Impacts of Culture on Online Journalism in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

The purpose of this research thesis is to explore the cultural impacts of online journalism in Saudi Arabia, focusing on the relationship between culture and online media, as well as media in general. The theoretical framework contains a statement, purpose and significance of study, research objectives and questions according to cultural and journalistic practices in the chosen country. Part of the theoretical framework is an overview of cultural practices, where the concept of culture, its role and impact are described. In the conclusion of the theoretical background for the research study, there is a description of global media, technology and its processes, and global media culture and the impacts of culture on online journalism.

The main component of the research thesis is empirical. The aim of this study is to identify, understand and explore the cultural factors that influence online journalistic practices in Saudi Arabia from the perspective of journalists. The purpose of this research is to provide insight into the factors that motivate and influence journalists to present news stories in specific ways. The research problem is focused on finding answers to the ways in which cultural considerations influence online journalistic practices and what the impact of local culture is on journalists’ professional attitudes, values and practices.

Based on the research results, I will argue that there are cultural impacts on online journalism in Saudi Arabian society. Like all cultures, Saudi Arabian society has its own specific elements which I will argue has influenced media and journalism and vice versa. Saudi Arabian culture influences the content of topics covered by media and journalists, the performance of online journals, and the spread of online information. Both readers’ and journalists’ cultures are influential factors in defining media practice in the online journalism industry in particular. Online journalism in Saudi Arabia has also helped to give a greater voice to women, mirroring their male counterparts in concerns about unemployment and family issues. My investigation has revealed that journalists in Saudi Arabia are dedicated to their craft and aim to produce fair and balanced news for their readers.
Statement of Original Authorship

The work has not been previously submitted for a degree at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signature: ..........................  
Date: ..............................  

Ethics clearance number: HUM/25/10/HREC

Publication

Dedication

Affection and gratitude is expressed to my family and especially to my parents who provided me with continuous encouragement, emotional and financial support. Without this support this thesis would not have been possible in the first place. This thesis is dedicated to my father, Dr. Ibrahim, who taught me that the best kind of knowledge to have is that which is learned for its own sake. It is also dedicated to my mother, AlJoharah, who has been a source of encouragement and inspiration to me throughout my life.

A special feeling of gratitude to my dear wife, Amirah Almansour, who has supported me from the beginning and stood by me in the most difficult years. I owe my deepest gratitude to her and to my wonderful sons, Faisal and Abdulrahman, who have never left my side.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my many friends and family who have supported me throughout the process. I will always appreciate all that they have done, especially my uncle Dr. Abdulah Alhomoud, who has directed me and given me important academic advice throughout my studies. Also, I give special thanks to my father-in-law Dr. Nasser Almansour for his support and advice.
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CULTURE AND ONLINE JOURNALISM
Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Overview

This thesis investigates the impacts and influences of culture on journalistic practice in Saudi Arabia. While traditional forms of journalism will be discussed, the primary focus will be to examine online journalism and how Saudi Arabian culture affects what is reported and how it is reported. My assertion is that culture has a strong influence on the structure and output of online news sites in Saudi Arabia. I will further assert that journalists are indirectly, or in some cases directly, pressured to comply with what are considered ‘traditional’ cultural norms, depending on the regional environment in which they work.

Culture, I will argue, has a distinct and considerable effect on how online journalism is conducted. Culture influences how journalists might perceive information, and in that sense, determines what they consider to be ‘truthful’, ‘objective’ or ‘accurate’ (Khoja 2009). By investigating how this occurs, recommendations from this study suggest ways in which online journalistic practices can manage external influences while journalists are performing their role.

Firstly, analysing exactly what ‘culture’ is will be necessary, providing an insight into how social, economic, commercial and religious perspectives apply indirect and direct influences on journalistic practice. Culture, arguably, can be defined as the influences and social conditioning that shape the way an individual views the world and acts within it in a certain way, defining their actions and beliefs and how they relate to others, both from their own or other cultural perspectives (Pon 2009, pp. 59-71). In this study, I will investigate how this cultural conditioning affects journalists, and how they report on and present information, exploring whether it has any impact on Internet-based journalistic practice.

Online journalism arguably could be considered the first truly and universally free news form, in that almost anyone anywhere can be reached if they have access to the Internet. Rupert Murdoch (2009 p. 21), despite the irony stemming from his most recent
interaction with the UK government¹, notes the potential of technology to spread ‘truth’ through journalism:

From the beginning, newspapers have prospered for one reason: the trust that comes from representing their readers’ interest and giving them the news that’s important to them. That means covering the communities where they live, exposing government or business corruption, and standing up to the rich and powerful. Technology now allows us to do this on a much greater scale. That means we have the means to reach billions of people who until now have had no honest or independent sources of the information they need to rise in society, hold their governments accountable, and pursue their needs and dreams.

Many consider that the Internet has enabled users to be exposed to a world of differing attitudes, opinions and beliefs that might otherwise have been restricted, or at least manipulated, by various culturally influential entities such as religious or political organisations with a vested interest in controlling or regulating the information a particular population receives (Baird 2010; Cooper 2008, p. 45).

The power of the Internet to allow unfettered access to information, especially information relating to current events on a local, regional and global scale, is unprecedented. Berger (2009 p. 355) notes: ‘Technologically, the Internet is the most global medium in the history of humanity. It shakes up traditional distinctions between local, foreign and international news.’ It can be used either as a vehicle to inspire change and promote egalitarianism, or alternatively, might threaten fragile and unique cultures whose leaders are not willing or ready to cope with the challenges that such a medium offers. Subsequently, the effect of cultural influences on journalistic practice through the online medium of the Internet is worthy of investigation and analysis.

Reese et al. (2007 pp. 236-237) note that the Internet has created a global news arena that no longer follows the traditionally accepted form of one-way news transmission. They observe:

The Internet has increased the speed, reach, and comprehensiveness of journalism available to the public and lowered the cost of entry to anyone seeking to participate. Thus, the online environment deterritorializes news, such that the user, creator, and news subject need

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¹ In 1968 Murdoch entered the British newspaper market with his acquisition of the populist *News of the World*, followed in 1969 with the purchase of the struggling daily broadsheet *The Sun* from IPC. When Rupert Murdoch closed Britain’s biggest newspaper, the *News of the World*, in July 2011 - after it became mired in allegations of phone hacking - he had hoped the move would draw a line under the scandal ([http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14078128](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14078128)).
no longer share the same national frame of reference.

In order to provide an in-depth analysis from a particular cultural perspective, several research methodologies and target groups were considered for data collection for this study. In light of research about journalistic practice, I determined that what is most necessary and perhaps most lacking is an investigation into media practices outside the influence of Western world. Additionally, exploring my own personal history, bias and ethnicity led me to decide upon an exploration within my own culture. Subsequently, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) was chosen for the basis of my research and data collection for this thesis.

1.2 Statement of the Study

Culture, I will argue, has a distinct effect on how online journalism is presented. Based on this assertion, I will undertake a study of the effects of culture on online journalistic practice. The form and function of journalism is gradually being forced to adapt to changing social pressures, economic conditions, the advent of new technology and the need to remain relevant and effective within a world that is becoming increasing reliant on mass-distributed, largely unedited, online content (Hans-Henrik 2002, p. 67). These challenges to journalistic practice need to be investigated if a clear picture is to be established as to how culture in all its forms affects how journalists operate in the traditional news media, and more specifically, in the medium of online news production and distribution.

The Internet is another means by which journalists can now communicate with a truly global audience in a very rapid manner (Zuckerman 2010, p. 66). The speed with which information can be organised and disseminated through the Internet has created several challenges for modern, technologically-savvy journalists. There is increased pressure to upload information quickly, effectively out-competing fellow journalists or other news agencies. This has brought into question the validity of the material reported, whether it has been assessed for credibility and whether, in fact, the information is reported in a neutral and ethical manner that does not unjustly vilify or unfairly characterise any specific religious, ethnic or other social group. In the rush to ‘get the story out there’, facts can fall victim to sensationalism and innuendo that are unsubstantiated or fictitious. The adage, ‘If it’s wrong, it’s not wrong for long’ is one that has emerged from the culture of online newsrooms in responding to criticisms of hastily-prepared stories that contain inaccuracies. As Giles (2000, p. 3) notes:
Mainstream news organisations are struggling to apply old-fashioned news standards to the Web, but are discovering it is not easy to translate the virtues of accuracy, balance and clarity to a medium where the advantages of speed and timeliness prevail.

This pressure forced upon journalists challenges traditional journalistic approaches to reporting: locating the source, checking the validity of the information and organising the story in a way that is ‘objective’ and at the same time, neutral. The sheer speed of the Internet and the ability to communicate with a mass audience almost instantaneously has created a situation where speed over accuracy has become the preferable option (Lissit 1998, p. 94). For example, Gawenda and Muller (2009, p. 14), in their report on the Victorian Black Saturday bushfires, acknowledge that events can create enormous pressure on journalists who have to make rapid decisions in order to organise and disseminate their information as quickly as possible. They conclude (2009, p. 14):

In particular, print journalists learnt the usefulness of instant exposure. They also had to cope with the additional pressures of being expected to file repeatedly during the day, and not just once.

Another example of the need to get a news story up and out on to the web is the case of the 2009 Fort Hood, USA shooting. In their haste to present stories about the event virtually as it was happening, many journalists failed to verify facts or situations, resulting in inaccurate information being broadcast. The shooter in question, Major Hasan, was initially labelled a terrorist. This later turned out to be incorrect, and the shooting was subsequently found to be a result of other more personal issues relating to mental health. Reporters also initially reported that the shooter had been killed in the melee, which also proved false following a proper briefing from police and military sources. Benjamin (2009) identifies the drive to be first in spreading the news and claims that biased viewpoints have resulted in inaccurate assumptions being made, concluding: ‘The passionate determination to hang the ‘terrorist’ label on Hasan, or rail against ‘political correctness’ in the military, are just more symptoms of media stars more excited about hot-headed debate than covering the real story.’

With increasing exposure of social media these “bad decisions” made in a hurry can have a longer negative effect. This is because social media can magnify our mood collaboratively and exponentially. The unhappiness generated by a negative report can therefore be amplified to a much larger scale across the nation or even the globe. While printed newspapers would reach the hands of the people almost the same time the next morning, online newspapers can spread information at any time on the Internet and with
the help of various social networks it can become viral (Coviello, Sohn, Kramer, Marlow, & Franceschetti, 2004) and create a lasting effect.

Therefore, online journalists have a responsibility, ethically and morally, to take into account the potential benefits or problems that sharing information across cultures might entail. The key issue is the presentation of information and that it should be done in a neutral and unbiased manner. While this is easier said than done, it is an ideal that should be aspired to in that it is arguably one of the core aspects of journalism as a profession (Applegate 2009, p. 5). Journalists, of course, are just people, and despite training in their particular field, cultural influences, ingrained biases or pressures can affect how they present their work. Despite this, it is imperative that journalists aspire to objectivity and to be true to the ideals on which journalistic practice is based (Bettag 2006, p. 37; Morris 2007, p. 707).

Unfortunately, in many incidents, this has not been the case. There are several factors that apply direct and indirect pressure on individuals to yield to the collective consensus, even if that compromises their professional standards. Politics, ethical bias, religious affiliation, proprietorial editorial influence, nationalism and the need to appear patriotic have resulted in journalistic compromises that, in turn, have influenced the creation of stories that are not necessarily unbiased, objective or balanced. This gets more complex with ethnic matters which are easily marginalised through a variety of different labels that segregate them from various other cultural groups (Cineros 2008, p. 569; Levenson 2004, p. 9). An example of this is when the Jordanian media commentator, Khouri, interviewed by O’Regan (2002), noted that even while Middle Eastern journalists are trying to ‘develop greater press freedom and greater professionalism’, the Western media’s attitude reverts ‘to simple clichés, black and white, one-dimensional images and stereotypes’.

There is no doubt that culture influences journalistic practice (Levenson 2004, p. 9), especially when it comes to sensitive issues like war where a country has a strong interest or connection (Ravi 2005, p. 45-62). During the Iraq war, by analyzing newspaper articles from five different nations, Ravi showed that apart from national interests and patriotism, cultural values influence how reporting is being done. For example, in that case, American and British newspapers reported individual deaths, rescue or capture while newspapers from India and Pakistan focused on the effect of war on the society. Apart from that, newspapers from India and Pakistan were willing to
show more violent pictures compared to those in the USA and UK. Understandably, this different type of reporting style can showcase different sides of the same event which can result in different responses from the audiences, especially online where it is easy to take an image out of context while sharing (Oh, Kwon and Rao 2010). While there have been recent studies in this area that include various countries, there has been limited research relating to Saudi Arabia when it comes to the cultural influence on online journalists.

Furthermore, with increased exposure to the online environment amongst the general Saudi population, there are new challenges for online journalists working there. Traditionally, privacy in journalism codes developed by the Federation of Arab Journalists “respect the right of individuals to privacy and Journalists dignity” and “abstain from publishing personal or family scandals aiming to weaken family relations”. For some journalists it is problematic when it concerns a prominent figure. For example, Hafez (2002) concludes, “Telling journalists that it is in general unethical to cover a politician’s personal affairs would be identical to a ban on investigative political reporting, since, for example, corruption, nepotism, and many other things are closely connected to intimate knowledge of a politician’s personal life and circumstances.” However, as this is part of the ethical code, it is closely followed in Saudi Arabia.

It gets blurry when it comes to the online environment. As people are accessing more and more information via the Internet and social networks, it is possible for them to find information about the private life of a politician via such social networks, which would not otherwise be reported in the media. It therefore may tempt some online journalists to report such material. As there has been limited research in this area and as online journalism is gaining mainstream acceptance from the Saudi general public, the issue of cultural influence on online journalistic practice needs to be investigated thoroughly. This is doubly important because the profession of online journalism in the KSA needs to continue to aspire to objectivity and to remain largely unfettered by cultural pressures. Journalism is about investigation, analysis and reporting the truth, and this is arguably more important with online journalism in that the potential to reach out to a broader audience globally provides a more rapid and potentially greater influential medium when compared with more traditional forms of news dissemination (Ward 2002, p. 135).
Therefore, several questions arise when confronted by the potential power of cultural influence on journalistic practice. How exactly does culture affect online journalists? How do journalists deal with news according to their cultural backgrounds? How can objectivity—however it is defined—remain unaffected by cultural influences? And lastly, how do readers’ cultural backgrounds, needs and expectations impact on trends in journalism?

Arguably, culture, in its various manifestations, presents a clear and present challenge to the profession and practice of journalism. The aim of this investigation therefore is to find out how cultural factors influence and hinder online journalists' attitudes, values, ethical standards and practices in Saudi Arabia.

The literature review of relevant research in this field will help to identify possible options the profession of journalism and online journalism might consider in an attempt to minimise unethical and unprofessional practices, as well as maintaining integrity and ethical professional standards. In recent years, with the advancement of technology in the areas of online communication, journalism has gone from being a relatively small additional form supporting traditional news dissemination to become an increasingly dominant way of presenting the news (Sundar 2000, p. 480). Subsequently, it is worth investigating the effects of culture on journalistic practice in that these influences can have a truly global reach.

**Figure 1:** The interplay of influences on journalism practice

This analysis of culture and its influence on online journalism will be conducted using the culturally rich Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. I will undertake an investigation of how the culture of Saudi Arabia influences Saudi online journalistic practice; how it shapes Saudi online journalists’ attitudes and values; and how it might hinder their reporting. How does Saudi online journalists’ practice compare with that of traditional journalists in the KSA?
Based on this premise, further investigation into conflicts of interest, ethics, principles and threats that culture poses to online journalism practices need to be fully understood. A study and review of relevant academic research will be conducted and analysed, comparing views, attitudes and findings that determine the level of influence culture exerts and how online journalism practices deal with this. Through an investigation of culture and how it affects online journalistic practices, we can gain a better understanding about how culture might manipulate and influence the ways in which news is presented. Subsequently, I will make recommendations that may help to safeguard journalistic practice currently and into the future.

1.3 Culture and Journalistic Practice in Saudi Arabia

It is widely accepted that most Anglo-European-based cultures under the auspices of a democratic political system and a capitalist economy have embraced the use of the Internet. Western news organisations have increasingly embraced the Internet as another means of distributing newsworthy information. In contrast, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is an Islamic-based culture with a political system organised around the Saudi monarchy. The economy is mainly petroleum-based with an emphasis on export to developed industrial nations. With the influx of petrodollars, Saudi Arabia has become one of the most advanced and modern countries in the Middle East. As a result, technology has been enthusiastically embraced and Saudi-based news services have incorporated online news into more traditional formats. Although it is not generally understood, Saudi Arabia has become increasingly technologically savvy, culturally diverse and subject to media agencies’ influence on how their products are produced and presented. In addition, it could be argued that journalists’ socio-cultural backgrounds have an impact on how the news is presented, resulting in news being presented in a way that appeals to the attitudes, values and beliefs of their intended audiences (Sosale 2007, p. 11-52). In a seemingly culturally insular country such as the KSA, this dichotomy between media and society is particularly interesting.

While I will review national cultural ideologies and practices extensively, I will also expand the definition of culture to encompass smaller influential groups such as economic and commercial entities that exert significant influence on what is or is not published. Arguably, commercial enterprises have developed their own unique cultures that are flexible and sensitive to market needs, wants and changing expectations (Berg 2006, p. 22). When such a culturally-orientated organisation finds its potential market
changing, it is logical to assume that it will try to adapt to such changes, subsequently influencing its staff to generate a product that will be more appealing and accepting to the target market (Koch 1995, p. 44). In addition, the increasing influence of governments, eager to control and manipulate the flow of information, also applies influential pressure through the creation of legislation that can hinder, or at least influence, journalistic practices (Goldsmith & Wu 2006, p. 7).

The majority of traditional news media organisations such as newspapers, television, radio and other print media own or operate online news websites. These websites are essentially online extensions of the current organisations. They are constantly changing and updating information provided on a daily or sometimes hourly basis. The names of these websites tend to closely mimic the names of the founding organisation, primarily to maximise market recognition (Stovall 2004, pp. 20-26).

In Saudi Arabia as in many other nations, any cultural organisation whether it is a religious, political or commercial, incorporates a specific set of values that is related directly to that organisation’s ideological perspectives. These standards reinforce expected behaviours related directly to the desired outcomes, expectations or objectives of the organisation in question (Mellor 2005, p. 6). Corporate culture, for example, usually imposes a set of behavioural expectations on stakeholders in order to reinforce regimented operational procedures. Sub-cultures also develop, operating independently or cooperatively within the organisation. The communication interface between groups is one of the roles public relations strategies can fill in order to promote operational efficiency and productivity (Jaillet 1993, p. 48).

Modern Saudi Arabian media organisations, for example, are no longer focused on one particular branch of the media. Television, radio, newspaper and other print media are usually encompassed under one umbrella organisation that controls output, focus and journalistic style (Ghiglione 2010, p. 5). Online journalism is no different. Arguably, online journalism is not a singular entity, but is instead another means by which the information gathered and assessed by the other forms of media is simply transformed to reach a new audience market (Lazaroiu 2009a, p. 154).
1.3.1 Purpose and Significance of the Study

The aim of this study is to find out how cultural factors might influence and/or hinder online journalists' attitudes, values, ethical standards and practices in Saudi Arabia from the perspective of journalists. The purpose of this research is to provide insight into the factors that motivate and influence journalists to present news stories in specific ways.

Journalism at its core is focused on reporting the facts of an issue or event without bias, and on playing a pivotal role in maintaining and supporting the democratic ideal of free speech and political and social transparency (Henningham 1998, p. 340). Adam (1993, p. 13) argues that journalism is characterised by four key elements, namely ‘reporting, judging, a public voice, and the here and now’. Culture impacts on these roles in unique ways, placing the journalist under increasing pressure to remain ethical and true to the profession. Multimedia corporations with a commercial interest in a particular issue can exert pressure on journalists in their employment to structure stories that support certain perspectives. Herein lies the need to compromise, which threatens to undermine the core concept of reporting the truth in an unbiased and objective manner. In this case, the corporate culture of an organisation is to blame, but this can, in turn, be influenced by large cultural concerns relating to religious, political or social ideology.

This creates a potential conflict of interest between the fundamental principles, ethics and ideals of journalism. Understanding exactly what the profession of journalism is, its role and importance will be explored in this thesis, highlighting how these fundamental beliefs determine the validity of the profession within modern society and justify its role as a watchdog over free speech and open and transparent government. Through understanding what journalism is and why it is important, I will explore why culture can pose a threat to these values and why the principles of journalism should be
aggressively defended. Deuze (2005, p. 443) states that journalism carries out two separate yet vitally important roles within the greater society. The first is an ideological purpose; the second, a public service. He notes (2005, p. 443):

In the particular context of journalism as a profession, ideology can be seen as a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular group, including - but not limited to - the general process of the production of meaning and ideas (within a group).

My investigation will pursue four central ideas on the effects of culture on online journalism in Saudi Arabia, seeking outcomes that will clearly define the issues and possible courses of action that might be taken to safeguard online journalistic practice from influence or manipulation. This will include:

1. analysis of the extent of cultural influence on online journalistic practices in Saudi Arabia. This area is largely unexplored within the available literature and further investigation will help to clarify and define cultural influence and how online journalism practices might be safeguarded from undue pressure;
2. a consideration of the impact of culture on online journalism with particular concern for notions of journalistic freedom and freedom of speech. I will also investigate the development of multimedia corporations that heavily influence content and the way news is disseminated, the validity of such news, and the challenge to journalistic creditability and ethics and regulation;
3. providing guidelines for journalists and news organisations when considering the influence of culture on what is being reported on and how; and
4. offering online journalists a clearer understanding of how to limit or eliminate barriers and challenges facing their profession from local cultural influences.

The idea to analyse cultural influence and focus on freedom of expression will help me to investigate and to draw conclusions on how it helps or hinders Saudi online journalists’ attitudes and practices. The other two ideas will assist in creating suggestions for online journalists who may not be aware of their rights and to assist them to gain better understanding of online journalism practices in Saudi Arabia.

1.3.2 Research Objectives
The research into cultural influences on journalistic practice aims to fulfil the following key objectives:
1. to canvass scholarly literature that considers cultural influences on online journalism practices in Saudi Arabia;
2. to develop an understanding of the current level of awareness that exists amongst journalists in Saudi Arabia in relation to the effect of culture on their professional conduct;
3. to evaluate how Saudi Online journalists understand the influence of culture on their news practices;
4. to emphasise that the underlying intention of this project is goal-orientated, in that it intends to influence opinion and offer possible solutions on how to deal with cultural influences on online journalistic practices;
5. to collect a wide range of opinions and views about cultural challenges for Saudi Online Journalist, to analyse them for their validity, and to synthesise from this an appropriate theoretical framework;
6. to collect empirical evidence to examine how the culture of journalists in Saudi Arabia affects their online journalistic practice; and
7. to offer a number of recommendations that will assist decision makers in developing codes of practice that specifically cope with the challenges that cultural influences impose on online journalistic practices.

These research objectives will assist in exploring the impact of culture Saudi online journalists and how this affects their work and values.

1.3.3 Research Questions

The central research question of this thesis is: **How cultural factors influence and hinder online journalists' attitudes, values, ethical standards and practices in Saudi Arabia.**

As this question covers a broad area, this question is broken into two separate parts to achieve the research aims and objectives:

Q1: How do cultural considerations influence online journalistic practice in Saudi Arabia?

- Investigate the cultural factors that influence online journalistic practice in Saudi Arabia
• Identify what factors hinder or facilitate online journalistic practice.
• Investigate how online journalists from the KSA cope with cultural challenges.
• Investigate the role of decision-makers in the online journalism industry in either protecting online news reporting practices from — or opening them up to — cultural influences.

Q2: What is the impact of local culture on Saudi online journalists’ professional attitudes, values and practices?

• Investigate the impact cultural influences have on online news websites in KSA and how journalists select and present the news.
• Investigate the impact of audiences on online journalistic practice (through such influences as trends, news evaluation, comments, audience numbers and feedback).
• Investigate the cultural impact of decision-makers on journalistic practices through the structure and formation of online news websites (through such factors as news, coverage, level of content, positioning or space given).

And in order to explore the research questions, this research will focus on online journalists who are involved in mainstream online media reporting (private or state sponsored).

1.3.4 The Theoretical Framework
Research which focuses on the relationship between culture and online media, or media in general, is plentiful. In this study, I conducted an in-depth examination of this relationship in a Saudi Arabian context. However, a theoretical framework for the basis of my data analysis must first be identified, specifically in regards to the definition of the dichotomy between culture and media, as well as the relationship between online media and more traditional forms of media presentation and dissemination. Unquestionably, culture, as I will argue, has a distinct effect on how online journalism is produced - both macro and micro levels of culture impact on media and vice versa. Society, culture and individuals operate surrounded by media; and media operate in an environment ‘surrounded’ by culture. In particular online media is inextricably linked to
culture as that is the realm in which it operates, and thus is not immune from its influences. The work of journalists in the online arena is a direct representation of these influences; therefore an examination of the relevance of culture to their work will assist in revealing cultural impact. Recognising the assumptions above, Hanitzsch (2007, p. 370) has sought to explore the relationship between journalists and culture by examining it universally. In defining this relationship he concludes:

Journalism culture becomes manifest in the way journalists think and act; it can be defined as a particular set of ideas and practices by which journalists, consciously and unconsciously, legitimate their role in society and render their work meaningful for themselves and others.

He identifies the impact of culture as occurring on three levels: cognitive, evaluative and performative (Hanitzsch 2007, p. 50). Cognitively, culture is the basis of a foundational value and belief system that impacts on observation, analysis and subsequent interpretation of media creation and presentation, as well as perceptions of the journalistic profession. On this level, cultural shifts or biases are paramount as they make up the cognitive basis on which a journalist works. On an evaluative level, culture is the basis of ideological and organisational worldviews for journalists, as it supports their practice framework at an occupational level. Examples of these professional guidelines include the concepts of ‘objective’ journalism or blogging. Evaluative cultural influence often occurs within the workplace, but can also occur on a more media-wide scale. For instance, journalistic practice has been criticised for lacking objectivity, and for journalists engaging in unethical behaviour that has resulted in the profession losing the respect of the very audience to which it reports (Feighery 2009, p. 167; Goldstein 2007, p. 92). Large-scale debate or reforms of these issues — for example, recent high-profile media inquiries in Australia (Finkelstein) and the UK (Leveson) — would represent evaluative cultural influence. Finally, the performative level is the manifestation of the above cultural factors on actual media production, for example, the use of online media formatting and varying methods of online reports (Hanitzsch et al. 2010, p. 273). However, the form and function of journalism is gradually being forced to adapt to changing social pressures, economic conditions, the advent of new technology and the need to remain relevant and effective within a world that is becoming increasing reliant on mass-distributed, largely unedited, online content (Hans-Henrik 2002, p. 67). I will explore these cultural norms or shifts affecting media professionals and their subsequent work using this framework of the identification of cultural impact.
As mentioned earlier, I will examine the impact of different cultural influences on journalism, but it must also be noted that there has been a paradigm shift in media. The old order of gatekeeper media is shifting, or arguably has shifted, to a new open sourced format (Hanitzsch 2007, p. 367). The previous model of media ‘elites’ deciding on what material to print and disseminate, thus influencing cultural content and meaning, is changing to a new media model where the audience is involved in production as well as consumption (Meyers 2012, p. 1022). Wikipedia is one example where an online media source is produced through collaboration of non-professional individuals and is widely accepted as factual and accurate by the public (Luyt 2012, p. 1868). Thus, some argue with justification that journalistic acumen is no longer a requirement for media production in an online context. This creates an interesting research question in that the old forms of journalistic professionalism and ethos may or may not be applied to current media content production. Ethically, journalists are still professionally, and perhaps organisationally, required to present the public with accurate news stories. Practically, the new internet model of news dissemination may have changed this ethos (Wasserman & Rao 2008, p. 163). Therefore, in identifying the relationship between culture and online journalism, it must be recognised that professional and perhaps ethical paradigm shifts have occurred in media production. The theoretical framework for this study must then reflect the fact that ‘old order’ journalism has been dramatically altered, and that traditional, professional, organisational and individual models can and will be different in the current age of globalisation and increased technology.

1.4 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis consists of a theoretical and an empirical component. It has six chapters. It presents a comprehensive literature review in Chapters 1 to 3. Chapters 4 to 6 apply the research methodologies adopted, and from the data, synthesise and discuss the impact of culture on online journalism practice in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The thesis has been organised as follows:

Chapter 1 contains introductory information such as statements of this study, purpose and significance of the study, research objectives and questions, and theoretical framework according to culture and journalistic practice in Saudi Arabia.

Chapter 2 presents an overview of cultural practices, wherein is described the concept of culture, its role and its impact. It also canvasses the concepts of cultural organisation,
how a culture can adapt and evolve, as well as culture in politics. Part of the second chapter also looks at the integration between media and culture and its influence on online journalism.

Chapter 3 focuses on global media and technology. I describe media and technology and its processes, global media culture and the effects of media. The attention is drawn to online journalism, the Internet, and online newsrooms in Europe. I discuss the technological challenges facing journalistic practices. In this chapter, I describe in detail the chosen case study of Saudi Arabia, its culture, customs and language, and how these values can impact on Internet journalism, Saudi online news and the Muslim online press. It will explore the question of whether culture changes over time or through influence. This section of the thesis will offer a theoretical background for the study.

Chapter 4 outlines the research methodology. It describes in detail the research stages, problems the research identified, the research design and the methodological processes. Also, I describe the research sample and detail the methods used for the data collection.

Chapter 5 is the core of this thesis. In this, I will present the research data and its analysis.

Chapter 6 offers a discussion of the research findings, in relation to the overall theoretical framework I have adduced. This chapter offers conclusions and recommendations for practice and future research. I point out the scientific benefits of the thesis.

The research focus of this thesis is unique. While there are numerous studies on the effect of culture on online journalism, few studies, if any, have been conducted specifically in Saudi Arabia. Through extrapolation, my specific research findings can be extended to offer insights into the impact of culture on online journalism more broadly. In this way, my study can make a contribution to advancing our knowledge and understanding of this important dimension of our society.
Chapter 2
Impacts of Culture on Online Journalism Practice

2.1 Introduction
The aim of this literature review is to ascertain a broad-based consensus on the issues concerning the impact of culture on online journalism, leading, in the following chapter, to my proposed theoretical framework for this study. In order to develop a broad understanding of the issues involved, a wide range of academic material has been reviewed. Topics ranging from the definition of what culture is, the challenges facing online journalism, issues of freedom of speech and the threat to journalistic ethics were sourced and investigated. In order to ensure that the material sourced was suitable, the data gathered had to be, as Kelly and Yin (2007, p. 133) argue, ‘sufficient, credible and accurate. Claims are linked to data by a credible and appropriate warrant’. Subsequently, it was clear that any data gathered had to be presented in a balanced and objective manner. For this to occur, rival opinions and viewpoints were explored where possible so as to provide an equitable and balanced analysis of the material.

In order to understand the relationship between culture and its influence on online journalistic practice, an analysis of exactly what culture is, the different types of culture that exist, how these cultures adapt and evolve and manipulate individuals, groups, their relationship with technology, communities and societies is required. This will enable insights into how culture influences and challenges online journalistic practice through enforcing cultural beliefs in both organisations and individuals. This will be followed by an explanation of the nature of online journalism, how it fits into the broader world of journalism practice generally, and how it has become an effective means for disseminating information around the globe.

Technology has enabled information to be distributed around the world practically instantaneously. It is the nature of this speed that has influenced its development and use. Williams (1974, p 18) noted that the development, utilisation and continued advancement of the Internet are powered by economic and political pressure, concluding:

According to Williams, technologies are developed and implemented in a complex of determinations that are not only scientific and technical but also economic, political and cultural factors. To assume that technology is the sole cause of cultural and social change with highly predictable
results is a deeply flawed assumption, though it is widely believed and to a considerable extent simply taken for granted.

Clearly, cultural influences — amongst others — determine how technologies are incorporated into daily life. And vice versa, technologies also help to influence culture through exposing the masses to certain points of view, alternate lifestyles and discourses.

2.2 Cultural Practice: Overview
Cultural practice only comes into being when enough individuals within a society consciously or unconsciously (through social conditioning, usually from a young age) agree to hold a set of beliefs or follow a set of predefined and enforceable actions. Many belief systems from around the world have evolved in this way, where a set of understandings has been imposed on a group that in turn, has evolved and imposed these on others. After a certain period of time, these beliefs and behaviours become accepted as the norm that leads to conflict on a variety of levels if an individual or smaller sub-group tries to break from the accepted norm. This has been the case throughout history, especially with religious cultures and smaller sects that have tried to alter or separate themselves from the accepted cultural practices (Hinshelwood 2009, p. 131).

Different cultural conditioning affects individuals in different ways. How an individual sees themselves, their family, community and society in relation to the rest of the world determines what they value, believe and how they respond to certain subjects. While the profession of journalism is one that values the ability to aim for objectivity and fairness in reporting a wide range of views on a topic, cultural conditioning has to be considered as a real challenge to be overcome. Different societies place importance on various aspects of human existence, the rights of individuals over the collective and vice versa. In order to develop a balanced understanding of how culture affects journalists, examination of a particular culture is perhaps the most effective way in which the effects of culture on journalism can be explored. As much research has been done around the Western, and largely English-speaking world, this study presents the otherwise underrepresented Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The KSA has a culture based around an Islamic heritage and has a highly structured and organised society with views on particular issues, which contrast greatly with Western paradigms.
Subsequently, a reasonable theoretical assumption in that Saudi Arabian journalists have independent views on a variety of topics and may place more value on certain stories than journalists in other countries may do. This in-depth study of journalism in the KSA will help to explore whether journalists as online commentators are acutely influenced by their cultural background and heritage.

2.2.1 The Concept of Culture
Williams (1966, p. 16) famously redefined culture in the early 1960s as, ‘a whole way of living’, inaugurating the academic’s ‘turn’ from literary to cultural studies. More specifically, culture is a series of learned behaviours of collective attitudes, values and beliefs specific to a particular group, organisation, community or society. On a most basic level, it is a series of socially enforced rules that ensure a certain set of behaviours that will reinforce the cultural group’s sense of identity and therefore its ability to work collaboratively and survive (Geertz 1977, pp. 4-5).

In essence, unusual or rebellious behaviour is seen as a threat to the collective understanding of a belief system and the culture on which it is based. This threat undermines the core aspect of a culture, which requires individuals to submit to a particular set of views. Subsequently, individuals presented with alternate viewpoints through the interactions with other groups, cultures or societies, can find issues arising from conflicting interests. Within the context of cultural influence on online journalism, individuals working in this field, coming from a culture whose beliefs are rigid and strongly reinforced, may find it difficult to apply broad or even global journalistic and objective ideals to a particular story without cultural bias (Howd 1999, p. 16). Culture, however, is not confined to a nationality or religion. There are many sub-groups of culture and these also have influence over how an individual, organisation or society acts. Journalists need to be aware of these influences and subsequently have sound cross-cultural competence when reporting on cultures different from their own (Stockwell & Scott 2000, pp. 10-13; Deuze 2005).

Perhaps the most common use of the word ‘culture’ is to characterise a group based on religious beliefs or nationality. The concept of culture, however, extends far beyond these initial points of reference. Race, religion, age, sexuality, political ideology, social standing and class within a society are all examples of culture. Journalists, as individuals, fit into any number of these sub-cultural groups.
Depending on an individual’s upbringing, social conditioning, personal attitudes, values and beliefs, how he or she carries out their job can be influenced by a number of variables. Personal views on religion, race, politics and morals, for instance, all affect how an individual might view a story. The underlying principle of journalism is that the journalist needs to remain objective in the search for, and reporting of, the truth. As Robinson (2006a, pp. 65-66) states:

Mainstream journalism has developed traditional values that mould the entire profession. Journalists must abide by a code to be objective, independent, accurate and truthful. They have a responsibility to society to provide significant, relevant information that can be used to inform democracy. Through these standards, journalists end up setting the agenda for societal debate.

Personal cultural attitudes can hinder this process, especially if they are reinforced by the culture in which the journalist operates. Within the realm of online journalism, the Internet is a melting pot of ideas, beliefs, conflicting values and ideals that make it difficult for journalists to remain professional and objective in the course of carrying out their role (Swatz 2006).

To take a broad-brush sweep, it is probably fair to say that it was the work of Marx and the rise of anthropology as a discipline in the 1840s that inaugurated a re-evaluation of a concept of culture that had endured since classical times. Classical thought created a dichotomy between nature/civilisation; hence, in terms of this principle, different ‘cultures’ could be placed on a hierarchy (‘progressing’ towards ‘civilisation’), differentiated on the same basis. The central problem for study thus becomes a normative one — how to value diversity over universality. Essentially, the question is whether this dichotomy can in any way be resolved in a normative sense into an underpinning ‘universal’ human cultural attribute, or merely a collocation of equal-value cultures. This logical conundrum leads directly to contemporary modern and post-modern thinking about culture.

Bauman’s (1999, pp. 1-30) study is an exhaustive and useful exploration of these early facets in culture debates. He nominates three co-existing concepts of culture — hierarchical (Cicero, Plato), differential (Locke) and generic (Boaz), remarking that the conflicts and inconsistencies between the three is ‘exactly the most cognitively rich, fruitful, and thus academically exciting part of their content’ (p. 13). However, the deepening and widening of the concept of culture pioneered by Marx, continued by
Williams (1960), and into the post-modern contemporary world, offers a much more sophisticated perspective on the complex interactions and interrelationships between culture and individuals, society, technological change, economics, media, and so on. In particular, the thorny problem of avoiding or reconciling a dichotomy between universality and relativity of culture has not disappeared, but has become even more central to the debate, extending far from the halls of academia and into the discourses of international law and human rights.

2.2.2 The Role and Impact of Culture
At the dawn of the twenty-first century, cultural challenges have become some of the most important the world faces — on a par with political, economic, social, and technological issues — and many media scholars have noted that mass media cannot be excluded from, nor avoid, these challenges (Abuosba 1999, p. 11). For example, in Saudi Arabia, culture is an important part of Islamic (religion, ethics) and Arab civilization (language, history, heritage). This society believes that Saudi culture needs to connect and communicate with other cultures for the dissemination of information and to enrich Arab culture as a whole. The Sixth development plan of Saudi policy (1995-2000) contained an explicit concept of culture involving knowledge, values, a code of ethics, ways of thinking, behaviour, methods of expression, and a societal system with the stability of belief and religion (The Sixth Development Plan of Saudi policy 1995-2000). According to this policy, the Saudi media needed to develop infrastructure in various fields, including the content of media messages (Abdulhamied 1997, p. 357).

But against this, cultural globalisation is also one of the most challenging processes now facing media all over the world, predictably both positively and negatively impacting on Saudi Arabia, as elsewhere. As Alhudaithy (Alhudaithy 2002, p. 65) notes, there are three main concepts that must be taken on board by Saudi media in order to overcome the challenges of cultural globalisation. Firstly, the imaginary collective needs to be controlled, for example, through television; the power of this medium makes it crucial to the task of explaining the impacts of globalisation to general Saudi audiences.

Secondly, attention needs to be paid to the daily content of the medium — that is to say, what role the reporting of daily life aspects such as crime, violence and road accidents, should play in overall coverage. Lastly, the mass media was encouraged to look at its
imagery and language of communication in order to better tailor this to, or target, their specific, everyday audiences.

Korayem (Korayem 2005, pp. 72-76) notes there are two main reasons that Saudi Arabian media should rethink their processes of dealing with the challenges of cultural globalisation. The first is that Saudi media practice should work hand-in-hand with Saudi media policy, which reflects the country’s religious, ideological, cultural, and social values. Ostensibly, there should not be a contradiction between government policy and media practice. The second major reason for Saudi media to look to examining their own practices is simply the sheer power of cultural globalisation across all media — its effects on the values of different cultures, such as the Saudi audiences, is potentially massive even if unmeasurable. The ‘global village’ created by the mass media that Marshall McLuhan predicted in 1962 has now truly come into being. And this internationalising of the mass media implies a kind of levelling, homogenising, and professionalising of media practices across the globe, casting aside historical, individual and cultural media practices (Korayem 2005, p. 141).

The cultural challenges facing the media in Saudi Arabia fall into three main categories: the educational and cultural level of Saudi society; the incapacity or inability of society to keep up with the information revolution; and Saudi media economic factors which have positive and negative effects in terms of collecting and sourcing information of appropriate quantity and quality (Korayem 2005, p. 142).

2.2.3 Cultural Organisation

On the evaluative level, organisational culture becomes paramount when journalists are making decisions about news production or dissemination (Hanitzsch 2007). Like journalists, corporate organisations have also been recognised as fostering cultural ideals, in that a focus on the pursuit of profits and the need to remain competitive within a capitalistic system creates an environment where employees are expected to conform to a stringent set of rules or behaviours that support the organisation’s goals (Goldmark 2000, p. 72). Within the context of this investigation, perhaps the clearest example is that of multimedia organisations driven not by journalistic ethics, but by market awareness, profitability and their ability to provide high returns for their shareholders (Morris 2007, pp. 704-705).
Corporate organisations, as a cultural sub-class within broader culture, are a subversive, subtle and powerful influence on both how their employees operate and how they manipulate their target market. Socio-economic, religious, ethnic, age or political attributes are all assessed and analysed for the most effective way in which to control or at least manipulate the consumer market (Toth 2007, pp. 517-518). This corporate culture, especially in the context of online journalistic practice, arguably has a significant influence on how a journalist goes about disseminating the news. The journalist’s role as a contributor to the public sphere has become undermined by the advent of corporate influence across the Internet. Hackett and Carroll (2006, p. 5) note that this influence is growing in size and significance:

Particularly relevant to the public sphere is the sustained attack on journalism’s ethos of public service. Since the 1990s, waves of mergers have yielded more and more media owned by transnational, bottom-line driven conglomerates. As media becomes part of corporate empires with multiple and far-reaching tentacles, conflicts of interest and organisational self-censorship risk becoming epidemic.

Journalists who are bonded to an organisation as employees are under significant pressure and expectation to ‘toe the company line’ in producing work that is in accord with the organisation’s attitudes, values, beliefs and objectives (Solomon 2000, p. 57).

Managing change in organisational culture is an entire academic field outside the scope of this study, but it is worth making two points that seem transferable to the core concern of cultural change and its impacts on the on-line newsroom. Firstly, changes in organised cultural behaviour can occur on all levels (Grunig 1992). Secondly, Grunig (1992) adds that exogenous approaches contribute significantly to an explanation for the change in culture within organisations. The disruption and discrediting of the extant cultures and the institutions have been highlighted using such models with the help of external and unanticipated ‘shocks’. The new institutionalist macro and meso level analysis is generally done based on natural disasters, sudden economic downturns, demographic shifts, wars or dramatic legal changes. Under situations like these, the extant cultural models and the practices must be reassessed. There are two kinds of responses: either the old models and practices are combined into new models and practices or new models and practices are invented so that they can handle the new altered context (DiMaggio 1991, p. 270). Hence, just as journalists’ organisational structure and output work in a biased manner as far as professional culture is concerned,
it is generally done for profit. This affects the style of journalism to a great extent. Thus, it is necessary to carefully review organisational models and to make amendments where it is found that this culture negatively affects the veracity of journalistic output.

2.2.4 Culture in Politics

My assumption throughout this thesis is that the interplay between culture and media is unquestionable. As mentioned earlier, the KSA and its political and cultural structures have long been considered mysterious by much of the Western world. However, the relationship between politics and culture is an important point of analysis due to the interaction between social, bureaucratic and individual cultural spheres. Governments across the globe tend to be either democratic or dictatorial, whereas the KSA is a constitutional monarchy, which differs from the Westminster system of government in Australia, for example. The particular nature of the KSA political sphere is indeed an anomaly in a globalised context, therefore study of the interplay between politics and culture in this environment would almost certainly benefit an understanding of journalism and the way in which it operates in this particular cultural context — and by extrapolation, in other cultural contexts.

Political structures operate in a symbiotic relationship with societal needs and trends. Specifically, in an efficiently operating political system, the culture of the society which is being governed should dictate the way in which its government operates. The converse of this should also be true to a certain extent. In a peaceful society, political bodies cannot operate without the approval of the governed, for public satisfaction is necessary in order for a bureaucracy to operate effectively (Muhtadi 2008). Communication between the public and the government, often fostered by media as the central organising element of the public sphere, is necessarily influenced by a society’s or groups’ political and personal culture (Habermas 1984). Likewise, news dissemination is a dynamic element in the socialisation process of political activities: for example, new policies or initiatives must be brought to public attention. The idea of organisational political culture is not a concept to be explored in this thesis, as it is not necessarily relevant to the work of online journalists. However, political culture is strongly correlated with regulation and decisions regarding what news is released, at what time and to which demographic (Hall 1993, p. 97). This occurs both internally (within a bureaucracy) and externally (from the government to the public). This cultural
and communicative relationship can be seen in the diagram provided by Muhtadi (2008, p. 35):

![Diagram](attachment://diagram.png)

**Figure 3**: Interaction between political culture and communication

This is also visible in times of social upheaval or over a period of slow but noticeable cultural shifts. Governments evolve either violently — the recent case of Egypt might be one example of this — or through political processes, and the interaction between the culture of the governed obviously commands how this evolution occurs. For example, in the case of public policy debates, proponents of transparency between the public and government, largely through media outlets, have felt that the interaction between the public and information must be analysed in order to improve communication between these parties. The study of the interplay of culture in governance is clearly necessary, and academics should be encouraged to explore it. However, there are limitations as to what can be gained from examining how the public reacts to government news dissemination. In the case of the KSA, much of the bureaucratic process is static and is changing at a slower rate than Saudi culture. Regardless, analysis can play a part in policy construction with the knowledge that, as Garnham (1993, p. 489) posited, there should be no…

overestimation of the kinds of contributions intellectuals can be expected to make to policy, as if these could – or, indeed, should – override the imperfect and compromised nature of any policy-making or political process.

### 2.2.5 How Culture Adapts and Evolves

Culture, like all entities that have a human component, is subject to change. Cultures worldwide are in a state of flux, in that internal and external pressures are challenging long-accepted beliefs and behaviours (Grunig 1992, pp. 580-582). Culture changes over time. Cultures that have remained isolated and insulated from outside influences change
rapiddly when exposed to other points of view, behaviours, beliefs and technology. Cultural stability remains constant as long as the foundations of attitudes, values and beliefs of the main influential group remain unchanged. Belief systems especially are under constant siege, and modern telecommunication technology is at the forefront of this assault. The attitudes and values of a culture can quickly be undermined if the accepted beliefs of a group come into question. The ability for individuals to observe and communicate with others who have alternative backgrounds and beliefs can plant the seed of uncertainty that leads to an individual questioning what he or she has long believed to be a righteous and unchanging norm. Once this idea takes hold, a ripple effect can occur that ultimately and inevitably leads to the culture changing (Garyanties 2010).

Resistance to changing the original culture, by those who have a vested interest in its continued operation, or those who have been exposed the longest to the social conditioning of living within a set cultural belief system, will pose the strongest obstacle to change. This is why, arguably, young people are always perceived as being the ones mostly likely to embrace change, in either a positive or negative sense, and that older generations tend to retain core values and beliefs. The indisputable fact is that cultures change, even in isolation, and how that change is managed is perhaps the most important issue for the survival and health of any society (Toth 2007, p. 521).

Technology is usually embraced by the youth of a society and subsequently, they are exposed to these different ideas earlier and more frequently than the older demographic. These sub-cultures develop needs and wants that must be accommodated. This social pressure reinforces a new set of belief systems, similar to the ways in which an initial set of cultural beliefs developed. The older culture has had more time to become engrained into the social fabric and to be reinforced and to reinforce behaviours that have been accepted over generations. Alternatively, the malleable young can easily adapt to new cultural or social constructs, for example, online communities or mobile media availability.

Online journalism can be seen as perhaps one of the most powerful instigators of this type of worldwide cultural change. Journalists, therefore, have to take care in how they report on cultural matters in a cross-cultural context (Kaplan 2001, pp. 25-27). Cultures that have been exposed to, or which have had, technology thrust rapidly upon them through the dynamics of globalisation have suddenly been provided with insight into the affairs of other nations and cultures, potentially exposing them to a broad range of
ideological manipulation. Fashion, moral attitudes (or their absence), political systems, economic and capitalistic ideals, religious discussions and levels of social interaction and other interaction all have the ability to create conflict within more conservative cultures (Keen 2008, p. 45).

In addition, online journalism can provide great benefits to a culture through education, enlightening new populations on better ways in which to interact with the world around them, or in contrast, creating levels of disharmony and social conflict that can undermine societies to a point of cultural collapse. It is the duty of the online journalist to ensure that the information presented is done as fairly and accurately as possible, taking into account cultural sensitivities, attitudes, values and beliefs so that cultures can still retain their core beliefs without being overwhelmed by ideas and assumptions — that is, ideologies (Hall 1982) — from the rest of the world (Clark 2010, pp. 5-8).

Online journalists are in a difficult, if not unique position, where their cultural backgrounds have to be placed to one side and journalistic ethics viewed as the guiding light for presenting information to the world in as objective and unbiased a manner as possible. At issue, of course, is whether this is possible, given the tenuous nature of journalistic objectivity. In their seminal work, Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media, Herman and Chomsky (1994, p. 2) discuss the ‘filters’ placed on those consuming and producing the media, positing:

The elite domination of the media and marginalization of dissidents that results from the operation of these filters occurs so naturally that media news people, frequently operating with complete integrity and goodwill, are able to convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news objectively, and on the basis of professional news values.

These ‘filters’ are not only organisational but also are cultural, thus hindering journalistic ethical practice (Romano 2003; Romano and Bromley 2005). For example, Romano’s study (2003, p. 152) explored how journalists feel indifferent to receiving envelopes containing ‘transport money’, which can result in their writing about or omitting certain topics. And such was the norm that some journalists felt that it was ‘WAJAR – something normal and proper’ and would ask for it in a press conference if it were not provided. Others, of course felt that this beggar-like behaviour creates the impression that ‘journalists can be bought’. However, it should not be assumed that this systemic conflict between journalistic ethics and practice remains static nor is it easily transportable across cultures. New attitudes and beliefs, cultural presumptions and the implementation of their iterations create a dynamic. Each culture has its own set of
ideas and beliefs but these days few beliefs are questioned in order to find out whether they are right or wrong. The youth of today tend to unquestioningly embrace positive as well as negative changes, and this is the reason why culture is changing. The original norms which are considered to be ‘right’ are retained, but those that are doubtful tend to shift. Thus, online journalists need to work with care as the information they publish as part of a broader cultural process influences the mindset of their audiences, and therefore has a profound impact on the image and the nature of that culture.

2.3 Culture, Online Journalism, Media and their Influences

Culture generally refers to patterns of behaviour within a particular society. Specifically, it can be used to determine a set of attitudes, values and beliefs of a particular sub-group within the greater entity of society. Culture in the broad sense, as well as in the context of minorities, can relate to a group’s particular characteristics such as race, religion, age, sexuality, interests, economic status or national identity. From a corporate perspective, culture is used to identify target groups that follow particular market trends or habits, purchasing particular products or services based on their socio-economic, religious, ethical or gender classifications (Toth 2007, pp. 345-347).

In short, culture is shifting constantly, based on the influences of technology, religion, economic factors and market trends. Attitudes, values and beliefs — the pillars of culture — are always adapting and changing based on social perceptions and influences. Sriramesh (2007, p. 508) argues that culture is constantly changing, with external influences — economic and otherwise — influencing the ways in which a society interprets its belief systems. Culture can also be seen as being affected by generational change, in that younger generations can be more open to varied interpretations of behaviour, modifying culture to suit their specific community or sub-cultural needs. Corporate culture is the incorporation of specific values and standards of behaviour pertaining to the desired outcomes and objectives of the organisation. Corporate culture is usually, but not always, imposed upon the stakeholders within an organisation, in order to develop a set way of operating. Sub-cultures within corporate entities do develop their own unique approaches and cultural structures relative to their roles within the organisation. The sub-cultures can operate independently or cooperatively within departments inside an organisation. This communication interface between groups is one of the roles public relations strategies can fill. Union representatives, for example, are the ‘face’ of the employees and engage in dialogue with management on
behalf of the employees. Corporate culture is not necessarily an internally developed concept. Organisations that bring in outside employees with specific skill sets and discourses also have their own unique culture relating to their specific role. Corporate sub-cultures within an organisation affect the overall capabilities and operational efficiency of the greater organisation. Subsequently, internal communication has to be effective and of a high standard to both distribute and receive information (Jaillet 1993). To further elucidate, Grunig (1992, p. 586) states:

Wilkins (1983) listed three periods when organisational culture becomes most apparent: when employees change roles after a transfer or promotion, when subcultures conflict or assign stereotypical characteristics to one another, and when the dominant coalition makes and executes key decisions about company direction and style.

External communication for an organisation presents its own set of challenges. An organisation has to foster and build a certain outward perception of who and what it represents. This public image can be significantly different to the internal operations. This is where organisational culture and corporate culture differ. Organisational culture is created around the idea of filling the organisation’s goals and creating a particular public image, while corporate culture is the internal working of the organisations that achieve those goals. In essence, the former is the thinking about what has to be done and the latter is the actual doing (Toth 2007, pp. 32-36).

External Communication
Local Culture
The Organisation
Sub-cultural

Three main cultural challenges factors facing media practice: the educational, cultural level, information revolution.

**Figure 4:** The general idea of academic research in the discussion above, about challenges that are facing media practices

International journalists have a responsibility to respect and report on other cultures in an unbiased manner. This has proved to be challenging for many. Political influence,
the pressure to appear ‘patriotic’, and the need to have access to information has resulted in some journalists creating stories that do not always appear balanced and objective, especially on ethnic and/or cross-cultural affairs (Levenson 2004, p. 122). Perhaps one of the most poignant examples of this is the case of the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, which sparked outrage and protests by many Muslims who felt that their religion been insulted. On the 30th of September 2005, the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published a series of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad. Claims of Islamophobia and subsequent protests and outrage showed how easily it is for journalists to overstep the line of cultural sensitivity. While many argued that the criticisms of the cartoons amounted to an assault on free speech, there is clear indication that in many cases, journalists are not aware of the cultural sensitivity needed when reporting on other cultures (Malek 2007, p. 18).

In the case of the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons, the issue was with the idolatrous nature of the pictures and the fact that they were perceived to be discriminatory. Islamic interpretations of pictorial representations of Muhammad are considered, in most cases, unacceptable to Muslims and to those who respect Islam. Many critics also considered the pictures as being insulting to Muhammad, which is considered one of the most serious of crimes in Islamic law. Journalists, as professional news-gatherers, should be aware of such issues and report accordingly. The suggestion that the cartoons were created as a critique on the boundaries or restrictions of free speech might be an apt excuse for those unaware of the seriousness of the issue from an Islamic point of view. From a more informed position, the obvious inflammatory nature of the cartoons would have resulted in their not being published. As Abdo (2001), a correspondent for *The Guardian* newspaper notes, ‘American journalists often lack training, knowledge and sensitivity needed to tell these stories’. Arguably, the same is true for many Western journalists who report on other cultures, not only Islam.

Another perspective of the lack of cultural awareness and biased attitudes towards Muslims is the way the media present the culture, regardless of nationality. There has been, even prior to the start of the so called ‘War on Terror’, a tendency to portray the sins of one as the sins of a culture. For example, Abdo (2001) notes that the media portrayal of Muslims can at times be confusing and misleading. He asks:

> Help me solve this puzzle: if a non-Muslim commits a crime, he or she alone is held responsible in the media for the act. If, however, a Muslim
commits the same crime, every man, woman and child who follows that
religion will stand guilty in newspapers and on radio and television.

Thus it is evident from the discussion above that there are many factors that influence
the formation and interpretation of culture. The prime factors are political, economical,
social, organisational, technological and communicational. Different places have
different principles that influence culture accordingly. Thus, good journalism needs to
take these influences into consideration before making statements to the world. The
following section discusses further the effects of culture on online journalism.

2.3.1 Cultural Influences on Online Journalism

From the discussion so far, it is clear that there are many factors that influence culture.
Direct and indirect influences do not necessarily suggest that a strong culture is the only
cause of bias. In contrast, an individual who comes from a culture that is less rigid,
more open and adaptive can cause the same issues to arise. Lack of understanding or
respect for more organised and collective cultures can cause bias through criticism,
ridicule or simply a lack of understanding of how cultural dynamics work. A case in
point would be the Western media’s lack of understanding when reporting on the
Islamic world. In coverage of news events over the past decade, Islamic cultures have
arguably tended to be lumped together under the general label of ‘Muslims’. This
ignores a fundamental understanding that cultures that share the same values and beliefs
do not necessarily share the same political ideology, nor as special social groups, do
they condone the actions of others (Akbarzadeh & Smith 2005, pp. 6-7). Furthermore,
as ‘the Internet has proselytised the notion that anyone could be a journalist’, the
knowledge of culture in reporting news over the Internet may not even be deemed
necessary (Knight 2009, pp. 17-36).

Culture affects how media professionals operate, but it is also influenced by how it is
portrayed by individuals from rival cultures. A general lack of cultural awareness and
biased attitudes towards Muslims is an example of how cultural clashes can create a
situation where inaccurate or untrue statements about a culture can be disruptive
(Hildebrandt 2009, pp. 23-25). Even before the so called ‘War on Terror’, there was a
tendency to portray the sins of one as the sins of many, conveniently targeting a culture
as the culprit. The Western media, however, are reporting to an equally uninformed
population in the developed world, and subsequently reinforcing unfair and inaccurate
stereotypes that do nothing to assist in accurately describing and analysing world
events. The Islamic world is not alone in being subject to this uninformed means of reporting. Africa, too, has suffered from a Western journalistic stereotypical reporting approach. The limited ways in which news is reported is due largely to the dominance of multinational media corporations. Muga (2009, p. 40) notes that this virtual monopoly of how images of cultures are portrayed around the world will soon come to an end:

What will be most significant about the anticipated faster and cheaper Internet access is that it will accelerate the development of online media resources within the region - in effect, ending the oligopoly of the handful of big media houses currently operating in East Africa.

Culture, in all its varying forms and degrees, affects online journalistic practice mainly through the intentional and unintentional use of personal, social or corporate perspectives to position the target audience in a specific way. Depending on the culture of the journalist, the organisation, society or country where he/she works, there is the increased possibility that the journalist may be pressured to report on local, regional or international news stories in a certain way (Garyantes 2010, pp. 2-43).

The purpose of this research project, therefore, is to explore the impact of culture on journalistic practice. Only by thoroughly exploring the attitudes of the KSA journalists, can some progress be made in addressing this research problem. There are clear examples of reporting on the Internet that suggest cultures do indeed play an influential role in how journalists operate. Emotive issues relating to international affairs such as the current ‘War on Terror’ have seen several examples where Muslims have been stereotypically portrayed via web news stories (Kamalipour 2000, p. 88). But how does this happen? What do journalists say about this process? These are questions I seek to explore in this study.

The need to respond to the fears and biases of a culture in which journalists operate is a powerful one, resulting in stories that are not always balanced or objective in scope. This helps to reinforce cultural perceptions and beliefs that a particular culture is just and righteous and that the actions of its government, military or other influential bodies are justified. Add the need for media organisations to remain competitive and constantly utilised by the public, then the need to generate stories that contain emotive content is high (Schudson 2003, p. 10). Therefore, the task of journalism is not to be biased towards one kind of culture or to portray a stereotypical image of another but to explore, research and then state the facts — as objectively as possible — with an absence of
cultural bias. There should be no fear about cultural prejudice, and the stories which are released to the readers should be from a position of neutrality and not from a social, organisational or stereotypical perspective. Culture should not influence how journalists operate, but it should be the journalists themselves who must shine light on facts both within and outside their culture.

The professionalism of journalism has been built around ethical standards developed and supported over a long period of time, ensuring that the profession remains relevant, believable and respected. The Internet, instead of simply becoming another tool to facilitate the profession, is arguably changing the very nature of what it means to be a journalist, in that anyone can report on events online with little or no journalistic training. Emergence of the concept of ‘citizen journalism’ is one influential development. Sagan and Leighton note that the ability to interact through a medium such as the Internet has impacted significantly on the way the news is formulated and distributed. They conclude (2010, p. 119):

The Internet has endangered the concept of one-way news, be it in print or broadcast. News is now personalised and interactive; the audience is taking charge. Viewers choose from more sources of news than ever before. They share news stories with their social networks, helping to dictate a story’s distribution. They shape the discourse and coverage of the news. And more and more, they are helping to capture, write, and share the news themselves over the Internet.

In addition to the pressures of modern corporate journalism, the Internet has created a situation where anyone can upload information, effectively acting as pseudo-journalists — or ‘citizen journalists’. Online ‘chat rooms’, blogs, and open forums that allow people to upload information anonymously and without having to authenticate information is another aspect that is undermining the very nature of online journalism. The trend for journalists and media organisations to use such unauthenticated sources to supplement their own news stories also presents a problem, in that journalists are actively drawing on information that is heavily influenced by personal opinion, bias and cultural conditioning. A case in point is the Indymedia (IMC) organisation, an increasingly global media group that evolved with the intention of becoming a viable alternative to corporate-driven media organisations (Ballve 2004, p. 29). Pickerill (2006, p. 266) explains that the structure of Indymedia was intentionally built around the ideas of freedom of information without censorship or modification.
Its premise was that media should be a many-to-many process, subverting the traditional media’s one-to-many approach. It was thus designed so that anyone could post information directly online without moderation or limitation, a form of open publishing (Pickerill 2006, p. 266).

The two-way nature of the Internet has empowered individuals and minority groups that otherwise would not have an avenue of expression. Community outlets, for example, allow small groups to voice their concerns and perspectives on local, regional and international matters in ways that may not be reported by more mainstream media sources. Some sites can be revolutionary in nature, as was the case with the Malaysian alternative media outlet, *Malaysiakini*, that has challenged the status quo and encouraged the citizenry to stand up and demand change from their governments (Ling 2003, p. 297). Meadows et al. (2007) argue that these community outlets provide alternative points of view for those searching for alternative or contrasting viewpoints:

The growth of community media outlets in Australia and elsewhere heralds a small fissure in power relations between the mainstream media and ‘communities’ it is a small crack in traditional relations between media producers and their audiences which has placed some power in the hands of local citizens.

Individuals with little or no training in journalism can upload information under the guise of it being news. Tarleton (2000) argues that lack of training in journalism potentially has little to do with retaining objectivity in that culture affects how individuals report on the news, whether they are ‘trained’ in journalism or not. He concludes (2000):

Some will question whether IMC journalism is real journalism since it is not ‘objective’, in the traditional sense of that word, and it doesn’t pretend to be. After all, can those of us who are politically motivated have the objective distance to question our own assumptions? Time will tell. Yet we argue that many corporate journalists have their own deeply ingrained bias toward retaining the status quo.

As Allen (2003, p. 32) points out, traumatic events that affect a society or a culture cause a rapid and powerful response from the populous in question. Such events, as with the September 11 attacks on New York City, saw the Internet used for the first time in a truly powerful manner, where anyone who felt affected by the events unfolding could become ‘citizen-reporters’ and upload their attitudes, viewpoints and perspectives of opinions in a manner that closely resembled news reports. Allen reflects
on the power of the Internet to create a new challenge to online journalism and the validity and accuracy of the information presented (2003, p. 32):

Across the websites on September 11, hundreds of websites were being rapidly re-fashioned as the day wore on. Many ordinary people felt compelled to post their eyewitness accounts, personal photographs, interpretations and analysis. Such ‘citizen-produced coverage’, to use a term frequently heard, was being produced by people who were transforming into ‘amateur newsies’, or instant reporters, photojournalists and opinion columnists. Their contributions to ‘personal journalism’, or ‘do-it-yourself reporting’, appeared from diverse locations, so diverse as to make judgements about their accuracy difficult if not impossible. These types of personal news items were forwarded via e-mail many times over by people who did not actually know the original writer or photography. As John Pavlik of Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism has since pointed out, some of the first person reporting was ‘seriously flawed’.

However, such sources of news (even if they are flawed) can be a useful generator of topics for professional online journalists. Paulussen and Ugille (2008) argue that such news can even create collaboration between amateur and professional journalists. This is mostly due to the fact that the person who is reporting the news has an obvious interest in the news and often is more informed. The authors conclude that, although due to a lack of knowledge the reporting style might be flawed and personal, the process shifts the top down news reporting flow to one which is more of an open conversation. Sometimes, such collaboration happens not via reporting but via comments where a reader provides a different point of view. This thesis will investigate if such partnerships happen in Saudi online journalism and if they do, how it impacts on the practices of professional journalists (Kaufhold, Valenzuela, & De Zúñiga, 2010).

The anonymity of the Internet arguably can be seen to undermine the profession of journalism, in that anyone can post information in a way that makes him or her appear to be a journalist (Woo 2005, p. 31). It is at this point that the influences of culture in all its varying degrees come into play. Whether the journalist is a trained and experienced professional, or a pseudo-journalist maintaining a blog or online forum, the cultural background of the individual can influence and manipulate — directly or indirectly — the way in which the information is formed and presented, creating bias one way or the other on a particular issue (Carpenter 2008, p. 531).
2.3.2 Global Trends in Online Journalism

Journalistic practice has the power to change cultural perspectives and subsequently is viewed as either a saviour or a threat. Beers (2006 p. 109) notes that journalism can be a ‘powerful force in democratic society for or against change, the news media as a subject warrants critical focus in classroom education’. An example of this is the strong steps the Chinese government has made in order to limit access by its people to news information that could otherwise undermine the social and political ideologies of the state (Barboza 2010, p. 4).

Tong (2007, p. 530) comments that journalists have to be seen to be complicit in the government’s wishes if they wish to remain ‘safe’ from state attention:

In this context Chinese journalists are required to always place political compliance about professional values and goals if they are to keep themselves and their organisations safe.

The Chinese government appears determined to limit the level of access to the Internet. There are several possible reasons for this that go beyond the simple assumption that Chinese authorities are fearful of cultural corruption from outside sources (Worf 2002, p. 7). Archie (2009, p. 62) concludes:

In 2009 the climate for freedom of expression in China remains troublesome. Despite continued pressure, both internal and external, on the government of the People’s Republic of China to improve its record on human rights; little progress has been made in reversing the tide of China’s strict censorship policies.

The communist regime has demonstrated a concise and rigorous resistance to opening up its population to outside influences, which has been well documented (Crook 2010, p. 299; Fons 2006; Mulvenon 2008, p. 115). MacKinnon (2008, p. 31) notes that China has been very effective in limiting Internet access from within China, and argues: ‘So far, the Chinese government has succeeded through censorship and regulation in blocking activists from using the Internet as an effective political tool.’

The Internet, with its ability to reach practically anyone who can log on, has generated fears within the Chinese government that resistance to its political domination of the country will be threatened by exposing its population to ideas and beliefs that are not acceptable to the government’s mindset (Pei 2007, p. 53). The issue of Google’s access to China is one such example (Dann & Haddow 2008, p. 219). This resistance by the
Chinese government is indicative of its perception that the effect of culture (in this case outside cultures) can have a powerful influence on a population and adds strength to the argument that culture has definite and distinct effects on how information is disseminated and interpreted (Dowell 2006, p. 111).

Globalisation is another factor that has influenced cultural pressures on journalism. Globalisation and the ability for individuals, small businesses, large corporations and governments to interact on a global scale has created a situation where ideas, concepts, attitudes, values and beliefs have become free-flowing in that cultures that have previously been culturally isolated are now open to a diverse range of sometimes conflicting viewpoints and influences (Sosale 2007, p. 11-52). Nearly every aspect of modern society has been affected by the media’s ability to disseminate information and images around the world (Artz 2007, p. 11). In turn, the media have also been altered by pressures, benefits, advantages and disadvantages that globalisation presents. However, some journalists try to retain the core belief of broadcasting ‘the truth’ without interference, yet aim at creating stories that appeal to certain cultural perspectives. Regan (2000) notes that many Arabic journalists are committed to limiting cultural influence and reporting on the news in an objective way, concluding:

Another great example of how technology is changing modern journalism is transpiring among Arab publications in the Middle East and North Africa. A group of editors set up a password-protected Website in London where Arab editors can file an uncensored version of stories they run in their publications. The idea is that other editors around the Arab world can read these stories, and although they can’t run them, it allows them to know what’s really happening in other Arab countries so they can shape their own coverage to reflect the truth. Perhaps an even more interesting comment comes from one Arab editor who told Powell that the Internet is finally allowing his paper to cover America in depth. When Powell asked what that meant after all, the Arab countries all get CNN and such he replied that he had been able to create a network of Arab correspondents in the United States who cover events in the United States from an Arab perspective.

The impact of globalisation has resulted in dynamic challenges that have the potential to change how media organisations operate and to influence journalists who work for these organisations.
The literature identifies that the key areas under consideration in the realm of online journalism are practices, ethics, and a blurring of the definition between online and traditional journalistic practices. The underlying cultural theory on which this investigation is based argues that culture does affect online journalistic practice and that the media should resist this influence. Lazaroiu (2009b, p. 146) warns:

…the overwhelming flow of data compromises truth: the journalistic process, which involves verification and fact checking, produces more truthful words that those of an Internet chat room. Electronic media sacrifices the intimacy of business and society that produces trust. We can be inundated with data and images that appear to be true (we can view images, in real time, on television, only to discover later that those images did not depict a factual event)…The average truthfulness or reliability of data has decreased.

The media have to ensure that journalistic practice remains open, neutral and truly independent, regardless of ideological, religious, corporate or political influence (Mueller 2007, p. 14). The underlying premise of journalism is to investigate and reveal the ‘whole truth’ on an issue, not just a carefully crafted version of the facts that assist a particular organisation in achieving its own idiosyncratic goals. However, this is not easy. As Gautherier (1993) notes, ‘investigative journalism is incompatible with objectivity due to the reporter’s adversarialism’. The nature of this adversarialism could possibly be attributed to the cultural background of the journalist and it is this influence of culture on the ability to report ‘objective’ information — or at the very least, to report accurately and fairly without bias — that is one of the key arguments on which this study is based.

The media have always been considered to be in a unique position to influence public opinion, restrict or liberate social policy, encourage derision or compliance, influence consumer decisions and lastly manipulate or disseminate the truth based on particular needs and objectives (Shanahan, Mcbeth & Hathaway 2011, pp. 373–400).
Information is power, and the media, through the printing press, radio, newspapers, magazines, television and now the Internet, have always had the ability to influence cultural outcomes (Christie 2006, p. 17).

![Figure 6: The nature of the influences on a continuum from culture to online journalism](image)

While the influence of the media over culture is evident in the literature (Bush 2007, pp. 11-12), a contrasting perspective of how the media are being influenced by culture is required to show that media are part of the societies and cultures in which they operate and are not immune from their influences. In short, journalists are part of the society in which they live and work, and the profession of online journalism is subject to the same influences enacted on other more traditional forms of media presentation and dissemination.

### 2.3.3 How Journalist Think While They Write

One of the important challenges facing media and online journalism, and their audiences, is intellectual development. Media practices have demonstrated that the intellectual processes involved do not happen randomly, but come as a series of plans, programs, tables and priorities. Korayem (2005, p. 118) notes that these intellectual challenges consist of a type of partiality and prejudice performed by a person, group, or organisation against others, based on incorrect information, reason and ideas, with the possibility of changing opinions into practices, and helping to change underlying concepts. He argues that the Saudi media can meet these intellectual challenges through restructuring the messages by using clear and simple words in news presentation: headlines, introductions, the body of stories, and in conclusions. Belief and thinking are different concepts in cultural practices. As Gelder, Mayou, and Cowen (2001, p. 630) point out, among adults the idea of belief includes the interconnection between ideas and beliefs as stable concepts. Psychologists define the meaning of thinking differently as a kind of mental activity, such as problem solving and building abstract concepts (Hijab 2003, p. 510). Bro (2010, p. 39) illustrates that the problems experienced by news reporters in their regular work might in some manner be seen as trivial when
compared to the problems encountered by grassroots-based individuals involved in more basic and non-corporate journalism, even when working on similar issues, for example, at a non-profit or student level. However, this news chain acts as an analytical framework, which in turn helps news reporters to relate in a better and more constructive way to the discrepancies within the problems they collectively experience. This includes challenges in getting something published or trying to get their stories on the front page of newspapers, for example.

They also face problems when there are political reactions to the stories published. It has been noted by Bro (2010, p. 41) ‘in almost all cases the news reporters experience problems between intentions and realizations’. In fact it has been found that most journalists take seriously their ethical responsibility for presenting accurate and relevant news stories to the public (Wasserman & Rao 2008). However, the conflict between what a journalist wishes to report and what he/she is able to report are not necessarily congruous, due to a variety of factors including organisational policy, corporate mandate or cultural constraints.

For an individual researcher who is a journalist, interaction with the media is not a straightforward road to prestige. If anything is handled badly, the eyebrows of colleagues are automatically raised, requiring a response from all parties involved. There is an increased demand for informed comment on any topic that is being discussed. The journalist’s viewpoint of a popular news story must complement, and at times also challenge, readers’ thinking, which in turn, makes information more interesting and exciting. At the same time, organisational culture must be adhered to, creating a multi-faceted conflict for online journalists.

2.3.4 Integration Between Media and Culture
Journalists generally place a great deal of importance on culture before publishing news. This is specifically because different information impacts and influences the mindset of people differently, depending upon the culture they accept, or to which they belong. With the advent of online journalism, integration between the media and culture has created some interesting dynamics.

The relationship between the media in Saudi Arabia and their audiences, social systems, and other institutes in Saudi society are based on social responsibility theory, stemming
from the establishment of Saudi media institutions, and influenced by the emergence of Saudi media policy (1982), the press institute system, publications and the publishing system, and intellectual property paradigms (Hijab 2003, p. 510). Media and mass communication in Saudi Arabia have been affected by global challenges, and participants (journalists and audiences) in the process of media production and consumption, in turn have been affected by international media messages. Hijab (2003 p. 221) suggests that freedom to discuss and deal with the influx of information professionally are the keys to helping media workers face global challenges and to reducing their effects. Although Saudi culture is different from that of other countries, it is not a closed system, which is unable to observe, analyse and learn from experiences of other cultures and histories (Alhemesh 2004, pp. 23-25). Saudi Arabia could be defined as a dynamic culture, slowly adapting to some global norms whilst rejecting others on religious or cultural grounds.

This media globalisation process currently underway within the KSA is not an independent case, as technology brings outside influences to many societies outside the Western realm. The positives of this are undeniable. Keane (2005, pp. 97-99), for example, argues that global media networks foster a sense of worldly interdependence. The exchange of news around the world ensures positive homogenisation of stories in different parts of the world, which are interconnected at great speed. A rise in the infrastructure of global communication tends to have an effect on social diversity and also leads to visible social controversies in this emergent global society. To gain more profits, firms need to make sure that the journalistic data they produce is according to the tastes and the likes of local populations. In addition, global journalism is more or less aware of its dependence on the shifting dynamics of the world. Global journalism will grow much stronger once journalists capture the local-global dynamic. Cultural globalisation has been described as the evolution of the transnational with television, film and other forms of media seen as polycentric systems that have multiple competing centres. These competing centres create competition across various types of media, thus improving production and content for audience members (Kuipers 2010, pp. 545-547).

Reese (2010, p. 345) further notes that new forms of online journalism do not take national boundaries into consideration, as they are considered to be a social practice which adapt well to global influences. Journalism has also been profoundly affected by the impact of globalisation of cultures. Reese further observes that globalised media and journalism have their own interpretation of creators, objects and also consumers of
news, which often do not tend to share the same national terms of reference. The reasons for this include the speed, rhythm and interconnectedness of the new forms of online media, which promote the idea of an ‘always on’ utility. Both the new and the old forms of journalism have become entwined, as shared and networked information is used collaboratively, leading to a different form of communication that has had an impact on conceptions of journalism as well. Globalisation is more of a dialectical process improving availability and standardisation of information; it also challenges cultural and societal norms. Whilst it is simplistic to state that the globalisation of media leads to the homogenisation of culture or cultural imperialism, it must be noted that in spite of having a media regulatory effect, globalisation is causing a tremendous disruption of cultural norms (Movius 2010, p. 9). On top of that it can also cause disinformation. In the case of Fons Tuinstra, the foreign correspondent who wrote about three Chinese journalists’ blogs being censored in his own weblog which resulted in multiple publications on the BBC and other well known media, it was found that the whole case was a practical joke by Chinese journalists ‘misusing Western obsessions with censorship of the Internet in China’ (Knight 2008, p. 122).

Corporate cultures have become much more global and are even more influenced by media and the information provided. The globalisation of media interprets the influence of globalised media. Media and information are subsumed under financial constraints, particularly in the face of the recent 2008 global financial crisis (Fuchs 2010, p. 558). Pieterse (2009, p. 222) further argues that the media also have an impact on the development of the entertainment market. This can be illustrated by considering the rise of the Internet in the television industry in the US, where there has been an increased incorporation of it into its framework of storytelling. Ross (2008, pp. 7-8) suggests that this interactivity between television and online media sources has become an important component of the television industry, due to the rise of the availability of the Internet as well as the deflating costs of Internet access. Thus, in a rejection of previous television production models, TV media companies must now satisfy viewer need for entertaining programming as well as online interactivity and media. According to Ross (2008, pp. 11), it is the entertainment industry that now must court potential advertisers in order to gain income. Therefore, it is the audience which is being sold as a product as opposed to the products being sold to an audience. As Herman and Chomsky (1994, p. 303) state:

In essence, the private media are major corporations selling a product (readers and audiences) to other businesses (advertisers). The national
media typically target and serve elite opinion, groups that, on the one hand, provide an optimal ‘profile’ for advertising purposes, and, on the other, play a role in decision-making in the private and public spheres.

In regards to television and Internet interactivity with audience members, television production companies need to show how holistic the marketing experience is for their audiences. For instance, a television company producing a sitcom and developing a website which allows viewers to post comments and thoughts to fellow audience members throughout the broadcast of the show has created a dynamic advertising experience which is far more attractive to the viewer than the previous static television models.

This marketing must, of course, be pleasing to audience members in order to maintain high levels of viewership. According to Schaap et al. (2001, pp. 47-90) social action relies on three premises: that the use of media is considered a social or collective action; that audiences form an active and social part of mass communication; and that the interaction within a society must be allowed to be interpreted by individuals. Social action must not be from unfounded propaganda as it must be rationalised by participants before action can take place. The process of producing commercial news programs can thus be considered in line with this idea of social action, as in order to satisfy an audience and to make them continue to view or consume a media object one must be able to find that object believable, rational and communicable. However, if we are to assume that global media entities are operating in order to make recurrent profit, they must meet the aforementioned requirements for social action in order to maintain their audience. Thus, the tactics of the global corporate media must come into question as Herman and Chomsky (1994, p. 303) posit:

The national media would be failing to meet their elite audience’s needs if they did not present a tolerably realistic portrayal of the world. But their ‘societal purpose’ also requires that the media’s interpretation of the world reflect the interests and concerns of the sellers, the buyers, and the governmental and private institutions dominated by these groups.

This ‘realistic portrayal’ means that media content is a construction by the media, which is done for financial and political, as opposed to cultural or educational, purposes. It was noted that the influence of television has an important role to play in creating viewer constructed meaning. For instance, viewers interpreting a news item either on television or through online media do so through their own cultural lens (Ahmad & Abdullah, 2005). This includes the viewer’s personal background and framework, that coupled
with previous knowledge of the news topic or culture, can determine the complexity of his/her interpretation of the news. Therefore it can clearly be seen that from a corporate perspective, media content must be seen as a consumable and realistic product for audience members, which must be accepted or at least processed through the personal and cultural lens of an individual.

The accelerating growth of media has had a profound impact on trends in journalism. There are many barriers in the communication process which show no sign of coming down. I have argued that globalisation affects the way in which people have traditionally considered media and communication. Television and the Internet are becoming increasingly interconnected, and the television industry has further influenced viewers’ desire for interactivity. Television news has a great impact on the mindset of the people, and the way in which people interpret news plays an important role in determining meaning. Thus news, including television news media, has become a means through which culture around the world is being globalised.

2.3.5 Transmission Versus Ritual Communication

Carey’s (1989) quintessential examination of media and society, Communication as Culture, defines communication as being deeply steeped in social and religious history. He posits (1989 p. 14) a dual model of communication, namely transmission and ritual. Transmission communication is metaphorically considered a means of ‘transportation’ across space. Carey (1989, p. 15) uses terms such as ‘imparting,’ ‘sending,’ ‘transmitting,’ or ‘giving information to others’ to describe it. Essentially, it is the transmission of messages or signals through space for the ‘purpose of control’. This is coupled with humanity’s desire to increase the speed and effectiveness of message transmission. In an online context, transmission communication is prevalent, as the distance over which a transmission can be sent is now nearly infinite. News organisations act as ‘senders’ or news disseminators and those who are online act as ‘receivers’. The success of such transmissions lie merely in whether or not the receiver has comprehended the message that has been conveyed.

Moreover, Carey (1989, p. 18) defines the ritual model of communication as, ‘communication [sic] linked to terms such as ‘sharing’, ‘participation’, ‘association’, ‘fellowship’ and ‘the possession of a common faith’. Based in ceremony, ritual and belief, ritual communication brings people together using shared experience and commonality. Less a dichotomy between sender and receiver, it is more dynamic as it is
community based. Shared experience and a sense of community allow messages which are continuously being created and recreated to influence communities over time, as opposed to space. Carey (1989, p. 18) sees its roots as being deeply religious, derived from humans’ ability to share morals, values and stories through many generations. He concludes (Carey 1989, p. 18):

[Ritual communication] sees the original or highest manifestation of communication not in the transmission of intelligent information but in the construction and maintenance of an ordered, meaningful cultural world that can serve as a control and container for human action.

However, ritual and transmission communications are not meant to categorise communication types, for example, online media as transmission and theatre performance as ritual. It merely serves as a way to illustrate that communication has different capacities. Carey (1989, p. 21) uses the example of a newspaper to demonstrate this. He says that according to the transmission model, a newspaper is valuable for the news that it disseminates or the information that it imparts. Using the ritual model, the importance of communication through newspapers lies in the act of obtaining or receiving the paper and reading it each day, thus affecting one’s worldview. A newspaper is then defined as a ‘presentation of reality that gives life an overall form, order, and tone’ (Carey 1989, p. 21).

Before his death, Carey experienced the burgeoning technological revolution that has led to the ubiquity of the Internet in communication practice. He felt that technology and the dissemination of information from the use of it were utterly linked to the ritual model. As he said in an interview in 1998:

By placing culture at the centre and by identifying culture…with ritual and conversation, I want to underscore…that technology is part of culture rather than an independent force of nature (Game 1998, p. 121).

Technology, perhaps more specifically Internet technology, has allowed for ritualised communication that is so far reaching that it touches every aspect of human life. For instance, Carey sights technology as possibly closing the gap between the educated and the uneducated, or the politically marginalised and policy makers. Online media is inextricably linked to opportunities to educate and inform the public, hopefully lessening inequalities. The ritualisation of using Internet based products — for example, smartphone applications or blogs — are still evolving, but it seems clear that Carey’s dichotomy of ritual and transmission communication is applicable even to these new technologies.
2.4 Conclusion

Culture affects every facet of human existence. Humans by nature are social animals, and this need for social interaction results in individuals conforming to a set of behaviours in order to be associated with specific groups and sub-groups. This continuous parsing of humans into smaller and smaller sub-groups of religious, ethnic, geographical and cultural similarity has been occurring throughout all of human history (Hinshelwood 2009, p. 131). This concept of culture and its influence over journalistic practice is extremely important, particularly for online journalists, in determining what codes of practice should be adhered to in order to seek objectivity and professionalism regardless of social, political or religious cultural influences (Hanitzsch 2007).

As stated in Chapter One, this research project will examine the effects of culture on online journalism practice in Saudi Arabia using a framework developed by Thomas Hanitzsch (2007). He defines the effects of culture on individual journalists as threefold. First, on a micro level is the individualistic or cognitive influence of culture on professional behaviour. As discussed above, personal culture including religious or family experience will most definitely frame a journalist’s practice (Hanitzsch 2007). Secondly, according to Hanitzsch (2007, pp. 27) culture affects journalists at an evaluative level, which I have examined above from an organisational context. Generally speaking, organisational policy seeks to make socio-economic, religious, ethnic, generational or political attributes of workers and their production both marketable and saleable (Toth 2007, pp. 517-518). Journalistic organisational policy can thus be considered a potential conflict, where a journalist’s personal framework may not match with the larger goals of an organisation (Handley & Rutigliano 2012, pp. 744-760). Finally, Hanitzsch (2007) argues that the third element of cultural impact on journalists is at a performative level. Here, influences on the cognitive and evaluative levels lead to some action being taken by a journalist. This manifestation of both personal and organisational cultural influence then becomes a cultural factor on its own. Specifically, as journalists being affected by their own circumstantial cultural influences place more and more content online, globalisation of these concepts will increase (Wasserman & Rao 2008). Therefore, the shifting of cultural norms will continue to fluctuate as the profession becomes farther homogenised. My analysis will also consider Carey’s (1989) notion of ritual communication and how this might help to explain the journalistic processes in action in Saudi online newsrooms.
In light of the research and theoretical frameworks mentioned above, I will explore the cultural influences that are affecting Saudi journalists as well as how those effects manifest themselves. As mentioned in Chapter One, this research seeks to offer solutions to mitigate what I define as a ‘Westernised globalisation’ process. In a Saudi Arabian context, the effects of Western globalisation are particularly evident. Essentially, it can be stated that just as globalisation changes local culture, local culture is changed by globalisation (Movius 2010). The following chapter will explore the relationships between journalists, traditional media and online media.
Chapter 3
The Global Media and Technological Convergence

3.1 Overview
Williams (1974, p 18) suggested that there would be a struggle over how technology was used. One argument was that technology (in Williams’ case television, but arguably the same also applies to the Internet) could act as a vehicle to facilitate democracy and become a publicly focused means of spreading intellectual and collective capital. In contrast, global capital was the other contender, driven by economics, capitalistic perspectives and dominated by a few large corporations. The latter appears to have become the case. Nightingale and Dwyer (2007, p. 7) reflect on Williams’ observations, arguing:

Williams posed the question of who would gain the upper hand in controlling these developments, specifically whether they would be commanded by global capital or become a public means for fostering greater democracy and participation. He feared that the interest of big business would win out. In that, he has surely been proven right.

The social networking nature of the Internet, emphasised by Manuel Castells (2007, pp. 11-22) allows information to be spread at phenomenal speeds. This allows the audience to also have an influence on how information is formed, organised and transmitted. The process is no longer one-way, with a news agency, for example, presenting information to the receiver. Instead, the receivers can now upload their own news, views and information in a way that is changing the very nature of news. These new aspects of the public sphere are influencing how individuals source news and information — and evaluate it — based on their ability to crosscheck and discuss the information with others from different societies or cultures. Habermas (1984, p. 49) reflects on this process:

By the ‘public sphere’ we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body.

So, with the extension of communication technology, there are many more elements with respect to journalism which have now become relevant, including online news
forums, discussion forums and online news websites. I will canvass these in subsequent sections.

3.2 Global Media, Culture and Technology

As I have suggested in preceding sections, it is the media that have ‘discovered’ and provided the major vehicle for dissemination of the concept of global culture. Thus global culture can be defined only in terms of global media culture. With the help of underwater data cables and communication satellites, people today are able to send, receive, store and distribute messages and media around the world with exponentially increased frequency. There might be an argument that culture has always been mediated by language. But with increased sophistication, multiplication and dissemination of information processing mechanisation, a change has been experienced by the global culture. Potentially, every cultural object now exists in a global context (Poster 2006, p. 35).

Poster (2006, pp. 35-66) further illustrates that the change in these information machines is so rapid that institutions today find difficulty in keeping up with the pace. The culture industries have not quite been able to keep up with the new media by maintaining traditional commodity forums. Through major mergers and acquisitions, the world today has been left with only a few major media producing players. However, new technologies enable almost anyone with access to a computer and the Internet to start their own culture industry — already an emerging trend in music production. This in turn has resulted in piracy of information related to cultural production. Since Bill Clinton’s presidency, every US administration has compelled other nations to conform to international copyright law thereby disregarding the benefits of innovation promoted by new media. The Clinton administration also attempted to prevent the flow of information on the Internet as it was recognised that national boundaries are not synchronised when basic web architecture is taken into consideration. Nations find it difficult to monitor and control the global flow of cultural objects like mp3 files or pirated movies.

Thus the question becomes whether or not there exists a point where globalisation has led to a global cosmopolitan culture? Once media products are completely integrated into the psyche of global cultures, this homogenisation is unlikely to become a complete reality. For example, Poster (2006) cites the Parks’ (2005) examination of Australian
Aboriginal use of satellite technology to broadcast Indigenous chosen or produced television programming across the southern part of the continent. This use of Western technology was not another case of imperialism but more of an adaptation of existing media used to promote the interests of a non-Western culture. The researcher argued that the use of satellite media by Indigenous people challenges the critical assumptions that satellite media works only as an agent of Western cultural imperialism and neo-colonial control. Aboriginal people used this technology to expand their global knowledge about the other cultures, as well as preserving their own practices and beliefs with the help of satellite technology. It has been argued that within this type of community broadcasting sector, a breakdown of the traditional boundary between Indigenous audiences and producers is occurring. However, it should be remembered that Indigenous access to such technologies has been and remains a struggle in a continuing policy vacuum (Forde, Foxwell, & Meadows 2009). Although cultural homogenisation could occur due to globalisation, the strength of individual cultures, particularly in the community media sector, offers the possibility for cultural heterogeneity to be maintained (Forde 2011).

Similar findings have been evident in explorations of global media culture. A huge number of local adaptations of new media exist that promote a combination of cultural elements existing in various places. Some research warns that the spread of global media culture can affect corporate culture and it is much more than simply disseminating text, images and sound around the world (Ang 1994).

What today might be called global culture is very different from what its definition was in earlier centuries. One new aspect of the current incarnation of global culture is its heavy dependence on complex media technologies. Special consideration of information technologies needs to be given as they have effectively ‘made’ global culture. This is a great challenge for scholars and intellectuals. Twenty-first century global culture may or may not clash with ethnic cultures of the past but it is definitely different from them. However, the conceptualisation of global culture might have the ability to counter major political or corporate powers, which underlines its persistence. If the globalising tendency of transnational corporations continues, then the major task confronting global culture is to promote something different; something that might help to extend democracy in unforseen and unforeseeable directions.
In summary, new technologies have brought forward the concept of a global or cosmopolitan culture. With advances in technology, the flow of information around the world cannot be controlled. Thus it can now be stated that the world has a common culture but still maintains elemental culture elements within some populations.

3.2.1 Media Effects
A unanimously accepted fact is that individuals depend on the significance of events and issues which are portrayed by media systems. Dependency on the significance of issues and events may be low or high, depending on the social and cultural variables that are used to define them. Along with this they also depend on the amount of information that is provided by the news media (Cacciotore et al. 2012). Human beings are an integral part of complex social systems like groups, institutions and communities and as a part of this network, humans need to relate to a view of the world that is conveyed en masse by the media (Hanitzsch et al. 2010). The perception of an individual is influenced to a great extent by the media which feed on fears, as well as a need for security (Bare 1998, p. 26).

Coman (2007, pp. 150-151) states that the press has the power to act on individuals, groups, institutions and society as a whole. It is able to affect the personality of humans in a cognitive dimension (which changes the view of the world), an emotional dimension (which changes a person’s attitudes and feelings) or in a behavioural dimension (which triggers changes in the way an individual acts and reacts to a phenomenon or a social situation). Interestingly, these three facets of the power of the press align with Hanitzsch’s (2010) theoretical framework which considers the ways in which cultures impact on journalists cognitively, evaluatively and performatively.

Media promote a lifestyle which is readily internalised by consumers and which is in accordance with the effects that are exerted by the mass media. Thus behavioural rules and patterns are promoted by the media, which in turn, are imposed as social models by the society. The more strongly a particular model is publicised, the more strongly it will be adopted by present members of a society (Herman & Chomsky 1994, p. 302). It can be observed that promotion of particular models by the media is related to the norms and the values of the dominant class in society. This, in turn, imposes a huge number of innovations or new concepts that are interpreted individually and may lead to a grave confusion in the multitude of principles and rituals of society (Bare 1998, p. 24).
Science author Steven Johnson (2006, p. 131) argues that television programs now have complex interwoven stories that need to be followed weekly in order to understand them. There are other technologies like DVDs, videos and on-demand programming, which allows consumers not only to be entertained through movies and shows, but also to help them to start to analyse and learn from what they are watching.

Frequently, the media reinforces images and values of a dominant culture, most of which are reproduced as well (Giroux 2002, p. 87). The idea that the entertainment media influences our conscious and unconscious ways of thinking is not new, as it was described in the seminal work *The Lonely Crowd* in 1950, now edited and revised in its fifth iteration (Riesman, Glazer, & Denney 2001).

Furthermore, use of alternative spaces — for example, Internet sites for the creation of entertainment — has and will continue to influence society as well as challenge educators. The importance of the Internet was displayed by *Time* magazine as the choice of the general public as the ‘Person of the Year’ in 2006. It audaciously stated that if the people control the media then the world simply cannot remain the same (Thompson 2007, pp. 83-90). Grossman (2006/2007, p. 42) argues that technology has created good grounds for humans to express themselves in a way that people in previous generations could not have even imagined.

A classic example of the new spaces that the Internet has provided for cultural resistance is *YouTube*. At 4 billion page views a day, resulting in more than a trillion page views over the course of a year, its 800 million users watch 3 billion hours of video per month (Grossman 2012). This is a staggering statistic with wide reaching repercussions. With the help of the Internet and with a single click, anyone can view, analyse and critique various forms of entertainment such as videos and news from across the globe.

The actions of journalists are affected to an extent by principles, precedents, production, publication and perception. This means that they are affected by changes from case to case, country to country and century to century. For many news reporters, internal and external factors might not be an obvious part of their daily work as the understanding of the importance of these is hidden in their daily routine (Donsbach 2004, pp. 57-131). In addition, faster reporting is now possible with the help of new technologies. We are able to see instant news and are also able to take live feedback and reports from audiences.
and participants at the very moment an event occurs. Hence, in many cases, it is only when the news reporters and editors are faced with critical incidents that the actual factors which affect journalism become clearer (Zelizer 1992, pp. 78-121).

In short, the Internet has enabled greater access to news and information than ever before. More information is available to people which can help us to make better decisions and also encourage us to watch more news. The reason this understanding is important for Saudi Culture is that, in general, people in the KSA are not well exposed to the outside world. As Internet penetration increases, people are watching a variety of news and other media that help to shape their perspectives. Even though censorship is at a high level, it is fairly easy to bypass the system (Schanzer & Miller, 2012). This increased exposure is increasing expectations by readers who increasingly are influencing what and how online journalists write.

3.2.2 What is the World Wide Web?
Although journalism has been influenced by the development of the World Wide Web, news and information have been affected much more. Stovall (2004, pp. 2-4) notes that there were two important aspects that helped to develop our current communication system and both of them came with problems. The first concerned the volume of human knowledge, which he defines as ‘literary-scientific’. This was obvious in the first half of the twentieth century as a result of the huge development in information management, ideas and technology.

In September 2001, a survey by the US Department of Commerce revealed that more than 50 per cent of people in the United States used the Internet and that this was increasing by around 2 million users every month. By 2004, it was estimated that more than 75 per cent of the people would be using the Internet if that rate of increase continued (Stovall 2004, pp. 2-4). The survey found that 90 per cent of children aged 5 to 17 used computers, and 75 per cent of 14 to 17 years olds were on the Internet for hours each day. The proportion of people using electronic mail increased from 35 per cent in the previous year to 45 per cent. In addition, the number of people using the Internet to search for products and service information increased to 36 per cent (Stovall 2004, p. 4). As of 31 December 2011 the world population was nearly 7 billion people...
with 2.3 billion people using the Internet daily. This is an increase of 528 per cent from numbers produced in 2001 (Miniwatts 2012).

Recently, the web has experienced its biggest change with a huge increase in the number of websites and the volume of information available. Designing web pages has also changed, with people who design and produce them becoming more experienced. But people’s behaviour has also helped the web to change (Stovall 2004, p. 5). Stovall (2004, p. 5) highlights a key aspect of online news production, which he describes as a monster that must always be fed. He argues that websites are not billboards and that they need to change often:

People want news, and they want it immediately. Even when the information is not ‘breaking news,’ they expect the website they visit to be different whenever they show up. People rarely return to a website if they keep seeing the same information. Website producers quickly realize this, even though they may have begun their site with the idea that they could put it up and just leave it there.

Although the World Wide Web includes news, it is not a newspaper on a computer. It is different from traditional media in some important ways. Stovall (2004, p. 6-23) suggests that the September 11 events have proven that the news is an essential element of the World Wide Web. He has pointed out five elements that influence the operation of the web: capacity, flexibility, immediacy, permanence and interactivity (Stovall 2004 p. 8). He goes on to explain that websites have more possibilities for presenting more information in more ways than either print or broadcast media. For example, a newspaper reporter, photographer or graphics journalist faces the two constant frustrations of professional journalism, which are time and space. However, journalists who are dealing with online news might not have to do so. He argues that flexibility is one of the key differences between online journalism and print media. For instance, online news can present information in many different forms — words, pictures, audio, video and graphics — and over time. Furthermore, although for a long time new technology was considered as a vehicle that “corrupts” Saudis, new devices such as the iPhone and iPad, as well as social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Youtube, are gaining huge popularity in Saudi Arabia (Schanzer & Miller, 2012). As these devices and sites encourage image and video based information and news, creating local content that is suitable for these devices is becoming increasingly important as well.
As a result, web journalists have increased flexibility and can express more creativity with their knowledge of various online formats. Moreover, as aforementioned, the web’s immediacy is a drawcard which is why there are millions of people using online news because it is an instant information source, although the information may not necessarily be ‘instantaneous’ in terms of its timeliness. Immediacy is offered in addition to a wide variety of information, expansive resources, and in individualistic contexts for example, political news presented on a sports website. The Internet has the power to summarize and update. Lastly, from my perspective, duplication and the ability to retrieve data are two other characteristics of the web which make it so powerful, and which enable journalists to easily recover what has been written before to provide background for a story.

Hoffman (2006, p. 449) used a survey of Internet users to explore the role the web plays in the lives of everyday people. He notes that in recent years, the Internet has become an important part of daily life for up to 126 million users. It means the number of Internet users has increased by 50 per cent in three years (between 2000 to 2003). The survey also showed not only an increase in the number of users, but also that people used the Internet most of the time.

Moreover, in the same study, 62 per cent of American people surveyed in 2003 agreed that the percentage of American adults who used the Internet was increasing because they were using it in their daily lives for such activities as shopping and financial management rather than travelling to business locations. Thus, a significant portion of the management of daily community affairs has shifted online (2006, p. 449).

### 3.2.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Media

As a means of disseminating news content, online media applications are perhaps the most effective to date. The advantage of online media is that they can formulate and transmit information in a short period of time compared with other media. Online news also operates on a 24-hour basis, unhindered by geography, network time constraints, or broadcast schedules. In addition, the overheads involved in running an online news site are considerably less than for other forms of news distribution. Staffing numbers are lower, research processes are simplified, albeit limited in some respects, and journalists can diversify news content by covering issues that are not covered by other traditionally focused news agencies (Stovall 2004, pp. 20-26). Online journalism is a practice that
can reach out to a global audience in a meaningful and effective manner. Transmitting via the Internet, journalists can reach an audience that otherwise is restricted from accessing information beyond geographically restrictive borders. The restriction placed on Chinese society by the government of the People’s Republic of China is one such example (Shirk 2007, pp. 24-27).

But online news media also have several disadvantages, especially when it comes to infringing on culturally accepted behaviours. Depictions of various social or ethnic groups by online journalists have not always been objective, fair or unbiased. As previously mentioned, portrayal of the Islamic world has failed to take into account the wide range of differences involved. Earlier, I cited the example of the Jyllands-Posten newspaper cartoon incident that caused widespread upheaval and protest throughout many Muslim societies (Malek 2007 p. 18). The series of newspaper cartoons published in 2005 depicting the Prophet Mohammad in disrespectful ways created outrage and protests by many Muslims who felt that their faith was being insulted (Jensen 2008, pp. 275-279). It was the depictions and stories transmitted over the Internet that added to the outrage, enabling many more people to see the cartoons. While many online viewers were not Muslim or were unaware of the attitudes, values and beliefs of the Islamic faith and did not understand the need for such outrage, it clearly showed that many journalists did not understand or were ignorant of issues of cultural sensitivity (Frost 2008, pp. 546-563).

Critics argued that the protests were an infringement of free speech, hindering journalists’ right to report and comment on relevant issues. But there are clear indications that in many cases, journalists were unaware of the cultural sensitivity that is required when commenting on other cultures (Malek 2007, p. 18). Online journalistic practices — like journalism practices in general — can, unintentionally or otherwise, reinforce racial and ethnic stereotyping through ill-planned and ill-structured reporting. The difference lies in the scale of dissemination bounded only by audiences’ access to the Internet. Understanding how to avoid these errors is one of the main aims of this investigation.

3.2.4 Technology Challenging Journalistic Practice

Journalistic practice usually involves a period of research and fact clarification prior to the writing of a story, editing to ascertain the accuracy of the content and then publication. Modern technology has affected this process in a number of ways (Shaw
2008, p. 40). The sheer speed of the Internet is perhaps one of the most significant advantages for the online journalist. Reports can be written and uploaded very rapidly, allowing journalists to both notify a global audience, as well as generate further interest in an issue or event. For commercially orientated media organisations, this is a profitable dimension of online journalism because as a story breaks, increasingly larger numbers of Internet users log on. The profession of journalism is no longer a career that reports after the fact; in contrast, reports and footage can now be delivered with very little time lag, as was seen during the September 11 terrorist attacks (Goldsborough 2002, p. 34).

The September 2001 events are evidence that online news has rapidly become an essential element of the World Wide Web. For example, by the time the second World Trade Center tower was hit at 9:05 AM, the CNN website was receiving nine million hits an hour. This number increased dramatically to 19 million hits an hour the following day (Stovall 2004, pp. 5-6). This shows that a global audience was eager to find out up-to-date information and knew that television, newspapers and radio were not the fastest delivery means available. The need to transmit information rapidly across the web in order to remain competitive has, however, come at a price. Many critics of online journalistic practice during the September 11 events argue that much of the news, views and reports were not accurate and were generated by people who were not even within the vicinity of the attacks. The ability of the public sphere to allow others who are not journalists to comment on issues through blogs, forums and chat sites also creates confusion. Added to this, some journalists presented some of this information as proven, factual data that could not be verified or confirmed (Hargrove & Stempel 2007, p. 99). The need, however, to supply fresh information rapidly created a situation where in some cases the normal accepted journalistic acumen of verifying information prior to dissemination was either forgotten or wilfully disregarded (Gladney, Shapiro, & Castaldo 2007, p. 55).

Technology provides advantages and disadvantages for the online journalist. Care needs to be taken that this technology is used to improve and enhance the journalistic profession, not to bring it into disrepute. The ease with which information can be collated from a broad range of sources provides ample opportunity for journalistic practices to become compromised and can lead to the reputation of journalism being damaged if the time-honoured and proven techniques of verification of facts and checking of sources is disregarded (Finberg 2001, p. 11). Hence, technology has helped
people to receive sought-after information on the spur of the moment. The time when people had to wait for radio stations or the next day’s newspaper to get important updates about an incident has long gone. The advantages of online journalism are insurmountable, but are accompanied by disadvantages and threats to ideas of journalism itself, which I will discuss in detail in subsequent sections.

3.3 Online Journalism Practice: Overview

Bro (2010, p. 38) argues that journalists often require specialist knowledge across many facets of their work and therefore must start their journalistic education in the classrooms rather than directly in the newsroom. This can help us to think about some important issues facing journalism that have become more visible in the late twentieth century (Bro 2010, p. 39). This also illustrates that later components of the public journalism movement have helped to emphasise the importance of particular principles in journalism, including the need for ‘pro-active neutrality’ as a guiding framework for reporters. Considering this, attempts made to promote and prompt more public journalism in the United States in both the first and the later period of the twentieth century have had far reaching implications. During the popularisation of public journalism, the events before and after helped to accentuate some universal facts about the actions of the news reporters (Pulitzer 1904). Movius (2010, p. 10) argues that as communication flows and global online networks are expanding, the possibility of a new dimension of globalization is emerging. New technologies help in the easy transfer of data across boundaries resulting in globalization. The patterns of social interaction are being reorganised by individuals who are creating new forms of interaction. There is a considerable increase globally in the number of people whose lives are being mediated. Thus it is quite evident from this discussion that online communities and networks have created new forms of transnational communities (Rosen 2001, p. 56-59).

The major outcome of this approach is that this type of reporting becomes neutral and accurate. However, in some cases this pro-active neutrality can interfere with the reporting of major public values without affecting or compromising their integrity. Merritt (1995, p. 116) argues that journalists should be fair-minded and remain neutral on specifics of a given news story. What is taken into account in this view is ambiguous emotional attachments to news stories, for example, journalistic passion and dedication.
However, it is the argument of the authors above that neutrality and objectivity remain paramount.

But the astute Pulitzer (1904, p. 25) maintained that reporters, editors and owners are the embodiment of the dissemination of truth. It is through this section of humanity that news and history is written. Thus it is these human elements that affect the actions and work in newsrooms in a very different and direct manner (Bro 2008, p. 39). As far as public journalism is concerned, attempts to meet these principles of neutrality have over time been tested again and again. Through this conflict and subsequent reflection, this knowledge has spread amongst news reporters and editors around the world. In 1990, David Broder, a famous columnist for the Washington Post, argues that the initial attempts at standardised neutrality and ethical practice were used particularly in political journalism that had evolved in the late twentieth century (Rosen 1998). Broder commented:

We have to reposition ourselves in the political process. We have to distance ourselves from the people we write about and move ourselves closer to the people we write for. It is time for us in the world’s freest press to become activists, not on behalf of a particular party or politician, but on behalf of the process of self-government. We have to help reconnect politics and government (Rosen 1998).

![Diagram](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**Figure 7:** Internal and external factors that can influence journalistic action (Bro 2010, p. 41)

The book, *Doing public journalism*, published in the public journalism movement’s first year (Charity 1995, p. 28), helped news reporters to engage in new ways, and offered specific methods, techniques and tools for reporting the news. It introduced approaches required to advance their existing principles. It was observed and shown that the practices of public journalism were in accord with conventional and mainstream
journalism (Haas 2007; Voakes 1999). Efforts to raise awareness of the impact of public journalism included such topics as ‘techniques for hearing citizens’, ‘issue framing’ and ‘public consensus’ (Charity 1995, p. 28). All these are the variations on the objective of trying to operationalise new guiding principles for journalism practice. This often involved reliance on precedents with the principles initially developed in the hope that journalism, in the words of James Carey (1997, p. 12), might become a tool which helps in both expressing public opinion while helping audiences to find their own identity through the process.

3.3.1 The Concept of Online Journalism

The common perception of online journalism is that it is simply another means by which information from more traditional forms of news dissemination — namely print, television and radio — can be made available to the Internet-accessing public. While this might have been true during its inception, online journalism has evolved and taken on a life of its own, to a point where it is mounting an increasing threat to traditional media, especially the print media.

Online journalism is associated with a broad range of technologically related terms that deal with accessing information via a computer connected to the World Wide Web. Words such as digital, online, the Internet and the World Wide Web have become common terms that are used in an interchangeable manner, despite having different meanings (Ward 2002, pp. 8-18). Information is sent through a process of transmitting sequenced digits through wire, cable or via a broadcast frequency to a destination where that information is reassembled into recognisable and readable data, text, images, sound or video. Online is a term that relates to a computer being connected to a network, subsequently allowing it to receive or transmit data. The Internet is the actual infrastructure that allows computer networks to communicate on a global scale, while the World Wide Web is an interface that allows people to swap information through such infrastructure. The World Wide Web and the application of email are perhaps the most important tools for the online journalist (Ward 2002, p. 4).

Like their more traditional counterparts, online journalists identify events of importance, compile facts about issues, and relate experiences and air opinions relevant to an issue in a way that can be informative and relevant to readers. Online news sites have become an important part of the overall newsgathering and distribution network of
media organisations (Fahmy 2008, p. 23). In a competitive market where success is gauged by the ability to report on events rapidly, accurately and concisely, online journalism is at the forefront of the news media industry. While online news services have developed quickly over the past decade or so, they are still primarily branches of larger media organisations and act in a supporting role to other forms of news media (Stovall 2004, p. 15). This, however, is changing. Independent, Internet-based news services that are not linked to other older forms of news reporting have already emerged, along with a separation of online and traditional newsrooms in several European settings (Fahmy 2008, p. 23). The Internet is growing in size and capacity daily with increasingly larger numbers of the general public turning to this new way of gathering information as their primary source of news and entertainment.

Stovall (2004, p. 16) identifies four elements of a successful online news service: focus, presentation, time and audience. He continues:

A news website is devoted to delivering timely news and information to its audience. Those who produce the site observe the traditional customs and practices of journalism in gathering, writing, and presenting the news. A new website is a means for a news organisation to display and distribute its content. That content is directed at an audience that is defined either by interest or geography.

In addition, Stovall (2004, p. 33) notes that online news websites need to link their sites to branding, in order to be easily identified by the audience. Content, how it is presented and the values that the news organisation stands for all need to be similar if audiences are going to associate the website with the host organisation. He suggests (2008, p. 33):

A news website has been the way in which the news organisations have presented the news content - pictures, stories, graphics, videos, etc. to audiences over the web...They have been an extension of the brand of the news organisation.

Online journalism is truly global in scope, not only because it can reach practically anyone connected to the Internet, but also because it can access and incorporate sources from anywhere in the world. Working online allows journalists to do much of the ‘footwork’ from the comfort of an office chair where they can access information, current and historical data, video feeds and sound bytes that are only a ‘click’ of the mouse away. Ward (2002, p. 6) elaborates on the versatility of this approach:
Online journalism is a broad church embracing content creation across a wide range of types (for example, news and information) and settings (commercial as well as news-based).

As a news media practice, online journalism is here to stay. In fact, it is foreseeable that it will become the dominant form of information distribution and access well into the future. As is the case with any new technology, there are advantages and disadvantages. Online journalism allows journalists to operate quickly and efficiently and report on matters of great importance rapidly and concisely. In contrast, online journalists — like journalists operating in any form — can adversely impact on culturally sensitive societies, or report in ways that are ignorant or unthoughtful, disrupting the attitudes, values and beliefs of societies into which they have no real insight or understanding. Again, it is the potential scale of the dissemination and the fact that removing material from the Internet can be difficult that promotes online news to a higher order in the hierarchy. Coupled with this, the pressure for producing more news stories and at greater speed inevitably leads to inaccuracies.

Rosen (1999, p. 22) argues that public journalism is a form which expects journalists to address the people as citizens or potential participants in public affairs instead of victims or those separated from democratic processes. It aims to help the political community to act rather than just learning about a problem; to improve the atmosphere of a discussion rather than simply undermining debate; and to make the life of the public flow evenly so that they pay more attention to journalists.

However, this reveals three factors which can foster better online public journalism: production, publication and perception. According to Rosen (1999, p. 22) these are the most important elements which need to be taken into account before reporting to ensure that the work will encourage some action by audiences. It is immaterial whether the action is actual support or public deliberation, in dealing with such community issues as fighting crime and poverty or other identified projects (Rosen 1999, p. 22).

On the other hand, Pulitzer (1904, p. 34) did not focus on external factors in the defence of his views of the future training of journalists, as he was certainly very well aware of the world outside newsrooms. Pulitzer (1904, p. 34) argued that knowing the sources of knowledge, being able to put one’s hand on that instantly, and hence being able to state the facts with full confidence and accuracy, is what is most important for a journalist. Can there be anything else which is more important? The sources of knowledge might
definitely change as demands for daily news and information changes. Additionally, he noted that interviews were important as they provided an effective way of making contact with the outside world. They also enable understanding of the predominant vision of reporters and newsreaders who have tried to encourage the public journalism movement since the late twentieth century.

3.3.2 The Evolution and Future of Online Journalism

According to McNair (2009, p. 347) in the twentieth century the dominant model for journalism was the professional delivery of news and information focused on a reader or a viewer. Much analysis and opinion was delivered with an authoritative public voice which was consensually accepted by people from different organisations and from different professional and cultural statuses. This model began to disintegrate in the late twentieth century when there was more focus on a more literary approach. According to McNair (2009, p. 347), in the twentieth century the dominant model for journalism was professional delivery of news and information that was focused on a reader or a viewer. Much analysis and opinion was delivered with an authoritative public voice which was consensually accepted by people from different organisations and from different professional and cultural statuses. This model began to disintegrate during the late twentieth century when more focus was placed on literary journalism in the 1950s and the 1960s. It was during this era that the popularity of documentary films in cinemas and television increased.

It is important to understand that all this continued to gain pace until the twenty-first century when an unprecedented trend in journalism arose through which almost everyone became networked globally. Not only is the change present in this aspect, but the dominant model of journalism has begun to adapt as well. Print media and analogue broadcasting are on the verge of extinction, significant change or at least are becoming more marginalised. This does not mean that journalism in its traditional form is dead but that it is evolving just as it has done since its inception.

The future of journalism is often conflated with the future of journalistic media such as print. Newspapers are in crisis. However, there are various other ways to disseminate factual information. Newspapers are common in developing countries such as India but are under significant pressure in many developed countries. The main reason behind this is that developed countries are in the final stages of a new digital era. Newspapers still
remain an efficient and affordable way of distributing information among people in Asian countries as the technology is still developing. As digitisation proceeds in Asian countries, newspapers will be forced to change there at least from their present forms (McNair 2009, p. 347).

Journalism will survive in Saudi Arabia just as it is going to survive in the USA, Europe, Australia and other parts of the world. All it will do is adapt and evolve. Journalism is about a lot of things which are very important to people, including entertainment, recreation, pleasure, citizenship, good government and many more. It is not a luxury but has been an essential part of liberal, democratic capitalism ever since the bourgeois revolution. Both journalism and democracy are essential for each other to survive, but a series of transitions has taken place. These include a switch from analogue to digital signals, a shift from passive to active communication, a move from magazines to mobile media, and from stationary to mobile platforms. Apart from this, audiences are now using computers, and increasingly, smart phones and tablets to access information (McNair 2009 p. 348).

The consequence of these trends has impacted on the technology that has supported them. Production has now become decentralised and globalised. The traditional professional’s authority is now being challenged by gifted amateurs as networking sites like Gaza and Twitter have come into existence. In summary, the communication environment has become more chaotic. In a way, this is a positive thing as chaos helps to improve creativity and sustain liberty. In the twenty-first century when so much information is freely available on the Internet, the distinction between the quality and quantity of information is difficult to recognise. The question is who can be trusted? Another major question that prevails is what could happen should there be an aggregation of news channels like the BBC and Google? If content remains free on the Internet then who will be responsible for its maintenance and who is going to pay for it?

There are so many issues that need to be considered and the answers have yet to emerge. The only thing that can be predicted is that revenue will need to be created from advertisements and viewers, essential to the maintenance of platforms of information. There are various arguments that suggest that the Internet has the power to deal with these challenges — which is good thing. Meanwhile, the boundaries between professionals and amateurs, information and entertainment, genres in journalism have already started to dissolve. A journey through this cultural chaos might be confusing or
even disturbing at times, but for the generation who settled and grew up in the twentieth century, it will be an exciting and rich experience.

3.3.3 Opportunities and Challenges of Online Journalism

Within a short span of time, online journalism has shown itself to be a powerful means for disseminating information. This is primarily because of various characteristic features like connectivity, hypertextuality and even anonymity on the web. Due to these factors, online journalism has been able to capture huge audiences who had long before declared themselves as being disinterested in newspapers. It is considered to be a predominantly free alternative form of media that enables the sharing of information and entertainment and thus has — and will have — a profound impact on newspapers and their survival (Auh 2000, p. 129).

Another important feature of the Internet is that this form of media has gone online without any fear, uncertainty and doubt. There are many well-educated, young and affluent people who prefer to gather information from the net as it has many attractive features to engage audiences, unlike traditional newspapers. To the traditional media and even newspapers, this development is considered both as a threat as well as an opportunity (Lazaroiu 2010). Newspaper publishers, fearful of obsolescence, are now creating online versions. This decision has been driven by fear, uncertainty and doubt rather than profitability, so that they can set up a good base at the earliest possible stage of competition and hopefully survive in the industry. The belief that is more prevalent now is that the Internet can help to create a more positive image of the newspaper (Lanson 1999, p. 130).

It has been observed by Pavlik (1997, pp. 30-38) that the content of news on the Internet basically evolves through three stages (See Figure 8). Stage one still dominates in most of the news websites. Here, online editors mostly copy the data from a mother, or primary, website. The second stage developed recently in which online editors create original content that is augmented further with the help of hyperlinks. The last stage is where new websites are built containing hyperlinks and information that help to act as a medium of communication. Stage three has a few characteristic features that include thinking about the nature of the online community and also deciding upon new ways to tell stories to people.
Taking all this into consideration, it can be said that online and offline journalism can be both complementary as well as competitive. As I argued earlier, it is now evident that people are spending increasingly more time on the internet accessing television, entertainment, magazines and information, leading to a significant decline in traditional media (Meyers 2012). Online journalism also faces the problem of sibling rivalry. Auh (2000, p. 128) posits that online news operates in an environment where a lot of attention needs to be paid to content and layout because many of the antiquated rules of traditional journalism have been rewritten for online formats. The very definition of news has changed. However, there are still a few sites which until recently followed the old rules of traditional journalism. There is also evident rivalry between those who once controlled publishing and a new generation of journalism that can be considered at war between the ‘elitists’ and the ‘populists’. Finally, it is definitely going to be a business rationale more than anything else that will determine which ideology will prevail, with most online news providers still grappling with a sustainable business model (Auh 2000, p. 129).

This new level of interactivity between producers and audiences has resulted in the creation of a community of common interests and ideology. Optimistic people state that interactivity is one of the most positive features that online journalism has contributed (Haas & Steiner 2006). Millions are attracted to cyberspace and comment on common things which have led to the creation of various communities — a geographical community, a community of common interests, or another sharing some common bond (Broersma 2010, pp. 21-33). The world has become intercultural, that is, culture is now globalised.
But there still are those who are sceptical about the formation of communities on the Internet and the interactions which take place through websites (Broersma, 2010). There are questions as to why polls are taken by people from all around the world for issues that are relevant only for one country (Hanitzsch et al. 2010). Thus, it is my opinion that, to some extent, the community aspect of blogs and discussion forums still has to prove its worth. However, there are many people who are more than willing to discuss issues on the Internet, which suggests that there are other people, too, who are very comfortable with this idea.

So many things have been observed on the Internet. The next question is who pays for all this? How is it funded? Creation and maintenance of websites is costly and has to rely on funding from some source. This can be done using personal sources or from outside, including advertising, monthly subscription fees or even transaction fees. Advertisers remain sceptical about the Internet and readers are reluctant to pay for the privilege of accessing content online. As suggested earlier, funding models remain in a state of flux (Lazaroiu 2010).

One study by Lanson (1999, p. 141) shows that around 60 per cent of a sample of community-based websites existed with minimal funding, based on donated time, work and the expertise of volunteers. Around 21 per cent of the sales and promotion websites attract mostly qualified customers which creates a ‘win-win’ situation for companies and is also cost-effective. Public information sites which are generally funded by government and educational organisations represent 11 per cent of the samples. Finally, there are sponsored sites which also account for 11 per cent of the total surveyed. These are sites which are very close to traditional media forms and package information in such a way that it reaches a target audience in a specific format.

Through analysis of various website models and surveys of people who have created and maintained websites, it seems that the level of interactivity and the ideologies related to intellectual property and the size of the audience act as important factors in determining how websites will be funded. Once a newspaper is involved in online business, it is important for it to come up with a good funding model for the company. Few companies remain optimistic that the amount they invest will yield them benefits in time to come.
In addition, there are various legal and ethical issues which online websites must face. Credibility and integrity of the information is generally at risk when compared with traditional media forms. This is particularly because the information is posted instantaneously on websites. There is also the risk of losing credibility as links to external sources are also provided. Though an editor of a newspaper can maintain control as to what will be published in a newspaper, it is not the same for online editors. Online editors are more concerned about what information will interest readers (Handley & Rutigliano 2012). This can be explained with the help of an example. Suppose a story on the New York Times website about the innocence of a person accused of being a killer provides links to two to three websites to augment the information provided to prove his innocence. It has been found by specialists (Broersma 2010; Haas & Steiner 2006) that such links lead to less credible information for readers. However, the New York Times in this case defended its action by stating that the website was responsible for providing readers a service and could not be responsible for all the information that is provided.

Reputable news websites have policies so that the links they provide do not lead users to sites which condone violence, present sexual content that is not ethical or promote racism or extol bigotry. Legal protection is and needs to be taken by websites, which is usually in the form of a disclaimer. Web surfers are reminded that they are leaving a secure place and the site they will be visiting is not under the editorial control of the news organisation. But the question that persists is could this disclaimer be used for formats like chat rooms where derogatory terms for body parts and swearing are commonly used (Auh 2000, p. 130)?

From my personal and anecdotal standpoint, logistical issues are just as relevant to a media system as are political or social constraints. For example, it is common knowledge that the US Constitution through the First Amendment allows for freedom of speech in any context for any person within the country. As I suggested earlier, this can cause problems, for example, depictions of the Prophet Muhammed in a cartoon. An additional issue that continues to plague countries internationally with regard to online news sites is the language barrier that prevents people from accessing websites in English. Despite the fact that globalisation, and arguably Americanisation, has led to English becoming the lingua franca, it is still a difficult language to learn and use, particularly in non-Western contexts. To many Internet users, English language news websites remain unexplored due to the barrier presented by language. The level of
English language proficiency for many is far too rudimentary to be sufficient enough to access basic information and perform basic daily activities. Thus the burgeoning interactive nature of websites means that media will make up for inadequacies in news dissemination. It is inevitable that future journalists will be developing communities of interest based on their stories, increasingly across cultural boundaries.

3.3.4 Online Journalism on the Internet

In the mid 1990s, journalism started to link up with the World Wide Web. It was used to illustrate news stories which were once left to magazines, radio or television programs. The Internet served as a virtual newsroom that carried up to the minute headlines (Cohen 2010, p. 532). Online journalism has the power to help citizens to access more comprehensive versions of the news. Apart from this, it also helps them to take an active part in the process of journalism. Online news habits and trends have already had an impact and reflect traditional journalism styles. Editors are now taking advantage of the new technological advances on the Internet like that of interactivity and multimedia to change the shape of presenting news. There are news websites presently ranging from the New York Times to newcomers that appear online only, like the Salon and Slate, which have become a social force and have the required capabilities to flourish (Pisani 2006, p. 43). Events like Zippergate2 and the September 11 terrorist attack gave a hint as to what impact the Internet would have on journalism. Since those two events, weblogs or blogs have become very common, and this commonality meets the needs of audiences who swarm online when such high drama events occur (Hellman & Jaakkola 2011). However, publishers of online news sites need to explore the capabilities of the Internet which can increases user gratification and improve people’s perceptions and trust of the media. This would help in supporting the concept of a viable form of Internet journalism (Robinson 2006b, p. 845).

According to Robinson (2006b), one of the unintentional consequences of online journalism has been the formation of a cyber community. Online versions of newspapers are allowing space for readers to provide comments on unedited versions of

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2 As the Clinton-Lewinsky investigation intensifies, the American media had a feeding frenzy over the allegations of an affair and cover-up. Americans have turned to the Internet for hard news and salacious gossip. At home and at work, wired Americans have been rushing online. Large American news sites such as The New York Times, Fox News Online and MSNBC have seen extraordinary traffic. Fox News Online executive producer Scott Ehrlich said it’s like nothing he’s seen before; not even the death of Princess Diana has generated as much traffic. On a normal day, about 1 million pages are served up to computer users. Now, it’s twice that. (BBC News, Friday, January 30, 1998 Published at 21:46 GMT).
a story. It has also been observed that online users of news are as concerned with bias as consumers of other media, but they do not care much about the kind of online information that is present on the Internet.

Thus we see that change starts at the edges. This is where the readers and the viewers develop new practices. News can be viewed in a multitude of ways on the Internet, a fact that has great relevance to the relationship between an online journalist and the web. A significant part of the news also comes from search engines. Robinson (2006, p. 486) explains that free online classified advertisements siphon key revenue away from newspapers and is being used by sites such as Craigslist.org, Google News, Yahoo! and Wiki news. These are sites that attract hundreds of millions of users around the world and hence challenge the traditional media (Robinson 2006, p. 487).

Apart from this, there are numerous other small websites which provide news. These include del.icio.us, Digg.com, NewsVine.com, Wikio.com and many more. These and other sites impact on journalism in varying ways. The presentation of information possible with the help of multimedia has replaced traditional storytelling in part, with all of this now available through one site. A phenomenal growth in blogs, mob logs, vlogs and stories is also evident (Luyt 2012). Today is the era when users expect journalists to engage directly with them and also expect to be able to act like journalists themselves. There has been a transition in journalism from lecture to conversation. Many more facilities are provided on the Internet to help users become journalists. There are discussion threads now present where users can discuss anything about the information they read. They can report errors if they find any. For example, Clarin.com lets users select the home page of the website they want to see. The BBC has a special page on which the users can upload their own stories and news about anything. Thus we see that along with the divergence of information around the world, culture is also becoming globalized. No culture remains hidden and people know almost everything which is present in all the parts of the world (Pisani 2004, p. 43).

Professionally, or even semi-professionally, the use of these types of blogging or vlogging sites can be taken advantage of by the journalistic community. J-blogs, as they have come to be known, are thought to have been created as part of community media and in response to the totalitarian corporate media models so pervasive today (Robinson 2006, pp. 65-83). More than 1500 J-blogs or blogs about journalism currently exist across the globe. Within these, J-bloggers muse on ethics, transparency, technological
advancements and organisational media structures (Robinson, 2006). These topics are discussed away from mainstream media ethical and organisational constraints, as Robinson (2006, p. 77) concludes:

Many of the j-blogs consider the issue of what is journalism, in part because so many of the independent news sites were created specifically to counter traditional journalism.

This then has two implications: first, those who are working in the field of journalism have the opportunity to increase their knowledge base, skills and Internet savvy through the use of the Internet itself; and second, amateur or publicly-sourced journalists who are posting content on the web daily have an opportunity to see relevant journalistic professional opinion. It is possible then that lessons can be learned both intra-professionally as well as inter-professionally.

Journalists who work online are generally constrained by deadlines and by source availability. The Internet helps online journalists to escape from the traditional forms of presentation. It encourages media organisations to push news narratives instantaneously online. But there still remains a constant pressure on journalists to keep information up to date. There is also a space for online journalists to make corrections later. This becomes an advantage because, given the increase in pressure and time limits placed on journalists by publishers, information needs to be uploaded quickly with little time to review what is being posted.

Online journalism has surpassed traditional forms of disseminating news in various ways and has brought forward the concept of blogs and discussion forums that have enabled audiences to air their views. These comment threads and the forums have made culture a more global phenomenon.

### 3.3.5 Online Newsrooms in Europe

In the past two years in Europe, online news operations have been separated from other newsrooms because of a perceived difference in quality, going against a global trend. Some put this down to investigative journalism, or is it just a European phenomenon?

Broadcasters in Europe have been engaging in using new technologies in their newsrooms so as to leverage the advantages of IT-based production and available asset management tools. In short, they are becoming more of a news factory. Along with this,
they have included the integration of social media. The integration of newsrooms is an old idea but with the advent of new communications technology, the meaning is changing rapidly. These days, automation of graphics, a shift to IT-based workflows, processing of metadata and the integration of social media are the prime elements of an online newsroom (Hunter 2011).

According to Hunter (2011) there are certain cases where integration can involve a complete merger of newspaper and broadcasting production processes. In such cases, this can be subject to regulatory hurdles if it actually means reducing existing competition in news production in a single country. This fact has also been a recent subplot in the UK phone hacking scandal, which took place by integrating a News Corporation owned newspaper in the UK with the country’s leading pay television operator BSkyB. The owner of News Corporation, Rupert Murdoch, planned to take over BSkyB completely by creating an online newsroom which would integrate resources between different newspapers like the Times and Sky News, the BskyB subsidiary which produces 24 hour news coverage (Hunter 2011).

However, for most of the broadcasters involved in the integration of newsrooms, newspapers are not involved. Significant importance is given to radio and also to online textual content. This was the case with the BBC, which in early 1987 decided to integrate radio and television production channels in an online newsroom. This decision was countered by resistance from trade unions who also threatened strike action as it resulted in the loss of at least 500 jobs. However, since then, the BBC online website has been one of the most successful and popular online information sources, providing news services to the rest of the world and challenging commercial broadcasters. Clearly, integrated newsrooms have been highly successful and have also resulted in huge savings (Hunter 2011).

Since the success of the BBC news service, other broadcasters have established online newsrooms and have taken advantage of incorporating new tools into their formats. In Italy, the country’s largest broadcaster, Mediaset, is owned by the former Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi. It has decided to centralize its newsgathering and production processes with an asset management platform from the French-headquartered digital media technology vendor, Dalet. An asset management plan examines all human and physical capital and amalgamates it into one platform. According to what current assets a company holds, these assets are planned for or
organised. The basic reason behind the move undertaken by Mediaset was that all data could be collected at a centralized database which would enable better management. It also helped in the preparation of text, graphics, edited video and voiceovers (Hunter 2011).

Based on the experiences I have outlined above, the importance of keeping metadata is crucial as the entire content can be streamlined in an efficient manner. It also enables greater accuracy with information management at all the stages from assigning to archiving (Hunter 2011). An accurate metadata database also helps to ensure that the stories journalists are working on are accurate and are being processed and playing out correctly. Another important aspect is the combination of data from traditional sources with different media such as mobile phones and tablets, the Internet and social media. Mediaset has confidently claimed that it has achieved this synchronization very efficiently without the need of hiring any extra staff (Hunter 2011).

New ways are being devised to provide information to people around the world. This fact is reflected by the configuration of online newsrooms, which contain information integrated from different resources. This information definitely has to be free from barriers as far as possible and should ensure mechanisms to enforce rights or controls on regulatory issues when required.

3.4 Digital Media and Saudi Arabia
This part of the chapter specifically explores how Saudi Arabian culture impacts on journalism. There are many studies into how culture impacts on media but none thus far has focused on online journalism in Saudi Arabia.

In the frame of the specifics of Saudi Arabia, I will focus on culture and language as important factors that affect online journalism. In compiling this section, I have studied the online resources describing the culture of Saudi Arabia and its specifics.

Identification
The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (in Arabic ‘al-Mamlaka al-Arabiya as-Saudiya’) occupies most of the Arabian Peninsula, the original homeland of the Arab people and of Islam. The cultural identities Saudi Arabian citizens express are principally those of Muslim and Arab, linking them to millions of people beyond the nation’s borders. They also identify with the contemporary state and its national culture; the country’s name
links the ruling dynasty, Al Saud, with the state’s cultural and geographic setting (Vasil’ev, 1998). Identities connected to the traditional ways of life of the Bedouin and of oasis-dwelling farmers, fishermen, craftspeople and artisans, and merchants, caravaneers, and long-distance traders remain in force, even as economic changes have transformed or ended those ways of life. Regional and kin-based tribal and clan identities are shared among Saudi Arabian citizens (Countries and Their Cultures 2013).

**Linguistic Affiliation**

Arabic is the language of all Saudi Arabian citizens and about half of the immigrants. Classical Arabic *fusha* as written in the holy Quran, literacy rates, and modern standard forms of Arabic are used for prayers and religious rituals, poetry, lectures, speeches, broadcasts, written communication, and other formal purposes (Al-Rasheed, 2010). Conversationally, people use colloquial Arabic (amiya). There are many sub-dialects and internal variants. English is the main second language (Countries and Their Cultures 2013).

![Figure 9: Map of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia](image)

**Emergence of the Nation**

Saudi Arabia’s cultural roots lie deep in antiquity. Although remote from centres of ancient civilizations, Arabia’s people had a multiplicity of contacts with Egypt, Syria, and Iraq and with the Roman and Byzantine empires. Ancient Arabia was home to states, cities and other manifestations of complex cultures and societies. Of particular significance to ancient Arabia was the domestication of the dromedary (the one-humped camel) in the southern part of the peninsula between 3000 and 2500 before common. By 1000 before common, camels were important in the lucrative caravan trade, especially
for the transport of incense between southern Arabia and markets in the north. The invention of the north Arabian camel saddle between about 500 and 100 before common allowed tribally organised camel raisers to enhance their power and influence (History and Ethic Relations 2010).

Camel raisers did not subsist on their own in desert Arabia but depended on foods produced by farmers in the region’s oases and on a wide range of products, including weapons, manufactured by local craftspeople. The Bedouin obtained some of their necessities through tribute in return for their protection of farmers and craftspeople. Market exchange also existed, and the output of nomadic and sedentary producers was marketed locally and, in the case of camels and horses, through long-distance trade. Markets and their specialized personnel of merchants and traders are as indigenous to the culture of Arabia as are Bedouin camel raisers and oasis-dwelling farmers. Knowledge of the state as an institution has also long been present, although the exercise of effective state power was often lacking in the past (History and Ethic Relations 2010).

The foundation and legitimacy of the state are linked to Islam, which is itself historically linked to Arabia. Muslims believe that God (Allah) sent His final revelation ‘in clear Arabic’, in the form of the holy Quran, through His Messenger, Muhammad. This occurred first in and around Mecca and then in Medina beginning in 622 common era, which marks the first year of the Islamic era (1 A.H.). By the time of Muhammad’s death in 632, almost all the tribal and local communities in Arabia had declared their loyalty to him as a political leader and most had accepted Islam (BBC 2011). The process of conversion was completed under the leadership of Islam’s first caliph, Abu Bakr. The religion was then carried by Arabian converts throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Islam brought not only a new religion but a new way of life that included innovation in legal and political concepts and practices, and a new identity that was universalistic and cosmopolitan. The new Muslim identity, politics, and laws transcended the social and cultural borders of existing communities that had been organised as localities or kin based tribes (Countries and Their Cultures 2013).

**National Identity**

Contemporary Saudi Arabia arose from a process of state development that began in the late seventeenth century, when leaders of the Bani Khalid tribe created a state in the al-Ahsa area of today’s Eastern Province. Other attempts at state building involved the Al
Rashid and Al Idrisi dynasties in Najd and Asir, respectively. However, the most effective movement was initiated in the late 1730s by Sheikh Muhammad Al Abd al-Wahab (died 1792). After studying in the Hijaz and Iraq, he returned to Najd and preached and wrote against practices that deviated from Islam. He stressed the unity of God and urged his followers, who became known as muwahhidun (Unitarians), to end polytheistic practices and adhere strictly to the Quran and the Hadith (the sayings and doings of the Prophet) (Al-Rasheed, 2010).

In 1744, the sheikh swore an oath with Muhammad Al Saud, the emir of ad-Diriyah that they would collaborate to establish a state organised and run according to Islamic principles. Their goal was religious reform, a phenomenon that involved a new leadership structure that placed Al Saud in the position of umara (princes, rulers) and Al Abd al-Wahab (also known as Al Sheikh) in the position of ulama (learned in religion). The reform movement also involved military struggle, preaching, the establishment of Quranic schools, the setting up of new communities, and the creation of a bureaucratic state that ruled in Najd from 1765 and in Hijaz from 1803 until 1818, when it was defeated by an Ottoman army from Egypt. This state was re-established in the mid-nineteenth century, overthrown by Al Rashid, and re-created through reconquest and religious reform under the leadership of Abd al-Aziz Al Saud beginning in 1902 and culminating with the declaration of the present kingdom in 1932 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2013).

Never a colony of a foreign power or a province of the Ottoman Empire, the Saudi Arabian state resulted from an indigenous local process of socio-political change and religious reform. Some think of that state as having a strong tribal dimension, in part because the Al Saud is of tribal origins. However, merchants provided loans and financial assistance, preachers and teachers built a consciousness among Muslims and imparted religious knowledge, and jurists and bureaucrats laboured to carry out the work of a state without regard to tribal identity. The legitimacy of the state is derived from Islam, along with the will of the citizens, who swear an oath of allegiance bayah to the ruler. The constitution is the Quran, and Sharia (Islamic law) is the law of the land. The ruler has the title ‘Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques,’ which implies an Islamic role, yet he also carries the title of king, which may be seen as symbolic of the state’s technical, administrative, and policing functions (Countries and Their Cultures 2013).
**Ethnic Relations**

As Muslims, Saudi Arabians participate in a community (ummah) in which issues of race, ethnicity, and national origin should be of no significance and which never form the basis for social action, political behaviour, and economic organisation. The identity of being Muslim transcends the borders of states and ideally takes precedence over all other identities. Socially, however, the concept of origin (asl) is strong among many Saudi Arabians. Some people, mainly in Hijaz, are recognized descendants of Muhammad and are known as *Ashraf*. Many others throughout the kingdom assert patrilineal descent from eponymous ancestors from ancient Arab tribes. Still others stress Arabian origins but without tribal connections. However, Saudi citizenship embraces people with historical origins outside the Arabian Peninsula. Considerations of origin are important markers and influence social interaction, including marriage, but do not translate directly into economic or power differentials in the national society. Moreover, the social significance of such considerations is waning, especially among younger people (Countries and Their Cultures 2013).

The more prominent cultural division within Saudi Arabian society is between citizens and immigrants. That division sometimes is muted by the common bonds of Islam and/or Arabism, yet many immigrants are neither Muslim nor Arab. In these cases, religious, linguistic, and other cultural barriers accentuate the social cleavage between the local person and the foreigner. Moreover, class divisions separate citizens from the many immigrants who are low-skilled workers. The immigrants come temporarily and mostly as individuals without families. They are thus in the society but not of it, and little effort is made to assimilate them (Countries and Their Cultures 2013; Ameer 2008).

**Religious Beliefs**

All Saudi Arabian citizens are Muslims. Except for a small minority of *Shia*, Saudi Arabians are *Sunni* and mainly follow the *Handbali* school of Islamic law (*madhab*). Half or more of the immigrants are also Muslims. The practice of any non-Muslim religion is not allowed to occur in Saudi Arabia (Countries and Their Cultures 2013).

**Rituals and Holy Places**

The major everyday rituals are related to the five daily prayers that constitute one of the five pillars of Islam. Those who pray face Makkah, ideally in a mosque or as a group.
The *haj* (pilgrimage) is another of the five pillars and should be performed at least once in one’s life. Visits also take place to the mosque and tomb of Muhammad in Medina. The other three pillars of Islam are witnessing that there is no God but God and Muhammad is His Messenger, fasting during the day throughout the month of Ramadan, and the giving of alms (Countries and Their Cultures 2013; Ascoura 2013, p. 255).

### 3.4.1 Evolution and Development of the Internet

Saudi Arabia’s telecommunications sector is growing at a remarkable rate. Facilities and services are constantly being expanded to accommodate the Kingdom’s growing market. Information about Saudi Arabia can be found at the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington DC. The major telecommunication provider in Saudi Arabia is the partially privatized Saudi Telecommunications Company (STC), one of the largest telecom services operators in the world. A second company, Mobily, also provides mobile phone service (CITC 2013).

Internet usage is growing rapidly in Saudi Arabia. More and more lines are being provisioned for Internet access to accommodate increasing demand, including high-speed service such as DSL. Nearly two-thirds of Saudis have Internet access. The Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC) supervises all operations of the Kingdom’s Internet sector. CITC also helps Saudi families own personal computers and access the Internet through the Saudi Home Computing Initiative (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, Washington DC 2013).

Saudi Arabia also sends satellites into space. In 2006 alone, the Kingdom launched six Saudi-built satellites for communication and observation. The King Fahd Satellite Communications City in Jeddah is the biggest such complex in the Middle East. It is also the ground station for Arabsat, the leading communication satellite in the Arab world. A second Arabsat satellite was launched on June 17, 1985 with the help of Saudi Payload Specialist, Prince Sultan bin Salman – the first Arab and Muslim to travel to space – during his mission onboard the US space shuttle Discovery (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, Washington DC 2013; The Report: Saudi Arabia 2010, p. 152).

In 1984, the first fibre optic network was launched. In the same year, telecommunications centres and complexes were established all over the Kingdom. In 1986, the King Fahd Satellite Communications City on the Makkah-Jeddah Road was
inaugurated. It consists of four ground stations to operate Arabsat, Intelsat (Atlantic Ocean), Intelsat (Indian Ocean) and Inmarsat for naval communications. Among the objectives of this network is to connect the Kingdom with the outside world (Al-Tawil, 2001).

The Statute of Telecommunications and the establishment of the Saudi Communications Commission in 2001 was changed to the Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC), charged with regulating the affairs of this sector and to ensure the provision of the best possible telecommunications services across the Kingdom by companies licensed in accordance with the Telecommunications Statute (Dwivedi & Weerakkody, 2007).

A royal decree\(^3\) in 2003 changed the name of the Ministry of Posts, Telegraphs and Telephones (MoPTT) to ‘Communications and Information Technology Commission’. This reflects the attention given by the Saudi government to the communications and information technology sector and the Kingdom’s development into an information society (CITC 2013).

**Saudi Arabia Internet Restrictions**

*‘How do I bypass Internet restrictions? Easy, Using our secure VPN services!’* Such offers and services are offered by many companies in Saudi Arabia (Schanzer & Miller, 2012). Saudi Arabian Internet censorship is considered to be one of the most extensive in the world. In fact, 18 months after the Internet was introduced in the Kingdom in 1999, the number of sites that had been banned in the country had reached 200,000. By 2004, the number of banned web pages had risen by 100 per cent to 400,000 (Al-Bab., 2009). According to authorities, the main reason why some Internet sites are prohibited in the Kingdom is to protect the values and culture espoused by Islam. Implementing Saudi Arabian Internet censorship is not particularly difficult. The KACST, short for King AbdelAziz City for Science and Technology, is the only institution that provides Internet service in the whole Kingdom. This really makes it easy for the government to monitor and censure access to certain Internet sites. Also, a renowned computer technology group has provided Saudi Arabia with equipment and techniques on how to effectively prevent people from accessing websites that the government deems inappropriate for its citizens (KACST 2012).

\(^3\) No. A/2 was issued on 28/2/1424 H.(1/5/2003).
Saudi Arabian Internet censorship efforts focus on banning pornographic sites and those that have anti-government sentiments, which really are not that numerous. The Kingdom’s Communications and Information Technology Commission makes use of certain software to block gambling and porn sites. However, for other websites, the citizens of Saudi Arabia are the ones who patrol the Internet on behalf of the government. In fact, authorities receive over 1,200 requests every day to have web pages blocked (Al-Gahtani, Hubona & Wang, 2007). The people who are most ardent in patrolling cyberspace in the Kingdom are religious figures and students. Authorities are only able to take action on half of the requests submitted each day (KACST 2012).

Although the government claims that they are only implementing censorship because they want to promote the culture and values of Islam, many people believe that profits are also driving the Kingdom to ban certain sites. One example is the ban on telephone company web pages in order for the Saudi Communications Company to retain monopoly over telephone connections within the Kingdom. Still, there are a lot of people who are able to bypass the government’s program filters.

In fact, there are over 2,000 anonymous bloggers in the country. Also, there are citizens who make use of ISPs from foreign countries for unrestricted Internet connection. However, this can be an expensive way to work around Saudi Arabian Internet censorship. Fortunately, many users can avoid restrictions by creating a virtual private network (KACST 2012; Altawil 2001, pp. 625-632).

### 3.4.2 Saudi Online News Institutions

This section will discus the Saudi Arabian Online News and the current organisations. There are many useful websites of online news, two of them are *alriyadh* and *al-jazirah*, also many Saudi Arabian radio stations present news from all around the country, as well as the world news and online television news channels, such as *Ekhbariya TV*, *Riyadh radio* from Saudi Arabia, or *al-Arabiya* an international news channel headquartered in Dubai, UAE. Many international organisations offer current issues of newspapers from Saudi Arabia in the original form. It is possible to read digital replicas of newspapers on a tablet or computer, for example, *Al-Watan* (Saudi), *Alyaum*, *Arab News*, *Arriyadiyah*, *Asharq Al-Awsat* (Saudi Edition), *Okaz*, *Sabq* online news (The Ministry of Culture and Information 2013).
In the next section, I will briefly introduce some of the online newspapers and point out their main characteristics.

Arab News

*Arab News* is Saudi Arabia’s first English language newspaper. It was founded in 1975 by Hisham and Mohammed Ali Hafiz. Today, it is one of 29 publications⁴ produced by the Saudi Research and Publishing Company (SRPC), a subsidiary of the Saudi Research and Marketing Group (SRMG). Arab News is popular among many sections of Saudi society, including nationals and foreign residents, and among various socio-economic levels from guest workers to company CEOs. *Arab News* was the first newspaper to provide a Saudi perspective in English on a wide range of national, regional and global issues through its diverse collection of columnists. This content keeps track of the Kingdom’s policies and developments in Saudi society. *Arab News* is printed in colour simultaneously at its state-of-the-art facilities in Jeddah, Riyadh and

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⁴ In 2010, the number of Saudi online news websites was up to 200 (Minister of Culture and Information Dr. Abdulaziz Khoja, Third Annual Media Forum in East Room 2010). In 2012, the number increased to 400 online news websites (Tariq M. Alkhatrawi, Director of Electronic Publishing, The Ministry of Culture and Information: internal media 16/01/2012).
Dammam. It can be found on newsstands throughout the Middle East (Arab News 2013).

**Saudi Gazette**

The *Saudi Gazette* is one of the largest and most read newspapers in Saudi Arabia. For more than 30 years, the Gazette has been committed to delivering readers the news and information they rely on in a format they enjoy. It has transformed the process of gathering and disseminating the news by creating synergies between their newsroom and saudigazette.com.sa, the online gateway. It is in the process of the evolution of a newsroom into the Rapid News System, a shift that will allow an expansion into multimedia and the delivery of relevant, targeted news across multiple platforms based on reader’s needs. The *Saudi Gazette* is owned by part of the Okaz family, and the company is rich in its diversity of people and communities. Okaz serves readers throughout operations within Saudi Arabia, as well as the Arab world (Saudi Gazette 2013).

**Alriyadh**

*Alriyadh News* is one of the leading media organisations in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, it also published in English by Alyamamh Press. This is the first daily newspaper was published in Arabic in the capital of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; the first issue was published on May 11th, 1965, with a limited number of pages. However, the newspaper continued to develop until it reached a daily publication of 52 pages, 32 of which are coloured, and the newspaper currently occupies centre stage in terms of distribution rates, readership and advertising space in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is edited by a group of elite writers and editors, and it is the first Saudi publication that registers a growth rate of 100% in Saudi editorial jobs (Alriyadh News 2013).

**Al-Jazirah**

*Al-Jazirah* was the first Saudi Newspaper to go online in 1996, and today the average number of hits reaches more than 120,000 hits per day. *Al-Jazirah* was also the first newspaper in the Middle East to successfully launch the mobile phone application with the unique capability of viewing pages as printed on the paper with full flexibility and user friendly options. The total number of users is 50,000. Furthermore, *Al-Jazirah* is the first Saudi company to launch a mobile photo application, through which the user can view news related photos on their mobile phones. *Al-Jazirah* provides consultation
services on editorial, printing, and publishing and mobile application services and is a certified training centre (Al-Jazirah News 2013).

3.4.3 Religion and Saudi Arabia

As the research is focused on Saudi Arabia, it is important to understand the worldviews that influences how an Arab journalist would report compared to a western journalist. Although in many countries around the world, there are clear distinctions between religion, politics, media and other areas of life, religion is inseparable from every aspect of life in Saudi Arabia (Mowlana, 2000). Religion and its virtue is at the core of every system in Saudi Arabia and has been that way for thousands of years. Thus contemporary systems, including ethical systems, reflect the religious virtues that are omnipresent in Saudi Arabia. Therefore familiarity with certain Islamic concepts and philosophies would be beneficial in understanding the influential factors in the Saudi Arabian mediasphere (Seini, 1986).

The Prophet Muhammad said, “Iman (faith) is what you embrace in your heart and apply to your actions” (Mohamed, 2008). Iman not only consists of belief in God but also belief in “His Angels, His books, His Messengers and in the Last Day (Day of Judgment)” (Mohamed, 2008). Iman is a private affair between a person and his Creator. Only the Creator can judge the Iman of a person. This is a pre-requisite of belief in Islam. The importance of understanding Iman is that it allows a greater understanding of the existence of deep enthusiasm about Islam and actions of people in Saudi Arabia.

The Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) said, “Surely G’d does not look at your outward appearances nor your wealth, but He looks into your hearts and your actions.” The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) proclaimed: “Allah (swt) wants that whenever you do something, you do it very well (as best as it can be).” Therefore, it is vital that we pay attention to our principles and ensure that what is introduced as essentials in the social environment is intellectually beneficial to reflect positively on journalists, their behaviour and development (Hasnain, 1988).

The Saudi media is pursuing principles based on the broad belief of faith in God and implanting this in the hearts of people. This occurs alongside a task of upgrading the intellectual and cultural heritage of the community and to look at the emotional
development of citizens. This necessarily entails addressing social problems within the framework of deepening the idea of obedience to God and His Messenger and the rulers, and an incitement to respect and implement the system of conviction. The family, school, mosque, mass media and society as a whole participate in guiding and directing this process.

The short message is that social status, money or even a perception of piety means nothing to G’d. Sanctimony means nothing to Him. What matters is the purity of the intentions that guide actions. This is why believers, who have a proper understanding always seek to purify their intentions before acting. This devotion to the Creator leads to the Umma, the community. The concept of Umma is universal and not bounded by location, language, culture or race. As long as people are devoted to the Creator, they belong to the Umma.

In Islamic communities, individuals should dedicate their life to adhere to these concepts and live in a harmonious community that follows the rules of the Creator and the Holy Book. For thousand of years after the establishment of Islamic law, these were the principles that have been guiding Saudi Arabia into its current establishment. This way of life and the law is therefore a common virtue among the people and thus guides communication and journalistic practices in Saudi Arabia (Scleifer, 1986).

Honor of an individual is another important aspect that plays a significant role in journalism in Saudi Arabia (Ayish, 2003). As this value and belief is built into every person, they will be hesitant to write about anyone in the fear that they might take away the honor of the person. For example, it would be almost impossible for USA president Bill Clinton to become a celebrity figure again in Saudi Arabia after his extra martial affair was narrated in detail in public. Such humiliation would almost mean the end of him if he were in Saudi Arabia. If the case is true, that is often not a problem. However, if the accusation proved to be false, lost dignity would be regained in many other parts of the world. In Saudi Arabia, however this is unlikely to happen once a person goes through such humiliation.

The biggest advantage of abiding by these rules is that this cultural belief by itself encourages thorough research and validation instead of jumping to conclusions as often happens in western media. It also ensures that false information and propaganda that
might create doubt in the community are stopped from being published. Any attempt to deviate people from their faith and the law that might result in a disharmony in the Umma is also prevented.

3.4.4 Media Code of Ethics in Saudi Arabia
This was reflected closely in the Council of Ministers Media Charter code of ethics for Saudi Arabia published in the Arab News in 1982 (sourced from Crook, 2009; Hafez, 2002; Whitaker, 1982). The guideline states that the mass media is not permitted to report “destructive, trends, atheistic tendencies, materialistic philosophies and any attempts to divert Muslims from their faith”. People have freedom of expression as long as they are within Islamic values. The guidelines also include the “the promotion of the idea of obedience to God, His Messenger, parents and guardians and the preservation of the established order”.

Understandably this clearly influences how media report news. The clearest benefits of these codes are that they ensure harmony among people without inflicting anger. (Pintak & Ginges, 2009) mention in a seminal article “Inside the Arab news room”, how Arabs from various middle eastern countries share the same belief and understanding and how strong the belief is. Therefore it was understandable when most Arab Journalists found the Danish cartoon regarding the Prophet as insulting and provocative (Pintak, 2009).

The code of ethics also suggests that journalists should highlight in every place (home or abroad) the fact that the harmony and security that people in Saudi Arabia enjoy is only because of the total adoption of Islam and Sharia law. While it is easier in print and other media that go through an editorial process to ensure that all articles follow this tenet, it is much harder to regulate in online journalism. That is mostly because online journalism is fast and interactive. When a journalist takes a reader’s comment and replies, it is highly possible for readers to make provocative comments and in return the journalist can make suggestions that are based on a secular concept of life rather than one governed by Islam (Schanzer & Miller, 2012). Such innocuous comments potentially can be seen as reporting that is contrary to both state and system.

The code of ethics for media was extended to include Internet publishing in 2001. On top of the existing code of ethics, the additions included anything that could damage the reputation of the head of state as well as diplomatic ambassadors or could create a
harmful relationship for them in their host country. Thus posting a positive article about the Arab Spring or referring a reader to such an article would be unlawful according to the resolution (Pintak, 2013).

While it may appear to create obstacles for journalists, there are certain clear benefits too. For example, the guidelines ask journalists to objectively present the facts and not to create hatred or to sow dissension. This has served Arab journalists extremely well compared to their counterparts in the USA. Pintak & Ginges (2009) found that Arab journalists rightly considered their quality of coverage of news was far higher than that by USA journalists even though they agreed that their level of professionalism was much lower. This has resulted in organisations such as Al-Jazeera becoming a more credible news organisation in the world compared to CNN (Lynch, 2006) or various other news organisations. This idea of trust has also extended online where trust has become a major issue around the world (Bratich, 2004).

### 3.4.5 Comparing Code of ethics with other countries

There has always been a battle over epistemological and historical foundations involving eastern and western communication theories (Kincaid, 1987). While in recent times, the difference between far eastern and western may not differ too much, it is quite different for Middle Eastern and western regions. Thus it is important to understand the difference between a media code of ethics in Saudi Arabia and other countries, including western countries. The common code of ethics shared around the world is “Truth and objectivity” (Hafez, 2002). However, interpretation of the code of ethics varies tremendously. While in Germany, the adaptation is respect for truth and accurate information as well as publication of views that they do not agree with, the Federation of Arab journalists suggests correcting published materials if any inaccuracy is found.

On the other hand, “Freedom of expression” is where the biggest difference in codes of ethics exists. While most western media mention freedom of any sort of expression as a basic concept, the Arab federation and other Islamic countries such as Pakistan, Indonesia, Egypt limits this based on Islamic governance (Hafez, 2002).

Apart from freedom of expression, another aspect where the codes of ethics differ between western countries and Middle East countries — including Saudi Arabia — is
the subject of tradition, mores and religion. All Islamic countries ask their journalists not to publish anything that is derogatory to either the religion or the state while western countries do not have such limitations.

Therefore it can be seen that the value of religion is extremely important in all Arab countries as well as those with Muslim majorities. Thus, extending such values online is extremely important. The next section analyses these values in the Muslim online press.

3.4.6 An Analysis Of Values in the Muslim Online Press

The Muslim press is important to Islamic society and we have seen it evolve over the years from newspapers, to television and radio, to online newspapers and then evolving even more to online interaction with its customer base. Now it has developed as far as allowing any individual to contribute to the story and pictures online. Over the years it has played a major role in Saudi culture (enforcing certain attitudes) but it has also been influenced by its culture base. This can be readily ascertained by reading the Muslim press news articles and seeing the point of view from which it has been written, then reading the same article written by, for example, a Western journalists. The version may have the same news story and ending, but there will be differences.

These differences may be slight or they may be major, usually stemming from the cultural expectations and feelings of its viewer base. Sometimes the differences may be so slight that only a difference in a feeling of sympathy may be noticed. The Muslim press (as well as Saudi media), and its presenters are influenced by Saudi culture and what they can say and write, just as all cultures usually are.

What are the philosophical implications of all of these influences and effects? The Muslim press may not be as unbiased as it should be. My thesis focuses on Saudi Arabian online journalism and media, but we must remember the implications are also valid for all cultures. What is the original, true purpose of the Muslim press? Is it to publish fact as it is seen, or is it to also explain motives and reasoning for what has occurred. When an explanation is given, how deep can it go before the reader starts inferring his or her own opinion? All people have lived in their own culture which has influenced them their whole lives, it is only fair to expect that when they see a story which needs reporting, they will carry their long life, ingrained influence. So is the Muslim’s press role to report what has happened with the reasoning for it, or would it be better to report on the facts alone without any reasoning? And if we do also report on
the reasoning, can we keep it from being expressed with our own culture’s influence? Can we report the reasoning of both sides without being influenced by our lifelong upbringing?

The Muslim press feels it portrays what is going on in the correct manner, just as Western media may feel the same. We have seen that cultural upbringing certainly plays a role in the media, whether that is a slight role or a very large difference of opinion, but all the same, it will play a part. We can also see that our culture can be greatly influenced by the online media. When we hear or read an article, we believe it to be reporting the facts, and may not realize the reporter’s own influence. So when we view what has been said online, we believe it to be fact.

All media can play a large role in influencing the culture and beliefs of its viewers and listeners. We see this many times over. For example, something may happen in the U.S.A which may be suppressed in the U.S.A, so as to not cause commotion and to keep it out of the public eye, but this same event will be reported in the Muslim press and may cause outrage in the Saudi culture. The reverse can be true. The Muslim press may suppress a story which the Western media will run with. In turn, Saudi people may think the West is making up stories which are not true, and perfect examples of this are subjects such as that of Palestine. Not only will the reader have a completely different point of view if read on themuslimpress website (themuslimpres.com) compared to CNN, but also there are many more news stories about Palestine in general on themuslimpress.com. The same may be said regarding other subject matters.

We must also remember that a high percentage of the media is now privately owned and geared towards making a profit rather than working solely the interests of its cultural base. The influence this factor alone can have can be astronomical. A media group will be aiming for ratings to increase its advertising revenue and therefore raise profits, whereas a non-profit media organisation would not have the same drives for profit. Therefore a non-profit media company will not be too concerned about its popularity, which may, in turn, result in less pressure, allowing it to be more unbiased in its reporting. A privately owned company also needs to keep its financial supporters/advertisers happy. For example, it would never speak badly about one of its sponsors. This financial involvement and its implications can go on and on.
We must understand that media is a part of life that is necessary to keep us informed of what is happening in and around our lives, while at the same time it must be remembered their people all have their cultural influences and upbringing, and will therefore report the news with their own biases. It must also be remembered that there are financial influences as well as our own cultural influences involved, and what we consider is acceptable to be published. Once we understand all this, we can view media for the necessity it is and we can open our minds to read between the lines, and to seek different points of view of the same story. With our modern ever changing world, and now with online media, seeking out differing opinions and points of view is very easily done.

It is now abundantly clear that even Saudi Arabia is in an accelerating culture change period, driven by the expansion of international commerce and especially by mass media. Ultimately, what is driving this cultural change is the massive human population explosion. The number of people in Saudi Arabia has increased from 18 million in 2008 to more than 20 million in 2012 (CDSI 2013).

According to Atiyyah (1996, pp. 37-47) and his study Expatriate acculturation in Arab Gulf countries, more attention should be paid to help expatriates to achieve a greater degree of acculturation. A literature survey shows that acculturation is influenced by four variables: cultural differences; expatriates’ rights and duties in the host country; work climate; and living conditions. Available information on Gulf countries indicates that the impact of these variables depends to some extent on the nationality of the expatriate.

3.5 Conclusion
The purpose of this study is straightforward in that it is based on the hypothesis that culture impacts on how individuals perceive the world around them. This, in turn, impacts on how they respond to certain issues in relation to how they affect, influence or threaten the position of the cultural group in question (Hanitzsch et al. 2010). In regard to journalism, it is suggested that individuals in this profession also interpret information in a way that is moulded by their personal beliefs, political or religious convictions or cultural conditioning. Combined with the advent of technology that facilitates high-speed communication and the need to distribute information quickly in order to remain competitive, it is not surprising that old media paradigms have been
slow to respond (Wasserman & Rao 2008). Hanitzsch’s (2007) three levels of cultural influence on journalists — cognitive frameworks, evaluative or organisational impacts, and collective or personal performative levels — offer a convincing framework through which to explore the ways in which journalists practice their craft. These three levels of cultural influence have been found to exist in journalism around the world (Hanitzsch 2007). There is no doubt that culture affects how journalists see the world around them and how they respond to various stories. However, it must be noted that the media, in turn, have an increasing influence on the cultures on which they are reporting. Thus far, there have been no studies on how such a framework might explain the practices adopted by online journalists in the KSA. That is a major driving force behind this project.

In this chapter, I also explored technological convergence within journalism and argued that advanced technology has had a profound impact on all forms of journalism (Robinson, 2006). With online journalism becoming more common, the traditional forms and rules of journalism are no longer considered dominant, but the interests of audiences are held to be of the utmost importance. Online journalism has led to the involvement of more and more participants in the news process because of the relative ubiquity of Internet access. Cultural, generational and political viewpoints are being added to web content at an astonishing rate (Dylko & McCluskey 2012, pp. 250-278; Lazaroiu 2010). Online journalism has given rise to online discussion forums where people from anywhere in the world can place their opinions (Lazaroiu 2010). Cultures are flowing onto the Internet and are being created by it. Hence, along with technological convergence, there is also a cultural convergence, and the world could now be said to be on the brink of a cosmopolitan culture (Poster 2006).

In this chapter, I examined how there has been, and continues to be, a massive shift from the gatekeeper model of media to a model where both socially and collectively, media are being placed on the web where it is monetized (Ang 1994). This inextricably links culture to online journalism, as essentially online journalism is a manifestation of culture (Meyers 2012). In saying that, journalistic skills are no longer a requirement for production of consumable media sources. However, journalists continue to be professionally, organisationally and anecdotally relied upon to present interesting and accurate news stories (Wasserman & Rao 2008). Therefore, this research will examine how the cultural and organisational context affects Saudi Arabian journalists. To enable me to achieve this, a second theoretical idea must be enlisted as ‘old’ journalistic
models no longer apply to online journalists. In line with what Ang (1994) has stated, online journalism is a capitalistic endeavour by corporations. This creates an interesting point of conflict for online journalists, as cultural frameworks and capitalistic influences impact on them as they attempt to disseminate news to the public.
EMPIRICAL STUDY
Chapter 4
Research Methodology

The purpose of outlining the research methodology is to clarify methods of data collection, the materials used, subjects interviewed, theories utilized and how the data is analysed (Walliman 2000, p. 7). In this chapter, I will outline the research methods and procedures I used to obtain and analyse data, with emphasis on the importance of using a qualitative approach to examine the research questions and to collect empirical evidence. Based on the questions I seek to examine, a qualitative study is the most appropriate method as it allows me to overcome many symbolic terms and definitions that need explanatory interpretations. In general, a qualitative approach allows researchers to gather insight into how the subjects think and relate to the world around them. It sheds light on motives, meaning, actions and reactions within the context of human experience (Minichiello et al. 1995, p. 12).

4.1 Research Introduction and Stages

The implementation of the research methods constituted one of the most instructive periods of my PhD study. My attention here is focused on theoretical foundations of the research, including a brief introduction of Saudi Arabian culture and its specifics, the evolution and development of the Internet in Saudi Arabia, Saudi online news institutions, an analysis of values in the Muslim press, and a discussion of issues of cultural change and acculturation.

A part of the theoretical foundation is a research definition, focusing on the description of the preparation and organisation, a description of the various stages of research, and finding features of a qualitative research paradigm in relation to the research questions and research subjects. This research is a systematic way of solving problems, extending the boundaries of human knowledge, to confirm or refute the previously acquired knowledge or acquire new knowledge. The research is a set of organised activities, which include the process of study to expand the knowledge about cultural considerations, and its influence on online journalistic practice and the impact of local culture on journalists’ professional attitudes, values and practices.

Based on the theoretical knowledge and deficient research findings about online journalistic practice and impact of local culture on professional attitudes, values and
practice of journalists in Saudi Arabia, one of the possible alternatives for acquiring knowledge is to realize qualitative research in Saudi Arabia, by interviewing professional journalists. I focused on finding information about the cultural factors that influence online journalistic practice, and factors which hinder or facilitate online journalistic practice. I also focused on how journalists cope with cultural challenges and the role of decision makers in the online journalism industry. Part of the research was to obtain information on the impact that cultural influences have on online news websites, and the impact of audiences on online journalistic practice. Very important for the research was to find out the cultural impact of decision makers on journalistic practices through the structure and formation of online news websites.

Obtaining information through field research in Saudi Arabia makes this research unique. We know there are not many studies on this research topic, and that there are none about the ways in which cultural considerations influence online journalistic practice and the impact of local culture on journalists’ professional attitudes, values and practices in Saudi Arabia. Research preparation comprised the selection and formulation of the problem, rethinking the way to approach people in the sample selection, the data collection method and the development of a plan of research.

Organisation of research involves defining the research stage. The research was qualitatively orientated and implemented, which meant setting research topics and defining the research problem, preparing information for research and undertaking training in research methods and research techniques.

**Defining the Main Concepts of Research**

The research contains terms that were used in the next chapters of the research stage, and therefore needed explanation, since the definition of key terms eliminated ambiguity in this research. As the key concepts of research used in the formulation of the research problem are defined in detail in the individual chapters of the theoretical part of the thesis, within this subchapter, only the main terms are listed in alphabetical order, with reference to the individual chapters and subchapters: *Culture* (1.3, 2.2.1, 2.2.3, 2.2.4, 2.2.5, 2.3.1, 2.3.4, 3.2), *Digital Media* (3.4), *Internet* (3.3.4, 3.4.1), *Journalistic Practice* (1.3, 3.2.4), *Media* (2.3, 2.3.4, 3.2, 3.2.2, 3.2.3), *Media Culture* (3.2.1), *Muslim Online Press* (3.4.3), *Online Journalism* (1.3, 2.3.1, 3.3, 3.3.1, 3.3.2, 3.3.3) *Online Newsroom* (3.3.5), *Ritual Communication* (2.3.5), *Saudi Arabia* (1.3, 3.4), *Saudi Online News* (3.4.2), *Transmission* (2.3.5), *World Wide Web* (3.2.2).
After the research topic, research problem and defining key terms were determined, the research phase of informative research preparation followed, enabling me to better focus on this issue.

**Informative Preparation of Research**

The preparation for the research consisted of searching and studying information sources — monographs, textbooks, encyclopaedias, journal articles and research reports — consultation with my supervisors and experts, as well as participation in discussions about culture and online journalism in the world in general and in Saudi Arabia in particular. The aim was to prepare an overview of what has previously been found about this issue, and lay the theoretical foundations necessary to clarify the research problem, which helped me to define the basic concepts with which I have worked in this research.

**Selection of Research Methods**

The informative preparation of the research was followed by a selection of research methods. It was necessary to test the research method on a small sample of participants. A pre-research (pilot) phase was performed, in order to determine whether the chosen research tool worked in the circumstances and also would produce data relevant to addressing the research problem. I conducted the pre-research phase with professional journalists in Saudi Arabia, which confirmed that the chosen method of a semi-structured interview was suitable for obtaining the necessary data in relation to the defined research problem and subjects. The detail of the research questions and the overall research problem is outlined below.

**4.2 Research Problem**

In terms of methodology, due to the nature of the research approach, essentially a *descriptive research problem* was adopted as a guiding focus for this study, and this stems from two related research questions. These have been identified to help achieve the research objectives and to advance understanding and knowledge from the perspective of journalists in Saudi Arabia.

Based on the thesis topic and processing of the themes in the theoretical part of this thesis, the main research questions and a proposed plan were formulated as follows:

**Q1: How do cultural considerations influence online journalistic practice?**

• investigate the cultural factors that influence online journalistic practice;
• identify what factors hinder or facilitate online journalistic practice;
• investigate how journalists from the KSA deal with cultural challenges; and
• investigate the role of decision makers in the online journalism industry in either protecting online news reporting practices from, or opening them up to, cultural influences.

Q2: What is the impact of local culture on journalists’ professional attitudes, values and practices?
• investigate the impact cultural influences have on online news websites in regards to how journalists select and present the news;
• investigate the impact of audiences on online journalistic practice (through such influences as trends, news evaluation, comments, number of viewers and feedback); and
• investigate the cultural impact of decision makers on journalistic practices through the structure and formation of online news websites (through such factors as news, coverage, level of content and positioning or space given).

4.3 Research Design and Methods
My research approach can be summarized as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Paradigm</th>
<th>Research Approach</th>
<th>Research Method</th>
<th>Epistemology</th>
<th>Direction of theorizing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpretive</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview</td>
<td>Subjective</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Anti-positivist)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Research structure outline

In this qualitative project, I have used an inductive method of constant comparison. This is an approach in which the researcher does not offer a hypothesis but develops an argument based on data analysis. This involved the application of two broad approaches:

1. Empirical method (used to gather data from journalists):
   • Semi-structured interviews.

2. Theoretical methods (used to provide a context for my analysis):
   • Analysis
   • Synthesis
   • Deduction
Semi-structured interviews were designed to enable a consistent data-gathering process. In accordance with research ethics protocols, I explained the purpose for which the interview was taking place and provided each individual with details of the approved ethical clearance documentation, an information sheet and an Informed Consent document which each participant signed. This was in accordance with Griffith University’s ethical approval for the project (GU Ref No: HUM/25/10/HREC, see Appendix B).

Wengraf (2001, p. 5) reminds us that ‘semi-structured interviews are designed to have a number of interviewer questions prepared in advance but such prepared questions are designed to be sufficiently open so that the subsequent questions of the interviewer cannot be planned in advance but must be improvised in a careful and theorized way’. Kitchin and Tate (2000, p. 213) confirm that semi-structured interviewing is the most usual technique adopted for qualitative research. This approach is supported by Minichiello et al. (1995, p. 73), who asserts: ‘Social reality exists as a meaningful interaction between individuals and can only be known through understanding another’s point of view, interpretations and meanings.’ I chose semi-structured interviewing as a method because it is more flexible than other approaches and allowed for the investigation of developing themes and ideas. In addition, it does not rely on concepts and questions defined prior to the interviews and the participants are able to speak about their views and experiences in depth (Hockey, Robinson & Meah 2005).

4.4 The Research Sample

The 16 target interviewees for this research were practicing online journalists working for organisations in Saudi Arabia. In terms of my methodological approach, I decided on a ‘purposeful sample’, taking into account demographic information such as age, gender, educational level, etc. I approached management of each of the organisations involved to request access to staff working in newsrooms. Each participant was approached individually. I explained the nature of the project and sought informed consent from each participant. All semi-structured interviews took place in Arabic. The sample was made up as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Online news</th>
<th>Number of Interviews</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Riyadh</td>
<td>Aleqtsadia</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15 August - 16 September, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kolalwatan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8 August -16 September, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeddah</td>
<td>Sabq</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8 – 10 August, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roaa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8 – 10 August, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dammam</td>
<td>Alyaum</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12 – 24 August, 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: The research sample

This sample was chosen through personal contact and on a ‘referral-on’ system where suggestions for other interviewees made by participants were pursued (Meadows 2009, p. 125). The selected participants — all practicing online journalists — were representative of the journalism demographic and environment in the Kingdom. All had been working as online journalists for a significant period of time, they were familiar with the working environment of online newsrooms and they were highly experienced. Based on these criteria, the respondents were in a very good position to give credible responses. For further details about the online news see table 1.

4.5 Research Data Collection

In order to gather comprehensive, balanced and objective data, this research utilized two approaches:

a) theoretical review of current literature; and

b) empirical study to investigate the research questions.

This research relied on qualitative methods using semi-structured interviewing to collect data in the field. It involved 16 semi-structured interviews with a range of online journalists from differing organisations in Saudi Arabia in order to collect the appropriate data. I conducted all semi-structured interviews which lasted between 30-45 minutes. With the permission of each participant, the interview was recorded for later transcript and analysis. The recorded interviews were destroyed once transcripts had been made. Between May and October 2011 I visited several locations in Saudi Arabia for data-gathering purposes. In the interests of clarifying the nature of the data collection, the loosely-structured interviews included questions such as ‘Do you think that a relationship exists between Saudi society’s culture and the concept of online journalism that is universal across all online journals and readers?’, and ‘Ok, did the online journalism develop the culture and the concept of the journalist from your point
of view?’ As with the nature of semi-structured interviewing, these questions and their exact wording varied slightly from one interview to the next, but each interview did enable me to cover the key contexts which required interrogation for this study. For example, here are a few sample questions from different interviews

- Do you think Saudi society’s culture can be considered as an obstacle or as an encouragement to the field of working in online journalism?
- What is the role of the readers’ feedback about a topic, and what they present from content, or the role of the viewers’ ratings to your work as a journalist?
- Do the policy and the culture of the decision makers in online journalism play a role in your work as a journalist?

All interviews were conducted in Arabic according to the participants’ preference, an important element of the research process which sought to maximise understanding between the participants and the researcher. Following the transcription of the interviews, I used the qualitative analytical software program NVIVO to manage, organize and analyse the data. This process contributed significantly to the final discussion and recommendations of the thesis.

The data obtained from the interviews was processed and divided into two broad categories. Category A refers to data related to the participants’ personal information and professional experience. Category B refers to information and data obtained from journalists in Saudi Arabia relating to three ‘types’ of culture:
1. organisational culture;
2. personal cultural frameworks; and
3. Saudi culture and online media.
These three variants of culture have been broken into several ‘themes’ based on their occurrence in the interviews. In the following chapter, I will explain these themes, how they are categorised, and how they relate to the framework identified in the literature review.

Category formulation elements (as per NVIVO analysis)

CATEGORY A

Demographics
- city/town;
- gender; and
• period of practice as a journalist and educational level.

CATEGORY B: Data Analysis

Organisational culture

Identified themes:
• verification and credibility of sources;
• differences between verified sources and unofficial sources;
• management should have control over journalists and what they do;
• relationships with management;
• relationships with colleagues;
• being rewarded for good work as a journalist in a variety of ways improves performance; and
• organisational policy.

Personal cultural frameworks

Identified themes:
• interaction with readers; mostly online forums, surveys and solicited opinions from news sites;
• professional ethics;
• responsibility to the public;
• personal convictions; and

Saudi culture and online media

Identified themes:
• reports on violence against women;
• influence of Saudi culture and online journalism and vice versa; and
• KSA information policy.
Chapter 5
Analysis and Discussion

For the processing and analysing of the data, I chose to develop as a narrative transcribed experiences of journalists in the first online news journals in Saudi Arabia. Although in writing in a narrative format there is no analysis per se (Kumar 2011), the sequence of the narration needs to be thought through. The core activity in narrative analysis is to reformulate stories presented by people in different contexts and based on their experiences (Nigatu 2009). The primary qualitative data used in this analysis is an unstructured text, the interview. Data analysis is divided into three groups (in Category B), each group consisting of identified themes.

The interviewees answered all questions asked, and sometimes supplemented their answers with new information, which led to new questions, or their answers were explained using examples. Interviewees’ responses were based on their own experiences, professional opinions and personal feelings, all according to their cultural backgrounds. The whole interview process was active and consisted of good interaction with the participants.

5.1 Analysis
The interviews were conducted in a ‘semi-structured’ format, which meant that some questions were prepared, but also allowed an organic development of the interview to progress over different areas, encouraging the interviewees more freedom in answering the questions. As it was impractical to attempt to interview every online journalist in KSA, a sample of 16 online journalists made up of 2 women and 14 male journalists was used. These journalists came from Riyadh City, Jeddah City and Dammam City. The demographics of the interviewees are further discussed below. These interviews were conducted face-to-face over a period of time, as seen below in Table 4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Date and Time</th>
<th>City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>August 8, 2011, 4:00 – 4:55 pm,</td>
<td>Jeddah City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>August 8, 2011, 5:30 – 7:00 pm,</td>
<td>Jeddah City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>August 12, 2011, 10:30 – 11:45 am,</td>
<td>Dammam City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>August 15, 2011, 12:30 – 1:15 pm,</td>
<td>Riyadh City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>August 22, 2011, 9:30 – 10:50 am,</td>
<td>Riyadh City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>August 24, 2011, 2:30 – 3:40 pm,</td>
<td>Dammam City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>August 28, 2011, 9:30 – 10:30 am,</td>
<td>Riyadh City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>September 4, 2011, 9:30 – 11:00 am,</td>
<td>Riyadh City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9</td>
<td>September 4, 2011, 11:30 – 12:15 pm,</td>
<td>Riyadh City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10</td>
<td>September 13, 2011, 8:30 – 9:00 am,</td>
<td>Riyadh City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11</td>
<td>September 16, 2011, 3:30 – 5:00 pm,</td>
<td>Riyadh City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12</td>
<td>September 16, 2011, 8:00 – 9:20 pm,</td>
<td>Riyadh City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#13</td>
<td>August 15, 2011, 9:30 – 11:00 am,</td>
<td>Dammam City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#14</td>
<td>August 17, 2011, 1:00 – 1:50 pm,</td>
<td>Riyadh City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#15</td>
<td>August 17, 2011, 4:00 – 4:50 pm,</td>
<td>Riyadh City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#16</td>
<td>August 17, 2011, 5:00 – 5:45 pm,</td>
<td>Riyadh City</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Interview dates and locations

Each interview was conducted face-to-face which had two important outcomes:

1. Interest and confidence in the research increased as knowledge of the research spread between colleagues.
2. The semi-structured style of the interviews allowed those journalists who were hesitant about the interview to think about the questions and therefore direct them to the elements they were more confident in and felt strongly about.

Once the interviews had been conducted and captured in Arabic, they were then translated into English. While translating it was important to translate based on wordage and implied intention by the interviewee, and to keep the personal bias of the researcher as neutral as possible.

**CATEGORY A: Demographics**

**City/Town**

The individuals interviewed originate from the cities indicated in Figure 10. The large majority of those interviewed came from Riyadh City, while Jeddah City and Dammam
City had a more even distribution between the two. What is interesting is that although Riyadh City is by far the largest city, Jeddah City which had a smaller proportion of interviewees and is the second largest city in Saudi Arabia, had the smallest representation for this research. This was due to the lack of the researchers’ personal networks to reach a suitable number of journalists in Jeddah City. Dammam City had the second largest proportion of interviewees and is the seventh largest city in Saudi Arabia. This also shows the growing number of online journalists who contribute to different online journals and who do not have to be physically located in the city of the news organisation as they did in the past when working with print media, for example.

![City of Interviewees](image)

**Figure 10:** Cities of interviewees

**Gender**

The breakdown of those interviewed reflects the current makeup of journalists in KSA. The number of female journalists is proportionately smaller than men and currently, the actual proportion of women to men that are online journalists in KSA is unknown. This in itself is a topic which could be pursued in another project to track, for example, changing attitudes of journalists as the proportion of women increases over time. Further research is needed on the percent change of journalists that are women, examined against the various news categories covered, to find a correlation relating to the changing culture and dynamics of journalistic culture in the KSA.
Period of Practice as a Journalist and Educational Level

This information reveals which journalists were working prior to the advent of online journals and enables an analysis of the impact of a switch between traditional and online media. It is also useful in being able to discover whether there are any new journalists who are going into traditional media, or those who have simply bypassed the traditional mode altogether. All 16 interviewees have a bachelor’s degree in journalism (including an additional 3 masters and 1 doctorate) and they have at least three years’ experience in this field. A future study might also explore the impact of education on the success or otherwise of journalists working in traditional and online modes.

CATEGOR B: Data analysis

Figures 12 and 13 show the themes which emerged in my NVIVO analysis of the 16 interviews, highlighting the key thematic areas I will be examining in this chapter. These are the areas which emerged as most mentioned from the analysis of all interviewees. The themes that have the highest occurrence in the interviews are the following (highest to lowest), which indicates areas where further research could be done:

1. Interaction with readers (166).
2. Responsibility to the public (91).
3. Organisation policy (76).
4. Relationship with management (58) and professional ethics (58).
I will now present a series of graphs to give a preliminary indication of the nature of comments provided by the different interviewees, and the extent to which they discussed particular issues. The ‘organisational culture’ graph (Figure 14) is analysed in more detail in Table 5.

![Occurrences of Themes in Interviews](image1)

**Figure 12**: Occurrences of themes in interviews

![Totals of Themes in Interviews](image2)

**Figure 13**: Breakdown of themes for all interviews
5.1.1 Organisational Culture

![Organisational Culture chart]

**Figure 14:** Organisational culture – Themes

### Summary of Identified Themes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified Themes</th>
<th>The Discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verification and Credibility of sources</td>
<td>Most reported that they thought their sources were verified for use in official or professional online journals, although they sometimes are unable to check all facts because of the pressures of publication deadlines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences between verified sources and unofficial sources</td>
<td>Interviewees stated that their concept of the professionalism of journalists prevented them from taking information from unofficial websites. Those sites were considered to be more concerned about readership numbers and less about ethics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management should have control over journalists and what they do</td>
<td>Seven interviewees thought that the managers of media sources should have the final say on the content of news stories. The remaining interviewees believe that this has to be done through compromise. All of the interviewees reported the need to have a strong management system which could make decisions on what to do, for example, where to place an article.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with management</td>
<td>There were no explicit discussions of personal relationships with management but nearly everyone alluded to being supported when they had performed ‘good work’. Most reported that management had been in the journalistic field</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
for a long time and therefore were very experienced and should be listened to and utilised.

**Relationship with colleagues**
Evidence, especially from interviewee 4, suggested that collaboration and cooperation with colleagues helped to develop news stories. On a broader note, most interviewees reported an extreme amount of competition both inter- and intra-organisationally.

**Being rewarded for good work as a journalist in a variety of ways improves performance**
Almost all interviewees reported that they were encouraged when they produced a particularly good piece of work. They reported that this motivated them to work harder in the future. Also journalists focussed on getting their stories onto the front page which is a big motivation.

**Organisational policy**
All revealed that organisational policy and specific types of systems have been created as a decision-making framework for reporters. Almost all interviewees mentioned that this organisational policy was in line with Saudi informational policy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5: Identified themes of organisational culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Verification and Credibility of Sources**
At first ‘verification of sources’ would appear to be a very important theme, as it relates to the continuity and moral code of the journal in relation to their readers’ confidence. It also underlines broad understandings of journalism as a profession (Hanitzsch 2007). An analysis of the interviews shows that on 19 occasions, interviewees implied the need for verification with nine emphasising the need for credibility in online news, as seen in Figure 15 (below).

For interviewees, the theme ‘verification of sources’ was influenced by the impact of online publishing, which also pressured journalists to publish an incomplete story faster because it was easy to update a story as it progressed and unfolded in real time. This is a very different style to the traditional form of journalism, as indicated by interviewee 1, and it relates to the experiences and expectations of readers. Although the nature of online journalism allows journalists to do more of the work, this issue of speed in relation to publishing accuracy can influence how journalists display and publish information relating to the sources they have used. Most participants reported that their sources were verified for use in official or professional online journals. The negative side was that the speed necessary to get ‘a scoop’ and publish it led to mistakes being made, as is the case of stories from non-trusted sources. This is because some
journalists were eager to create excitement, especially in their headlines, ‘to grab the reader’s attention and get the highest rate of viewing’ (interviewee 1).

Another factor that might affect credibility issues and which has a direct relation to the speed of publishing the news is the level of competitiveness between online journals and online forums. As interviewee 5 observed: ‘As a journalist, I am doing my best to complete my reports from all aspects and viewpoints.’

There was much mention of the credibility and accuracy of delivering information, especially with the appearance of news websites and the variability of these websites. The consensus was that the source is one of the first elements a reader questions when questioning about a story of which they are familiar. It was up to journalists to maintain standards, as interviewee 6 concluded: ‘A journalist for example, can never give up credibility and accuracy of the news he or she reports even if they need to deliver an article quickly.’

Interviewees agreed that journalists must ignore the temptation to sensationalise the news and must verify and check facts and sources. This issue is actually more of a concern with regard to information from websites and online forums that transfer information for the sake of transferring information quickly and to maximize audiences, without correction and appropriate checks. Credibility and accuracy of the news were identified by interviewees as the most important foundations of a news journal. Interviewee 13 confirmed: ‘This is the main difference between official online journals and other websites; I think that a reader is able to differentiate between this.’

All journalists interviewed said they were determined to report accurate news in order to maintain credibility with their readers. Overall, there was a negative view of unofficial online journals that do not follow the same ethical code of conduct that determines their operational practices. This causes friction between competing publications as ‘unofficial’ journals display news and present it in much the same format to the same readers. Depending on how readers search out the news, interviewees suggested that they may read the ‘unofficial’ or ‘unreliable’ version which would ‘muddy the waters’ for those official journals publishing the same story using verified sources. In interview 7, the journalist involved reported:

I believe that the commitment of official online journalism is more than the unofficial news sites in terms of press practice parameters. A
journalist must ignore the temptation to sensationalise the news and must verify and check facts and sources. For these reasons, their commitment to social and press responsibilities is questionable. They are not inclined to become enthusiastic or passionate and that can impact negatively on public opinion.

This opinion is reinforced by interviewee 15 who concluded:

…adding to the difficulty of these challenges is that even if accurate information were broadcast on some unofficial websites correctly, there can be incomplete aspects of the story that the reader may not know about. For example, the information must be directed or focused on certain topics. Thus, it influences negatively on public opinion under the cover of credibility.

These references show that although the ‘verification of sources’ is important, there are many more themes and elements that are currently more critical. Interviewees also identified the existence of policies, regulations and agencies that will follow up and prosecute journals that spread information that is not correct.

Figure 15: Mention of verification of sources as a key professional issue

Differences Between Verified Sources and Unofficial Sources
Interviewees stated that their professionalism prevented them from taking information from unofficial websites. Those sites were considered to be more concerned about readership numbers and less about ethics. Interviewee 1, for example, stated that the Kingdom enforces the rule that women are forbidden to drive cars. One online journal published a story suggesting that a judge sentenced a woman to undergo a whipping for driving a car. However, the authorities denied this soon after it was published. Then,
after looking for the source of this particular report, it was found that it had been reported in an unofficial electronic forum of the social network Twitter. The story was never found in any official electronic media.

...someone could take the news from such social websites due to the ease and speed of getting the information, but without making sure of its truth. That is a serious issue especially in sensitive cases, particularly in the case of the specific culture of Saudi society. Social media is not a news source (Interview 1).

Six of the interviews identified this theme suggesting its importance. However, following the interviews, it appeared that it was not as important as other themes relating to culture, readership, responsibility to the public, etc. Nevertheless, the journalists emphasised the importance of and their responsibility to audiences and the broader journalistic community, as well as to the wider culture. It is this belief and commitment that encourages their choices of sources for news stories. But it raises the dilemma of being seen to be accessing the latest technologies (like Twitter) while at the same time time ensuring accuracy that such media cannot guarantee. Interviewee 1 concluded: ‘People need to get used to having the news at their fingertips. Technology is revolutionizing journalism, but the audience needs to catch up to the changes being made.’

It is believed that Saudi Arabian media outlets have a high level of credibility with their audiences and with other media outlets outside the country and are considered to be a strong source of news. The main factor is that, with the emergence of the information revolution, anyone working from home, at virtually no cost, can communicate with society and construct an electronic ‘news’ website. This issue relates to information exchange and for my interviewees, raised the issues of credibility and objectivity in transmitting news and dealing with events. One (interviewee 12) responded: ‘From my point of view, the victims here are the readers, who are non-professionals or unable to deal with news websites and differentiate between the level of news in online journals and those on personal websites.’

Increasing publication of unsourced rumours can create confusion in audiences about news websites and forums, blogs and other crowd-sourced types of media versus official news websites. Adding to the difficulty of these challenges is that even if accurate information is published on some unofficial websites correctly, there can be incomplete aspects of the story that the reader may not know about. For example, the
information may be directed or focused on certain topics. Thus, public opinion is negatively influenced under the cover of credibility, as interviewee 16 explained: ‘With the existence of professional standards, I believe that this influence disappears with the professional journalist, and he presents his news story away from the intolerance and bias, which may be thrown at him by outside parties.’

Professional standards are what distinguishes journalists working in official news organisations from those writing for news websites and trying to impersonate journalists.

Management Should Have Control Over Journalists and What They Do
All participants thought that managers of media organisations should have the final say in what was published but some believed that this had to be achieved through compromise. All supported the need for a strong management system which could make decisions on, for example, where to place an article and how deal with policy in specific situations. Managerial organisational structures are still controlling some online journals; some journals give their journalists more authority in how he or she becomes the writer, editor and decision maker. Other journalists thought that the editor’s inspection of the news before it is published was an obstacle to speedy publication. But generally, most agreed with some sort of check being provided by more experienced personnel, as evident in these responses: (interviewee 4) ‘I prefer that another professional should inspect my work before publishing’; (Interviewee 5).‘the editor or managerial team must take responsibility for what is happening’.
The interviewees confirmed that they as journalists know very well the limits of news reporting, and can identify the events that are not suitable for publishing, according to their organisation’s policies. They argued that the culture of the decision makers within an organisation is supposed to be parallel to the culture and the policy of the journalist because they are working towards the same goal. Journal organisations conduct studies into what news content or topics were most watched throughout the year. This gives journalists knowledge about the cultural concerns of the society in which they work.

On face value, this theme would indicate a stronger response than was found after the analysis. In interview 4, for example, the journalist indicated that both journals and their management enforce control by hiring certain journalists based on an individual journal’s criteria and need:

For example, some journals hire certain journalists to work, as they know them from their previous published work. They have seen the way that journalist has written a story, what he or she is interested in or where he or she has demonstrated passion. On the other hand, other journals are keen on bringing journalists who are known to be focused and have great attention to detail in that they produced heavily researched writings. This occurs even in online journalism, because management believes in objectivity when presenting topics. Therefore, we find that some reports are published in certain journals and are delayed or never published in other journals.

Furthermore, in interview 5, control by online news management was highlighted through training journalists, whereas in traditional media, there was less training provided. The differences between these two media forms is strongly indicated by the publishing frequencies. Traditional media journalists have a slower development track related to the types of news they cover, and they produce stories at a slower rate. However, the very nature of online publishing is that it can be and is published at high speed, therefore management of these journals enforce training so that their journalists can produce material accordingly, as interviewee 16 suggested:

I think that online journalism does not leave room for any journalist to train at the expense of the culture of readership. I mean, there are many expressions, such as ‘accusations’, ‘criminal’, or ‘guilty’ which are sensitive in online fields and there is no room for errors, as the journalist will be held accountable for every word because of the fast and widespread nature of online information. On the other hand, this helps develop the culture of the journalists and that of the authority of the journal.’
In interview 16, the respondent indicated that with the nature of online journalism, some journalists can publish their own work before being seen by an editor, but this is problematic as he suggested: ‘Some officials, and for the sake of encouragement, give the journalist this authority. However, this does not help in the development of journalism.’

![Management and Control of Journal](image)

**Figure 17:** Should management have control of journalism?

**Relationship with Management**

This theme is one of the more important ones evident from analysis of the interviews. This theme occurred 58 times in total. As seen below in Figure 18, every interview mentioned this theme. Most interviewees reported that their management had been in the journalistic field for a long period of time and therefore were very experienced and should be listened to and utilised. Although mentioned earlier that ‘control by management’ was a low occurring theme, it indicates that there is a positive and intrinsic relationship between management and journalists and that it is a beneficial and necessary one. Although online journalism facilitates the production of content that could bypass management, it is important to point out the importance of management in maintaining the integrity of the journal. This relationship between editor and journalist was indicated by interviewee 2, who suggested:

> We, the female journalists, always find encouragement from the chief editors, who give us more space for freedom in dealing with news, and ensure that the report carries the personal touch of the journalist. For me, I have never met an editor who poked his nose into my work from the side of my personal convictions.
That this journalist’s editor is supportive of her writing process it is not only seen with female journalists, but also with male journalists, as evident in interview 4:

From my point of view, this review and approval by management varies from one journal to another according to the popularity of the journal. Well-read journals are keen on making sure that other professionals follow the news with the journalist until the process of publishing.

The journalist in interview 4 continued, indicating the cultural influences on online journalism:

So I would like to tell you that in the Alegtsadia online journal, most stories and topics are reviewed by two different individuals from two different organisational cultures. For instance they differ in educational level, expertise and sometimes are from different cultural backgrounds. The journalist and the editor may be from two different nationalities, for example. In this way, the process of merging of journalistic work often happens, which I consider to be favourable for both the stories and the journal in general. This cooperation may seem hard to understand, especially if you consider a journalist’s professional ego. But the report sometimes becomes stronger when more than one journalist participates in creating a title, headline or even content. Usually, the professional journalist is the one who wins in the end. That is simply because the professionals are typically better at phrasing and pitching things to the public. But there is a spectrum of strengths within the profession.

This journalist further indicates how much influence editors or managers have over the writing process:

There is a great influence on the level of performance of the journalist by those who control either the journal or the corporation who owns the journal. This occurs in a positive manner, as long as the decision-makers are highly cultured and are professional.

These are just some examples highlighted by my interviewees of the importance of management in guiding them while maintaining content integrity and respect for audiences. Although they have the expertise and the capacity to control, they understand the nature of this growing online media culture and are trying to develop their journal’s policy and to integrate a faster paced style into the more traditional policies and ethics of the journalism industry. This shaping of an online news journal’s culture is indicated by management’s selection of news stories by certain journalists, as indicated by interviewee 6:

In accordance, you may find special treatment by the electronic journals towards a well-trained journalist. As a result, they might send him for training sessions, and put him under the supervision of an experienced
journalist in order to get benefit from him. In addition, you find that the journal selects certain experienced journalists to cover the events and important conferences either inside or outside the Kingdom. Moreover, I think that it will be easy for practiced journalists to observe the cultural differences between journalists in the electronic journals, as he will find that each journalist follows the culture of his organisation.

Conflict increases with the lack of experience amongst the junior journalists. In some cases, journalists believe that it is important to report from their point of view, and that it is worth publishing urgently on the front page, but decision makers often disagree as this is not only the prerogative of a journalist. Journalists are treated well by managers as they share the same loyalty and willingness to improve online reporting. It is clear from this example that decision-makers and journalists must exchange views and not work alone. However, the administrators do have the last word, because journalists operate under an organisation’s management rules and regulations which means that they work within its culture.

My relationship with officials is good in terms of how our views converge. There are no conflicts or major clashes, even if there are clashes, soon agreement on a certain vision that satisfies both parties is established (interview 16).

Editors and management are appreciative of journalists’ efforts because they know that fieldwork is tiring, and they acknowledge that writing news stories requires great discipline and skill.

![Figure 18: Relationship with management](image)
Relationship with Colleagues

Although not referenced as much as other themes, relationship with colleagues had the healthy response of a total of 32 occurrences within the interviews. The nature of online journalism is such that the ‘relationship with colleagues’ is important because it reflects how journalists collaborate with each other.

This relationship with colleagues has extended to foreign journalists working in KSA as illustrated by interviewee 13:

I can give you a good example of non-Saudi journalists who work in Saudi online journals from different communities and different cultures, whether close or far away from the culture of Saudi society. The conclusion is that they share experiences with journalists with close contact with the Saudis and the Saudi society and you find that over time, their style of following events and news editing differs significantly from the when they first start working with the journal. The reason is that the culture of the society has affected their performance. After all, the journalist works for the sake of readers and not his self-interest. Many examples exist, like the news coming out of international news agencies. Some have been translated from other languages. A journalist of the same language but another culture writes for others. It is easy for specialists in the field of media to notice these differences or cultural traces in the news.

This illustrates how culture is being affected and developed by all journalists from KSA society, as well as foreign journalists working there. It is clear from the interviews that journalists help each other with sourcing information or by giving advice on writing styles that reinforce cultural norms. They may look at fellow journalists or journalists from other organisations but do not necessarily accept the extent of the competition between them. Interviewee 14 put it like this: ‘The conflict between media organisations and journalists is a necessary and peaceful conflict.’ Despite this expression of camaraderie between journalists from across different online news organisations, differences of opinion between journalists or between journalists and supervisors does occur.
Being Rewarded for Good Work as a Journalist in a Variety of Ways Improves Performance

Being rewarded for work is a very basic ideal found throughout various occupations, industries and countries. This is an interesting theme to emerge in the interviews I conducted, as it recorded 36 occurrences as illustrated below in Figure 20.

The main ideas related to this theme that emerged from the interviews are as follows:

1. Direct awards or rewards that led to increased motivation.
2. Recognition of work especially with placement of it on the front page.

While looking at the first classification — reward — we need to look at the references to specific rewards in the interviews. Interviewee 1 notes that her journal awards journalists with an acknowledgement of having produced ‘the most read, saved, or e-mailed report’. She goes on to explain:

Due to all the positives and satisfaction that we glean during and from our work, such as the amount of flexibility in publishing or the non-interference of censors deleting some themes etc., we became more enthusiastic to review all the feedback given regarding any topic and I think that is the reason for the success of these reports in online journalism. When what we are doing is appreciated, or at least paid attention to, we are more apt to pay attention to both compliments and criticism.

In interview 3, the journalist involved pointed out that online journalism ‘as a means of new mass media has offered great returns to the journalist, and to the field of journalism and it develops their performance’. Interviewee 4, points out that through all of the
informatics available through website access data gathering, he can monitor how his particular stories perform:

… we find that well known online journals have developed a lot from their performance where you can know the number of readers, amount of feedback, and their content. In some journals, you can see the number of times the topic was saved, sent or uploaded to a social media network. Therefore, as a journalist, I am keen on learning and analysing these numbers and reading the content of the feedback and comments. This has developed my skills, increased my expertise, and helped me in developing my work, and my performance in the journal.

Rewards of monetary value beyond just recognition is the policy of some journals, as recounted by interviewee 6:

For instance, there is a special advisory committee concerning this that assembles everyday and looks at the most important news articles that are nominated by the head of the department, and then they look at the site of the news publication and the number of readers. Hence, there is a monthly incentive award for journalists.

In interview 11, the online journalist explained about the rewards and other incentives designed to increase the writers’ motivation:

They offer us extensive rewards and incentive programs, along with internal and external training courses. The journal itself also shares a certain ratio of profits to its journalists; this has a positive effect on our work and the effect on society.

The journalist in interview 16 commented that the rewards do not just stop with journalists, with online journals also providing incentives to their audiences: ‘In addition, they give awards to encourage the audience to interact, and to be permanent members of the journal’s readership.

Recognition of a journalist’s work by placing it in a prominent position (such as a front page ‘Point 2’) is not new to online media because every journalist strives to get their story on the front page, where it will be seen by every reader, even in passing.

Interviewee 3 spoke about his own efforts:

Here in the Alyaum online journal, we have a weekly award for the best topic coverage. Moreover, there are incentives to put the topic on the front page in a suitable space. Therefore there is a bit of prestige that comes from composing, writing and publishing a popular story.
Initially in the printed form, the front page of a newspaper or magazine presented physical limitations to placement of the stories, and sometimes they had to be edited down to make them fit. Online news pages are not necessarily limited in the same way, allowing a journalist to get his or her story in its pure form (unedited due to size) on to as front page, which increases the writer’s motivation. Also, with current audience data being tracked through analytics, journalists get more exact feedback on their story than ever before. Interviewee 4 observed:

Outside of industry wide awards, the general public does not necessarily judge printed materials. Online journals have the benefit of having immediate feedback and therefore the relevance of stories can be ascertained immediately.

Although getting a story published on the front page is a driving force for most journalists, not getting their story published there is not seen as a negative. As interviewee 5 concluded: ‘I think it is a positive reward for the journalist to publish his story on the front page, and this gives him a strong drive. However, if not published on the front page, I do not think that it negatively impacts his performance.’ The journalist from interview 8 expanded on this:

There are news articles that are more important in the media landscape, however because of political, cultural and social reasons we find the paper shying away from handling them. Sometimes, the paper has to deal with and focus on specific topics. This is a logical direction by virtue of news organisations having a social and cultural responsibility.

And interviewee 10 added:

If you asked any journalist who works in online journalism, it would be stated that the publication experience on the front page is a strong motivation. However, it is not felt negatively if it was not published on the front page, because the journalist is aware of how professional and experienced the decision makers are. This aspect certainly gives a strong motivation for us as journalists to provide the most accurate and culturally relevant news.

The question asked of interviewees 14 and 16 was the following: ‘Do the culture and personal framework of decision makers in the organisation of online journalism influence your framework regarding the importance of the news, for example, the extent of the importance of getting publishing on the front page?’ Both indicated the importance of getting their story on the front page, or even the main pages of their respective online journals, as illustrated by interviewee 14:
Well, this is one of the main points that can be found in online journalism, although it was present in the past in printed journalism. However, its importance has increased in online journalism because readers have reacted to what is printed on the front page of online journals and have responded to it significantly. Moreover, when the news is being published on the front page of an online newspaper, this means that it matters more to a significant segment of readers. Thus, it spreads quickly at other online websites giving the journalist self-confidence, which is considered a success by a journalist, especially when he sees his news story spread through the Internet and become an issue of public opinion. Yet at the same time, I think that editors or those who are responsible for the pages decide the place of publishing of the news within the journal.

Interviewee 16 reinforced this:

Front or main pages in online media have a great importance for both journalists and for readers. It is a motivation for me when they publish or even refer to my news on the front page. It gives me extreme motivation to continue working as professionally as possible. I might anticipate some news being published on the front page, which may not be printed there because of factors that are unknown to us.

Incentives, and the culture of the drive for journalists to get their story on the front page is an important factor in influencing online journalism culture. This drive to get their stories seen, read, shared across the Internet to raise the prestige of the writer as well as their journal remains a driving force for journalists. It is an important point that will need to be further researched. It would be useful to use these interviews as a base from which to conduct more qualitative research across the broader journalistic culture in
Saudi Arabia, for example, to see how the race to get a story on the front page affects the culture of journals and journalists more generally.

**Organisational Policy**

This is the third most noted theme which emerged from the interviews, occurring 76 times and on average, 4.75 times during each interview. This indicates that although some journalists view this as having higher importance — as the theme emerged more than eight times in a few interviews — it indicates that all the participants value organisational policy in regards to their developing journalistic culture. Although each journal is different, most journalists discussed the ways in which organisational policy adds to and develops their practices as part of a broader global culture. But individual identities remain important, as interviewee 4 pointed out:

Each journal’s organisation has its own political identity, and has its own influence on the self-conception and culture of the journalist himself. Some journals depend on excitement and boldness, even in the presence of self-censorship. However, at the end, the culture of the organisation will be the main strong direct influence affecting the identity and culture of the journalist.

Interviewee 5 talked about how online journals ‘differ in their general structure, and the content of their topics are created according to the society in which they exist and that they relate to’. And the journalist in interview 8, suggested a diversity of responses within a shared cultural context:

For example, all of the journals may publish the so-called ‘hot-news’ because of they are sharing the same media culture. However, you may find some variables because the personal, intellectual and conceptual variations of the journalist or of the media organisations. For example, the way the story is formulated, analysed, the discussion around the event or the focus on certain subjects.

What will be interesting to see in the future is how these policies change and adapt as culture and other variables apply pressure on organisations. Will these practices stay aligned to their own current vision or will they change and adapt as the culture and technology changes?
5.1.2 Personal Cultural Framework

Figure 21: Organisation policy

Figure 22: Personal cultural framework
Summary of Identified Themes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified Themes</th>
<th>The Discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with readers; mostly online forums, surveys and solicited opinions from news sites</td>
<td>Feedback from the audience was mentioned in each and every interview. Audience feedback is essential and necessary for journalists, especially in what stories they should ‘follow’ and continue to report upon. This is not terribly surprising, but it is significant nonetheless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional ethics</td>
<td>Barring the two women who were interviewed, all said that they had an ethical obligation to the field of journalism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility to the public</td>
<td>Journalists who spoke of ethics typically also spoke of responsibility to the public (interviewee 13 is a good example). Each journalist had a different take on the form of that responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal convictions</td>
<td>Most interviewees reported that they were dedicated to journalism and wished to present a fair and balanced view to the readers. None spoke of their personal culture as being a factor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Identified themes of personal cultural framework

Interaction with Readers: Online Forums, Surveys and Solicited Opinions from News Sites

The interaction factor is the new cultural aspect offered by online media in the world of journalism from which it has directly benefited. As indicated below in Figure 23, there were a total of 166 occurrences of this theme in my interviews, with an average of 10 per participant. With the development of online journals, interactivity has increased in relation to traditional forms of news, where it used to take place in the form of either letters to the editors as complaints or in a formal ‘letter to the editor’ column, published on different days in response to a previous articles. Online media presents a new dimension to interaction, with the following key elements:

1. Interaction between readers and journalists.
2. Interaction between readers and other readers ‘online discussions, newsgroups, etc’.
3. Interaction between readers and editors.
4. Interaction between readers and journals.
5. Interaction between journals and other journals.
6. The tracking of all data to see what articles are read, areas of journal most read, etc.
In relation to this theme, interviewee 1 observed:

We noticed that the readers have easily accepted such a technical and cultural revolution in the form of news dissemination through the Internet or technological media. The readers look for more detail in online journalism, which is updated daily or weekly.

Interviewee 2 highlighted the proliferation and speed with which the news is now delivered to audiences:

Media should be a part of society’s culture and should have an effect on it, instead of waiting until society’s culture affects journalistic practice through online journalism. I do not think that the society is waiting for the details of the story when I present fast and important information to them. This technology provides the ease and speed of transportation of the information. I’m not sure how the audience feels about how in-depth the story is but we simply cannot wait until we have all the facts for a story checked several times and so forth. The media cycle is not like that anymore. It is 24 hours now and people expect their news to be fast and entertaining, as opposed to longer or printed forms of media.

The difference in proliferation between old media and new media is illustrated by interviewee 3’s remarks:

Saudi readers’ culture can basically be deemed at an extremely high level. The old consumed media, which arguably did not really do much to further society or to really disseminate information holistically, will not satisfy them. As a result, this concept has positively affected journalism. Because online journalism is renewable and it is inappropriate to present traditional non-useful topics, we should seek and present what is new.

The importance of interaction between readers and media was described as a ‘cultural movement’ by interviewee 5:

The online interaction of the readers makes some topics stronger, and makes others weaker; of course, online journals are a part of the online working system, in which the reader participates with the journalist in highlighting the events. This is due to the cultural movement led by society’s readers, journalists, and media organisations.

The interaction with readers also has lead to the development of writers, access to new sources for stories, and provision of further information to expand and develop current topics. Interviewee 5 acknowledged the importance of readers’ feedback in this process:

I am keen to follow up on the amount of feedback, views, the evaluation done by readers, and the content of their comments about all topics. This is because they develop my experience as a journalist and present me
with wider information about the topic. For instance, some reports do not live up to the standard of publishing, even though they have a large number of viewers. Nevertheless, if you read the content of the comments you will find that most of them criticise the journalist, or the journal. In general, we consider the readers as the most important factor in the issue of developing the journal and the journalists.

![Interaction with Readers](image)

**Figure 23:** Interaction with readers

**Professional Ethics**

It was mostly found that the journalists interviewed tended to adhere to the broader idea of ethics associated with media work. A common factor was the responsibility all of my interviewees felt towards adopting an ethical framework. One of the positive aspects of online journalism is the ability to modify mistakes in news or in articles in real time. Journalists working for online journals said they focussed on the quality and accuracy of news, as its importance to society was paramount. Official online journalism is media work that serves journalists, readers and society all in one. Everybody in Saudi Arabia has many responsibilities towards their society and they do not accept rumors, lies, or profit at the expense of the readers, or the exploitation of readers for the sake of excitement or sensationalism. A journalists’ career is based on their level of professionalism, a quality recognised by their readership.

This theme amongst interviewees was also a popular one, with 58 occurrences throughout — and an average of 3.6 for each interview. All viewed professional ethics as being a very important aspect of their practice and a key element which separated them from ‘unofficial’ journalists and bloggers who did not follow any code of conduct. The journalist in interview 1 indicated that ‘we always try to respect our societal
traditions in addition to respecting the policy of the authorities and the law of publishing that is related to the freedom of press’. She continued, stressing that journalists should…

…seek results or awards, because they will be achieved by simply raising the level and quality of their work in terms of what they offer society; this is far more satisfying than winning any award for the journalist or the journal. Ideally journalism is a noble profession, regardless of the switch from print to online. The tenets of our profession should be maintained no matter how the media are used for economic gain.

The journalist in interview 2 expanded on this, suggesting the influence of organisational culture as well:

…in any media organisation, decision-makers’ concepts about the nature of work in online journalism are very crucial. Hence, every online organisation should accurately represent the culture of the actual society and general media within its own organisational framework.

The interviewees agreed that it was up to publishers of online news journals to help develop and reinforce the ethics of journalism. Interviewee 3 concluded:

I am always asked for what is new and what is useful. I think that online journalism develops the performance of the journalists in the way they deal with news and events and the way they phrase titles and topics. Even the way in which stories they choose to axe and which ones to publish is indicative of how journalistic performance is guided by this technology.

Ethics was a very important topic for all journalists with interviewee 5 taking issue with the ethical practices of colleagues from other journals:

Some journalists are just not as cultured in regards to how to source online materials. They think it is still the 1990’s where the Internet was an extra convenience instead of a necessary and indeed integral part of all aspects of journalism. Regarding the other obstacles, I think that online journalism does not leave room for any journalist to train at the expense of the culture of readership.

Interviewee 15 agreed, concluding that ‘these non-professionals have less journalistic integrity than those of us who are trained in the field’.

Another area of future study would be to explore the possibility of development of a set of standards, policies, and ethics within non-registered journals. It would be interesting to see how culture influences these other organisations and whether they come into
alignment with the formal news websites or develop their own ethical standards to match ‘the professionals’.

![Professional Ethics](image-url)  
**Figure 24:** Professional ethics

**Responsibility to the Public**  
This is the second most recorded theme in the interviews, occurring 91 times and an average of 5.7 times for each interview. This has important links with the two previously discussed themes, ‘Response to Readers’ and ‘Professional Ethics’. Interviewee 1 indicated that ‘Saudis are fully embracing social media, which occasionally is detrimental to how our media is operating’. In many fields, technology is often outpacing local law, culture, ethics, etc. She argued that it was up to the online news journals themselves to reign in unacceptable responses and to facilitate the management of this process. She underlined the importance of online journalism:

> I think that online journalism, especially in Saudi society, strikes out against social obstacles. These social obstacles are the traditions which are imposed on the journalist to be included among his priorities in his work. Thus we are both hindered and liberated by these social conditions.

That is, it important to adhere to traditions so that there are some boundaries and guidelines against which technology pushes, so that some sort of balance is achieved. Interviewee 1 concluded:

> [The] culture of both the readers and the journalists come from the same culture and go in the same direction as does this recent concept of speed related fact checking. Saudi culture has positively affected the concept of press and vice versa.
Interviewee 5 stressed that he could not write news that was of no interest to his readership and explained how he tried to relate news to his public:

I am a varied journalist, and I attempt to relate to the current culture of my audience. It is not possible to concentrate on reports that the readers are not interested in, do not know, or do not desire to read. For example, in the sports pages, it is easy for the reader to read about public sports which already have a high viewing rate in Saudi society. You find that football is the first sport, without any competitors, and then comes the other sports like volleyball, swimming and horse riding. In reverse, if someone writes a report about hockey, I as a journalist may not find enough information or even enough readers in order to merit the publication of that story. This is in contrast to other countries where hockey news headlines their sports pages.

In another example, interviewee 5 explained his response when he discovered inaccuracies in the information he posted:

A few days ago, I covered some social activities concerning orphans [a report related to Prince Sultan’s centre]. Later, I learned that the centre was not directly in charge of those orphans because their age group exceeded the legal age in which the centre operates. Therefore the centre was non-related in any way to the children on which I reported. However, this is related to the cultural level of the journalist and I consider myself a part of the society’s culture and the proof is that it was a new information for me and for the reader. Therefore, we can say that the society’s culture positively influences the content of the topic and consequently, developed the performance of the online journal and participated in spreading online information precisely. A retraction was printed and the readers were informed that these children had actually been placed in foster families that the centre could not have been involved. Therefore, the strength of the news lies within the cultural level of the journalist and the society. When these cultural factors are all present within the journalist and he or she is cognisant of it, this helps in the success of the journal and the level of professionalism.

Whenever journalists maintain a high level of ethical practice, they become closer to their audiences. The journalists interviewed for this project felt that one of duties of online journalism was not to allow the spread of rumours and incorrect information. Above are just some examples of how responsibility to the public seems to be paramount for all of the professional online journalists I interviewed. This drives them and develops their culture as they respond to their responsibility to the public while aligning with the KSA policy, at the same time adapting to rapidly evolving technology.
Figure 25: Responsibility to the public

**Personal Convictions**

This was also a significant theme, although not as frequently identified as the others, but with a total of 43 occurrences and an average of 2.6 mentions per interview. Most interviewees reported that they were dedicated to journalism and wished to present a fair and balanced view to their audiences. None spoke of a personal culture as being a factor in this. This is evident in Hanitzch’s framework, as it seems to be on an exogenic level only. As interviewee 1 commented: ‘I think that online journalism has positively affected my concept of and my work in the field of journalism.’ She reported noticing a big difference in attitudes towards publishing between the Sabq online journal and Roaa magazine. She observed: ‘In the online journal Sabq, they do not wait for more details on a news story due to their rapid periodic release.’

Online journalism has offered journalists many benefits, particularly speed of communication. The journalists interviewed all reported that their relationship with Saudi culture dramatically changed after they began work in the field of online journalism. Some journalists admit that they are still not capable of sourcing information from a variety of Internet sources. Although these more archaic professionals may be minimal, they are negatively influencing the development of online journalism. Online journalists said that they tend to build a general idea of their audiences’ demands and seek ‘the proper tools’ to satisfy them, whilst also maintaining
quality in their reports — a value audiences determine along with the journalists themselves. As interviewee 6 stated:

From my point of view, I can classify society into two categories; the first category includes the literates, writers and journalists, while the second one contains the readers who do not have the ability to analyse or remark.

Journalists are representatives of public culture and the news articles that are important to the public should be also important to them. Interviewee 7 opined: ‘I think the journalist should be professional at all times and at any level of their career.’

The journalists argued that they should use their cultural knowledge and experience in their field of work to build on their beliefs with controls and conditions no obstacle to the freedom of online media practice. Interviewee 9 went so far as to suggest that online journalists in Saudi Arabia ‘ may be more professional than other journalists’.

Each online journal is a product of the culture of its journalists and its organisational culture. Audience culture and journalists’ culture influence media practice in online journalism as interviewee 11 suggested:

I take pride in my determination to get a scoop or special material in relation to how it will prove useful to the journal, and secondly its usefulness to me personally as a journalist. As a journalist, I have a different vision that may differ from that of the reader, the reader might not notice because he does not practice journalism.

Online journalism is considered to be a new school in the world of modern media and a cultural and technical revolution. When readers reactions to online news articles is published, it indicates to journalists that their journal has been acknowledged and is valued more than other journals.
5.1.3 Saudi Culture and Online Media

Summary of Identified Themes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified Themes</th>
<th>The Discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reports on violence against women</td>
<td>Interviewee 1 said that there was misreporting about punishment due to a woman driving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of Saudi culture and online journalism and vice versa</td>
<td>Interviewees commented that the interactive process of online media is creating a noticeable difference in the way Saudi journalists work as well as how KSA journalists can influence how western media reports news about the KSA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KSA Information Policy</td>
<td>Interviewees mentioned informational policy as constraining what they can or cannot report. This is in cooperation with the online journal for which they worked (organisational culture) but should be addressed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Identified themes of Saudi culture and online media

Reports on Violence Against Women

Interviewee 1 talked about the misreporting of a punishment for a woman driving a car in relation to the use of verified and unverified sources. She observed:
The Kingdom enforces the rule that women are forbidden to drive cars. Last week, a journal published a story stating that a judge sentenced a woman to endure a whipping for driving a car, however we have never found it in any official electronic media. The truth is that the woman did drive a car but had not been sentenced to a whipping. Princess (Al-Taweel), the wife of Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal, says that her news could have been taken from the personal pages on Twitter or Facebook—that is a serious issue especially in sensitive cases, particularly in the case of the specific culture of Saudi society—especially if they are concerning critical cases such as a woman driving a car, or the rules that relate to women in general, as in Saudi society. Therefore, I think that journalists in the kotalwati online journal are dedicated and cautious in the verification of the source of the stories. To be honest, I cannot speak about how rumours spread in other countries. But I assume this is similar to our situation.

From the two women journalists interviewed, there were no official reports of any kind of violence against women. We were told of the one report of the woman driver being punished by whipping, but that was unofficial, not verified and denied by officials.

Influence of Saudi culture and online journalism and vice versa

All the journalists I interviewed had positive comments about the role of the Internet in Saudi news media culture. The common opinion was that it makes them more responsible in what they write for various reasons, including increased interaction with their readers via feedback or comments, as well as the ability to see the impact of their stories through a readership count of their article. Interviewee 3 concluded:

The presence of a website for the journal [online news site], of course, allows for the increase of production and an increase in the performance of the journalist. It also increases the activity of the journalist in regards to closely following the events and it gives him more responsibility in his work.

Since they can now receive almost instant feedback on their published articles from anyone the world, they need to ensure they are up to date with the information they provide and that their writing is both effective and useful. This makes the journalist ‘fast, efficient and competitive’ as per comments by interviewee 3. Furthermore, this exposure to a worldwide audience changes the way journalists write, which in turn affects the way media discourse is interpreted and created in the KSA. According to interviewee 3:

The globalisation of news sources in the journals in different areas and countries with different cultures helps in changing the style of media
discourse from being a local one to being an international one.

Interviewee 10 reflected this view as well. He feels that online journalism has encouraged journalists to be more involved in publishing, which makes them understand, research and write more about cultural diversity. This increased involvement and writing results in the creation of a positive cultural movement:

> They have become involved in writing for journals that cover society’s interests and topics relating to cultural diversity, causing a cultural movement in the production of online journalism.

However, this is not a one-way street where KSA journalists are influenced by the Western media alone. Interviewees commented that journalists around the world modify their cultural frameworks and reporting methods after being exposed to Saudi online media for a period of time. They gain increased awareness of the culture and the sensitivity required in reporting cultural issues. They also gain a better understanding of Saudi culture and have more respect for it and this shows in their future writing. There has been such an increased effort in reaching a global audience that some Saudi news organisations have dedicated news service targeting Western readers, as interviewee 6 highlights:

> For instance, the daily journal has a first edition specifically aimed at all regions of the Kingdom, the second edition is aimed specifically at the Western region, and the third, updated, one is aimed specifically at Dammam and Alkhobar cities. This is due to each journal’s increased focus on the news of its region, because of the nature of the readers.

This gives them the belief that online journalism provides Saudi journalists with the ability to influence the world of journalism through their writing as well as exchanging the cultural values of the KSA with the world. Interviewee 6 again:

> The exchange of knowledge, culture, science and expertise between editors and journalists inside or outside the same society also helps the rapid development of the world of journalism and the whole media in general.

**KSA Information Policy**

This theme was raised by the interviewees 13 times, occurring on average 1.86 times in the 7 interviews which mentioned it. It was interesting to note the low frequency this theme recorded in my analysis. Although we might expect journalists would highlight the KSA information policy, its low level of mention could mean that either they do not think it has much impact on their practices, or that they feel concerned that what they
say might be read by someone in a position of authority in the KSA. It was difficult to reach a conclusion on this point from my interviews. As a result, it could be another important topic for future research.

Regarding Saudi government publishing policy and its impact on journalism, interviewee 4 acknowledged that there was censorship of some news:

We find that some reports are published in certain journals and are delayed or never published in other journals. We know that that these reports are valid for publication and are under the censorship of Ministry of Culture and Information.

It seemed that some journals were able to publish information more freely than others. Interviewee 5 observed that specific ‘authorised’ writers seemed to be enlisted to address sensitive or important topics:

I think that authorized people in a journal have tremendous experience and knowledge of the media policy of the Kingdom and the policy of the journal and its objectives. When they have a certain opinion about publishing or choosing a certain type of news, this could be in favour of the society and the journalist himself. We have here [at the journal] a professional section that is responsible only for following the events and the general trends in Saudi society, and internationally.

5.2 Further Analysis
Figure 27 shows two phrases that were much used throughout the interviews but were not identified or discussed as specific themes — speed and the front page.
These phrases were raised throughout the interviews — perhaps predictably because online journalism has pressured journalists into changing the way they produce and publish their stories. As all of the interviewees suggested, while they might not get all the details of the story when they publish, it is because online news is ‘organic’ and ever-changing. The very nature of the story and the fact of it being online would facilitate constant updating and linking to other media forms, reinforcing the story using material (videos, news boards, international publications) which were not present in the original paper content.

The focus for journalists on getting their stories on the front page was discussed in the awards section of the analysis. Future research might focus on this because the very front page that journalists strive to be on is constantly evolving and may well be different in the future.

5.3 Hanitzsch’s Framework

In the literature review chapter I discussed the theoretical framework offered by Thomas Hanitzsch (2007). In previous sections, I described the themes I identified from my analysis of the interviews, based on the occurrence of particular words or phrases. In this section, I will tie the themes together by grouping their based on the key points from the useful framework offered by Hanitzsch. The key points that emerge from Hanitzsch’s (2007) work are that journalism can be theorized from three key standpoints: cognitive, evaluative and performative. Each of the points can be broken down further as follows:

a) In the themes related to Cognitive responses, the key attributes are perceptions of media creation and presentation and of journalism as a whole in society. As Arabic culture is quite different from Western culture, the way cultural aspects influence cognition or acquiring of knowledge varies and is addressed there.

b) Occupational practice and Ethical behaviour are two key attributes in the Evaluative dimension of Hanitzsch’s framework. Even though objective journalism is mentioned frequently in his thesis, from the data I have gathered it seems that where journalists work influences their evaluations of what they write. Therefore, those two elements of Hanitzsch’s approach were highlighted.

c) How reporters are able to write online content is a significant part of what gets produced and seen, and is addressed under the Performative element of the framework. The significance of the method of the delivery is also highlighted here.
My analysis of the interview material in relation to Hanitzsch’s concepts are explained in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Theoretical Point</th>
<th>Secondary Point</th>
<th>Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Verification and credibility of sources</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td></td>
<td>Organisational culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Differences between verified sources and unofficial sources</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td></td>
<td>Organisational culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Professional ethics</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Performative</td>
<td>Personal cultural frameworks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reports on violence against women</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td></td>
<td>Saudi culture and online media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Management should have control over journalists and what they do</td>
<td>Evaluative</td>
<td></td>
<td>Organisational culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Relationships with management</td>
<td>Evaluative</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Organisational culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Relationships with colleagues</td>
<td>Evaluative</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Organisational culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Being rewarded for good work as a journalist in a variety of ways improves performance</td>
<td>Evaluative</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Organisational culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Interaction with readers; mostly online forums, surveys and solicited opinions from news sites</td>
<td>Evaluative</td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal cultural frameworks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Organisational policy</td>
<td>Evaluative</td>
<td></td>
<td>Organisational culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Responsibility to the public</td>
<td>Performatve</td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal cultural frameworks</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Influence of Saudi culture and online journalism and vice versa</td>
<td>Performatve</td>
<td></td>
<td>Saudi culture and online media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>KSA information policy</td>
<td>Performatve</td>
<td></td>
<td>Saudi culture and online media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Personal convictions</td>
<td>Performatve</td>
<td>Evaluative</td>
<td>Personal cultural frameworks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Grouping themes into their respective elements
Verification and Cognition (Theme 1 and 2)

Cognition or acquiring information is often one of the first steps in creating news and is the first building block of Hanitzsch’s framework. If the source for a story was false, the claims made would be false, which in turn would make the news false as well. However, when considering the first theme, ‘Verification and credibility of sources’, I identified cases in the literature of publication without verification because journalists argued that it was more important to ‘break the news’ rather than to ensure it was accurate. The argument was that because the news was in an online mode, it could be modified later if needed. The journalists I interviewed for this project all argued that they were determined to report based only on verified and credible sources.

This is arguably an interesting aspect of Saudi culture and online journalism emanating from there in particular, because contrary to other online journalists around the world who are also keen to ‘break the news first’, according to my interviewees, keeping their reputation and credibility is more important.

This becomes clearer when we consider evidence supporting the second theme, ‘Difference between verified sources and unofficial sources’. Here, the interviewees showed a reluctance in acquiring information from unofficial sources. This suggests a distinct cultural element in Saudi newsgathering where Saudi journalists are more interested in publishing the truth than being first, and where they claim to be drawn more to using official and verified resources, even if that means not being the first to publish.

Professional ethics and cognition

Even though it is easy to edit mistakes on the Internet, Saudi journalists believe that it is far more professional to produce a quality article in the first place rather than producing and correcting it at a later stage. Maintaining a code of conduct and creating only what will benefit society was extremely important to them, according to my analysis of the interviews.

From the evidence, we can see a clear alignment with Hanitzsch’s notion of impact on a cognitive level. Specifically, he concludes that ‘the belief system often impacts the media creation and presentation’ (Hanitzsch, 2007, p. 369). As can be seen in further exploration of the data which relates to this theme, journalists will not produce an article if it falls outside a code of conduct or if they feel that there is no clear benefit to society. They believe it is not the audience’s job to identify the truth, rather it is the role of
journalists. As a result, I suggest that this belief system has a higher chance of producing trustworthy reports than in cultures where journalists do not have a similar belief system. This identifies the effects of acquiring knowledge, the high status of journalism in Saudi Arabia, as well as the performative impact of media creation.

**Evaluation and management control**

In many online news portals, reporters seek full freedom to publish and frown upon others controlling what they write. However, in Saudi Arabia, the journalists interviewed preferred their work to be evaluated and controlled by management to ensure it falls into line with the organisation’s publication policy. This suggests a strong desire to conform to what the journalists identified as a culture and code of conduct that they felt was appropriate for themselves and their society.

Furthermore, there is also a deep respect for senior management in that most of the journalists interviewed felt that management or at least another professional should check their work before it gets published. In practice, this is akin to the subediting that is a central part of most large news organisations globally.

Nevertheless, the interviewees’ strong allegiance with their organisations is a clear demonstration of the impact of journalism culture on an evaluative level. While other cultures may allow — on the surface at least — minimal intervention in terms of control over journalists, Saudi journalism culture not only suggests, but also expects, adherence to cultural norms at the occupational level.

**Relationship and evaluative and cognitive impact**

I have identified three subsequent themes, ‘relationships with management’, ‘relationships with colleagues’ and ‘being rewarded for good work as a journalist in a variety of ways improves performance.’ These have been grouped under the evaluative and cognitive elements because even though they are mostly about evaluation, in various cases the reporters acknowledged that they sourced ideas from their colleagues, as well as being motivated and supported by the workplace to create articles.

Concerning the theme of being rewarded for good work, the rewards mentioned by journalists were not in terms of monetary compensation or awards, but in the placement of their articles in prominent positions in publications. Perhaps the difference between this and other cultures is that, reward for good work in many cultures is related to
monetary recompense, and quite often when monetary value rather than prestige is involved, quality is compromised.

From my analysis it seems evident that Saudi culture has an important influence, as having a news story featured on the front page of an online publication is perhaps not as significant as being on the front page of a newspaper. Regardless, this demonstrates a clear cultural impact on the ideological worldview of the KSA journalists I interviewed. Data relating to the two other themes — ‘relationship with management’ and ‘relationship with colleagues’ — bore a strong resemblance to findings from Western studies of journalism practices I identified in my literature review (Donsbach 2004, pp. 57-131; Rosen 1999, p. 22). Due to the structure of most global news organisations, management has the final say. ‘Relationship with colleagues’ was also important as some of the journalists found the source and inspiration for their stories through colleagues. This form of ideological worldview for journalists is common in many other countries as well (Howd 1999, p. 16; Donsbach 2004, pp. 57-131).

**Interaction with readers and evaluative cultural impact**

This theme was the ‘hottest’ in my analysis, with all interviews emphasising these elements. The interesting part was that this appears to be a newfound ideological view for journalists. Feedback from readers was nonexistent even as recently as a few years ago, but has emerged as a huge influence on journalism practices.

Furthermore, most of the journalists I interviewed have used readers’ feedback to modify their stories, find new resources and even develop new topics. Therefore, we can clearly see the impact of this newly adopted, but evaluative element, of journalistic culture in Saudi journalists’ repertoire.

**Organisational policy and performative impact**

One of the most prominent themes to emerge was the impact of organisational policy. According to Hanitzsch’s framework, the performative level of cultural impact can be seen in the actual processes of media production (2007, p. 369). One of the interviewees reported that even if various news media reported the same story, the formation and production of the story varies because of the variation in policies of online news organisations. Other interviewees mentioned how different outlets have their own political identity and how this influences what they produce. Based on these responses, I
suggest that there is a deep performative cultural impact on media creation practices in Saudi Arabia.

**Responsibility and performative element**

Almost all the journalists interviewed spoke about their responsibility in the creation of news to ensure they reported accurately. Even when rumors were spread through social media, some journalist felt compelled to write about the topic to educate and inform audiences, always seeking the truth. This high level of responsibility creates a strong performative impact on the production of journalists’ reports. Such responsibility also ensures a high level of trustworthiness.

**Creating influence, information policy and performative element**

Although one would expect that government information policy on what can be published is widespread in the KSA, most of the journalists did not strongly emphasise that information policy influenced their practices. This suggests that government information policy does not have a strong performative impact in the journalism culture of the KSA. Perhaps it is a case of journalists knowing the rules and carefully skirting them, but it did not emerge as a noteworthy topic during the interviews, suggesting that for journalists, at least, it is not considered to be significant.

On the other hand, the influence of foreign media has a far stronger performative impact on KSA journalism. Most interviewees suggested that exposure to foreign media heavily influences journalists. However, in recent years there has also been a cultural movement by KSA news organisations to direct publishing outputs to foreign audiences. According to my interviewees, some news outlets produce versions specifically targeted towards users in foreign countries.

As the interest of the readers in foreign countries will differ from that of local audiences, the publication makes that adjustment. As we can see, a newly established culture of creating influence impacts on what is being produced, aligning with the performative impact element of Hanitzsch’s framework (2007, p. 369).

**Personal convictions and performative impact**

Even though there are various tools and ways online journalism allows Saudi journalists to publish, personal conviction remains one of the major influential factors in what actually gets produced. Journalists look for sources and create articles they believe are
not only in demand by the readers, but which are also personally useful to their audiences. Such a personal belief system is often the reason why journalists produce unique stories, even though they may all attend the same event. With more exposure to online media, this has increased in recent years.
Chapter 6
Conclusion and Recommendations

The chapter contains the final discussion, conclusions and recommendations for further research. The results of the current research show an impact of Saudi Arabian culture (in the words of the respondents: ‘public culture’, ‘society’s culture’) on online journalism. However, other factors which impact on online journalism and journalists’ practice were also discovered, such as readers’ culture, journalists’ culture, and influence of organisational culture.

6.1 Summary and Discussion of Research Findings
This section of the research thesis focuses on summarizing and discussing the research findings according to the research questions and objectives.

The central research question of this thesis was: how cultural factors influence and hinder online journalists' attitudes, values, ethical standards and practices in Saudi Arabia.

According to my analysis, it is evident that local culture has an impact on online journalists’ perceptions, their professional attitudes, values and practices. This impact of culture can be seen at the cognitive, evaluative and performative level, whether it is through their news gathering strategies or an evaluation based on audience feedback or publication of sensitive cultural materials (Hanitzsch, 2007). Instead of creating a hindrance, Saudi culture has enhanced the attitudes, values, ethical standards and practices of online journalists.

Compared to many online news media across the world, Saudi online journalists ensure the news is authentic before publishing it – which is often a rarity in today’s pressured news environments where “being first” to report dominates. This enhances the reputation and credibility of online Saudi journalists as readers find them more trustworthy. This not only helps Saudi online journalists in their own country but also can play a role in the future if they want to spread their news globally.
Taking account of reader feedback is also an extremely positive approach by Saudi online journalists and I will be discussing this further in the following section. This feedback loop has allowed online journalists to provide a richer perspective on news as they now not only provide their own views but also those of their readers.

In the following sections I will be explaining the two research sub questions and how my analysis offers some responses.

Based on the interviewee’s responses, the research questions were as follows:

**Q1: How do cultural considerations influence online journalistic practice?**

- Investigate the cultural factors that influence online journalistic practice in Saudi Arabia;
- Identify what factors hinder or facilitate online journalistic practice;
- Investigate how online journalists from the KSA cope with cultural challenges; and
- Investigate the role of decision makers in the online journalism industry in either protecting online news reporting practices from — or opening them up to — cultural influence.

**Influence of Cultural Considerations on Online Journalistic Practices in Saudi Arabia**

As I have argued, there are some distinct cultural impacts on Saudi journalism practices that are not commonly seen in other cultures. Understandably, one of the main reasons is that Saudi Arabia has a unique culture, and the impact of the culture can be seen in all three levels of Hanitzsch’s framework: cognitive, evaluative and performative.

In addition, there are other factors such organisational culture of the news producers which, along with the specific dimensions of the culture itself, is often responsible for what gets published. I argued in my analysis that KSA journalists have a distinct ideological view of working under management where they seek approval for their writing not because they have to, but because they want to.

Additionally, the influence of foreign media and social media is also evident in the
current media discourse being produced in the KSA. One of the main reasons for this is that exposure to different cultural elements has broadened the views of journalists who are now willing to write articles that provide new and interesting perspectives on society and our place in it. Apart from that, because their articles are published online and can be accessed by anyone around the world, they have to ensure the quality of their work is of an equal standard to other global publications. This has produced a positive impact on Saudi media discourse, in that it now offers a broader range of unique perspectives and interesting articles. At the same time, this has also introduced a trend towards capturing global audiences and educating them about Saudi culture.

However, contrary to expectation, information policy has little impact on KSA journalism practices. Rather, it is the influence of personal conviction and responsibility that determines what gets produced. More women are joining news outlets, resulting in creating new observations, analysis and perceptions, but this is happening slowly. It nevertheless represents another cultural shift taking place in the KSA, and it could be that it is in the online news environment that this will be most evident in the future. This is the task of another study.

Finally, a new cultural phenomenon has been on the rise in Saudi Arabia as it has been globally: feedback and interaction with readers. The feedback loop is being used by Saudi online journalists not only to receive feedback on their work, but also to adjust or enhance viewpoints or find new sources for stories.

B): What is the impact of local culture on Saudi online journalists’ professional attitudes, values and practices?

- Investigate the impact cultural influences have on online news websites in KSA and how journalists select and present the news;
- Investigate the impact of audiences on online journalistic practice (through such influences as trends, news evaluation, comments, audience numbers and feedback); and
- Investigate the cultural impact of decision-makers on journalistic practices through the structure and formation of online news websites (through such factors as news, coverage, level of content, positioning or space given)
Impact of Local Culture on Journalists’ Professional Attitudes, Values and Practices

As mentioned earlier, it is of the utmost importance for KSA online journalists to use verified sources for their stories. This has multiple implications and reasons. The first is to maintain the ethical code of conduct of Saudi Journalists and their adherence to Saudi internet publishing regulation. As I discussed earlier, the Saudi code of conduct clearly identifies objectivity as a key element of what gets published. Since journalists are only allowed to publish facts and to not exaggerate the news, online journalists need to be cautious when they publish their stories. This is challenging for online journalists as it is important for them to be in front of the reader as early as they can (Alhomoud, 2012). Since people have access to all kinds of news portals through their computers or mobile devices, once they have read the news, they are less likely to go to another news site unless they have doubts or want to gain further information (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009).

Although this slows them down, this results in an added benefit in maintaining reputation and trustworthiness. Since they are willing to hold a story if they do not feel that their sources have credibility, rather than ‘breaking the news’ only to find out it was inaccurate or incorrect, followers of Saudi online news sites are more likely to be loyal (Kiousis, 2001).

The other important cultural impact identified is that while journalists compete with each other for ‘the perfect story’, they also help each other and support colleagues who create dynamic, popular work. Their reward for good work is often related to the prominent placement of their story rather than to monetary reward.

With regards to the content KSA journalists produce (online or traditional), they work on articles according to their own interests, personal culture and conviction, while remaining within the influence of their news organisations. In terms of their personal culture and vision, this is either acquired from the surrounding environment or through self-improvement, attained through their work as journalists. This, together within a broad journalism policy, tempered by readers’ interests, influences journalists’ practices and publications. In this way, journalists tend to represent public culture and write only the news articles that are important and in the public interest. However, they also believe that their interpretation of ‘culture’ must be at a ‘higher’
level than that of their audiences in order for them to provide news that is recent, accurate and useful.

A recent shift in the cultural norms of KSA journalism is the high regard placed on user-generated feedback. Through online media in particular, journalists have very seriously started to take into account what their readers say, and refer to the increasing number of useful questions, criticisms and suggestions proposed as evidence of an increased level of producer-audience engagement. Audience size is also viewed as an important dimension, with journalists becoming more and more determined to produce fair and balanced views for a growing diversity of readers. All of these influences have resulted in improving the ability, speed and professionalism of online journalists in the KSA.

Another new change is the introduction of women’s content in the news that is reported online. Online journalism in Saudi Arabia has contributed to elevating the importance of reporting from female perspectives, mirroring their male counterparts in concerns such as unemployment and family issues. This is a new dimension in KSA journalism. Regardless, publications follow both media codes of ethics and societal cultural norms and remain respectful of people’s beliefs and emotions.

From my analysis, it is evident that local culture has an impact on journalists’ perceptions, their professional attitudes, values and practices. Furthermore, this impact of culture can be seen at the cognitive, evaluative and performative level, whether it is through their news gathering strategies or an evaluation based on audience feedback or publication of sensitive cultural materials (Hanitzsch, 2007).

**6.2 Recommendations for Future Research**

The research results of the thesis highlighted the interrelationship of culture on online journalism, and online journalism and the reader’s cultural influence on online journalism in Saudi Arabia. So we know that in terms of professional journalists, culture has an impact on online journalism in Saudi Arabia, but audiences represent the culture of the society.

Based on the analysis, interpretation and results of the collected research data, new research questions have arisen. Questions will detect causal relationships and ask the reasons for the causes that led to some results.
Q1: What impact does the reader’s culture have on online journalists’ practices in online journalism?

Q2: How does the reader’s culture influence online journalistic practices?

The Direction of Future Research
For further study in the field of culture, online journalism and their interrelationship and impact, I would recommend implementing research in other parts of Saudi Arabia, selected at random, and comparing the results. After analysing the results, I propose carrying out similar research in other countries (communities) outside of Saudi Arabia with similar cultural specifics.

Research objectives
As has been stated previously, there is an impact of culture on online journalism in Saudi Arabia that might have a positive influence on journalistic practices. Accordingly, to fulfil the research objectives, there are many relevant resources that discuss culture in Saudi Arabia and the beginnings of online journalism in Saudi Arabia. However, the missing components linking the impact of culture on online journalism are the research findings looking at the relationship and influential factors of those two components.

Based on the literature review, it was found that this research area has not been adequately examined, and research of this kind is unique. Therefore this lack points to the importance of building literature that considers cultural influences on online journalism practices.

Another necessary result of the research objective is realizing the influence of culture among journalists in Saudi Arabia in relation to the effect culture has on their professional conduct. When looking at this from a positive perspective, good examples are the fact that online journalism and its own ‘freedom’ helped bring women’s issues out into the open, as well as topics such as unemployment or family issues in Saudi Arabia.

Based on the research results, online journalists in Saudi Arabia understand the cultural influences of their news practices. A positive fact is that despite the journalistic rivalries and the popularity of individual websites, many journalists will not go against their own values just to see their article on the front page. But it should not be forgotten that the
readers also represent the culture of the society. The reader’s culture and the journalist’s culture are the influencers of media practice in online journalism.

There are still many cultural challenges and factors that affect the methods of dealing with online news in Saudi Arabia based on the journalists’ viewpoints, even though the journalists are dedicated to journalism and wish to present a fair and balanced view to their readers. Respondents referred to the need to bring together the culture of the journal and the needs of Saudi society as they, the journalists, represent the public culture.

6.3 Conclusion

The central intention of this thesis was to investigate the impact of culture on online journalism in Saudi Arabia. In order to do that, I began by exploring the scholarly literature to identify an appropriate theoretical framework to guide my study. I identified three elements (figure 28) of Hanitzsch’s (2007) framework on deconstructing journalism culture as the lens for my investigation.

![Figure 28: Three chosen elements of Hanitzsch’s framework of deconstructing journalism culture](image)

The core attributes of the cognitive elements include acquiring knowledge, perception of media creation and perception of journalism in society. Occupational practice and ethical behaviour are two key attributes in the evaluative element, and media creation and methods of delivery are the main attributes of the performative element of the framework.

This three-part model of cultural impact was ‘tested’ through an analysis of my interviews with Saudi online journalists. Based on this, I identified several themes and
then grouped them into the three elements (Figure 29) corresponding with Hanitzsch’s framework.

I found that similar to offline or traditional journalists, online journalists follow the protocols of management and editors willingly, while at the same time keeping the topics of reported news within a culturally acceptable framework of the society in which they are working. Management and colleagues seem to work well together and positively encourage each other. Journalists feel comfortable knowing that management is there to make the ‘tough’ decisions, while at the same time respecting journalists and appreciating how hard it is for them to work in the field.

![Figure 29: Impact of culture on three levels – with identified themes](image)

The core differences, however, were in terms of content creation, the method and the speed of creation. Topics being covered in online journals have exposed audiences to modernization and new ideas, because many journalists have a fair degree of freedom to express their opinions. This has allowed them to introduce new and interactive way to deliver contents. Almost all the journalists I interviewed expressed the ability to use video and images to complement their reports and to make them more interesting. This allowed journalists to experiment with their personal styles of writing which was difficult for them to do with traditional media.
As a result, journalists are rewarded in various ways, and the highlight is having their work placed prominently in their publications. They also reported that being an online journalist, they were keen to improve themselves and would compare their reporting with other journalists. Although theoretically this can be done in traditional media as well, due to the vast distance between places and limits in circulation of newspapers, it is less convenient than in an online environment. This has allowed online journalists to improve themselves. Although they were willing to improve, they have a healthy competition with their colleagues because most journalists reported having a good positive working relationship with their colleagues.

On top of that, unlike traditional journalists, online journalists have the ability to get reader’s feedback and use this in the content creation and modification process. In my research, I also found that Saudi Online journalists were happy to utilise their readers’ feedback to help them improve. And they were keen to improve the number of people who visit their sites and who became members. In order to do that, they took feedback (via comments) seriously and used it to improve their writing as well as enhancing their interaction with readers. Although this might be a common situation in the western world, Saudi journalists’ worldview is often top down rather than collaborative. In certain situations reader’s comments were even more authoritative than those of the journalists so they were happy to acknowledge their shortcomings and to include absent information in stories to improve the quality of their online news portal.

Regarding official government policy relating to a wide range of issues and how this impacts on what they can and cannot write, journalists seem to be content knowing that management will edit their work if needed, and on the whole, will manage KSA policy requirements. The KSA has its own culture, as do journalists and the publications themselves. Journalists need to follow the culture of their organisation while at the same time adhering to broader KSA societal culture when reporting on issues of interest. The interviewees suggest that KSA journalists have adopted strategies that manage this potential conflict well.

Online journalism has spread very quickly and because of this, is now not only read in the KSA, but also worldwide. Journalists and management are aware of this, a fact that tends to promote the publication of more accurate information, with greater care being taken over what is published. In some cases, the articles have been translated and published in other countries as well.
My findings also showed that official and unofficial sources vary. Journalists believe that unofficial websites can have a negative effect on reporting, as they are more concerned with attracting audiences and advertising revenue than with focusing on the accuracy of news reporting. Online journalists writing for official journals highlighted the importance of accuracy in news and the credibility of sources and prioritized this over publishing speed.

The KSA online journalists I interviewed identified a strong work ethic, a sense of responsibility and professional attitude towards their craft. They prioritize accuracy and the responsibility to the readers above speed. They all voiced a sense of responsibility to publish fair and unbiased information for the public. When writing, journalists feel that they need to be more knowledgeable on a subject than their audiences so that they are able to report with authority and provide useful, educated information. They write in their own culturally-appropriate style and like to leave their ‘footprint’ on their work and to feel they are making a positive contribution to society. They write articles based on fact, accuracy and what they feel should be written about, without a focus on trying to attain the front page, or to artificially boost audience numbers using sensationalism.

Most journalists are happy to receive online feedback. Forums and other forms of feedback allow them to know what and how their readers are feeling and thinking about their work. This feedback is instant and has generally been seen to be a positive driving factor in online journalism in the KSA.

It has also been found that Saudi culture is growing (The Report: Saudi Arabia 2010, p. 152). One of the interviewees mentioned, ‘More people are attending the theatre and have a higher education level than in the past.’ Journalists need to take this into consideration when writing and planning their news agenda.

I have also found that online journalism has helped the move towards equalising women’s issues so that they are now seen as being of similar importance to men’s issues. It can be safely said that women’s perspectives are slowly being brought into the public arena. It is my belief that this attention will grow, and in time we will see more female journalists as well as more topics and information being published on issues of particular interest to women. This is definitely an area warranting further study.

Upon completion of my research, writing and analysis, it can be safely stated that online journalism has had an effect on the culture of Saudi Arabian society, but we have
discovered that online journals and their management are also affected by the culture of the people. What the journalists considered to be topics of interest and worthy of publication is governed by the society in which they are represented.

![Diagram](image_url)

**Figure 30**: Impact factors of online journalism in Saudi Arabia

This idea can be illustrated in the above diagram (Figure 30) which shows that online journalism in Saudi Arabia is influenced by four elements: organisational culture, journalists’ culture, public (societal) culture and readers’ or audiences’ culture.

Journalists’ culture in upholding their own forms of ethics and feelings of responsibility to the public to provide accurate and unbiased information is an example of cognitive and performative cultural impact. All journalists interviewed felt their personal culture also contributed to and influenced their writing, and claimed that they could often see its effect when reading other journalists’ articles. Having a good working relationship with management and their colleagues, appreciation of having management in place to handle responsibilities of sensitivity and KSA government policy are evidence of both a journalistic and organisational culture that is unique to Saudi Arabia.

Similarly, saving reputation was far more important to KSA journalists than just breaking the news. All journalists reported that writing facts and making sure their facts were correct and from official sources was a number one priority. Credibility always took preference over any form of speedy delivery. The culture of welcoming the new forms of feedback from readers, such as online forums, and considering this feedback in
a positive manner reveals an influence of all the four cultural aspects highlighted above and aligns with the three elements of Hanitzsch’s (2007) framework. Time taken to show appreciation, criticism or links to new research or articles promoted by the reader are all considered to be positive and helpful by the journalists. These make the journalists more responsible in their writing, which helps to produce better articles that seek to educate audiences and to enhance the broader public cultural environment.

In addition, as I discovered from the female journalists interviewed, they felt that management treated them fairly and gave them equal opportunities to their male counterparts. They tended to report mostly on women’s issues, while appreciating the support they received from management and the opportunity gained to portray women’s issues as being equal to men’s issues. This reflects a marked improvement in all four cultural elements above (Figure 30). It suggests that online journalism not only is influenced by these cultural dimensions but also influences them.

Finally, online journalism has created a new practice in Saudi news organisations which now creates separate versions of the news targeted towards international audiences. The impact of this, in turn, upon KSA journalism practices is significant.

Online journalism appears to be leading the way in influencing a shift in the various cultural dimensions of Saudi journalism I have identified. At the same time, journalism is being influenced by those same cultural elements to produce new ways of interpreting the world — from a Saudi perspective. While the changing world that online journalism has offered has seen tremendous professional growth among journalists, there is strong evidence of cultural impact in terms of the cognitive, evaluative and performative elements as described by Hanitzsch (2007).

6.4 Benefits of the Research Thesis
Relative to the unexplored area of Saudi Arabian culture and its impact on online journalism, this research can be deemed unique. Through extrapolation, the research findings can be extended to offer insights into the impact of culture on online journalism more broadly — and on journalism in the KSA. In this way, the study offers a contribution to advancing knowledge and understanding of our society and the increasingly powerful role of journalism in its many different cultural forms.
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Data Collection, Interviews with Saudi Journalists

- Appendix A1 Interview 1

This is an interview undertaken with a female journalist working in Sabq, the online journal and Roa), the online magazine (August 8, 2011, 4:00 – 4:55 pm, Jeddah City).

Do you think there is a relationship between your personal concept, personality and cultural conviction on one hand and your dedication to the field of online journalism on the other hand?

I think that online journalism has positively affected my concept and my work in the field of journalism. The news reports have incorporated special characteristics to present the news to the readers in a way that corresponds with its nature. I have noticed a big difference between my work in the Sabq online journal and Roaa magazine. In Sabq online journal they do not wait for more details on a news story due to their rapid periodic release; for example news stories are updated periodically each and every second. This is not the case in Roaa magazine where we cannot write breaking news, but we can search about what is beyond the news in more detail. Essentially this is fact checking. This concept is considerably new to the culture within Saudi journalists as well as for the readers. We noticed that the readers have easily accepted such a technical and cultural revolution in the form of news dissemination through the Internet or technological media. The readers look for more detail in online journalism, which is updated daily or weekly. Hence, we can say that the culture of both the readers and the journalists spring from the same culture and go in the same direction as this recent concept of speed related fact checking. Therefore, you can conclude that Saudi’s culture has positively affected the concept of the press and vice versa.

Do you think that a relationship exists between Saudi society’s culture and the concept of online journalism that is universal across all online journals and readers?

I cannot disregard some new up and coming online journals that reject traditional journalism in return for an increased number of new readers, versus those who still depend on the printed journal or have another form of their favourite informative channels. Some online journals have not benefited from the properties of online journalism; they still provide long form journalism, which is slower and typically less attractive to the reader. When this is published, especially in printed form, I think, it is not conducive to the advancement within the field of news dissemination. However,
eventually, I think the change will positively affect our journal and these types of readers through practice. People need to get used to having the news at their fingertips. Technology is revolutionizing journalism, but the audience needs to catch up to the changes being made.

**Ok, did the online journalism develop the culture and the concept of the journalist from your point of view?**

One of the positives of online journalism is that the journalist is the one who has more authority in dealing with the news. For instance, the journalist is the one who follows, edits, and publishes the story before another journalist gets to it. Essentially, if the news story is considered a product, the journalist can produce it using vertical integration. Conversely, the negatives could be the speed in which it is necessary to get the scoop and publish it, which may lead to mistakes being made, as in the case of dependence on titles from non-trusted sources. This is because some journalists are eager to create excitement, especially in their headlines, to grab the reader’s attention and get the highest rate of viewing. In addition, the role of a journalist covering a story correctly and achieving the reader’s attention is a serious responsibility. Here, I would like to offer you an example; the Kingdom enforces the rule that women are forbidden to drive cars. Last week, a journal published a story stating that a judge sentenced a woman to endure a whipping for driving a car and the authorities denied it soon after it was published. Then, after looking for the source of this particular report, we found it had been reported from an unofficial electronic forum and the social network Twitter. We have never found it in any official electronic media. The truth is that the woman did drive a car but had not been sentenced to a whipping. Princess (Al-Taweel), the wife of prince Alwaleed Bin Talal, says that her news could have been taken from the personal pages on Twitter or Facebook. However, this is the downside; someone could take the news from such social websites due to the ease and speed of getting the information, but without making sure of its truth. That is a serious issue especially in sensitive cases, particularly in the case of the specific culture of Saudi society. Social media is not a news source. It is like we tell our university students that Wikipedia should not be used as a source in their research papers, Twitter should not be used for journalistic purposes. Saudis are fully embracing social media, which occasionally is detrimental to how our media is operating.

**Yes, this is true. However, do you think that these types of rumours spread more widely in some societies than in others?**
Yes, especially if they are concerning critical cases such as a woman driving a car, or the rules that relate to women in general, as in Saudi society. Therefore, I think that journalists in the *kolalwatn* online journal are dedicated and cautious in the verification of the source of the stories. To be honest, I can not speak about how rumours spread in other countries. But I assume this is similar to our situation.

**Do you agree that the policies of some press organisations push the journalist to seek entertainment and excitement far from routine news, which may lead to a gap or a defect in the media’s process?**

Yes, I feel that is correct. Basically, the work of the journalist is complementing the overall work of his press organisation. I am still working for *Roaa* magazine, which is a special magazine written for Saudi women. In addition, I worked for a *Sabq* journal that focuses mainly on male issues and hot news; therefore they have a limited number of females working for them. A number of female colleagues and I went to cooperate and write stories for the *Sabq* online journal. We were the only females in a male work environment, which focused mainly on informational policy. The chief editor proposed that we could work in the field to report on issues that concern women. He told us that many topics regarding women are still argued about, especially by the non-Saudi press who circulate the ‘Saudi female’ condition as being miserable in that respect. Therefore, we tried to utilise this point and we switched our work towards concerns of the Saudi women. This became a very positive point in our dealing with the online journal as we could help to shape the messages that were being reported about Saudi women. In addition, Saudi culture helped a lot in showing women’s problems as being equivalent to those of men’s, mirroring their male counterparts in concerns about unemployment and family problems. Assuming women affect society more than men, especially in a society with a culture like the Saudi one, this helped online journalism improve its success in depicting how society is actually running in relation to the public perception. Specifically we are able to accurately depict the roles and positions of women in society. Therefore, we had two important elements influencing the public opinion. First, is our knowledge of local culture and its concept about women, and secondly, the culture of dealing with online journalism. Then, we started to feminise the reports and interview female members in society. However, I believe that the amount of freedom in online journalism should not be limitless. We always try to respect our societal traditions in addition to respecting the policy of the authorities and the law of publishing that is related to the freedom of press. Furthermore, I think that online journalism, especially in Saudi society, strikes out against social obstacles. These social obstacles
are the traditions which are imposed on the journalist to be included among his priorities in his work. Thus we are both hindered and liberated by these social conditions. As we are accustomed to this, I reached a sense of satisfaction that the issue of a hot news story is taken into consideration both sociologically and journalistically, so there is consideration of the nature of the reader on a large scale, because they are being read by many official organisations. In a difficult circumstance, it is creating the ability to work on both sides.

**Does this mean that, in the presence of Saudi female journalists, online journalism was modified, and implemented a special policy when dealing with news?**

In general, I think that the amount of satisfaction with the work of the female journalists in the online journalism industry as well as its merits are highly considered, as women were the ones who discussed and followed the news, and cases in relation to women in society. In addition, usually a Saudi female journalist does these news stories and reports better than a male journalist. We are now asked to cover royal decrees concerning women’s issues, and we have started to periodically cover the news reports. Frankly speaking, we are happy when receiving the readers’ feedback on the journal’s website, which could reach 50 or 60 thousand readers. We are also pleased when we find our work on the journal’s front page, or if we win the title of the most read, saved, or e-mailed report. We are thankful to online journalism and to what it offers to society and to us as journalists. We, the female crew, have written more than 100 widely read reports during our initial period working for the journal. In a male dominated industry and in a highly segregated society, there is more than enough room for female professionals to rise within the industry. After all our population is approximately 50 per cent female, and to ignore this corpus of readers is to ignore a huge customer base.

**Are you referring to your work in online or in published journalism forums?**

Both of them have the same working nature, but online journalism added a lot of new components I mentioned before. One of the most important aspects is how quickly and widely the news is spread. Through feedback, we can evaluate our work and society’s need for such reports. In addition to this, many of the reports’ ideas were taken from the readers’ feedback through which we found many important topics. So evaluating feedback has become a major part of our work in developing the online journal. Another advantage is the large arena of presentation, which we can use without being limited to certain areas, as this a problem we have when dealing with published press. For example, we are able to produce more videos, pictures and graphs when using online media forums.
However, this large number of opinions and feedback of the readers might be tiring when read electronically

Yes, that is right, but it became a major part of our work and we have gotten used to the workload. The reports should be well observed and all its elements should be fulfilled. Due to all the positives and satisfaction that we glean during and from our work, such as the amount of flexibility in publishing or the non-interference of censors deleting some themes etc., we became more enthusiastic to review all the feedback given regarding any topic and I think that is the reason for the success of these reports in online journalism. When what we are doing is appreciated, or at least paid attention to, we are more apt to pay attention to both compliments and criticism.

**Do you think that online journalism has created any obstacles in relation to the journalist doing his job?**

Technical obstacles are always present by the virtue of it being online journalism. Nevertheless, in terms of its nature, speed might be a double-edged weapon, as sometimes it leads to massive pressure being placed on the journalist because he has to finish a certain topic in a short time. As I mentioned before, this can lead to errors or short cuts or simply not checking the facts correctly.

**How do you overcome deficits caused by technology in particularly?**

It could be through the culture of the journalist, and his skills; also, experience has a big role in this issue. I still remember a report that I had done a short time ago; it was about the royal decrees concerning the participation of women in the Saudi State Council. The decree was released late in the day, and due to my professional relationship with a number of female executives and journalists, I ran wide coverage about the opinions of Saudi women concerning this decree. It was published on the journal’s website at two o’clock in the morning (2:00 am). I was pleased to find out, after hours of my coverage and reporting, that it had been published and started to be widespread on official websites like Okaz and Alhayat and non-official websites also. I felt so pleased with my efforts for two reasons, firstly because I was sincere in the content and the information of the report, and secondly because I had finished my work in record time. In spite of the time pressure that was put on me by this report, I felt great pleasure because it provoked the opinions of the cultural elite and it recorded a high reading percentage.

**Regarding the Sabq electronic journal, where you are working, do you think that the Saudi society’s culture has affected its policy and its way of dealing with the events?**
I think, for every media organisation, there is a certain media policy that provides for the country’s needs. Of course, every media organisation is a part of the society in which it works. Therefore, you can find the effect on society in the way that it deals with the events and how it reports the issues with which society is concerned. In addition, I think that Saudi online journals have harnessed all their potential and features for the benefit of society. It is the member of a society is the one who seek and determines the nature of the news, and who distinguish between breaking news and what can wait for another day. Women’s issues are proof of that, as they are considered one of the most important topics in Saudi society, particularly at this time. Online journalism deals with women’s issues in the way and the level needed by readers. It has harnessed its resources and has adapted to the changing media market to in order to better serve the changing culture. Therefore, this is evidence of the way the culture in Saudi society has positively affected online journalism in many aspects, such as when the Sabq online journal was awarded the best Saudi online journal for the year 2011. Here, I highlight an important point; I would like to advise my colleagues who, with online media in particular, try to develop their work and to stick to the principals and proficiency of the media practice. I mean this on a professional and personal level, as we must remain true to both ethics in journalism as well as to best practice. In addition, journalists should not seek results or awards, because they will be achieved by simply raising the work level, as to what they offer society; this is far more satisfying than winning any award for the journalist or the journal. Ideally, journalism is a noble professional, regardless of the switch from printed to online journalism. The tenets of our profession should be maintained no matter how the media is used for economic gain.

You mentioned that, in Sabq you care about the feedback of the readers, and you do your best in order to read all the feedback. How do you distinguish between constructive criticism and useless comments made by irate readers?

I think that expert journalists can distinguish between constructive criticism and useless criticism just as they can distinguish between good and bad information. They can also distinguish between feedback that is in favour of the topic as well as opposing feedback. A large amount of feedback contains criticism either against the journalist, the journal or other parties, so we try to deal with such criticism according to certain restrictions and media laws. Feedback is open for all opinions either for or against ours, but the journal’s policy forbids any criticism against persons, organisations, religions, etc. Unfortunately, portions of our readers do not provide constructive criticism, but they are
offended or insulted by any dissenting opinions put up on the web. This might be relevant to the scope of influence on society regarding the feedback, which we have observed and recorded to maintain our integrity. Cultural shifts mean that the change in culture has shifted what we are reporting. Yes, we are talking about women having political positions. That would not have been the case in the past, when print journalism was the only type of media available. This causes controversy to those traditionalists who believe these things should not be reported, or that women should not be reporting them, or that Western influences should not be included in the news. Conversely, more liberal critics say that we do not do enough reporting on women’s issues or educational reforms. You can not please everyone, but the point is that reader feedback allows us to know when cultural shifts are occurring as they are revealed through the way that people respond to our news reports.

**Does this mean that the readers’ feedback has influence on your approach when dealing with reports in online journalism?**

I, personally, look for thorny or controversial topics that seek solutions, the topics that many readers don’t agree on. Both the journalist and the reader are part of society. The examples of women’s controversies are those concerning the desertion of young women, divorce and addiction. In these topics, I do not look only for excitement, but I try to help educate, inform and create a dialogue amongst the public and, as a result of my first hand knowledge of these issues, feedback and my interactions with society, I am able to get a holistic view of these issues. Moreover, I think that all journalists should be more in touch with their society. The media represents what is going on in the world and that should be markedly shown in an online journalist’s work. We are disseminating the information in what is currently still a respectful forum.

**Therefore, you look at the type of issue, but not the entertainment value. Do you think that this raises the number of readers and their feedback?**

Yes, that is right and in fact, the number of readers or feedback does not represent the importance of the topic or its success and it could be misleading to some journalists and readers. In this regard, I remember a good example; some female journalist colleagues and I conducted a report about the alternative sanctions and options for traditional prisons. We covered all the facets of this topic, and after it was published the chief editor told us that it recorded more than 20,000 readers in its early publishing hours. In spite of this relatively large number of viewers, we felt that it did not match the importance of the topic. Therefore, it cannot be an accurate measure for the importance of a topic to society. So no, viewership and feedback and importance within society are
two separate things. There are many reasons for this, which I won’t go into now, but it definitely could be a topic for discussion in the future.

- Appendix A2 Interview 2

*This is an interview with a female journalist working in the kolalwatn online journal (August 8, 2011, 5:30 – 7:00 pm, Jeddah City).*

In general, how do you see the relationship between the journalist and online journalism? Moreover, did society’s culture influence the nature of journalistic practice, through online journalism?

I think that online journalism has offered the journalist many merits, like the speed of communication. There is no need to communicate with the chief editor or anyone in charge in the journal, as the journalist himself is the editor and the chief editor at the same time. Therefore, I think that in any media organisation, decisionmakers’ concepts about the nature of work in online journalism are very crucial. Hence, every online organisation should accurately represent the culture of the actual society and general media within its own organisational framework. They should adopt an up-to-date culture and concept that keeps pace with the capabilities of new technology as well as the needs of the readers. Media should be a part of society’s culture and should have an effect on it, instead of waiting until society’s culture affects journalistic practice through online journalism. I do not think that the society is waiting for the details of the story when I present fast and important information to them. This technology provides ease and speed of transportation of the information. I am not sure how the audience feels about how in-depth the story is but we simply cannot wait until we have the entire story fact checked several times, and so forth. The media cycle is not like that anymore, it is 24 hours now and people expect their news to be fast and entertaining, as opposed to longer formed or printed forms of media.

**Do you think that it is the society which demands fast information?**

News is the cornerstone of media work in these modern times. Therefore, I think that breaking news always wins, and the quality of work is determined by the feedback or the adverse effects gleaned from the surrounding environment. The audience is the news consumer and the consumer is anecdotally king.

**Some might think that speed affects credibility negatively. What do you have to say to that?**

Yes, that is right. In the kolalwatn online journal we try hard to make sure that speed is in line with the ethics of media work, and that the information is precise, even if this
does slow down the process of publishing online. The competition between online journals and online forums is another factor that also affects this credibility issue and has a direct relation to the speed of publishing the news. This is called online competition, and unfortunately it rules a lot of what we do. We all know that information can spread very easily and quickly by only one click. Therefore, I think that many online journals are still affected by this to win this competition. Owing to the nature and the culture of every society, we find that online journals are affected by the publics’ needs and demands. When society seeks excitement, some journals change their policy or presentation policy to meet this demand, hopefully without feeling that they are moving away from an important objective, which is that the media should be serving and developing the society. Due to the nature and the properties of the technology used in online journalism, credibility and freedom are the cornerstones of working in it. It creates a quandary where competition and ethics are at war with one another. It is the job of modern online journalism to create a peaceful marriage between these two concepts, satisfy the reader and satisfy the business model.

From your point of view, do you deal with news in accordance to with personal culture or with the nature and culture of that society?

First, I always try to work and edit the news in accordance with my personal conviction. In addition, I give the story a lot of my personal identity and my personal culture. All journalists are attracted to topics that are more exciting to public opinion and those that are more daring. We, the female journalists, always find encouragement from the chief editors, who give us more space for freedom in dealing with news, and ensure that the report is carrying the personal touch of the journalist. For me, I have never met an editor who poked his nose into my work. Therefore, I want to focus on a point that you mentioned before; the good journalist should work in accordance with his own culture and his own conception of the events, and he should keep away from trying to satisfy the reader or the authority by the way he handles and presents the topics. We find that some journalists are affected by the surrounding environment and this is quietly noticed in the organisational journals where a journalist is related to the same organisation and the journal’s first and last objective is to present the organisation to the public in a good light. Therefore, we can clearly notice the conflict between the professionalism of the journalist and the culture and needs of the society.

Do you think there is a conflict or clash between the culture of the journalist who is working in online journalism, and that of the media organisation in which he is working?
I do not think so. During my work as a journalist in kolalwatn online journal, I never notice that my work conflicted with the policy of the journal. It could be due to the fact that we all work under the same cultural umbrella, so we all agree on following the publishing rules, and taking into account our country’s culture. There might be some delicate topics, which some beginner journalists may abstain from, but we work on these topics in accordance with their importance to society. Moreover, we discuss it in a civilized manner that does not offend the reader. We always find encouragement from the editors. I want to focus on an important point. After I entered the field of online journalism, I noticed that the strength of monitoring and observation of the presented topics is the reverse of what happens in the published press. Hence, I can say that the culture of the Saudi reader influences and reacts positively within the given constraints of online journalism. The area of argumentation evidences this, and review of the topics has increased. This is significantly apparent in the field of criticism. When you criticise an official person or organisation, you soon find a review or feedback from that person or organisation, and this was not present or really even possible in the past, or let me say that it was not like this. Because of this, I think that working in online journalism has become more interesting and more efficient. In addition, in the end, I think that the coming future of journalism is and will be primarily for online journalism.

Do you think Saudi society’s culture can be considered as an obstacle or as an encouragement to the field of working in online journalism?

Currently, and after years of appearing in online journalism, I think that Saudi society has started to realise the importance of online journalism in the field of news dissemination. Moreover, I think that this helped the journalist a lot in practicing their work. The way of transporting, presenting and spreading of the news, which characterises online journalism, helps in being closer to the sources of the topic, and helps the cooperation between authorities and the online journal. Besides, the decree of the Saudi Ministry of Information and Culture giving the license to a number of online journals, has helped society to accept online journalism. In the past, there was mixing and misunderstanding of the difference between personal forums or informative websites on one hand, and the licensed online journals on the other hand.

- Appendix A3 Interview 3

This is an interview with a male journalist working in (Alyaum) online journal (August 12, 2011, 10:30 – 11:45 am, Dammam City).
Do you think that your work in the Alyaum journal’s website has affected your work as a journalist positively or negatively?

Certainly, the presence of a website for the journal, of course, allows for the increase of production and an increase in the performance of the journalist. It also increases the activity of the journalist in regards to closely following the events and it gives him more responsibility in his work. It requires the journalist to be more up-to-date on every topic he presents or any topic that is presented in other mass media, besides and in addition to the readers’ feedback and comments. All of these components create a journalist who, when working in online journalism, should be extremely fast, efficient and competitive. It also enlarges the journalist’s culture and modifies the way he is thinking and performing through reviewing what has been written on the topic he is working on. So he is always asked for what is new and what is useful. I think that online journalism develops the performance of the journalists in the way they deal with news and events and the way they phrase titles and topics, even in the way in which stories they choose to axe and which ones to publish is indicative of how journalistic performance is guided by this technology. Finally, I think that the onset of online journalism as a means of new mass media has offered great returns to the journalist, and to the field of journalism, and it has developed their performance. In addition, the globalisation of news sources in the journals in different areas and countries with different cultures helps in changing the style of media discourse from being a local one to being an international one. The exchange of knowledge, culture, science and expertise between editors and journalists inside or outside the same society also helps the rapid development of the world of journalism and the whole media in general.

Would you please specify exactly what do you mean by rapid development?

For instance, the cultural level of Saudi readers can basically be deemed as being extremely high. The old consumed media, which arguably did not really do much to further society or to disseminate information holistically, no longer satisfies them. As a result, this concept has positively affected journalism. Because online journalism is renewable and it is inappropriate to present traditional non-useful topics, we should seek and present what is new. We can handle a topic that was previously presented, but from another viewpoint. For instance, a subject like the election of the Saudi politicians as was previously presented by another colleague. From my point of view as a journalist working in an online journal, I am working on rephrasing it and handling it from another viewpoint that was not presented before. In this way, the viewer is getting many viewpoints on stories so that they can find both their own view and also the converse
opinion. This is the way for the public to become engaged in social and political issues, by presenting both assenting and dissenting positions. The old way, of one newspaper party line and presentation from one angle is dead. Online media is now the multi-faceted and holistic presentation that the public wants and needs, and indeed, expects.

**How do you know that these concepts are new and useful to the topic and the reader?**

I think the importance of online journalism springs from the evolving expectations of the reader. They want to see all viewpoints, correctly and extremely quickly. The journalist can access all the published pieces on the news websites and by following the updates. Not only the story, but also all of society benefits from such possibilities, through the universal availability of shared news resources and information. I think that the reader knows these principals, and knows that an online journal cannot rehandle or represent the same topic with the same phrasing. Plagiarism is something that is typically not tolerated by readers. Even if the journalist is ignorant of plagiarism, the reader and the society will not accept it. We have readers who are at a very high level of education and cultural awareness, and because of that, online journals have developed their performance and organisational policy. Chief editors are also very familiar with these concepts as they are journalists too. They always examine the demands of society, the reader’s cultural level, and his or her need for a topic that strengthens the public’s relationship with the journalist. Believe me, if they were not oriented towards public culture, online journalism would never have developed and spread as fast as it has. These media outlets, including the one that I work for, definitely have their fingers on the pulse of the public. It is necessary for both journalistic and economic success.

**Do you mean that the reader is also a partner in the success and development of online journalism?**

I think yes, and this is evidenced by the regular follow-up done by the journal’s officials to investigate the cultural development of our society, intellectuals, and feedback from the regular readers. We are having a very inspiring upward cultural movement in the present. There is a growing number of theatres and cultural clubs, culture and arts associations in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Our online journals and media outlets in general are aware of that and those facts are reflected in online publications.

**Do you think that there are any obstacles or clashes between such a developed and renewable culture and the true nature of journalism?**

In my point of view, I think that the relationship is positive, not negative, and that there are neither obstacles nor clashes that could prevent the journalist from performing his or
her work. To give an example, I am now working on covering the events of a literary club in the eastern region, which represents the furthering of the development of cultural and academic fields in the Kingdom. I always find encouragement from the chief editor and the readers. This encouragement helps me to do my best in the coverage. Sometimes, the reader offers me great ideas for presenting such topics. Moreover, I remember the proposal of some readers to follow-up literary releases of intellectuals, and that is what has made me more a responsible journalist eager to build relations with the cultural elite, officials and readers all over the world.

**What is the role of the readers’ feedback about a topic, and what they present from content, or the role of the viewers’ ratings to your work as a journalist?**

I categorise readers according to their types. Some are distinct and educated and add to news stories, and others are more intermediate so they may not be prepared to offer their input to journalists. However, we should not ignore which journal the intermediate reader may choose to read the news and why, as that is a good indicator for the journalist, the journal and the news topic itself. What is presented in Saudi theatres is followed by a large proportion of readers in the upper echelons of society; namely the rich, the educated and the well travelled. The theatre district in the eastern region of Saudi participates in performances by people from countries all over the world, and many of these performances have received awards. This cultural success might be due to the interest and the follow-up of Saudi’s cultural elite, which helped give priority to these topics in the journals. This gave a moral and cultural push to the writers, which led to further development of culture in the eastern region of the Kingdom. This does not mean that the journalist only poses an interest because it is his or her duty, but they do this for the sake of society, which seeks this in accordance with its culture. For example, nowadays the Saudi company **ARAMCO** presents cultural works accompanied by theatrical performances, which have been highly lauded and positively viewed by many members of society. The number of useful questions, criticisms and suggestions from the readers, is evidence of the increased level of culture of the reader. This engagement is encouraging and revealing, so we are supposed to develop our news topics and present fresh views of them in order to satisfy this evolving audience.

**You mean there is a positive and qualitative exchange between the online journal and societal members.**

Yes, and it is well noticed. All the development in online journalism or any other online communication means, such as social media networks, has been due to the positive culture transmitted by the Saudi community. I think that the positive effect can be seen
between the society’s culture and online journalism. As a journalist, and after I started working in online journalism, I started to develop my skills and my relationship with the readers. It is easy to publish your reports online through social media and it is nice to have a strong resource upon which to rely, like the journal where I work. That is what increases the reader’s confidence of the report published, and increases his or her relationship with me as a journalist. I remember many intellectuals who we searched for in the past and had difficulty in interacting with. Now they are searching for us and contacting us because they have taken note of this technical revolution through which society has reacted. These intellectuals also noticed the development in the reader’s culture which was present in the past, but which was not that remarkable. Here I would like to add another point. The spread of our journal, the awareness of the reader about it, and its closeness to him or her, are very important factors, which the management of the online journal knows very well. This will not be achieved in the presence of a non-reactive culture. In the presence of this evolving audience, and the competition it creates between online journals, the more the reader’s culture is reactive, the more they seem to take ownership of the journals that they read. In this you are creating positive relationships between our journal’s readership and the readers.

**Do the policy and the culture of the decision makers in online journalism play a role in your work as a journalist?**

Yes of course. The more the cultural proficiency of the decision makers deals with the properties of online journalism and presenting the journalist’s work in a way required by such properties, the more an effort is expended to bring the journal to success. Here in the *Alyuum* online journal, we have a weekly award for the best topic coverage. Moreover, there are incentives to put the topic on the front main page in a suitable space. This gives us, as journalists, a big push towards doing our best and, of course, the front page of an online journal is read more than the front page of a printed one. Therefore there is a bit of prestige that comes from composing, writing and publishing a popular story. We are pushed to do this through management through our editors but perhaps we also want our own popularity. Here in the journal, we compete for perfection and we help each other and send our congratulations to any journalist who creates a dynamic and popular work. That is a new concept in our culture as journalists. This teamwork is something which is driving us towards success, but as I said, this is a relatively new concept within the journalism industry.
This is an interview with a male journalist working in the Aleqtsadia online journal (August 15, 2011, 12:30 – 1:15 pm, Riyadh City).

In general, do you think there is a direct or indirect effect of online journalism on your media practice?

I think a journalist’s relationship to his or her culture dramatically changes after they start to work in the field of online journalism. Doubtlessly, the development of online journalism is due to the evolution of society, their cultures, and the general societal need for a bridge of knowledge to connect readers to the news wherever they are. Bridging this gap between information and the audience is the quintessential role of a journalist. Therefore, online journalism, due to its speed and ability to reach large audiences is the utmost competitor for printed journalism, but it does not cancel or limit it. Each media forum has its own characteristics and properties. Online journalism has reduced a lot of time, and effort, and has reduced the cycle of work for almost all media professionals. It offers us, the journalists, a wide berth for creation and excellence. I think the regular updating of the news, plus the rapid spread of it, are what distinguish online journalism from its archaic printed competitors.

Upon the rapid appearance of online journalism, did you change the way in which you viewed local or world events? I mean do you now focus on certain perspectives of events that you had not before?

Frankly, the answer is yes. That is because on one hand, we try to present news and topics that serve the policy of the journal, like satisfying public opinion or creating marketable and palatable society news. However, on the other hand, we try to be superior to other online journals with the fast in-depth coverage of important topics and news. This is considered a new concept in the field of journalism. In printed journalism, the details beyond the stories were what journalists sought, but in online journalism, the factor of time and the speed in which a story is produced is paramount. The reader has become more conscious and aware. He or she looks for what is new and useful and will not spend time looking at news that they deem out of date, irrelevant or boring. Therefore, you find that journals bring together cultural analysts, as they are who dot the i’s and cross the t’s, in order to produce better products for the readers. When it comes to online journalism, you should know that it is like the clear voice that sounds out over all the others. Of course this voice is present in printed journalism, but it is very hard to evaluate or judge the opinions of the readers in this medium because it is not easy to move from one journal to another. Outside of industry wide awards, the general public does not necessarily judge printed materials. Online journals have the
benefit of having immediate feedback and therefore the relevance of stories can be ascertained immediately.

**Does that mean that your way of following up the stories has changed since you come to the online journalism field?**

Yes, because printed journalism checks finely what is beyond the news and presents it widely. This fact checking is basically necessary for news in print. Nevertheless, online journalism presents the most up-to-date, or let me say the ‘freshest’ stories, and then works on their development as they go, if it is at all possible. Our stories are always evolving and we add sources, data and fact check as we go. We have the benefit of speed to get things out to our audiences. In order to get this done, online journalist have skills particularly in regards to the speed in which we work.

**With all of those benefits of online journalism, do you find any obstacles that may prevent you from doing your work?**

The managerial organisational structures are still controlling some online journals; some journals give the journalist more authority in how he or she becomes the writer, editor and decision maker. Even if this makes delivery of the stories speedier, it may be harmful to accuracy. Some journalists think the editor’s inspection of the news before its published is an obstacle to speed. However, I prefer that another professional should inspect my work before publishing. It is not a matter of approval; it is to ensure the accuracy and the compatibility with the culture of the readers. This is applicable especially when we consider a case which is a sensitive society issue or could sway public opinion. From my point of view, this review and approval by management varies from one journal to another according to the popularity of the journal. Well-read journal publishers are keen on making sure that other professionals follow the news with the journalist until the process of publishing. As I understand from your research, you are looking for such cultural influences on online journalism, so I would like to tell you that in the Aleqtsadia online journal, most stories and topics are reviewed by two different individuals heralding from two different organisational cultures. For instance they differ in educational level, expertise and sometimes come from different cultural backgrounds. The journalist and the editor may be from two different nationalities, for example. In this way, the process of merging of journalistic work often happens, which I consider to be in favour of both the stories and the journal in general. This cooperation may seem hard to understand, especially if you consider a journalist’s professional ego. But the report sometimes becomes stronger when more than one journalist participates in creating a title, headline or even content. Usually, the professional journalist is the one
who wins in the end. That is simply because the professionals are typically better at phrasing and pitching things to the public. But there is a spectrum of strengths within the profession. One journalist, for instance, could be a fantastic investigative reporter but does not have the composition skills of another journalist. Or some media professionals are able to pitch their stories perfectly to particular audiences. This cooperation then is not an obstacle, but rather a more holistic way to produce the news in a speedy manner.

**You mean that the culture of the organisation where you work influences you as a journalist, and we can say that it develops a certain culture for you when dealing with the news.**

Of course, yes. Each journal’s organisation has its own political identity, and has its own influence on the self-conception and culture of the journalist himself. Some journals depend on excitement and boldness, even in the presence of self-censorship. However, in the end, the culture of the organisation will be the main, strong, direct influence affecting the identity and culture of the journalist. Therefore, it is easy for us as journalists to categorise the journals according to their boldness in presenting the topics, and their level of attention or enthusiasm during our follow up of events. In addition, it is usually easy for us to understand the culture of the journalist through his work in the journal. For example, some journals hire certain journalists, as they know them from their previous published work. They have seen the way that particular journalist has written about a story, what he or she is interested in, or where he or she has demonstrated passion. On the other hand, other journals are keen on bringing journalists who are known to be focused and have great attention to detail, in that they produced heavily researched writings. This occurs even in online journalism, because management believes in objectivity when presenting topics. Therefore, we find that some reports are published in certain journals and are delayed or never published in others journals knowing that these reports are valid for publication and are under the censorship of the Ministry of Culture and Information. However, the decisive factor in publishing is not only the governmental policy but also the culture of the journal itself. This is indicated through the type and quality of the work in an online journal.

**Do you think your understanding of dealing with the news changed after you began work in online journalism?**

Yes, certainly, and this is due to decisions made by me as a journalist. Online journalism clearly shows the level and abilities of each journalist, and I do my best to add a clear footprint of my personal framework and culture to the news that I deal with.
Therefore, I think that each journalist tries, as much as he can, to make use of his expertise and culture to produce the most marketable, but personal, press material possible. The field of competition has become stronger, and that helps in increasing the standard of many journalists after they enter the field of online journalism. I am certain that the culture of the journalist is what helps the journal to be on the frontlines of news investigation. You also have to consider the feedback gleaned from social media or crowd sourced sites where the public suggests sources or viewpoints for the journalist to utilise. Adding new sources or new information has become a part of a journalist’s job, even that was not necessarily what was expected before entering the industry.

**Does online journalism help you in choosing certain stories or concentrating on certain topics?**

I think the answer is yes. Topics and events published in online journals have a characteristic tinge and have certain phrasing, which differs from any other media source. For me yes, breaking news is what readers are very interested in reading about, following-up regularly, and seeking more from the journal about. Even in this way of presenting the news, there is a difference. When the topic I am working on is published in an online journal, I am always keen on new information and I choose to phrase my headline in a clear, simple and exciting way, which does not misrepresent my story. You may find that the title or the content is updated according to the last update in another journal. All reports are frequently updated, which attracts the reader and develops the abilities, skills and expertise of the journalist. However here you have some ambiguity to the work, as many journalists are publishing about similar stories. The importance of this increases when the news or topic is exclusive and has not been previously published in any journal. Here you find that the journalist’s imprint is clear. You may also find the strong influence of the reader on the news, the increase in the reading rate and feedback, all of which positively affects the performance of the journalist and the journal in general.

**Does the readers’ feedback and interaction with the news, either by watching it or by sending their feedback in to the publishers, influence your work as a journalist working in an online journal?**

Without a doubt, yes. Online journals are characterised by interaction with the readers in a timely manner. Therefore, we find that well known online journals have developed a lot from their performance where you can know the number of readers, amount of feedback, and their content. In some journals, you can see the number of times the topic was saved, sent or uploaded to a social media network. Therefore, as a journalist, I am
keen on learning and analyzing these numbers and reading the content of the feedback and comments. This has developed my skills, increased my expertise, and helped me in developing my work and my performance in the journal. Interaction with the public undoubtedly increases the quality of my work as well as increasing the marketability for my employer.

What about corporate or editorial decision makers and the influence of their decisions on your work regarding putting the topic in a certain place in the journal and presenting it in a certain way?

There is a great influence on the level of performance of the journalist by those who control either the journal or the corporation who own the journal. This occurs in a positive manner, as long as the decision-makers are highly cultured and are professional. This makes the journalist feel comfortable that someone values his or her efforts. I have noticed that the expertise of the journalist increases, corresponding to the expertise of the editor. This is reflected by how a piece is published, where it is put on the page and whether it is an internal or front-page story. Additionally there are professional editors who are extremely good at creating interesting and relevant content. Even the reader starts to have sufficient knowledge about whether what is presented on the front page is what is most important or not. Therefore, you find that the journalist is very keen on raising the level of his news reports and you find that online journals develop internally, improve their websites, and follow up what is new about developing news websites by doing competitor analysis. This is my target when I follow the events and it should be every journalist’s too.

So, you agree with those who say that online journalism has a positive influence on the journalist when dealing with the news?

Yes, sure, we find that online journals compete on developing their websites as the journalists compete at being more popular and respected. This was not applicable before the appearance of online journalism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

- Appendix A5 Interview 5

The following is the translation of the interview with MR. Said from Aleqtisadiah online journal (August 22, 2011, 9:30 – 10:50 am, Riyadh City).

With your entrance to the field of online journalism, do you think that you became more interested in concentrating on certain aspects of news events? I mean, does your personal conviction and framework in following the events change?
I think that journalists differ, or the level of their dealing with online journalism differs. Therefore the way in which journalists deal with their investigations also differs.

**Would you tell me more about your personal experience regarding this, and how much change you have perceived in your practice framework?**

I am not interested in a certain field nor do I stick to following certain news stories. I work according to what my media responsibility requests me to do as a journalist. There are many readers who are waiting to see what I will say in relation to certain events that occur. This week I may face a security event or a social incident, which requires me to research and investigate it. Another colleague may be responsible for social follow-ups, and this helps me in completing important points about the topics in which I am interested. Sometimes, important topics of the week appear within the news cycle and this requires me, or the journal, to follow them.

**Regarding the topics that appear in the news cycle, do you think that the characteristics of online journalism have any role in projecting and highlighting them?**

The online interaction of the readers makes some topics stronger, and makes others weaker. Of course, online journals are a part of the online working system in which the reader participates with the journalist in highlighting the events. This is due to the cultural movement lead by society’s readers, journalists, and media organisations.

**Do you think this cultural movement in information changed after the launch of online journalism?**

Yes, I think so. It was present in the past, but not at the same level of clarity and strength as it is nowadays.

**How did that change happen?**

Now it is easy to see the approaches and demographics of the readers and it is easy for the readers to reflect their culture on the identity of the journal and the journalist. You find that online journals differ in their general structure, and the content of their topics are created according to the society in which they exist and to which they relate. However, I feel that I am a varied journalist, and I attempt to relate the current culture of my audience. It is not possible to concentrate on reports that the readers are not interested in, do not know, or do not desire to read. For example, in the sports pages, it is easy for the reader to read about public sports in the Saudi society, which already have a high viewing rate. You find that football is the first sport, without any competitors, and then comes the other sports like volleyball, swimming and horse riding. In reverse, if someone writes a report about hockey, I as a journalist may not find
enough information or even enough readers to merit the publication of that story. This is in contrast to other countries where hockey news headlines their sports pages.

**Therefore, this culture of society which you are talking about, has a certain influence over online journalism?**

Yes of course.

**How does it occur?**

For example, increasing sections and online pages, bringing well-known writers into the organisational fold, developing the mechanisms for reporting and publishing, regularly updating content, and developing technical and directorial aspects of popular pages; all these reflect on developing the journal in general.

**Do you think there are obstacles or challenges that you face whilst working in online journalism?**

I think so, to some extent. You may find some journalists do not have the ability to go along with the technology and information revolution. The widespread information now available through different facets of online journalism could be the cause of that. You find some of them still working within the concept of printed journalism, which gives them enough time to search for details. In addition, they may not have full knowledge of the published topics online. Some journalists are still not able to source information from a variety of Internet sources. However, I think these archaic professional are minimal, but they are negatively influencing the system of online journalism. It is easy for anyone to differentiate the good journalist from the bad. Simply put, some journalists are just not as cultured in regards to how to source online materials they think it is still the 1990’s where the internet was an extra convenience instead of a necessary and indeed integral part of all aspects of journalism. Regarding the other obstacles, I think that online journalism does not leave room for any journalist to train at the expense of the culture of readership. I mean, there are many expressions such as ‘accusations’, ‘criminal’, or ‘guilty’ which are sensitive in online fields, and there is no room for error, as the journalist will be held accountable for every word because of the fast and widespread nature of online information. On the other hand, this helps to develop the culture of the journalists and that of the authorities of the journal. They know the responsibilities of the printed online word, so you find that the authorities of the journal are keen on the establishment of comprehensive training courses in the field of dealing with online journalism, as well as in phrasing and writing the stories in a simple easy language that the readers understand. Among the important aspects that I
learnt in such training courses were ways of dealing with the properties of online journalism, and how to use them properly. I also learned how to avoid damage, such as technical inaccuracies due to the rapid spread of information, being able to distinguish the correct news online from false stories and the importance of the presence of relevant sources, especially in online journalism.

**You made a very important point, which is the phrasing or language in publishing, as in the precision in expressing the content in the news, is now something that must be taught to new professionals. Can you expand on that?**

Yes, of course. I would like to give you a realistic example of that. A few days ago, I covered some social activities concerning orphans (the report written as related to Prince Sultan’s centre). Later, I learned that the centre was not directly in charge of those orphans because their age group exceeded the legal age in which the centre operates. Therefore the centre was not related in anyway to the children I reported on. However, this is related to the cultural level of the journalist and I consider myself a part of the society’s culture. The proof of this is that it was a new information for me and for the reader. Therefore, we can say that the society’s culture positively influences the content of the topic and consequently, developed the performance of the online journal and participated in spreading the online information precisely. A retraction was printed and the readers were informed that these children had actually been placed in foster families that the centre could not have controlled. Therefore, the strength of the news lies inside the cultural level of the journalist and the society. When these cultural factors are all present and the journalist is cognisant of them, this helps in the success of the journal and the professional.

**From your point of view as a Saudi journalist, what are the factors that increase the importance of the news and factor in their spreading to the public, according to the things you have previously mentioned about the local culture? How did online journalism influence news in general?**

Some journals depend on how quickly they can get their articles out to market. This is determined by the accuracy and the content or kind of topic being reported on. I mean that they seek excitement and exploit the number of readers and feedback. In contrast, other journals adhere to journalistic standards and social responsibility. They consider the accuracy of the news and the extent of the society’s need for it, and its reflection on the society. I think that the second type of journals are those that are superior, because that is what characterises online journals over other online forums and there are many examples of this.
Does the culture of the journal organisation agree with that of the journalist in the field of choosing and publication of the news?

I think that the authorized start of the journal has tremendous experience and knowledge of the media policy of the Kingdom and the policy of the journal and its objectives. When they have a certain opinion about publishing or choosing a certain type of news, this could be in favour of the society and the journalist himself. We have here (at the journal) a professional section that is only responsible for following the events and the general trends in Saudi society and internationally. Most of the authorities or decision makers here are ex-journalists, in that I mean that they worked in the field and acquired relevant experience.

Do you mean that a journalist may bring news that he wants to publish immediately, but he may find it rejected in favour of a different concept?

Yes, and as you mentioned it depends on the nature of the online journal. I think that this is a good and healthy concept, and it is in the society’s favour because it is wrong to rush news dissemination, regardless of the information revolution and the speed in which events occur. This could happen to the journalist a few times in the beginning of his dealings with online journalism, then after spending some time in practice and gaining experience, you will notice that all of his news articles are published immediately, as he practiced applying publishing rules and he also became more responsible towards his society. This is on both an organisational and political level. Everyone learns on the job and hopefully improves their skills.

However, some people say that we are in the era of speed, and the journalist should keep pace with it. What are your views on this?

Yes, that is right, and I agree with it, but not by harming the media procedure and the ethics of media practice. If the publication of the news is delayed due to the professionalism that media practice requires, this is natural. But the problem would be if the news is published regardless of our standards of media and ethical frameworks because of the need to get the articles out to market quicker. We, the journalists, know some reports that certain journals or journalists use to concentrate on and gain their information from. However, there are topics related to me, as a journalist, and I am sure that there is no other coverage on that topic in any other journal. In such case, the publication of this topic takes a day or two depending on the nature of the report and it can’t go out until all of its elements are completed.
How does this concept influence your work and your online journal?
As a journalist, I am always doing my best to complete my reports from all aspects and viewpoints. Including the accuracy of the information, the presence of the source, its suitability for the time and place, and the clarity of its language. Hence, you can expect that all reports published in the journal are at this level. Naturally, this helps in the development of media practice in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in general, and in the development of the media outlets. We are a part of this society, so I can say that our media outlets have a high level of credibility with the reader and with other media outlets outside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and are considered a strong source of news.

What do you think about the comments, the contents of these comments, and the feedback of the readers, the rate of viewing articles, and the evaluation of those articles? Of course, you know that this interaction with the audience reflects the culture of the society and the extent of its influence on you as a journalist, and on your online journal.

Regarding myself, I am keen to follow up on the amount of feedback, the views, the evaluation done by readers, and the content of their comments about all topics. This is because they develop my experience as a journalist and present me with wider information about the topic. On the other hand, I know that the view rate and the amount of feedback do not mean that the report is good or excellent or otherwise. It depends on the readers’ interest through viewing and commenting either positively or negatively. For instance, some reports do not live up to the standard of publishing, even though they have a large number of viewers. Nevertheless, if you read the content of the comments you will find that most of them criticise the journalist, or the journal. In general, we consider the readers to be the most important factor in the issue of developing the journal and the journalists.

Does this concept lead you to choose specific reports or to concentrate upon certain topics?
Eventually, I think that the journalist builds a general idea about the readers’ demands, and he seeks the proper tools to satisfy the readers, as well as sticking to the values in the report, which the reader determines along with the journalist. Moreover, I do not look for a large number of comments or feedback because my work requires follow up of the news in the society. On the contrary, we the journalists know certain reports that
create some sort of excitement among public opinion. We classify this type of news as ‘hot news’. Therefore, we can say that the nature of that sort of news influence is positive on one hand and negative on the other.

**Does online journalism change your concept about the nature of ‘hot news’?**
The ‘hot news’ topics are being sensationalised but they are the same stories being regurgitated no matter what the audience wants. However, I think that online journalism presents them to the reader in a quicker and more sensationalist way. This is due to the speed of delivery, and the speed of circulation among the readers. Thanks to online journalism, we get quick coverage on stories from the perspective of the authorities’ comments, and are able to bind them to older stories. In addition, as online journalism creates the revolution of information it helps the development of the story in a holistic manner. Both the journalist and the reader can collect the information in record time. Therefore, we can say that online journalism affords the story speed in which it reaches the public, integrity and accuracy. Regarding online journalism, I think that the time factor has positively affected the concept of the journalist when following up events. In addition, the reader may have more knowledge about the events than the journalist does, due to the readers regular and easy follow up of current events, which is what online journalism facilitates.

**Do you think that the concept and culture of decision-makers in an online media organisation are in conflict with your concepts about the importance of the news and the importance of publishing on the front page, for example?**
First, the journalist follows news according to his or her experience and culture. Decisions must be made on his behalf and the editor or managerial team must take responsibility for what is happening. However, with time, he builds enough knowledge about the topics that are important to him, and to the decision makers. I think it is a positive reward for the journalist to publish his story on the front page, and this gives him a strong drive to perform better. However, if not published on the front page, I do not think that it negatively impacts his performance.

- **Appendix A6**  
  **Interview 6**

*The following is the interview done with Mr. Talal who is working in Alyaum online journal (August 24, 2011, 2:30 – 3:40 pm, Dammam City).*

Since you first started work in the field of the online journalism, do you think that you have become more interested in concentrating on certain aspects of the events? I mean, does your way of following up the events change?
Yes, I think that some sort of change happens in the concept of the journalist, and in about 70-80% of the readers. You can read the online journal at home without any fee, and in a more accessible way than reading a printed journal. In addition, the speed of publishing the news gives the journalist another facet to consider when producing news. Some studies have proven the increase in the percentage of online readers, and the increase in the percentage of readers searching online for news. This is pointing to the change in the reader’s concept. Therefore, you find the online journals and journalists are trying to keep pace with the development that occurs in the culture of the society. This influences the journals, the nature of the work of the journalist, his choices, and the coverage of the events.

Do you think the characteristics of online journalism that you mentioned are the only factors helping in the development of online journalism? Alternatively, do you think the cultural factor of the readers has also participated in this development?

I think that the cultural level of the society has a big role in the development that occurred. I remember a good example of this. There has been a lot of talk lately about the credibility and accuracy of delivering the information, especially with the appearance of news websites at all levels. Speed is not considered a big problem because all of the websites have this advantage. However, the debate now is about the accuracy of delivering the information, which causes many social and ethical problems in the society due to rumours, and because this technology is still new to society. From my point of view, I can classify the society into two categories; the first category includes the literary elite, writers and journalists, while the second one contains the readers who do not have the ability to analyse or comment. Those in the first category finder easy to know the true reports from the false ones, and can analyse them easily because of their high level of literacy. However, for the second category, it is hard for them to differentiate between true and false news, so they are easy prey for the negative influences of this technology. However, with time, I think the second category will decrease and the knowledge level will begin to increase among readers. Therefore, you find that the source is the first thing that the reader is asking about when he understands a story. Moreover, the journalist’s work and the online journals have developed because of this concept of culture and they adhere more to the ethics of media practice.

Does the culture of the journalist have a relationship with the positives of online journalism?

Certainly yes, there are basic guidelines that allow you to discern the difference between a journalist and a member of the public who reports the news as a hobby. A
journalist for example, can never give up credibility and accuracy of the news he or she
reports even if they need to deliver an article quickly, because the target market of the
journalist totally differs from the target market of other people who own websites aimed
at sensationalising reports, and seeking fame and advertising revenue.

**Do you mean that the journalist represents the organisation he works for, and both
aim for the same goal?**

Yes, the journalist and the journal work in the same culture and are aimed at the same
goal. However, the journal affects the journalist work and not the vice versa. I mean, in
the journalist’s concept of culture, the journal is founded on laws, identity, certain and
clear policy. However, the vision and the culture of journalists may differ. They acquire
the culture of the journal and work through it, with practice and time. Accordingly, you
may find special treatment by the electronic journals towards the well-trained journalist.
As a result, they send him for training, and put him under the supervision of an
experienced journalist in order to get benefit from him. In addition, you find that the
journal selects certain experienced journalists to cover the events and important
conferences either inside or outside the Kingdom. Moreover, I think that it will be easy
for practiced journalists to observe the cultural differences between journalists
working in the electronic journals, as he will find that each journalist follows the culture of his
organisation.

**In your opinion, what are the most obvious obstacles or challenges facing online
journalism now?**

I think that the journalist himself is the one who puts these obstacles in front of him self.
This depends upon his qualifications, experience, culture and the extent of compatibility
of his personal objectives with the objectives of the journal and society. For example,
there are journalists who are working on websites and in online forums where they find
no restrictions on news publication. You find they have the wrong concept of
journalism. In addition, when they move to work in an official online journal, they face
great challenges. Originally, these are not challenges, these are the rules and basic
assumptions which they must overcome. Hence, the evidence is that these so-called
‘challenges’ are not facing other journalists who are more professional and experienced.
This aspect affects the journal itself either negatively or positively. In addition, some
journalists maybe accustomed to a particular nature or pattern of sources, for instance, a
phone call from a friend, or a story that may be inaccurate or incorrect. Therefore, the
official journals do not considering this type of source to be a reliable one.
Does the culture of the readers play a role in increasing or decreasing the impact factor of the journal?

I think the culture of the reader comes second to the issue of the challenges facing online journalism. This is because the role of the reader here is secondary and not fundamental, in my opinion. I think that because the online journal or the journalists themselves are constructing the right or the wrong culture for the readers. In addition, and to be honest with you, we suffered a lot from these challenges previously. At that time, we were in the position of proving ourselves, and proving that the information in the official journals, even if it is short or incomplete, is better than the details the reader may find in other locations. Eventually, we found we were able to build this trend thanks to the awareness of the reader, which is what leads to the weakness of the provided information at those sites. Now, these sites are affiliated to the official online journals, I mean, they copy stories from the online journals. Moreover, I think that the main reason for this change is the success of the online journals in attracting qualified journalists. In addition, we have many models for official online journals that have proved their worth in the media in spite of their recent experience.

There is some sort of discrepancy or disagreement between the Saudi online journals about the approach taken in dealing with the news, and the nature of the design of the journal itself. What are the reasons for that, in your opinion? For example, the Riyadh journal, which is published in the central region, and the Alyaum journal, which published in the western region.

If you mean the discrepancy in terms of news display and dealing with it, the answer is yes. I can observe that, and I think that it is due to the culture of the officials and the percentage of readers. The Riyadh journal, as you pointed out before, has an online department that specifies in breaking news. They update this department from time to time, and have a certain approach through which they publish the breaking news. Some other online journals depend upon breaking news, but this is not updated because of their tie-up with the original journal. Moreover, the policy of the journal determines what is breaking news.

In addition, do you think the culture of the region has a role in that respect?

I think the difference is not great, as all the regions have the same cultural character. However, this may be due to the culture of the workers in the journal. The proof for this is that you may find a discrepancy or difference between the journals in the same region, for example the central region. Moreover, this may be due to specific convictions of each journal is management and its policy towards news editing.
Everyone is keen to have a distinctive media appearance to serve the informational field. This is reflected positively to the reader. Consequently, you will find that some of the readers prefer one journal to another, because it fits the pattern of their thinking style. Finally, this is a beneficial and healthy phenomenon in the field of online journalism due to the presence of the technological and cultural variance in using the technology. In addition, most online journalism links to multiple of newspaper. For instance, the daily journal has a first edition specifically aimed at to all regions of the Kingdom, the second edition is aimed specifically at the western region, and the third updated one aimed specifically at Dammam and Alkhobar cities. This is due to each journal’s increased focus on the news of its region, because of the nature of the readers. Accordingly, the reader who cares about the news and activities of the western region can follow this news from anywhere.

**What distinguishes Alyaum, the online journal from the other journals?**

Here we have a group of principles that we rely upon in the policy of editing news. These include the continuous search for the needs of the citizen, the assessment of their demands, and satisfying their desires. Therefore, you find a high level of communication with the readers and the citizens. There are multiple channels for communication. That is because we believe the journal is from, and to, the reader. It reflects his culture, unlike a number of journals that act like public relations centres. I mean that these journals are running according to the requirements of the events that occur, and are keen to improve their image, as much as possible, while they may curtail the rights of the citizens. The journalist has to reflect the citizen’s point of view and sustain his concerns and aspirations. You can observe this easily through a quick reading of the various sections and pages of the journal, where you will find a good percentage of the pages relate to the citizens and the community.

**As a Saudi journalist representing the culture of the society, how do you deal with the different types of news, and their editing, during your work in online journalism?**

This is a good question. This confirms that the journalist along with the reader share the evolution of the media and the optimal use of the websites. The readers are sometimes unable to reconcile the uninformative or incorrect articles, and this can lead to misinformation, resulting in readers making poor decisions based on incorrect information. This concept is the same one that professional journalists believe in, so I am always remembering a theory, which is ‘The distinct journal is bound to distinct journalists and distinct readers’, and vice versa. Accordingly, you find that the
professional journalist has good experience and familiarity when dealing with news on one hand, and in dealing with the properties of online journalism on the other hand. When the experience level increases, the journal deals with modern technology with a higher level of professionalism.

**What are the main factors that you think makes a story more valuable to a publication in electronic media?**

I think that how widespread the news becomes is what determines its value in society, and it is easy to see how much news disseminates and achieves global resonance in the online media arena.

**Does this mean that the public has an active and efficient role in your decisions as a journalist in terms of the number of readers and the content of their comments?**

We as journalists benefit from working in online journalism. For instance, last week I wrote an article about the bridge of King Fahd that links the Kingdom to the state of Bahrain. I was surprised that there was a group of readers that gave me supplement any, new and important information about the article. Moreover, these comments prove the reliability of the article itself, that is to say, confirms its credibility.

**Do you focus on the news articles that you believe will have a high viewing rate?**

Of course. However at the same time, this cannot be at the expense of my point of view or my media responsibility that I believe in as a journalist. As I said before, I represent the public culture and the news articles that are important to the public are important to me. From the reaction of the readers, we can measure the level of their culture as well as the extent of the success or failure of any news coverage. In addition, we know the places where defects occur and we work to repair them. Some people read the news according to how much a topic has been viewed. This is a culture that exists in society, and I personally know readers like this. Surveys tell me that every day when the reader opens his preferred electronic journal, he goes directly to the news topics that have been most viewed, have a large number of comments or have been forwarded by email. This results in an elevation of the cultural awareness of the owners of the news organisations about the readers themselves. In addition, this helps spread the news electronically, and this is of interest to the journalists and observers. There are studies on news articles that have gained the reader’s attention in the kingdom, and the news has spread to international journals, and all of this is due to the culture of the readers.

**Who judges the importance of the news in online journalism?**

The audience’s reaction makes it possible to conduct studies on the most common news articles in the Kingdom on one hand, and the most common news articles in different
cultures like Australia, on the other hand. For example, the top story in the Kingdom may not necessarily have any impact in Australia, and vice versa. This is due to cultural differences and you will find the differences in their approach towards dealing with news. This does not mean that the story in Australia is not valuable, but that Australian readers place high value on the topic.

**How do you look at the concepts and culture of decision makers in organisations and journalists with extremely popular widespread news stories?**

This is a good question. The officials here in the journal have exceptional knowledge and they are keen to develop the work curriculum of the journal. The organisation spiritually and materially supports the journalists. Spiritually in terms of fitting the news in the right place which reflects its informational value, as well as developing a list of names of the journalists who receive positive feedback about their articles. For instance, there is a special advisory committee concerning this that assembles everyday and looks at the most important news articles that are nominated by the head of the department. They then look at the site of the news publication and the number of readers, and, there is a monthly incentive award for journalists.

**Does where the article is placed affect the way you portray the news?**

The journalist always tries to distinguish himself and make himself better than the rest. As an example, when the editor decides to publish a news story on the front page, this gives a strong motivation for the journalist to excel. This is due to the high level of awareness, which decision makers have in successful journalism institutions. This has positively influenced our views as journalists as we start to look for the news within the news. In other words, an article may be published in the internal pages of any journal, and according to the level of professionalism the journalist has, he can infer from this the articles important topics, and thin can be what will be in on the front page the next day. Online journalism in general has news that has not been fact checked because of the speed in which the articles need to be published, and from here comes the importance of follow-up.

- **Appendix A7**

*This is a translation of the interview with a male journalist from Aleqtisadiah online journal (August 28, 2011, 9:30 – 10:30 am, Riyadh City).*

**Do you think that you become more interested in focusing on specific sides of news when you started to work in the field of online journalism? Has your concept of follow up of the news changed?**
Elevation at a cultural level is very important to the journalist within and outside the media because it reflects the culture of his or her country. This affects the society either negatively or positively, and the evolution of the community. The entrance of the journalists into the field of online journalism has increased the importance of readers who are well travelled, well read and well educated. Dealing with online journalism requires a high concept of culture so the technology revolution does not affect it negatively. Hence the journalist who understands the electronic work system officially represents online journalism. If we assume that the percentage of culture is low or modest, undoubtedly this will reflect negatively on the journal in terms of its objectives and will also reflect on the culture of the readers, as the journalist is in a place of social and cultural responsibility.

What is the relationship between the cultural level of the reader and online journalism, according to your point of view?

Online journalism is a new cultural concept in the media and, because it is based in the world of technology, this helps with the speed that thoughts, concepts and knowledge are disseminated to the public. Online journalism is a widespread and easy way for cultures to exchange ideas between institutions, society and individuals. In addition, sensitive elements that are not present in online journalism in terms of the spread and speed of information deployment, characterises online journalism. It is the cultural archive in which the society itself participates in building.

Does this reflect on online journalism in terms of work and development?

Undoubtedly yes. The current journalism field as it has evolved is the result of cultural sediment from the same organisation, journalists and the readers, and all of them represent the community with its various levels of education and varying age groups. As for the readers, wherever there is a high level of cultural awareness, this will have a more positive effect on the possibility of knowledge of important news that is of interest to the community. Thus, the journals elevate the level of work and level of news content that they deal with. Even with the classification of news in terms of importance, readers, due to their level of cultural intelligence, are able to distinguish between news that is fit or unfit for publishing. In addition, every member of society knows his responsibilities and there is an integrated system in existence between members of the society and the media.

How did the properties of online journalism influence the journalist’s culture in dealing with news, as the speed in news transmission, spread, and the ease of the relationship between old news and new news have increased?
It is supposed to have a positive effect not a negative one, because the standards and laws related to media practice are constant and cannot be renounced at the expense of something else.

**How do you evaluate the current situation?**

I believe that the commitment of official online journalism is more than that of the unofficial news sites in terms of press practice parameters. A journalist must ignore the temptation to sensationalise the news and must verify and check facts and sources. For these reasons, they are committed to their social and press responsibilities. They are not inclined to become enthusiastic or passionate, and that can impact negatively on public opinion. Due to the presence of regulators, you do not find irregularities or imprecise news because the regulators will prosecute the journalist. This does not mean that there is not something like that, but if there is, it will be because of a lack of sufficient cultural awareness, adequate experience, or mistakes from the journalist or the journal itself. Notably, the Ministry of Information and Culture began only about a year ago to provide licenses for online journalists in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

**What differs between online journalism and other media press and printed journalism when dealing with culture?**

The main factor is that online journals, with the emergence of the information revolution, or the Internet, anyone from his home and with little charge, can communicate with society and construct an electronic news website. He may work as a journalist and as an editor, but he in far from being professional, and he relies on his culture, which is limited or not founded in a scientific base. This is the wrong practice by the publisher, and causes free speech to have a negative impact on society. As a result, the need for official online journalism with specialists in the field has arisen, and talking about the cultural factor undoubtedly helps in improving this practice, as the reader cannot consent to fallacious or imprecise information.

**Is there a relationship between the emergence of online journalism and the journalists’ approach in dealing with the news in terms of topic selection, the nature of the reports or the way news is worded?**

Certainly, there is a positive influence on the journalist and his approach, and also on the press organisation. For instance, we know that in economic electronic journals the issue of the scoop becomes common between the journals. Some of them believe in the theory that the breaking news always wins when courting a reader, and we agree with this theory. However, we focus beyond the scoop. This is more important from the journals point of view as it searches for important details in the news. The reader, after
getting the information from the online journal, will find himself searching for further
details. This trend gives good results by gaining large numbers of readers and
developing the performance of the organisation. This is a new concept, existing in the
community. We have a team who works to investigate any news that we require
information about, and to find the answers to many questions. I think that we have
priority, which is the revolution of product in the information arena in return for the
awareness of the reader. However, if we go in another direction searching for what is
beyond the news that is a direction that many journals ignore, because they believe that
it is the territory of the printed journals, and this is wrong. In addition to that, the search
for news details presents us with a scoop, which is privy to the journal only, as we do
not expect the source to give us the information.

In your opinion, what are the most obvious obstacles or challenges facing the
journalist or online journalism now?
I think the journalist should be professional at all times and at all levels of their career.
If the journalist is working in his section, either the social or the economic news section,
he should be responsible enough to deal professionally in his work as a journalist in
online journalism.

What are the main cultural challenges that face the journalist during his work in
online journalism?
Notably, the reader is no longer a local reader, but a global one. Hence, the journalist
must understand the difference and the multiplicity of cultural levels. He must address
the topic that develops the performance of himself and the journal itself through a
number of factors. These factors include the high cultural level of the journalist, the
content of the journal, the way the news is formulated, and the use of words and terms
that are understandable to all readers. Regarding online journalism, these factors help to
develop its divisions and pages as well as readers’ concerns, and also the impact that its
policy is now seeking to gain from global and local readers. Perhaps the appearance of
online issues and versions in different languages are the most prominent results of these
cultural influences.

Are there any interests or studies carried out by the journal in relation to other
cultures outside Saudi Arabia?
Yes, and if you look at today’s issue of the journal you will find more than one story or
news article concerning other societies and cultures. The journal has articles on many
topics relating to Egypt and Yemen that are reported by local journalists as well as
through international media outlets. This is the result of the journalist’s interest in other
readers’ cultures in online journalism. I think that online journalism helps us overcome cultural barriers. This intellectual openness has a positive impact on the career of the online journalist. In addition, this approach helps the journalist to have a great experience, increases his intellectual level, and increases his performance level when dealing with current events. Furthermore, journalists or readers from other cultures have a significant role to play in the development of online journalism through their interest in global news published by the journal. This is achieved through attempts to attract journalists who have high levels of inter global culture, which has provided new job opportunities and has introduced a new skill set in the field of online journalism. This resembles the effect of the skilful physician in the medical field for example the highly intellectual and professional journalist will have a good effect on the online journal.

Do you think that the personal framework and the culture of the decision makers in the organisation of online journalism could be inconsistent with your personal framework or your understanding about the importance of a story? For instance, an evaluation of the degree of importance of the story to publish it on the front page?

The officials here in Aleqtisadiah follow a clear protocol in support of journalists using online journalism. We are communicating with them online, moment by moment, to publish their news. The journalists mutually believe that everyone is keen on the evolution of the journal. The journalist may nominate news for the front or last pages, or as breaking news. This is a result of the cultural level for both the journalists and the decision makers working on the journal. In our journal, the decision makers are keen to deal with the journalist, and with online journalism, in a professional manner. In addition, the decision makers have helped journalists many times to convert information into scientific studies that are beneficial for them and for the society.

Upon your entry to the field of online journalism, do you think you focus more on certain aspects of events, meaning that you change your concept of follow-up on events?

Online journalism has important characteristics and features that every journalist should know. Certainly, online journalism has affected the method of work. The theory we follow is to compete with others in the online journals. We have a team that specialises in the study of the requirements for online journalism, the way to publish and present information; this is the result of an entry to online journalism that is different from print media significantly. For example, in a printed journal the news published on the front page is often the official news, meetings and political decisions that may be news of
interest to a certain segment of the economy according to the journal’s policy. However, in the field of online journalism this is no longer acceptable because it has provided a wide range of choices due to technology. In addition, due to the reader’s culture and wish to view news that suits his or her interests and concerns, many journals have created a page called a ‘Home Page’. The so-called ‘Home Page’ is the front page from the technological and practical aspects, but not the first page in the serial order. This page displays the most prominent things in the journal and summarizes the important events in a clear way to suit the reader’s concerns.

**What do you think about the reader’s comments and their evaluation of the news as they reflect the culture of the community? How do they affect you as a journalist and your online journal?**

Feedback is very important and has positive impact on the readers, the journalists, and the organisation. It is a matter of concern to us, for example, to know the importance of a subject, and to recognize the needs, the interests, and the culture of readers. In addition, when the reader writes a comment about the news, it makes him feel that he belongs to the journal. The reader often participates in the media by offering new ideas, or opening the field for other news. Furthermore, opening a debate about news reports gives us wide scope to help to understand the culture and trends of readers. An important piece of information is that it in the reader himself who is the one who demands that, and he is the one who offers his opinion. Being ‘receivers’ only may not satisfy many readers. They show their desire to participate by offering their opinions. This is a healthy phenomenon. It results from cultural awareness in the way the readers deal with online journalism. From that it follows that the readers are the founders of the online questionnaire or survey about many causes they wish to share with the decision makers.

- **Appendix A8**  
  **Interview 8**

*This is a translation of interview with Mr. Fahd, a journalist from Aleqtisadiah online journal (September 4, 2011, 9:30 – 11:00 am, Riyadh City).*

**Upon your entry into the field of online journalism, do you think your focus was more on individual aspects of the topic and have you changed the way you follow up these topics now?** Generally, I think that the journalist is one individual who represents his or her society’s culture as well as his or her personal framework. A journalist should use his or her culture and experience in their field of work as a journalist to build on his or her beliefs. A journalist’s professionalism as a member of
the media requires them to know their limitations politically, legally and culturally, so they are able to work on any journal in any community. Eventually, every journalist distinguishes him or herself from others by his or her universal culture. This does differ from one journalist to another just as his or her cultural effects on media practice differ from others. That is why we notice a number of prominent international names in the field of media who work in cultures different from the journalist’s own culture. Hence, I can say that such journalists have benefited from modern techniques in online journalism and new media, in that they have employed cultures, skills, and professionalism according to the needs of their society within the ethics of the media.

Do you believe that you practice your work in online journalism according to your understanding of the events, or are there other variables affecting your work?

I think the journalist must affect and be affected by the surrounding environment, as his culture is influenced by the surroundings they interact with. The Kingdom and Saudi journals have restrictions on what goes out in the media and I think that this shapes my culture and personal framework when looking at current events. In addition, each journalist does have his or her own style and comprehension of these media policies. For instance, the personal variations in intellectual understandings between journalists and online journals, lead to variations in published reports. This also impacts on the interests, the analysis, the style of presentation and the publishing of the stories. Therefore, as a researcher or as one of the followers, you can recognize some of the comparable factors between these journals simply because all of them are among the same intellectual system. For example, all of the journals may publish the so-called ‘hot news’ because they are sharing the same media culture. However, you may find some variables because of the personal, intellectual and conceptual variations of the journalist or of the media organisations, for example, the way the story is formulated, analysed, the discussion around the event or the focus on certain subjects.

Do you think that the freedom of media practice, which has increased after the appearance of online journalism, may be influenced by cultural factors in the environment the journalist works in?

Controls and conditions cannot be an obstacle to the freedom of media practice. However, they do work to portray the news accurately and to ensure that the journalists’ personal framework does not influence the news. I think the importance of these restrictions on media has increased recently because of the information revolution founded by online media, because of how prevalent it is in society, the competition between journals and the appearance of websites that do not portray the information
professionally. Here the journalist can deal with issues subjectively and freely. The journalist now knows very well the limits of news reporting, getting away from events that are not suitable for publishing according to the publisher’s policy. I think online journalism has a great role in this, it has offered journalists a great service, and it has improved their cultural framework in regards to society and culture quickly.

Do you think that the properties of online journalism, like the speed in which news is distributed and how widespread the news is, has affected your way of dealing with events?

As I said before, a journalist is an individual working within a cultural framework. He influences and is influenced by this framework. Journalism practice is indeed influenced by being in an online forum and you may find that a journalist works on useful news articles to the society. I think the way I formulate and phrase today is different than it used to be. Online journals and readers are now able to evaluate news at a journalistic level. Previously, I have worked in isolated cultures with routine evaluation of the news standards. However, now the evaluation comes from the readers. This has certainly motivated me to improve my journalistic skills, my cultural framework, and my investigative skills. Sometimes you find that readers have a superior cultural framework to journalists, hence you notice that there is a higher percentage of journalists who are not capable of dealing with websites, especially social media, they now have good stock of knowledge about current events.

In your opinion, what are the most prominent challenges facing the journalist, or online journalism, now?

In general, we can say that the challenges facing printed and online journalism are similar. However, these challenges may be much more in online journalism by virtue of cultural openness and the information revolution and technology. The journalist in online journalism faces these challenges if he cannot develop himself and deal with the events according to the nature of online journalism. In addition, he is required to be more professional as online journalism allows quick publishing and spreading of news. The time factor here may be shorter compared to the time given by a printed journal. When the journalist is familiar with these challenges and improves himself, he would be much better reporting the news. That is what I have noticed with some of my colleagues, and in new journalists. However, the most prominent point to note is that they have not understood the nature of these new online means. As a result, the online news organisations provide training sessions on an ongoing basis to develop the skills of journalists in their dealings with online journals. Nowadays, e-mail has become the
appropriate way for communication between the journalist and the journal. The old ways of communication, such as the fax, was an appropriate means of communication for printed journals to some extent. Some journals depend on direct publishing, which means that the journalists themselves can publish their news directly on the online journal’s website. It requires only few minutes to review spelling and be approved by the editor, then it becomes ready to be broadcasted live online. Generally, challenges are concentrated on the speed in which the news article is distributed and that challenge is created by online journals. Therefore, you can find a high rate of investigation and exchange between online journals when publishing breaking news.

Do you think that your cultural framework when dealing with news in online journals is different from that in printed journals? In other words, has online journalism influenced your understanding as a journalist in your dealings with news?

Yes, of course. In online journalism for example, there are no restrictions on the space provided to the journalist in the dissemination of news. It is considered a positive property if the journalist deals well with it. In another words, a large or a small space is not a criterion of importance of the news. It has to be balanced with the importance and nature of the news. In addition, this is a new cultural concept presented by online journalism. An example of this, I now edit news about the events in Syria. In my view, the news includes important information sought by the reader. If this news was published in a printed journal, it would take up two pages, therefore it would be cut. Yet here in an online journal I have much more space. Some online daily journals have a policy which is based on parallel information in both online and printed journals. You can notice that these journals rely on open online files, especially on hot files for those who want to read more. They have designed their online journals in a manner consistent with the properties they are looking for in the reader, and this serves the new media process. Also the display of videos and photos reflects the news more than just in text.

What do you think about the relationship between the culture of the journalists and the expressive culture represented by the internet network, in general, and online journalism in particular?

Yes, I think that journalists affect the culture of the internet and visa versa. For example, in our Aleqtisadiah journal there is a statistic that indicates that of 3% of the site’s visitors are in Egypt. Thus, the journal is starting to focus on the news and current events that come out of Egypt. A while ago there was a football match between Egypt and Algeria. The survey revealed that the number of visitors to the website from Algeria
had risen, and we started to focus on the nature of this event, which also appeals to the Arabic and Algerian societies. Then we see another journal transferring and exchanging news.

**Do you think the cultural framework of decision makers in online media organisations is in conflict with your personal framework about the importance of the news, and the importance of publishing some articles on the front page, as an example?**

Because of the nature of online journalism and the nature of readers themselves, the management of the online front page is different from the management of the rest of the pages. That is because the reader looks to the front page as a mirror for the work of the journal, and it is the page which is supposed to attract the reader to go through the rest of the journal. Innovation and working to understand a reader’s cultural framework are the main demands of a successful journal. The journal needs to ensure diversity in news articles published on the front page, such as health studies, the economy, social issues and sports even if some of these news articles do not live up to the ideal standards that guarantees placement on the front page. Yet, innovation is much more important than any other strategy. You may find news about a local football match, oil or another world power on the front page because it is breaking news. These are not necessarily the same types of articles that would be printed on the front page of a printed journal. They have been published on the front page in the online journal because of innovation and renewed demands for breaking news stories. To clarify, my journal, *Aleqtisadiah* is a daily journal, and is interested more in the economic field. It is often featured on the front page, but a lot of the time the breaking news articles will contain, for example, three sports news articles due to the demand for innovation. For this reason, as a journalist, I work according to my culture and my level of interest in an event without regard for the fact that it may not be published on the front page. It is management who decides this. However, if it were published on the front page, I would have more incentive to provide the best and up to date news more rapidly. In short, I can say that the culture of the decision makers within the organisation is supposed to be parallel with the culture and the policy of the journalist, because they are both working towards the same goal. There are news articles that are more important in the media landscape, however because of political, cultural and social reasons we find the paper shying away from handling them. Sometimes, the paper has to deal with and focus on specific topics. This is a logical direction by virtue of news organisations having a social and cultural responsibility. They also follow the policy of the country.
What is the impact of the amount of feedback from the readers, their content, and the rating from viewers on your work as a journalist and your online journal?

This has a significant impact on the practice of journalists and journalism itself. Firstly, the journalist finds direct and rapid assessment for his work through comments from readers. Of course, comments from the readers are not all published because it is an official journal. Thus, comments that are abusive, irrelevant or against cultural norms are being blocked, but those are few and far between, due to the virtue of the reader awareness. In addition, the online journal is working to develop its pages, and the division of topics and content of its news according to the needs of society and culture. The comments are the measuring tool for that. This is because there are types of news that you will find a large proportion of comments are not in favour of, for example, news that is not read by the community. This answers your question about the effect of cultural transparency. From this, we can say that the online journal should not give up its principles and its policy. If they do, they will lose its readers.

- Appendix A9

Interview 9

This is a translation of interview with a journalist working in Aleqtisadiah online journal (September 4, 2011, 11:30 – 12:15 pm, Riyadh City).

With your participation in the field of online journalism, do you think that you focus on certain aspects of events? In other words, does your framework for investigating the events change?

A journalist who works in online journalism may be more professional than other journalists, because he is not affected by other factors such as new technologies and their impact on transmitting information. Most times you find the journalist more adherent to the ethics of media work. On the other hand, a journalist who works in the field of online journalism may be superior to others. That is because the use and suitable employment of optimal technologies serves the information flow of news. The common factor in both cases is the extent to which the journalist upholds him ethics, and the effectiveness of the method of media used. No doubt, online journalism is a new concept in the world of journalism.

Would you give an example of one of those concepts created by online journalism?

I will give you an example that has a direct relationship to your scientific research. Journalistic identity is a cultural concept that because immersed into online journalism and has become influenced by other surrounding cultural factors very quickly. This effect exists in the field of print journalism as well, but not to the same extent that it is
now in online journalism, where it is affected quickly. It is a very powerful broker or carrier of the cultural movement, which is not present in a printed journal. In addition, cultural requirements, which are reflected in media work, can be seen easily by virtue of the properties that online journalism has. On the other hand, these properties are difficult to see in printed journals.

**Would you tell me more about the influence of the culture of the journalist on his online journal?**

The range of this influence is very high, and you can notice that the online journal represents the culture of its related journalists from all practical aspects, quality of topics, how to edit, dealing with the news, dealing with properties of online journalism, and dealing with readers, etc. The journalist himself is the reader, editor and everything related to the article, as he considers and deals with the material according to his point of view. I will give you an example of that. We journalists often talk among ourselves about the issue of the cultural tag left by the journalist on the report he deals with. In other words, we know who has written certain news by reading the article and reading its title, without looking for the writer’s name. Each of us used to test this by giving a news report and hiding the name of the writer, we often succeed in knowing the writer.

**Well, this is a good example I liked it, but do you believe that all journalists working at the online or printed journal share this?**

Yes of course, but it is more obvious in online journalism for many reasons. For example, the speed with which the journalist can edit and publish the news causes him to leave his fingerprint more clearly. In addition, there are several methods in editing that have been found by online journalism and reflect the culture of the journalist. A degree of clarification is required in online journalism by virtue of its wide deployment. News often comes, for example, to the editor or journal administrator when the journalist has forgotten to write his name on the news report. We find that the administrator starts to call the journalist who is expected to write the news article just by looking at the quality of it and its phrasing. To summarize, every journalist has his own cultural identity and the online journal in general consists of group of many cultural practices that finally composes a journal.

**So, how could the culture of a journalist influence online journals especially?**

Well, I will give you an example of that. If a journalist is going to do a report about sports or write about a sporting event, his culture has to be higher than the reader’s culture in this aspect so that he can fill the report with recent, accurate and useful news. In addition, all online journals may use this information, and try to build other news
articles based on it because of the ease of browsing websites. That is the effect of the culture of the journalist on the content of the news reports provided to the online journal. As for its effect on improving these journals, I think that his culture also has a great role in this aspect. The more expansive the culture of the journalist and his acquaintance with the world of online journalism, the more suitable and up to date his reports will be form. He will also be able to provide ideas to develop the journal in technical aspects which are used in media practice. Another example, online journalism provides the reader with accuracy of information. Therefore, you can find that the journalist works on online questionnaires and statistics, and is keen to strengthen his relations with sources. That is because online news has become a major source watched by thousands of readers in many different countries.

In your opinion, what are the most prominent obstacles or challenges that face the journalist or online media now?

I do not think that there are challenges or difficulties facing online journalism or the journalist. Journalists or online journalism face challenges often. Speed of transfer of the news is an example of that. As the journalist is required to deal with information in record time, which is not always the case in printed journals. Online journals are responsible for rapidly transferring the news precisely keeping the integrity of the news story, and despite it being breaking news, satisfying the reader with this story. Competition between online journals, other websites and other means of modern technology in general, which transmits information very quickly, pose great challenges to online journals and to the journalists themselves. However, many journals had overcome it, and it has become one of the important features of online journalism. Moreover, one of the positive aspects of online journalism is the ability to modify mistakes in news or in articles, which is a good feature as the journalist can rectify a mistake and modify it online.

What about the relation between the culture of the journalist and the cultural openness found in the Internet in general, and in online journalism in particular?

Yes, definitely journalists should be open minded, and have enough knowledge about national and international events to bring to more readers. In addition, this advantage increases the culture of the journalist himself. There is no doubt that focusing on the readable news which is directly related to the concerns of readers, is conclusive of this issue. Therefore, we can say that the quality of news is determined by the policy of the journal and the culture of the journalist. Recent studies show that readers of online
journals in the Kingdom outnumber readers of printed journals. This strongly motivates the journalist to develop his practice, and positively influences his culture.

**Do you think the conception and culture of decision makers in the online media organisation is in conflict with your conception of the importance of the news and the importance of publishing on the front page, as an example?**

There is no conflict, but the culture of the journalist has to largely correspond with that of the journal. Policies of online journals vary in dealing with the news. Some news can be important to one journal but seems to be unimportant to another. The culture of the journal is most important, and is more powerful than the culture of the journalist, which dose follows the culture of the journal in the final analysis. In addition, I see that some journal managers, when they need to stimulate or encourage a journalist, can nominates his particular news story to the front page, but not at the expense of important news or the journal’s policy. A journalist with an excellent report is one who gains in the end.

**What about comments, responses of readers, proportion of follow up and assessment of the news and the content of their comments, especially as they reflect the culture of community, and how this affects you as a journalist and your online journal?**

Yes, it affects me positively. It reflects the work of the journalist or the journal, even if the content of the comments is negative. The interaction of readers is more important from my point of view. In addition, number of readers and comments are very important in building the culture of a journalist and a journal, which is of interest to journal management and the journalists. Online journalism outperforms in this aspect; thus, all journals and magazines have an online version seeking interaction.

- **Appendix A10**

  **Interview 10**

  This is a translation of interview with a journalist working in kolalwatn online journal (September 13, 2011, 8:30 – 9:00 am, Riyadh City).

  **In general, how do you see the relation between the journalist and online journalism? Does the culture of society influence the practice of the journalist in his work in online journalism?**

  The online journals came about as serious contender in the world of journalism in their online forms and various applications. I think that the journalist and the journal he writes for are two sides of one coin. In the past, the journalist affected the journal and left his mark, adding to, exchanging culture references with the community and affecting the journal’s trends. At the same time, the journals affected the journalist in
regard to writing style and social topics that need to be addressed. In present times, their own personal culture, journalism’s policy, and the readers’ interests influence the journalist and online journalism. They have become involved in writing for journals that cover society’s interests and topic relating to cultural diversity, causing a cultural movement in the production of online journalism. Online journals have also had to endure the cultural implications that come with reporting on society’s beliefs and the relevance to Saudi’s modern world. Journalists cannot work alone; their work must coincide with the culture of the journal and the needs of Saudi society. These influences must be assessed for quality as to whether the journal should be reporting on the topics. For example, the shape, direction, division of pages, content, and the quality of the news, etc.

**From your point of view, are you dealing with news according to your personal culture or to the nature and culture of society?**

I think online journalism has a certain feature or character that a journalist must go along with. The journalist and the journal show duality in reporting on culturally specific news. In addition, journalists and society also coincide in their understanding of the importance of relaying culturally diverse news. In order to answer your question I will give you an example. The journal is eager to contract new journalists who are mostly graduate students from university who have been studying mass communication. Every now and then you find some of these students who have vast knowledge of theories in media and theoretical steps in media practice but lack practice or experience in media. This is most obvious when they deal with online journalism and the extent to which their personal concepts, beliefs, own style of writing and cultural views influence their journalistic practice. This often conflicts with reality because of the difference between the cultures of the readers and the journal itself. It also represents a certain type of thinking, however after some practice you notice that the journalist gains good cultural awareness and flexibility, empowering him to become aware of the news he is reporting on. Additionally gaining journalistic sense and speed of intuition through interaction with readers and with online information in a general sense. Hence, I can tell that the organisation’s culture, the reader’s culture, and the journalist’s culture are the influencers of media practice in online journalism. However, there are social and professional responsibilities that must be present in the journalist and the journal and must not be abandoned. This is the main difference between journalist’s responsibility and the reader’s. We should take from culture what is useful and improves online
journalism work, and which show how official online journals differ from non-official ones.

**Do you think that there is a conflict between the culture of the journalist, who works in the field of online journalism and the media organisation’s culture?**

I think that an experienced journalist in the field of media will have few collisions or conflicts between himself and the online journal. As in time, the journalist becomes affected by the policy and the culture of the journal. Conflict increases with lack of experience amongst the junior journalists. Sometimes a conflict is in favor of the online journal because the journalist who works in the field may provide new ideas, which may appear avant-garde in concept, but this way of thinking usually proves invaluable to the journal on completion.

**What is the effect of the number of reader’s responses to the news and their presentation to the content or viewer ratings in your work as a journalist?**

Readers have an important role in reflecting their cultures to the journalist and the journal. The interaction is the new cultural aspect offered by online media in the journalism world, which it has directly benefited from. It was not as prevalent in previous times, as the interaction between sources was not as developed. This occurs through personal meetings that is, when the journalist meets or stays somewhere, he become aware of readers’ opinions about many important cultural aspects. This can also occur through traditional communication methods like fax, email, ordinary mail, or phone. None has proved more effective than the media process, because interaction requires direction from transmitter and receiver, and vice versa, in the same instant, and subsequently the process is repeated. Online journals have offered this concept as readers represent the culture of the society. When they express their thoughts or criticisms, this reflects positively and is in the favour of the journalist and the journal itself. No doubt, interactive readers are the main participants in the success of modern journalism.

**Do you think the conception and culture of decision makers in the online media organisation conflict with your conception about the importance of the news and the importance of publishing on the front page, as an example?**

Yes, this is an integrative concept as the journalist is also responsible, even if he disagrees with decision makers on this issue. In addition, the division of labour and distribution of tasks is beneficial in preventing conflict about this conception of the importance of the news and of being published on the front page. Therefore you find that journalists working in an online journal focus on the quality and accuracy of news,
as its importance to society is paramount. In some cases, a journalist believes that it is important to report from his point of view and worth publishing urgently on the front page, but decision makers are often conflicted as this is not the prerogative of the journalist. For example, if the news is stronger than is, or was, more accurately addressed by another journal and then returned to the journalist who is asked to add wider and more updated details; this is seen as appropriate as long as the culture of decision makers is accepted amongst the journalists. If you asked any journalist who works for online journalism, it would be stated that the experience of being public had on the front page is a strong motivation. However, it is not felt negatively if it is not published on the front page, because the journalist is aware of how professional and experienced the decision makers are. This aspect certainly gives a strong motivation for us as journalists to provide the most accurate and cultural relevant news.

- Appendix A11 Interview 11

This is a translation of interview with a journalist working in Aleqtisadiah online journal (September 16, 2011, 3:30 – 5:00 pm, Riyadh City).

In general, how do you see the relation between the journalist and online media? In other words, does the culture of society affect the nature of journalistic practice through the online journal?

My relationship with the journal is quite strong and I feel very much a part of the process, and very connected to the journal, enabling myself to become part of cultural approaches and policies. I defend the journal and continue to strive for its development and improvement in relaying quality news. I take pride in my determination to get a scope or special material in relation to how it will prove useful to the journal and secondly its usefulness to me personally as a journalist. My fellow journalists and I talk about excellence and innovation frequently as a method of constantly improving our effectiveness of reporting news. Journalists improving their abilities to report reflects positively on the journal and its credibility. We help each other with sourcing information or giving advice on writing styles that reinforce cultural norms. Journalists receive good treatment from officials in the journal as they share us the same loyalty and willingness to improve online reporting. They offer extensive rewards and incentive programs, along with internal and external training courses. The journal itself also shares a certain ratios of profit with its journalists; this has a positive effect on our work and consequently on society. It is considered clear and significant because after all
journalists represents the society in which they live, their opinion, approach, and criticism, therefore the end result is holistic and well informed news.

**In your point of view, do you deal with the news depending on your personal culture or on the nature and culture and society?**

Generally, I work according to my personal culture and vision. However, I think I am a varied journalist working on all kinds of news and events in my department. Of course, society affects me to a certain extent, but as a journalist, I have a different vision that may differ from that of the reader. The reader might not notice because he does not practice journalism. Indeed a successful, smart journalist is the one who tries to benefit from readers’ concerns and opinions, and adds his personal vision, which is significant due to his experience and professionalism, to provide a quality product. Although online journalism is a modern advancement in the world of the information technology, it has offered a great service to the field itself in terms of information spread, sharing and strength. It is said that online journalism is a double-edged sword, as it provides information quickly and shares its analysis on a variety of different cultures. This theory is not correct in my opinion. This theory is actually concerned with websites or online forums that transfer information for the sake of transferring information, without correction and appropriate checks. Official online journalism is media work that serves journalists, readers and society all of the same time. Everybody here has many responsibilities towards Saudi society and does not accept rumours, lies, or profit at the expense of the readers, or exploiting readers for the sake of sensationalist coverage.

**Do you think that there is a conflict and clash between the culture of the journalist who works in the field of online journalism, and the media organisation’s culture?**

The vision of the journalist should be compatible with the vision and policy of the organisation; I think this mostly happens among journalists. However, I believe the journalist is the one who is facing events and might have a more accurate and wider vision. That is what the journal has to understand, especially in the field of online journalism. Because the journalist is mainly concerned with his name before anything, hence, the nature of the news and story he offers reflects his style and approach, most official journals considers this. Nevertheless, on the other hand, the journalist knows that the journal represents the policy of the Kingdom in relation to media and he represents this wide range. Therefore, he works according to specific considerations that do not conflict with the principles of journalistic practice. The cultural conflict between the journalist and the organisation now exists in governmental journals more than before, because of greater openness in the field of information. In addition, readers are
not accustomed to the online outlets of modern media. I think in time this cultural conflict will gradually vanish.

**Do you think the conception and culture of decision makers in the online media organisation conflict with your conception of the importance of the news and the importance of publishing on the front page, as an example?**

The online media organisation reflects the concepts of administrators and journalists who have great experience in the media field, whilst at the same time respecting the regulations and laws concerning news publishing. Therefore, the organisation reflects the vision of qualified people in this field. On the other hand, the journalist who is also representing a culture has specialised in his field. Thus, any difference in cultural concept or certain vision would be useful and beneficial in determining professional differences for the organisation including its staff. As a result, major journal organisations employ large numbers of experienced journalists. I believe that this is the main reason why ideas are compatible, as this leads to forceful decision making. For me, over time I have gained full knowledge of the expectations necessary to report at the level on which I work. I can easily determine the opinion of decision makers about the news stories I present, however if there is a difference of opinion about the importance of news or its position of publication or space provided for, or this would be an indication of a defect in practice or technique of the work in the organisation.

**What is the impact of feedback of the readers, its content and the rate of viewers, on your work as a journalist?**

This impact is a great, and is one of the contributions of modern media. It is a great service provided by online journals to media and society so that interaction takes place on any issue, thus increasing the culture of both the journalists and readers. This helps in clarification of cultural identity among the society. Successful online journals and successful journalists are those who implement this modern service in a serious and professional manner. When readers evaluate my written work and provide feedback, this gives me positive reinforcement to continue producing my best work and to strive for success in my profession. In addition, the content of readers’ comments contains important information which aids in the production of news, or correction of some inaccurate information, or even provides me with new topics and a wider vision about the same topic, or other related topics and that is the most important aspect of my job. In addition, it is important to follow up responses of readers because they reflect their demands and interests about many topics, so I can say that they are the fuel for new age journalism.
Generally, do you think that there is a direct or indirect impact on your practice as a journalist by online journalism?

Yes, online journalism provides wide fields for journalism in dealing with news. Adding to recent technologies, it has opened great projects for journalists and great prospects for handling news. In the past, the work and effort of the journalists were limited to a geographical framework, and the voice of readers was not heard. What I mean is that journalistic work was going in one direction during the period of printed journals. As for the entry of online journals, the voice of the journalist and of the readers is heard significantly by the world, and in various colours and directions. A cultural and information exchange has been created and an information revolution has occurred.

What do you mean by this?

I mean that the number of news websites has increased rapidly in recent times. This issue relates to the information exchange, therefore, we are speaking about credibility and objectivity in transmitting news and dealing with events. From my point of view, the victim here are the readers, who are non-professionals or unable to deal with news websites and differentiate between the level of news in online journals and on personal websites. Thus, rumours increase and can have a negative effect on the readers’ concept of many sensitive issues.

So who is responsible for this, or how do we stop these negative effects, in your point of view?

In each society there are entities responsible for media organisations, preservation of rights, consumer protection and the definition of the official channels of news, from which is derived the correct form of outgoing news. It is a very important issue because it affects the policy of the state, and causes many people to have the wrong attitude, and builds the reader’s misconceptions of correct practices. I have to commend the efforts of the Ministry of Culture and Information in KSA, represented by the management of online media, which has dealt professionally with this modern revolution in the field of online journalism. It placed great effort in creating a standardised list of procedures for online publishing, and issuing sanctions against violators. This protects cultural movements in society, and enhances the credibility of the information provided to the
reader. Some news websites have specific targets or financial goals and do not recognise that their responsibility is to serve the community.

In your point of view, do you deal with the news depending on your personal culture or on the nature and culture of society?

I think that the journalist working for online journals is an important part of the culture of his society. Yet in order to be distinguished by him readership, he must be professional in his career. I believe that my expertise has grown because of my background within my society. The first step may be having similar behavior to other journalists with the same level of experience and skill, and the same level of commitment to ethical standards.

Eventually journalists must submit articles to the readers which are suitable in presentation and content. Not all material should be published and not everything presented in the field of local or international media deserves to be covered by the journalist. This differs from one journal to another according to trends, so that every journalist is characterized by his own cultural vision, extent of experience in practicing media, his power to have a positive effect on his society according to his beliefs of what is useful and favorable to the reader and to the society. The most importance factor is the relationship between himself and the readers, this increases the standard of journalistic practice in online journalism.

Do you think that there is a conflict between the culture of the journalist, who works in the field of online journalism, and the media organisation’s culture?

Yes I agree with that, however I do not feel that this is what has negatively influenced the media process.

Would you kindly explain more about that?

The publishing organisation has many targets designed to maintaining media policies. Decisions makers look at aspects beyond that of the journalist due to their proximity, their dealings, and their competition with other publishing organisations. Journalists may look their fellow workers or journalists from other organisations and may not realise the extent of the competition between journals. Finally, it relates to the reputation of the organisation in the media field and its goals in general. Thus I think that is normal, but not at the expense of the journalists career.

Does that mean that studies and research carried out by the online journal organisations about their performance are important to you as journalists?

Yes, of course, journal organisations makes studies on what news content or topics were most watched during the whole year. This gives the journalist knowledge about the
cultural concerns of the society he works in. In addition, studies showed that the percentage of viewings for online journalism are better than those for competitive journals, this result provides the journalist with an indicator of how important his work is and increases his level of performance.

**Does the culture and concept of decision makers of online media organisation affect your understanding of the importance of the news and the importance of publishing on the front page?**

Yes it has a major effect on me. It is a proper point of view for the journalists and decision makers in the organisation. Scientific studies have proven that the main pages of online journals, and the front page of the printed journal as well as the last pages are the most important in terms of appeal and approach to the reader. It is considered to be an introduction that attracts readers, so journals are eager for these interfaces to contain the most important and prominent news. In addition, from the aspect of output, it is proportional to online news sites. When my news story is published on the front or last page, this is considered as a motivation for me to keep striving for success in my profession.

**In the case of media practice in online journalism based on cultural backgrounds of the editors not being compatible with your vision, does this affect your performance as a journalist?**

I think that if the arrangement or distribution is appropriate and the decision-makers have extensive experience and widespread media practice, this results in a positive outcome for both editor and journalist. However if the opposite happens, the problem needs to be addressed.

**What is the impact of amount of feedback of the readers, its content, and the rate of viewers, on your work as a journalist?**

This impacts my work as a journalist in a positive and reinforcing manner, as the concept of quality online journalism is achieved. It benefits all online journals and journalists themselves.

**How is that so?**

In general, I know the number of visitors to the journal’s website, the number of comments on all news, and the rate of interaction. When compared to other online journals, it is a judgment as to whether the journal was much read or not. From these statistics, decision makers can provide strong indicators about the standard of journalism and its relationship with the readers. In addition, the journalist can evaluate the news he edits through the feedback of the readers and their cultural views.
Do you think that this cultural exchange between the journalist and readers has an impact on the composition of a particular cultural vision?
Yes, undoubtedly, through responses and in the length of time the journalist has known the requirements of the readers’ interests. As well the journalist knows the appropriate wording and important information about the news, and which details should be highlighted. It is well known that principles and concepts of fixed practicing media is static everywhere in the world, but differences of style or skill show how other journalists are dealing with media. I think that each culture has its own way of reporting news.

• Appendix A13 Interview 13
This is a translation of an interview with a journalist working in Alyaum online journal (August 15, 2011, 9:30 – 11:00 am, Dammam City).

Do you think that online journals, have a direct or indirect effect on journalists in practicing their work?
Yes, online journalism is a new paradigm in the world of modern media. Since it relates to the Internet, this therefore indicates that the effect factor would be present, because news websites and the Internet have become unlimited, it has opened a window to the world. There is a great difference between the previous world of journalism and the current stage of online journalism. However, every stage is important from a scientific aspect. In relation to question about the cultural effect, I can say that it is clearly seen in the second online stage, but from my point of view, I see that journalists represent the intellectuals, scientists and professors. This means that their effect on society has to be a positive one. As we know, the Internet, as much as television or radio, transmit messages directly to recipients.

Do you mean that journalists are not negatively affected by direct online messages?
Generally, yet there may be rare cases of some journalists who follow certain trends so they are affected by messages that are compatible with their beliefs. If the journalist is professional, or is very experienced, you will find him change his opinion. It is a useful process in my view, because it depends on cultural retraction with some journalists.

Can you explain more, do you have an example?
There are many examples. I think that the best example for this issue can be discussed in relation to sport, particularly a football game as this has a great interest to many teenagers here in KSA. Since affiliation to a certain team and barracking for it, based on
the cultural background of the fans, arguments can arise as to which them base their cultural backgrounds on. Journalists are part of this community and stemming, from this Internet websites play an important role in retraction, or denial, or fixation of certain cultural concepts.

**From your point of view, do you deal with news according to your culture, or according to the nature and culture of society?**

Well, it is a good question. Before I entered online journalism I was working in a closed cultural circuit, this means that the effect was not well-known and was limited to the surroundings. This is because the journal I worked for was a print journal, where the readers could not positively share its cultural view and opinions. That is the opposite of what I have found in online journalism. Thus, I believe that my concept about events is based on the reader’s culture, and in my follow up in online media, and the arguments going on there. There are other factors which increase the strength of interdependence cultural communication and cultural influence. These factors, for example, include incorporation with community and online discussion boards. These are different to online journals, which provide opportunities for discussion directly with the readers. Hence, I am working on an integrated cultural concept with my readers, and as journalist I have my own tag. This is the intention of your study.

**Is there an example or evidence of this view?**

I can give you a good example. Non-Saudi journalists who work in Saudi online journals from different communities of different cultures, share experiences with journalists who are in close contact with Saudi society. You find that their style of following events and news editing overtime has differed significantly from the beginning of their work in the journal. The reason is that the culture of the society has affected their performance. After all, the journalist works for the readers and not for his own self-interest. Many examples exist, like the news coming from international news agencies. Some news items are translated from other languages, and journalists of the same language but different cultures writes others. It is easy for specialists in the field of media to notice these differences or cultural traces in the news. That is not a negative impact in my opinion. Readers are not from one cultural level. They differ in nationality and culture, and I can tell that online journals, using these cultural variables, have founded cultural identity for themselves through the variety of cultural content in the formulation and selection of news.
Do you think that there is a conflict or clash between the culture of the journalist who works in the field of online journalism, and the media organisation’s culture?

It is better for the journalist to focus on the news or the tasks of his department, and not pay attention to decisions that contrast with his concept and approach. One condition is that journalist be committed to be the ethical standards of practice and media, but at the same time must know the policy adopted by the journal that he represents. I think this rarely exists in new online journals where journalists do not understand their media policy. Sometimes journalist become biased to news stories and do not accept any form of supervision or deletion of passages from their work. This always happens, and is always solved by a meeting between the journalist and the official or editor to agree on the points of view.

Does the culture and concept of decision makers of media online organisation affect your understanding of the importance of the publishing of the news on the front page?

These are problems where journalists are faced with continuous competition between themselves in their own or other journals. However the most important thing is the news itself. I do not expect news that is important to wide range of readers to be published in the middle of a page or given a small space. As a journalist, I am concerned about publishing my news stories on the front page, and the paper is concerned about this too. I think journalists today have full knowledge of the main and the most important news. Sometimes news is nominated to a specific page according to the editor’s personal evaluation. However the problem here is when a journalist sends important news and then minutes later other important news comes to light. I think some papers have solved such problems by adopting the policy of breaking news that offers the journalists the possibility of publishing their news on the website at the same instant, even if more important news appears at the same time. No doubt, such online features motivate the journalist to follow up important events and offer them to the readers accurately and simply.

Do you not think that it somehow influence the credibility of the news?

This rarely exists in official online journals, as the credibility and the accuracy of the news are the most important foundations of a journal. This is the main difference between official online journals and other websites, I think that a reader is able to differentiate between this. Sometimes the name of the journalist himself gives credibility to the news. All journalists are determined to report accurate news in order to maintain credibility with readers.
What is the impact of feedback of the readers, its content and the rate of viewers, on your work as a journalist?

This plays an effective role. You may imagine that what is published in online journals has originated from readers’ feedback and their interaction with events. This is what we need to focus on, and I want to thank you for this question. Many people think this new property introduced by online journals is a service for readers only, but the true definition is that it is a service for readers as well as for journalists and the field of media in general. Therefore advanced online journals are eager to educate the reader in terms of expressing their opinion, which is an easy technique to facilitate. Many journals offer awards for those who participate in the evaluation of news or in writing the responses, and random automated selection chooses the winners. Most important is the issue of affiliation of readers which might be used for advertising purposes for the journal. The large number of visitors to the website, are of great benefit to the cultural movement in general, and this is important for your research. Also, with regard to what lies beyond the news, or providing further details or even correcting some of the information received, a large percentage of readers are highly intelligent and many people are familiar with the events and interested in them, perhaps even an associate of the journalist who wrote the news. Some of the readers live outside Saudi Arabia, and their participation is important from a cultural point of view.

- Appendix A14 Interview 14

This is a translation of an interview with a journalist working in kolalwatn online journal (August 17, 2011, 1:00 – 1:50 pm, Riyadh City).

Do you think that online journals have an impact, directly or indirectly, on the culture of journalists and on their practice?

Web journals have offered vast developments in the field of journalism practice, which is considered one of the most traditional forms of the arts. This is simply because online journalism uses new techniques and offers new concepts for media practice. On this basis, I say yes, there is a significant change in the concept and framework of journalists working in the field of online journalism in how they use modern techniques and deal with the news. News here is no longer confined to the local scale, but is also spread all over the world. Hence, anyone from anywhere can read the news in the same instant as it is published. Additionally, the journalist and readers can communicate with each other interactively about the news and published material. No doubt, those developments in online journalism and the great competition in the way in which
Journals and journalists are using modern technologies have positively affected the media field.

**How does this affect you?**

My dealings with events in the past were through a narrow framework, which depended on the extent of my experience, my relations with officials, and the extent of the revision and additional investigation of events within my narrow scope or interest. Now, I can investigate all events and update them easily through the Internet. For example, whilst working in printed media I had to wait for the release of the issue the next day to be able to follow other journals, or communicate with my fellow officials or journalists about updates for the news. It was difficult to link events to further ones until they was first published in printed journals, but now I and other journalists are able to write, follow, and search for news easily on news sites without a serious concern about credibility. This serves the journalists themselves as well as the media as a whole. Online journals have since developed archives in which the reader is able to follow and comment. I think this is also reflected on societal organisation, in that publishing companies started developing rapidly, correcting mistakes, and responding quickly to the needs of society. In short it could be considered to be a self-regulating system where I produce something from reliable sources, the public and my colleagues view my work and judge me based on its veracity and relevance. This is than fed back to me, and I make appropriate changes and can do the same for my colleagues.

**Are you dealing with the news according to your personal cultural framework or according to the nature and culture of society at large?**

I think that the culture in which a journalist operates plays a major role in the selection and editing of news. Regardless, the journalist must operate within the scope of a given culture. It is ultimately his own culture, which is reflected in his practice of journalism, that’s why you find well-known journalists who are distinguished by their concern about specific aspects of societal issues e.g., women’s rights or economic policy. They are also distinguished by the way they discuss, analyse and introduce events to readers from their own viewpoint. That is what distinguishes excellent journalists from others. Those who follow or are interested in this field can notice this. Despite the fact that the same news story is published in more than one online journal, they find that style varies dramatically from one journal to another, even though the event and information are the same. However, the journalist here, with his own culture and vision and his knowledge of appropriate journalistic methods, knows the information that he starts and ends with, and what should be presented and highlighted in line with the larger societal culture.
Do you believe in the people who say that the surrounding environment influences the journalist?

Yes, this is true. Nevertheless, his personal culture is either acquired from the surrounding environment or through self-improvement, given the final form of the work of the journalist. For example, taking into account the opinion pages in online journals, you find that these include a variety of articles that differ from each other. Here there are many comments and different opinions, although they all originate from the same culture. These opinions follow one culture, one society, and sometimes are in one house, but each writer has his or her own opinions. Journalists themselves also differ in their opinions and approaches, but are specified by their responsibility towards their particular field in journalism. So the surrounding environment affects the journalist, despite the fact that he should keep his decisions and orientations under the control of professionalism and media practice regulations. That is how a journalist must be distinguished from others. It is not the job of the journalist to share his own personal opinions on what is right or wrong. Barring opinion columns and editorials, reporters have a responsibility to remain as unbiased as possible, even whilst presenting a particular viewpoint.

Do you think that there is a conflict or clash between the culture of the journalist who works in the field of online journalism, and the media organisation’s culture?

Yes, there is no doubt that this happens. It happens normally in all governmental and trade organisations, but if I can rephrase it: the conflict between media organisations and journalists is a necessary and peaceful conflict. I mean that it is peaceful and does not interfere with the media process. On the contrary, it has many positive consequences. For example, recognising the approach of each party (journalist and journal), as the journalist recognises the approach of the paper and those responsible for it and benefits from their decisions and advice. As most editors are long experienced in the field of media, the organisation also recognises a journalists culture and approach and tries to improves his abilities and skills. Some organisations arrange internal and external training sessions for their journalists to improve their skills; others arrange training sessions inside the organisation itself, this all results from the conflict or interaction between the newspaper and the journalist.

Do the culture and personal framework of decision makers in the organisation of online journalism influence your framework regarding the importance of the news for example, the extent of the importance of getting publishing on the front page?
Well, this is one of the main factors in online journalism, although it was present in the past in printed journalism. However, its importance has increased in online journalism because readers have reacted to what is printed on the front page of online journals, and have responded to it significantly. Moreover, when the news is being published on the front page of an online newspaper, this means that it matters more to a significant segment of readers. Thus, it spreads quickly to other online websites giving the journalist self-confidence, which is considered success to the journalist especially when he sees his news story spread through the Internet and become an issue of public opinion. Yet, at the same time, I think that editors or those who are responsible for the pages decide where the news story should be placed in the journal. Online journals differ in the nature of distinctive news which is published according to internal organisational policies or approaches.

**What is the impact of feedback from the readers, its content, and the rate of viewership on your work as a journalist?**

I think that this is the basis of cultural interaction and exchange between readers and those who work at the online journals. Its role is great, observable and of interest to officials and academic researchers who are concerned with improvement in the performance of the organisation, either in the technique of investigating the news or improvement in performance of the journalists themselves. I think that the improvement happening now in online journalism is because of the responses and interaction of the readers to new reports gleaned from online forums for them to express their opinions, whether by evaluation of the news or by commenting on it. In addition, these responses have become a panel for online discussion where readers exchange their views. In my opinion, this exchange is of interest to the officials and to other parties which have a role in institutions of civil society, who are following these intellectual trends and building on them.

- **Appendix A15 Interview 15**

*This is a translation of interview with a journalist working in Aleqtisadiah online journal (August 17, 2011, 4:00 – 4:50 pm, Riyadh City).*

**Do you think that online journals have directly or indirectly influenced journalists’ culture and practice?**

No doubt, online journalism is part of a cultural and technical revolution. In addition, it has excelled over many other technical methodologies in the communication field.
Online journalism presents information in a professional way even in the field of social networking amongst people. The way that permits the sharing of opinions is often done in a professional and validating manner when done on official journals websites. I am talking here about official online journals only, because most readers are confused between news websites as forums, blogs and other crowd-sourced types of media versus official news websites. However, in my point of view, this confusion will eventually disappear due to an increase in awareness and improved education amongst today’s readers. As the audience becomes better travelled and educated, their ability to distinguish between official sources and poor sources will depend on personal choice. No doubt, journalists were the first to be able to distinguish validated sources because they are professionals. Previously, I noticed that in the mix amongst readers, there were writers who wrote articles based upon non-official sources. These non-professionals have less journalistic integrity than those of us who are trained in the field.

**How does this influence your job practice?**

Of course, it has had a great effect, and made me look for strong and trusted sources through which I can gain the confidence of the reader. In addition, and this is what distinguishes journals and journalists from one another, is the extent to which some journals have become a source of news. When Aleqtisadiah journal, for example, writes news based on its sources, it will be of interest to readers even if the journal does not mention the name of the source for various reasons. The source may remain anonymous for reasons of security or for social purposes. Therefore a journalist has a responsibility to protect some sources, such as politicians who will only speak to the media anonymously. In fact, these types of stories are of extreme interest to readers, and will increase both trust in the journal and readership in general. Conversely, some journals are still looking to prove themselves in the media arena, and are looking for readers’ confidence.

**Did this influence exist before the emergence of online journalism?**

Yes, it exists now and has existed in the past. However, online journalism faces significant challenges because of its electronic nature, technical characteristics and its dealing with the Internet to prove its credibility amongst its many competitors in the online media arena. One challenge is working out what is official and what is personal or belongs to groups concerned with media affairs. However, through these challenges, online journalism must be ranked first in terms of its proximity and flexibility for the reader. Whenever you maintain the criteria of practicing media, you become closer to the reader, and that is one of the duties of online journalism, not to allow the spread of
rumours and incorrect news. The Internet has become a powerful means of disseminating information and opinions. However, some people do not seek out community services and do not care about important aspects of social responsibility, and have materialistic or personal goals. Adding to the difficulty of these challenges is that even if accurate information was broadcast on some unofficial websites correctly, there can be incomplete aspects of the story that the reader may not know about. For example, the information must be directed or focused on certain topics. Thus, it negatively influences the public’s opinion under the cover of credibility.

**Do you have an example of that?**

There are many examples. One of the examples is clearly economical. Imagine a situation when a journal writes a correct news story about losses facing the Saudi market, but does so on a massive scale taking up nearly 80% of the space in a publication. This journal does not take into consideration the positive and important news. Thus, a problem exists. In addition, there will be deception as although the story is credible, it has been sensationalised so as to create excitement in the readers. This is neither balanced nor fair.

**Do you deal with the news depending on your personal culture or on the nature and the culture of society that you are operating in?**

If it is the society that tells me directly or indirectly what I should or should not write, then I am not a journalist. The journalist should follow the events with a neutral, criticise and responsible eye. There are some objectives that the reader may not know anything about from these are social, cultural, political and sometimes security objectives. Many readers see the events according to their own passion and viewpoint, and sometimes are influenced by certain cultural backgrounds. However, that does not mean that the journalist must ignore trends in society and their own cultural background. That is to say, that the journalist has to take a stand on a central position that satisfies societal requirements, his responsibilities as a journalist, and he must work modestly to serve the information process and the society where he live. As there are extraneous websites or other unofficial news reported in the media arena, some journalists or media practitioners are considered intruders in the media field. Someone who does not know the basic principles of media practice is affected negatively by society, seeks personal unbalanced viewpoints, and works towards goals that do not serve the society, is certainly not a journalist.
Do you think that there is a conflict between the culture of the journalist who works in the field of online journalism, and the culture of the related media organisation?

The best thing is that there is this collision between the two that is of course present; however, it is a theoretically positive collision between two parties who share the same goals and directions. That is to say, it is not a cultural collision, but a cultural matching among a group of interested people and specialists in the field of practicing media. This matching is generally in the interest of the media process. Usually, it results in positive concepts that are useful for both parties, leading to solutions and suggestions that could increase development and improvement of the performance of the newspaper, which is a good sign. You do not find such type of collision on unofficial online news sites. This is not because the work environments are better, but because that the effort, which is personal with clear objectives as profit gain. I do not think that there is a conflict between one or more persons working in an online site about the importance of news to community or considering the feelings of readers or respecting their mentality. What actually matters is to attract the reader in any way possible.

Does the culture and framework of decision-makers of online media organisations affect your understanding of the importance of publishing the news on the front page?

For me, yes, it influenced me too much, my colleagues as well, this became a point of attention. We compete on the important news and events that the community needs. In addition, we compete in the nature of information we receive and method of display. I have remembered a situation that happened at the beginning of working in the newspaper, where I did not know how important the front page in online publishing is. When I wrote news about a particular subject that interested a large segment of people, provided good information, and I submitted it to the person responsible for the page. He told me that it was important that the content reflect the aspect of the news.

I did not know what that meant. However, he helped me to re-draft the story, in a professional manner, and highlighted the most important information in the headline. Finally the news became legible to the reader. At the same time, through the sociolinguistic way in which we are wording the news, he highlighted the important words over the non-important ones. Thus, my story was published on the front page and received wide resonance. It is clear from that example that decision makers and journalists must exchange views and not work alone. The decision of the journalist may be wrong, and he may be too inexperienced to promote his news story. Sometimes, the
webmaster nominates what should go up on the front page, while the editor sees the opposite, not because of the weakness of the news but because of the existence of more important items in another field.

**What is the impact of feedback from readers, its content, and the rate of viewership on your work as a journalist?**

One of the most prominent differences of online journalism and other media types, such as television, radio and print journals or even other technical means, its such as, that broadcast text messages, news email, etc. is how quickly the public can react. Online journalism is very fortunate in that it reaches its audience immediately, which has presented a great service to journals and journalists in the interface between the journalist and the reader. This is very important, especially so that the journalist can assess his work through the responses of readers. Some people see that this as being similar to a chef, for example, who will learn the strengths and weaknesses in his work, although the opinions may vary. For printed journals, this feedback comes much later as like the chef who gets a report on the quality of his cooking two months after serving the meal. However, printed journal readers cannot provide their point of view except in an indirect and impractical way. This is not in the interest of the media process. Knowing the strengths and weaknesses of a journalist’s work is one of the most important things that readers offer to journalists, and there are other benefits.

**Can you tell me the most obvious benefit from your point of view?**

One of the most obvious benefits is the affiliation of the reader to the journal. When the reader reacts when news is published, it means that he has chosen the newspaper and values it more than others. Perhaps this means that he is registered as a member, which is a strong indicator that he belongs to the journal in some way, which means that the newspaper is successful. In addition, the interaction of readers adds even more current information to the news. The more the comments or readers, the easier it is to search the journal and know its position apart from that of other competitive journals. It is a very useful feature and a huge benefit for media organisations.

- **Appendix A16**

  *Interview 16*

  _This is a translation of interview with a journalist working in Aleqtisadiah online journal (August 17, 2011, 5:00 – 5:45 pm, Riyadh City)._  

  **In general, how do you see the relationship between the journalist and online journalism? Does the culture of the society influence the nature of the practice of journalist in his work through online journalism?**
With the advent of online journalism the world of media, I think that the journalist’s affiliation has become more Internet related thanks to modern technology. This was a gradual affiliation. After the advent of the Internet, journalists began using search engines and e-mail to service their printed journals, until online journalism became this new form. The work became quicker and easier in terms of reporting the news and the sharing of information between the journalist and the newspaper, as well as between the journalist and society. Thus, readers interact with the journal because of the online services and opportunity provided to them. This undoubtedly gave greater ease in receiving and sending media communications from and to the reader.

**Do you think that the culture of Saudi society has responded to the characteristics of online journalism?**

Yes, of course. I think there has gradually begun to be a large interaction with online journalism and the public that has proved itself successful in the media scene. Online journalism is disseminating the news via television, radio, and printed journals combined. It provides photos and videos. Online journalism looks as if it is a multi-purpose tool and it is easily available to the readers. Saudi society, like other communities, builds its culture on knowledge and acquaintance building. This society is looking for credibility in the news. So, I think that the evolution of Saudi online journals is due to the development of readers themselves and their interaction with the different facets of online journalism, especially with the advent of modern, smart and small-sized devices that one can carry to read the news, participate and share ideas and opinions from anywhere in the world.

**In your point of view, do you deal with news depending on your personal culture or depending on the nature and culture of the community?**

This is a broad question and it needs much time to answer in detail. It is important as well. Some people think that they are journalists. Even if they succeeded in more than one test they have printed one story or broken one source however, the journalist must have a combination of many things to be a true journalist, and these are professionalism, experience and responsibility. They distinguish the journalist from these who are negatively influenced by the readers’ feedback, or the surrounding environment. Next in the role of officials in the newspaper or heads of departments. They have to work alongside the journalists in a professional way and try to develop their which by using evidenced based practice. The surrounding environment certainly influences the frameworks of the journalist, just as it would to other people. However, with the existence of professional standards, I believe that this influence disappears with the
professional journalist, as he presents his news story with no intolerance or any bias, accusations of which may be thrown at him by outside parties. This is what distinguishes journalists working in official news organisations from persons writing in news websites trying to impersonate journalists.

**What is the working mechanism that you use in absorbing the surrounding influences of your culture?**

For my fellow journalists and myself we try as much as possible to present the news story and choose the correct words for the event, and then express them in an appropriate and logical manner. I think that consideration of someone else (as editor) to the news before it is published is a healthy phenomenon in favour of media practice. The culture of the journalist may influence the news and he does not notice. However, when a more experienced journalist revises the news and gives his comments on it from the scientific aspect, or in terms of integrity of the news or its phrasing, this is not because he is weak in this aspect, but to help the story to be more powerful. In time, you find that the editor’s amendments become fewer, because the journalist has gained the knowledge and experience from those who are more professional. I consider online journalism in particular to be very accurate in terms of choosing terms and selecting titles that have a strong influence on the journal and the readers.

**However, some journalists do not agree that someone can modify their news. Some chief editors give all the authority to the journalist himself to publish the news directly.**

I think this is a big mistake. In addition, I do not think that this exists in official or large well known journals, simply because the newspaper bears the full responsibility towards the community. In addition, if you have different parties publishing in an online journal, it will run the risk of muddying or even losing the journal’s identity. I know what you mean. Some officials, for the sake of encouragement give the journalist this authority. However, this does not help in the development of journalism, and I think that such practice increases only in the non-official news websites concerned with the quantity and not the quality of news published on the site. However, each piece of news needs precise revision and linguistic editing.

**Do you think that there is a conflict or clash between the culture of the journalist who works in the field of online journalism, and the media organisation’s culture?**

A difference of opinion between the journalist and his colleagues or between the journalist and his direct supervisor is possible. As I pointed out, this difference may be a cultural difference in certain circumstances, or it could be some other type of conflict,
that can be all true. However, the administrators have the last word, because the journalist operates under the organisation’s management, meaning that he works under its culture. I think that if this negatively influences the journalist, then he is in the wrong place, and he has to turn to another newspaper that is compatible with his approach. This is not a mistake, because journals differ in trends and concerns, but they agree in the principles of media practice and the information policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

How does that affect you personally?
My relationship with officials is good in terms of how our views converge. This is the basis, I think, for any journalist. There are no conflicts or major clashes, or even if there are clashes, soon agreement on a certain vision that satisfies both parties is established. The more agreed upon goals between the journalist and editors or management in the journal, the more a journalist feels satisfied with this job. This amount of cooperation or convergence of views helps me to feel satisfied, and is something that I often experience.

Does the culture and framework of decision makers of online media organisations affect your understanding of the importance of publishing the news on the front page?
Front or main pages in online media have a great importance for both journalists and for readers. It is a motivation for me when they publish or even refer to my news on the front page. It gives me motivation to continue working as professionally as possible. I might anticipate some news being published on the front page, which may not be printed there because of factors that are known to us. We are appreciative of editors and management because they know that fieldwork is tiring, and writing some news stories needs a great effort. They try as much as possible to serve the newspaper and us in at the same time. This is apparent in the significant progress in the direction and design of online journals, which becomes an online gateway showing the most important news in an attractive manner. These journals vary according to their point of view. So this variety is due to management and a variety of decision making frameworks.

What is the impact of the amount of feedback of the readers, its content, and the rate of viewership on your work as a journalist?
The impact is absolutely tremendous, but you have to remember it is not just feedback but a range of other ways in which the journal is interacting with the public. These include the content of these responses, the participation of readers in the evaluation of the news, the assessment of the responses, the number of stories sent via e-mail, the
saving of the news, uploading the news in social networks, and number of print copies of the news. All of these properties are of interest to the journal and the journalist. The readers’ opinions give the journalist certain cultural, social and occasionally factual input, such as how the reader thinks, and what he needs. We benefit a lot from the notes written in these special boxes. Thus, you can find competition between journals in the development of a mechanism for this interaction, and for the style of interaction between the readers and the journal that make it easier for the reader to comment and attracts a large number of readers. In addition, they give awards to encourage the audience to interact, and to be permanent members of the journal’s readership. Here I believe that the journal earns many things including the gaining of advertising review due to the number of visitors to the website, learning the needs of the reader who writes in the interaction box, and the journal works to provide for him in accordance with the principles of media practice. Moreover, if you ask about how the journalist benefits in particular, he gains many things from this interaction, such as knowing whether he is going in the right or wrong direction. In addition, benefits also include factual, opinion or viewpoint differences, which can be added by good readers of the news who can then act as a resource for the journalist.
Appendix B: The Ethics Approval

22 August 2013

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Griffith University Human Research Ethics Application – HUM261/10/HREC

This is to confirm that Human Research Ethics Application HUM261/10/HREC titled “Impacts of Culture on Online Journalism in Saudi Arabia” conducted by Student Researcher Khalid Alhormoud, and Chief Investigators Professor Michael Meadows and Associate Professor Susan Forde, was approved by the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) on 7 January 2011. The authorisation for this research was issued from 7 January 2011 to 16 October 2012.

The HREC is constituted and operates in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further queries about this matter.

Regards

Rick Williams
Manager, Research Ethics and Integrity
Office for Research
Appendix C: Information Sheet

Impacts of Culture on Online Journalism in Saudi Arabia

INFORMATION SHEET

Senior investigators:

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The Research Project:

Within the scope of this PhD student investigation, I will investigate the impact and influence of culture on journalistic practice. While traditional forms of journalism will be included in my study, the primary focus will be to examine online journalism and how various cultures affect what is reported and how. As part of my overall approach, I consider culture to include the influences and social conditioning that make up an individual’s view the world. It helps to explain how people act within it in a certain
way, defining their actions and beliefs from their own or other cultures. I am investigating how this cultural condition affects journalists and how they report on and present information, to better understand how culture impacts on online journalistic practice.

**Your Involvement:**

Your agreement to be part of interviews group is voluntary. The interview will seek your insights on the issues concerning your understanding and perceptions of the impact of culture on online journalism practices.

**Participant Selection:**

You have been selected on the basis of being a journalist working in an online news environment.

**Expected Benefits of the Research:**

The aim of the research is to identify, understand and explore the cultural factors that influence online journalistic practices in Saudi Arabia from the perspectives of journalists. I plan to use a semi-structured interview method as a means of achieving this goal. My objective is that analysis of a broad range of viewpoints, experiences and reflections will provide insight into the challenges facing online journalism and how such challenges can be overcome.

**Risks:**

It is your insights and opinions that are being sought on the basis of your understandings of the influence of culture on your own online journalism practices. However, your anonymity will be protected by this research and your identity will not be disclosed without your approval. There are no expected risks for any of the participants in taking part in this project.

**Confidentiality:**

Your statements or parts of your statements may be used in subsequent scholarly publications such as a book or an academic journal article that arise from this research, however your name will not be used unless you have given prior consent. Upon completion of our meeting, if a transcript is prepared, you will be given a copy upon request. In the event that you agree to be quoted in a publication, you will be first contacted, most likely via email, and will be informed of the intention to use your statements. The statements will be provided to you for your approval. Upon receipt of your approval, only then will your statements be reproduced. Following transcription,
any digital voice recording of the discussion that was made will be erased.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Your participation is voluntary. You do not need to answer every question unless you wish to do so. You are under no obligation to participate and are free to conclude the meeting at any time.

**Questions / Further Information:**

Further information about the research can be provided by the Director of the Griffith Centre for Cultural Research, Professor Andy Bennett, Phone: +61 7 373 54286, andy.bennett@griffith.edu.au or either of the Chief Investigators listed at the top of this document. For an independent contact, you may wish to phone or email Dr Gary Allen, Manager Research Ethics, on +61 7 37355585. Email: research-ethics@griffith.edu.au.

**The Ethical Conduct of this Research:**

Griffith University conducts research in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. If potential participants have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the research project they should contact the Manager, Research Ethics on +61 7 37355585 or Email: research-ethics@griffith.edu.au.

**Feedback to you:**

Should a transcript of the interview be made, you will be sent a copy upon request. An audio file of the interview will also be available upon request. Additionally, upon request, you may also obtain a summary of the overall research once the publication is complete.

**Privacy Statement:**

The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet academic and research requirements. An identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded. For further information consult the University’s Privacy Plan at www.griffith.edu.au/privacy-plan or telephone +61 7 3735 5585.

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