm Iraq, then Iraq

advanced 30,000 troops to its border with Kuwait. Many calls for dialogue and the convergence of views between Kuwait and Iraq were launched, but they all failed.

All these conditions led the Iraqi government to take the first serious step against Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, which was later called the Gulf War. Iraqi forces carried out a surprise attack against Kuwait at midnight on August 2, 1990. President Hussein also ordered the incursion of Saudi Arabia, launched from the Southern point of Kuwait, called Battle of Khafji (Titus, 1996).

They were able to surprise the Kuwaiti forces, isolate Kuwait, the capital city, and then seize the Emiri Palace after a land and sea attack by Iraqi commando teams. Fierce fighting between Iraqi and Kuwaiti forces continued for two days, with the result that the Kuwaiti forces were completely destroyed, then the Emir of Kuwait and some ministers had to flee to Saudi Arabia. President Hussein appointed Ali Hassan al-Majid, his cousin, as the governor of Kuwait and made a declaration of the accession of Kuwait to Iraq (Al-Marashi, 2003).

The term Gulf War refers to the war led by the United States of America in alliance with thirty-four countries and with the approval of the United Nations to liberate Kuwait from Iraq. Also, this war was called "the mother of all battles" by the leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein (Tierny, 2011). On the other hand, in the United States and Saudi Arabia, this war was known as the Operation Desert Storm (Ushistory.org, n.d).

During the first hours of the Iraqi forces entering Kuwait, the Kuwaiti and American delegations requested an urgent meeting of the Security Council to condemn this attack as a war against Kuwait. The Security Council issued Resolution 660 demanding that Iraq withdraw immediately from Kuwaiti territory (UNSCR, 1990). Also, the Arab League issued a statement calling on Iraq, as a member of the League, to withdraw immediately from Kuwait and sit at the negotiating table to resolve all political problems (Stokes, 1990). Iraq refused to comply with all

international calls and resolutions, so the Security Council passed its resolutions 661 and 665, which authorized the imposition of huge economic sanctions on Iraq for its failure to implement the truce resolutions (UNSCR, 1990).

The United States government led by President George H.W. Bush, insisted on the withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait to avoid war, and the U.S. government stressed that the withdrawal had to be without any preconditions. On August 12, 1990, Iraqi President Hussein proposed that he would withdraw from Iraq if Israel withdrew from the Palestinian territories, but the US government met this proposal with strong rejection (Friedman, 1990). When the US had rejected several Iraqi proposals, President Hussein had taken hostile stances against Saudi Arabia because it is America's leading strategic ally in the region. The Iraqi threat to strike Saudi Arabia was a major concern of Western countries because Saudi Arabia has a huge oil stockpile, especially after President Hussein's verbal attack on Saudi Arabia, in which he described America as Saudi Arabia's illegitimate guardian (Kepel, 2000).

The efforts of the coalition were geared towards avoiding a war (Mueller, 1994). However, the war did occur, and thanks to satellites, the war was televised directly by the alliance (Moore, 2001). According to Mueller (1991), the conduct of the Iraq soldiers was inhuman as it involved the killing of innocent citizens. After fearing that the Iraqi army would enter and occupy Saudi territory, President Bush directed the U.S. forces to move to Saudi territory and begin a protective operation called Operation Desert Shield. It started on August 7, 1990, after Saudi Arabia's King Fahd asked the U.S. President to participate with his country's forces to protect Saudi interests from the threats of Iraq. Therefore, the U.S. Navy sent two naval combat groups, and the U.S. Air Force sent 48 F-15s in addition to a 543,000-strong military buildup. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (n.d.), 2,322,000 were the total of

the U.S. servicemembers, while 694,550 were deployed to Gulf. On the other hand, statistics

show that 152,000 Saudi soldiers participated in the Gulf War (Muse, 2018).

There is still debate about whether or not this war was justified (Mattison, 2008, p. 143).

However, taking a broad view, the war was justified by the actions of former Iraqi President

Hussein, who broke all international conventions by blatantly attacking Kuwait and using

ballistic missiles to attack Saudi Arabia and Israel.

The Gulf War and Media Coverage

Several studies have discussed the coverage by the U.S. media of the Gulf War from

several angles through the perspectives of supporters and opponents. Kellner pointed out that the

George H.W. Bush administration dominated the media discourse partly through the use

misleading information and propaganda and partly by controlling journalism through the pool

system (Allan, S & Zelizer, B., 2004). Offering more details on the extent of the publicity

offered to the American public, Katz (1992) states:

> In all, only 3 percent of the published pictures showed the events occurring in actual
> combat zones… Only 27 of 1,104 pictures in the US news magazines (about 2%) showed
> any signs of wounded or killed soldiers… The total number of images of hurt or killed
> civilians from all sectors of the conflict – Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Israel – was 19,
> less than 2 percent of the published pictures.

It is reasonable for the U.S. government to use the media to support their actions in the Gulf

War. However, the split in the House of Representatives over whether or not to fight in the Gulf

War was reflected in the media. According to Entman, there were 1,633 analytical stories in

newspapers, 55 percent of which were against the war and 45 percent for the war (2004). Thus,

the U.S. media expressed support and rejection of the war in nearly varying degrees. On the

other hand, the Arab media followed the opinion of their governments as they were dependent on

the governments for their ownership.

The Gulf War occurred more than twenty years ago. During these twenty years, many technologies have emerged that have given researches a variety of options to access information. Thus, it is important to discuss other issues with the same conditions to compare the performance of Saudi newspapers.

<p style="text-align:center">The Yemen War</p>

Yemen is a country in western Asia, the second largest country, after Saudi Arabia, in the Arabian Peninsula. According to the latest statistics, the population of Yemen is 29,292,913 with a median age of 19.3 years (Worldometers, 2019), which means that it is a young country. Yemen has gained special importance because many Arabs believe that the origin of Arabs resides with the Qahtan, who lived in Yemen in the past. Therefore, the impact of this notion has extended to political thought, as mentioned by Mohammed bin Salman, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, during a meeting with the heads of Yemeni tribes (Alarabiya, 2017).

Demographically, the majority of the Yemeni people are Muslims divided between Shi'a Zaydis, who largely live in the north, and Sunnis. They were separated until 1990, when Ali Abdullah Saleh, the former president of Yemen, merged North and South, establishing the Republic of Yemen (Serr, 2018).

Twenty-one years after the federation of Yemen was created, violent demonstrations erupted in early 2011, during the Arab Spring, demanding the departure of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had been in power for 33 years (Whitaker, 2011). Although his resignation met the protesters' demands, the transfer of power did not go through a peaceful transition to freedom and stability. Yemen devolved into a series of civil wars, in which many internal and external political forces intervened, increasing tragedies and bloodshed. In the meantime, the Houthis took advantage of the deteriorating political situation and went south to take control of

the capital, Sana'a, while the army was still loyal to outgoing President Ali Abdullah Saleh. The Houthis are a rebel group that Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi founded in the 1990s. They belong to the Zaidi Shi'ite sect. Yemeni soldiers killed Hussein in 2004 after a dispute with the government, and the Houthis are currently led by Abdul Malik al-Houthi, Hussein's brother (McKernan, 2018).

In January 2015, the presidential palace in Sana'a was seized by the Houthis. They imposed house arrest on Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi, the Yemeni President, who had been vice-president for 18 years and was elected on February 25, 2012 as a compromise candidate unanimously agreed on by the Yemeni political factions. However, Hadi managed to flee to Aden, the country's former southern capital controlled by the Houthi's enemies, considering this a coup against the legitimate government. During these events, the Houthis announced the establishment of a revolutionary council, while President Hadi was quick to establish alliances against the Houthis, who were then joined by former President Ali Abdullah Saleh and officially announced his alliance with them. The brigades of the Yemeni army were divided between supporters of the legitimate president Hadi and supporters of the Houthis and the former president Saleh, which led to the spread of chaos and insecurity due to the inability to keep control over the Houthis in the country (Seer, 2018).

In March 26, 2015, President Hadi appeared in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, on a private plane with the symbol of Saudi Arabia on it. Then on March 27, 2015, Saudi Arabia, in alliance with eight countries, announced the launch of the military campaign targeting the Houthis within Yemen, upon the official request of the legitimate president of Yemen, Hadi.

The coalition's goals were to cut off supplies to the Houthis and try to isolate them from the citizens, but that was not easy. According to the World Food Programme (2017), more than

10,000 civilians have been killed between 2015 and 2017 since the war began. On the other hand, reports indicate that the death toll of the Saudi army in Yemen may reach 3,000 dead, while the number of wounded has exceeded 20,000 wounded since the beginning of the war in Yemen (Faroq, 2019).

In November 2017, the crisis escalated dramatically when the Houthis targeted the King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh with an Iranian-made ballistic missile (Edroos, 2017). Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia continued, using Iranian-made medium and long-range missiles, escalating to more than 200 ballistic missiles up to October 2018, resulting in 112 civilian deaths and hundreds of wounded (Welss, 2019).

This war has lasted for nearly five years and has undergone several serious situations, such as the defection of the former Yemeni president from the Houthis and his assassination by them. Also, Saudi Arabia and its allies have faced a lot of criticism for killing children and targeting illegal areas. On the other hand, there were some disagreements and tension between Saudi Arabia and the allies, most notably Saudi Arabia's request for Qatar to withdraw from the coalition after the political crisis between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. According to Reuters reports, the diplomatic crisis between Qatar and Saudi Arabia slowed the coalition's military progress in Yemen (Yaakoubi, 2017). In addition, differences of opinion on the ground between Saudi Arabia, which sees the federation of Yemen, and the United Arab Emirates, which sees the division of Yemen between north and south have recently emerged.

The Yemen War and Media Coverage

The Yemeni media is the only source of Yemeni internal news because of the difficulty of daily life and the domination of civil wars on the Yemeni interior (Sultan, 2019). There are

not many foreign journalists on Yemini soil, and news agencies are left only with reports and briefings provided by the coalition leadership.

In a first-of-its-kind incident, a court from the Houthi-ruled territory sentenced the journalist, Yahya al-Jubahi, to death for collaborating with Saudi Arabia (Amnesty, 2017). Hence, media work inside Yemen has become very difficult as psychological and physical pressure is exerted on independent journalists. As a direct result of the hinderance of the media work inside Yemen, the news reaching the international media may not be correct or sufficiently accurate. In fact, there is only one Bahraini reporter who is living in Yemen since the beginning of the war under the protection of the Saudi army. Mohammed Al Arab is a TV reporter for *Sky News, Al Arabiya,* and *Hadath.*

### Value of This Study

The current study was designed with a purpose of examining the freedom of Saudi newspapers in two periods: In the 1990s and at the current time, when the government allows journalists more freedom. This study attempts to investigate whether the media has more freedom now than in the 1990s. Examining the press freedom is helpful to get an overview of the history of the media in Saudi Arabia, especially when Saudi Arabia announced its historical movement that started with Saudi Vision 2030.

The results and discussion of this study will help the journalists and international authorities who are examining the freedom over the world and will provide insight into the history of press freedom and how it has done through the years. Also, it gives a special view to Saudi editors to review their work and improve it. According to Kim and Johnson (2009), additional governmental controls in media leads to diminished public trust. The Project for Excellence in Journalism (2004) mentioned that those who said they trusted Saudi newspapers

dropped from 80% of readers in 1958 to 59% of readers in 2014. It is a chance for Saudi newspaper officials to review their agenda by using the highest level of freedom in order to gain back printed newspaper trust. In addition, the results can help those working on researches about Saudi newspaper to continue examine to Saudi media during different periods in order to have an overview of the history and current realities of the media in Saudi Arabia.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL POSITIONS

## Normative Theories

The term normative theory, which is the setting of standards for how the media should operate, was coined by Fred Siebert, Wilbur Schramm, and Theodore Peterson when they published their book "*Four Theories of the Press* (1956)" with the University of Illinois Press. More than 80,000 copies have been printed, and it has been translated into many languages as one of the most widely published books on the topic of journalism and mass communication (Nordenstreng, 1997). According to Siebert, Schramm, & Peterson, the four normative theories are the libertarian, authoritarian, Soviet Communist concept, and social responsibility (p.98). Recently, McWilliams (2001) added two theories to the normative theories in journalism and mass communication, which are the developmental theory and democratic participation theory (McWilliams, Bathory, & Schwartz, 2001).

It is certain that these normative theories describe an ideal media system in which the structure and processes are determined. The elements of these theories are reflected in media laws, policies, and the codes of ethics. Baran & Davis (2015) explained the objective of normative theories as having a model with defined standards against which a specified media operation can be judged (p.16).

## Press Freedom

The American Civil Liberties Union noted that the freedoms of speech, expression, the press, assembly, association, and petition are fundamental to civil society and individual rights (Dobratz, Buzzell, & Waldner, 2011, p. 216). Because of the importance of freedom of the press as a legitimate right for every individual, whether a journalist or a receiver of information, many

studies have been interested in measuring the extent of freedom of expression in the press at the level of states, minority groups and individuals. Nowadays, doing research and academic studies on the freedom of press is very important because the degree of freedom found around the world has been declining recently. According to Freedom House Report (2019a), for 13 consecutive years, the amount of freedom of political rights and civil liberties found around the globe has become alarmingly low.

The political system in any country is the main factor in the uneven level of press freedom. In this context, Lowenstein (1970) stressed that the political system of a country negatively or positively affects press freedom. In addition, in a highly important study conducted in the field of freedom of the press, Kent (1972) presented the most important factors and variables related to governments that have an impact on the level of press freedom, which were defamation laws, advertising and licensing (pp. 65-75). On the other hand, Schramm and Carter (1960) argued that other government factors undermine press freedom, including economic pressure from the government on press institutions, close political censorship by the government, and restrictions on criticisms leveled against the government.

In terms of Saudi press freedom, a Freedom House Report states that Saudi Arabia is a "Not Free" country as stated earlier. Being "Not Free" country may be reflected in the extent to which press performance is free and transparent. There are not many studies about press freedom in Saudi Arabia. However, some prior research has shown that the main factor affecting the public trust in Saudi newspapers is that the public considers Saudi newspapers to be governmentally owned (Al-Haqeel, 1993; Al-Harithi, 1983). Therefore, Saudi newspapers have suffered from a lack of credibility, especially for political coverage, since the public views these newspapers as serving the political positions of the government.

To understand the law in Saudi Arabia, Duffy (2014) pointed out that the theocracy is considered to be constitutional in Saudi Arabia; however, they have recently been using the law instead of religious doctrine, especially with regard to public morals (which includes issues in journalism) (p. 4). One of the major dilemmas in Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, is that Arab judges tend to provide less defense for journalists, causing journalists in Arab countries to avoid reaching toward even the minimum level of freedom. Charles Glasser (2006) explained some of the difficulties faced by those who practice journalism in Middle Eastern countries:

> The two most significant problems on understanding law in this region are that first, the scant Press Law that there is offers few if any meaningful guarantees for a free and robust media: at the same time it prescribes severe criminal penalties for vaguely defined forms of defamation. Second, there is a strong Islamic undercurrent in any approach to publication or broadcast. Even in those nations that may not describe themselves as theocracies, the political and cultural power of fundamentalist Islam permeates the legal foundation. (p.184)

However, Saudi Arabia has recently realized the importance of giving the press a higher ceiling of freedom in order to encourage the press to support the government in carrying out its agenda. Although the former minister of media in Saudi Arabia officially announced that Saudi journalists can use their freedom in press, there is a gap between the data in the previous studies evaluating press freedom in Saudi Arabia and the current situation after the Saudi Minister of Media gave the green light to journalists to employ press freedom in the development of their content.

## Research Questions

In summary, the research suggests that there remains a need for future evaluation of the ways in which Saudi Arabian newspapers currently apply the right to freedom in the development of their content.

> RQ1: What are the most salient issues Saudi newspapers dealt with in their editorials during the study period?

RQ2: What are the differences between the two periods of study in terms of salient issues?

RQ3: What are the differences between the editorial features in terms of the editorials' stances on the government's orientation during the Gulf and Yemen wars?

RQ4: What are the differences between the editorial features of different Saudi newspapers representing Saudi regions during the study periods?

Method

This study was conducted to measure the press freedom in Saudi newspapers during the Gulf and Yemen wars, which have nearly equal political circumstances. However, the Yemen War study period comes after the Saudi Minister of Media encouraged Saudi journalists to use their freedom in developing their content. According to Sabir (2012), previously Saudi newspapers had focused more on news of the royal family in order to remain on safe topics and to gain government satisfaction and favor, which finally led to them losing their credibility. This paper aimed to discover if the Saudi newspaper coverage has changed recently or not.

The current study employed qualitative content analysis, which has been described as "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (Holsti, 1969, p. 14). In this research, the unit of analysis was the editorials of the following Saudi newspapers:

1. *Al Riyadh*: It is a daily newspaper representing the central region. It takes its name from the capital city of Saudi Arabia and was founded in 1965.

2. *Al Yaum*: It is located and focused on the news and issues of eastern Saudi Arabia, so it represents the eastern region. *Al Yaum* was founded in 1965.

3. *Al Nadwah*: It was founded in 1958, and it represents the western region. However, it was shut down due to financial problems at the end of 2013 and later reopened on January 13, 2014 as *Mecca* newspaper.

4. *Okaz*: It was founded in 1960, and it represents the southern region.

5. *Al Jazirah*: It was founded in 1960. The headquarters of *Al Jazirah* newspaper is in Riyadh, capital and central city of Saudi Arabia. Due to the fact that there is no newspaper printed in the north of Saudi Arabia, *Al Jazirah* represents the northern region in this study.

The editorials were selected for collecting data in this study due to the fact that they are written by the newspaper's editor-in-chief, who represents the newspaper to the government.,His articles might be written following the government rules and not applying freedom of the press.

Study Sample

Two hundred eighty-five editorials were coded. One hundred forty-one of them reported on either the Gulf or Yemen wars during the study period. There are two periods of study: The first period of the Gulf War was between January 18 and February 17, 1991, and the second period of the Yemen War was the first month after the declaration of Saudi Vision 2030, which was between April 25 and May 25, 2016, spanning 31 days for each case study. All the editorials during the study period were read, and any article directly or indirectly mentioning the independent variables, which were the Gulf or Yemen wars, was selected to be analyzed in the case studies. The editorials were selected from the newspaper archive, the Saudi ministry of media, King Abdulaziz Library, or the Saudi journalists association. After reading the articles thoroughly, prominent and similar news features were analyzed for the purpose of answering the research questions, with the focus on questions such as what is the main purpose of writing the article? What are the main points that the article was keen to highlight? Are there specific people the article focuses on? Does the article discuss ideas or attitudes that are consistent or contrary to the government's approach?

To answer Research Questions 1 and 2 (What are the most salient issues Saudi newspapers dealt with in their editorials during the study period? and what are the differences between the two periods of study?), all editorials during the two study periods were read by three coders. The main goals of the editorials were categorized into these codes: the Gulf War, the Yemen War, defense, Saudi Vision 2030, National Transformation Program 2020, interior, economy, foreign affairs, and terrorism.

The most salient issues will give a hint about whether the editorials were written freely or following the government's approach. These issues are defined as follows:

- *The Gulf War*: This is the war in which Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990. That war ended in 1991, when the United States of America together with its allies expelled the army of Iraq from Kuwaiti lands.

- *The Yemen War*: It refers to the civil war which is happening in Yemen between the legitimate president of Yemen, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, along with his allies against the Houthi armed campaign, which began in 2015 and continues to present,2019.

- *Defense*: It includes the focus on arms trade, navy, air force, and military.

- *Saudi Vision 2030*: It includes details about the new and first vision of Saudi Arabia.

- *National Transformation Program 2020*: It includes details about the special program set by the Saudi government which provides some initiatives presented in 2020 that will lead to the realization of Saudi Vision 2030.

- *The interior*: It includes the topics about police security, the Saudi football team, the government announcements, and education.

- *The economy*: It deals with topic referring to the International Monetary Fund, salaries, and the Saudi ministry of finance.

- *Foreign affairs*: It refers to topics discussing the relations between Saudi Arabia and other countries.

- *Terrorism*: It refers to topics which discussed violent actions against civilians, except wars.

To find the answer to the third question (What are the differences between the editorial features of the Gulf and Yemen wars?), the researcher replicated the codes of Gulati's (2011) study. He examined 605 articles found in the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* that were published between the year of 1980 and 2006. The items that were coded for included story trigger (which is defined as whether the editorial was written in line with the traditional journalistic methods of "beat reporting" or by doing in-depth investigation "media-initiated reporting"), issue focus (defined as referring to the context in which the issue was discussed, positive issues such as the victories in wars or the bright future; negative issues which may have focused on the strategic mistakes in the war or tragic situations; or neutral which discussed the issue neutrally without praise, vilification, or highlight any feelings), main ideas about causes and solutions (what were the ideas and solutions that the author wanted to explain), country focus (what was the country that was focused on), and source type (categorized into: government, news agencies, and private sources). This study duplicates this approach in answering the second and third questions.

For the fourth question (What are the differences between the editorial features of different Saudi newspapers, representing Saudi regions, during the study periods?), story trigger, issue focus, ideas about causes and solutions, country focus, and source type will be used to analyze each newspaper separately and to compare these newspapers between two study periods.

Inter-Coder Reliability Analysis

To do the inter-coder reliability, the trustworthiness and increase in confirmability, this study used the methods provided by Mike Allen (Allen, 2017). He stated that the inter-coder reliability can give the study a high level of trustworthiness, and its results will be internally consistent; therefore, that consistency can be confirmed using samples from the study. The reliability sample was selected as follows: Each editorial had a specific number starting with 1 to 285, depending on the date of publication and the region represented by the newspaper. The central region was represented by 1, southern 2, northern 3, eastern 4, and western 5. Then the coders chose every ninth one. That means number 9, 18, 27, etc. The total number was 32 editorials which represented the reliability samples.

To increase the trustworthiness of this study, three experienced coders, including the primary researcher, had met to design a coding manual (see Appendix A) which includes the coder information, coding instructions, and detailed definition for each variable and its categories (possible values). Trial rounds of editorials were carried out so that inter-coder reliability could be ensured. The data generated for this study for the trial sample came from other Saudi newspapers which were not part of the sample, such as Al Watan, Al Hayat, Um Al-Qura, and Al Eqtisadiah. Through the trials of editorial analysis, we were able to reach an agreement of 90% on all variables after redefining and merging the variables. The primary researcher sent the codes to other colleagues in order to confirm the codes. They used a formal pilot test in 30 randomly selected articles of text not part of the editorials in the study sample in order to assess the reliability. For each variable, the reliability levels met the criteria established earlier. Then the coders started coding the full sample. In the end, there were nine codes for the first research question, and five codes for the second and third research questions.

The first and second questions' codes were: The Gulf War, the Yemen War, defense, Saudi Vision 2030, National Transformation Program 2020, interior, economy, foreign affairs, and terrorism.

The third and fourth questions' codes were: story trigger, issue focus, main ideas about causes and solutions, country focus, and source type

Finally, to add more reliability in this study, the primary researcher used member checking, which involved telephoning some respondents, 12 editorial authors out of the total 18 to check the accuracy of the codes representing their ideas. They agreed 100% about the final codes used in this study.

Limitations

This study's findings cannot be generalized to all Saudi journalists and newspapers for several reasons. First, there is no consensus among Saudi journalists on the meaning of press freedom and how they can use that right, even when they have been told that they can use their freedom. Second, Saudi newspapers still rely directly on government support, so it may be premature to judge the independence and freedom of Saudi newspapers. However, this study provides a historical and realistic view of press independence and freedom in Saudi Arabia, so the study's results may be the starting point for many future studies in light of the political change in the Saudi landscape.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This study's aim was to investigate press freedom in Saudi Arabia during two wars. The study periods were between January 18 and February 17, 1991 for the Gulf War, and from April 25 to May 25, 2015 for the Yemen War. Three questions were developed in this study that focus on what the salient issues discussed in Saudi newspaper editorials were during the wars, and what the differences between the editorial features of the Gulf and Yemen wars were. Then finally, what were the differences between the editorial features among the different Saudi newspapers representing Saudi regions?

Two hundred eighty-five editorials were content analyzed with 141 of them reporting on the Gulf or Yemen war. It is worth noting that *Al Riyadh* newspaper publishes an editorial daily, and *Al Yaum* newspaper publishes an editorial every day except Friday. However, the other newspapers, *Al Nadwah, Mecca, Okaz,* and *Al Jazirah*, publish their editorials on an irregular basis, which means they only publish an editorial when there is some important issue. Also, all these newspapers publish the editorials under the name of the editor-in-chief. The editorials are located on the first page of the newspaper, most of them on the left half of the page.

Overview of the Gulf and Yemen Wars Editorials

The six Saudi newspapers published 141 editorials about the Gulf and Yemen wars among 285 editorials during the study periods. There were 90 editorials during the Gulf War and 51 editorials related to the Yemen War. Figure 1 combines the results of both period studies.
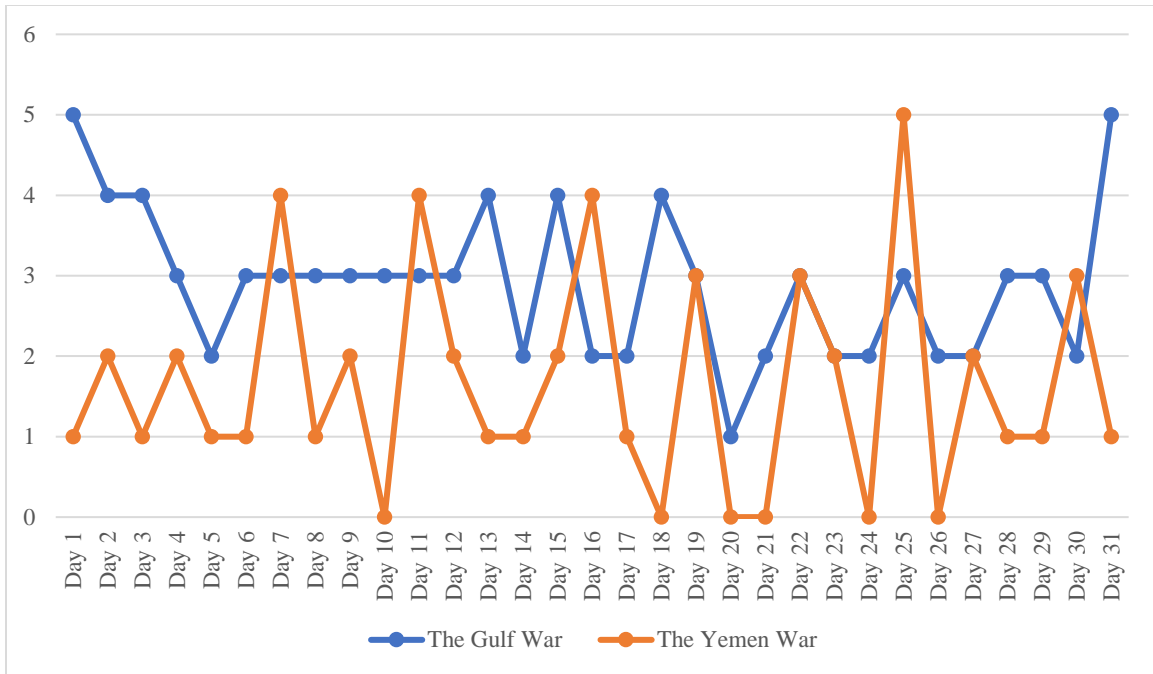
**Figure 1: Combining the results of editorial numbers between two period studies, the Gulf and Yemen wars, the Y in this graph represents the number of daily editorials about the case studies.**


Result of Research Questions 1 and 2

Research Questions 1 and 2 asked what are the most salient issues Saudi newspapers dealt with in their editorials during the study period? And what are the differences between the two periods of study? The analysis revealed that beside the case study topics, the Gulf and Yemen wars, there were other topics which were discussed, such as Saudi Vision 2030, economy, defense, and foreign affairs. Figures 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 show what the study samples were about during the two study periods.
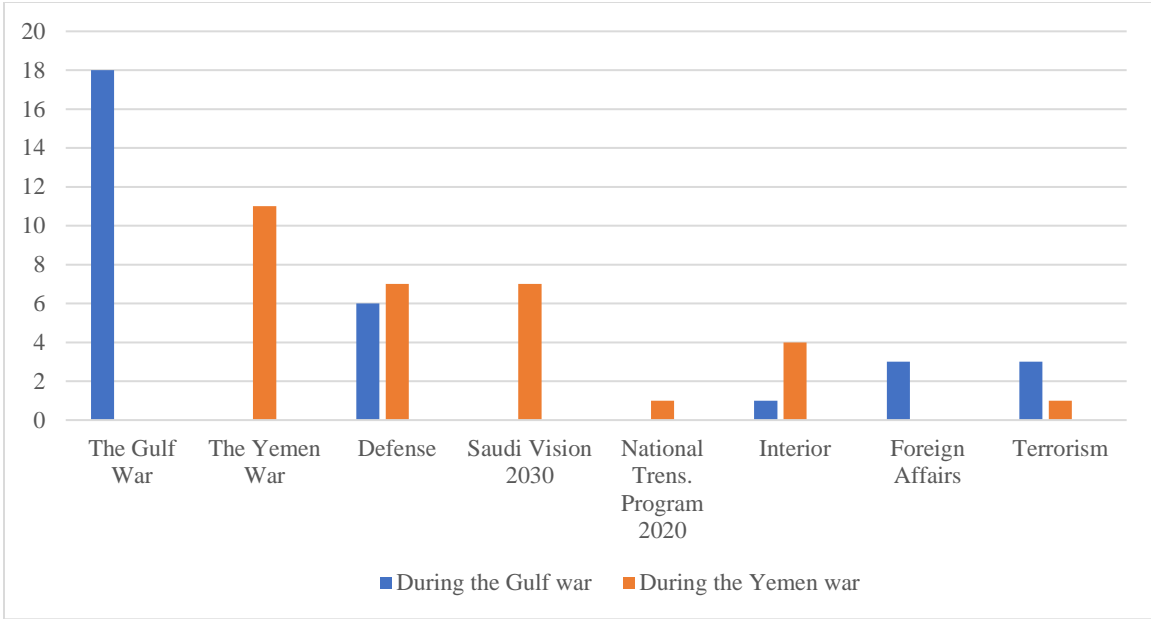
**Figure 2: Combining the results of *Al Riyadh* editorials during the two study periods. The Y in this graph represents the number of daily editorials about the case studies.**
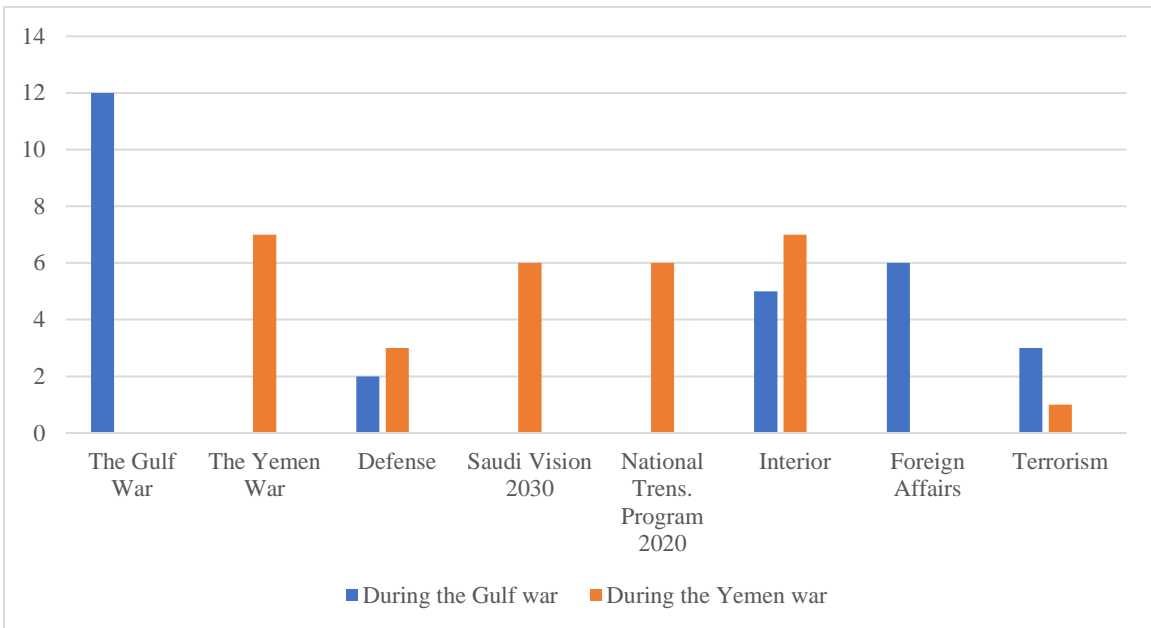


**Figure 3: Combining the results of *Al Yaum* editorials during the two study periods. The Y in this graph represents the number of daily editorials about the case studies.**
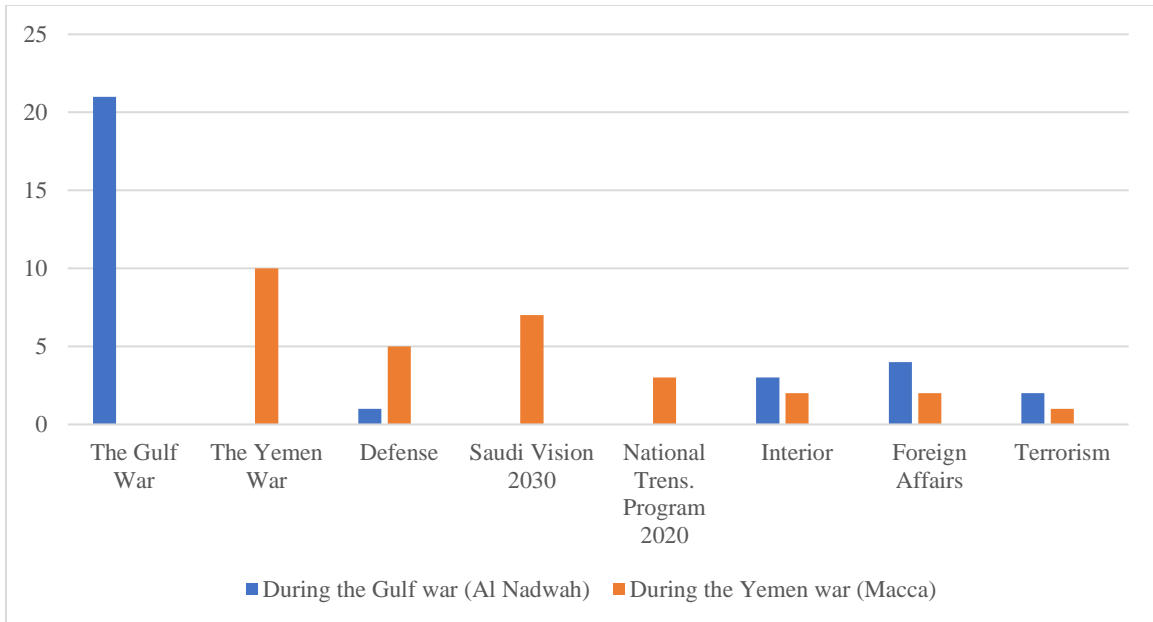
**Figure 4: Combining the results of *Al Nadwah* and *Mecca* editorials during the two study periods. The Y in this graph represents the number of daily editorials about the case studies.**
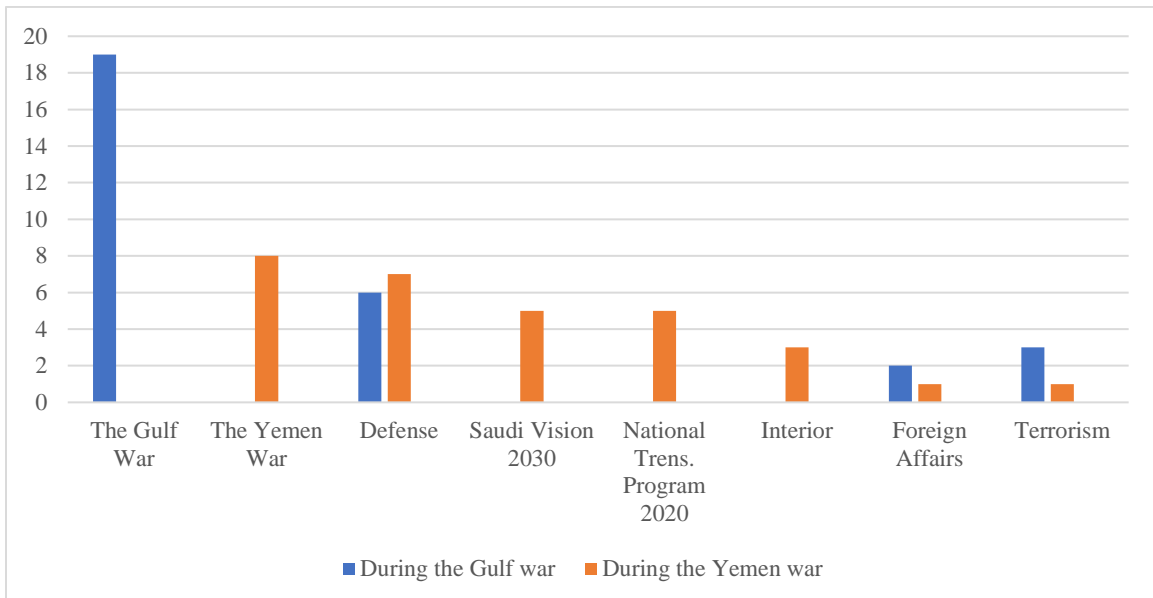


**Figure 5: Combining the results of *Okaz* editorials during the two study periods. The Y in this graph represents the number of daily editorials about the case studies.**
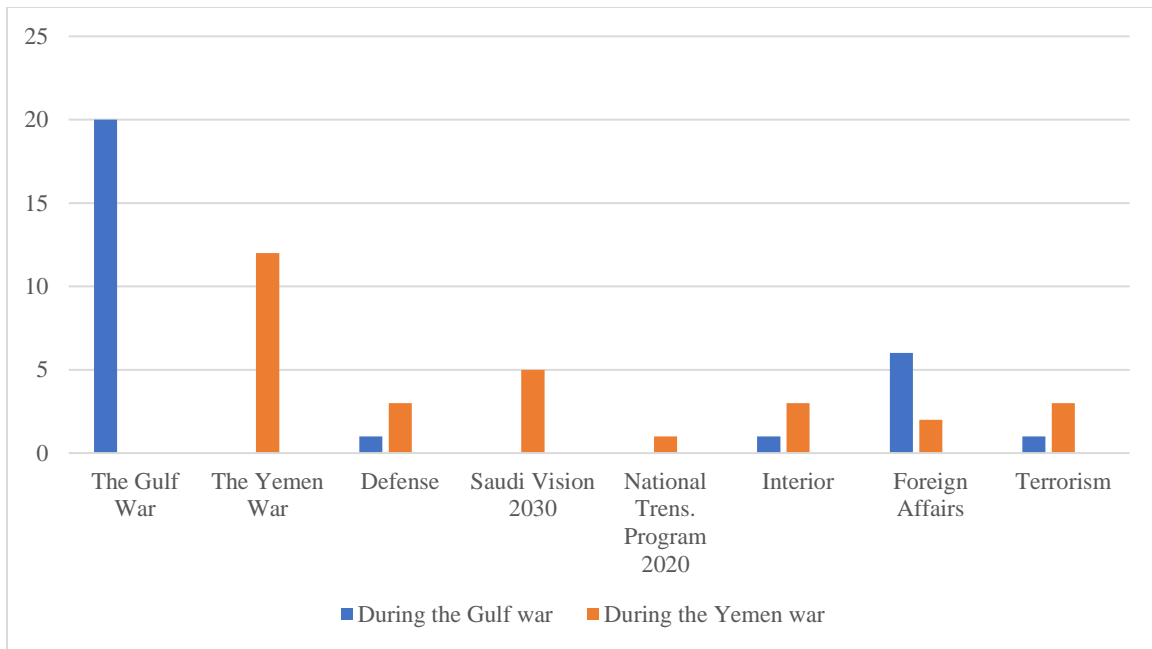
**Figure 6: Combining the results of *Al Jazirah* editorials during the two study periods. The Y in this graph represents the number of daily editorials about the case studies.**

## Result of Research Question 3

Research question 3 asked what are the differences between the editorial features of the Gulf and Yemen wars?

During the Gulf War, 86.7% of the editorials were written following the traditional journalistic methods, which means that 78 of 90 editorials were beat reporting without any additional investigation on the topic. However, 74.5% of the editorials during the Yemen War were written as media-initiated reporting, which means that the editorials were written after more thorough investigation.

In terms of issue focus, most of the editorials during the Gulf War were focused on positive issues, and some of them were neutral. However, during the Yemen War, there were 9 of 51 editorials focusing on negative issues related to the war, most of the others were neutral, and 6 editorials were focused on positive issues.

The most common reporting about causes during the Gulf War were that Saudi Arabia

was being attacked by Saddam Hussain, president of Iraq, because the Arab countries were

weak. In contrast, the most common reporting about causes during the Yemen War were because

Saudi Arabia is the greater country, and the enemies wanted to exhaust it through warfare. Most

of the solutions during the Gulf War entailed calling the Arab countries to stand with Saudi

Arabia. However, during the Yemen War, the reporting on solutions entailed calling Saudi

people to stand behind the government during this difficult situation.

In terms of country focus, both study periods found 72.3 % focus on Saudi Arabia in the

reporting. The rest of the focus during the Gulf War was on GCC countries.

The source types during the Gulf War were as following: 75.5% were governmental

sources (n = 68), 16.6% were news agencies (n = 15), and 7.7% were private sources (n = 7).

However, 62.7% of the editorials during the Yemen War depended on news agencies (n = 32),

27.4% used governmental sources (n = 14), and 9.8% were private sources (n = 5).

Result of Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked what are the differences between the editorial features of

different Saudi newspapers representing Saudi regions during the study periods?

The story trigger of *Al Riyadh* newspaper, which represents the central region, was

written following traditional journalistic methods during both periods, the Gulf and Yemen wars.

It was focused on positive issues during both wars. The reporting on the causes of the Gulf War

focused on the idea that the Arab countries lacked unity, so the solutions were focused on the

idea that Arab and GCC countries had to stand with Saudi Arabia. In addition, during the Yemen

War, *Al Riyadh* editorials were focused on the CCG crises as the main factor in prolonging the

war, and it focused on the allies joining together as a solution to ending the war. All editorials

were focused on Saudi Arabia as the country focus. The source types for both study periods were the governmental sources first and then news agencies and private sources.

*Al Yaum* newspaper, which represents the eastern region of Saudi Arabia, had a completely different story trigger. During the Gulf War, 12 editorials, which reflect 100% of the *Al Yaum* sample, were written following traditional journalistic methods. However, *Al Yaum* published 7 editorials during the Yemen War employing media-initiated reporting. The sample was focused on positive and neutral issues during the Gulf War. In contrast, it was focused on negative and neutral issues during the Yemen War. It was focused on the Arab countries as the aggressors of the Gulf War and argued that the GCC had to be incorporated as the main solution for the war. However, it was focused on the need for security of Saudi Arabia as the reason for the Yemen War and suggested that the Arabs allies and Saudi leaders could bring about the solutions. *Al Yaum* was focused on Saudi Arabia and Bahrain audiences. The main source of information about the Gulf War was the government, while the main sources during the Yemen War were the news agencies and private sources.

*Al Nadwah* and *Mecca* represent the southern region. During the Gulf War, *Al Nadwah* editorials about the war were written following traditional journalistic methods. However, *Mecca* editorials during the Yemen War were written using more investigative methods. The issue focus during the Gulf War was positive. On the other hand, it was frequently negative and occasionally neutral during the Yemen War. The causes of the Gulf War explained in *Al Nadwah* newspaper were focused mostly on the dispersion of Arab countries, and the solutions were focused on the idea that the Arabs countries had to stand with Saudi Arabia. *Mecca* was focused on the global standing of Saudi Arabia as the main reason for the Yemen War, and the solution had to come from inside Saudi Arabia through support of the government position by its citizens as *Mecca*

newspaper suggested. During both study periods, Saudi Arabia was the country focus of editorials. The type of sources for *Al Nadwah* was mostly governmental sources, but it was private sources and news agencies during the Yemen War.

*Okaz* newspaper, which represents the western region, had a similar story trigger in both study periods in which editorials were written following traditional journalistic methods. It also had similar issue focus, which was focusing on positive issues during both wars. In terms of the main ideas, *Okaz* focused on Saddam Hussain's ambitions as the main cause of the Gulf War, and the solution was through working with allies to stop his ambitions. Also, during the Yemen War, it discussed the Houthi rebels as the main reason for the war, and working with allies was the main solution that was discussed. *Okaz* was focused on Saudi Arabia as the country focus and using the government as the main sources for both study periods.

The last newspaper was *Al Jazirah*, which represents the northern region of Saudi Arabia. It was written following traditional journalistic methods during the Gulf War, but it employed media-initiated reporting during the Yemen War. The issue focus was positive during the Gulf War, and it was negative and neutral during the Yemen War. In terms of ideas, during the Gulf War, *Al Jazirah* focused on the value of Saudi Arabia as the main reason for the war, while the federation of GCC countries was focused on as the solution. However, it was focused on the needs of the Yemeni government in the case of the Yemen War, and on the Arab allies as the solution for this war. *Al Jazirah* was focused on Saudi Arabia as a country focus during both wars. The source type was the government during the Gulf War, while news agencies and private sources were the source types during the Yemen War.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study investigated six Saudi newspapers to find out what the limitations on press freedom in Saudi Arabia were using case studies of the Gulf and Yemen wars. According to Johnson & Abdulrahim (2000), the difference between the media in third world countries and the Western world is that most of the third world media is highly controlled by the government. This study investigates and compares the press freedom between the 1990s and the 2000's. Also, it aims to find out the most salient issues which Saudi newspapers dealt with during these periods of wartime, the differences between the Gulf and Yemen wars coverage, and the differences between the editorial features of different Saudi newspapers representing Saudi regions during the study periods, thereby leading to a fuller understanding of past and current levels of press freedom in Saudi Arabia. The discussion will include an overview of the Gulf and Yemen war editorials, the most salient issues during the Gulf and Yemen wars, the differences between the Gulf and Yemen war coverage, and the differences between each newspaper during both wars.

Overview of the Gulf and Yemen Wars Editorials

The six newspapers published 141 editorials during the two wars, 90 editorials about the Gulf War and 51 about the Yemen War. It is clear that the proportion of editorials related to the Gulf War is higher than that of the Yemen War. The reason for this is that the study period for the Gulf War was between January 18 and February 17, 1991, which was the actual period for the movement of Saudi Arabia and coalition forces towards Kuwait and the start of the military operation. The newspapers were heavily covering the war at that time. In contrast, the study period of the Yemen War comes a month after the beginning of the war, so although the focus of

the media was not as high as during the Gulf War, this period of time is equally significant because it came after Saudi journalists were encouraged to use their freedom of the press.

## The Most Salient Issues during the Gulf and Yemen Wars, and the Differences between Them

During the two study periods, topics unrelated to the wars were also discussed. In his master's thesis, Almistadi (2014), found that civil defense and foreign affairs were commonly the top topics in Saudi newspapers. The results of this study confirm that, especially during the Gulf War. According to Figures 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, during the Gulf War, the editorials of Saudi newspapers were focused on the right of defense as the most highly discussed topic after the Gulf War. In addition, they were published in different papers at the same times with the same angle, which was the right of Saudi Arabia to defend itself. That may lead us to believe that there was an outside influence on the press institutions which directed them to discuss a specific topic at a particular time. On the other hand, during the Yemen War, the most salient issue discussed was the Saudi Vision 2030. It may be reasonable for that to be a big topic, especially considering that it is the first Saudi vision historically. However, all the editorials talked about the positive side of the vision with similar expressions, such as "new era," "gold future," "the greater country," and "young leadership for incredible future." Therefore, that might lead to the same conclusion that was made of editorials during the Gulf War. In other words, there may have been an outside influence directing the narrative.

The other most salient issues during the Gulf War were terrorism and foreign affairs. For terrorism, the editorials were focused on the terrorist actions that happened in other countries. Through that, *Al Riyadh* and *Okaz* responded directly, *Al Yaum* and *Al Jazirah* responded indirectly to the global media who wondered if the United Stated and Saudi Arabia were justified in attacking Iraq. On the other hand, the foreign affairs editorials discussed the historical

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relations that Saudi Arabia has had with other countries, such as Sudan and Palestine, who stood with Saddam Hussain, the president of Iraq, against Saudi Arabia.

During the Yemen War, the other most salient issues were the interior and the economy. The interior issues were focused on police security, the Saudi soccer team, education and government announcements apart from announcements related to the war. The economic issues referred to the International Monetary Fund, salaries, and the Saudi Ministry of Finance. These topics related to the economy were discussed based on the National Transformation Program 2020 or the Saudi Vision 2030.

In general, besides the topics of war, Saudi newspapers were focused on other issues, sometimes depending on their regions. During the Gulf War, *Al Riyadh*, which represents the central region, was focused on defense and terrorism issues because it represents and holds the name of the capital city of Saudi Arabia. The editorials contained that type of information frequently during the Gulf War. However, it was focused on the interior and economy during the Yemen War.

Besides defense, *Al Yaum*, which represents the eastern region, was focused on foreign affairs during the Gulf War. That was because *Al Yaum* targets Saudi, Bahraini, and Qatari audiences, so it discussed how strong the Saudi relationship with its neighbors was. However, during the Yemen War, it was focused on Saudi Vision 2030 and interior issues, with only one editorial related to Bahraini army forces involved with Saudi Arabia in the Yemen War.

*Al Nadwah*, which represents the western region, had only four editorials about defense, three about foreign affairs, and two about terrorism. In addition, during the Yemen War, *Mecca*, the new edition of *Al Nadwah* newspaper, was focused only on the Saudi Vision 2030 and defense.

Unlike the Yemen War, *Okaz*, which represents the southern region, was only focused on defense and terrorism during the Gulf War. However, during the Yemen War, it was focused on multiple issues, such as defense, interior, economy, and Saudi Vision 2030. One main reason for that was the Yemen War affected Saudis who lived in the southern region, so *Okaz* published its editorials almost daily focusing on positive issues. That may lead us to conclude that they wanted to encourage people living in the south to accept the side effects of war, such as the constantly falling missiles and the heavy presence of ground forces in the southern area.

Although the Gulf War was in the northern region of Saudi Arabia, *Al Jazirah*, which represents the northern region, only focused on defense and foreign affairs during the Gulf War. However, during the Yemen War, *Al Jazirah* focused on multiple issues, such as Saudi Vision 2030, the interior, the economy, and terrorism.

### The Differences between the Gulf and Yemen Wars Coverage

According to Gulati (2011), story triggers can be studied to determine whether the writer of a story used traditional journalistic methods or used more investigative methods. Examining story triggers as well as other variables, including issue focus, country focus, source type, and the ideas discussed is helpful in discovering whether the government is controlling the newspaper or not (Sanford, Martínez, & Weitzer, 2016). These qualitative variables give an accurate look at whether newspapers offer a clear and informative view, or if they are presented to fit the government's agenda. These five variables were used for both study periods to determine whether Saudi newspapers exercised freedom of the press or not.

The results show that 86.7% of the editorials during the Gulf War were written following traditional journalistic methods. However, during the Yemen War, the percentage of editorials written following more investigative methods was reduced to 74.5%. Although the rate of

editorials written following investigative methods was high during the second study period, the Yemen War, the decline in traditional methods was noticeable. Many writers of the editorials tended to present information beyond the basic news rather than reporting the facts of the news as its original source, which was a change from the first study period. The percentage of story triggers found during the Gulf War in this study matches the data presented by Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain. This organization concluded that Saudi newspapers followed the official line of the government-run Saudi Agency Press (SAP) (ADHRB 2015, p.6). However, the results of the Yemen War coverage showed that most editorials did not follow the official line of SAP, which shows a clear contract with the coverage of the Gulf War.

Issue focus refers to the context in which the issue was discussed, positive, negative, or neutral (Sanford, Martínez, & Weitzer, 2016). The results have shown that during the Gulf War, the editorials were mostly focused on the positive issues of the war or were basically neutral. This finding coincides with a study by Artz. He pointed out that the main focus of the Saudi media was on positive outcomes and local issues (2015, pp. 26-28). However, the results show that 9 out of 51 editorials during the Yemen War focused on negative issues related to the war, and most of the others focused on neutral issues. It appears that Saudi newspapers could discuss some issues during the Yemen War that they could not discuss during the time of the Gulf War.

During the Gulf War, the theories discussed by Saudi newspapers about the causes of the war were mostly that the Arab and GCC countries were weak. In addition, the solution presented as most viable was that the Arab and GCC countries had to stand with Saudi Arabia. It is clear that Saudi newspapers were focused on actors and concerns outside of Saudi Arabia. This finding coincides that of Alexei Vasil′ev. In his book, he wrote that during the 1960s, Saudis were affected by propaganda broadcast by Ciro Radio (1998, p. 251). On the other hand, in the

second study period, Saudi newspapers focused on actors and concerns inside Saudi Arabia to determine the causes and solutions of the Yemen War. In fact, the results show that the causes of the Yemen War presented in Saudi newspapers were focused on the idea that it was because Saudi Arabia is the greater country, and the enemies wanted to exhaust it through war. Also, the solution to the Yemen War was centered on calling on Saudis to stand behind their leaders. Clearly, the rhetoric has shifted from being directed abroad to being directed inside Saudi Arabia. One of the main reasons was Saudi Vision 2030, and the editorials capitalized some of its phrases, such as "our nation," "our gold generation," and "Saudi will be new Europe."

During both wars, the results demonstrate that the editorials of Saudi newspapers were mainly focused on Saudi Arabia at a rate of 72.3%. This figure makes sense because most of the issues were related to Saudi Arabia. However, 27.7% were focused on the GCC countries during the Gulf War. That may coincide with Vasil′ev's opinion (1998) regarding Saudi Arabia's previous approach in trying to exploit events to influence the opinions of neighboring countries instead of the Saudi interior.

Previous studies have found the coverage of news media in Saudi Arabia predominantly uses official sources, particularly officials in the government, including government reports and other documents (Hashemi & Postel, 2017). The results of this study focused on the Gulf War period confirm the previous research. The results found that 75.5% of editorials written during the Gulf War relied on governmental sources, while 16.6% relied on news agencies and 7.7% relied on private sources. However, on May 28, 2012, the Saudi Press Agency transformed from government ownership to an independent authority supervised by the Saudi Ministry of Media, making it independent of government resources (Saudi Press Agency, n. d). During the Yemen War, Saudi newspapers relied on SPA in their editorials by 62.7%, while 27.4% used

governmental sources and 9.8% relied on private sources. That means Saudi newspapers were liberated from following government positions to a large extent and free to follow the Saudi Press Agency. For its part, the Saudi Press Agency may follow the Saudi government's general policy, but in the decision of the Saudi Council of Ministers, it was made clear that the agency is independent and operates on its own discretion.

The Differences between Each Newspaper during Both Wars

Although Saudi newspapers belong to a single news agency (SPA), there are many differences that emerged during the two study periods as explained in the following;

1.  *Al Riyadh* newspaper, which represents the central region, is considered the most popular and readable newspaper in Saudi Arabia (Alotaibi, 2015). It was written following the traditional journalistic methods during both periods of the study. Also, it was focused on positive issues during both wars, while its sources where mostly governmental sources followed by news agencies and private sources. Al-Riyadh newspaper is one of the newspapers still influenced by the government orientation.

2.  *Al Yaum* newspaper represents the eastern region. The results have shown that *Al Yaum* had two different story triggers. Its editorials were written following traditional journalistic methods during the Gulf War, but then they followed media-initiated reporting during the Yemen War. Also, the results show that it was focused on positive and neutral issues during the Gulf War, but then it was focused on negative and neutral issues during the Yemen War. *Al Yaum* newspaper is distinguished for targeting the Saudi public as well as the Bahraini public and allocating them with independent advertising and news pages. During the Gulf War, it relied on governmental sources, while the main sources during the Yemen War were agencies and private sources. *Al Yaum* newspaper is one of the most prominent Saudi newspapers that has developed

its performance and exploited all the possibilities available to provide distinguished media content.

3.   *Al Nadwah* and *Mecca* represent the western region. *Al Nadwah* editorials during the Gulf War were written following traditional journalistic methods, and it was focused on the positive issues of the war. The main sources were governmental sources. However, the results of this study found that *Mecca* editorials during the Yemen War were written using more investigative methods, and its focus was frequently negative and occasionally neutral. *Mecca* relied on private sources and news agencies during the Yemen War. Therefore, *Al Nadwah* represents the old model of Saudi newspaper, which followed the government, but *Mecca* represents the opposite model of extending its press freedom.

4.   *Okaz* newspaper represents the southern region. It had similar story triggers in both study periods which were written following traditional journalistic methods. It focused on the positive issues during both wars and used governmental sources as the main source. *Okaz* is similar to *Al Riyadh* newspaper in that they are still influenced by government orientation.

5.   *Al Jazirah* newspaper represents the northern region. It was written following traditional journalistic methods and focused on positive issues during the Gulf War with the main sources being governmental sources. However, its editorials were written with media-initiated methods, focusing on negative and neutral issues, and using news agencies and private sources during the Yemen War. Although *Al Jazirah* was founded before *Al Riyadh* and *Okaz*, the results show more significant movement of *Al Jazirah* toward providing excellent media content.

## Conclusion

The Yemen War coverage, according to the sample, supports the idea that the press was freer in covering the war. Most Saudi newspapers have made a paradigm shift in lifting the

ceiling of press freedom and moving away from the government trend that was clearly prevalent during newspaper coverage of the Gulf War. By examining the story triggers alone, it was evident the editorials during the Gulf War period followed the government opinion without attempting further investigation. However, the editorials during the Yemen War shared in-depth information and were written using investigative method, which makes clear difference between the two periods.

The main findings of this study are:

- Through a qualitative analysis of Saudi newspaper editorials during the Gulf War which focused on the story trigger, issue focus, ideas, country focus, source type, and the most salient issues, it became clear that there was indeed a directing of newspapers to write and highlight specific coverage to the public, confirming that Saudi newspapers during the Gulf War did not work freely.

- Through qualitative analysis of the Saudi newspaper editorials during the Yemen War using the elements of the previous analysis, it turned out that most of the Saudi newspapers developed greatly in raising the level of press freedom and moving away from representation of the government. This corresponds to what Doumato and Posusney (2003) found. They also reported that in 2003, Saudi Arabia allowed the newspapers to criticize the venerable religious establishment for its oppressive moral policing, which may have led to the beginning of raising the ceiling of freedom in the Saudi media (pp. 260-263).

- The Eastern, Western, and Northern press have achieved remarkable excellence in media content, keeping up with events and raising the ceiling of freedom slightly. However, it is too early to judge the Saudi press as free.

- It is obvious that Saudi Arabia's media system is moving from an authoritarian system to be a social responsibility system. Baran & Davis (2015) explained the social responsibility system as "a normative theory that substitutes media industry and public responsibility for total media freedom on the one hand and for external control on the other" (p.61). Therefore, by Saudi ministry censorship on Saudi newspapers, it is reasonable to have a higher level of press freedom now than in the 1990s when the government fully controlled media.

## Limitations

The results of this study may not be generalizable to a large audience because the analysis was limited to editorials, while internal articles may contain many views that may or may not agree with the editorials. Therefore, this study may be used as the beginning of many upcoming studies that discuss the freedom of the Saudi press.

## Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should focus on what Saudi journalists understand about press freedom and how they define it. The answer to this question will give a hint of the future of Saudi newspapers in terms of press freedom. Also, future studies may focus on comparisons between print and online versions in terms of press freedom during wars.

According to Kim and Johnson (2009), additional governmental controls on media leads to a decline in public trust. Also, The Project for Excellence in Journalism (2004) reported that the number of readers who trusted Saudi newspapers dropped from 80% in 1958 to 59% in 2013. Therefore, future research may use Agenda-setting theory and data collection through surveys to measure the impact of these significant movements on the public.

APPENDIX A

CODING INSTRUCTIONS

**The unit of analysis**: the editorials of Six Saudi newspapers (*Al Riyadh, Al Yaum, Al Nadwah, Mecca, Okaz,* and *Al Jazirah*).

**Date**: Between January 18 and February 17, 1991, for the first study period (the Gulf war). Between April 25 and May 25, 2016, for the second study period (the Yemen war).

**Independent variables:**

Region: Central, Southern, Northern, Eastern, and Western of Saudi Arabia.

Newspaper name: Full name of newspaper.

**Dependent variables:**

*RQ1:*

1= the Gulf War: It refers to the war when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990. That war ended in 1991, when the United States of America and its allies expelled the army of Iraq from Kuwaiti lands.

2= the Yemen War: It refers to the civil war which is happening in Yemen between the legitimate president of Yemen, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, and his allies against the Houthi armed movement, which began in 2015 and continues to present,2019.

3= the defense: It includes arms trade, navy, air force, and military-focused or details.

4= Saudi Vision 2030: It includes details about the new and first vision of Saudi Arabia.

5= National Transformation Program 2020: It includes details about the special program set by the Saudi government which provides some initiatives presented in 2020 that will lead to the realization of Saudi Vision 2030.

6= the interior: It includes the topics about police security, the Saudi football team, the government announcements, and education.

7= he economy: It deals with topic referring to the International Monetary Fund, salaries, and the Saudi ministry of finance.

8= foreign affairs: It refers to topics discussing the relations between Saudi Arabia and other countries.

9= terrorism: It refers to topics which discussed violent actions against civilians, except wars.

*RQ2 and 3:*

1= story trigger: whether the editorial was: 1a= written following the traditional journalistic methods of "beat reporting" or 1b= by doing in-depth investigation "media-initiated reporting"

2= issue focus: the context in which the issue was discussed, 2a= positive, 2b= negative, or 3c= neutral.

3= main ideas about causes and solutions: what were the ideas and solutions that the author wanted to explain.

4= country focus: what was the country that was focused on.

5= source type: categorized into 5a= government, 5b= news agencies, and 5c= private sources.

APPENDIX B

DATA

# The Gulf and Yemen wars editorials

## The Gulf War

| | January | | | | | | | | | | | | | | February | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 |
| 1 | * | * | * | * | - | - | * | - | * | * | - | - | * | - | * | - | - | * | * | - | - | * | * | - | * | - | * | * | * | - | * |
| 2 | * | * | - | * | - | * | - | - | - | - | * | - | * | - | * | - | - | * | - | - | - | * | - | - | * | * | - | - | - | - | * |
| 3a | * | * | * | * | - | * | * | * | - | * | - | * | * | - | * | - | * | * | - | * | * | - | * | - | * | - | * | * | - | * | * |
| 4 | * | - | * | - | * | * | * | * | * | - | * | * | - | * | * | * | - | * | * | - | * | * | - | * | - | - | - | - | * | - | * |
| 5 | * | * | * | - | * | - | - | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | - | * | * | - | * | - | - | - | - | * | - | * | - | * | * | * | * |

## The Yemen War

| | April | | | | | | May | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 |
| 1 | - | - | * | - | * | - | - | * | * | * | - | * | - | * | - | - | * | - | * | - | - | - | * | - | * | - | - | - | * | - | - |
| 2 | - | - | - | * | - | - | * | - | - | - | * | * | - | - | - | * | - | - | - | - | - | - | * | - | * | - | - | - | - | - | * |
| 3b | - | * | - | - | - | * | * | - | - | * | - | - | - | - | * | * | - | - | - | - | - | * | - | - | * | - | * | - | - | * | - |
| 4 | * | - | - | - | - | - | * | - | - | - | * | - | - | - | - | * | - | - | * | - | - | * | - | - | * | - | - | * | - | * | - |
| 5 | - | * | - | * | - | - | * | - | * | - | * | - | * | - | * | * | - | - | * | - | - | * | - | - | * | - | * | - | - | * | - |

* Yes. - No

1. *Al Riyadh.*

2. *Al Yaum.*

3a. *Al Nadwah.* 3b. *Mecca.*

4. *Okaz.*

5. *Al Jazirah.*

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