

**THE PRESENCE AND USE OF INTERACTIVE FEATURES
ON KURDISH NEWS WEBSITES IN THE IRAQI
KURDISTAN REGION**

Hunar Rasul Salih SALIH

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A case study of interactivity of news Kurdish websites of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region

Hunar Rasul Salih SALIH

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Department of Media Design and Technology
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Abstract

Hunar Rasul Salih

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Kewwords: Media, Kurdistan region, online journalism, Interactivity, news websites

Internet has emerged as an interactive platform. Thus, new communication technologies are challenging the traditional media with interactive devices turning online journalism into a rich media environment. While new information technologies have enabled media organisations to use interactive features in the constructed presentation of news websites, few news websites in the Iraqi Kurdistan region are maximizing such features. Also, this thesis argues that despite the lack of a good infrastructure in the field of communication technology and the Internet in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR), online journalism has become a major part of Kurdish media outlets and distinctive from traditional media because of its interactive nature.

The study presented in this thesis focus on interactivity in online journalism by examine interactive features of Kurdish news websites of the (IKR) and analyses how news is presented and to what extent these news websites tried to apply the interactive features on their hompages and inside the news pages. The level of interactivity of those Kurdish websites was also measured using several dimensions of interactivity by conducting web-based content analysis. The analysis of the qualitative part based on in-depth interviews with Kurdish reporters, editors, editor in chiefs, media experts and web developers. The findings show that the Kurdish news websites did not fully utilize and enhance interactive features in online journalism.

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Glossary of Abbreviations

CM	Change Movement
CMC	Iraqi Communications and Media Commission
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
HDP	The Peoples' Democratic Party (Turkish: Halkların Demokratik Partisi)
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
IHEC	Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq
IMN	Iraqi Media Network
KIG	Kurdistan Islamic Group
KIU	Kurdistan Islamic Union
KJS	Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate
KRG	Kurdistan regional government
KRP	Kurdistan regional presidency
KSM	Kurdistan Socialist Movement
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PDK	Kurdistan Democratic Party
PKK	The Kurdistan Workers' Party (Kurdish: Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê)
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
UGC	User-generated content

Chapter One

Background to Methodology

1.1 Introduction

This thesis argues that despite the lack of a good infrastructure in the field of communication technology and the Internet in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR), online journalism has become a major part of Kurdish media outlets and distinctive from traditional media because of its interactive nature. This study focuses on interactivity in online journalism by examining the interactive features of Kurdish news websites of the IKR, and analyzes how news is presented and to what extent these news websites tried to apply the interactive features on their hompages and inside the news pages. The level of interactivity of those Kurdish websites was also measured using several dimensions of interactivity by conducting web based content analysis.

The analysis of the qualitative part is based on ethnography of online newsrooms working routines and in-depth interviews with Kurdish reporters, editors, editor in chiefs, media experts and web developers. This thesis also attempts to present the various definitions of interactivity, especially online interactivity, to reach a clear and specific definition of the concept of interactivity. Moreover, it explains why Kurdish news websites should apply more commonly used interactive features to engage their users as the features serve distinct functions. It also indicates the role of journalists in developing interaction processes with their users. This chapter aims to introduce and highlight the overall structure of the current research study. It presents an outline and background of the Kurdish media and development of the Kurdish online journalism. It also presents the main research questions of the thesis, the aims, the methods used, the limitations of the study, and an outline of the study structure.

1.2 Background to the research

With the emergence and development of communication technologies and the Internet, the media has become more interactive. The explosive worldwide growth of the Internet has led to the emergence of new communication mediums in the world societies, it has shaped the media landscape, through both human and technology mediated interaction and moved human interaction to a virtual dimension (Raghavan 2006; May et al. 2008). With the spread of information and communication technology the Internet has become available to the public, become part of their daily lives and entered them into a new form of interactive communication (Wang 2011). Nowadays society has arrived at the point at which information and communication technologies saturate every aspects of the lived even the human body (Katz 2017). Using the Internet services worldwide is an activity that an increasing number of people are participating in continuously (Siekpe and Kamssu 2005). By June 2018, there were over four billion Internet users worldwide (Internet World Stats 2018). Everyone agrees that the Internet has experienced an exponential growth in the number of users worldwide depending on the technological and economic development of countries (Massey and Levy 1999). It has created intense increases in its marketing and communication applications during a reasonably short period of time. It is acknowledge that people are using this tool in various fields, including science, politics, economics, communications and social relations (Lim and Ting 2012; Ko et al. 2005).

The Internet as a communication medium and source of information plays a great role in the process of communication. It has the ability to create a new style and form of media message, due to the Internet's interactive features such as hypertextuality and multimediality. For news websites, these features provide continuity to the process of communication (Morris and Ogan 1996, Boczkowski 1999). Generally, Internet media are often considered as more interactive and dialogic; they are able to reach large audiences and enable recipients to answer or comment on the perceived messages in a comfortable way (Schultz et al. 2011). It is striking that since the beginning of the spread and development of the Internet and a mass communication tool, media

scholars well versed in the history of mass media have maintained a mass media-centric perspective when examining Internet and digital media. They have hesitated to judge and understand digital media per se, and the whole scale of interrelations between mass media and digital media (Morris and Ogan 1996; Finnemann 2009). Of course, with the constant and radical change in all aspects of the technology, communication and economics of the Internet, this view has changed with many experts in the field of mass communication. The big global events in the 1990s have helped change media organizations' perception of the fact that web publishing is much faster than other means and attracts many audiences. As noted by Monaghan and Tunney (2010), some of these events include the death of Princess Diana and the September 11 attacks which were important turning points for electronic journalism and "key moments when immediacy and interactivity of online journalism outpaced the print newspapers and media publishers began to rethink about the importance of online journalism" (Rafeeq 2017: 29).

Concurrently, because of the ease of interactive communication via the internet and as browsing and interacting with the Web continuously improving, the Internet has become a viable channel for journalists and media outlets. Since the beginning of its development and expansion, an increasing number of local and global media organisation discovered that internet is indispensable in order to remain competitive in the modern day of global and local communication (Lee 2007; Gaskins and Jerit 2012). Even journalists were convinced that the practice of journalism via Internet is better suited for themselves and for the public and, therefore, the internet should be recognized as an important media alternative in view of its nature (Machill and Beiler 2009). At the same time, development of the internet has increased the ways in which journalists can communicate with users by offering interactive features on websites. Online journalism has revitalized the idea that the internet as a new medium of communication will make journalism more dialogical, interactive and dynamic by converting the audience (users) into active members of news production work (Bruns 2005). Because of the nature of the internet and all its features, the media are no longer just about informing

people about events and facts; the media have become more interactive and people have become “closer to the news” by adopting interactivity in articles. The popularity of news websites (Chung 2008) can be attributed to the interactive features and quality of the internet.

After the uprising of the Kurds in the IKR in Spring 1991, Kurdish media entered a new phase by liberating it from under the authority of the Baath Party, which ruled the Kurdish region more than four decades. In the transition from armed opposition to power and governance, Iraqi Kurdish parties set up the first Kurdish-controlled television channels, radio stations and daily newspapers in Kurdistan (Zimmerman 1994). Kurdish media landscape had become a mirror of Kurdish political-sectarian divisions. The two main parties in Kurdistan took over power, which divided the governmental positions and the arteries of economy and finance among themselves and entered into a constant struggle to get the large share of the resources of Kurdistan. This divide had driven the region to devastating civil war from 1994 to 1996 (Michael 1999). The Iraqi Kurdish Civil War was a strong military conflict that took place between rival Kurdish political parties in Iraqi Kurdistan during the mid-1990s, most notably between the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (PDK). Over the course of the war, other Kurdish political parties and factions from Iran and Turkey, as well as Iranian, Iraqi and Turkish forces were drawn into the fighting. Thousands of militants from the two main political parties have been killed, with thousands of civilians killed and displaced in the cities and villages of Kurdistan (Gunter 1999). Unlike sovereign states, which have established relatively developed forms of democracy or authoritarian system and constitutionality, IRK is still in transition with regard to the system of governance without an independent and sovereign state. The institution of Kurdish journalism is not as steady as its western or neighbour countries, as many factors, such as technological backwardness, lack of professionalism and unstable economic system, etc. might influence the context in which Kurdish journalism works.

The advent of new Information and communications technologies (ICTs) in Kurdistan region in the end of last century sparked celebratory as a great event for journalists. From the outset, they believed that this was a radical and sustained shift in journalism that was monopolized by the political power of the country (Salih 2008). As Syan (2016) explained, "[i]t should be noted that many of these media channels were guided by different political parties and their policies across the region". From the outset, the adoption of the internet in Kurdistan in various sectors was largely motivated by independent journalists bridging the divide between the political party media and the independent media, and promoting freedom of speech, civil society, democracy and socio-economic progress. In the context of online journalism practice, new communication technologies were also seen as having the potential to develop the professional skills of journalists and opening the way for them through breaking down authoritarian barriers.

The IKR was one of the later places to adopt the internet in the Middle East, as it faced difficult economic circumstances and political conditions. While some traditional Kurdish media organisations and Kurdish newspapers reacted with fear and uncertainty, by the end of the 20th century a few of them had started using the internet (Omar 2007) as a new communication medium, to enhance their news services and to expand their readership. Kurdish news website journalists have sought to increase their products by improving and offering new news formats.

In general, the landscape of the mass media industries in the Kurdistan region has changed rapidly, with the provision and evolution of new communication technologies, especially the internet. The new media technology in Kurdistan drastically changes relationships between consumers and producers by offering the use of new interactive features. Step by step, a great and an important revolution has begun through Kurdish media landscape (Syan 2016). Since 2000, the dominance of the traditional media in the IKR has being

challenged, and occasionally has been supplanted, by an emergent, if as yet amorphous, independent media outlets and online journalism.

There has been a dramatic growth in the Kurdish online journalism due to the development of communication technology. In the recent years, the readers of traditional media have dramatically decreased resulting in the closing down of many printed media outlets. Then, journalists are one of the most widely user groups of online digital media to convey new information and produce first-hand news story as an essential source (Aivas 2017: 103).

This expansion in online interaction between journalists and their audience is considered to be one of the great and significant changes in the Kurdish media today. Because in recent years, in the Kurdistan region, online media have become one of the most popular types of communication channels (Salih 2010). Nowadays, the Kurdish audience is not limited to obtaining information from traditional media channels anymore, but they can access vast amounts of information by doing a variety of interactivity functions by using a lot of interactivity features. This research examines the development of Kurdish news websites in terms of exploiting the structural interactive features, conducting quantitative and qualitative research methods drawing upon content analysis and semi structured interviews. The researcher tries to address the growth and development of the concept of interactivity in Kurdish news websites and will discuss the concept of interactivity in communication, which was initially formulated by Heeter (1989). She suggested six dimensions to assess the measure of interactivity for a medium: complexity of choice available, amount of effort users must exert to access information, responsiveness of the medium, monitoring information use, ease of adding information and finally facilitation of interpersonal communication. This thesis contributes to the body of knowledge by clarifying the relationships between interactive features, actual interaction, and perceived interactivity by examining the range of possible forms and expressions of interactivity in the Kurdish online newspapers and the development of Kurdish online

newspapers in terms of exploiting the structural interactivity features available today.

The researcher is interested in this topic due to his personal experience of working in a variety of Kurdish news websites from 2000 until 2012. He also established and managed two well-known Kurdish websites from 2007 until 2010. Moreover, the researcher had some researches and articles on online journalism published by Kurdish journals and newspapers. This has encouraged and enabled him to observe closely the development of the Kurdish online journalism. This practical and educational background of the researcher plays a pivotal role in the direction of the choice of this topic. With this in mind, the specific research for this thesis has progressed as follows:

1.3 Aims and objectives of the research

The main objective of this study is to gather information on and understanding of the growth and changes of online newspaper websites to evaluate user perspectives towards the evolving and continuous changes that occurred in the online news environment during the period of the study. The purpose of this study is to determine if and to what extent Kurdish news websites in the Iraqi Kurdistan region incorporate the interactive quality of the internet. This study will ask and seek to answer questions about the levels of interactivity, the provision of interactive features and the nature and the utilisation of these features on the Kurdish news websites.

The primary aims of the proposed study are stated below:

1. To explore the content and features of online newspaper websites
2. To discover the level of interactive features of Kurdish online journalism
3. To identify and analyse the interactivity dimensions that influence the growth of Kurdish online newspaper websites

4. To explore the lack of interactive features and positives and negatives of Kurdish news websites.
5. To find the best way to create interactivity between Kurdish readers, Internet users and online journalism.

The study will specifically highlight the provisions (if any) and nature of features of the newspaper sites that allow for interaction between the readers and the paper, and interaction amongst readers and the significance of these interactions. The practical experience of the researcher in journalism in general and work in online journalism in particular, have played an important role in determining the objectives of this study as the researcher began working in the Kurdish media institutions since the mid-1990s as a reporter, news editor and writer of opinion articles. At a later stage, he moved on to the radio as a talk show host. He also worked in the field of online journalism and started to create a news website. This experience gave the impression to the researcher the need to conduct research and in-depth studies to detect shortcomings in the Kurdish media, Kurdish news websites in particular.

Specifically, the aim of the research is to examine what types of interactive features are available on the Kurdish news websites, and what factors are pertaining to these news websites that seem to affect the employment of those features. In this thesis, interactivity is defined according to a four-part typology of online interactivity factors to the context of news websites developed by Deborah Soun Chung (Chung 2008; Chung and Nah 2009; Chung 2011). The typology is based on empirical studies of news website users, and posits that four different types of interactive features are distinguishable in the news website context.

First, human interactivity, means those features that allow site users to contact other users or editors in news websites in different ways chat or talk to them and exchange information between them.

Second, medium interactivity details the more technical features available, provide different opportunities for users to access information and data in different formats such as text, graphic, audio and video, features that allow users different choice options when browsing web site pages.

The third type is labeled human-medium. Through the human-medium features, the user of the website becomes an active participant in the reproduction of content. These features allow users to send or submit their own news tips, stories or photos to the website.

The fourth identified type of interactivity is labeled as medium human, which allows users to re-categorize the content of the site as desired or even sometimes allows users to re-design the site according to his wishes. Common functionalities found under this heading include customized topics, headlines as well as different options for search and news updates or email alerts.

1.4 Research questions

The general aim of this thesis is twofold: firstly, to analyse the level of interactivity on Kurdish online journalism. Secondly, it explores effects of interactivity through news websites on the users in the Kurdistan region, and investigates how the online journalism helps in developing and transforming the civil society, democracy and political participation. As such, the principal research questions of this study are formulated as follows:

RQ1: What is the nature of the content and layout of Kurdish news websites?

RQ2: What categories of interactive features exist in Kurdish news websites?

RQ3: What is the overall level of interactive options offered by Kurdish news websites?

RQ4: To what extent do Kurdish online newspaper audiences make use of different types of interactive features?

RQ5: What user attributes, if any, are associated with the use of different types of interactive features?

RQ6: To what extent are these websites collecting information about their users' aspirations?

RQ7: Are the Kurdish news websites becoming more sophisticated over time, as indicated by an increase in content interaction, information accessibility, interpersonal communication features, and network presence items?

RQ8: Is there incongruence between the level of actual and perceived interactivity in the Kurdish news websites?

RQ9: What is the relationship between the number of interactive functions on Kurdish news websites and the level of perceived interactivity?

1.5 Methodology

In order to achieve the main objectives of the thesis and answer the questions related to interactivity in the online journalism in Kurdistan region, this research will employ both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine if, to what extent, and in what ways Kurdish news websites incorporated the interactive characteristics of the web.

A mixed-method is conducted in this study which is highly accepted among media experts for analysing the interactivity in the online journalism and implies collecting and analysing first quantitative and then qualitative data in two different phases within one study. By using quantitative method analysis the researcher can obtain necessary data to evaluate the interaction in the Kurdish news websites. In order to obtain an in-depth understanding and analysis of quantitative data, the researcher uses qualitative analysis by conducting semi structured interviews (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998). According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) "[m]ixed methods research as

the third research paradigm can also help bridge the schism between quantitative and qualitative research”.

If we further assume that each type of data collection has both limitations and strengths, we can consider how the strengths can be combined to develop a stronger understanding of the research problem or questions (and, as well, overcome the limitations of each). This “mixing” or blending of data, it can be argued, provides a stronger understanding of the problem or question than either by itself. This idea is at the core of a reasonably new method called “mixed methods research. (Creswell 2009: 14)

Quantitative and qualitative methodologies incorporating a content analysis, and semi-structured interviews, were used to collect data for this study. These methodologies are introduced in brief in this section, and then more detailed and systematic in chapter four.

For the quantitative phase, the researcher use content analysis to measure quantitatively the extent to which interactivity functions and features are in use on Kurdish news websites. Data were collected from three Kurdish news websites. These sites are the most visited online news sites in the IKR. To get more information and to supplement quantitative data and to complement the findings from quantitative research, a series of qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted. Interviews were conducted with twelve editors-in-chiefs, editors, journalists, web developers and media experts. Interview participants were selected using a purposive sampling method. Thus, the researcher will employ both quantitative and qualitative methods of research to address the research problems of examining to what extent and in what ways the Kurdish news websites have incorporated the interactive characteristics of the web.

1.6 Online Journalism in Iraqi Kurdistan Region

Since the 1991 uprising against the Baathist regime in the cities of the Kurdistan region, the establishment of media institutions has begun under the supervision of the Kurdish political parties, which have held power since then and until now (Zimmerman 1994; Noori 2018). After the overthrow of the regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the economic situation in the Kurdistan region recovered and this has led to the influx of new media channels. According to the Ministry of Culture in the Kurdistan Regional Government, today there are more than 315 television channels and radio stations operating in the provinces of the region according to their statistics, and dozens of Kurdish news sites (Shafaq 2017). In general, today in Kurdistan independent media do not live in a promising and good stage, but rather the independent media, one of the essential elements of Iraqi Kurdish democracy, is experiencing its worst days since its emergence in 2000 (Chomani 2014). The landscape of the media in Iraqi Kurdistan is not different from the experience of the region and its politics and economy ambitions. It is a media that grows at a clear pace, but the most prominent is that it is a "gross" media, it is still in the process of recovery and therefore confuses between news and propaganda, and sometimes exaggerates in the follow-up issues that raise public opinion.

The Kurdistan Region is a federated region in Iraq. Its main institutions are the Kurdistan Regional Government, the Kurdistan Region Presidency, and the Kurdistan Parliament. The population of the Kurdistan Region is estimated at more than 5.2 million people in the provinces of Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Dohuk and Halabja. These cities cover an area of 40,000 square kilometers. These statistics include areas that are under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government. Kurdish areas outside the government administration do not include the governorates of Nineveh, Salah al-Din, Kirkuk and Diyala, which are called disputed areas according to the Iraqi constitution (O'Leary et al 2006; Kelly 2009). The Kurdistan Regional Government exercises executive power in accordance with the laws of the Kurdistan Region, which is enacted by the Parliament of Kurdistan and the Iraqi Parliament. The Iraqi Constitution

recognizes the Kurdistan Regional Government, Kurdistan Parliament and all other official institutions in the region, and in the same way recognizes the Peshmerga as a legitimate armed force to protect the borders of the Kurdistan Region (Stansfield 2003; Saeed 2006).

After the internet entered the Kurdish community since the beginning of this century, in general Kurdish media outlets have tended to rely on the web to disseminate news and other materials. A shift occurred in the mainstream media. It has led to the change in traditional Kurdish journalism where the evolving communication technologies have led to alternative Kurdish media types gaining more importance. Independent journalists in Kurdish media environment have created their own alternative media via internet by creating news websites, as well as private citizens began to use social network sites in order to publish their own ideas and events. Step by step with the changes in communication technologies in Kurdistan, the form of Kurdish online journalism has also changed and it has moved to a higher stage of development and professionalism. Today, with the expansion of the use of internet technology and smart mobile phones, journalists and citizens produce news and are able to reach people without relying on traditional media such as radio and television, and also more freely outside the authority of political parties. Online journalism have changed the landscape of Kurdish media and understanding and practicing of journalism among Kurdish journalists; news websites have become one of the the primary information and news sources for the Kurdish society. Kurdish online journalism by adopting on the internet, with all the facilities to cover the old media, which are text, images, audio, video, real-time broadcasting, has offered new opportunities for Kurdish users such as interactivity. Today, Kurdish people have a chance to receive the news in real time, they do not need to wait for the evening news from the television or radio, or waiting for the next day's newspaper. As Pavlik (2013: 48), argued that:

New media can change the definition of journalism and Network-based new media is interactive, customized on request, image, a new combination of moving images and sound can be brought

together, it can create a new society based on the interests and concerns, has unlimited space to provide depth and context for journalism.

Furthermore, the interactivity of the web allows Kurdish users, either Kurdish media professionals or media consumers, to actively search for news, communicate with each other and provide information and data for news stories faster and freer than before. In addition, the Kurdish online journalism is also suffering from some serious obstacles and problems like the rest of the Kurdish media. Because the media cannot be separated from the political, economic and social reality, the effects of the Kurdish political landscape continue to have a negative impact on the Kurdish online journalism. News websites are under-funded and marginalized by the authorities. Journalists are also not professional enough to work in the online journalism. The researcher tries to highlight the details of these problems and the Kurdish media landscape in general.

1.7 Pertinence of the subject

Significantly, many consider that interactivity is now a key feature and central characteristic of new media technologies and motivates a considerable reassessment of communication research (Heeter, 1989; Morris and Ogan, 1996; Rafaeli and Newhagen, 1996; Rafaeli and Sudweeks, 1997; Ha and James 1998; Hasan and Sinnapan, 2007), and early scholars from the communication field stated that communication is mostly about, and for the purpose of, interaction (Rafaeli 1988). Media researchers should look for opportunities for analysing the implications, exploring and developing interactivity features in news websites. From many perspectives, studying interactive characteristics is important and significant. As McMillan (2006: 205) stated:

... Understanding interactivity can help practitioners create environments that facilitate interaction. Individuals who use new

media can more effectively utilize interactivity if they understand it. And for scholars, understanding interactivity is central to developing theory and research about new media.

In order to answer the question: why is there such a big fuss about interactivity, Spyridou and Veglis (2008) discuss three points:

1. From an industry perspective, interactivity is a key element of economic viability for Web news organisations.
2. Media organisations may stand to benefit by recognising the non-monetary contributions of Web news to the broader news mission aiming at enhanced coverage and media credibility.
3. Through interactivity, journalism will approach its fundamental mission of serving the public interest and provoking increased interest in news as well as enhancing civic engagement and knowledge. Interactive networking is said to offer perhaps the most potential for consolidating and mobilising audiences.

Thus, the pertinence of this thesis is that it would be important and essential for further research to motivate Kurdish online news producers to take full advantage of interactivity platforms. While research has been done to develop Kurdish media, there is a lack of research in interactivity in Kurdish online journalism in an integrated manner and more work is needed to identify interactivity, especially through well-principled quantitative data analysis. This study tries to investigate various aspects of interactivity in Kurdish online journalism through analysing key elements of it. As far as we know, this is the first systematic and principled study in exploring the interactivity in Kurdish online journalism, in an integrated way in order to improve the interaction between the users and the Kurdish websites. Conducting such studies become the support and development key for Kurdish news websites and other forms of internet publishing by uncovering their shortcomings, and presenting theoretical and practical ideas to address problems experienced by the Kurdish online journalism. There is no doubt that the practice of the work of

journalists gives a good idea of finding practical solutions to the shortcomings and issues of those news websites, but often cannot detect a lot of problems, only through deep and rigorous research. The major importance of this topic is to focus on the interactivity, which in turn engages in analyzing the nature of communication between journalists and their audiences. One of the reasons for the success of any news website, is the participation of the users of their interest through publishing some interactive content that concerns the users and linking them to the items such as news and reports, which increases the interest and loyalty of the user to this website. The most powerful effects of the internet are the integration of the media and new technologies, which in turn has transformed structural structures into the structure of communication processes, providing researchers with unlimited possibilities for choice and free interaction with communicators. Therefore, it leads us to a new communication style that can accommodate all types of communication, interactive communication based on the free and direct interaction between the senders and the future, and the exchange of communication roles between the two poles. In the midst of these developments, simply, internet as a mass medium produced an interactivity. The importance of this research lies in the importance of interactivity in online journalism.

1.8 Progress of research

At the start of studying media in 2000, while a graduate student, the researcher chose to investigate the emerging presence of online news in the Kurdistan region. In 2004, the author wrote a paper entitled 'Online journalism' (Salih, 2004) and focused on the hypertextuality, multimediality and interactivity characteristics. Six years later, in 2010, the researcher submitted a thesis to the University of Sulaimani about Kurdish online journalism for the degree of MA in media. Those prior researches will be used to contribute to this study. This thesis is the first study on interactivity in Kurdish online journalism. Therefore, it is of theoretical and practical importance to crystallize and settle the concept of the Kurdish online journalism at this time. It was followed by some other research on the role of journalists in online journalism and how to design and develop news websites, editing news and video of those websites.

Since 1995 the researcher has worked in Kurdish newspapers, radio and television channels in the Kurdistan region as a reporter, news editor and writer. From the very beginning of his work he tried to harness new technologies available at the time in his journalistic work. He succeeded in creating a personal website and was a static page in 1999. The researcher lived with the dream of developing a large news website, despite the lack of sufficient technical and financial resources, so that he can manage to create a news website himself, even if it was not developed enough. The researcher named his website "Public Opinion" and continued to publish news and opinion articles. It continued for two years, then, the website was closed as a result of the disappearance of the company that provided the domain name and the host server. The researcher worked for five years in an independent radio station (Radio Nawa) , where he was a talk show host, his program named without Sponsorship (Babe Sansor) , which was the first talk show among radio and Kurdish television channels. The researcher tried to allow listeners to participate effectively in his talk shows by relying on email correspondence and re-broadcasting conversations on the radio website. This attempt led to the creation of an interactive atmosphere through this radio program. From this point of view, the idea of the importance of working on interactivity in the Kurdish media, especially the news websites, and the importance of carrying out research on this subject in universities, institutes and research centers has been crystallized. Moreover, the researcher has been the Editor-in-Chief of two Kurdish news websites since 2007 until 2009, and 2009 until 2011. During the period between 2007 and 2011, the basic idea for this research was formulated. Whilst in Kurdish society the internet has become increasingly popular as a means to transform news and information, as it is an ideal medium to communicate with large numbers of people. Step by step, Kurdish media began to take advantage of the internet's ability to communicate with large numbers of people. Moreover, the researcher noticed that Kurdish news websites suffer from professional and technical problems, for example Kurdish journalists didn't pay enough attention to the main capabilities and characteristics of the internet, such as interactivity. Experts emphasise that to make the internet or other computer network news medium, the news stories must fully exploit the medium's basic properties (Fredin, 1997). It is particularly

interesting that the first attempts to establish and develop Kurdish news websites not very successful in Kurdistan, specially those attempts were not successful in encouraging interactivity use of the internet as a new medium of communication in the Kurdish community. It attracted researcher's attention in a high degree. He has been convinced that the development of advanced models of interactive news websites can only be achieved through in-depth and insightful research with hard and continuous work with journalists at those websites.

After a literature sweep, the author decided to do this research, which is concerned with the professional and technical problems facing interaction, as posed in the online Kurdish media, to examine whether indeed certain interactive features offered by Kurdish news websites share common ground and if these interactive features serve distinct functions.

1.9 Contribution to knowledge

Such as other societies in the new world, nowadays, online news media have become a part of social, political, economic, and cultural life in the IKR and are expected to become an essential part of it. According to McMillan (2008), analysis of interactivity in websites is an important extension of a long tradition of analysing content of media messages. She states that studies about interactivity in online journalism are important to both researchers and practitioners, as these kinds of researches “develop and test a tool that has potential to be highly valuable”, to them. This thesis will examine interactivity in online journalism, more specifically by focusing in particular on the range of interactive functions and expressions of interactivity in the Kurdish online newspapers in terms of exploiting the structural interactive features available today. The contributions of this thesis are:

1. Kurdish online journalism is interesting to study in this regard because of the lack of, or a limited amount of, prior research studies

on this topic (interactivity and Kurdish online journalism). Given this gap in the literature, this research study aims to contribute to the understanding of interactivity in Kurdish online journalism.

2. It contributes to the literature on Kurdish media, especially Kurdish online journalism, and contributes to identify Kurdish online journalism features.
3. It distinguishes and unifies interactivity with respect to the Kurdish news websites and their users.
4. It contributes a conceptual framework with which to understand the creative interaction between Kurdish news websites and their users.
5. It contributes to the analysis of different theoretical perspectives and practical approaches to interactivity.
6. The findings will be used to produce recommendations for editors for the appropriate planning of interactive strategies.

1.10 Projected outcomes of the hypothesis

This study will enrich the understanding of the interactivity of Kurdish online journalism. It argues that the internet has many advantages over other media in the support of interactive and creative communication. However many Kurdish news websites are not yet taking full advantage of its potential for interactivity.

The main hypothesis of this thesis is that interactivity functions are generally used inconsistently in the Kurdish news websites, especially the functions that

facilitate human-to-human communication and the features that allow users to express their viewpoints. However, only a few categories of interactive features exist on Kurdish news websites and these interactive functions offered by Kurdish news websites do not share common ground for their audience and don't serve distinct communication functions.

H1: Kurdish news websites do not pay enough attention to the existence of interactivity features on their pages, and do not meet the wishes of their visitors by supporting the interactivity

On the other hand, the other hypothesis of the thesis is that it provides evidence that applying main interactive features to the Kurdish news website content will greatly increase interaction and participation by Kurdish internet users.

H2: Applying interactive features to the news website content will greatly increase interaction.

The level of professionalism of journalists and the policies of editing and publishing in the Kurdish news websites affect the level of interaction and the presence of interactive features in their pages. An efficient journalist with high technical and journalistic skills plays an active role in raising the level of interactivity on his website.

H3: Journalistic skills and editorial policy affect the level of interaction in the Kurdish news websites.

There is a positive relationship between the level of funding of news websites and the level of presence of interactive features in them. When financial possibilities are available at the sites, this increases the interest of journalists in these websites by interactively, makes them use the features that lead to boosting the level of interactivity.

H4: Financially funded or profit-driven news websites will have more interactivity than nonprofit websites.

The other hypothesis of this thesis is that the high level of interactivity of Kurdish news websites will result in encouraging their users to participate in the consolidation of the pillars of civil society in Kurdistan. Increasing the presence of interactive features on the web pages of Kurdish news websites results in an increase in the civic participation of Kurdish users. Weber et al (2003) argued that users who engaged in online activities, such as chatting and sharing topics, were more likely concerned with the free exchange of ideas and dialogic discussion in the real life of the society.

H5: Civic involvement will be the strongest positive predictor of use of interactive features that facilitate the expression of ideas.

The final hypothesis of this thesis is that providing more interactive features in the Kurdish news websites increases the level of interaction between users, journalists and the users themselves, which prompts them to participate in the political talks and encourages them to participate in the real political process. Katz et al. (2001) assert that news website users were more likely than non internet users to engage in the real political activity.

H6: Political engagement will be the strongest positive predictor of use of interactive features that facilitate interpersonal communication.

This thesis will explore interactive content and design features used in news websites of the IKR from the perspective of both news website editors and end-users.

1.11 Review and outline of the PhD thesis

This thesis comprises six chapters and will be structured in the following way:

Chapter one is the introduction. This chapter briefly sets the scene of this research by discussing the scope of the topic: an investigation of the relative

effectiveness of the dimensions of interactivity within Kurdish news website context. The chapter begins with a background to the current research, followed by a section with a general overview of the major questions, aims, pertinence and significance of the study, including the methodology, and describes the research problem. It also provides an overview of the academic and media organisation contributions made by the study and limitations and an outline of the study structure. (7000 words).

Chapter two focuses on the development of the Kurdish media, beginning with a brief overview of Kurdish history and introduces the media scene in the IKR, which includes a brief history, geography, human development status, and political, economic, and freedom of press overviews. (11.000 words).

Chapter three focuses on the Kurdish media in Iraq (Southern Kurdistan), Moreover, mass media, television and broadcasting in Kurdistan are presented. The emergence of independent media is also discussed. (8.000 words).

Chapter four critically reviews the literature and theories in the relevant areas of the study and aims to provide clear definitions concerning interactivity, and further provides a description of the applications involved in interactivity, underlining and analysing how interactive features have contributed to the online journalism. Any gaps identified in the existing literature will also be identified and summarised. (9,000 words).

Chapter five provides a methodology. This chapter will identify and describe the research design and the methodology used to explore and answer the research questions and outline the reasons behind this study's choice to use both quantitative and qualitative research methods. This chapter will explain the study approach and will then discuss the method of analysis of the data gathered. A rationale for the choice of data collection methods is provided in

conjunction with the methodological selection of the techniques. This chapter also describes the application of the theoretical analysis to the research study. (14,000 words).

Chapter six provides details on the beginning of the use of information technology in the Kurdistan region and explains the infrastructure of communication technology in the region. It then focuses on the emergence and development of the Kurdish online journalism through the examination of various aspects and highlights the challenges and problems of online journalism in the Kurdistan region in the past and present time. (13,000 words).

Chapter seven reports and discusses the results of the quantitative data analysis. It presents the findings of the study with a full discussion and interpretation including linking back to the literature review to provide an indication of the appropriateness of research findings. (12,000 words).

Chapter eight presents qualitative data analysis and results. First, it provides background information concerning the interviewed participants. Then the researcher describes the method of analysing the qualitative data and provides an analysis of comments made by the participants with respect to the questions in the semi-structured interviews. The chapter is concluded with a summary of current research. (13,000 words).

The final chapter, which is chapter nine, summarises the quantitative and qualitative research results as presented in chapter six and chapter seven. It focuses on the progress towards achieving the main research objectives. The chapter then presents and discusses the implications of the research, suggests future research and offers some recommendations for practice to the Kurdish news websites and concludes the thesis by summarising the key features of the research and its significance. (4,000 words).

Chapter Two

The development of Kurdish media: Past and Present

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a brief overview of Kurdish history followed by a short, context-setting history of Kurdish journalism. The current evolution and features of Kurdish online journalism will then be described. The purpose of this chapter is to enable an understanding of the origin, growth and development of Kurdish journalism, but especially of Kurdish digital media and the implications that this has for journalism. The aim of the overview of Kurdish history is to highlight the historical conditions within which Kurdish nationalism lived was constructed. This is an important prerequisite for understanding the process of the emergence and development of the Kurdish media in various historical periods. It should be noted that going into historical details, when studying the Kurdish media have a remarkable importance. While the Kurdish media landscape in general has a radical connection to the historical, political, economic and social changes of the Kurdish people, readers also need a historical idea of the Kurds and their history over the years. Without this context, Kurdish media cannot be adequately studied because Kurdish history is unique in ways that many people may not know about (Jacob 2014).

2.2 Kurds and Kurdistan, a brief history

2.2.1 Kurdistan and origin of Kurds

The Kurds are one of the largest ethnic groups in the world of numbering some 27 to 36 million (Kinnane 1964, Gunter 2005; Kreyenbroek & Allison 1996; Mojab, 2001; Vali 2003; Stokes 2009; Waterbury 2017) who are living without their own nation state and have a long and complicated history. There has never been an independent state of Kurdistan (the land of the Kurds) (van Bruinessen 1992, p. 11), nor has there ever been a full self-governing political entity exercising exclusive jurisdiction over all the Kurds (Nader Entessar 1984). Nowadays, the Kurds live in large populations in northwest Iran (Rojhalat), the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Bashwr), the Kurdish-majority Rojava cantons in northern Syria (Rojava), and southeast Turkey (Bakwr). As

McDowell (2004) suggests, "Kurdistan exists within relatively well-defined limits in the minds of most Kurdish political groups". Even some of the senior Kurdish politicians may recognize that the issue of the existence or establishment of an independent Kurdish state. Former Iraq's President Jalal Talabani, who played major roles in building the KRG, which was officially recognized in the Iraqi Government (Akturk 2016), said:

An independent Kurdish state in Iraq was impossible. Independent Kurdish state could not survive because neighbouring Turkey, Iran and Syria would close their borders. Iran and Syria also have a sizeable Kurdish minority. I tell this to my Turkish brothers: Don't be afraid of Kurdish independence. To stay within Iraq is in the interest of the Kurdish people in an economic, cultural and political sense Kurdish nationalists' dream of a Great Kurdistan was a dream in poems" (Reuters 2009).

With the lack of accurate information, Kurdish identity is a most complex issue among a constellation of Kurdish complex problems. It is difficult to trace the origin of the Kurds and it is very clear from the point of view of many historians that there is an ambiguity in the origin of Kurds. O'Shea (2006: 126) states that "[I]t is impossible to achieve a reasonable understanding of either the precise origins of the Kurds, when they coalesced into such an identifiable group, or their early history, much before the Arab/Islamic invasion".

The Kurds did not start writing their own history before the sixteenth century, in the end of this century Sharaf Khan Ibn Shams Al-Din Bidlisi (d. 1604), ruler of the principality of Bids, used Parisian language to write his *Sharafnama* (1596), a history of the Kurdish principalities which is still the main source for the Kurdish history (Yasir Suleiman, 1999). The persecution of Kurds by the ruling states in the Kurdish areas led to unexpected pressure even in the academic studies, and thus there has been only a modest amount of information about Kurds until recent years (Gecer 2014). Because of this, scholars and historians depend on non-Kurdish sources in their papers about the origin of Kurds and they faced many challenges which cause significant

scientific problems and no end of controversy (Bengio, 2012). In addition, the emergence and development of the Kurdish identity is not systematic and has become almost random because of the interference of other peoples in their region, “Kurdish identity has passed through irregular stages of monologic, dialogic, and dialectic interaction with outsiders, which most often have been powerful surrounding states” (Ozoglu 2012: 21). For example, some scholars have even claimed that they have found a Kurdish nose that looks like the nose in the relief of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal. Thus, the Kurds are the Assyrians. Others have felt that, since the Kurdish women are tall and attractive like Georgian women, the Kurds are a branch of the Georgians (Limbert, 1968).

However, some Kurds’ neighbours, like Arabs, Turks, and Fars, think of the origins of the Kurds differently. For example, some Arab geographers and historians of the Middle Ages such as Tenth-century Arab geographer Muhammad Ibn Hawqal and twelfth century al-Masudi have tried to trace Kurdish ethnicity to the Arabs. Masudi (2005), in his book *Muruj al-dhahab wa madin al-jawhar* (Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems) recorded asserting that the Kurds are “Sons of Jinns”. Also, Ibn Hawqal (1992) suggests that Kurds may be of Arab origin.

The Persian historians Ali Asghar Shamim and Rashid Yasami claim that the “Kurds are not a separate nation, rather, they are of Persian origin, they presented the Kurds as authentic Iranians and shared the goal of proving that Kurds were Iranians rather than Arabs or Turks. And according to an alternate but equally unfounded philological theory, Kurds are one of the original Turkic clans of Central Asia and, therefore, are of Turkish origin (Ozgul, 2004). Their views lacking any evidence of the origin of Kurds, in contrast, other historians generally agree that there is clear and distinct evidence that Kurdish identity is differentiated from the Arabs, Turks or Persians.

There are many legends and myths about the Kurdish origin, McDowall (2007: 4) summarizes some of these myths as follows:

Various myths exist concerning Kurdish origins. The myth that

the Kurds are descended from children hidden in the mountains to escape Zahhak, a child-eating giant, links them mystically with 'the mountain' and also implies, since the myth refers to children rather than one couple, that they may not all be of one's origin. A similar story suggests that they are descended from the children of the slave girls of King Solomon, sired by a demon named Jasad, and driven by the angry king into the mountains. Another myth claims the Prophet Abraham's wife Sarah was a Kurd, a native of Harran, and thus validates Kurdish identity within the mainstream of monotheism.

To begin to understand Kurdish origin, it is important to explore and differentiate between the myth from one hand and the historical and traditional accounts from the other, but McDowall (2007: 4) believes that these myths and legends are important to the Kurdish people. He says: “[t]here is a danger of outsiders dismissing such myths as worthless; they are valuable tools in nation building, however dubious historically, because they offer a common mystical identity, exclusive to the Kurdish people”.

The main question about the origin of the Kurds is this: are they the descendants of the original inhabitants of all or a part of the extensive regions they inhabit, or did they come to this area at an undetermined date from an undetermined place? Therefore, many researchers traditionally regarded Kurds as Iranians and of Iranian origin, and therefore as Indo-Europeans, mainly, because they speak Iranian. This hypothesis was predominantly developed by linguists. Northwest-Iranian origin theory tries to explain Kurds mainly as descendants of Old Iranian speakers like the Medes, because of assumed language similarities (Hennerbichler et al., 2012). Those researchers and some of “Kurdish nationalists” trace the origin of the Kurds to an Iranian migration in the first millennium B.C.E from an unknown eastern territory in the area where the Kurds now reside (Bangui, 2012), and known as Kurdistan among the Kurds themselves.

On the contrary, some researchers have a new idea, findings of the first

interdisciplinary study (Hennerbichler, 2012) suggest that the Kurds are very closely related to Jews. Despite what many people believe, oldest forefathers of the Kurds were mainly not of Iranian origin, even if now they speak an Iranian language today. There were Kurds in the areas they live in long before the oldest of the Indo-Iranians who live there today, and Kurds originally spoke their own pre-Indo-European language and they did not adopt Iranian until the middle of the first millennium before the Christian era. The DNA-research in advanced human anthropology (Hennerbichler 2012) indicates; Kurds as indigenous Northern Fertile Crescent people and descendants of ancient multi-ethno-cultural mountain dweller civilizations, who originated out of a native autochthonous Neolithic population of ancient farmers and shepherds north and north-east of Mesopotamia. They were later linguistically Indo-Europeanized by militarily organized groups and elites who immigrated into the area obviously from Central Asia and the Indian sub-continent primarily via the steppes of what is South Russia and the northern plains of Iran of today. Some of the immigrant elites could have been born already in Eurasia. As for the Kurdish people who live in the four regions of Kurdistan that were divided in the Middle East today, it can be said that the Kurds are dual or even multi origin, and this is confirmed by Elphinston (1946), He argued that is:

The modern Kurds are therefore the descendants of several ancient peoples, mainly Iranian. They include Caucasian strains in the north and some Semitic strains in the south. They are, however, bound together, by a purely Kurdish influence which probably derives from the original mountain tribes which have inhabited these regions from earliest times. (Elphinston 1946: 91-103).

2.2.2 Geography and population

The absence of Kurdistan as an independent state in the past and present has caused great difficulties for historians and geographers in determining the borders of Kurdistan. This complex situation led to the incompatibilities and appearance of several opinions and discussions among academics, writers, and geographers. Moreover, Kurdistan as a strategic area exists in the heart of an ethnically and geographically complex region (O'Shea 2004). There has

never existed a state with the name of Kurdistan, therefore most scholars describe Kurdistan as the area in which Kurds constitute an ethnic majority (Meho 1997). For the first time, the term Kurdistan used in historical documents in the twelfth century, when Selçuklu Sultan Sancar ordered the establishment of a new province (administrative unit) called Kurdistan in 1157, which is located in the eastern parts of the Zagros Mountains (McDowall 2004).

....It was governed by the Sultan's nephew Süleyman Shah as the Selçuklu Empire preferred to administer its provinces through Turkoman officers. The province covers parts of the territories of modern Iraq and Iran and indicates a very small area compared to the desired borders of Kurdistan today (Kaya 2012: 97).

Since the early thirteenth century a large part of this region has been called Kurdistan. However, it was not until the sixteenth century that the term Kurdistan came into common use. There have also been various non-Kurdish speaking minorities living in Kurdistan who have been tied to the Kurds by networks of social and economic relations. If they are not the only people who continuously inhabited Mesopotamia, there is no doubt that the Kurds are one of peoples who lived in this area and the largely mountainous region of the Near East and the northern boundaries of the Middle East (Elphinston 1946, Nerwi 2012). There is general agreement that the Kurds since ancient times have lived in a geographical area known both to themselves and many outsiders as Kurdistan (Westheim 2009).

In general, Kurdistan "land of the Kurds," is about 200-250 square miles of a mountainous expanse straddling the present state boundaries of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and the former Soviet Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan. O'Shea (2004: 20) provides more detailed information regarding the Kurdistan area and she explains:

The area that can be generally described as Kurdistan consists of an arc of mountain chains enclosing a series of interior

basins, astride the international boundaries of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. It includes the Pontic and Taurus mountains in the north, the northern and central Zagros and some of the southern Zagros range. In the west, the mountains become rolling hills down to the Mesopotamian Plain; to the east lies the Iranian Plateau; and to the north the mountains become the highlands of Armenia and Anatolia. The entire area covers roughly 400,000–450,000 km².

The geographical area of Kurdistan is almost equal to that of France or the states of California and New York together in the United States. This area (Kurdistan) covers about 190 000 km² in Turkey, 125 000 km² in Iran, 78 736 km² in Iraq, and 12 000 km² in Syria (Mills and Sen 2016). This geographical framework that has been put forward is a region that lies within the borders of the four countries Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran and inhabited by Kurds. And also the ruling authorities in these countries tried to change the demography of these areas against the Kurds forcibly (political difficulties and state terror which took the forms of ethnic cleansing, forced migration, mass evacuations, village-razing, etc.).



Figure 2.1 Map of Kurdish areas (Kurdistan) in the Middle East.

Source: http://www.northerniraq.info/forums/gallery/image_page.php?album_id=2&image_id=75

Estimations of the size of the Kurdish population varies highly depending on different sources. According to one estimation, there would be about 35–45 million Kurds. Usually some of the Kurdish nationalists give a higher number while the governments in countries that are parts of Kurdistan within their borders Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria give lower figures (Alinia 2004). There are no official and reliable statistics on the numerical importance of the Kurds in the Near East states where they live (Hassanpour 1994). Researchers often face problems in determining the number of Kurds, for example, The official censuses of the occupying countries most often undercount the size of the population of Kurdistan, most of the authorities and governments of these countries did not (and still do not) give correct statistics and did not carry out any real official census for the Kurdish populations in their respective countries and they do not count the minorities, for example, in Turkey. Some of those countries deny existence of the Kurds amongst them let alone to accept its national rights. Thus, their status as a minority remains precarious and subject to government policies of each country. This is in addition to millions of Kurds dispensed in different parts of the world (Mella 2005). This is due to political and ethnic considerations and their constant hostility against the Kurdish nation.

The Kurds are the fourth largest population group in the Middle East after the Arabs, Turks and Persians. They are primarily concentrated in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria, but Kurdish communities are also found in the former Soviet Union. There are about 8-8.5 million Kurds in Iraq (not all of whom live in the IKR) and the population of the IKR (stated by the KRG at 5.2 million). Iran has around 10 million Kurds, Turkey 15 million, and Syria 3 million. Finally, the Kurdish diaspora in Western Europe is estimated at 1.5 million people and Kurdish Diaspora of the former USSR is 0.5 million (Amnesty International 2008; Koohzad 2008; Agency 2014; Mills and Sen 2016). However, nowadays there are many Kurdish groups in Jordan, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Georgia, Russia and Israel.

N°	Pays	Minimum Estimate	Current Estimate	% minimum of total population	% current of total population
1	Turkey	15 million	20 million	19,00%	25,00%
2	Iran	10 million	12 million	13,00%	17,50%
3	Iraq	8 million	8,5 million	25,00%	27,00%
4	Syria	3 million	3,6 million	12,50%	15,00%
5	Kurdish diaspora in Europe	1,2 million	1,5 million		
6	Kurdish Diaspora of the former USSR	0,4 million	0,5 million		
X	TOTAL	36,4 million	45,6 million		

Table 2.1 The Kurdish population. Source Kurdish Institute of Paris

<http://www.institutkurde.org/en/info/the-kurdish-population-1232551004>

After the fall of the Mad or Median Empire in the sixth century BC, which some historians consider it as the first Kurdish state in ancient history (Limbert 1968. Saeedpour 2002). Natali 2005, Sheyholislami 2011), areas that are considered great Kurdistan have become under the power of empires at different periods of time, such as the Achaemenid Empires (6th-4th BC), Sassanian (3rd-7th AD) Empires, Islamic Arab Khalafat (7th-13th AD), and the Mongols Empires (13thit.16 AD). In the tenth and eleventh centuries, when the Kurdish areas were under the rule of the Isalamic Arab Khalafat, some Kurdish dynasties

took control over local matters and tried to form the administrative entity in their regions (McDowall 2004). However, these attempts did not last and were wiped out after the invasion by the Seljuk Turks as these Kurdish dynasties were not strong and organized compared to the Seljuk Turks (11th-12th AD) and the Mongols (13th AD). In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, these areas were occupied by Persians and Turks and became under the authority of Ottoman Empire and Safavid Empire. Then, the land of the Kurds became divided between these two powers. At this stage, the ongoing conflict between the Ottoman and Safavid empires created problems for the Kurds and brought misery, devastation and rivalry among the Kurdish principalities (Hassanpour 1992. Van Bruinessen 1992. Özoğlu 1996). In most of these stages, which were ruled by the Arabs, Turk and Persians, the Kurds were not allowed to participate in power. The Kurdish areas faced significant marginalization in the cultural, economic and administrative aspects.

Kurdistan remained poorly controlled by the Imperial centre, and such dynasties and autonomous regions were tolerated as long as taxes were paid when requested and troops levied in times of need. The region was poorly developed. The Kurds themselves, however were more important to their rulers. The Kurdish tribes frequently rose in rebellion and continued to jostle amongst themselves for power and lands (O'Shea 2004: 67).

The conflict between the two empires was no longer just a political conflict but turned into a religious war between the Sunni Ottoman and the Safavid Shiites. Then, Kurdistan was to become the buffer between the two major branches of Islam religion (Romano 2017). The Battle of Chaldiran broke out in 1514, then, Kurdistan became divided between the two empires, even though it was not a formal administrative division recognized. In order to resolve their conflict, a treaty was concluded between the Ottoman Empire and the Safavid Empire in 1639. This treaty resulted in drawing the first official border line. Kurdistan was divided into two parts. This became the first official division of Kurdistan. As Sheyholislami (2011: 166) states, “the two empires started centralizing their powers and one by one eliminated local governments including those in Kurdistan. By the mid-nineteenth century all of the principalities were

overthrown”.

After the First World War and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, the possibility of solving the Kurdish problem came into existence for the first time, perhaps because of the creation of a buffer zone between the Turks of Anatolia and the Turkish-speaking population in Central Asia and the Caucasus, especially in Azerbaijan. But with several treaties such as the Treaty of Sevres and the Treaty of Lausanne, the territory of Kurdistan has been divided into four parts (Gunter 2004). The Ottoman part of Kurdistan was divided between four countries (the new Republic of Turkey, Iraq and Syria, and the Soviet Union). The Iranian part remained intact. All this has led to a further escalation of the Kurdish issue after the Kurdish people became practically and legally divided between four states instead of two. To increase the suffering and to begin a new chapter of the relationship with new countries dominated by tension and violence, which has not found until today fair solutions. Kurdish parties and nationalist forces began to form to lead the struggle and struggle for the right to self-determination. This division has continued so far, divided the Kurds culturally, linguistically, territorially and politically.

2.2.3 Kurdish language

While the authorities that ruled Kurdistan through history and so far, do not assert that the Kurds are the owners of parts of Kurdistan and sometimes do not recognize the Kurds as a nation, the survival of the Kurdish language played an important role (Kreyenbroek 2005) in the struggle of the Kurds in order to recognize them as a nation. In the eyes of some, the Kurdish language is a guide to the separate identity of the Kurds, and efforts are being made to preserve and develop it. The Kurdish language is a trait that sets them apart from their neighbours and is “probably the most common bond shared among Kurds.” (Arfa 1966: 4). The Kurdish language can be defined as the language that contains a number of distinct dialects of spoken language in parts of Kurdistan and some other places where Kurds lived (Abdulla and McCarus 1967; Yavuz 1988). The Kurdish language includes different dialects, this difference is due to the influence of geographical and geopolitical factors. In

the latest study on Kurdish dialects, Haig and Öpengin (2014) identify the Kurdish dialects as Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji), Central Kurdish (Sorani), Southern Kurdish, Gorani, and Zazaki. They have classified these dialects and identified areas that are used as follows (Haig and Öpengin 2014:110):

1. Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji): It is often divided into Badini (spoken principally in Duhok and Hakkari provinces) and Kurmanji (in the rest of Northern Kurdish speech zone) varieties; both include a number of other regional dialects.
2. Central Kurdish (Sorani): Its main regional dialects are Mukri (Mahabad), Hewlêrî (Erbil), Silêmanî (Suleimaniya), Germiyanî (Kirkuk) and Sineyî (Sanandaj).
3. Southern Kurdish: It includes the varieties such as Kelhuri, Feyli, Kirmashani, as well as some dialects of what is called Laki, in Ilam and Kermanshah provinces of Iraq and the town of Khaneqin in Iraq
4. Gorani: It covers what is known as Hawrami or Hawramani, with the well-known dialects of e.g. Paveh and Halabja, and includes the old transdialectal literary koine, the language of religious rites among some Yaresan groups. In this sense, "Gorani" would include several varieties spoken in present-day Iraq, e.g. Bajalani.
5. Zazaki: Its three main dialects are Northern Zazaki (Tunceli-Erzincan provinces), Central Zazaki (Bingöl-Diyarbakir provinces) and South Zazaki (Diyarbakir province and Siverek town).

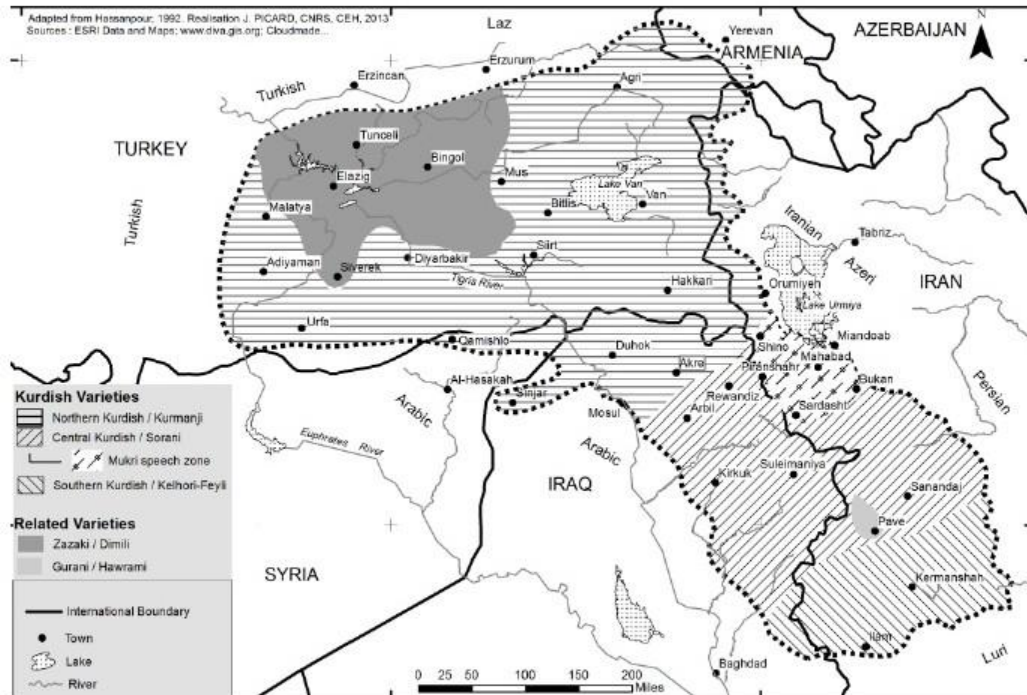


Figure 2.2 Map of language varieties spoken by the Kurds (from Haig and Öpengin 2014)

Kurdish language is written in a variety of separate scripts that "lack full interlegibility" (Collin 2011: 16). The popularity of the scripts differs according to the geographical and geopolitical situations. Kurds in Turkey write in Latin (Hawar), which is similar to Turco-Roman, although some exile groups have proposed a purely Roman system without diacritical marks called Yekgirtú, which means "unified.", it is a recent devised writing system by Kurdish Academy of Language. In addition, Kurds in Iraq use a modified Arabic script with extra signs for Kurdish sounds; some Kurds in Iran do the same while others write in Persian/Arabic (Hassani and Medjedovic 2016).

The Kurds are among the nations that have more of a dialect in their spoken and written language. A problem that attracts the attention of the intellectuals of the Kurds in general is the problem of establishing a national language or official unified language, the language of reading, writing, school and media, Kurdish language for all Kurds everywhere in the world. The recognition of a single official or national language for all Kurds seems impossible at present,

because there is no Kurdish state with all the Kurds inside. Moreover, even in the each of the four parts of Kurdistan, the situation is not quite the same. Kurdish in Turkey and Syria is not as fragmented as it is in Iraq or even Iran "with the exception of about two million Zaza speakers, all northern Kurds speak Kurmanji. It might be easier to declare Kurmanji as the official or national language of Kurdistan-Turkey" (Hassanpour et. Al 2012).

Interlegibility among Kurdish writing systems is asymmetric. Sorani speakers typically write in their modified Arabic, but educated Kurds are familiar with English or European languages and can read the Latin script. The opposite, however, is not true, since Kurds in the Kurdistan of Turkey cannot typically read the Arabic script (Hassanpour 1995. Collin 2011). The main issue currently facing the Kurds is to find a standard and unified Kurdish language for all the Kurds in the world, with more than one tone. In short, the issue is confined to two main dialects (Kurmanji and Sorani), each aspiring to be the standard Kurdish language before the other. Standardizing Kurdish language faced a linguistic challenge (Khalid 2005), lack of a united linguistic policy, due to the absence of united authority of the Kurds and other political considerations, such as fighting the Kurds culturally and politically, by surrounding countries such as Turkey, Syria and Iran. Also, there is not an adequate suggestion and a detailed plan to standardize Kurdish language because of having opposite views.

“Any change in this situation would be politically critical; for example, a decision by Iraqi and Iranian Kurds to use Hawar would allow them to establish closer links, read the work of the much larger Kurdish community in Turkey, and further distance themselves from their Arab neighbours. Romanization would make it easier to read and write Kurdish, since the Arabic abjad is not well suited for Indo-European languages. And Romanization would bring the Kurmanji and Sorani dialects closer together, alarm governments in both Turkey and Iraq, and encourage Kurds to

think more strongly about establishing a Kurdistan, particularly if a continued union with Iraq proves unsatisfactory and wide-spread violence erupts again between Turks and Turkish Kurds” (COLLIN 2001: 16).

It is worth noting that the absence of a standard and unified Kurdish language for all the Kurds in the world, is a heavy burden on the Kurdish media, especially Kurdish Online Journalism. It has become difficult for the Kurdish media organisations to address all the Kurds through the websites for not being able to provide sufficient financial and human resources to open several sections in one location in different Kurdish dialects Such as Kurmanji and Sorani. If the Kurdish media does not take this step, it will not reach its media goals because those who speak the Kurmanji do not understand Sorani very well. We will discuss this issue and its relationship to the subject of our research in the next chapter in detail

2.3 Kurdish media, origin, growth and development

2.3.1 Origin of Kurdish media

The weak nations witnessed denial and negligence of their national and cultural rights under the reign of the Ottoman Empire and were deprived from all types and methods of free expression. However, the changes and developments occurred following the principles of the French Revolution and their transference through orientalist and delegations, etc., and then the establishment of printing press had a great impact. As a result, printing press made a progress in the Ottoman State which became an encouraging start to the emergence of journalism there. The first Turkish gazette was published in 1832 entitled Calendar of Affairs, which later became an important beginning for the history of journalism of the nations within the Ottoman State (Mardin 2006).

The development of literature and the emergence of the Kurdish press was linked to its Ottoman-Turkish-Arab environment. The entrance of the printing press into the Ottoman Empire, including Kurdish and Arab regions, was delayed until the eighteenth century due to an Islamic advisory opinion stating

that the printing press was "filth made by Satan." (Gunter et al. 2013: 11). The ruling elite in the Ottoman Empire was threatened by the press and considered it to be a dangerous competitor that could jeopardise their monopoly of control over politics, economy, science and knowledge (Al-Jaber 2012). The first printing press using Arabic alphabets was founded in Rome in 1514, then in Egypt in 1800, in Algeria in 1847, in Lebanon in 1858, in Tunisia in 1861, in Syria in 1865, and then in Iraq in 1869 where the Ottoman Governor of Iraq, Midhat Pasha, established a new printing press in Baghdad in 1869 and named it The Printing House of the Vilayet, publishing the first Iraqi newspaper called Al-Zaura (Ibrahim 1975).

If the birth of journalism of other nations was a natural one, starting from palaces of kings, sultans and their courtiers, as a response to their will and devoted to praising and glorifying them, the Kurdish journalism was born in the exile. It was a weapon in the hands of Kurdish nationalists against the invaders, a message to spread national, cultural and social awareness, etc. In general, it served political dimensions of Kurdish national freedom and improving their movement in order to achieve the Kurdish people's ambitions of freedom and independence. It joint with the national freedom movement very strongly and its struggle against terrorism and the oppression it suffered from the invaders for centuries. Thus, the first Kurdish newspaper was published in the exile, away from the Ottoman terrorist oppression. It was Kurdistan newspaper, which was a political, literary, social fortnightly newspaper. The newspaper Kurdistan was published by the Bedirkhan brothers between the years of 1898-1902, 31 issues were published (Hassanpour and Mojab 2005). The first issue was published in Kurdish in Cairo, Egypt, on 22 April 1898 by its owner and editor-in-chief Miqdad Midhat from the Kurdish family of Bedirxhan (Fuad 1972, Jabari 1975). The Bedirxhan family had an important role in Kurdish modernisation in 1845. They opened dozens of education institutions in Istanbul and their lands in the north of Kurdistan (east Turkey) such as the Kurdish Foundation of Powerful Ideology and Kurdish Education Institution. However, because the Ottoman

Empire thought that they were supporting Kurdish nationalism, the Bedirxhan family were forced into exile in Egypt (Hassanpour, 1992; Celil, 2000).

The newspaper served its national duty and played a major role in introducing the Kurdish cause to other nations. It also had a key role in building and raising national sense among the Kurdish people which made it a target to Ottoman authorities; this in turn caused the newspaper not to remain in one particular place. Thus, the first five issues were published by Miqdad Midhat Bedirxhan in Cairo, and then his younger brother Abdulrahman Baderkhan published issues 6-31 in different cities of the world; issues 6-19 were in Geneva, issues 20-23 were in Cairo again, issue 24 was in London, issues 25-29 were in Folkestone in south London, and issues 30-31 were in Geneva again. The last issue, i.e. issue 31, was on 14 April 1902 and so those were the issues of its first season (Fuad 1975, Blaj 1992). That was the first attempt of Kurdish journalistic work at that time; in the exile and by a revolutionary family, and as such that newspaper was the building block for the Kurdish journalism thereafter. Hassanpour (1996: 276) summarises the state of the Kurdish press in the beginning in the following terms:

The Kurdish press is characterised by the absence of enduring dailies, low circulation, poor distribution facilities, dependence on subscription and single copy sales, lack of or insignificant advertising revenue, poor printing facilities, shortage of newsprint, and limited professionalization and specialisation. These features are characteristic of the press in developing societies, although their persistence and hindering impact on the Kurdish press has been reinforced by the division of the Kurdish speech community and political restrictions on the use of language.

Mouthpieces of the authorities and governments in the Ottoman Empire were preoccupied with the publication which is the suit in line with their view points and instructions, while inhibiting any critical view point. "The Printing Law issued in 1857 and modified in 1865 by the Ottomans or colonial powers or dissident powers (like Muhammad Ali in Egypt) was hegemonic and restrictive to freedom" (Al-Jaber 2012: 19), aiming to control democracy and critical thought, subjugate it to the Ottoman authority's vision, and direct it to submit to its ideas (Ayalon, 1995, 2001; Rugh, 2004).

The print journalism went through several historical stations, each featuring its own characteristics differentiating it from others. After the collapse of the Kurdish Baban Emirate and its capital, Sulaimani by the Ottomans in 1851, which was the last Kurdish emirate, before that year, other emirates of Soran, Badinan, Botan Hakary, etc (Tawfiq 2004) collapsed, too. A large part of Kurdistan was under the control of the Ottomans until the beginning of the WW1. Kurdistan was in a state of ruin and turmoil economically, socially and culturally, Kurdish national values were destroyed, and darkness covered Kurdistan. The Kurds were not allowed to publish newspapers and magazines during the entire period of 1851 until 1908 within the areas controlled by the Turkish authorities until the Turkish army carried out a coup *d'état* and moved from Salonik towards Istanbul on 24 July 1908 (Amin 2001). The army imposed the constitution on Sultan Abdul Hamid again which continued until the failure of the coup in April 1909 by the followers of the Sultan. The situation turned out in favour of the Committee of Union and Progress which directed the governing authority in accordance with their principles and racist political ideology (Tawfiq 2004).

The period from July 1908 until April 1909 witnessed a spread of the principles of freedom and the right of free expression from which the main law of the Ottoman State emerged. Following that the first Kurdish political organisation was established in Istanbul in Autumn 1908 called the Committee of Kurdish Union and Progress and the Kurdish journalism witnessed a radical change as

several Kurdish newspapers were published (Jalil 2003). Noshirwan Amin, who himself was a Kurdish media history scholar, focuses on the importance and the role of the Kurdish press in that period and illustrates:

The Kurdish elite played significant role in developing Kurdish nationalism, so did art and poems. Sharafnama of Sharafkhani Bitlisi and poets such as Ahmadi Khani and Haji Qaderi Koyee played significant roles in developing and enhancing Kurdish nationalism. The emirates of Baban, Botan, Ardalan and Soran are all good examples of the existence and strength of Kurdish nationalism. Kurdish newspapers in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century not only played a significant role in that aspect but also proved that the Kurdish nationalism was well spread across all Kurdistan and beyond (Resool 2012: 70).

2.3.2 Kurdish press in the parts of Kurdistan, a brief overview

In order to analyse and study the Kurdish media in more detail, it is significant to firstly identify and analyse the main historical events and conditions that the Kurds in the four Kurdistan parts have witnessed and been exposed to, especially over the last century. This helps to provide an accurate understanding of the media conditions affecting the Kurdish people and their issue (Syan 2016). In view of the Kurds' sufferings at the hands of the governments of the ruling states on Kurdistan parts, from the practice of repression and marginalization policies in their attempt to obliterate Kurdish national identity, Kurds were supposed to pay special attention to the newspapers in order to be an ambassador to their national issue in different parts of the world.

2.3.2.1 Kurdish media in Iran (Eastern Kurdistan)

In Iran, Kurdish journalism did not appear in the true sense until the Second World War. In the 1920s, there was a few leaflets in secret from some Kurdish

parties and organizations, until the activity of the national movement in Mahabad increased with the beginning of the war, and some newspapers and periodicals appeared, such as: Nishtiman (Motherland) Magazine (1943-1945), Hawari Nishtiman (cry of the Motherland) Magazine (1946) and Halala (Rose) Magazine (1946). Nishtiman Magazine issued by the first modern Kurdish organization in Iran called Komalay Jiyanaway Kurd/Kurdistan (The Society for the Revival of the Kurds/Kurdistan) which was established in September 1942 in Mahabad. Kurdish political movements in Iran's Kurdistan regions have consistently challenged the central government of Tehran. In Iran, once the USSR's wartime occupation of the northern part of the country ended in 1946, Raza and Mohammad Reza Pahlavi shahs ruled Iran from 1925-1979, In January 1946, the Kurdish leader Qazi Mohammad tried to establish a Kurdish state independent of the Iranian authority. He declared Kurdish independence and named himself president of the new Republic of Mahabad. Iran is the only country where there was a Kurdish state and lasted only eleven months (Kaya 2012). The Tehran government of Mohammad Reza Shah quickly suppressed the Republic of Mahabad which the Soviets had stimulated and facilitated (Harris 1977). Tehran publicly hanged Qazi Mohammad with some of his relatives and aides, including around 20 leaders who were hanged in public in Mahabad and two smaller cities, Saqez and Boukan (McDowall 1997; Ahmadzadeh and Stansfield 2010). Reza and Muhammad Raza Shah's cultural, political and tribal policies also disrupted the Kurdish socio-political order. Laws imposing the Persian language also marginalized Kurds. Because few Kurds in Iran spoke Persian, as a result, they were excluded from many cultural, political and economic activities (Jwaideh 2006; Dehzani 2008).

Thereafter Tehran tightly controlled Kurdistan regions. Since then, successive Iranian authorities have controlled Iranian Kurdistan and have in no way permitted the formation of an independent or semi-independent Kurdish administration in those areas. Until now, the Kurdish movements opposed to the Iranian authority have been struggling to realize the right to self-determination and establish a Kurdish administrative entity in Iranian Kurdistan. In contrast, the Iranian authority views Iranian Kurdistan as integral Iranian territory and "will fight to maintain it as part of Greater Iran in some

fashion—even if they must make a devil's bargain with Iraq or Turkey in order to do so" (Beeman 2007: 4).

After the fall of the Republic of Mahabad, the Kurdish opposition political parties played a limited role in the development of the Kurdish press in Iran's Kurdistan through some Kurdish magazines and newspapers, although the majority were weak in appearance and content. After that, the Iranian Kurdish parties reached the public through their limited radio programs that broadcasted from stations based in Iraqi Kurdistan. Since the 2000s, the arrival of digital satellite television broadcasting has revolutionized the parties' abilities to communicate with their public in Kurdistan. Kurdish parties have established dozens of satellite television channels such as Tishk TV (the "sun-ray"), the Kurd Channel, Rojhelat TV (East), Komala TV, Newroz TV, and Aso Sat. The programs broadcasted from these TV stations are mostly cultural and political and aim to mobilize their Kurdish audience in Iranian Kurdistan against the Iranian regime (Ahmadzadeh and Stansfield 2010). Overall, Iranian Kurdish oppositional parties run about ten satellite TV stations, tens of radio stations, dozens of active news websites and weblogs, and several weeklies or seasonal journals with contents ranging from cultural to political and current affairs.

Nowadays in Iran Fars dominates other minority groups such as Kurds, Baloch and Arabs, within their territory. The Iranian authorities do not oppose the existence of a Kurdish society with a Kurdish culture and language in Kurdistan, however it is strongly opposed to independent political movements by the Kurdish parties, brutal government actions have been against opposition political leaders. Concessions in recent years, especially on language and cultural issues have reversed policies from the Pahlavi era. Although Persian is the official language in Iran, legal provisions are available for the use of minority languages in the media and society, under strict supervision and control in certain circumstances. In addition, Persianization is the building block of language policy in Iran, which adversely affected the use of minority languages in official media (Haddadian and Meylaerts 2014). Instruction in Kurdish has now started in schools and in the University of

Kurdistan albeit minimal and under strict control. According to Amnesty International (2008: 1) "the use of the Kurdish language in education is frequently thwarted". Some newspapers and magazines, albeit controlled, are printed in Kurdish and central controlled televisions and radios such as Sahar TV – Multilingual TV based in Tehran, Iran and affiliated to Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) which has programs in different languages, including Kurdish. Therefore, it is good to recognize that the 1979 revolution in Iran brought about some important changes in how Tehran dealt with Kurds and restored some of the Kurdish linguistic and social rights, changes that have borne significant influence over Kurdish use, vitality and standardization.

Article 15 of Section 2 of the current Iranian constitution reads:
The official language and script of Iran, the lingua franca of its people, is Persian. Official documents, correspondence, and texts, as well as text-books, must be in this language and script. However, the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian. (cited in Sheyholislami 2012: 31)

With no established independent media outlets, some Kurdish journalists use the Internet and set up news sites. Regarding the access to internet in the Kurdish area in Iran, there is access to internet, particularly in big cities like Mahabad and Sanandaj, although the Iranian government tries to restrict access to internet through filtering. But the use of the Internet for media and political purposes is not safe within Iran. Mustafa Moloudi an Iranian Kurdish opposition politician says: "adopting the internet for media and political purposes can be censored and monitored by the Iranian regime. The Tehran regime is also able to monitor the population by telephone tapping" (adopted from: Danish 2013: 25).

2.3.2.2 Kurdish media in Syria (Western Kurdistan)

The Syrian Kurds have been fighting an identity struggle since the

establishment of the Syrian state in the beginning of the last century, following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the sharing of its property among the countries that contributed to defeat it. Those victorious in the First World War pushed the Ottoman Empire out of its vast possessions to seize what it wanted and set itself up as its guardian. In general, the Kurds in Syria have suffered from ethnic persecution by the absence of an independent Kurdish administrative entity since the beginning of the last century until the uprising of 2011 (Gambill 2004). With political and intellectual repression by the ruling regimes in Syria, cultural and economic backwardness had a significant impact on the lack of development of the Kurdish press in Syria in the last century (Sinclair and Kajjo 2011).

During the period of the French Mandate over Syria, the Kurds enjoyed some civil and cultural rights. Some Kurdish intellectuals managed to publish newspapers, magazines and cultural clubs. The Kurdish community has made strides in the field of education and culture. Political and cultural developments led to deepening the national conscience for the Kurds in Syria and happening of a wide cultural renaissance. This transformation led to the issuing of the journals HAWAR and RONAHI in the 1930s and 1940s. HAWAR was the beginning of the Kurdish press in Syria, which was issued by Prince Jaladat Baderkhan in the Latin alphabet in Damascus, after the approval of the Syrian government on May 15, 1932, a monthly magazine first published in Arabic and Latin alphabet, and then just in Latin (Tejel 2014). Hawar formed a revolution in the field of the Kurdish press in terms of its issuance in Kurdish language for the first time in Latin alphabet, and its focus on the publication of research and studies on the Kurdish language and different dialects. Hawar was interested in Kurdish literature alongside language and provided analysis on the level of Kurdish contemporary and classic literature and published literary and cultural productions, and altogether some 30 books were published between 1925 and 1959.

Also, in the 1920s, a leading Kurdish organization was established. The Xoybûn (Being Oneself or Independence) organization was established in 1927 in Lebanon and was expanded in Syria. It was the main and leading

organization of Kurdish movement in Syria primarily carried out political and cultural activities and struggle against Turkey (Sinclair and Kajjo 2011). During most of the French mandate (1920-1946), it provided a more suitable environment for publishing, writing and broadcasting in the Kurdish language, more freely than other Kurdish parts. However, this freedom diminished in 1937 because the Kurds supported political and military attempts to deprive Syria of the Mandate French (Hassanpour et al 1996). The importance of Kurdistan increased during the Second World War because of its geographical location and political and economic considerations. The French attitude towards the Kurds changed in a positive way. The French mandate authorities allowed the resumption of journalistic activity and provided a radio programme in Kurdish (on Radio-Levant, 1941-1946). The main purpose of the operation of this radio was to use it for propaganda (Tejel 2008).

The second stage in the history of the Kurdish national movement and media began with the establishment of the first Kurdish party in Syria, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) in 1957. This political party issued his newspaper DANGI KURD (voice of Kurds 1959-1960). This newspaper benefited from the experience of some Kurdish writers, poets and intellectuals, such as Cegerxwin and Qedri Can to focus on issues of nationalism, self-determination and oppression, providing a foundation for the development of the Kurdish political movement (Paasche 2015). This step stimulated the national and cultural awareness of individuals and the Kurdish community towards achieving legitimate national and political goals.

Beginning in the mid-1950s, the political situation changed, and Syria declared independence and came out under the French mandate. The Syrian Republic became independent in 1946 following the end of World War II. The Syrian Arab government seized and destroyed all the Kurdish newspapers, magazines and other publications. Schools built throughout Kurdish areas were banned from teaching and learning in the Kurdish language, Arabic curricula were imposed. Arabic became the official language of the state in all fields of education, politics and culture. Since then, Syrian authorities have banned, and dispersed gatherings called for Kurdish minority rights or

celebrating Kurdish culture, as well as the detention of leading Kurdish political and intellectual activists and their ill-treatment in custody. The Kurds as the biggest non-Arab minority in Syria, came to be seen by Syrian central government, as the most threatening contender of Syrian unity (Paul 1991; Hassanpour 1996).

Syrian authorities have discriminated against the Kurds for fear that they might seek self-determination. Many were denied citizenship under a controversial law in the early 1960s. In 1962, according to a central government decree, many Kurds were stripped of Syrian citizenship. A central government decree (No. 93) of 23 August 1962 ordered a census of the population in Jazeera, this exceptional census stripped Kurds of their Syrian citizenship. The Syrian state has long denied the Kurds basic human rights. Many Kurds were registered as foreigners in their homeland. Many became stateless under this unfair law. These stateless Kurds lived in a legal vacuum and were deprived of the basic human rights such as linguistic, political, and other human rights. It was one component of a comprehensive plan to Arabize the Kurdish areas northeast of Syria along the Turkish-Syrian border, which began by the Syrian regime and lasted for several decades and caused a negative ethnic, political, social and economic impact on the Kurdish society (Human Rights Watch 1996; Sinclair and Kajjo 2011).

In 1963 the Baath party came to power following a coup d'état on March. After the Baath party came into power, the Arabisation, and thus suppression of the Kurds, was intensified. The Baath Party regarded the Kurds as a real threat to Syrian Arab unity (Tejel 2008). The repressive policies adopted by the Syrian government against Kurds led to the disappearance of the press related to the national and political movement of Kurds in Syria. On November 6, 1970 Hafez al-Assad seized power after leading a coup. During the time of the Assad regime and his son Bashar, there have been many changes in the Baath party's dealings with the Kurdish people, sometimes permitting the formation of organizations and even the Kurdish parties and issued some Kurdish newspapers on condition of subordination to the central authority and not addressing national issues such as the self-determination of the Kurds in

Syria (Allsopp 2015). At this stage, the Kurdish writers took upon themselves the task of spreading and developing Kurdish culture and literature through the issuance of some literary magazines, which focused on the issues of the Kurdish language and literature. Some Kurdish literary journals appeared such as: Gulistan (1968), Rojhalat (1978-1982), Galawej (1979-1997), Aso (1992-2010). Some newspapers were also issued later such as Deng (1995), Roshnibir (1995-1997), Newroz (1995). The Baathist regime in Syria allowed the Kurdish parties opposed to Turkey and Iraq to operate politically within its territory, for example in 1975, Jalal Talabani announced from Damascus that his Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). After the military coup in Turkey in 1980, Syria offered refuge to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leadership as part of a balancing strategy against Turkey (Gunter 1992; Sinclai and 2011). The entry of the members and leaders of these Kurdish opposition parties to Syria's Kurdistan has had a significant impact on the development of the Kurdish media in Syria, although the movements of these parties are limited and monitored by the Baathist regime.

The period of the 1990s can be considered the Golden Age of the Kurdish media in Syria, where many newspapers and magazines have been published despite the existence of political pressure and censorship by the Syrian regime on Kurdish publication. The pressure on the Kurdish press intensified after the uprising in Qamishli in March 2004 (Caves 2012) until it reached the prohibition of several Kurdish newspapers and magazines by the Syrian government. This situation continued until the Syrian uprising in 2011.

The Syrian uprising in 2011 was accompanied by the birth of a new generation of Kurdish media outlets differed significantly from the Kurdish media during the Baathist rule. As the civil war in Syria continues and since the withdrawal of Syrian regime forces in 2012 from the most Kurdish areas (Rojava), Kurdish parties formed The Regions of the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, formerly known as Cantons. The Afrin, Jazira and Kobanî cantons were first established under the Constitution of Rojava in January 2014. In March 2016, the Shahba region was organized, however it was later formed into a canton of the Afrin region (Cemgil and Hoffmann 2016).

In general, Kurdish journalism in the Kurdistan of Syria was always subject to the repression and control of Baath and Assad rule. Repression of Kurdish identity went farther than repression of Kurdish media to include all cultural expressions. The gain by Rojava of a de-facto autonomy that had kept it in a sort of neutral position in the struggle between the Assad regime and other forces led to the establishment of Kurdish media outlets and attempting to represent the region's diverse communities (Badran and Angelis 2016).

When the Kurds gained a certain level of autonomy, Syrian Kurdistan (Rojava) saw the emergence of new media outlets such as Ronahi TV, new journals and newspapers such as Welat, Buyer and Shar, and radio stations such as Arta and Walat and the Ara News agency (Badran and Angelis 2016). The first and second years of the Syrian uprising witnessed a remarkable revival of the Kurdish media and turned towards specialization. The secret and unofficial party newspapers began to appear publicly and spread among the masses. The opening of freedom led to the increase of media outlets, news websites and social media. The Syrian uprising that erupted has basically changed the Kurdish media landscape in Syria. Kurdish journalists started to produce news and content on a large scale and distribute it via their own news websites, social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook (Ahmad and Hamasaeed 2015; De Angelis 2011). Today, the Kurdish media in Rojava is witnessing a continuous change in technology and content, and citizens can participate in the media outlets in general and the online journalism in particular. There is a good relative area of freedom of speech and political participation.

2.3.2.3 Kurdish media in Turkey (Northern Kurdistan)

During and after the First World War, Istanbul made a considerable shift upon the arrival of the British army and there was a kind of freedom at all levels. On the other hand, the Kurdish struggle during the war helped raise the national awareness among its people like the other nations living under the control of the Ottomans. This awareness strengthened the right of self-determination more and more in the mind of the public and especially in the mind of the educated. This, in turn, became a contributing factor for moving to a new stage

of freedom struggle after the war (Ahmad 1998). Kurdish intellectuals and social figures began to establish Kurdish cultural committees in the major Kurdish cities of northern Kurdistan. The Kurds in Istanbul formed political and professional groups and organisations such as Kurt Terakki ve Teavun Cemiyeti (Kurdish society for progress and mutual aid) and Kurdistan Taali ve Terakki Cemiyeti (Society for the elevation and progress of Kurdistan) etc. (Shamzini 1998). The aim was to achieve the Kurds' demands of freedom and the right of self-determination. As a result of this cultural and political mobilization and British support for the establishment of an independent Kurdish state, the Kurdish issue was presented at subsequent international conferences such as the 1920 Sevres Treaty, in order to secure guarantees of political and cultural rights through the declaration of an independent Kurdish state. All these attempts failed because of the non-fulfilment of promises by colonial powers at the time.

The Kurds did not enjoy their national, political and cultural rights under the Ottoman Empire, but the Kurds' hostility and deprivation of their rights emerged remarkably with the emergence of the Republic of Turkey. On 29 October 1923, the Republic of Turkey was proclaimed, and Mustafa Kemal became its first president. Kamal Atatürk, although initially allied with the Kurds and promised to fulfil their national and political demands, in the end did not keep his promises and adopted a strict policy against non-Turkish people, and entered into a conflict with other nationalities in Turkey, especially began to suppress the Kurds. The nascent Turkish state was constructed as a Turkish ethno-national state and sought to homogenise its ethnically and religiously diverse population (Özcan 2006: 86). The raising of the conflict and the tension between Turks and Kurds in the new 'Turkish nation-state', has been shaped during the struggle for 'Turkish National Independence' by Atatürk (Özcan 2012). From the 1920s onwards, the relations between the Turkish state and the Kurds were very bad, hostile and oppressive.

From 1925 when the uprising of Sheikh Said Piran started, until 1938 when the massacre of Dersim, a Kurdish city, took place, there were at least 28 Kurdish local, regional or national uprisings and revolutions broke out in

Kurdistan against the tyranny and suppression of the Turkish authorities. Three of them were 1925, 1930 and 1937. They were large revolutions (Loizides 2010). The 29th revolution started so late by PKK. Kemal's followers, such as Ismet İnönü second President of Turkey (1938) and interior Minister, Şükrü Kaya (1934) similarly argued for the establishment of one monolithic nation and they continued their former president's approach to anti-Kurds and oppressing the non-Turkish populace. Şükrü Kaya, argued for the emergence of one nation state to replace the existing ethnic differences (Arslan 2015).

However, after Mustafa Kemal won, all those activities stopped under pressure and threat, yet several newspapers and magazines were published at the time. Nearly all early publications were short-lived, and many were suspended or shut down by the Turkish government. Kurdish journalism experienced ups and downs due to political and military periods and what the invaders did and hard times that Kurdistan went through in every historical stage. It continued to intermingle itself with the Kurdish national movement, it reflected the movement's temporary achievements as well as failures. It also integrated with the movement's development enriching its contents and new relationships with other locations where Kurds from other parts of Kurdistan existed. Repressive policies of the Republic of Turkey led to the obstruction and retardation of Kurdish media and culture in northern Kurdistan, practically, from 1924 the Kurdish language was banned (Chaliand and Black 1994). Some scholars (Hassanpour 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas and Bucak 1994; Arslan 2015) argue that the Turkish governments during the last century have committed a cultural and "linguicide" or "linguistic enocide" against the Kurdish nation via prohibiting their language and preventing it to develop into a full language used in education and media. Over the last century, Turkish nationalist elites (Kemalists) systematically suppressed the Kurdish language through what is collectively termed the Turkish language reforms. On July 12, 1932 the Turkish Language Institution (Türk Dil Kurumu, TDK) was established. It is the official regulatory body of the Turkish language, founded by the initiative of Atatürk, which was a part of their goal of building a homogenous nation-state of Turkish speakers. Under the Turkish state,

Kurdish language had suffered the long repression. They have a various “Turkification” strategies to achieve their goals such as banning the Kurdish language, the denial of the existence of the Kurds, changing the names of towns and villages, the forced re-settlement of Kurds and the assimilation of Kurdish children (Cemiloglu 2009).

The use of Kurdish—along with other languages—was prohibited in teaching as was its public use. By 1930, publishing in languages other than Turkish was prohibited by an act of parliament that was heralded under the slogan of “Citizen, Speak Turkish!” (Vatandas, Türkçe Konus!). The Kurdish names of towns and villages in southeastern Turkey were also changed to Turkish (Panico 1999: 92).

Between 1938 and 1984, there were some Kurdish attempts by a number of Kurdish intellectuals or some little secret Kurdish groups which published some newspapers and periodicals, however, none of these attempts was serious. Scholars such as Hamit Bozarslan (2012), Ramazan Aras (2013) refer to this period as the "silent period". PKK, which was officially established in 1978, and started its armed operations in 1984 in the towns of Eruh (Sirt Province) and Semdinli (Hakkari Province) in the south east Turkey (Casier and Jongerden 2011).

So far, the conflict has not ended despite the announcement of a cease-fire and truce from time to time. The PKK grew up and became the first Kurdish armed party to fight for the rights of the Kurds in Turkey, thus has become the main cultural, national and social party on which the Kurds depend on and give their support to (Yeğen 2015). After years of struggle, the PKK had turned into a huge military organisation and hard started working as a political power that operated newspapers and TV channels mobilising thousands of Kurdish and other civilians in Turkey areas and Europe countries. Kurdish intellectuals and journalists have resorted to European countries to issue newspapers and working on Kurdish media. The Kurdish print media operated in Western Europe outside the control of the Turkish state. However, these attempts were

relatively minor. The great shift in the Kurdish media scene has taken place in 1995, when a powerful instrument was added to this arsenal, the satellite television station MED-TV, which beamed programs to the Middle East and Western Europe and a large part of Asia (Hassanpour 1998; Van Bruinessen 2000). MED-TV was able to convey a Kurdish voice to the Kurdistan of Turkey and to address important political, cultural and social issues for the Kurdish community, which was deprived of reading Kurdish newspapers and watching Kurdish television channels long ago. For example, in the months after the opening of Med-TV, Lord Hilton of the British House of Lords (Sinclair and Smets 2014) visited the Northern Kurdistan, he considered opening this TV channel as “a new window on the world for the Kurds there who had faced “cultural starvation”. Since 1996, the Turkish authorities had to resort to European states in the NATO alliance to persuade them to close the Kurdish media channels, especially television channels such as Med-TV, Medya-TV and Roj-TV, broadcasting licences were withdrawn in France and Poland to shut down Med-TV.

With its electoral victory in 2002, the AKP won sixty-five percent of seats in the Turkish parliament, and thus the AKP became the first party in almost two decades to rule Turkey without coalition partners. The AKP has made some Constitution adjustments. Regarding the Kurds, in August 2002, the Parliament ended the ban on Kurdish-language broadcasting (Smith 2005). The most important reform came when the Parliament deleted the following sentence from Article 26 of the Constitution: “No language prohibited by law shall be used in the expression and dissemination of thought.” This provision had banned the use of Kurdish, as Kurdish was a “prohibited language.” Changes have also been made in the legislation on broadcasting and the publication, paving the way for the publishing and broadcasting in the Kurdish language in a very narrow and limited range. In 2003, the Turkish Supreme Board of Radio and Television (RTUK) drafted the regulation on “Radio and TV Broadcasts in Languages and Dialects Traditionally Used by Turkish Citizens in Their Daily Lives.” (Cemiloglu 2009). Then, by 2004 the state-run radio-television institution TRT (Turkish Radio Television) inaugurated broadcast in the Kurdish language broke the over-eighty-year blind denial

tradition (Özcan 2012). At the beginning of 2009, broadcasting in Kurdish language via a state-owned channel (public broadcasting agency TRT) started, TRT6 was the first 24-hour Kurdish language television channel broadcasting inside Turkey. In January 2015, the channel was renamed to (TRT Kurdi). Considering the long repression Kurdish language had suffered under the Turkish state, it was quite puzzling to see Kurdish broadcasting via its kind state-owned channel that targets a Kurdish audience in Northern Kurdistan. However, the launch of an all-Kurdish channel in Turkey for the first time has been regarded as a highly symbolical and propaganda event. Many Kurdish activists and politicians have evaluated TRT-6 critically "while its symbolic significance is recognized, the channel is regarded as an assimilation tool of the Turkish state, obscuring the work that remains to be done in terms of human rights for Kurds" (Smets 2016: 12).

With AKP coming to power in Turkey under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, there have been some developments in the Kurdish language policy in Turkey, and the government has taken some reform efforts towards the Kurds as part of the EU's candidacy for the country. However, that whilst looking good on paper, did not really have much impact, and Kurdish speakers in Turkey are still systematically denied their basic human and linguistic rights (Zeydanlıoğlu 2012). After a few years of these procedures to resolve the Kurdish issue in Turkey, Turkish governments have resumed strict policies against the Kurds. Arrests began for prominent Pro-Kurdish parties leaders after they achieved significant results in the parliamentary and local elections in Turkey in recent years. On August 29, 2016, Turkish police raided the office of Azadiya Welat, the Diyarbakir-based only Kurdish language daily newspaper and detained at least 23 journalists, six of whom were later formally arrested. The paper was one of those shut down entirely via emergency decree on October 29, 2016 (Kaczorowski 2017). In Turkey, within the spread of digital technology, Kurdish online journalism has entered the local media landscape. The diffusion of several kinds of newspapers online in Kurdish has contributed to the creation of a relatively appropriate room for Kurdish journalists to work more freely to address Kurdish audience. Unfortunately, Turkey's telecommunication directorate blocked hundreds of

Kurdish and opposition news outlets on the internet, approximately, more than 114,000 websites were inaccessible as of November 2016, up from about 40,000 in 2013 for different reasons (Yesil et al 2017). Over the past few years, Turkish authorities restricted internet access for millions Kurdish residents in the Kurdistan areas (House 2017).

The Turkish authorities have begun to crack down on public freedom, in particular after a failed coup on July 15, 2016, in which a rogue faction of the Turkish army attempted to overthrow the government. This became an excuse for Ankara to declare a state of emergency on July 20, allowing the Council of Ministers (cabinet), chaired by Erdogan, to issue decrees without parliamentary or judicial oversight. Since then, the government has repeatedly suspended access to social websites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and WhatsApp on national security grounds. At the same time, ongoing tensions between the Kurds and Ankara resulted in the arrest of parliamentarians, mayors, and officials from the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP). The government has arrested tens of Kurdish journalists, political activists, and ordinary citizens.

Chapter Three

Kurdish media in Southern Kurdistan

3.1 Kurdish media in Iraq (Southern Kurdistan)

When the Kurdish government collapsed in its first round, London appointed a number of political officers in Sulaimani. For example, Major Soane was appointed as a political governor in Sulaimani after the first putting an end to the first revolt of Sheikh Mahmood at the end of spring 1919 with the aim of threatening people on one hand and gaining their trust on the other (Ahmad 1985).

As he was appointed, Major Soane brought a small old typing machine to Sulaimani, which is considered an important event and a key shift in the journalistic and educational life of the city in particular and in the whole Kurdistan in general. This brought newspapers out to light. The machine was used to type official books and letters of the government during the English administration and at the time of Sheikh Mahmood's administration, and after that during the 1940s. In fact, the machine became a building block for the school of journalism in Sulaimani (Amen 2004).

The English and its allied army (including the Assyrians and Arabs) attacked Kurdistan; they reached Sulaimani on 19 July 1924 and appointed one of the British officers as a governor for the city. The English ruled the city again until the city was annexed to Iraq as a governorate and the royal government appointed a governor to it who took office on 7 March 1925 (Salih 2003). *Bangî Kurd* (The Call of the Kurd) was the first Kurdish magazine to be published in Iraqi Kurdistan on 8 February 1914 by Cemaleddin Baban (Syan 2016). After merely five issues, the magazine has stopped publishing because of the outbreak of the First World War and the deterioration of political and economic conditions that affected all aspects of life in the region as a whole (Omer 2001). It can be said that the publication of this magazine is the beginning of the Kurdish press in Iraqi Kurdistan and since then until the modern stage in the Kurdish press, a hundred newspapers and magazines have been published in

the Kurdish language in this region, To illustrate, Figure 6 shows how the number of Iraqi Kurdish periodicals grew within the decades from 1910 through to 1990.

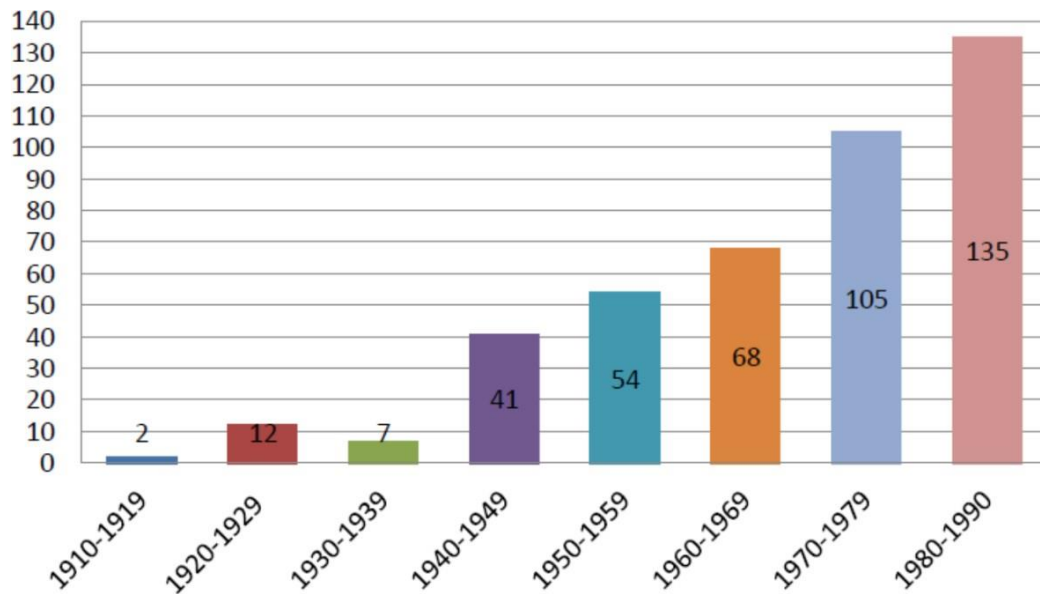


Figure 3.1 The development of Iraqi Kurdish periodicals, per decade from 1910 to 1990 in Iraq. Source: Syan (2017: 32).

Since the end of the Ottoman rule, Iraqi Kurds have tried to benefit from the press to gain their political, cultural and civil rights in different periods and until now. They have faced many indispensable obstacles and difficulties (Al-Deen 2005; Zanger 2001). With the emergence of every movement or political and cultural gathering, there was a Kurdish press, albeit not upscale and consistent in quality and content. Iraqi Kurds were noted to have used the power of the press' platform in their struggle in the last years of the Ottoman Empire toward the end of World War I, an effort that continued through the years of the monarchy. The successive regimes in the post-1958 Republican period in Iraq attempted to destroy Kurdish identity in the north, a region that now has about 5.2 million residents. (Relly et al. 2015).

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Kurdish press entered a new phase, despite the lack of necessary material and human resources in the field of journalism. After the WW1 began, and to achieve Britain's goal to invade parts of the Ottoman Empire (the Sick Man), Britain attacked Mosul after it had already controlled both Basra and Baghdad. It continued its invasion as it took control of Kirkuk on 25 October 1918 and finally the city of Mosul on 10 November 1918 during which the British army completely controlled the southern Kurdistan putting an end to the reign of the Turks (Salih 2003). A Kurdish government was formed in the southern Kurdistan under the leadership of Sheikh Mahmood Hafid (Baban 2006), in other words, following the end of the Baban Emirate in Sulaimani in 1851, the Kurds were able to form another government in Sulaimani. Britain recognised that government stated by its representative Major Noel at a grand party held for that occasion in Sulaimani on 17 November 1918. This time period ended by the end of the WW1, as the British army entered Istanbul, the invasion of Mosul and then the formation of the Kurdish government by Sheikh Mahmood with the direct control of the English, until Sulaimani became an administrative governorate and annexed to the newly formed Iraqi State (Salih 2003). By the time Sheikh Mahmud Barzinji declared himself king of Kurdistan in 1922, over an area that included the city of Sulaimania and its environs, he had already fought dozens of battles; some alongside the British against the Ottomans, others against the British alongside the Arabs, and then several more against the Arabs.

Since the arrival of British forces in Iraq and even in subsequent periods, the Iraqi government and the British mandate in Iraq did not allow the publication of any Kurdish newspaper because they believed that the issuance of Kurdish newspapers would stimulate the Kurdish national consciousness and urge them to fight for independence and declare a Kurdish state (Hassanpour 1996. Syan 2017). As mentioned earlier, Sheikh Mahmood established a Kurdish government and Britain recognised it, but after a short period of time and following the political changes occurred in the area as well as in the world, the direction of Britain's policy towards the Kurdish government changed (Mahzouni 2008). This led to a revolution in Sulaimani and other areas under the control of Kurdistan government. However, after an imbalanced fight in

terms of number and war equipment between the British army and the Kurdish revolts in *Darband Bazyan* on May 18 (known as *Barda Qaraman* war), 1919 the British army captured Sheikh Mahmood wounded and then put an end to the revolution. Thus, the English began ruling Kurdistan directly. We don't find any newspapers published by Sheikh Mahmood's government between 17 November 1918 and 18 May 1919 because there was not typing machines neither in Sulaimani nor in its surrounding areas (Amen 2004).

Major Soane, Smith and other English governors realised that their policy of terror was not working, thus they reconsidered the way they treated Sheikh Mahmood and brought him back from his exile in the Indian island of Andaman where he was taken after his arrest. However, before his arrival in Sulaimani, a political group was formed upon the approval of the English political governor under the name of Kurdistan Group (Bawar 1998). The group's leader was Mustafa Pasha Yamulky and it published a newspaper called Call of Kurdistan (*Bangi Kurdistan*). The English governors and employees moved to Kirkuk on 5 September 1922 and formed a council to administrate official affairs called People's Assembly (Bawar 1998). Sheikh Mahmood arrived in Sulaimani on 30 September 1922, and after a while he formed his government for the second term (9 October, 1922-3 March 1923). However, the political situation changed which resulted in disputes between Sheikh Mahmood and the British Army. The British forces attacked the revolts and as such began bombing Sulaimani and its surrounding with the most modern planes of that time. As a result, the Kurdish forced moved to *Surdash* and the English forced entered *Sarchnar*, which was a close area to Sulaimani, on 16 March 1923, but they were forced to retreat to Kirkuk again on 17 May 1923, and Kurdistan government was formed again in its third term on 30 May 1923 until 19 July 1924. (Amen 2004).

As the southern Kurdistan was annexed to the Iraqi State, Britain committed the government to recognise the Kurds' rights, thus the Iraqi government passed a law called the law of regional languages on 23 March 1931 (Amen

1999). This showed the government's recognition of some cultural rights of the Kurds like publishing newspapers and magazines in Kurdish. In fact, a number of Kurdish newspapers and magazines were published upon the official agreement of official bodies in the cities of Kurdistan and Baghdad. However, the law was drafted according to the law of publication drafted by the Ottomans in 1909 and was valid until law of publication number 82 in 1931, law number 57 in 1933, and law number 24 in 1954 were issued (Farhadi 1988). The government used the laws to suppress the voice of opposition and that created a very difficult time for journalists, a condition continued until 14 July 1958 when the situation changed from the beginning. Moreover, there was a practice of secret journalism expressing politics of Kurdish parties and groups as well as Iraqi opposition parties.

The newly formed Iraqi government ignored the Kurds' rights, it was constantly trying to erase their national identity and deprived the Kurdish areas from development and progress. Kurdish armed forces fighting against both governments of Iraq and Britain stopped, and the Kurdish cities were bombed with the most modern weapons at the time. As a result, intellectual Kurdish elite began organising itself and formed national organisations which led to the rise of secret journalism. The journalism incorporated itself with the difficult stages that it passed through and with the atrocities that the Kurdish nation experienced in a quest for its freedom cause until it (i.e. the journalism) became part of that cause. Thus, the secret Kurdish journalism started to emerge and within this context we can refer to a number of newspapers, journals and magazines (Amen 1999, Farhadi 1998).

After the coup of 14 July 1958, the nature of reign changed from monarchy to republic. Positive steps followed the change and the leaders of the coup issued a temporary constitution which its third article stated that the Arabs and the Kurds are partners in the country (Hamadani 2004). However, it did not define the nature of that partnership. Permission was given to several parties and they were allowed to publish their own newspapers and magazines.

Journalism revived, and it was regulated according to new laws, such as the law publications number 24 of 1963, law number 55 of 1967, law number 206 of 1968, etc (Bakri 2001, Omer 2003).

The period lasted from July 14, 1958 to 5 March 1991 during which Iraq experienced several administrations under the republican system. The period of peace did not last between the Kurdish parties and the Iraqi government. The revolution of September began, and Kurdistan experienced political and military turns as well, especially the accord of 11 March 1970 which lasted four years. This period represented a great turn in the history of Kurdish journalism as it enjoyed a noticeable revival. However, political and security conditions became worse due to the tension between the Kurdish freedom movement and the Iraqi government again, and their conflict started again on 11 March 1974. Following the consequences of Algeria Accord between Shah and Saddam on 6 March 1975 and failure of the revolution, Kurdish newspapers published by the Kurdish movement disappeared, except for the Kurdish newspapers and magazines published by the Iraqi government. Nevertheless, this period did not last long as another Kurdish revolution started in 1976 and new Kurdish and Iraqi parties formed, and they began publishing Kurdish and Arabic newspapers and magazines (Omer 2006).

Here we have to refer to the role that the Kurdish freedom movement played in developing and flourishing Kurdish journalism. Kurdish organisations and groups also had a profound effect on the development of Kurdish journalism. When the revolution of September 1961 and the new revolution of 1976 started, the revolts published newspapers and magazines on the mountain areas under their controls, we can refer to that as mountain journalism, and published others secretly in the cities, we can refer to that as secret journalism (Adbulla 2006).

The Kurdish political leadership considered establishing a printing press for the revolution. As a start, the Kurdistan Democratic Party established *Khabat* printing press, followed by others. When the revolution of 1976 started, a number of printing presses were established which published statements, books, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, etc. We should mention here that those printing presses were mobile and were hidden in caves, villages, valleys, etc (Ahmad 2008). While Kurdish journalism was born, grew up and developed in the exile, it intermingled with the Kurdish freedom movement at home. It became one of major element participating in the national conflict carrying the political message to raise national, patriotic and class awareness. It also refuted the much propaganda made by governments invading Kurdistan, in particular the dictator government of Iraq which was using everything to damage the Kurdish revolution and Kurdistan government. Freedom is considered one of the main elements of journalism and it is taken from the society's ethics and standards. This fact made the Kurdish journalism stick to the traditions and ethics of the Kurdish society, play a key role in promoting the politics of Kurdish freedom movement, contribute to directing people and encourage Kurdish people to gather around the revolution and cooperate with it. Kurdish media at this stage did not have a specified size and the number of its sources relied on its representatives inside the cities, and on the mountain.

3.2 Journalism at the time of Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government

Kurdish journalism did not witness any considerable development during the reign of Iraqi monarchy and Iraqi republic to deserve reflection upon; neither did it make any shift from a stage to another. Nevertheless, we can refer to it as a station of the historic stations of Kurdish journalism, because it is characterised by ups and downs following the emergence and development of the Kurdish freedom movement and the nature of political relations of government with the leadership of Kurdish movement negatively and positively (Ralam 2001, Rasul 2012).

Although newspapers had limited freedom, they were subjected to oppression and censorship, and they were forced to satisfy the authority and promote its politics and alleged achievements. The successive Iraqi administrations marginalised the Kurdish nation, listing them at the end of its concerns, and looked at Kurdish individuals as second-class citizens, something that negatively affected Kurdish journalism. Individuality in power led to the existence of one direction in the journalistic content. This resulted in the alienation of journalistic speech not only in Kurdistan, but all over Iraq (Bahadin 2005. Muhammad 2013).

Kurdish newspapers, except those published in the areas outside the control of the authority, were owned by the Iraqi government. The result was that they were seized by a group who supported the authority, and as such depriving the vast majority from expressing their opinions, thus they had to listen to others. Therefore, there was a lack of free expression despite the fact that the Iraqi government had recognised civil and political rights in accordance with law 193 in 1970 published in the official newspaper *Al-Waqa'i Al-Iraqiya* number 1927 on 7 October 1970, but it was only ink on paper. At that time darkness surrounded Kurdistan due to the policy of oppression, political pressure, terror and intellectual suppression practiced by successive Iraqi administrations. All those and other factors including external ones led to the uprising of March 1991 and the collapse of the dictator authority (Karim 2007).

The Kurdish uprising of March 1991 is considered a radical change in the individual as well as public life in all aspects including political, economic, social, historical, cultural, media, etc. It brought with it a spring full of work and hope. As the Iraqi government retreated from the Kurdistan areas in April 1991-26 October 1991, the Kurdistan Front took control of the affairs in the region. The region witnessed a series of significant political shifts including the election on 19 May 1992 leading to the formation of Kurdistan National Assembly (the parliament) and the first local government in Kurdistan region on 4 August 1992. Following that, authorities of legislation, executive,

jurisdiction and media were formed and organisations of political, social, economic, media, human and cultural issues were established. Laws and decisions were made in the interest of Kurdish people including every social groups and classes (Nuri 2000).

Kurdistan National Assembly issued the law of political parties in the region of Kurdistan number 17 of 1993 recognizing freedom of political and party activities. It also issued the law of press number 10 of 1993, the law of journalism number 4 of 1998 and the law of box pension for journalists number 13 of 2001 (Saadi 2005). According to this law, freedom of expression was recognised, which led to the publication of many newspapers and magazines, and the local government opened a number of TV channels, radio stations, internet, etc. so they express opinions of different political, profession and democratic parties and organisations. Private journalism was also born. In fact, this stage can be considered the most significant stage that the Kurdish society have witnessed, not only in the political and social history but also in the history of Kurdish journalism. That said, the path of the core message of Kurdish journalism remained unchanged; the national political message (Salih 2007).

As most of the Kurdish political parties established their own media organization, including local TV stations, at that time, the Kurdish media has updated itself in a new form and structure. In addition, many newspapers have appeared. Media scholars in Kurdistan began supporting the media as new institutions (Ismaeli 2015: 1).

Kurdish journalism experienced a radical change in this period in all aspects including form and content. It covered quality and quantity in terms of staff, technology, directing, etc., various channels: visual, audio, audio-visual, as well as in terms of press and means of communication. The change was related to the new political situation created by the uprising which, in turn, had

an impact on the media policy, the use of modern technology, the experience of world journalism and World Wide Web. It opened horizons, made people enter the international environment; writers published in world newspapers and followed developments at international levels (Ali 2009). This period is characterised by the development of private journalism which made considerable progress, in addition to this, specialised journalism published and improved by professional and democratic organisations such as: workers, students, engineers, women, divers, etc. (Saida 2005).

After the uprising, the administration of Kurdistan Front in the Kurdish-held areas, holded the election on 19 March 1992. Then, formed a regional government on 4 July 1992. Then the civil war broke out on 1/5/1994 (Shirwan 2007). It is worth to mention that during this period the law of publication and journalism was made. These made free expression to be legally recognized which is considered one of the main elements of journalism. Thus, this was viewed as a major shift of its kind in the history of Kurdish journalism, and it had a great effect on improving the work as well as living condition of journalists. Many newspapers and magazines were issued in this station:

Kurdistan experienced the media free-for-all sweeping the rest of Iraq after the 1991 Gulf war, when the region gained autonomy from Baghdad and a plethora of new publications burst onto the scene. The two main Kurdish parties, (the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), whose parallel administrations each govern about half of Iraqi Kurdish territory dominate the broadcast and print media. In addition, the KDP and PUK subsidize smaller political parties and consequently control their media operations, as well (Zanger 2004)

This period of autonomy in the region did not pass peacefully, because military conflict broke out between the two main parties, i.e. Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which ruined the economy of Kurdistan and disabled the process of rebuilding destroyed villages and developing human resources. Each party imposed economic sanction on the areas controlled by the other which, in turn, put a heavy burden on people financially and made many young people immigrate. It also drew other parties to the fighting, new political alliance and separations emerged and new parties were born (Rasul 2009, Saeed 2011). The media has become a platform for the civil war and a propaganda tool in the hands of the two ruling parties. The civil war lasted until the United States intervened and brought the two parties views closer to each other. They signed the Washington Agreement by the effort of the Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and a final agreement to stop inter-factional fighting. (Muhammad 1998, Sharif 2009).

This stage cannot be compared with the first stage as it features a whole range of publications in the form of daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly or annual newspapers and magazines. There appeared a great variety of newspapers and magazines expressing various views. For example: between 1975 and 1990 only 4-9 newspapers and magazines were issued annually, whereas only in 1991, 71 publications and periodicals were issued. The number of newspapers and journals published in 1991-1998 reached 400 (Tanya 1998). These publications were not restricted to the big cities, for there were 6 newspapers and 11 journals in the districts and sub-districts, and women publications reached 7. Table 1 shows the distribution of Kurdish publications (newspapers, magazines and periodicals) in 1991-1997 in the Kurdish cities totalling 375. The number of newspapers and magazines, officially licensed by the Ministry of Culture of the Kurdistan Regional Government, in Sulaimani in 2005 only reached 112. In 2007, i.e. from 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2007, 146 newspapers and magazines were issued. In 2008 until the current study is carried out, 722 newspapers and magazines obtained license from the Directorate of Media, Ministry of Culture, Kurdistan Regional Government (Amen 2008). These include: *Khabat*, *Kurdistani New*, *Aso*, *Hawlati*, *Awena*,

Alay Azadi, Regay Azadi, Rebazy Azadi, Yakgrtw, Komal, Rozhnama, Chawder, Khak, Gulan, etc. This stage is considered a golden age of Kurdish media compared to the past stages it experienced, and the main factor is related to the political situation that the uprising created; opening to the outside world as well as the use of modern technology.

In order to provide sketches of the media landscape in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, revealing the model of media ownership, it is necessary to present the Kurdish media through ownership, because the ownership of the media in Kurdistan often affects how it deals with news and various other topics that it presents to the public. In Southern Kurdistan, generally, there are four different forms of media with different strategies and policies regarding their ownership. The first is the ruling partisan media which ruling political parties possess theirs (KDP) and (PUK), both own dozens of newspapers, radios, television channels and news websites. The second type of media in Kurdistan is the opposition partisan media, owned by opposition parties, such as the Wisha Company of the Change Movement and Speeda TV of Kurdistan Islamic Union. The third is the private media or independent which is run by independent journalists or sometimes financed by some investors with an independent liberal background, such as Awene Newspaper, Hawlati Newspaper, Lvin Magazine and a few others. The fourth is the shadow media which are affiliated to Kurdish ruling parties or their leaders.

3.2.1 Partisan Media

Partisan journalism, mainly focuses on educating, instructing and persuading its audience of very certain political or sociocultural views. This partisan approach saw media outlets inform their audience what they needed to know from the point of view of a political party or a social movement (Broersma 2018). It usually focuses on topics of interest to the political party, disseminates positive news about the party and neglects all topics that harm the party's reputation. Generally, Partisan journalism is the journalism that speaks in the name of the party, its journalistic materials are shaped by specific features, it defends the party's ideology, and reflects the party's perspective on different

issues such as ideological, political, social, etc. It also accommodates a suitable constructive platform for an opinion and its counter-opinion (argument and counter-argument) as well as dealing with the people's problems. The success of party journalism mainly depends on adopting a clear approach towards national and international cases.

3.2.1.1 Ruling Party Media

Despite the density of publications in the Kurdistan region of newspapers and magazines and the increase of television channels and radio stations, most partisan media are owned by the two ruling parties in Kurdistan and other parties and official organizations. Traditionally, the partisan news media of the Kurdistan region has served as the faithful propaganda machine of the parties' elite. Two ruling parties in the region operate their own print, broadcast and online services, recognizing the power the media holds in legitimizing and stabilizing their authority. From mid-1990s until now, Kurdistan was split politically to Erbil and Sulaymaniyah zones, during the Kurdish civil war came under the control of two ruling parties, KDP and PUK respectively, which they have differing approaches towards press freedom. Regarding the Kurdish ruling parties, the media has become a main platform in political communication, they started to depend on their media for shaping the political attitudes towards national issues and strengthening the pillars of Kurdish power and improving the image of the party and its leaders. It is true that the Kurdish media improved numerically under the rule of these two parties. In Iraqi Kurdistan, for example, today there are dozens of newspapers, radios, satellite television channels and local channels and news websites but they all operate according to the ideology of the two Kurdish parties with which they are affiliated (Soz 2016). Surprisingly, these parties allocate enormous material resources and huge monthly budgets to their media outlets, provide them with new technology and give their journalists good salaries, "although they serve only the will of political parties, not the nation" (Chomani 2012).

According to Sirwan Gharib (Appendix 1) "this partisan press has continued its ideological approach that has long gone, so the number of newspapers, magazines and printed publications cannot be considered a measure of freedom of the press." At the same time, some journalists who work for these ruling political parties' media, say that the highly partisan nature of the Kurdish media may be its good point, considering that these parties were able to turn the Kurdish journalism from the backward stage to development, prosperity and progress by establishing new newspapers, radios and television channels, enabling journalists to working and improving their professional skills (Appendix 5).

Often, the role of partisan media in Iraqi Kurdistan is to provide and broadcast false and untrue stories or create fabricated news, in order to brainwash the Kurdish public, which has already suffered for decades under the influence of the Iraqi Baathist media (Isakhan 2008). Party channels allocate a large part of its material to attack opposition parties or voices calling for change and the eradication of administrative and financial corruption in the region. So far in the Kurdistan region, media outlets largely controlled by ruling political parties (KDP and PUK), it remains doubtful that this form of partisan media will be able to provide Kurdish citizens with independent information and data crucial for democratic decision-making.

In addition, if the Kurdistan region suffered from civil war in the nineties last century, today the war is largely carried out on television screens and news websites rather than the society. The media of the political parties have played a negative role regarding the country's political divisions. Partisan media created a sharp split in the Kurdish society towards crucial national issues, and these divisions emerged strongly in a referendum on the independence of the Kurdistan region in 2017. On 25th September 2017, independence referendum was held for the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and the Kurdistan areas outside the administration of the Region to become an independent state. Often, a fractured media also fractures the national identity (Kozol 1995;

Schlesinger 1997). for example, referendum and the associated aspiration for independence, potentially could have unified the different political parties in the Kurdistan region, but has cruelly exposed divisions (Park et al 2017).

...the history of Iraqi Kurdistan's media became a product of the region's political history. PDK and PUK have taken control over the media and now use it as an instrument of political propaganda for their advantage and interest. Partisan journalists worked with the politicians they supported in order to help promote their causes (Ismaeli 2015: 2).

In the Kurdish media landscape, there are different realities presented according to the ownership and political orientation of the channel. As a result, it erodes common space in the Kurdish society. The rise of Kurdish partisan media outlets changed how Kurdish citizens perceive the other party, partisan media made Kurdish people dislike and distrust the other party, even other independent media outlets. The slanted presentation of the news on Kurdish partisan outlets often led audience to perceive the other party more negatively (Levendusky 2013).

3.2.1.2 Opposition Party Media

Opposition partisan media in the Kurdistan region is considered an essential part of the media landscape. It is also financed by non-participating parties in the actual power in Kurdistan. Sometimes these parties get some government posts but without actual authority. Via their radio, television and news websites, they are effectively exposing the ruling parties' corruption and always encourage journalists to investigate political actors' wrongdoings (Hussein 2018). There are four Kurdish opposition parties in IKR, Goran movement, the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), the Kurdistan Islamic Group (KIG), and Nawai Nwe (NN, New Generation).

The Kurdish Islamic parties have no real influence on the political arena in Kurdistan, but the Movement of Change has become a serious influence on the entire political process. The KDP and PUK duopoly had not faced a serious electoral challenge from the smaller opposition parties such as Kurdish Islamic parties, up until the 2013 elections, it was only with the formation of the Goran party (Change Movement) that this first occurred (Romano and Gurses 2014). Later, the formation of Nawai Nwe (New Generation) has become another serious force joined the opposition parties since 2017.

In line with that in the same period and specifically after 2006, the emergence of a new Kurdish media corporation has changed the media landscape of Kurdistan region. After three decades of political actions and armed struggle in the ranks of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), veteran Kurdish politician Nawshirwan Mustafa Amin (1941-2017) decided to resign as the deputy to the leader of former Iraqi President Jalal Talabani's party in 2006. Following his resignation as of PUK, Amin established an independent media group, Wusha (Wisha) Corporation (Wisha Company for Media) in March 2007. In 2008, he founded the daily newspaper Rozhname, a website, an international satellite TV channel KNN, and the Wusha research center to serve the Kurdish issue in general. According to Zeidel and Baram (Zeidel et al. 2010), it seems that Jalal Talabani wished to neutralize Nawshirwan by diverting him to media and intellectual fields. However, Nawshirwan used Wusha as an effective tool for promoting his ideas regarding the radical political and economic reforms in the PUK and Kurdistan region in general. He had always been known for his critical voice inside the PUK and Kurdistan and he was known to be leading a wing in the PUK known as the 'reformists'.

In the beginning, Wusha Company started as a media organization independent politically and financially from the parties and governments, unlike the media on the arena of Kurdistan, which was either partisan or government, as it was known that the arena in Kurdistan and Iraq are free of independent media, which is "considered a great shortcoming for a country

that strives towards democracy and the free economy" (Aziz 2007). In the first interview after the establishment of Wsha Company, Nawshirwan sharply criticized the media landscape in the Kurdistan region and hinted to the monopoly of the Kurdish media by both Kurdish ruling parties which have usurped all media outlets, newspapers, radio and TV channels. According to Amin, it is impossible to build a democratic system or develop a free and solid economy in isolation from free and independent media.

There are some independent weekly newspapers in Kurdistan, but there is no independent media, which is what we are trying to achieve. I have said many times on several occasions that the Kurdish media largely imitate the former Baathist media, which was in turn imitating the media that prevailed in the republics of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe where the media was monopolized by the parties. It is now with the existing media in both Sulaymaniyah and Erbil. Each political party has its own media and therefore there is no independent media in its own right (Aziz 2007).

However, later in 2008, Nushirwan Mustafa launched a media war against the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan by writing a number of important critical articles. This led to the stage that eventually led to the announcement of the Change Movement in 2009, which was joined by many former reformist leaders and other intellectuals, academics and independent activists (Jaf 2017). Goran Movement was officially formed in February 2009 and held its first party congress in 2012. It participated in the July 2009 elections to the Kurdish Parliament on a platform calling for transparent government, an end to corruption and patronage politics, improved services, and a stronger judiciary (Dougherty and Ghareeb 2013).

From its inception of Wusha until the founding of the Change Movement, Wusha media, especially KNN TV, was unique in Kurdistan region in that it was the only news channel not under the direct control of one of the major political parties in the region. This it was the only televised media outlet at the time of its founding which could be considered semi-independent and objective in the selection of its material and reporting. One of the main ramifications of media control run by the ruling political parties in Iraqi Kurdistan is that it broadcasts only news about government activity and policies in a positive light. On the contrary, Wusha media has sought to provide a more balanced presentation of events and in-depth analysis of the region by addressing the negative aspects of the system, rather than simply highlighting the positives. With the passage of time and the participation of his political movement in political conflicts with other parties, Wusha Media transformed from semi-independent media to opposition party media.

3.2.2 Shadow Media

After the emergence of Hawlati in 2000 as a first daily independent Kurdish newspaper and the first free Kurdish media outlet, the two main Kurdish parties, namely KDP and PUK which monopolized all spheres of political and economic life, began establishing a number of media outlets to undermine and weaken the free and independent media. In the Kurdistan region of Iraq, these outlets are widely referred to as the "shadow media" as they claim to be independent but are subservient to their respective political parties (Chomani 2014). However, this pressure from the two ruling parties on the free media did not produce the desired results. Independent media, nevertheless, continued to flourish with outlets such as Awene newspaper and Lvin magazine.

This type of the media is indirectly affiliated with the ruling political parties. It is the non-independent form of the media in the Kurdistan region. It is a product of the ruling political system in Kurdistan, which monopolizes money and power and uses it to disturb the independent media. This media is funded in a

secret and indirect manner by the ruling parties, or by people with positions and high authority, called 'shadow media'. Journalists in these types of media usually boast of their independence but do not disclose their financial resources and are never harassed by authorities who always threaten independent journalists. They are linked to one of the ruling parties.

For years, the two ruling parties in Kurdistan have been buying independent newspapers, radios and websites, encouraging journalists to leave free non-partisan media outlets to work with partisan institutions to attack opposition and critical voices. They decided to create media platforms in the shadows, try to establish new channels to downplay opposition parties and maximize the achievements of the rulers. The basic problem created by this type of media is that it gets a lot of money from the two ruling parties and attracts journalists from other channels with the power of money and makes them leave the independent media. They obtained their operating permits because of their connections to the ruling authorities in Kurdistan (Rahim 2018).

The two main shadow media outlets in Iraqi Kurdistan in chronological order are Rudaw Media Network and Kurdistan 24 (K24): Rudaw secretly funded and financed by the Prime Minister of Kurdistan Nechirvan Barzani, nephew of the Regional President Masoud Barzani, and Kurdistan24 funded by Masrour Barzani, son of Masoud Barzani. They always refuse to acknowledge their ownership of their media channels, Rudaw and Kurdistan24, despite the channel's editorial policy being biased towards the Kurdistan Democratic Party, headed by Masoud Barzani. Both channels define themselves as independent, though most journalist circles in Kurdistan deny this (Ismaeli 2015; Soz 2016). Rudaw Media Network is one of the shadow media institutions in the region. It has adopted a professional slogan, but its coverage of electoral campaigns and other political events has lost its confidence. Rudaw television channel, was broadcasting the Democratic Party's campaign directly using party speeches as news material in its daily news bulletins. The speeches were mostly directed against party rivals. Most of the Democratic

Party's election campaigns were broadcasted from the Rudaw channel without covering the speeches of other party parties in the election campaign as much as they could reuse their information against Democratic rivals. According to Saeid (cited from: Qadir 2018), "the channels that are considered shadow channels were working to distort their competitors indirectly".

In fact, shadow media are more dangerous than non-partisan party labels because they work behind masks (Chomani 2012), often covering political or social events in the interests of the ruling parties that fund them. Although independent media have attempted to unveil these masks by focusing on their unclear funding sources, shadow media are still working hard to mislead the public and give their audiences fake information.

3.2.3 Independent Media

Independent media is not linked to partisan ideologies, it transfers the reality as it attempts to meet readers' interests, responding to people's legal demands, providing people with intellectual awareness and entertaining them. In doing so, it relies on the newspaper's owner and acts according to their plans. The privacy is its most general features and it relies on an independent bold view. This is a new experience in Kurdistan which is currently developing. It has been able to impose itself by providing the readership with what is new, and real and true news and information, and criticizing parties and governmental authorities, etc. (Hamza 2005).

From 1991 until 2001, KDP, PUK and other political parties dominated the media almost entirely, but the launch of Hawlati newspaper in 2001 marked the emergence of an independent media. This phase began in literary opposition movement, which was in the form of written opposition movement, the establishment of a free world, the formation of civic movements, and the emergence of popular protests. This can be noted in the writings and essays of a group of intellectuals and academics under the name Dimension Group

“Nawandi Rehend” which issued *Rahand* as a first independent Kurdish theoretical, analytical and cultural journal (alzeydi and sadiq 2012). Early in 2001, any media in Iraqi Kurdistan did not agree to publish a statement from left-wing intellectuals group, and as a result (Sirwan Gharib: Appendix 1), a group of independent writers and authors living in Kurdistan (mainly Sulaymaniyah) or abroad, among them were Asos Hardi, Kamal Rauf, Shwan Mohammad, Sardar Aziz, and Mariwan Qani, planned to issue an independent newspaper, out of the hands of political parties and governmental authority. They concluded a deal with Tariq Fatih, who then owned Ranj Press, in order to launch *Hawlati* (Citizen) from the PUK-dominated city of Sulaymaniyah, as a first independent Kurdish newspaper. They launched the paper with a handful of staffers and a \$3,000 investment. *Hawlati* quickly became the region’s most popular newspaper by criticizing the government and the ruling parties with a distinctly populist tone, and through the publication of many reports of corruption in the provision of services to citizens and revealed numerous files on the financial and administrative corruption and the lack of public services (Salih 2007). Since *Hawlati*’s launch, a handful of other independent and semi-independent papers have followed such as *Awene* (mirror) and *Ray Gishty* (public opinion), the region’s other leading independent newspapers. Asos Hardi, the first editor in chief of *Hawlati* stated that:

We felt that we needed to create such a media in order to be free to publish what we wanted, and to build a sort of bridge between the two administrations. We applied for the permit. No one wanted to display their hostility to this project. They thought that we would not make it financially. Some were also betting on internal strife, others that we would fall into the grip of a political party we would have joined. None of that happened. We managed to stay together, despite our differences of opinion (Borders 2010: 5).

Beginning with the *Hawlati*, a number of independent Kurdish media outlets emerged in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. This trend rapidly accelerated in

Kurdistan after the ouster of Saddam Hussein in April 2003, where there was more press freedom than in surrounding regions. However, media was under the control of the party and government authority, and as such the Kurdish media entered a new stage. In general, Kurdish media transformed on three fronts: one driven by the Americans who made establishing a free press a priority such as Radio Nawa; second by some Kurdish independent journalists that had been cut off from the free marketplace of ideas under a partisan corrupt regime. The third was the semi-partisan media outlets that constituted by officials and journalists affiliated with the two main parties, but with new names and almost independently of their parties such as Xendan media organisation (Ricchiardi 2011). Through the provision of an alternative source of information outside party media, the new media outlets have spread rapidly in popularity, "provoking a backlash from a political elite unacquainted with critical independent journalism that has continued until the present day" (Walke 2015).

However, one way or another, the evolution and spread of independent media in the Kurdish scene did not lead to a reduction of authoritarian media. "In the years following its inception, the independent media never supplanted traditional party-affiliated outlets, but it did develop a formidable presence and forward momentum that greatly undermined the political establishment's control over information" (Walke 2015). During this period, a group of students with the independent tendencies at Sulaimaniyah University issued an independent student newspaper (Khwendny Libral) and played a prominent role in educating students and the publication of major press materials and boldly criticized the political power and spread the news about the numerous administrative and higher education corruption (Salih 2005). In general, this situation was not good for the ruling parties, journalists have faced many problems and some of them have been arrested and brought to trial (Ricchiardi 2011).

Later in 2005, Radio Nawa has become increasingly popular in the Kurdistan region; with funding from the United States. Radio Nawa is a 24-hour programme providing news, entertainment and music, which is produced in Sulaimani city and distributed via FM broadcast. The station broadcasts in Arabic and Kurdish across the country. Because of Radio Sawa's (Arabic US-funded Radio) overwhelming success in attracting audiences and new listeners, a similarly formatted service in Kurdish directed at Kurdistan is a high priority. Radio Nawa leads among Iraqi Kurds, whereas in a short time it ranked first in the Kurdistan region and nationally it placed second after state-run Radio Baghdad on the level of Iraq as a whole (Andary 2007). Radio Nawa has played an important role as an independent Kurdish radio station and made inroads into the Kurdish media industry, especially by highlighting themes and perspectives that are not represented in Kurdish official and partisan media. It addressed taboo topics, such as political and financial corruption, and allowed listeners to take part in live discussions via phone calls. In general, radio spreads the word to places that cannot penetrate with the other media outlets. Especially in a controlled media landscape, radio can overcome barriers. Kurda Jalal, head of Radio Nawa pointed out that the media in Kurdistan is extremely partisan and prone to propaganda (Butters 2006). There are no independent television stations in the region, and the future is grim for independent radio news, according to him "Kurdistan isn't suitable ground for a free media, If America wasn't here and if America wasn't funding us, the parties would move to shut us down" (Butters 2006).. A 2007 poll suggests that Radio Nawa was the most-listened to stations in a short period in Iraq (Andary 2007), it received the largest percentage (7.8 percent) of Kurdish listeners compared to other Kurdish radio stations such as PUK Radio (6.9 percent), KDP Radio (6.1 percent) and Yekgirtu Radio (5.3 percent). The Kurdish authorities tried to limit the influence of Radio Nawa on the media landscape and the political arena in Kurdistan, with numerous means, but it is clear unlike text documents such as newspapers and magazines, sound content is very difficult to control. According to Jensen (2017):

Radio remains the most dynamic and engaging mediums in the 21st century, offering new ways to interact and participate. This powerful communication tool and low-cost medium can reach the widest audience, including remote communities and vulnerable people such as the illiterate, the disabled, women, youth and the poor. Radio offers these communities a platform to intervene in public debate, irrespective of their educational level. It provides an opportunity to participate in policy and decision-making processes, and to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expression.

Hence, it played an important role in empowering audiences to fostering positive dialogue for change. It gives a voice to the Kurdish voiceless and served as a source for forbidden information's promoting public access to information.

Until the 2000s, the media in IKR were regarded as the propaganda tools by which their authoritarian parties maintained their power. However, after the appearance of some independent newspapers such as Hawlati and Awene and radio stations such as Nawa, some strongly believed that this new media could nullify parties' control over the media and become a sweeping power for democracy and civil society.

The independent press in the Kurdistan region entered a new phase with the start of the Nalia TV and Radio (NRT) Channel broadcast. NRT television started broadcasting from Sulaymaniyah as a first independent satellite channel not belonging to a political party or the Kurdistan Regional Government. It launched in space opposite the Kurdish media squadron and a source of a new tone, which others considered "anomalous" about the rhythm of their controlled and forced media, for this, after three days of the pilot broadcast, a group of armed men attacked the office of NRT Channel, completely burning it. In August 31, 2017, armed men entered the NRT TV

studio in Dohuk city, damaged the NRT logo on the roof, and threatened to set the office on fire (Park et al 2017). In addition, the Kurdish media landscape also includes a number of well-regarded independent media which have played an active role in reporting on sensitive issues such as financial corruption, nepotism and the misuse of power and public money (Isakhan 2008).

Nowadays, in Kurdistan, independent Journalists face the challenge of reporting on corruption of government, ruling parties, and leaders critically. Those both independent and non-independent journalists face difficulties getting information from governors and politicians about cases such as corruptions. Kurdish journalists who are too critical of ruling parties' leaders and authorities often have been subjected to blackmail, beating, arrest, torture and death threats, if not death itself. In the past years, it was easy to get a print license or to set up a radio or television station, but now the situation has changed. It has become relatively complicated. At the very least, establishment of an independent Kurdish media organization is required to obtain a license from the government controlled by both parties; a license which can be refused or revoked for any number of charges, thereby rendering the outlet illegal (Whitaker, 2003).

3.3 Conclusion

In general, the media developed in various forms in the Kurdistan region gradually, established several media organizations, mostly partisan and some of them independent, there are negative and positive aspects of the media landscape in Iraqi Kurdistan, as mentioned earlier. The big obstacle of the media independence lies in the control of political parties over financial resources and the failure to apply existing press laws. Independent journalists in Iraqi Kurdistan often face violence to report sensitive issues, such as rampant corruption, leaving many journalists with a difficult choice, either to flee the region or seek favoritism and protection from political parties. These dynamic forces independent journalists to choose between honest action and self-safety. It is still doubtful that the media will be able to provide citizens with independent information critical for democratic decision-making.

CHAPTER FOUR

LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Introduction

In the proceeding chapter, the focus of this research was identified and determined. This chapter provides an overview of the published literature relevant to the study of the digital media and online news websites leading to the increased attention to online news in general. The purpose of this chapter is to review existing literature and theories that are relevant to the research objectives and provide a platform for this study. This review begins with analysing the literature of this era, which underpins the research using website content analysis and qualitative research method presented in Chapter Four. It is then followed by some discussion and reviewing of the concept of interactivity, in particular, interactivity characteristics of online journalism and how it can be adopted into the research.

In the years of this research study, the digital media have witnessed a remarkable transformation and development in their reliance on modern communication technology, especially with increased use of the Internet. The adoption by media organizations and journalists of web publishing has become a major feature of today's media work. As a result, it is not easy for researchers to study all the factors of success and failure in parallel with the rapid development of technology and the wide range of uses.

First, this literature chapter endeavours to systematically review various studies on electronic publishing and online journalism literature, in order to provide the groundwork for the theoretical framework developed in this thesis. Second, this chapter is designed to examine the role of the objectives of online journalism and news websites through the interactive contexts, which corresponds to the role of practicing journalism based on the advantages of the Internet.

The chapter examines the concept of interactivity in the media, including its origins, dimensions, applications, and functions. Four key dimensions of

interactivity are identified and isolated to determine their relative effectiveness within Kurdish news websites. For this purpose, the chapter provides a full exploration of Kurdish news website characteristics through determining the dimensions of interactivity, which contributes to our knowledge of the role of news websites within different interactive contexts.

4.2 General background

From the middle of the last century to the present, the world has witnessed a tremendous revolution in the field of information and communication technologies. With the development of computers, telephone networks, information networks, satellite technology and the emergence of the Internet, modern and global medium of communication have emerged with unique technological capabilities which were not available in traditional media. Perhaps the most important characteristic of these modern communication technologies, is to possess the tools of interaction between the sender and the receiver. Interactivity is the most important feature of the Internet which makes it different from other communication tools. Web features include content rich media such as animation, audio and video etc. which create interactive communication model. Unlike the one-to-many news model used by traditional media such as newspapers, online journalism provides internet users more personalized or conversational content and makes them a key and effective part of the communication process (Williamset al 1988; Morris and Ogan 1996; Jakobovits 1997; Rafaeli and Sudweeks 1997; Fortin and Dholakia 2000). The focus of media and communication scholars has become on the interactivity impacts of these new technologies which has changed the style of communication between the participants of the communication process.

When studying and discussing interactivity, it is best to identify and present some assumptions that researchers relate to in their studies and definitions of this complex term. In everyday contexts, most people believe that it is not impossible to identify interactivity in media outlets and normally they have an intuitive understanding about interactivity. Within the communication literature, however, the conceptualization of interactivity in mass communication is not the same and has been a relatively contested undertaking (Warnick et al

2005). In general, researchers connect the term interactive to the nature of technological development in the field of science and communication, especially the Internet (Rafaeli 1988; Pavlik 1996; Wagner 1997; Downes and McMillan 2000) which would be a great approach to explicate interactivity concept in an effort to contribute to the terms theoretical foundation (Kiousis 2002). According to some scholars (Walther and Burgoon 1992; Williams et al 1988), the level of interaction varies with the way the information message passes, the medium has a strong depersonalizing effects on the level of interactivity, usually anchored in its ability to facilitate interactions same to interpersonal communication. Moreover, finding a special criterion and standard to determine the reasons why one communication medium more interactive than another medium appears to be somewhat ambiguous. In empirical literature and researches (Kiousis 2002), interaction was measured as an independent variable, they empirically examine the critical roles of interactivity as both an assumed independent variable to describe a medium and as a dependent variable gauging people's perception (Kayany et al 1996; Teo et al 2003). As Kiousis (2002 p352) stated, "a major limitation with some experimental inquiries is that a condition is often called interactive without considering multiple levels of the variable, let alone defining its meaning".

Like many vocabularies and concepts in the field of media and social studies, there is no complete consensus on measuring and determining what is interactivity. There is a lack of theoretical consensus regarding the concept. However, in the analysis of studies conducted on interactivity, the discrepancy and components and features that comprise the various definitions can be approximated in two ways, first, that interactivity levels rise and fall within a medium dependent upon people's perceptions (Newhagen et al 1995). Second, interactivity levels only fluctuate by altering technological properties (Schneiderman 1987). Rapid and Excessive Continuity in Information Technology makes scholars constantly monitoring the impact of the media on the recipient and changes in the nature of the communication process as a result of the change in media characteristics. This naturally generates a difference in views. It seems that the best way to collect variation on this concept is to survey most of the literature on interactivity and analyse them

according to the competence of scholars who talked about it. Analysis and focus on the concept of interactivity as the most distinctive characteristics of modern medium of communication must be in-depth and thorough, by reviewing some of literatures and definitions of the concept of interactivity and its models, whether one-dimensional or multi-dimensional. Accordingly, the purpose of this thesis is to employ the concept of interactivity in analyses and find a detailed explication of interactivity that could lead to some consensus on to how the concept should be theoretically and operationally defined. As one of the hypotheses, it is recommended to focus on the interactivity process as both a technological and psychological factor that differ with the changes of communication medium, communication contexts, and user's perceptions.

4.3 Interactivity and modes of the communication process

The weakness of the traditional media in interactivity has been a reason of interest for intellectuals and scholars in the mass media since the beginning of the last century, experts such as Brecht and Benjamin (Schultz 2000) criticized the limited one-way direction of the mass media, they were worried about the limited one-way direction of the new electronic media at that time. Their discussions were based on the role of the media in this period, especially radio in influencing the power of government and society towards democracy, democratization of western society. Brecht first formulated his theory of radio (Radio theory) in the latter part the 1920's, he thought the radio could serve as a democratic appliance of communication (Winthrop 2006). This theory was met with opposition by European fascism because it was considered a threat because it called for democratization and freedom of media.

Throughout the history of the advent of communication technology, the ongoing influx of new communication technologies, especially digital technology and the Internet, have redefined, reworked, and reinvented many concepts of mass communication and media (Kioussis 2002). The Internet has changed the nature of communication from the traditional one-way model to a multimodal model in which the basic elements of the communication process are met with a high degree of interaction, many-to-many communication (Hoffman and Novak 1996; Palmer 2002). Williams et al. (1988) argue the

basis of communication development is digitization of production systems, that the 'convergence' of new information technologies is skewing the traditional boundaries involved in traditional mass communication theories. New technologies enable content to travel across media boundaries.

The theoretical interest in the interaction and influence of mass media study and mass communication began around the mid-20th century with the emergence of cybernetic theories, when Norbert Wiener (1947) emphasised on the feedback in mass communication and coined the term cybernetics (Stromer 2004; Kwastek 2008). Wiener was less interested in the interactions between human beings than in analogies between the self-organization of the human organism and cybernetics" (Sommerer et al 2008: 16). Later in 1950, he explained the possibility of studying and investigating the impact of communication in society through analysing messages and communication processes. Wiener thought society could be understood through the messages and the communication medium, as he argued that:

society can only be understood through a study of the messages and the communication facilities which belong to it; and that in the future development of these messages and communication facilities, messages between man and machines, between machines and man, and between machine and machine, are destined to play an ever-increasing part (Wiener 1989: 16).

This was followed by other attempts on the influence of the medium and the message of communication. For example, Wilbur Schramm during 1940s focused on the impact of the communication medium and the message on his book "The process and effects of mass communication" (1954). The Schramm model views communication as a process that takes place between a sender (transmitter) and a receiver: there will be also a message, and a medium through which the message can be transmitted. He also mentioned the term of feedback. The concept of mass communication began to be discussed and analysed as a response to new opportunities to reach large audiences through the mass media: newspapers, radio, and film. Consequently, subsequent

attempts at framing the interactivity concept in the communication process inevitably draws from its roots in Cybernetic theory, as a basic communication model, the main variation between Cybernetic theory and the classic Shannon and Weaver (1949) model is its concentration on feedback in the communication process. Traditional mass communication models such as Shannon and Weaver model have followed a sender to receiver in one-way process, unidirectional, centralized approach to sending data and information. The receiver in the traditional media was hidden and relatively negative, the primary role was the share of the senders and they have been distinct. In traditional news media outlets, the receivers were relatively passive and relied on the information source to get messages (Chung and Nah 2009).

As an intermediary of mass communication, the Internet combines old and modern. Based on its technical characteristics, the Internet allows for communication that sometimes fits and follows traditional models. while, sometimes allows for altogether new configurations of communication (Morris and Ogan 1996).

Obviously, the view of the theorists of the communication process and their construction of non-interactive models, descended from the non-interactive nature of traditional media, they did not take an ever present, active audience for granted. Schultz (2000: 206) identifies some aspects that confirm the non-interactivity of the traditional media, compared with digital media. The most important of which is:

1. the old mass media produce their messages mainly independently from the audiences with autonomy'
2. traditional media do not keep a distinction between the creation of a message and the construction of meaning by those receiving it.
3. ordinary people have fairly limited opportunities to participate in the generation of mass media content.
4. Control of the communication process is done according to the sender's wishes, which is considered the first controller in the nature of the media contents addressed to the public.

Interactive is the most salient and most influential characteristic of new information technology. It has caused a considerable reassessment of communication studies (Rice and Williams 1984; Pavlik 1996; Rafaeli and Sudweeks, 1997). It is not limited to Internet technology only, but it has been proposed in other means of communication as well. Interactivity is existing in the operation of traditional media, too. "The phenomena of letters to the editor, talk shows on radio and television, listener participation in programs, and in programming are all characterized by interactivity" (McMillan 2002: 205).

Interactivity as a communication processes has been operationalized as a two-way communication (Rafaeli and Sudweeks 1997; McMillan and Hwang 2002; Liu and Shrum 2002). Reactive (two-way) communication is further down the road. In reactive communication, one side responds to the other side, it's a process-related, variable characteristic of communication settings, such as face-to-face communication, one side responds to the other side. As Rafaeli and Sudweeks (1997) point out, Interactivity is not only some specific characteristic of the medium of communication. But it is much more, "[i]t is a process-related construct about communication. It is the extent to which messages in a sequence relate to each other, and especially the extent to which later messages recount the relatedness of earlier messages" (Rafaeli and Sudweeks 1997).

The main criticism facing traditional models of communication is their focus on one-way transmission of a message from media outlets to public. Traditional communication models mostly focused on the one-way flow of programming sent by media sources over media systems to consumer audiences. Heeter (1989) briefly reviews the traditional perceptions of mass communication, starting with the Shannon and Weaver's model of communication, then focusing on the theory of magic bullet, then talking about the "two-step flow" theory of media influences, explaining the basics of selective attention and perception theory, and finally discussing the Westley and MacLean model, with its concepts of gatekeepers and feedback. Heeter (1989: 218) argued that:

"[m]ass communication was originally modelled as the one-way transmission of a message from source to receiver,".

Based on the issue of responsiveness, Rafaeli (1989), one of the most cited scholars on the subject of interactivity, thoroughly scrutinizes and presents the concept of interactivity, he clarifies the definition of interactivity and validates it as a variable. Rafaeli suggests his communication model related to interactivity, defining three levels of interactive communication, two-way (noninteractive) communication, reactivating (or quasi interactive) and fully interactive communication. He (1988: 111) states that: '[i]nteractivity is an expression of the extent that in a given series of communication exchanges, any third (or later) transmission (or message) is related to the degree to which previous exchanges referred to even earlier transmissions', and argues that not all communication processes are interactive and as a matter of fact most of new communication technologies are non-interactive:

1. Non-interactive (two-way communication)

According to Rafaeli, a two-way communication is a non-interactive connection, for example, when there are two-persons, person A and person B. Person A says something (M1) and person B replies with an answer not related to the first message (M2), because person B just felt like ignoring whatever person A said. Rafaeli believes this kind of communication is not interactive because there is a complete "conversation" between two people but with completely unrelated messages. This is actually reactive communication rather than interactive, there is no reference to topics previously discussed in the conversation.

2. Quasi-interactive (reactive communication)

Conversations where fairly recent content is discussed in answers. In this example, we have person B who is actually interested in what person A says (M1). When Person A asks (M1) a question and Person B replies (M2) by relating his/her answer back to earlier discussed topics, in other words, they can only recall the latest data:

3. Interactive (responsiveness)

In order for the communication process to be fully interactive, both participants must engage in conversation with memory of everything that has been said prior to the moment so that where a lot of previous content is discussed in present answers. For example, when Person A asks a question (M1) and Person B replies (M2) by relating his/her answer back to even earlier discussed topics. Figure 4.1 shows Rafaeli's model of interaction levels.

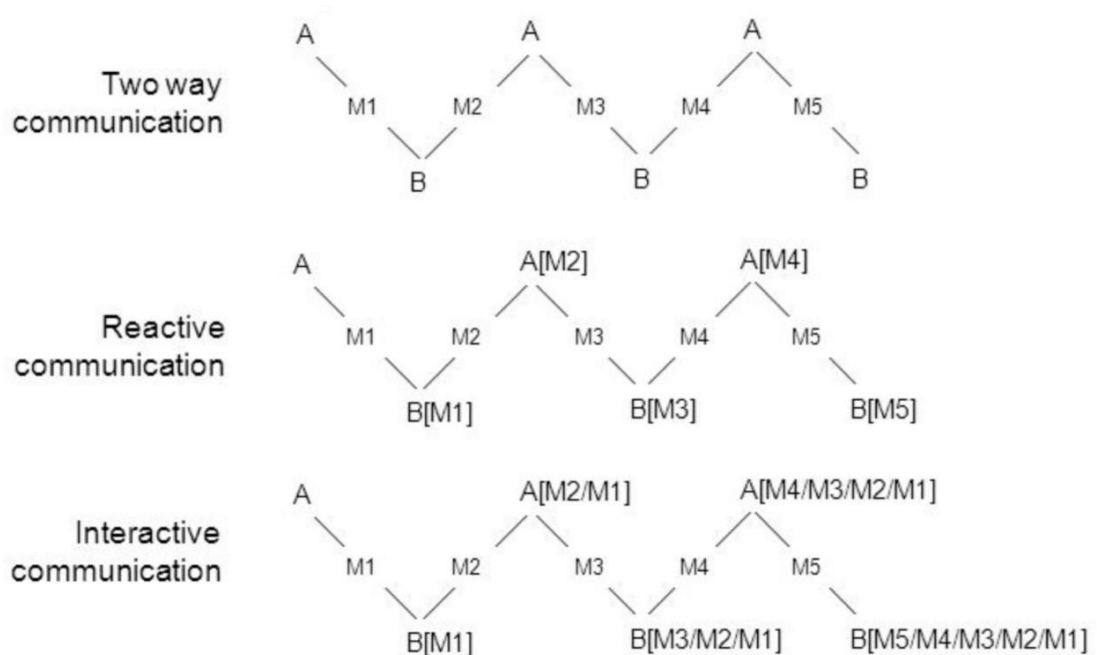


Figure 4.1 One-way, two-way, and interactive communication. Source: Rafaeli and Sudweeks (1997)

Traditional models of mass communication are not sufficiently interested in social attitudes where the interactive partner is actually present and sometimes ignore the role of the communication medium, which varies according to its technical capabilities and its interactive features (Jensen 1998). In the interactive communication model, both parties "sender and receiver" receive, decode and decrypt the data and information either intentionally or unintentionally. It interprets messages and decodes them. In both cases, the interference is accompanied by the stages of transmission and reception of

the message, which affects the efficiency of communication and its effectiveness. It is a bi-directional and interactive process, unlike linear or one-way communication models. The interactive communication model includes all active communication elements such as the communication medium, environment, feedback, and subsequent behavior. This is the nature of social relations, so that they are built on one another without end. It explains the nature of mutual influence when we interact with each other, because it depends on the relationship with the other party, and the more the other party is more skilled in communication the greater the chance of success. With his critique of old contact models, Heater identifies seven observations key points in his interactive communication model in emerging media systems:

1. Information is always sought or selected, not merely sent.
2. Media systems require different levels of user activity. Users are always active to some extent.
3. Activity is a user trait as well as a medium trait. Some media are more interactive than others; some receivers are more active than others.
4. Person-machine interactions are a special form of communication.
5. Continuous feedback is a special form of feedback in which behaviour of all users is measured on an ongoing basis by a source (e.g. videotext system) or gatekeeper (e.g. cable operator).
6. The distinction between source and receiver is not present in all media systems.
7. Media systems may facilitate mass communication, interpersonal communication, or both.

The key point that cannot be ignored is that interaction was present in human societies and in the traditional media before the existence of "information utilities" or the use of the term interactivity or interaction in social studies. In other words, interactivity existed in many forms before their producers really quite knew what they were about, despite the importance of having feedback idea in some contact models, which focuses on the reaction of the receiver

after receiving the message. However, this point does not make those models fully interactive, the model must consider the possibility of sending an independent and separate message from the receiver or sender to any direction (Heeter 1989, Alku, 2012). However, based on what was discussed above, the precise and comprehensive meaning of interactivity lies in how it is achieved. Setting up a fully interactive communication requires a good effort, probably not every communication in human society is interactive. Also, it becomes clear that not all non-interactive communication is incoherent. And the other point is that the interactivity does not depend on the characteristic of a medium or device or channel only but depends on all components of the communication process technology, form and content (Rafaeli 1988). Interactive communication model fundamentally challenges traditional models of communication and blurs the lines between mass and interpersonal, sender and receiver, and old and new media.

4.4 The Concept of Interactivity

Building further on the literature (e.g., Rafaeli 1988; Moore 1989; Ghose and Dou 1998; Jensen 1998; Massey and Levy, 1999; Heeter 2000; Schultz 2000; Kenny et al. 2000; Kioussis 2002; McMillan and Hwang 2002) any literary review of the interactivity is not easy, rather so cumbersome. The reason for this is that interactivity is a complex concept and the researchers attempted to define “interactivity” in a variety of different contexts, they have drawn up a wide range of definitions according to different academic and professional perspectives. This term is not only one that is vastly used but a concept of interactivity that has an intuitive appeal. Interactivity has remained a buzzword that many scholars use, but few define the concept, they have been making different categorizations to define and explain interactivity because it is a complex concept and it can manifest itself in various forms (Ghose and Dou 1998; Kenny et al. 2000).

For at past three decades, interactivity has been discussed and used in a variety of fields and several areas such as advertising, arts, information systems, communication, computer science, education, marketing, and

educational psychology. It has been a matter of debate and interest. Although the overall meaning of the term interactivity seems obvious on an intuitive level, the concept itself is so broad that it is difficult to define it in a simplified manner (McMillan and Hwang 2002). Most of scholarly examination interested in interactivity focused on the difficulty of defining one concept of interactivity, often there are complaints about ambiguity and overuse of the interactivity concept (Rafaeli 1988; Moore 1989; Heeter 2000; Schultz 2000; McMillan 2002) whereas a basic common understanding of the concept is urgent need and strongly required. As Rafaeli and Ariel (2007: 71) noted: “[o]ne of the interesting features of the concept of interactivity is its continued prominence in scholarly thought despite technological changes”. The difficulty of framing a unified concept of interactivity as that has been mentioned above should not be surprising, interactivity is a term only like a lot of other specialist terms, which is strongly related to the vast areas of daily life and usage. It takes on many and various meanings within diverse fields of sciences.

In other words, the meaning of the concept ‘interaction’ or ‘interactivity’ based on the context in which it is used (Jensen 1998) such a concept is called ‘multi-discursive’ and this refers to terms whose meanings or connotations vary significantly depending on their use within different discourses and uses. Concepts are said to be multi-discursive "when they can be found with significantly different meanings or connotations according to their use within different discourses" and "[t]he kinds of words that depend to a very large extent on their context for their meaning to be clear" (O'sullivan et al 1994: 190). Thus, interactivity can certainly be said to be a multi-discursive concept due to its different usages.

In the case of literary review of any subject, it is essential that the interpretation of the concept be a basic part, especially when the analogies and conceptions are the subject of a sharp dispute over the subject of the study, as was the case with interactivity (Kiouisis 2002). Perhaps the best way to obtain a comprehensive concept of interactivity is to analyse and present definitions based on the main focus of authors on process, features, perception, or combined approaches. In general, there are researches and studies on

interactivity from several perspectives, and of course different definitions of interactivity are presented through these studies by both communication and non-communication perspectives. Due to the diverse literature on the concept and in order to not fall into a thorny spiral, we focused primarily on the explicit definitions of interactivity rather than implied or tacit conceptions. We move away from the comprehensive survey of studies and choosing to set of readings to serve the goals of our research.

McMillan and Hwang (2002) categorized the definitions of interactivity based on interactive communication process, both show that scholars defined interactivity based on multiple processes, functions, and perceptions. Frequently, elements of direction of communication, user control, and time appear in their definitions of interactivity. Kioussis (2002) also classified the concepts and the definitions of interactivity based on communication and non-communication perspectives whereas, both of Mahmoud and Auter (2009) also summarized the definitions of interactivity into four areas: the medium, user perception, process, and the combined approaches.

4.4.1 Definitions that focus on process

The definition of interactivity from the process perspective depends on human activities via communication process, such as exchange, response, action, reaction, feedback, and participation as key dimensions of interactivity. In this perspective, it often indicates that interactivity is the basis of exchange (Haeckel 1998) and a style of control (Guedj et al 1980: 69) between audiences and advertisers, especially in studies that have been conducted in the field of commercial advertising, where it refers to interactivity as the degree to which a person actively engages in the processing of advertising through interaction with advertising messages and advertisers. Cho and Leckenby (1999: p163) defined interactivity as “[t]he degree to which a person actively engages in advertising processing by interacting with advertising messages and advertisers”.

Bezjian et al (1998) are focusing on user control and dialogue between consumer and firms, analysing how interactivity gives companies massive of ways of contacting customers, arguing that:

In these interactive systems, a customer can control the presentation order of the information, and unwanted options may be deleted. The consumer may request that the information sought be presented in comparative table format. The hallmark of all these new media is their interactivity-the consumer and the manufacturer enter into dialogue in a way not previously possible. Interactivity is the immediately iterative process by which customer needs and desires are uncovered, met, modified, and satisfied by the providing firm (Bezjian et al 1998: p23).

Rafaeli (1988) examined interactivity as a process-related variable and focused on the notion of control. In his definition, interactivity is predicated on the relatedness of sequential messages. He argued that that interactivity is a one-dimensional concept, which is responsiveness. Rafaeli defined interactivity as:

a variable characteristic of communication settings an expression of the extent that in a given series of communication exchanges, any third (or later) transmission (or message) is related to the degree to which previous exchanges referred to even earlier transmissions. (Rafaeli 1988: 111)

Williams et al. (1988: 10) stated that interactivity is 'the degree to which participants in a communication possess control and exchange roles in mutual discourse'. In their view interactivity is a three-dimensional construct comprising control, exchange of roles and mutual discourse (Kioussis 2002). Discourse was also at the centre of Rafaeli's definition: however, prominent difference is that Williams give up the notion of control in the interest of clarity. As well as, Ha and James (1998: p461) argue for a definition of interactivity that includes dual roles and responsiveness, suggesting that "interactivity

should be defined in terms of the extent to which the communicator and audience respond to, or are willing to facilitate, each other's communication needs."

Heeter (2000) focuses on the functional aspect of a medium via action and reaction. She proposes that interactivity is:

An interaction is an episode or series of episodes of physical actions and reactions of an embodied human with the world, including the environment and objects and beings in the world. These actions and reactions are actual interactions, a subset of the range of potential interactions of the human and the world at that time and place (Heeter 2000: 7).

Pavlik (1998) argues that interactivity is a two-way communication process, different from traditional one-way communication. According to Pavlik (p137) "[i]nteractivity means two-way communication between source and receiver, or, more broadly multidirectional communication between any number of sources and receivers". His definition reflects the importance of two-way communication. Also, Miles (1992) highlights responsiveness of interactive communication suggested that interactivity is "[a]n interactive communication involves responsiveness of the displayed message to the message receiver" (Miles 1992: 150).

However, Steuer (1992) proposed a definition of interactivity based on the three subfactors of speed, range, and mapping focusing on the real-time participation. Steuer (1992) suggests that the concept of 'presence - real time' is the key to defining interactivity as:

Interactivity is defined as the extent to which users can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time Interactivity in this sense is distinct from engagement or involvement interactivity (like vividness) is a stimulus-driven

variable and is determined by the technological structure of the medium (Steuer 1992: 84).

Despite the difference in the use of terms and emphasis on detailed aspects, all previous definitions focus on interactivity in order to characterize the communication process, the preceding definitions express variations of the concept using different terms. All focused on interactive process via some key elements such as: user control and dialogue between consumer and manufacturer, interchange between individuals and advertisers, responsiveness, exchange, action and reaction, two-way communication and real-time participation.

4.4.2 Definitions that focus on perception

Definitions that focus on perception of interactivity always referred to the extent to which a person perceives he or she controls over the interaction process via communication with others, which is likely to be a significant impact on audience perception and behaviour.

Although Kiousis (2002) does not ignore the role of mediator in setting up an interactive environment through which participants can communicate, it focuses mainly on simulation of interpersonal communication and users or audience's ability to perceive the experience of interaction. He says:

Interactivity can be defined as the degree to which a communication technology can create a mediated environment in which participants can communicate (one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many), both synchronously and asynchronously, and participate in reciprocal message exchanges (third-order dependency). With regard to human users, it additionally refers to their ability to perceive the experience as a simulation of interpersonal communication and increase their awareness of telepresence (Kiousis 2002: 372).

Newhagen, Cordes, and Levy (1995) examine interactivity as an individual trait and perception of interaction by self and others, not only a characteristic of the medium. They state that "[c]onceptualize (perceived) interactivity based on the psychological sense message senders have of their own and the receivers interactivity" (Newhagen 1995: 165).

Jankowski and Hansen argue that interactivity is "widely considered one of the core concepts in theorizing about new communication technology" (Hansen and Jankowski: 1996, 9), they propose three elements to interactivity definition including, equality, responsiveness and functional communicative environment:

Aspects of interactivity were clustered around three terms: equality (containing aspects such as participants, mutual activity, role exchange, controlee), responsiveness (e.g. mutual discourse, nature of feedback, response time) and functional communicative environment (e.g. bandwidth, transparency, social presence, artificial intelligence) (Hansen and Jankowski: 1996, 71).

Also, Schumann et al (2001) focusing on consumers control over and a choice of interactions with the advertising, argue that "[u]ltimately it is the consumer's choice to interact, thus interactivity is a characteristic of the consumer, and not a characteristic of the medium. The medium simply serves to facilitate the interaction.". In addition, Wu (1999: 6) define perceived interactivity as "a two-component construct consisting of navigation and responsiveness." Later, with concentration on consumer's perspective, he redefines interactivity as a "psychological state experienced by a site-visitor during the process of the interaction" (Wu 2005). Similarly, Coyle and Thorson (2001) in their definition of interactivity focus on mapping, speed, and user control, which recommends that websites "should have good mapping, quick transitions between user input and resulting actions, and a range of ways to manipulate the content" (Coyle and Thorson 2001: 76).

It is important to note that Heeter (1989) introduces a definition of interactivity from a perception perspective as well, referring to elements of complexity, effort, responsiveness, monitoring, participation and interpersonal communication: “Interactivity is a multi-dimensional concept that includes: complexity of choice available, effort users must exert, responsiveness to the user, monitoring information use, ease of adding information, and facilitation of interpersonal communication” (Heeter 1989).

Furthermore, there are several other definitions of interactivity from perception perspective. There are many scholars focusing on the nature of the user's personality and their perception abilities, most of them emphasize the importance of this aspect of the interactive communication process. The focus on perception interactivity is consistent with marketing, advertising, and communication process. However, focusing, on this aspect does not mean underestimating the other elements of interactive communication.

4.4.3 Definitions that focus on features

Definitions that focus on features try to analyse general or specific characteristics of the medium. This category of scholar finds in the communication medium the utmost importance to form a suitable interactive environment between the sender and the receiver. According to this approach, interactivity refers to the mediated communicative interaction, within communication medium rather than communication process itself.

In other words, this category knows the interaction through the technical features of the medium through which the communication takes place. The functional feature of the medium are such as hyperlinks, chats, downloads, uploads, email, search engines, multimedia, etc. For example, Ahren et al (2000) define interactivity in terms of features such as audio and video. Ha and James (1998) add five characteristics of interactivity: (1) playfulness, (2) choice, (3) connectedness, (4) information collection, and (5) reciprocal communication.

From this perspective, Carey (1989) refers to interactive media as the media that simulate an interpersonal exchange within communication medium. His conceptual definition focuses on the forms of channels involved in the communication exchange. According to him, interactivity is: “technologies that provide person-to-person communications mediated by a telecommunications channel and person-to-machine interactions that simulate interpersonal exchange” (Carey 1989: 328).

In other words, this perspective emulates an interactive communication within a feature of machine-mediated communication, features that enable users to control communication content or forms (Kim and Sawhney 2002). From this perspective, Jensen (1998: 201) defines interactivity as: “a measure of a media’s potential ability to let the user exert an influence on the content and/or form of the mediated communication”. As such, Lombard and Snyder-Dutch (2001) argue that interactivity is a feature that enables user control and provides users with an active, personal experience. They define interactivity as:

a characteristic of a medium in which the user can influence the form and/or content of the mediated presentation or experience. It is not dichotomous (a medium is not just interactive or not) but can vary in degree (from not interactive to highly interactive) as well as type (different aspects of the form and/or content that can be influenced by the user) (Lombard and Snyder-Duch 2001, 57).

In general, these definitions try to describe interactivity from the medium perspective; they refer to general characteristics of communication medium, such as user control and two-way communication, and/or specific characteristics such as hyperlinks, multimedia, emails, and chat rooms that characterize interactivity (McMillan and Hwang 2002).

4.4.4 Definitions that combine process, feature, and/or perception

Some of the experts and scholars have moved away from focusing only on one aspect when defining interactivity. They try to combine the terms medium,

perception and/or process with their definition of interactivity. McMillan (2002) has identified some important aspects such as monologue, feedback, responsive dialogue, and mutual discourse when explained interactivity.

In this context, Chung (2004; 2008) emphasize the four dimensions of human, medium, human/medium and medium/human to explain interactivity. He defines interactivity as:

a multi-dimensional construct that is on a continuum of medium to human interactivity. While interactivity is represented on a continuum, the categories of interactivity are manifested through various forms of interactive features that fall on that continuum (Chung 2008: 661).

Zack (1993) also combines medium, perception and/or process in order to explain interactivity, he argues that the following key factors emerge from the literature as elements of interactivity:

the simultaneous and continuous exchange of information; the use of multiple non-verbal cues; the potentially spontaneous, unpredictable, and emergent progression of remarks; the ability to interrupt or pre-empt; mutuality; patterns of turn-taking, and the use of adjacency pairs (Zack 1993: 663).

In addition, in their attempt to examine interactivity and vividness in commercial websites, both Coyle and Thorson (2001) focus on concepts such as increased levels of interactivity, mapping, speed and user control. They state that “ [a] website that is described as interactive should have good mapping, quick transitions between a user's input and resulting actions, and a range of ways to manipulate the content” (Coyle and Thorson 2001: 67).

Perhaps existing various definitions of interactivity could be a helpful way to understand interactivity through the distinction between all aspects of this concept. This might be a reason that experts have identified this distinction as

a significant approach to understand the concept. Through their attempts to define the interactivity concept, they answered many questions about how the media affected users or the public. They have opened up ample space for researchers to conduct in-depth studies on interactivity and focus on those aspects which exist within those definitions.

4.5 Interactivity and online journalism

Internet and new information technology have become an essential part of journalism, journalists everywhere and around the world are now relying on the internet basically as a communication tool. The Internet has also entered the depth of human society so that the number of users is constantly increasing, people also access news via websites and smartphones apps, they post their news tips about events, facts and their daily life experiences (Chung 2008).

The utilisation of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in the media has irrevocably affected the nature of the traditional media consumption. The human society has become an online society as a multiplicity of networks. Communication technologies have developed, changed and expanded over time. This revelation transformed the way people consumed news. Traditional mass media organisations such as newspapers, television and radio have started to use websites and put their media products on the web. Also, internet provides media organisations with a wide space to interact with public and encourages them to become an active element in communication processes (Gody 2015).

In Roger's (2010) words, the internet has reached the "critical mass" stage, thus proving its place within media organisations, society, politics and economy. Online journalism by adopting internet becomes interactive media when content web users are given roles and opportunities to become content editors and creators. In addition, the web's features, as adopted by online journalists, could establish communities of users who congregate around a shared interest at a public space carved out of a news website. People who otherwise would not meet within traditional media are now interacting in a

cyber space (Massey and Levy 1999). This reflects the ability of the online journalism to provide a truly interactive environment for users to become key elements such as online journalists. Online journalism now offers a wider menu of options to users which enables them to customise their online experience within news websites. Unlike newspapers, television and radio, new online media allows users to follow their own preference in a multi-directional form: human-to-human, human-to-content and human-to-medium (Nielsen and Pernice 2010).

With the increasing interest of media organizations in online publishing, the style and nature of publishing the journalist content has changed. The earliest news websites consisted of the same content of offline or printed editions. Then the content of websites changed and saw a radical shift in terms of interactivity. This has attracted researchers to conduct studies on interactivity in online journalism. According to Pavlik et al. (1997), news websites content has been evolving through three stages. In the first stage, websites mostly republished newspaper articles via web pages, while in the second stage, journalists started creating original content for their websites combined with some interactive features such as hyperlinks and search engines with a degree of customization which enables users to choose what categories of news and information they need to receive. Stage three is characterized by original news content created specifically for the websites and online journalism as a new medium of mass communication.

There are many studies linking the web with the concept of interactivity in order to explain and determine the dimensions, impacts, benefits, and implications from various perspectives and disciplines such as: Communication Studies (Ferber et al. 2005; Walther et al. 2005), Information Systems (Chen and Yen 2004; Lowry et al. 2006), Education (Chou 2003; Leung et al. 2002), and Journalism (Chung 2007, Chung 2008, Greer and Mensing 2006; Hashim et al 2007). Studies of the interactivity in online journalism are often done via conducting a functional analysis of the web pages. Heeter (1989) asserts that interactivity resides in the features of a communication medium. Scholars such as McMillan (2002) and Massey and Levy (1998) have adapted Heeter's

conceptual definition of interactivity and content analysing of websites in order to measure interactivity level through detection of presence or absence functional features such as hyperlinks, chat rooms, multimedia. Heeter's model is based on human-medium interaction.

The Heeter's (1989) six dimensions model and examination of interactivity has been considered as one of the first seminal works on interaction between the user and the medium (computer) regarding the media use. Several researchers (Massey and Levy 1998; McMillan 2002; Hashim et al 2007; Hashim 2010; Rafeeq 2014) adapted Heeter's model of interactivity in the study of news websites. Heeter positions interactivity in the structure and processes of the websites, her six dimensions are specific and measurable. The dimensions of interactivity are (1989: 221-225):

- the complexity of choice available: users are provided with a choice of available information or selectivity;
- the effort users must exert: the amount of effort users must take to access information;
- the responsiveness to the user: the degree to which medium can react responsively to a user;
- the monitoring of information use: potential tools to monitor system use;
- the ease of adding information: the degree to which user can add information to the system that the mass can access, and;
- facilitation of interpersonal communication: the degree to which media system facilitates interpersonal communication between specific users.

In an early study of online newspapers, Tankard and Ban (1998) have examined the extent to which online newspapers are taking advantage of the special features offered by the internet including hypertext, interactivity and multimedia. They set out to investigate whether online newspapers added interactive features on their homepages or not. They also conducted a content

analysis of US online news websites and found that interactive features were scarce on the US newspaper websites. For example, 94 percent of online newspaper items contained no hyperlinks. Overall, in their study, they concluded that; while some online newspapers have adopted interactive features and used all of the internet capability at their disposal to enhance presentation of the news, most have not.

Li (1998), adopted content analysis method of three major U.S. newspapers websites: USA Today, New York Times and the Washington Post. His study has found that internet newspapers gave more priority to providing textual news articles than video, audio and graphic articles, and large graphics were more likely to display on homepages than on news article pages. According to him, with interconnected links, the traditional one-to-many newspaper publishing process turned into many-to-many communication centered with and facilitated by the host internet newspapers. He also focused on changing the roles between the journalist and the user of the websites so that the user can participate effectively in the site through interaction with the journalist, websites content and other users, which demonstrates a shift of balance of communicative power from sender to receiver. For example, "[t]he interconnected news links brought in audience participation in producing newspaper content and providing information beyond the original newspaper content" (Li 1998: 353).

Furthermore, in their study on English-language online newspapers in Asia, Massey and Levy (1999) conducted a content analysis approach in order to offer a wide theoretical framework for studying interactivity of English-language newspapers websites in Asia and examine that framework in the cross-cultural context of Asian journalism. To these ends, they adapted Heeter's dimensions of Interactivity to test interactivity of the online journalism of English-language newspapers in fourteen Asian nations. They found that English-language online newspapers in Asia provided users with a relatively complex choice of news content, but many of them did not rate highly on the remaining other dimensions of interactivity such as the effort users must exert, the responsiveness to the user and the monitoring of information use.

However, they only explicated four of Heeter's six dimensions of interactivity in their study arguing that not all of those dimensions were relevant given the changes that have taken place in online journalism. They note that they "appear to offer a close fit to the online-journalism literature" (Massey and Levy 1999: 140). They did not use 'effort users must exert' and 'monitor system use' dimensions, but they posited 'immediacy' as another dimension of online journalism's interactivity, "as the extent to which web news sites provide consumers with the most immediately available information" (ibid: 141).

Precocious researches raised doubts about the unfulfilled promise of interactivity in online journalism, essentially that interactive features were either not widely used or severely limited in capability. Schultz (1999) in an exploratory content analysis of 100 U.S. online newspapers discussed the main challenges of providing interactivity within online journalism. He used different dimensions of interactivity to examine the level of interactivity of news websites. Taking a functional view of interactivity, he examines the availability of features such as hyperlinks, e-mails, chat rooms, web polls, web surveys and forums. Schultz views interactivity "as a variable of responsiveness in interpersonal and societal communication" (ibid: no p). The findings of this study showed that the web has the potential to increase interactive attempts in journalism. However, online newspapers in the U.S. do not necessarily exploit this opportunity effectively, most of them provide only token interactive options. Also, many news websites rarely exploit interactive features of the web. U.S. news websites are not necessarily interactive at all.

In addition, McMillan and Hwang (2002), in their study pointed out that interactivity is an often mentioned but seldom operationalized concept associated with the web. They used qualitative and quantitative multimethod approaches in their study to discover the interactivity of marketing websites. They developed three overlapping constructs to operationalize the perception-based approach to interactivity: direction of communication, user control, and time. They suggest that measures of perceived interactivity is significant for researcher for doing studies in regard to interactivity of websites. For example, if a researcher tried to understand effects of changes in a website design, the

measures of perceived interactivity "could be an important measure to determine whether design changes are perceived as changing the interactivity of the site" (McMillan and Hwan 2002: 39).

McMillan (2002) presented a new model of cyber-interactivity based on two primary dimensions, direction of communication and level of receiver control over the communication process. Her study designed to explore the applicability of this model analysed 108 websites using both perception-based and feature-based measures of these two dimensions. She found that websites users in her study did not necessarily classify websites with more opportunities for interactivity as more interactive than sites with smaller amounts of features. Also, "no significant correlation was found between the perception-based and feature-based models" (McMillan 2002: 271). Regarding the differences across medium and target audience and a convergence of interactive features (interactive convergence), Singer (2004) examined newsroom convergence among traditional media platforms and online media. He conducted qualitative and quantitative data drawn from case studies of four US newsrooms and found that traditional media and online news website journalist accepts convergence as a way to stay competitive. He noted that "the diffusion of convergence within the newsroom may be hindered by cultural and technological differences in approaches to newsgathering and dissemination" (Singer 2004: 3).

However, in a study of homepages of disaster relief websites, Paul (2001) has conducted a content analysis method using a seven-dimensional conceptualization of interactivity. He used Heeter's six and Massey and Levy's immediacy dimension. The study provides a theoretical exploration of the concept of interactivity and its potential contributions to the websites as an increasingly interactive mass medium. In Paul's study, the unit of analysis was the disaster relief website homepages. He showed that most websites (53 percent) that were analysed exhibited moderate levels of interactivity and contained a large amount of news and explanatory content, as well as potential for user response, whereas 20 websites did not show high scores in actual responsiveness to user or the other five dimensions of interactivity.

Some of the previous studies have also focused on imbalanced adoption of interactive features across different media platforms. In order to offer an explanation for the slow adaptation of interactive features in news websites, Gunther and Scharkow (2014) analyzed 65,000 news articles from nine countries, comparing broadcast and cable television news websites with websites of national newspapers. They found that institutional factors such as media system, nation and media type are more relevant for predicting websites' online sophistication than content-related factors. Hashim et al. (2007) have addressed the growth and development of the concept of interactivity in online newspapers from the perspectives of computer-mediated communication, journalism, advertising, and information system. Their study adapted Heeter's dimensions of interactivity onto contemporary settings of Australian online newspaper industry and reviewed twelve Australian newspaper websites conducting content analysis approach. The researchers found that the content availability and choice was found to be the most significant element of interactivity. While the majority of the Australian news websites offer interactive functionality for expressing opinions such as blogging, contests and polls, only one online newspaper provided genuine interactive gaming.

Research of Maldives news websites has shown that there were few news websites in the Maldives maximizing interactive features. In his study on Maldives news websites, Rafeeq (2014) has developed an interactivity table and analyzed the interactive features of the Maldives news websites and discussed how news articles is presented and to what extent the various publications differ in their application of interactive devices in news websites. He used content analysis of three mainstream news websites and found that the news websites did not fully utilize and enhance interactive features in online journalism.

Chung (2004; 2007; 2008; 2009; 2012; 2015) conducted a series of consecutive studies on interactivity in the online journalism and dealt with the phenomenon in theory and practice. In his study (2004), Chung conducted a content analyzing method using a six-dimensional conceptualization of

interactivity on 43 news websites, he found that the news websites is slowly sharing their control and power of news delivery with the users, compared to other medium interactivity features such as audio and video download files, multimedia galleries and search features. However, overall, the news websites displayed moderate to significant amounts of interactivity. In another study, Chung (2007) also shows that the most popular type of interactivity among news websites are medium interactivity features such as multimedia content (audio, video) and search engines. Chung conducted interviews with website producers in order to get their perceptions of interactivity in online journalism and reasons for presence and use of interactive features on their news websites. He reveals that news website site editors show interest but are experiencing issues with adopting such interactive features onto their websites.

Chung (2008; 2009) presented empirical data on interactivity in the context of news websites. He identified four categories (typology) of interactive features: Human, Human/Medium, Medium and Medium/Human. He also argued that that news websites need not worry about applying all types of interactive features to interact with their users as the interactive features serve distinct functions. Instead, news websites should assert on creating credibility and "may seek to identify their online news audiences and then subsequently provide interactive features accordingly" (Chung 2008: 658). Studies have revealed that although web interactive features are not used by the users of different websites, such features might be appreciated by the website users. Larsson (2011) adapted Chung's typology of interactive features in his study and examined interactivity in online journalism in term of use and appreciation of interactive features by Swedish news websites users. He conducted an online survey focusing on several traits and habits of website users. He found that users of news websites are interested in interactive features, although they do not know how to fully utilize these features, "news website users might be characterized as slow learners" (Larsson 2011: 1180).

4.6 Conclusion

In general, previous studies have catalogued the presence of interactive feature in news websites, but few have indicated whether such features are being used and focused on the role of news website journalists in term of interactivity in online journalism. Therefore, this research study seeks to supplement prior work with this information. To that end, the researcher catalogued not only the presence of interactive features in news websites but also analyzed how journalists think about interactivity in online journalism and how they focused on the reasons for presence and use of interactive features on their news websites.

Chapter Five

Methodology

5.1 Introduction

Scholars tried to measure interactivity in online journalism depending on various criteria, such as feedback options, availability of website features (e.g., hyperlinks, videos, downloads), ease of navigation, and scale (Rafaeli and Ariel, 2007. Sohn, 2011). A study of the interactivity in news websites can be done by conducting a functional analysis of the web pages (Rafeeq 2014) . After providing an extensive theoretical framework, this chapter will define quantitative and qualitative approaches to the presentation of research data as well as explaining and examining the extent of interactivity in Kurdish news websites, Kurdish media in several technical and human aspects. Also, preaches to explain the interactivity of Kurdish online jouranlism from perspective of Kurdish news websites editor in chefs, journalists, media experts and web developers.

Interactivity via internet or more specifically through websites has been studied for about three decades. The issue with former researches, as with any other fields of study that handle arenas of online journalism, is the constant development of the subject. Steady and rapid development of new digital media that now confronts researchers with new questions about online journalism require researchers to reconsider the longstanding dependence within media research on theories and phenomena of mass society (Lievrouw and Livingstone 2002). Hence every study has to be considered the researcher as an independent enquiry, which of course presents him with methodological difficulties.

In this chapter the researcher will share some points regarding epistemological premises and ontological assumptions that informed and framed the methodology of this research and guided him throughout his fieldwork and data analysis. The researcher will also refer to the theoretical framework that

contributed to his philosophical worldview behind the research and provided a theoretical background for both quantitative and qualitative methodology applications, with analysing research methodology and sampling procedures as well as technical research details and procedures of investigation.

Considering the natural and dynamic nature of qualitative research, the researcher applied qualitative methodology for the second phase of this research which enables me to plumb the depths of news website producers' experience. The aim is to get meanings about interactivity in Kurdish news websites that are not otherwise observable and that cannot be collected adopting a quantitative method. The second phase of this research is aimed at understanding interactivity in Kurdish online journalism through the experiences and interpretations of news website editors and journalists who are involved in producing online journalism in the Kurdish society.

5.2 Mixed method approach

In the last decades, conducting mixed-methods designs has become common among more social sciences researchers for their studies (Ivankova et al. 2006; Creswell 2005). This is done by mixing or combining and analysing quantitative and qualitative data at some stage of the research process within a single study. Because each approach of data collection has both weaknesses and strengths, researchers can consider how the strengths can be combined for the purpose of developing and gaining a better and stronger understanding of the research problem or questions and, as well, overcoming the limitations of each (Creswell 2013). During the writing and mapping procedures for this study, the researcher decided to conduct a mixed method based on the assumption that both types of data (quantitative and qualitative) provide different types of information (open-ended data in the case of qualitative and closed-ended data in the case of quantitative method). However, the main reason for mixing both types of data within this study is based on the fact that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are sufficient by themselves to capture the trends and details of a situation of interactivity in the Kurdish news websites. Importantly, the use of multiple research methods

within this study about Kurdish media and assuming the same conditions is likely to result in better reliability and validity contrary to a single methodology approach (Denzin 1973 and Miles and Huberman 1994). By conducting quantitative technique of content analysis, the researcher is able to develop categories and subsequent counting of the presence or absence of features in Kurdish websites; it is a transparent and efficient tool of analysis, but it focuses purely on the technological features (Lilleker and Malagón 2010). However, to get high degrees of subjectivity and gain considerably more information in this study, the researcher used a qualitative method through a series of interviews using a semi-structured protocol. Sofaer 2002, asserts that it does not mean that qualitative approach is much more scientific and therefore much better than quantitative research. The researcher believes that neither method is the best. They both have their advantages and disadvantages, and they are both still very useful for research and "mixed methods will eventually pave the way for more commonality in research language that will benefit both the quantitative and qualitative" (Cameron 2009: 142). Sofaer (2002: 196) explains that:

Quantitative and qualitative research are not in contraposition to each other. In fact, different methods enable the researcher to gain access to different types of knowledge. These types of knowledge are not necessarily hierarchically arranged. Also they cannot be added together to provide a bigger or better picture of what is really happening. They may even come up with conflicting perspectives. Quantitative and qualitative research have to be thought of as complementary and are to be used to generate a richness of understanding and interpretation.

This thesis examines the benefits of interactive features on news websites thereby helping in social and political interaction and developing online journalism by using quantitative and qualitative research methods. The researcher employed a mixed-method research methodology combining quantitative content analysis for interactivity features in the Kurdish websites and qualitative analysis to produce the richer analysis more appropriate for

assessing interactivity online. Given this focus, the researcher selected three Kurdish news websites as the research context for quantitative phase as well as conducted semi structured interviews with 14 of editor in chiefs, journalists, media experts and web developers from six news organizations.

In addition, to examine the relationship between actual and perceived interactivity, the researcher will use two research methods: The selection of methods consists of qualitative techniques to acquire data and perform analysis for the study, a quantitative content analysis and qualitative content analysis. The procedures and methods used to conduct the data collection and data analysis of the research are discussed in this chapter. In other words, this chapter justifies, identifies, and describes the methodology used to solve the research problem and to answer the research questions.

Of course, as with the use of quantitative or qualitative methods independently, there are challenges and benefits to using mixed methods (Onwuegbuzie and Johnson, 2004; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003; Sheperis, Young and Daniels 2016). The researcher took advantages of both approaches when he got more results on interactivity in the Kurdish online journalism. In contrast, the researcher faced some challenges as allocating additional time needed to obtain and analyse data. Although conducting mixed methods research on interactivity in Kurdish online journalism has been a very difficult undertaking, the advantages and benefits of a mixed methods design encouraged the researcher to conduct both qualitative and quantitative research methods in this thesis, preferred the benefits of mixed methods on its challenges. As a result, the researcher gained a unique opportunity to broaden his understanding of interactivity in the Kurdish online journalism using different data sources.

Due to using two main research methods, this chapter is divided to two main sections. Research design, methodology, data-collection instruments, analysis methods and methodological rigour are outlined in detail in the following sections:

Section 5.3 review the quantitative content analysis of the Kurdish news websites.

Section 4.4 reviews the qualitative content analysis of the Kurdish online journalism.

5.3 Phase One: Quantitative content analysis of the websites

As mentioned above, in this chapter a way of addressing the research questions is developed, in the form of a research methodology and techniques. In order to answer the main research questions of the thesis, the researcher applied two different methods to get different results. Firstly, in this the researcher conducted a content analysis of Kurdish online news media to investigate the level of interactivity features. The researcher used content analysis to measure quantitatively the extent to which interactivity functions and features are in use on Kurdish news websites. This content analysis will explore home pages and various news formats in the Kurdish news websites. Quantitative studies emphasize measurement and analysis of casual relationships between variables, not processes (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). In quantitative research, questions are directional because they state either a relationship between two or more independent and dependent variables or a comparison between two or more groups of dependent variables (Creswell, 1994).

The main objective (phase one) of this study is to examine which interactivity features Kurdish news media are adopting on their websites. As already introduced at the beginning of this chapter, previous research (Li 1998; Massey and Levy 1999; Massey 2000; chung 2008; Chung and Nah 2009; Hermida and Thurman 2008; Larsson, 2012) has shown that the best methodology to adopt regarding interactivity of mainstream online news websites is a quantitative one, a content analysis based on a study sheet structured according to a typology of interactivity features. The researcher adopted content analysis of Kurdish news websites, developing an interactivity index and examining the interactive features of the Kurdish news websites and analysing how news articles are presented via websites and to what extent the various publications differ in their application of interactive features in online journalism.

This section will be aimed, firstly, to provide a brief overview of a quantitative approach and a content analysis technique. Secondly, it aims to introduce the Kurdish news websites under study and how the data were collected. Thirdly,

it justifies the need to create a new typology of interactivity features of news websites, instead of using a typology created in previous studies. To conclude, it will present the specific design of the study sheet.

Content analysis as a research technique, enables researchers' analysis data to be structured and could be used in both qualitative and quantitative studies to make replicable and valid inferences by interpreting and coding textual material and non-textual data (Neuendorf 2002). In contrast to quantitative content analysis, qualitative content analysis relies on an individual's perspective, it is the same to textual analysis in that it is fundamentally interpretive in nature, and often does not use statistics for data analysis. Regarding quantitative studies, content analysis is probably the fastest-developing technique. This is due to the evolution of computer software which has made the organized study of messages faster and easier.

Content analysis is a fundamental research method that has been widely used in mass communication science studies with many different research aims and objectives. In the words of Berelson (1952, p. 18) content analysis is "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication". Kaplan (1943, p. 230) states that the technique known as content analysis "attempts to characterise the meanings in a given body of discourse in a systematic and quantitative fashion" while Krippendorff (2013, p. 24) defines content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use".

Berelson (1952) suggests five main purposes of content analysis as follows:

1. To describe substance characteristics of message content
2. To describe form characteristics of message content
3. To make inferences to producers of content

4. To make inferences to audiences of content
5. To predict the effects of content on audiences

However, content analysis is one of the common research approaches used. In media studies, it is normally used to analyse the subject materials within news in newspapers, television or websites. This method definitely has some advantages. Krippendorff (2013, pp. 45-47) identifies four distinguishing features as primary advantages of content analysis:

1. It is unobtrusive. Controlled experiments, interviews, focus groups, surveys, and projective tests are especially vulnerable to some errors. By contrast, content analyses, computer simulations, research using already available statistics, and interpretive research (in cultural studies, for example) are nonreactive or unobtrusive.
2. It accepts unstructured material. The chief advantage of the unstructuredness of content analysis data is that it preserves the conceptions of the data sources, which structured methods largely ignore.
3. It is context sensitive and thereby able to process symbolic forms. Content analysis is context sensitive and therefore allows the researcher to process as data texts that are significant, meaningful, informative, and even representational to others.
4. It can deal and cope with large volumes of data. Much of ethnomethodology as well as case study approaches, historiographical methods, and interpretive research rely on small samples of text; the volume of data is limited largely by what a researcher can read reliably and without losing track of relevant details.

In addition, in the content analysis literature, scholars have provided essentially three kinds of definitions of this research method: first, definitions that take content to be contained in a text, second, definitions that take content to be a property of the source of a text, finally, definitions that take content to

emerge in the process of a researcher analysing a text relative to a particular context (Krippendorff 2013).

The earliest known application of content analysis emerged in the late 1600s (1690-1699) (Krippendorff, 2013). It was used by the church for religious purposes, when the church conducted a systematic examination of the content of early newspapers because of its concern about the prevalence of anti-religious articles and the church was very worried that people were influenced by what they defined as heresies and so it dealt with newspaper content in moralising terms. The first well-documented case of quantitative analysis of content occurred in 18th century Sweden. That study also involved a conflict between the church and scholars. In general, with the boom in the newspaper industry at the turn of the 20th century, content analysis came to be more widely used. Then, from the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, content analysis came to be a widely recognised research tool that was used in a variety of research disciplines, especially researches in the communication field (McMillan, 2000).

However, from the late 20th century and with the rapid growth and expansion of the World Wide Web (Web) and online publishing, content analysis techniques have also been used more and more to analyse web content, many researchers have made the web as a moving target (McMillan 2000), especially applying content analysis as part of their research methodology. Probably because of its original presentation as a one-to-many broadcast medium, the Internet has attracted many researches that use content analysis method (Herring, 2010). In general, a lot of online journalism studies and other internet studies have made the most of the web-based content analysis, especially studies conducted on interactivity in online journalism and news websites (Schultz 1999; Massey and Levy 1999; Dibeau and Garrison 2001; Chung 2004; Gerpott and Wanke 2004; Greer and Mensing 2006; Hashim and Jones 2007; Hashim et al 2007; Homer and Aoyama 2009; Smith 2009; Ostry

et al. 2008; Spyridou and Veglis 2008; Larsson 2011; Sarkar 2012; Rafeeq 2014).

McMillan (2000) believes that the content analysis method seems to apply equally to the websites as to media such as newspaper articles or television segments:

Analysis of studies that apply content analysis techniques to the World Wide Web found that this stable research technique can be applied to a dynamic environment. However, the rapid growth and change of Web-based content present some unique challenges. Nevertheless, researchers are now using content analysis to examine themes such as diversity, commercialisation, and utilisation of technology on the World Wide Web. Suggestions are offered for how researchers can apply content analysis to the Web with the primary focus on formulating research questions/hypotheses, sampling, data collection and coding, training/reliability of coders, and analysing/interpreting data (McMillan 2000: p).

Content analysis techniques of quantitative method were used to measure the level of interactivity of the news websites that have been selected for the study. Content analysis was used to find out how many media-rich and interactive features were used in the Kurdish news websites. Based on the quantitative data a model was conducted applying four factors of interactivity to create an index that would show which Kurdish news website is most or least interactive. In order to achieve the objectives, the researcher applies content analysis to the Web with primary focus on formulating research questions/hypotheses, sampling, data collection and coding, training/reliability of coder, and analyzing/interpreting data (McMillan 2000).

Arguably, such as any other research methodology or research technique, there are some significant steps, that the researcher must follow while conducting quantitative content analysis in order to be successful in his research with high accuracy that are required in performing a quantitative analysis (Poppin 2000). Considering the research problem thoroughly is necessary as a first step as well as developing testable hypotheses, and deciding how the researcher wants to operationalise the set of concepts that will be used.

Furthermore, Neuendorfs (2002) illustrates the process of content analysis through nine steps, he explains the typical process through nine stages which is illustrated as a flowchart (see Figure 5.1). The following paragraph describes each step taken in this research.

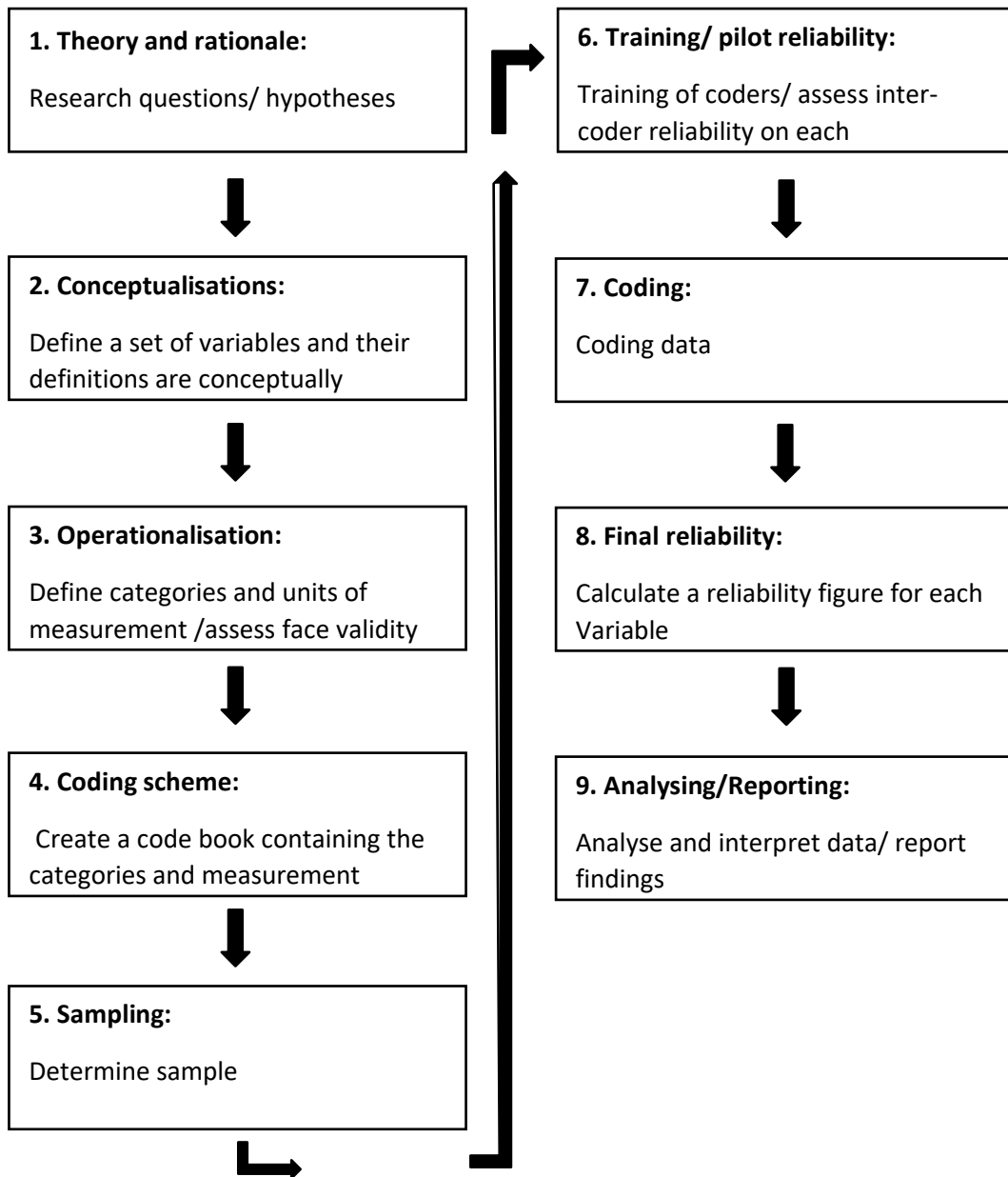


Figure 5.1 A flowchart of the typical process of content analysis research for human coding adapted from Neuendorf (2002)

With consideration for application to the websites, McMillan (2000) briefly identifies five primary steps that are involved in the process of conducting quantitative content analysis research. These steps are: The investigator formulates a research question and/or hypotheses. Then, the researcher selects a sample. The size of the sample depends on factors such as the goals of the study, also defining categories; coding units and context units in another step. Coders are trained, they code the content, and reliability of their coding

is checked. Finally, the data collected during the coding process is analysed and interpreted.

In order to ensure a smooth process of conducting quantitative content analysis research of the Kurdish news websites, this research study took above steps into account and conducted them as primary steps. With these main steps taken into consideration; the formulating of research questions or hypotheses, the sampling, unit of analysis, developing the categories, and the coding procedures, the later step then was to analyse the collected data.

5.3.1 Step 1: Formulating research questions or hypotheses

Before proceeding with any research, it is advisable to discuss the importance of this research and to focus on the fact that there are certain theories or perspectives that indicate that this particular subject is important to study. On the subject of this research, analysing interactivity of Kurdish news websites is important to examine the advantages and disadvantages of Kurdish news websites and to present practical recommendations for solving their problems, which were discussed in detail in chapter one of this thesis.

As explained before, this thesis was conducted using a mixed method approach, the web-based content analysis of Kurdish news websites was one of the methods that had been applied in this study in order to examine the interactive features of Kurdish news websites in Iraqi Kurdistan region. The first phase seeks to answer questions about overall level of interactive options offered by Kurdish news websites and analysing how news articles are presented regarding interactivity and to what extent the various websites differ in their application of interactive functions in online journalism. The main questions related to the level of interactivity of Kurdish news websites, are:

RQ1. What is the nature of the content and layout of Kurdish news websites?

RQ2. What categories of interactive features exist in Kurdish news websites?

RQ3. How do the different Kurdish news websites vary in their levels of interactivity?

RQ4. What is the overall level of interactive options offered by Kurdish news websites?

RQ5: Do the presence, attributes, and use of interactive features differ between newspaper, television and news websites?

Those questions were answered through the web-based content analysis. Based on those research questions, the main hypothesis are that interactivity functions are generally used inconsistently in the Kurdish news websites, especially the functions that facilitate human-to-human communication and the features that allow users to express their viewpoints. However, only a few categories of interactive features exist on Kurdish news websites which do not share common ground for their audience and do not serve distinct communication functions.

H1: Kurdish news websites do not pay enough attention to the existence of interactivity features on their pages, and do not meet the wishes of their visitors by supporting the interactivity.

On the other hand, the other hypothesis of the thesis (H2) is that it provides evidence that applying main interactive features to the Kurdish news website content will greatly increase interaction and participation by Kurdish internet users.

H2: applying interactive features to the news website content will greatly increase interaction.

Web-based content analysis is an efficient and prompt technique in exploring and capturing multimedia, textual, and graphical data of the websites within a specific time frame, this is one of the main reasons for choosing this research approach for this study.

5.3.2 Step 2: Sampling:

Another step of this study is to define a population and draw a sample. According to Neuendorf (2002: p83) "Sampling is the process of selecting a subset of units for study from the larger population". The size of the sample in content analysis differs depending on factors such as the objectives of the research (McMillan 2000). Multiple methods can be used for sampling.

Experts in research methodologies emphasize the importance of following random sample in drawing a sample. For example, Krippendorff (2004: p114) asserts that "to draw a simple random sample, a researcher must enumerate (or list) all sampling units to be included in or excluded from the analysis ... grants each unit the same probability of being included in the sample". But it could be one of the most difficult aspects of content analysis on the Web because of the size and chaotic design structure of the Web. McMillan (2000) cautions against the use of statistical methods that assume a simple random sample given the difficulty of identifying a true random sample on the Web. She mentions some specific challenges of the Web regarding random sampling in drawing a sample of content analysis. She explains that as a result of the rapid technical changes in the websites and increasing number of websites continuously and fast, selecting a true random sample may become very difficult, if not impossible.

This study examined three Kurdish news websites representing newspapers, televisions and other Kurdish news websites in the Iraqi Kurdistan region. This focus allowed the researcher to extend past work examining the trajectory of

interactive feature implementation in the Kurdish news environment. The researcher selected different newspapers, televisions and other Kurdish news websites to represent all online Kurdish media outlets in the Iraqi Kurdistan region.

This research used systematic stratified sampling which can be described as "distinct subpopulations (strata) within a population" (Krippendorff 2004: p115). In stratified sampling each sampling unit belongs to only one stratum, and the researcher carries out random or systematic sampling for each stratum separately. Thus stratified samples represent all strata either in equal numbers or according to any other priori definition. Consequently, I applied some different standards to specify which Kurdish news websites are most compatible for the sample.

First, the researcher already limited the study to news websites, so the concern was which news websites should then be selected to address research hypothesis. As my research concerns are Kurdish news websites, it was a criterion that the websites in question should have news dissemination as their primary objective, not just as a secondary one among others. Private websites such as arts, sport and fashion websites removed from the sample because these websites do not pay attention to the all-news kinds, such as political, social and economic materials.

Second, in the Kurdistan region there are websites of the print newspapers, radios and televisions. Generally they are different from non-print-based news websites in that they offer a different and unique set of articles. As Kammer (2012) suggests: "what is unique is the specific constellation of affordances, which enable news dissemination in real time, by a multitude of modalities, with audience interaction, and through interconnected web pages." For this reason, the use of the simple random sample was excluded, in order for the sample to include all types of news websites such as newspapers, television

and radio websites. If the researcher followed the simple random sample, it was possible to exclude some of these types of news websites. As a result, it would have a negative impact on the course of the research study.

Third, based on the thesis title and the research questions, the main language of the news websites in the sample should be Kurdish and the websites should have a main office in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. This is because there are many news websites such as Arabic, Turkmen and Assyrian news websites which are run from within the Kurdistan region, but their language is not Kurdish. For example, Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region, is the base for some of the major Syriac, Turkmen, Arabic language media organisations, such as Ishtar TV which was established in 2005 and broadcasts from Ainkawa, a large town on the outskirts of Erbil, which is home to a very large Christian community. Several non Kurdish language websites and newspapers work and publish in Kurdistan region (Syah 2016).

Fourth, another reason for choosing some websites and removing others from our sample is due to differences of language dialects; websites that have an operating Sorani dialect and websites that have an operating Kurmanji dialect have been selected. In general, among the dialects spoken by the Kurds, there are two main Kurdish dialects, first called the Northern Kurdish dialects (Kurmanji), spoken by most Kurds in Turkey, Syria, the northernmost parts of Iraqi Kurdistan region, and in a number of former Soviet Republics. Second, the Central Kurdish dialect, also called Sorani, is spoken by most Kurds in Iraq and Iran (Sheyholislami 2015). Still there is no one official Kurdish dialect. In Iraqi Kurdistan, both Kurmanji and Sorani are used extensively in print media, radio, television and websites. Those who speak these dialects do not speak the dialects of others, and even do not well understand the dialects other than their dialect. Therefore, the researcher was forced to choose websites with both dialects, but the sites chosen mostly in the Sorani dialect because about three-quarters of the population of the Kurdistan region speak that dialect (Karacan and Khalid 2016).

Fifth, in order to have a more complete picture of the results, website ownership or sponsors also have a role in the sample. Like other media outlets, most of the Kurdish news websites are typically owned by political parties, politicians and government or they are funded by government and private organizations or individuals secretly connected to the political parties (see chapter three). There are a few independent news websites which are funded by business companies. We will choose websites owned or managed by official organizations such as companies, political parties or government organizations.

There are several studies that usually confirm that the ownership of the media affects the content of mass media messages and journalistic professionalism (Larsson, 2012. Beam, 1993. Chan-Olmsted and Park, 2000. Adams, 2007. Schultz, 1999). Thus, depending on the ownership of the Kurdish news websites, the researcher mixed between all of them and chose the sample for his analysis.

Sixth, in Kurdistan there is no specific institution for that registers and enumerates news websites and most of the Kurdish websites – including news websites – still have a very rudimentary approach to web analytics. Because of that, the researcher tried to obtain data about the Kurdish news websites from media organizations. Then, a ranking of the top Kurdish news website was used for selecting the websites in the content analysis.

Web analytics have been defined by the Web Analytics Association (2006) as "the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of web data for the purpose of understanding and optimizing Web usage". Clifton (2008) suggests that: "Web analytics is a thermometer for your website constantly checking and monitoring your online health. As a methodology, it is the study of online experience in order to improve it, and without it you are flying blind".

In March 2005, Google acquired a Web analytics company called Urchin Software Corporation, a San Diego-based web analytics company, and subsequently released Google Analytics to the public in 2006 (Fang, 2007) and Alexa service provided by Amazon.com.

Thus, a list of most visited and popular Kurdish news websites was compiled depending of the Alexa web ranking and Google analytic which are fermium web analytics services that track and report website traffic. To a certain extent, the result of this ranking list reflects the popularity of the website on the Web.

Applying those six criteria, this selection process resulted in three Kurdish news websites, Table 5.1 (below) summarizes the list of selected news websites.

Websites	Ownership	Type of owners	URL
Nrttv.com	Nalia Group	Independent	http://www.nrttv.com/default.aspx
Awene.com	Awene Publishing Co Ltd	Independent	http://www.awene.com/
Sbey.com	Wsha Publishing Co Ltd	Partisan	https://www.sbey.com/

Table 5.1 the list of selected news websites

5.3.3 Step 3: Developing categories: Conceptualisation and Operationalisation

In order to develop categories for this research, the conceptualisation of the study should be clarified. It is important for the researcher to have a clear understanding of the concepts and terms used in his research, such that there are no conflicts arising later regarding their interpretation and

measurements. This necessitates the understanding of the conceptualization process, accurately and clearly. It is necessary to clarify what we mean by the concepts we use in the research, in order to draw meaningful conclusions about them (Babbie 1998; Rourke and Anderson 2004).

Conceptualization is the process through which we specify what we mean when we use particular terms in research ... produces a specific, agreed-on meaning for a concept for the purposes of research. This process of specifying exact meaning involves describing the indicators we'll be using to measure our concept and the different aspects of the concept called dimensions (Babbie 1998: pp124-125)

Conceptualizations used for this phase of the research regarding interactivity are from the perspective of feature-oriented interactivity, which focus on interactivity as the extent to which the medium (websites) allows the participant (users) to modify the content or form of a mediated environment in real time. Similar conceptualizations of interactivity often relied heavily on lists of technology (web) functions or features viewed to facilitate interactive communication (Steuer 1995; Heeter 1989; Ha and James 1998). Interactive features of news websites such as hyperlinks, photos, and Q&A forms are variables which are used in this study. The researcher identified variables related to the interactivity features that news websites provide to users.

This study was structured by employing the four-part Chung (2008) typology of interactivity in order to classify the interactive features found on Kurdish news websites.

Three main reasons for employing the four-part typology of interactivity can be discerned (Larsson 2012): first, it is empirically grounded, the requisite empirical grounding of this research is achieved by adopting this typology and

it is theoretically and empirically relevant to this research. Second, it was developed specifically with news websites in mind so that all the interactive features that are supposed to be found in news websites can be organized into this typology. Third, it goes beyond the distinction between human and medium interactivity and provides the research community with a more versatile way of focusing on the concept of interactivity.

The four-part typology of interactivity and its main features are summarized in Table 5.2

Type of interactivity	Clarify	Function on website	Example features
Human	interactive options that promote human interactivity facilitate user-to-user mutual communication	Users can communicate with other users and staff	Users comments Message boards Chat functions Q&A (live chats) Discussion forums e-mail-a friend
Human–Medium	Human–medium interactive features that allow users to submit customized perspectives and opinions further provide the audience with a sense of ownership	Users can contribute with own content.	Submit stories function Submit photos function Submit news tip function Reporter/editor e-mail links Letters-to-editor
Medium	Features representing medium interactivity rely on	Users can experience content in a	Photo files Audio files Video files News graphics,

	technology to allow users to select and elicit choice options	variety of ways.	infographics mobile version of site, apps
Medium–human	Medium–human interactive features, or features that provide interactive tailoring, allow users to personalize information to their liking	User customization of site looks, content and use.	Customized weather Customized topics Customized headlines Search feature E-mail updates/alerts Languages feature SMS alerts

Table 5.2 Summary of Chung’s four-part typology of interactive features.

Source: (Chung 2008, p. 666; Chung and Nah 2009, pp. 857–858)

5.3.3.1 Human

Medium interactivity involves interactive functions that promote human interactivity and facilitate user-to-user mutual communication. Stromer-Galley (2000) referred to it as computer-mediated human interaction. It is prolonged interaction between two or more users through the websites. Simply, websites enable users to communicate with other users and editors by offering some interactivity functions such as user comments, message boards and chat functions.

This type of interactivity that may occur online focusing on person-to-person communication mediated by the internet, a process Massey and Levy (1999) call interpersonal interactivity which is "the extent to which news audiences can have computer-mediated conversations" (Massey and Levy 1999, p. 140). Also McMillan (2002) labeled this type of interaction as user-to-user interactivity. Users of the websites can make communication easy with each

other's and workers at news websites (editors or journalists) via E-mail addresses, also there are other features which have an impact on increasing interactivity among users such as discussion forums and live chat areas.

5.3.3.2 Human–Medium

With human–medium interactive features, users are able to create and post web content via submit customized perspectives and opinions, giving users the impression that they are the journalists working in the websites (Chung and Nah 2009). This type of interactivity involves interaction with website content, it is focusing on the control that users practice over the selection and presentation of websites content such as submitting text, photo, audio, or multimedia (Massey and Levy 1999). Stromer-Galley (2000) has mentioned to human-medium interactivity as a media interaction. Later, McMillan (2002) used the term user-to-system interaction to human-medium interactivity.

In a moment of transformation of media as a result of ongoing processes of digitalization and convergence, television broadcasters are increasingly betting on tools that allow the public to assume a more active role in the production of contents. Emergent phenomena such as participatory journalism, user-generated content or the integration of social networking websites are becoming more and more relevant in the online public sphere (Franquet, Villa and Bergillos 2011, p. 223).

As a positive feature and unlike print and broadcast, news websites give the ability to users and allow them to upload any type of data and information's such as text, photo, and video with the potential to reach millions. Users have a choice to share their idea and express their opinion with others via websites. They can provide unedited commentary on any website articles they choose and post it.

5.3.3.3 Medium

Medium interactivity involves interaction with content of the web pages, users able to get data and information in text, audiovisuals, or multimedia formats. Features represent medium interactivity, depending on the multimedia technologies to allow users to select and elicit choice functions when they visit websites, they can experience websites content in a variety of ways.

Medium interactivity, sometimes also referred to as user-to-system, user-to-document or content interactivity, denotes interaction between a user and some technological interface. In studies of the web pages operated by online newspapers, such features would typically involve the ability to click and select news items in a variety of ways (Larsson 2018, p. 2229).

Relying on the interactive nature of the web, news websites have evolved from posting only textual contents to more interactive and multimedia formats such as audio, photo and video within one article. Unlike traditional media platforms such as newspapers and television, news consumers in the online journalism have control over the selection and presentation of editorial content of the websites. The web environment create interactivity for users by allowing them to interact with the medium itself.

5.3.3.4 Medium–human

According to Chung (2008: p): “Medium/human interactive features, or features that provide interactive tailoring, allow users to personalize information to their liking much like that available through push technology”. This type of interactivity depends largely on personalization via technical services provided by websites within interactive features, which allow users to customize any news or other services he/she requires such as customizing weather, topics, and headlines. Sometimes personalization requires a registration process by users, especially for activating features like E-mail

updates/alerts or SMS alerts. Regarding interactivity, personalization has become more important in the websites and challenging since web users always demand higher retrieval quality (Cai et al 2014).

Through information collection dimensionary log-in, counter or polls functions allow the user to feel being a part of an audience. Personalization options of online newspapers range from choosing topics and headlines, getting newsletters and alerts/updates via e-mail, getting specific community information (local weather, theater schedules etc.), greeted by the site to event calendars (Şanlıer and Tağ Kalafatoğlu 2005, p. 239).

Medium/human features focus on an adaptive ideal of users by allowing them to customize website design and content ((Deuze, 2003, Chung, 2008). Sometimes users are able to personalize the homepage of the websites by moving the places of the sections presented on the website. Also, users have a choice to share website articles such as news, photos, and vedios on social network services such as Facebook and Twitter.

5.3.4 Step 4: Coding Units and Unit of Analysis

As mentioned earlier, most of the scales and items used for this research had been adapted from Choung's (2008) four-part typology of interactivity and improved from relevant research identified in the literature (refer to chapter three). The researcher has conceptualized and operationalized those dimensions for the Kurdish news websites. These interactivity functions and features were made to fit with a convenient item and element to match the quantitative web content analysis technique. After a pretest with six selected Kurdish news websites, the final version of a coding scheme for this phase of the research was prepared along with coding guidelines.

By adopting Choung's (2008) four-part typology of interactivity as variables and using a scoring method, the interactivity factors were measured based on the presence or the absence of the interactivity features on the websites, on a five-point score scale of Very High (4) %75-100, High (3) %50 - 75, Medium (2) %25-50, Low (1) %1-25 and Very Low (0) %00. This scale was used to calculate the index of interactivity. An importance weighting was given to each unit such as photo, video within interactivity factors such as human/medium or medium human, which varied depending on the level of significance. The lower the availability of interactive features, the lower the level of interactivity which could fall to being zero. For example, in measuring the human/medium interactivity, Sbeiy.com was given (Very low) which equals zero.

5.3.4.1 Human Interactive Features

Users comments: Comments are one of the most important interactive features of news websites (Ziegele et al 2014), which allow users to comment on the news stories or any other items either on their website pages or on related presences on social network sites. They usually appear below the posted items. Coding this unit depends on providing it on the website items, while scores for this function varies as follows: if the feature appears below the posted items and on related presences on social network sites, it will get a score 4. If the feature only appears below the posted items, it will get a score 3, if the feature only appears on related presences on social network sites, it will get a score 2. If it is not available or does not exist at all, it will get a score 0.

Chat functions: Live chat is one of the best interactive tools that many news websites are utilizing on their home page. Users can communicate with editors via live chat tools, and talk with them about posted articles or any other topics. Coding this unit depends on providing it as an independent section on the websites home page (score 4) or not (score 0).

Q&A (live chats): Q&As interviews where questions are sent in from the audience or posted directly to the interviewee via a chat interface (Jönsson and Örnebring 2011), is another interactive feature of the news websites. Coding this unit depend on providing it as an independent section on the websites home page (score 4) or not (score 0).

Discussion forums: Online discussion forums are an increasingly common use of news websites. It has been suggested that online discussion forums can lead to increase interactivity in online journalism (Beyers 2004). Coding this unit depends on providing it as an independent section on the websites home page (score 4) or not (score 0).

Polling: Web-poll is a simple but important web interactive feature which is meant to solicit quick input/opinions from news website users, the results of this polls are typically displayed for viewing by other users (Cyr et al. 2009). Coding this unit depends on providing it as an independent section on the websites home page (score 4) or not (score 0).

E-mail-a friend: Website users can send posted items such as news, photo or video to their friends by using this interactive feature, which is usually located below the items. Coding this unit depends on providing it or not, with the posted items (score 4) or not (score 0).

Share: By using this feature, users of news websites are able to share posted items on their social networking site accounts or pages such as Facebook and Twitter which is usually located below the items. Coding this unit depends on providing it or not, with the posted items (score 4) or not (score 0).

5.3.4.2 Human–Medium Interactive Features

Submit stories function: This feature enables users to send news stories to editors in order to post on the website as a separate item. Coding this unit

depends on providing it as an independent section on the websites home page (score 4) or not (score 0).

Submit photos function: Users can take advantage of this interactive feature to send their photos to editors in order to post on the websites. Coding this unit depends on providing it or not, as an independent section on the websites home page (score 4) or not (score 0).

Submit news tip function: Users of news websites usually have news tips. By using this interactive feature, users can send their news tips to editors. Coding this unit depends on providing it or not, as an independent section on the websites home page (score 4) or not (score 0).

Reporter/editor e-mail links: Putting reporter/editor e-mail links with posted news stories and other items significant to increase interactivity, it enables users to send their messages to reporters and editors easily. Coding this unit depends on the ratio of its presence or absence on the posted items between zero to four.

Letters-to-editor: Website users benefit from this feature to send any item to the site through the post, so that the administrators of the website can put clear address in a special place on the websites home page. Coding this unit depends on providing it or not, as an independent section on the websites home page (score 4) or not (score 0).

Reader blogs: Blogs, as interactive elements are successful in promoting interactivity in online journalism, designed to enhance the participation of users, providing an opportunity for them to publicly exchange ideas and opinions (Thorson and Rodgers 2006). Coding this unit depends on providing

it or not, as an independent section on the websites home page (score 4) or not (score 0).

5.3.4.3 Medium Interactive Features

Photo files: coding this unit (from zero to four) is based on the ratio (from zero to four) of the presence of photos within posted news stories, Also, the existence of an independent section for Photo Story on the homepage is placed in mind.

Audio files: coding this unit (from zero to four) is based on the ratio of the presence of Audio files within posted news stories, also, the existence of an independent section for podcast on the homepage is placed in mind.

Video files: coding this unit (from zero to four) is based on the ratio of the presence of video files within posted news stories. Also, the existence of an independent section for Video on the homepage is placed in mind.

Infographics: coding this unit (from zero to four) is based on the ratio of the presence of Infographics files within posted news stories. Also, the existence of an independent section for Infographics on the homepage is placed in mind.

Mobile version of site, apps: Due to the rapid development and deployment of smartphones, adopting mobile apps and mobile version has become more important for the news websites. Coding this unit varies depending on its availability on the websites from zero to four.

Internal hyperlink: An internal link is a type of hyperlink on a web page to another page or resource, such as an image or document, on the same

website or domain (Lodhia 2006). Coding this unit (from zero to four) is based on the ratio of the presence of it within posted news stories.

External hyperlink: External Links are hyperlinks that point at (target) any domain other than that the domain of the link exists on (source). It is hyperlink on a Web page that points to a page on a different website. Coding this unit (from zero to four) is based on the ratio of the presence of it within posted news stories.

5.3.4.4 Medium–human Interactive Features

Customized weather, Customized topics, Customized headlines, Search feature, E-mail updates/alerts, Languages feature and SMS alerts are Interactive Features which were coded (from zero to four) according to their presence within the websites.

5.3.5 Step 5 Coding Procedure

Below is the list of steps the researcher took in mind before commencing the Kurdish websites observation.

5.3.5.1 Research Instrument

This phase of the research chose a twofold view of sampling units within each Kurdish news website. Firstly, each home pages of the websites were examined. Given its attention-grabbing and organizational roles, a home page is likely to contain many interactive elements of the websites. Any interactive feature presented and/or linked to from the home page was coded. Weare and Lin (2000) argued that focusing on home pages works well for research questions regarding the interactivity of the news websites, "i[t] facilitates rapid data gathering and coding, and, in this context, the home page may be an appropriate unit for analysis" (Weare and Lin 2000: p281). For the website

users, homepage serves as the main gate, at first glance, they decide whether they continue to browse the site or to close and leave it, such as newspapers front pages, news website home pages are significant to engage users and engage with them by incorporating interactive features into their design.

Nevertheless, only focusing on the home pages as sampling units is not likely to be appropriate for this research, because some other interactive features already exist in the internal web pages of the sites and not on the home pages. Therefore, in order to find these features which did not exist on the home page, the headlining news story from the start page of each website was analysed. Interactive features were coded as present or non-present on the sites. Overall, the homepage and up to 500 additional news pages for each website were analysed.

5.3.5.2 Content analysis time frame

Requirement for rigor in drawing a sample in the research may be one of the most difficult steps of content analysis on the websites (McMillan 2000). Thus, in order to sample the interactive functions in the Kurdish websites, the researcher developed a modified constructed-week sampling strategy. Regarding content analysis on online news websites aggregator "constructed week sampling is more efficient than simple random sampling or consecutive day sampling" (Hester and Dougall 2007, p. 811).

The constructed-week sampling strategy is significant for doing content analysing on online news websites because it provides the researcher with a systematic way to capture content that is different across days and weeks. "When evaluating modern news websites, however, variability in the use of interactive features could occur not only across days and weeks, but also across time periods during a day" (Stroud, Scacco and Curry 2016, p. 344).

The period in which the data were collected consisted of 96 days for 24 weeks (4 days for each of the weeks) between August 1, 2014 and February 1, 2015, from Monday to Sunday. Each was divided into two time blocks corresponding to the morning and evening, each news websites in the sample was randomly assigned to a day and time block.

5.3.5.3 Intercoder reliability

The researcher coded a minimum of 12 percent of the overall sample, for the intercoder reliability test. Intercoder reliability was calculated with Holsti's coefficient of reliability. According to Holsti's formula (Neuendorf 2002), the coder reliability of each coding category for each website was overall above the acceptable indicator (higher than 0.75). Although only one coder was in-charge of this observation, the intention of having only one coder (the researcher himself) involved was to ease the reliability measurement. Probably, the reliability of a one-coder analysis is due to the complexity of both the task and the data. As warned by many web researchers before this, examining interactivity on the news websites web can be complex, time consuming, and create confusion (Ha and James 1998, Massey and Levy 1999, McMillan 2000). Therefore, the reliability of a coder will be more reliable when the task and/or the materials are less complex (Potter and Levine 1999).

5.3.6 Step 6: Analysis and Interpretation of the Data Collected

The data collected from these observations were first converted into percentages and numeric codes (0,1,2,3,4). The main reason for the coding was to make the changes to the news website interactivity features more understandable by using four-part typology of interactivity. Simple statistical analyses methods were performed to generate insight into the collected data. The availability of the interactivity features of each website is presented in percentages and scores in charts and tables. For media platform type and language of news outlets, cross tab method has been performed.

5.4 Phase Two – Qualitative Interviews

5.4.1 Qualitative approaches and their significance in research

With the emergence of the new information and communication technologies, recent years have seen an ongoing scholarly debate over measurement of interactivity. The rate of interactivity can be measured by a wide range of approaches, turning to the literature on the availability and effects of interactivity in the web. Scholars in human sciences and technologies have used quantitative and qualitative content analysis using human or automatic rating procedures (Rafaeli and Ariel 2007). While employing qualitative research methods to data gathering and analysis to discover the level and the impact of the web interactivity has significantly increased in popularity over the past decade, in a qualitative method, this thesis examines Kurdish news websites as the case study into their relationship in terms of interactivity. As an empirical evidence regarding outcomes of interactivity, this research focuses on the impacts of interactivity on the relations of individuals with the social and political landscape in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

In media studies, qualitative method attends to answer questions such as why and how, rather than what, which only quantitative study can help to answer. Fundamentally, a qualitative approach in this research is relied upon in order to come up with claims based primarily on a constructivist perspective, (i.e., the multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed with an intent of developing a theory or pattern) or advocacy/participatory perspectives (i.e., political, issue-oriented, collaborative. or change oriented) or both. (Creswell 2013, 18).

Qualitative research is more likely to explore processes (for example, how the community makes sense of the accident) than outcomes (the frequency of farm accidents). Qualitative research focuses on the meanings of experiences by exploring how people

define, describe, and metaphorically make sense of these experiences (VanderStoep and Johnson 2008, p165).

In the simplest terms, the significant difference between quantitative and qualitative research approach is the fact that quantitative studies employ measurement methods such that their results can be expressed in numbers, but instead of generating numerical data, qualitative researches require verbal explanations (Ten Have 2004). However, the distinction between these methodologies extend beyond the case of using numbers or words; in general, qualitative research is the method of choice when the research question needs an understanding and in-depth description of processes, events and relationships in the context of the social and cultural situation. Qualitative approach does not precisely focus on a specific question but ponder the theoretical philosophical paradigm. "Qualitative researchers may place their inquiry in the context of ongoing discussions with other researchers" (Neuman 2014: 20). Jensen (2002: 236) described and characterized qualitative communication in three common denominators as follows:

1. Its interest in the concept of meaning (its embedding in and orientation of social action).
2. Presumption of qualitative research (especially in communication fields) is that meaningful actions should be studied, as much as possible, in their naturalistic contexts.
3. A last common characteristic of qualitative research concerns the role of the researcher, who is defined undoubtedly as an interpretive subject.

Historically, qualitative research methods originated in the social and behavioural fields. According to Edwards and Holland (2013), of the early decades of the last century, qualitative research, as an acknowledged and systematic approach to knowledge creation, has its roots in the anthropology and sociology. While such as many scientific and philosophical terms, the qualitative term itself is much younger than one should think, the adjective

“qualitative” has a longer history (Brinkmann et al. 2014). For example, medieval philosophers of scholasticism distinguished qualia (the qualities of things) from quanta (the quantities) hundreds of years ago, and with modern philosophy from the seventeenth century onwards, empiricist philosophers like John Locke argued that there are different kinds of qualities (Bernard 2017)..

The humanities have long relied on systematic and efficient methods of analysis, even if these are not normally referred to as “methodologies.” Logic within philosophy, grammatical analysis in philology and more recently linguistics, textual criticism of historical sources—all these procedures are the hallmarks of science. The humanities seek—and find—facts. (Jensen 2002: p 31).

Brinkmann (2014: 19) stated that “moving from discussing the term qualitative to qualitative research, we may note that it was only quite late in the twentieth century that qualitative research became a self-defining field of inquiry, although researchers had been employing similar methodologies before”. However, in the last twenty years, with the use of a wider spectrum of research methods, qualitative research has become more accepted in many different academic disciplines, including in the social sciences and natural sciences (Schatz and Walker 2005). Concurrently, technological development drove Qualitative research towards new stage and style of both the collection and the analysis of qualitative data, which is relay on different technological devices, and whole range of software that enables computer-assisted analyses of qualitative materials.

According to Jensen (1991), two different sets of historical circumstances have interacted to produce the qualitative turn: First, the growth in qualitative approaches is a product of factors internally in the scientific community. Second, the qualitative turn is the product of factors of social history that are external to science. While some scholars believe that the increased popularity and acceptance of qualitative methods in the social sciences in the past 25 years is to some extent the result of a reaction against quantitative research

method assumptions (Vanderstoep and Johnston 2009), some others assert that all research methods have their own distinctive strengths and weaknesses (Rubin and Babbie 2012). Partially, both are true. Some social scientific research involves quantitative data, but other research uses qualitative data without statistics and both of them; qualitative and quantitative approach use multiple research techniques in order to gather and analyse empirical data (Neuman 2014).

Consequently, qualitative research approach helps to focus on specific areas and it can address quite focused questions about specific aspects. However, it is necessary to restrict the area of research to reveal specifics and patterns, namely by hearing some people's experience and analysing their ideas in Kurdish online journalism and linking the stories together with theoretical concepts. The purpose of conducting qualitative method is therefore to collect data that produces a deeper and better understanding and answering the study questions logically. With qualitative method the researcher is able to determine the type of important data which are necessary to understand the nature of interactivity in Kurdish media. Although by subscribing to a qualitative approach, this study claims meaning developed both socially and historically with individual experience holding a capacity for multiple subjective interpretations. However research involving Kurdish media and especially Kurdish online journalism has often focused on a quantitative lens on generalization and statistical predictability (Salih, 2010). The qualitative approach of this study seeks to explain the complexity of an information mediated technology phenomenon (interactivity) through defining patterns in the emergence of findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Through in-depth interview between the researcher and the participants, the Kurdish news websites journalists afforded an opportunity to revisit their experiences and construct meaning through dialogue.

One of the significances of qualitative approach specifically is that it allows researchers to use open-ended questions. Secondly, qualitative method

allows the researcher the flexibility to probe initial participant responses – that is, to ask why or how (Mack et al. 2005) which enhances the researcher's accuracy in understanding, explaining and interpreting observations about various aspects. To illustrate this, McNabb (2015: 107) explains:

Probably the single greatest advantage of employing qualitative research methods in exploratory studies and possibly the greatest disadvantage as well—is the richness of the information gained. Richness refers to the large number of topics that may surface in an interview, for example. As Gaskell (2000, 53) has pointed out, the broad aim of [all qualitative data] analysis is to look for meanings and understanding of what is said in the data, but the researcher must interpret this.

In summary, qualitative research is suitable for media study because it is rich and holistic, offers more than a snapshot – provides understanding of a sustained process, focuses on participant's experience, placed in its context, honors participants' local meanings. Meanwhile, this method supports quantitative data by explaining, illuminating, or reinterpreting. It displays viewpoints and stories of participants. On the other hand, qualitative approach preserves the chronological flow, documenting what events lead to what consequences and explaining why this chronology may have occurred. It celebrates how research representations (reports, articles, performances) constitute reality and affect the questions we can ask and what we can know, illustrates how a multitude of interpretations are possible, but how some are more and theoretically compelling, morally significant, or practically important than others (Tracy 2013). For the second stage of this mixed methods research, the researcher chose a qualitative approach for several compelling reasons. As Rubin and Babbie (2009) have pointed out, depth of understanding, flexibility and subjectivity are some of the key strengths of qualitative Research. According to Rubin and Babbie (2009), qualitative research method is mainly effective for studying subtle nuances in attitudes

and behaviours, and for examining social processes over time. As such, the main advantage of this method lies in the depth of understanding it permits. Qualitative research methods are especially useful in discovering the meaning that people give to events they experience.

Qualitative research is the method of choice when the research question requires an understanding of processes, events and relationships in the context of the social and cultural situations. Accordingly, this phase foremost focuses on the justification of main issues associated with the qualitative semi structured interview methodology and this is on the basis of the nature of the research problem and research questions. The qualitative research techniques are used to discover the profound meanings of the proposed subjects being studied. The purpose of this study is to discover the meaning and the nature of interactivity that supposed to be available in Kurdish news websites and exercised through the use of these sites by Kurdish web users and journalists. However some questions of this study require deep understanding of interactivity process in the context of the social and cultural situations instead of generating numerical data about availability of interactive function in the Kurdish websites in supporting or refuting clear cut hypotheses (Sofaer 2002). Secondly, by adopting qualitative method, the researcher who has insights into, will be able to explore and understand a phenomena, such as complex feelings, reasons for certain behaviours or thought processes regarding interactivity in online journalism, that are difficult to extract or learn about through quantitative or some other research methods (Alston and Bowles 2003). For the present study, the researcher explored Kurdish website journalist's perceptions and experiences of increasing interactivity in their news websites in order to produce factual descriptions based in-depth interview techniques. Third, in this study the researcher tries to play an active role as a main participant and instrument in data collection, and the interpreter of data findings. The researcher uses a qualitative method through the point of view, which emphasizes that media research will benefit from being performed as field research based on interaction between the researcher and the participants studied (Fink 2000).

5.4.2 Conducting in-depth interviews, justification

5.4.2.1 Qualitative research interviews

Qualitative research approaches involve the analysis nonverbal data through conducting several research tools, such as interview, observation, document analysis and auto ethnography and summarizes the findings primarily through narrative or verbal means (Lodico et al. 2010). However, the most common methods used, particularly in media research, are interviews and focus groups. The in-depth interview is a qualitative technique designed to get a vivid and clear image of the participant's perspective on the research topic (Mack et al. 2005). Interview is one of the most important, common and widely accepted and recognized methods of collecting information for qualitative research. Many social scientists conducting qualitative interviews in their studies as a methodological and research tool in social science. Researchers spending time working out because they expect what they get out of these methods. Edwards and Holland (2013: 1) state that "[t]he interview is probably the most widely used method employed in qualitative research, a central resource for social science. Qualitative interviews have been the basis for many important studies across the range of disciplinary fields".

Lindlof (2010: 173) suggests several functions served by qualitative interviews.

1. Understanding the social actor's experience and perspective through stories, accounts, and explanations
2. Eliciting the language forms used by social actors
3. Gathering information about things or processes that cannot be observed effectively by other means
4. Inquiring about the past
5. Verifying, validating, or commenting on information obtained from other sources

6. Achieving efficiency in data collection

Interviewing has a variety of forms, such as ethnographic, oral history, life course, life history, biographical, narrative interviews, group interviews (Edwards and Holland 2013), standardized interviews; in-depth interviews; elite interviews; life history interviews; to semi-structured interviews and structured interviews (Cohen et al. 2007). Cohen et al. (ibid: 352) suggest that this variation of forms of interview given is "frequently a function of the sources one reads". Mainly, there are three fundamental types of qualitative interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. The most popular used interview technique employed in qualitative interviewing is the semi-structured interview (Frey and Fontana 2005, and Navarro 2007). Through a continuum and from structured, semi-structured, to unstructured or focused interviews, qualitative interviewing provides a method for collecting rich and detailed information about how individuals experience, understand and explain events in their lives. Mason (2002: 62) suggests that all forms of qualitative interviewing has the following core features in common: it creates interactional exchange of dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee(s), in face-to-face or other contexts, it has a relatively informal style, a thematic, topic-centred, biographical or narrative approach where the researcher has many topics, themes or issues they wish to cover, but with a fluid and flexible structure. Finally, most qualitative research operates from the perspective that knowledge is situated and contextual, and therefore the job of the interviewer is to ensure that the relevant contexts are brought into focus so that situated knowledge can be produced.

A structured interview is an interview that has a series of predetermined questions with a limited set of response categories. The questions would be asked in the same order for all respondents with little or no variation and with no scope for follow-up questions to responses that warrant further elaboration (Wildemuth 2016). This standardization is intended to minimize the effects of the instrument and the interviewer on the research results. Structured interviews are similar to surveys except that they are administered orally rather than in writing. Consequently, structured interviews are relatively quick and

easy to administer and may be of particular use if clarification of certain questions are required or if there are likely to be literacy or numeracy problems with the interviewees. However, by their very nature, they only allow for limited participant responses and are, therefore, of little use if 'depth' is required (Gill et al. 2008). Generally, there is very little flexibility in the way questions are asked or answered in the structured interview setting (Fontana and Frey 1994). In this type of interview, the researcher is systematic and does not deviate from the script or share personal views or experiences with the interviewee.

Briefly, the structured interview is based on a questionnaire with a sequence of questions, asked in the same order and the same way of all subjects of the research, with little flexibility available to the researcher. The major objective is for neutral interviewers to obtain comparable information from a potentially large number of subjects. It is typical of more positivist approaches, with methodological rules for its practice, and often is subjected to statistical methods of analysis (Edwards and Holland 2013: 3).

Conversely, unstructured interviews in qualitative research mainly referred to as open interviews; involve asking relatively open-ended questions of interviewees to find out their percepts on the subject of interest. This form of interview does not reflect any preconceived theories or ideas and are performed with modicum or no organisation. Researchers engage participants with undemarcated, vague and general questions about those constructs (Given 2008). Consequently, there are relatively few demand characteristics when conducting this technique. In short, the participants determine the direction the interview will take when conducting an unstructured interview. Moreover, the process of this interview type exactly is not such as a daily conversations among the participants, but the use of "unstructured" interviewing term for this kind of qualitative interview could be a "misnomer, because no research interview can be completely lacking in some form of structure" (Mason 2002: 62). Minichiello et al. (1990) described unstructured interviews as interviews in which neither the question nor the answer

categories are predetermined. Instead, they rely on social interaction between the researcher and interviewee without relying on any priori categorization. It is not easy for researchers to use unstructured interview in their studies, because it usually takes a long time for carrying out (often lasting several hours) and it is not easy to participate in. Therefore, as Gill et al. (2008: 291) state "[t]heir use is, generally only considered where significant depth is required, or where virtually nothing is known about the subject area or a different perspective of a known subject area is required". Consequently, there are relatively few demand characteristics when using this method. In short, the interviewee determines the direction the interview will take when using an unstructured interview.

Finally, a semi-structured interview which is a combination of structured and unstructured interviews is flexible than other two interview forms (structured and unstructured) for qualitative data collection. An interview guide, usually combines both closed-ended and open-ended questions which allows the respondent to have the opportunity to follow an idea or answer in more detail. Such as structured interviews, the researcher mainly follows a script or interview guide, but it is acceptable to deviate from the order of questions, to add new questions, or to ask participants to talk more about their responses (Wildemuth 2016). Basically, the researcher is interested in the context and content of the participants, how the interviewee understands the topics and he retains some control over the direction and the subjects to be discussed. Moreover, "these interviews allow much more space for interviewees to answer on their own terms than structured interviews" (Edwards and Holland 2013: 29).

5.4.2.2 Justification of Interview Methodology

As mentioned previously, this research uses an explanatory, multi-phase mixed method to examine interactivity in Kurdish online journalism. A part of this research deals with the impact of interactivity of the Kurdish news websites on social, political and financial aspects in the Iraqi Kurdistan region, whereas we relied on quantitative data analysis in the first phase. Thus, the interview

method was employed to collect expert perspectives from the editor in chefs, journalists, media experts and web developers from six Kurdish news websites in Iraqi Kurdistan Region websites. Interviews help in analysing and revealing how producers of the Kurdish news websites view the concept of interactivity and how/why they incorporate or not incorporate interactive features onto their websites or their articles. The qualitative research method was used to justify, identify, and describe the methodology used to solve the research problems and in order to achieve the objectives, answer the questions and reaching a scientific conclusion of the second phase of this study. We believe that it is important and necessary to qualify and quantify interactivity in the Kurdish news websites together in order to know what is interactivity and to have a better understanding about it in the Kurdish media. Below is a detailed description of the second phase of the research methodology, data collection, sampling and data analysis.

In order to generate insights into the production of the news on the web in Kurdish news websites and develop an understanding of interactivity in the Kurdish online journalism, the researcher conducted a series of semi-structured interviews individually and face-to-face (Lindlof and Taylor 2010) with 12 of editor in chefs, journalists, media experts and web developers from six news organizations (see table 4.3 and 4.4). According to Lindlof (1995), semi-structured interviews are particularly best technique in helping the researcher understand a social actor's own viewpoint. Thus, the interview method was employed to collect expert perspectives from the news producers who are central to the final production of the websites as well as to get additional information on the uses, trends and roles of news website interactivity in the Kurdish society. However, the researcher has decided to do this semi-structured interview as the principal tool of data collection. This would lead to attain as much information as possible from a broad range of point of views. The answers collected from these questions provided the researcher with rich and detailed information for the entire thesis which the researcher has used in the previous theoretical chapters about aspects of the Kurdish media

since there are no enough reliable new sources about Kurdish media and main questions of the research.

Overall, there are some important advantages of open-ended questions in qualitative interview technique for exploratory research. Mack et al. (2005: 4) have pointed out that "[o]ne advantage of qualitative methods in exploratory research is that use of open-ended questions and probing gives participants the opportunity to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses, as quantitative methods do". According to them, open-ended questions have the ability to evoke responses that are meaningful and culturally salient to the participant, unanticipated by the researcher and rich and explanatory in nature.

The findings from interviews helped to enrich the data gathered from quantitative content analysis by explaining, illuminating, or reinterpreting (Tracy 2013). The main reason to conduct semi-structured interviews as a research approach for this study is the researcher's interest to understand the experiences of the interviewees, specifically the webmasters and news editors with regard to interactivity in Kurdish online journalism, and how they link interactivity with the emergence and development of online journalism in the Kurdistan. The semi-structured interviews guide referred to the respondent's knowledge of Kurdish website site users' profile, the strategies used to build and develop user loyalty. In addition, the means provided for the user to give feedback, the use made of the feedback information with the facilities and functions for their users to contribute to news content, the weight attached to user contributions in the overall website strategy, and related questions (Trench 2003). The interviews also assist to further probe why such results were found and verify and comment on the findings of research in this field (Lindlof, 1995).

5.4.2.3 Proposed Framework for Semi-Structured Interviews

For quantitative phase semi structured interviews were conducted with 12 of editor in chefs, journalists, media experts and web developers from six news organizations. In this research phase, a stratified sampling approach is adopted in order to ensure that the participants represent Kurdish online journalism in Iraqi Kurdistan region. The sampling design for this qualitative interviews has been organized in three phases (Corbetta 2003). First of all, the reference population has been subdivided into four sub-populations: editor in chefs, journalists, media experts and web developers. Then, editor in chefs and journalists samples have been subdivided into four sub-populations depending on the nature and classification of media organisations or websites in Kurdistan according to their ownership, whether they are partisan, independent, or shadow media. Later, a sample has been selected from each group by means of a random procedure. Finally, the samples drawn from each group have been collected in order to create an overall sample.

In addition, the researcher contacted administrators of selected Kurdish news websites and media organisations for their permission to conduct the study. Consent from the media organisations is collected. The researcher then attached the invitation to participants, including a brief introduction to the researcher and the rationale of the research study. Also, the researcher obtained permission from both administrators of selected Kurdish news websites and participants to use the interviews for his study and to take photos of the participants. The in-person interviews took place over a two-month period (August 2015 -October 2015), all were conducted in the Kurdish language in Sulaymaniyah, Erbil and Duhok cities. In this study, all of the interviews conducted are audio recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim and then were translated by the researcher into English.

The participants of the interviews in this study were divided into four main groups and each interview lasted approximately 30 to 90 minutes in duration and were digitally recorded for subsequent transcription and review.

Interviewees are selected from six Kurdish news websites (See table 5.3 and 5.4). The first part was conducted with six Kurdish news website editors in chief (webmasters) of the four Kurdish news website samples in different places and different times such as: Dashty Salar editor in chief of Sbeiy.com, Xalaf Ghafur editor in chief of Xendan.org, Sirwan Gharib editor in chief of Westganews.net, and Hazhar Osman editor in chief of Nrtrtv.com. The aim of this part was to get detailed information about the websites production processes, policies, economics and organisational development of the Kurdish media. Interviews help in detecting how producers of the websites view the concept of interactivity and how/why they incorporate interactive features and functions. The second part was carried out with a group (four) of professional news website editors in Kurdistan Region of Iraq, such as: Bahadin Usuf editor of Sbeiy.com news website, Shno O Qadir editor in Basnews.com, Pshtiwan Zahir editor in Xendan.org. Saman S Muhammad editor in Westganews.net, Aram Ghafur editor in Dwarozh.net. and Razdha Menuchahry editor in Nrtrtv.com.

The data from the interviews with the second participant group provided information about the uses, roles and trends of interactive news website features through active negotiated interaction between the researcher and them. This information helps to provide a fuller picture about the nature of interactivity in the Kurdish online journalism, most importantly, by meeting editors personally and unearth the meaning that they made of their experiences in explaining interaction between them and their news website users. The third part of semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted with one web designers and developers, Zanst J Mhedin web developer in Avesta group Ltd. A purposive, theoretical sampling approach taken in selecting interviewees to seek out similarities and dissimilarities, looking at both typical and atypical cases of Kurdish news websites. This is to get deep information about Kurdish media landscape in the past and present. The fourth part of semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted with one Kurdish media expert and trainer in the Kurdistan region who are also experienced journalists,

namely Bahroz Ali lecturer in the media department at the University of Sulaymaniyah.

Table (5.3) Sites that participated in the interviews

Website	Ownership	Unique visitors/Mo	Site Focus
Dwarozh.net	Independent	More than 2000,000	General news
Westge.net	Independent	Less than 2000,000	General news
XENDAN.org	Shadow media	More than 2000,000	General news
Basnews.com	Shadow media	More than 2000,000	General news
SBEIY.com	Partisan	Less than 2000,000	General news
NRTTV.com	Partisan	More than 2000,000	General news

Table 5.3 Sites that Participated in the Interviews

Table (5.4) Details of interviewees

Name	Gender	Administrative status	Unit
Dashty Salar	M	editor in chief	Sbeyi.com
Xalaf Ghafur	M	editor in chief	Xendan.org
Sirwan Gharib	M	editor in chief	Westge.net
Hazhar Osman	M	editor in chief	Nrttv.com
Bahadin Usuf	M	Editor	Sbeyi.com

Shno O Qadir	F	Editor	Radionawa.com
Pshtiwan Zahir	M	Editor	Xendan.org
Saman Muhammad	S M	Editor	Westge.net
Aram Ghafur	M	Editor	Dwarozh.net
Razdha menuchahry	M	Editor	Nrttv.com
Bahroz Ali	M	Media expert	Sulaimany University
Zanst J Mhedin	M	Web developer	Avesta group Ltd

Table 5.4 Details of interviewees

5.4.2.4 Interview questions

In order to generate ideas from respondents through covering all the relevant aspects and to make data collection process more methodical and organized for each interviewee, an interview protocol is designed based on the nature as well as type of the question. The questions stemmed from the researcher's observations and reading of secondary sources. In order to build the normal relationship between the participant and researcher, the interviews began with background questions, which Hill et al. (1997) suggest that this type of questions can help the interviewee feel comfortable as well as assist in gathering demographic information.

The main section of the interview questions, which is about interactivity in Kurdish online journalism, was based on the interactive features that were offered by Kurdish news websites (sample taken for quantitative phase). Because the quantitative phase was conducted prior to the interviews, the researcher had a general perception of the level of use of interactivity features in Kurdish news websites. The researcher benefited from this positive point to

formulate interview questions and re-ask questions during the interviews, if necessary. Thus, the interviews were not structured because not all Kurdish news websites offered the same interactive features.

Generally, the interview guide (Appendix 1) consisted of four perspectives: The first section of questions consisted of general questions about the media in the Kurdistan region. This section included 4 questions (numbered 1-4). The second section was devoted to general queries about online journalism in the Kurdistan region. This section consisted of 3 questions (numbered 5 -7). The questions of the third section was about interactivity in Kurdish online journalism. Mainly, questions were based on the interactive features that were offered by each Kurdish website, and thus the interviews were semi structured because the researcher observed that not all websites offered the same features. News editors were first asked about the use of human interactive features, or interpersonal interactive features, on their news websites. Generally, "[t]hese features were given special attention as human interactive features are critical in facilitating participatory journalism" (Chung 2007: 47). After that, interviewees were asked about their perspective of interactivity. Finally, the interviewees were asked about the problems with interactive communication on their news websites. This section included 13 questions (numbered 8-20). The fourth section of questions consisted of professionalism and the journalist's role in online journalism in the Kurdistan region. This section included 3 questions (numbered 21-23). The questions of the fifth and final section focused on technical aspects of the Kurdish news websites. This section included 3 questions (numbered 24-26).

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented an overview of the methodology and research design used in this study. It has dealt with the research design and research methodology of this study. It has demonstrated seeking an understanding of interactivity in online journalism, which is based on a mixed method approach. The nature of the methodology of this study was analysed using both

quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, identified and discussed. The data analysis procedure on both research phases were delineated in detail and accurately.

Chapter Six

Kurdish Online Journalism

6.1 Introduction

In the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, within the spread of internet service, online journalism has entered the Kurdish media landscape. The diffusion of many Kurdish websites has helped the creation of a new form of journalism addressing Kurdish audience. While traditional media in the Kurdistan region was monopolized by the political authorities, online journalism opened a wide space for journalists to build independent media models directing their attention to the Kurdish audience. Today, Kurdish online journalism is not simply the web version of traditional newspapers but has become a new and sophisticated model that provides various news services continuously and in different types.

Since the 1990s, online journalism has become a new area of practice in journalism, outside of mainstream media. This is with the emergence and development of the World Wide Web. The previous establishment of a global communication networking and infrastructure, as well as empowering people to own a PC in their homes and providing Internet service, has helped make the Internet a new communication medium, used by media organizations to broadcast news and other journalistic material, and facilitated to expand the Internet and made it easy to use globally (Curran and Seaton 2003).

The exponential growth of internet and the increasing dependence on digital medium have revolutionized online newspaper journalism with new types and forms of disseminating news and other products (Haneefa and Nellikka 2010). Online journalism or digital journalism has changed the ways in which traditional media works. It has helped speed up the preparation of journalistic material and improve its content by adding new digital features. It has also influenced the speed of publication and the availability of new effective methods for broadcasting it to the public. One must clearly note that the Internet has influenced the press in many aspects and not only the publishing process, as Deuze (2001) notes, "it can be considered as influencing the

press in ways that can be adapted to the newsroom on computer means: electronic journalism". While the ownership and management of Kurdish traditional media, such as television and radio, was confined to political parties and administrative authorities, the birth of the internet in Kurdistan opened a wide space for journalists who dreamed of working in independent media institutions, far from political and intellectual monopoly. Strong competition and usage of Internet encouraged Kurdish journalists to develop their skills of using internet and new media technology. Some of them have also started to create personal blogs to publish their opinions and ideas or present some private information that did not get in traditional media outlets. Digitization of Kurdish media has also led to the emergence of civic journalism in Kurdistan. Broadband services and new media technologies made possible for some people to participate in the Kurdish media landscape and work as a journalist. Today some users that has mobile phone or computer connected with internet can compete with journalists (Salih 2010; Syan 2017).

This chapter focuses on the emergence and development of the internet and online journalism in the Kurdistan region. Before discussing the nature of Kurdish online journalism, it is important to focus on the impact of technologies on journalism through a detailed explanation and presentation of the effects of the print, broadcast technology and the internet on journalism at different stages of human history. In addition, its relevant for this chapter to focus on stages of internet, digital media and the concept and types of online journalism, in order to understand how the internet influenced traditional media and played a significant role in the emergence of a new form of journalism, namely the online journalism. It is also necessary to examine its key features and the most common barriers that affect this style of media. This chapter seeks to address some of the major issues surrounding Kurdish online journalism, such as history, characteristics, advantages, limitations, types, norms, and practices, with an emphasis on Kurdish news websites as a case study, which in turn will contribute to a better understanding of the development of online journalism in the Kurdistan region.

6.2 The Impact of Technologies on Journalism

Understanding the press in all its forms through technological medium or

framework of technology gives an important and thoughtful perspective on what can and should be the press (Tsui, 2009 63). The point that many scholars agree (Hujanen and Pietikäinen 2004; Boczkowski, 2009; Zelizer 2009) is that communication technology has changed the press over decades of creativity and evolution. The press in all its stages has benefited from technological development. While media seems to benefit from technological developments in news gathering, and publishing, these are generally bright and positive aspects in talking about the technological impact on the media. There is also a sense that communication and information technology sometimes have a negative impact on the press. Technology is responsible, partially or wholly, for a devaluation of journalistic standards. However, talking about the disadvantages of communication or publishing tools is not new, even with the invention of printing, the invention was rejected in many underdeveloped societies, especially by the clergy on the charge of printing influence on the individual and its role in corrupting society (Briggs and Burke, 2009. Horsfield 2013). According to Xu (2015: 66) “the role of technology in the development of journalism is intricate, combining with many other factors, and has resulted in much debate”.

Looking at the technological impact on the media, ranging from social experts to journalists, it seems that many journalists believe that technological development is unavoidable, and the advanced technological means affect the process of journalism and the media scene in general, and the development in their perspective is positive. Technological determinism is common among journalists when reflecting on changes in their profession (Örnebring 2010). Perhaps the crystallization of this belief goes back to the use of technology in the daily work of the journalists permanently. Not to mention the past, for the media of our time, the development of information technology and publishing has a profound impact on traditional media, especially print media, the crisis in journalism has affected media outlets everywhere (Curran 2010; Franklin 2008; Picard 2006; Reinardy 2011). With the opportunity for new media platforms, major media companies are struggling to survive by gaining new audiences and not losing their place in the busy and irregular media market. Therefore, companies resort to

restructuring, and disposal of some traditional means, such as newspapers, and sometimes radio and television channels (Nikunen 2014).

As noted, technological determinism is disputed among scholars, experts such as Briggs and Burke insist that the new media techniques have not replaced old technology. “Today’s television serials follow the model of radio serials, which in turn follow the model of the stories serialized in nineteenth century magazines” (Briggs and Burke 2009: 2). Conboy also raises doubts about the importance of technological determinism to media studies; he believes that the media is also shaped by “a particular combination of technology and public communication. Whether a new technology is mostly adopted by society or not is determined by political, economic and cultural factors” (2011: 81-82). Others, such as Bain (1937), regard technology as a factor in the destruction, production and integration of cultural phenomena, added that the term of technological determinism encompasses all physical and non-physical areas, all things are directly —and indirectly— dependent upon technology and mediated by it.

As an example, before the development of Johannes Gutenberg’s printing press in Europe, in the 15th century, few people had direct access to the Bible, primarily just the Catholic clergymen who interpreted its meanings to their flocks. With mass production of the text, though, more people had access, and more questions were asked about the traditional interpretations, and behaviors of pastors, fueling the Protestant Reformation. In that case, and many others, particularly in the past century, the efficacy of technology as a driving force in history is apparent, as a specific innovation appears and causes tremendous change (Oppegaard 2015: 24).

Based on the above ideas and views, on the impact of technology on the journalism, it is better to explain, clarify and discuss media technologies in their political, economic and cultural contexts to detect how these different technologies have impacted on media.

6.2.1 Printing Technology and Journalism

The discovery of printing by Gothenburg in 1456 AD created an appropriate environment for the development of communication. Its discovery was the beginning of a revolution in society by facilitating the dissemination of information, learning to write and read and make science possible and available to a large proportion of people step by step. Gutenberg invention seems to be so significant when scholars study the development of publications (Briggs and Burke 2009). The direct influence of the printing invention is that it has become possible to distribute many publications compared to the pre-print phase. This has led to the possibility of distributing more than one publication in less time, which enabled the emergence of prints with much larger circulations. Over the centuries following its invention, printing has influenced the education of people and changing habits and traditions lagging behind closed societies. A large number of new works were available in various fields of science and knowledge, at a cheaper price than before, in relatively inexpensive formats, and across an increasingly varied range of topics and genres, creating a new audience for reading religious and secular works in classical and modern languages (Pettegree 2010).

Later, with the advent of printed periodicals and newspapers, print media has played an important role in political debates (Winston 2006; Peacy 2013). The invention and spread of newspapers in the seventeenth century had a profound effect on the culture and politics (Baron and Dooley 2005). The western pattern for the delivery and consumption of political information provided the model for the rest of the world. In the mid-17th century, the nucleus of free journalism began to form in England when the press criticized the authorities. From there, the opposition press spread in Europe, then America and then in other countries at different periods. In addition, print media-from ballads to pamphlets and newspapers-transformed the public's ability to understand and participate in national political debate and life. After Gutenberg invention, the real revolution in print production began (Phillips 2018) when Friedrich Koenig developed a steam-powered press in 1814 on which a revolving impression cylinder substituted for the hand press's flat platen, delivering 1,100 sheets per hour. This invention had a positive impact

on the press in the speed of news publishing, which implied that newspapers could contain more recent news than ever before depending on the printer speed.

On the other hand, when the press profession became profitable and provided a huge financial return to newspaper owners, the press took advantage of the ads to improve their quality, develop their tools and their products. Revenue from advertising played an increasingly important role in the total income of the newspapers, which pushed them towards a more commercial style (Harris, 1978).

Based on what was discussed above, printing technology affected the journalism that it invented in terms of both the medium of the press and the content of newspapers. The invention and development of printing technology has led to a tremendous impact on the public, political, economic, cultural and civic spheres of life. The press itself benefited from its development and led to the use of technological development in the newspaper industry in all stages of the press production, from the production, design, editing, information collection, printing and publishing. The most important of these developments is the innovations in printing technology that benefited the written press in the best form and in a short time.

6.2.2 Broadcast Technology and Journalism

After the printed media, the first step towards change in the media medium, was that of telecommunications, beginning in the latter part of the nineteenth century when Guglielmo Marconi invented wireless telegraphy in 1896 (Street, 2002:14). Drawing on Marconi's innovation and others, by the 1920s experimental radio broadcasting was being replaced by regular services from many of the western capitals. Among them was the first British radio station which began broadcasting from London on 14 November 1922 (Street 2002, Starkey 2017). Radio transmitted live sound to a private, domestic audience, and from 1936 television provided the same kind of audience with live sound and live moving pictures.

Technological innovation continued in the field of radio broadcasting, the radio was able to impose itself as a new communication medium different from newspapers and magazines on both the technical and content sides. While these new innovations and broadcast technology offered new form of mass media consumption, Barnard (2000) notes that historically, radio's ability to survive in competitive media and environments to compete and influence, has always depended on how well radio broadcasters can tap into social and cultural change. As explained before, the first automated mode of mass communication was print newspaper, however, "radio broadcasting was the first genuinely live mass medium since 'theatre' because it was instantaneous: it did not offer fixed messages in the form of printed texts and photographs or recordings of sounds or moving images" (Crisell 2002: 4).

Understanding the characteristics or affordances of each medium or technology that influence its usefulness for journalism and mass communication processes, will help clarify our thinking of the possible benefits or weaknesses of each medium or technology. The fundamental changes that broadcast technology has made are mainly due to the advantages of this type of communication in the communication process, which lies in the following: First, the radio then television embraced and domesticated various live or live-seeming genres which hitherto could be experienced only in public such as theatrical, talks, plays, narratives, debates, spectacles and light entertainment. In addition, cinema film production re-developed by television by constantly changing in a body of dramatic productions (Ellis 2002), which adapted with the nature of the television broadcasting and its technical and communication characteristics, "which were both optimal or definitive in themselves and capable of being shown many times over" (Crisell 2002: 7). Second, radio and television were able to add a living character to things that were rigid and were already private because they were generated to newspapers especially news. Broadcast technologies conveyed the sound and sight of public events to audiences in a short period of time compared to printed means.

Although scholars (Williams 1974; Jones 1998) claim that broadcast

journalism is a re-publishing of the contents of the print media and it is essentially a combination and development of earlier forms, such as newspaper and advertising columns, the new radio and television communication technology has resulted in a several important changes and transformations in the form of journalism.

Over the various periods, the emergence of new means of communication has affected the old media. Even if the impact did not erase the old media, it put a definite end to its rapid development and spread. For example, in the beginning the presence of broadcast and television media has threatened the existence of printed newspaper. According to Francis Williams (1984), at least 225 weeklies and 21 out of 41 regional morning dailies between 1921 and 1957, have been closed. This is due to the emergence of other media such as radio and television. Simply, the advent of new media does not mean the elimination of previously existing media at all. In addition, new media based on advanced technology can take advantage of the legacy and media experience that has come before it, to build new forms of journalism (Lewis et al. 2007). Whenever new technology expected to play a great role in the development of media comes around, huge numbers of experts, scholars, business executives and journalists alike all participate in a debate of revolution prophesying. Mosco (2005) states that the emergence of new media techniques often has been surrounded by legends and myths about their enormous potential and revolutionary powers for change and influence.

Simply put, the experts' point of view (Negroponte 1995; Hall 2001) on the impact of technology on the media has dissipated, with the advent of the digital age era. Digital technology can affect the message in different dimensions:

The medium is not the message in a digital world. It is an embodiment of it. A message might have several embodiments automatically derivable from the same data. In the future, the broadcaster will send out one stream of bits, like the weather for

example, which can be converted by the receiver in many different ways. The same bits can be looked at by the viewer from many perspectives (Negroponte 1995: 71).

6.2.3 Internet and journalism

The advent and spread of the internet have contributed significantly to the increased dissemination of information and the empowerment of knowledge in the societies that have been linked to this innovation (societies 2002. Winston 2002. Fuchs 2007). Since the invention of the internet in the late 1960s in the United States, the internet as a project of the Ministry of Defense was strictly used for military and government purposes in the exchange of scientific information among scientists (Leiner et al 2009). The invention of the internet has gained a remarkable importance from the last decade, and the continued development of computer-based technology in the late 20th century enabled the internet to become a new medium for journalism. The internet, and specifically its graphic interface, has had a major impact on all levels of (information) societies such as economic, politic, education and journalism. The internet allows users for instantaneous exchange of small and huge amounts of data and information to and from any part of the world. It makes it possible for individuals, officials, organizations and companies to communicate with others both at the interpersonal and mass levels of communication. It also allows its users access to large volumes of texts, images, videos available on the websites and to share their data as well. Sending and receiving these data occur very quickly from and to the farthest point in the world at a startling speed (Morris and Ogan 1996; Ohiagu 2011).

Since the release of the world wide web (WWW) standard by CERN in 1991, until 2001, almost 14,000 online news publications have been available online (Carlson, 2005). This is certainly a huge number in ten years, confirming the interest of media organizations in this new communication medium since its inception. At the beginning of this century, Hill (2001) predicted that people would leave newspapers and turn to using the internet as their favorite medium for news. He stated that "[w]ithin five years more people in the

developed world will get their news from the Internet rather than from a daily paper" (Hill 2001: 16).

According to Pew Research Centre (Kohut and Remez 2008) the internet, as a media outlet, has surpassed all other media at the end of 2008 except television in some cases as an outlet for national and international news. Today, people in Western Europe have a clear preference for television as a source of news, while the use of online outlets for news is also widespread (Pew Research Center 2017), as well as about half of all adults are already online. Today, roughly nine-in-ten American adults use the internet.

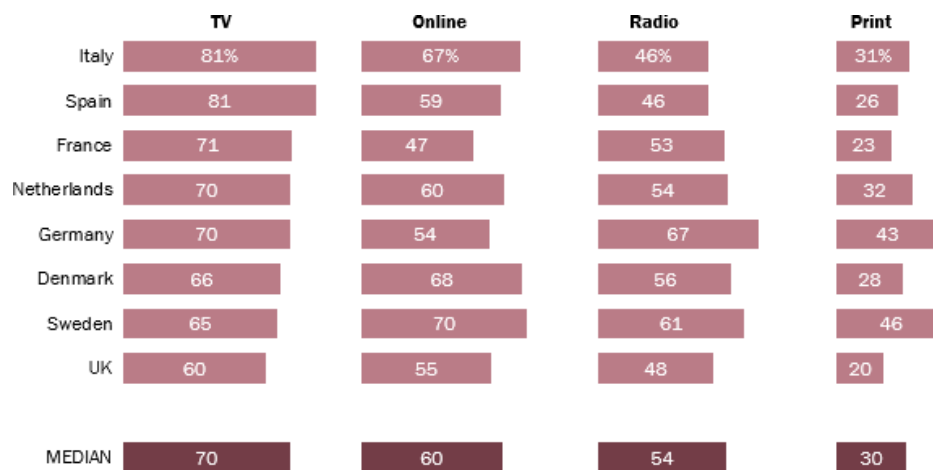


Figure 6.1 most popular sources for news across western Europe. Source: pew research centre (2017)

The first steps of electronic publishing began in the early 1990s, when Prodigy and America OnLine (AOL) start posting news via internet. One of the first newspapers offering its services on CompuServe was The Wall Street Journal, and the financial information was the one to prove that there was some room for payment news on the internet (Díaz 2013). According to (Elmer-Dewitt 1995): The rush to get online, to avoid being 'left behind' in the information revolution, is intense. Those who find fulfilment in cyberspace often have the religious fervour of the recently converted. Largely unedited, its content is often tasteless, foolish, uninteresting or just plain wrong". It is

therefore imperative that traditional media keep pace with this technological development so as not to lose its existence.

With the beginning of the present century, the number of news websites and other forms of journals sites has increased tremendously. With the growing controversy over the extent and impact of the internet there has been much debate about the impact of the rise of the internet and other digital technologies on traditional news media, such as newspapers, radio and televisions (Kraut et al 2006). Studies often focus on the threat posed by the internet to other media outlets, or how the internet has given journalists the opportunity to activate their skills or open up a wide space to freedom of expression and to get rid of political, economic and social constraints. The question of the impact of the technical dimension on news content is one of the issues raised by researchers. Pavlik (2000) suggests that news content is crucially determined by the available technologies. Hence, changes in journalism can be explained predominantly by technological developments. Hermans et al (2009) suggest that a more profound and realistic approach in this respect related to the impact of the internet on the media, come from the integrated perspective of social constructivism. Here, the adoption of innovations is seen as a complex interaction process between professional, organizational, and economic factors "With this in mind, the role of social context factors, such as working conditions, workplace organization, and professional values, should be taken into consideration when studying the adoption of technological innovations in news media" (Hermans et al 2009: 138).

Pavlik (2015) proposes that technological developments especially internet and new information technologies are reshaping media and society in four fundamental ways:

1. the participatory nature of journalism and media,
2. the methods of doing journalism and creating media,
3. the content and paracontent of journalism and media, and

4. the organizational structures, culture and institutional controls of journalism, media and society.

According to the views of some scholars (Koch 1991; Pavlik 2001; Burnett and Marshall 2003; Lewis 2003), across different perspectives, the characteristics of internet and technology, particularly the ubiquity of the Web, have affected journalism and altered it. Pavlik (2001: p1) states that “developments in new media are leading to the development of new storytelling techniques that engage the audience in more contextualized and navigable news reporting”. There are three main influences carried by the internet as follow:

First, the internet has become an important tool which assists journalists to produce news. Journalists use the internet to collect information on topics related to the events or phenomena they work on, to prepare press material such as news and other press reports (Phillips et al 2009). The internet enables journalists to follow other media outlets and compare their news products with what they have by using online search engines, which is increasingly indispensable for journalists to conduct journalistic research. As a result, the journalist has clear insights into what he should do in the day-to-day practice of his work at his media establishment or when he enters the event site. The internet has made access to information sources easier for reporters. Sometimes the journalist uses his cell phone connected to the internet service to connect or uses his e-mail, which enables him to make the connection faster and cheaper. Sometimes news materials such as pictures and video clips of events are received live and reliably. Today journalists have utilized online tools for researching and reporting. Pavlik (2015) believes that the internet is an essential tool for gathering information and checking facts in a report, especially when journalists produce breaking news or face an upcoming deadline.

Second, the internet has changed the concept of news to some extent, especially in an online context. The preparation and dissemination of news and reports on the internet are very different from news in other media such

as radio, television and newspaper. For example, a journalist can add multimedia, hypertext, and internal and external links to his reports when published on the internet. This was not possible in the traditional press. At the same time, the journalist can add his or her e-mail with the published article so that the user can contact him or her. Drawing on modern technology in the field of production and journalistic editing, press reports are no longer just text printed as they are in newspapers, or audible news on the radio or even a television scene, but the press material on the internet has become a compilation of all these read, audio and written elements.

Third, the internet has provided an avenue to producing journalistic pieces for people who are not media professionals. In the traditional media, there are big opportunity to share the productions and ideas of a high level of journalists, experts, specialists, stars, etc. For ordinary citizens, there is not enough space to participate. The internet has changed this prevailing situation. Today, through the internet, especially social sites, it is possible to participate and express opinion and offer suggestions and solutions and criticism of the authority, this content is a large proportion of each person if he can connect to the internet and hence the concept of citizen journalist enters the media and social science with the development of the internet. Even journalists are not dependent on media organizations to publish their news reports. Phillips et al (2009: 61) suggest that "[t]he advent of the internet has the potential to change the nature of journalism, for it gives journalists the ability to distribute the news without reliance on media organizations". Citizen journalism has become a key concept in any analysis of this practice and its possible impact on mainstream media. Today, news websites provide a range of options for users and producers to interact, discuss, up- or download, and to communicate in a participatory way.

Finally, answering questions about the potential threat posed by the internet to the other communications mediums, it can be said that the internet can weaken the status of other media, especially newspapers and other print publications. However, due to the internet, existing media organizations are facing a new challenge by pulling audiences away from the traditional news

providers, newspapers, television and radio (Phillips et al 2009). James Carey (1998: 28) argues that “[t]he Internet should be understood as the first instance of a global communication system. This system in turn, is displacing a national system of communications which came into existence at the end of the nineteenth century as a result of the railroad and telegraph”.

6.3 Online journalism

Online journalism is one of the most controversial output that was born as a result of the technological development in the field of broadband networks and computers. Many scholars and media professionals (Negroponte 1995; Hall 2001; Singer 2004; Boczkowski 2005) have addressed the phenomenon of online journalism, they focused on the exponential and accelerated growth of internet and the increased reliance on digital information have revolutionized online journalism with new ways and means of disseminating news and other products. It has put online journalism to the challenge of updating and providing fresh news frequently and changing news content by improving it with unique interactive features

Online journalism has many advantages that make it different from traditional media, including the ability to provide news items faster and more intensively, and access to a huge amount of information and news free of charge or at cheaper costs than newspapers and magazines, regardless of the enjoyment of articles published through newspapers with interactive features that make users active participants in the communication process.

Scholars (Dewolk 2000; Deuze 2001; Fusco 2010) have presented different definitions. There is no agreed and unanimous definition, but we can provide some of them that serve our study and from various angles to avoid repetition. Therefore, we will mention some important definitions. Perhaps the simplest definition of online journalism is presented by Deuze (2001), who believes that “[t]he fourth kind of journalism - next to radio, television and print - is online journalism, seen as gathering and distributing original news content on the internet”. This definition seems to be a superficial elucidation of the

concept of electronic journalism, simply because it only links online journalism to the re-publication of traditional media via internet and ignores the role of citizen journalism, which has evolved so much today through Social Media.

Quinn and Lamble (2012) focus on the strength of electronic journalism in terms of speed of publication and depth of news, and interactive possibilities with the public. "Online journalism offers the immediacy of TV and radio and the space of print. Its main strength is the capacity to be interactive: to foster a sense of connection with audiences. Its news hole is almost infinite" (Quinn and Lamble 2012: 76).

Determining the concept and nature of online journalism requires a critical discussion about its dimensions, characteristics and multiple meanings in its technological, social, professional and economic contexts, which will be determined by dimensions such as the nature and characteristics of the means through which it is exercised the process of production and publishing and producers, etc (Kopper et al 2000). According to Mike Ward (2002: 6), online journalism is the practice of journalism on the web and it should include several fundamentals in order to be considered as online journalism, as follow:

- Online is a distinctive medium because it is user-driven and multifaceted.
- All elements of the medium should support the offering of the content.
- The application of core journalistic principles and processes should inform all stages of online content creation and presentation, from the original idea to the finished page or site.
- Online journalism is a broad church – embracing content creation across a wide range of types (e.g. news and information) and settings (e.g. commercial as well as news-based).

Indeed, today we are living an age of digital and online journalism, a media whose existence has imposed in virtual reality in turn in monitoring events and the news industry. This is in tandem with the traditional press and beyond

the geographical and political constraints of its paper counterpart, whose countdown may have begun to fade as time progresses. Online journalism is making day by day great development in its types and services, thanks to the characteristics of the web that made it interactive journalism.

The process of producing news and stories, the person who produces, the editor, the tools of editing and publishing all play an important role in the online journalism. In some cases, the citizen will become a journalist, smartphones will be a sophisticated tool for news, photos and video editing, and a social media pages will become a public media platform. This is the online journalism at present, in which many types of technological tools are shared by journalists and non-journalists. On the other hand, online journalism allows for the spread of a huge amount of news data on important and sensitive topics that are difficult for the traditional media to cover easily. Also, users can compare published news and data on various websites and social media pages to get the truth of what happened. This is the power of online journalism.

Online journalism, at its best, brings to bear alternative perspectives, context and ideological diversity to its reporting, providing users with the means to hear voices from around the globe. News accounts that are overly reliant upon official truth-claims are likely to be revealed as such when compared and contrasted with reports from elsewhere available online, posing acute difficulties for those engaged in information management. (Allan 2006: 105).

The prevailing concept of online journalism is that it is just another medium of mass communication by which information from traditional media can be made available to the web accessing audience. If this definition was appropriate for the online journalism at the beginning of its appearance, online journalism has entered an advanced stage with the development of computer technologies and smart phones and evolved to a point where it is mounting an increasing threat to traditional media, especially the

newspapers.

The implications of the internet and new communication information technology for online journalism are not limited to the way that journalists transfer their works to the public, but also the impacts reach wider aspects such as news-gathering, research processes. Scholars (Dahlgren 1996; Deuze1999) argue that the internet with new information technology has also led to the creation of new type of journalism, which is quite different from their traditional counterparts such as print and broadcast journalism.

The researcher focuses on three main aspects here, with the aim of discerning the broad contours of online journalism's position at a time when this field is developing rapidly and enormously (Shapiro 2014). We get into the depth of the discussions by answering three questions: (1) What is an online journalist? (2) What is the nature of the content of online journalism? And (3) what are the forms of online journalism?

6.3.1 Who/What is an online journalist?

Since entering the press into web, a concurrent change in journalism practices noted in a number of studies of internet and digital media, particularly of journalists working in online journalism (Allan and Matheson2004). Studies often focus on the professional role and normative demands of online journalists to uncover how normative demands of a new professional role are negotiated within the online journalism (Steensen 2009). The successful launching of web and appearance of news websites led to some new normative demands for the practice of journalism, online journalists are required to develop technical or multimedia skills in order to be able to work as multimedia creator in their websites instead of producing news stories only in a text format. Thus it became binding on the journalists to learn new technical skills to support their professional background in journalism to be able to add new informative content with new features in news websites.

Evolution of the internet and new communication technology has led to significant changes in media industry, it seems one of the most important

things in this regard is the appearance of citizen journalism. Bloggers, amateur journalists, citizen journalists, user-generated content providers and social media reporters participate in coverage of events. By relying on personal new technologies such as laptops, smart phones or tablets, they edit and post news items in their websites or within social network sites. In some cases, their items match what has been published in newspapers or has been broadcasted in television channels. Due to this change of roles, the mega media organizations have lost their monopoly over news. So, newspapers, television, radio and news websites have started publishing citizen journalist's articles permanently and continuously (Riazand and Pasha 2011).

From today's perspective, the ways in which ordinary members of the public – 'accidental journalists' in the view of some – engaged in impromptu news-gathering can be interpreted as signifying a tipping point for online news, not least by opening up for redefinition what counts as 'news' and who can be a 'journalist' in ways which continue to reverberate today (Allan 2006: 9-10).

Occasionally, what ordinary people publish about their daily experiences or the events they have witnessed, offered website users a different, more convincing and important information than most of the articles published by news media organizations (Allan 2006). The character of professional journalists working for big media outlets, media activists, citizen journalists, bloggers and user-generated content providers is close to each other's, the ways they produce and distribute news content not too much differ. In general, the lines between journalist, technician and ordinary people who publish news information through social network sites are becoming blurred. As web or online publishing opportunities are growing, the situation is a bit murky, still there is no set definition for online journalists. The common point among all of these is that they form the online journalism, all of them serves online journalism for the better rather than for the worse, all together hold a significant part on the realm of online journalism and cover the events to post it via websites (Kelly 2009). The environment created by the internet serves

as a deep sea for these characters, citizen journalists fall into this pool along with what are considered to be professional journalists.

6.3.2 What is the nature of the content of online journalism?

The second aspect, through which the concept of online journalism can be influenced, relates to the technical nature of the content produced by this type of journalism so that it differs from the characteristics of newspapers articles and television programs. The content of online journalism differs from traditional media content in terms of its interactive features. These functions are generally identified by scholars as points where online journalism brings added value in comparison to the newspapers, television and radio (Karlsson and Holt 2016).

Because editorial content of online journalism is distributed via the internet as opposed to publishing via print or broadcasting via television, it is always considered and debated by scholars as contemporary form of media. Editorial content of this journalism form is presented in combination of text, audio, video and other interactive forms, and disseminated through online media platforms (Herbert 2003). Creating and posting digital news contents on the websites or mobile news apps bring us closer to relative not absolute agreement as to what constitutes online journalism.

If republishing the content of the newspapers or broadcast channels on the websites has been considered previously as a new media, today doing this job for an online audience is not sufficient for all. Web and smartphone users almost need contents created with the web and new technology interactive features such as hyper textuality, images, audios, videos and graphics, because online journalism does not only constitutes of texts, but it also contains multimedia and interactivity (Deuze 2003).

The new technologies of mobile and digital media have revolutionized the content in terms of interactivity. Online journalism can be functionally differentiated from traditional media by its interactive content and how people access the news, with a high degree of interactive features. It is true that other

kinds of journalism especially television also present rich media content by adopting technological component when creating news stories and broadcasting it (Castells et al. 2004), but the real difference of online journalism from traditional media is reflected in the ability of the news websites to include many interactive features in one article and give the real opportunity for website users to be active participants and re-edit what was posted to them. The development of media technology with advanced multimedia features and network connectivity has brought great opportunities for online journalists to produce rich news stories by photos, voice and videos. They could find the ways which make the news production process faster and more efficient (Umair 2016).

Summing up what was presented, content elements of online journalism have changed traditional static content to dynamic content comprising texts, images, graphics, videos and sounds that are merged for posting as online content. It could also be said that another main criterion in online journalism content is recent and accurate content, posting news items via websites and mobile applications with its audio-visual experience and rich multimedia content. This has given the online journalism power and a good advantage to match the traditional types of mass media.

6.3.3 What are the forms of online journalism?

The development and popularity of journalistic work on the web led to creation of many forms of online journalism, from news websites to the social media news pages which have been established by different media organizations, journalists or even individuals. Perhaps the common point or principle of any of these online journalism forms is posting journalistic or news items. Online journalism has different forms, defining forms of online journalism depends mainly on the ways and means through which the journalism products are posted as Siapera (2012: 160) explains:

Form is understood as referring to the various elements that are included in journalistic websites and to the different ways in which they are arranged together. This understanding and the discussion

of form relies on readings from the field of art. Form differs from genre in that the latter refers to a repetition and similarity at the level of contents, while the former operates at the structural level

The views and opinions of experts differ in terms of categorizing online journalism forms, depending on the ways which they produce, arrange, and combine the different elements that are part of journalism. While Mark Deuze (2003) classified online journalism into four widespread types: mainstream news sites, index and category sites, meta- and comment sites and share and discussion sites, Siapera (2012) has been able to categorize at least seven different forms of online journalism and identified the following seven forms: (1) participatory journalism; (2) journalistic blogs - j-blogs; (3) multimedia or visual journalism; (4) news aggregators (5) online versions of mainstream news media; (6) open or crowdsourced journalism; and (7) social media journalism.

Participatory journalism: has some particularities that are distinct from citizen journalism (Nip 2006). The main feature of this type of journalism is that it allows the active participation of news website users, ordinary citizens can post their own news articles, photos and any other kind of articles via this form of websites or news mobile phone apps. They have a chance to work like professional journalists. Indymedia site, www.indymedia.org is one of the participatory websites which allow users to send their work to editors, then they will post it via the website pages.

J-blogs: Journalistic blogging differs from participatory journalism in that its inclusion and arrangement of news items is according to the blog's priorities and interests. Usually, bloggers not usually post news items continuously, but always blogs are typically produced by journalists or individuals who consider themselves as media workers.

Multimedia or visual journalism: Video journalism is a new form of online journalism, focusing mainly on the dissemination of news or other topics in the form of video rather than text, combines the principles of broadcast journalism with the participatory forms and is produced by professional

journalists as well as by citizens themselves.

News aggregators: This form of online journalism is concerned with collecting news from media organizations and newspapers, then posting them via the meta websites, such as Google or Yahoo. The production process of news article differs in that in fact the site reproduces rather than produces the news.

Mainstream news media: This form of online journalism refers to the media organization that has often switched its platform to the web. These websites employ professional journalists and editors working in an official establishment who are getting paid for their work.

Open or crowdsourced journalism: This form of online journalism focuses on collecting and posting a lot of data on one subject. The news stories emerging from this kind of websites tend to data and to be investigative such as Wikileaks.

Social media journalism: This form of online journalism refers to the ways in which social media are combined with journalism and produce a new kind of social media journalism. Journalists and amateur individuals use social media websites to post their news works about different events. It is a media model consisting of a hybrid of professional journalism, contributor and reader content.

6.4 Kurdish online journalism

6.4.1 Online journalism in the Kurdistan region: an analysis

As the economic and financial situation improved after the fall of the Saddam regime in 2003, individuals, companies and institutions in Iraqi Kurdistan tended to use the internet either to entertain or to follow their administrative or media matters. Internet usage has witnessed a dramatic increase in Kurdistan and has become an essential part of everyday life with tens of ISPs companies available and number of users constantly increasing (Rashid et al 2016). In addition, digital technologies have had significant effects on media

and journalism practices in IKR, whether in the production, distribution or content of the news and non-news services provided by the media in Kurdistan. The Kurdish media outlets and even journalists themselves now have a range of technologies devices such as computers, smartphones, internet services which they use in their everyday journalistic practices (Syan 2016; Zangana 2017). Although the effects of technology on the media and society in Kurdistan is determined by how to use these technological tools and the purpose of their use, but there is no doubt that the effects have become tangible and huge positive and negative depending on both individual use and organizational decisions and modalities of use.

During this subsequent technical change, Kurdish media has found itself facing a historical challenge, not only of accelerating the use of new digital technologies, but also of opening up to open competitive conditions over the internet. This competition is not limited to employing the most advanced technologies to reach users everywhere, it is to compete over the nature of the content, professional work.

Although the emergence and availability of the internet in IKR lagged behind other countries, media organizations and newspapers did not stop trying to catch up with technology in their attempts to overcome the problems of Kurdish publishing. With the lack of expertise and the necessary techniques, the use of modern techniques in the media work is evident in the march of the Kurdish media. The importance of online journalism in Kurdistan as a part of people's overall media outlets use, and the increasing number of audiences/users who rely on news websites for news has been a gradual development unfolding since 2003 after the collapse of Baath regime in Iraq, which led to an improvement in the financial situation of individuals and improvement of internet. In recent years, then, the gradual move towards online journalism has accelerated and changed in potentially profound ways.

Except of television and radio, Kurdish media organizations have never experimented other means of electronic publishing such as videotext, audiotext and teletext. However, the Kurdish media did not rely on these

systems because they were not available in the Kurdish media organizations. The Kurdish online publishing was delayed until the second half of the 1990s. According to Salih (2010), the transition of Kurdish print and broadcast media to the internet began in the second half of the 1990s, online journals firstly started to appear in 1997 in Kurdistan, especially after the end of the civil war between PUK and PDK. Kurdish online publishing attempts started on the internet by Kurdish political parties and ordinary peoples. Kurds resident in western Europe countries and the USA have started creating personal websites.



Figure 6.2 Hejzen Kurdish Weblog was among the first Kurdish weblogs on the web.

source: (Salih 2010)

Because the internet was not available in Kurdistan during the 1990s, the two main parties in Kurdistan (PUK and PDK), which dominated the media at the time, launched two websites (puk.org and kdp.pp.se) in 1997 and put simple PDF versions of their daily newspapers and other print publications on these static websites (Salih 2010).



Figure 6.3 homepage of KDP website which has been created at 1997. Source: (Salih 2010)

These attempts are a primitive form of orientation towards online journalism, a way of transferring newspaper content to the internet in the form of PDF pages. At the beginning of this century, Kurdish websites such as KurdistanNet and KurdistanPost were launched. The content, nature, and techniques of these sites were very different compared to the other sites that preceded them, because they did not rely on the re-publication of the newspapers in the PDF form, but rather started publishing news and articles in HTML form. After 2003, publishing via web and establishing websites began a qualitative shift in Kurdistan. In the early 2000s, when Kurdish media organizations started to establish online departments of online news workers, establishment of the PUKMedia website by PUK was considered a remarkable step followed by other news websites such as Kurdistan monitored by KRG and some independent Kurdish news websites such as Hawlati and Awene, until it came to the opening of hundreds of static and dynamic news websites.

Therefore, we can divide stages of Kurdish online journalism into two main stages. First one was between 1997-2005, at this period the internet was a

very recent invention and most of the Kurdish journalists did not know what the internet or world wide web was and how to use it. There were only a few Kurdish websites and they were static online versions of the Kurdish newspapers. These websites were publishing a simple copy of the printed version of their newspapers.

The second part of the Kurdish online journalism started in 2005, after some web designers and developers have been able to create dynamic professional websites for a few Kurdish media organizations such as Awene, Hawlati, Sbeiy and radio Nawa which enabled them to overcome the traditional way of practicing the online journalism in re-publishing the newspaper pages of the PDF form. Today, all media organizations in Kurdistan have invested in a news website, but the content of their websites is mostly copying from respective print editions or radio/television programmers, sometimes with very simple changes.

The openness to the internet was not limited to the newspapers only but extended to include all the components of audio and visual media to become news channels. Radio stations competed to export their image through the internet and to emphasize the pace of new technology, that some television and radio channels have created for other sections only specialized in the creation and operation of websites belonging to them, besides the traditional task of publishing the news on television has become dependent on the computer screen as an important player in this equation. But these sites have not proven their ability to attract a reasonable proportion of readers and followers due to underdevelopment in the infrastructure of the internet in Kurdistan. From there, the Kurdish press in all its components and types began to move even slowly to the websites, which opened up important horizons for the spread of news, views and information. During the last two decades, the media environment in Kurdistan has become increasingly online and digital with the widespread use of the internet and the development of infrastructure for broadband services and mobile phone. The development of ever more advanced and often cheaper digital devices affected Kurdish media, Kurdish websites improved connectivity, and increased supply of

digital media content, products, and services.

In general, online journalism has entered a relatively advanced stage in Kurdistan due to two main factors. First: many people were starting to use the internet after the improvement in the infrastructure of broadband services in Kurdistan and the possession of a good proportion of people for technological devices such as computers, smart phones or tablets. This led to their reliance on websites for information, news, entertainment, etc. Second, the media institutions, especially those owned by the parties of power headed towards the Web and this created an atmosphere of competition in the provision of news and reports and entertainment materials in the better form and content. The entry of smart phones into the Kurdish market and society is a turning point in Kurdish electronic journalism. Computers were not available to most people because of the high cost, and smart phones became more practical because of their ease of use and cheap price compared to the computer. The move to smart phones has been accompanied by the rise of social media, such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat. People in Kurdistan do not use WhatsApp.

At this stage, the Kurdish websites and the media organizations went to Social Media to publish their news and articles. In addition, the citizen journalism in Kurdistan was formed and crystallized. Many people started to open political, cultural and news pages on Facebook. These pages were used as effective media platforms, and attracted many users, sometimes their followers exceeding the proportion of visitors to the most popular news websites.

The advent of online journalism and the high proportion of the use of social media did not only empowered the Kurdish media organization that have most developed news products and services for making use of it, but it also provided Kurdish news website users with new opportunities to engage with the articles by commenting on stories, sharing photos and videos, discussing them with other users and sometimes with editors, or even submitting and publishing their own material through news websites or social media pages

or blogs.

It is true that social media are widely used by Kurdish citizens for entertainment purposes or to share experiences and stay in touch with friends and family. However, social media also play an increasingly great role in Kurdistan as sources of news and as a political platform as more and more people come across news on these pages. The importance of the social media sites in the Kurdish community is becoming more important because of the monopoly of power over the other media and the lack of opportunity for ordinary citizens to participate and freely express opinions.

During the political events and demonstrations and protests organized by the civilian activists in Kurdistan to demand transparency and improve economic conditions and eliminate financial, administrative and political corruption, between 2010 - 2017, the role of social media as a means to disseminate information, entice support for protests and as a logistical platform to organize events has increased significantly. While the three most popular social media sites in the Kurdistan, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram had all been adopted to varying degrees for social purposes prior to the demonstrations, their popularity surged incredibly between 2011 - 2017. Most often, the sites have been used to drum up support for demonstrations and protests (Hassan 2015; Farhan 2017).

Nowadays, Kurdish citizens are increasingly adopting social media to engage with social and political life, discussing issues pertaining to their communities and on a wider policy-related spectrum. "Social networking giants such as Facebook and Twitter provide for them a platform to vocalize their grievances and widen their network, often leading them to start political groups online" (Rabar 2015). In addition, despite the fact that citizens' participation in social sites and their discussions of political issues are sometimes considered to be entered into a virtual world that is unrealistic and weak to participate in the real world as online and offline civic participation vary in many characteristics, such as the extent of interpersonal contact, there are researches (Dahlgren 2009; Gil et al 2012; Loader 2014; Hampton et al 2017) on both positive and

negative potential of social media sites use and cyber participation in relation to political participation. Most of these studies confirm the important positive association between social media sites as a source of political information and political participation in the real life. Gil de Zúniga et al (2012: 325) argue that “the extent to which respondents used social network sites to keep up with news about political news, public issues and information about their community is positively related to social capital”.

The concept of social capital as an economic and social phenomenon, entered academic and policy debates only in 1990s (Bhandari and Yasunobu 2009). Robert Putnam (1994) used the term social capital to explain how basic features of civic life, such as trust in others and membership in groups, provides the basis for people to engage in collective action. The term social capital involves both psychological and sociological factors and defined as the "resources of information, norms, and social relations embedded in communities that enable people to coordinate collective action and to achieve common goals" (Shah and de Zuniga 2008: 824). Regarding to the media, indicators of social capital such as civic participation, discussion networks, and social trust always strong relationship with media use. There are many scholars of social capital mention information provision or diffusion as an important aspect of social capital (Vergeer 2015). These apply to the Internet and the online journalism more accurately, because online journalism is a journalistic practice that leverages a network of sources, collaborators, and audiences to produce and distribute news (Fox 2017).

Here it is necessary to emphasize that in Kurdistan so far, the popularity of mass media, such as television and radio, is more than the percentage of online media. Television and radio media are still very important for Kurdish audiences and for news production compared with the online journalism but are relatively less important for news distribution than they were in the past. The proportion of internet users in the Kurdistan region compared to the proportion of the population proves this statement. So far broadband services have not been provided throughout major parts of the cities and suburban cities. According to the Arab Media Outlook (Club 2015) television channels

remain the most popular media in both Iraq and IKR.

To conclude, after two decades of providing internet service to the public in Kurdistan, Kurdish online journalism dramatically increased amongst Kurdish citizens. Online journalism became an instrument in influencing public opinion. For both Kurdish journalists and citizens, news websites and social media pages became an open sphere for sharing of information, and, perhaps most importantly, they were used by end-users to express their personal views in a free manner, as well as, online journalism became an alternative to Kurdish newspapers and a competitor to other media channels.

6.4.2 Key aspects of Kurdish online journalism

The Kurdish online journalism has become a presence in the recent years, allowing internet users and readers a wide range of local, regional and international news and topics. But despite passing the initial stages and overcoming some obstacles, there are still several problems and challenges facing the Kurdish online journalism. Online journalism in Kurdistan faces the arduous task (Syan 2016; Aivas 2017) in order to consolidate its foot and impose itself as an effective media tool in the political, economic and social aspects, along with other media such as television and radio. Also, to become a major source for online users who retrieve information from cyberspace, a venue where there are many distractions and where content is not given much attention. "For a developing society such as the Kurdish one, online journalism is relatively new and still suffers from many obstacles" (Syan 2016: 188).

As internet opens up to Kurdish media organization wider fields and options, at the same time it creates a challenge for them. This thesis addresses the problems faced by the Kurdish online journalism and the obstacles it faces through presenting and discussing four aspects, which are: professional skills, economic impacts and requirements and social aspects, as follow:

6.4.2.1 Professional skills

As many other broadcast and digital communication technologies, the internet has transformed the journalism profession in several aspects in all over the world. In Kurdistan, internet has also affected journalism regarding the way journalists gain access to news sources, how news website journalists present news content to their users, and how journalists change their working style in the newsrooms in terms of developing their own technical and editorial skills to suit the nature of work in a different technological environment than in the past. In recent years, online journalism was challenged by various critical developments, ongoing diffusion of digital technologies, and digitization of messages. All those have serious effects on skills and abilities required from journalists. Online journalism "changed job descriptions for journalists' focus on the growing demand for multi-skilled journalists" (Balcytiene et al 2011: 224). In the midst of online journalism, journalists are required to have more technical and written skills than a journalist who works for a newspaper, a radio station or even television. Journalists who work for news websites offer content that serves internet users rather than a newspapers reader. Media organizations are now looking for multi tasks journalists, who can play more than one role between photography, editing, auditing and management of the institution's account on social networks, correspondence and coverage of all kinds of news (Dupagne and Garrison 2006).

The trend for convergence implies that journalists have to work for more than one type of medium. The average journalist does not work exclusively anymore for a print medium; he/she also provides content for the online environment and – increasingly so – for an audio-visual format (photo and filmed material). This multi-skilled profile demands a lot of flexibility from journalists. Also, the technical job demands come to the forefront. For instance, journalists in an online newsroom spend a great deal of their attention to technical aspects related to the medium. In this respect, their job description goes beyond the traditional definition of news gathering (Balcytiene

et al 2011 p224).

Journalists are often sharply criticized for not taking advantage of Web features in their news stories. "Online journalists, however, have been criticized for repurposing existing content rather than capitalizing on the medium's ability to provide interactivity and personalization" (Fahmy 2008 p24). Kurdish online journalism problems compounded by the poor professional capacity of most of the journalists working for news websites. Kurdish online journalists seem to have a lack of professional experience, most of the news website editors have less than one year of professional experience in journalism. even for some of them their current job was not their first job as a journalist (appendix 6). It is noted in the past few years that there are journalists who did not know main principles of media professions only through the establishment of their news websites without the least knowledge of journalism, and this is evident in their way of formulation of news and reports and publishing in some websites. Dashti Salar, the editor in chief of Sbey.com news website, talks about the shortage or problem of journalists working for his organization, and explains how getting skilled reporters and online journalism professionals is very difficult. Therefore, they do not have any news editor who writes news reports and produces audio or video material at the same time.

Most of the journalists who work for us either came from newspapers after they were closed or were non-journalists and learned the vocabulary of the news editing here on this website. They do not know how to produce special news reports for websites, and do not know how to edit videos or add audio to their news reports. We do not have enough experience to teach them web journalist skills, because we focus on increasing the number of news in our website, instead of focusing on improving the reports by adding interactive reports and multimedia features (appendix 3.3)

The working routine of the Kurdish news websites' journalists is the main issue. Journalists spend the most important part of their working hours to write news reports, sometimes they make research on the Internet in order to find good topics or some relevant information's to their stories. In addition, Kurdish website journalists do not spare their time to make technical adaptation of their news articles to be suitable with the internet environment, whereas, the implications of the online journalism for journalists are not limited to the news writing, gathering and research processes (Deuze and Paulussen 2002). Some journalists working for Kurdish news websites attribute the problem to the bureaucracy of their institutions. They emphasize that the nature of the work of their institutions does not allow them to allocate enough time to edit news rich in pictures and video or even follow up what is published, or to build interactive communication with their users. Pshtiwan Zahir, one of these journalists, is very interested in learning how to create and edit special articles for news websites in a different way than what is on the newspaper pages, but he points out that there is not enough time to learn during the working time on their website, due to the large number of news items in a limited time.

I want to learn, I need to develop my skills and abilities in the field of online journalism, but how. When I come to work, I start editing news, translate world topics in other languages, or make contacts with news sources to get some new information. Time executes quickly. Suddenly you see that the working hours are over. Tell me how to learn, or even if there is anyone who teaches me how to edit news for the websites and how to edit video and how to create multimedia. Kurdish online journalism problems are many, there is no serious desire to address them, especially about the development of journalist skills. (appendix 3.9).

Strong competition and usage of new information technologies and internet should push journalists to develop new skills of online work. Digital skills rise in importance in the online environment, online work gives journalists more opportunities for combination of formats. For the news websites, reports could be combined with text, photos, video and audio (Oblak 2005). Moreover,

Kurdish journalists have realized that editing new formats and types of news content require constant learning and developing skills. Unfraternally, generally, it is difficult to find some professional online journalists in the Kurdish news websites in Iraqi Kurdistan (Soz 2016).

With a study and teaching the profession of journalism in universities and institutes in Kurdistan, an additional concern has been whether those journalism schools were able to keep up with the emerging technologies and whether they played any primary or additional role in improving the skills of journalists who work on news websites, which is a legitimate concern considering that the new media techniques change faster than the curricula in universities and institutes (Magee 2006). Further, some media experts (Fahmy 2008) suggest that skills training should be left to the workplace in the newsrooms. Editor in chiefs, journalists and even teachers of media departments at the universities of Kurdistan agree that these academic institutions have played no role in developing the skills of online journalists. This is mainly due to the lack of experience of media trainers in these institutions in digital and new media technologies (Appendixes 3.1,3.4,3.7).

Bahroz Ali (Appendix 3.1), a journalist and a teacher at the University of Sulaymaniyah, criticizes the academic institutions in Kurdistan in terms of their inability to prepare skilled journalists able to work in media channels, especially news websites:

It is best for teachers in media institutes to be journalists, so that they can teach journalists and develop their skills. Media technology is evolving rapidly, keeping pace with this speed is not easy and at the same time not impossible. Our problem as teachers is that we do not want to learn how to use new media technologies, so as to develop the skills of our students to be online journalists, able to work in all media organizations especially news websites. In addition, it is not fair to defend the value of journalism education in our academic institutions, without knowing the main issues journalists face when dealing with new technologies in their news

websites. (Appendix 3.1).

It is true that journalistic professionalism is not limited to technical aspect. As for the online journalism, it is imperative for the journalist to be familiar with computer techniques to benefit from the technical characteristics of the Web. Journalism profession nowadays has undergone serious changes and affected by the rapid development of the internet, computers, smart phones and the emergence of social network sites, as individuals who are working on their social sites pages can be seen as journalists even without any academic education. There are many free software or applications available on smartphones that enable individuals and journalists to edit videos or audio in an easy and fast way. But journalists working on Kurdish news websites appear not to be interested in such applications.

Based on the above, in regard to Kurdish online journalism attributes and practices of Kurdish news websites, editors suffer from three occupational problems, which are: (1) Kurdish news website editors are relatively primitive in journalism and have no experience, (2) In general, they lack technical skills, they are often producing only texts, technical skills not importance among them (3) Kurdish online journalists are heavily focused (and dependent) on the traditional media products, mainly repurposing newspapers content instead of doing journalism exclusively for the web.

Despite the serious efforts of journalists to build and develop news websites that exist outside the scope and control of newspapers, television and radio, online journalism in the IKR, in most cases, continues to be dominated by the traditional media. This not only generates and publishes news but also contributes to creating an atmosphere conducive to freedom of speech and cultural, political and economic change. In fact, media owners in the IKR, who often belong to political parties, do not show sufficient and serious interest in the online journalism and believe that the level of its influence is not like the level of impact of television channels on public opinion. In this circumstance, the good and encouraging news is that Kurdish journalists who want to build

independent media organizations are making a concerted effort and relying on the online journalism to carve an identity for this type of independent media based on new technological tools, especially the internet. The truth is that the online journalism in Kurdistan continues to experiment, using the tools that technology has placed at its command, in its serious and brave effort to build a new independent news website model.

6.4.2.2 Economic impacts and requirements

The Kurdish media market is currently undergoing the stage in which ruling parties and the opposition dominate the media channels, and even commercial companies do not allow them to support the free and independent media by giving them advertisements. The few independent media models face financial challenges. One of the most significant issues of the Kurdish online journalism is the fact that media business model in the Iraqi Kurdistan region has been destroyed by ruling political parties, which undermines Kurdish media independence (Dos 2012; Al Monitor 2014). In general, it is possible to assume that political and economic forces in the Kurdistan region basically affect changes within online journalism landscape, because there is a mixture of a command and control economy with a sort of media market economy clearly monopolized by politics (Aziz 2017). The two main ruling Kurdish parties the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) dominate television and radio broadcast, newspapers and even online media. In addition, both parties subsidize smaller political parties and consequently control their media operations, as well. Reconstructing the ownership structure of private online journalism in the Iraqi Kurdistan region is particularly not easy job. The ways of funding most of the news websites are still not clear. Except of dozens, there is no such a thing in Kurdish news websites as website owners. The main reason is that these sites are funded indirectly by party officials (Zanger 2004). Over all in the Iraqi Kurdistan region, ruling parties and government control over media has been considered as the most significant challenge for online journalism.

Furthermore, public corruption is another big challenge for independent web media because financial and political corruption has been a significant issue

in the Kurdistan region.

Yet, what exactly is “public corruption”? Because of the increase in the forms in which official authority is used to obtain personal benefit, there is no single definition of public corruption and no generally accepted definition of corruption has emerged. The term of corruption has focusing on everything from "blatant acts of bribery to the use of political power to advance one party or faction’s agenda" (Henning 2001: 793). Since public corruption is a destructive activity with a negative impact on society. that those who engage in strive to hide, eradicating it is difficult and inherently problematic. Public corruption is defined as the abuse of public office for private gain by a public employee (Boylan and Long, 2003; Goel and Nelson 1998).

Even if our goal or subject is confined to one form of corruption such as political corruption, it has other types. For example, Heidenheimer and Johnston (2002) isolated definitions of corruption into three categories. First, public office centered definitions. the largest group of social science experts follow this definition which is specify corruption as deviation from legal and public duty norms for the purposes of private gain. Second, market centered definitions which is define corruption as part of the rational utility maximizing behavior of public officials. Third, public interest centered definitions, this group discuss corruption more with regard to the concept of the public interest.

Perhaps the roots of corruption in the Kurdistan region dates back to the nineties of the last century, as pointed out by both Berwari and Ambrosio (2008): "The establishment of the safe haven in 1992 and its dominance by the two political parties led to a system of corruption and patronage which appears to restrict emergence of a vibrant civil society".

The biggest challenge for Kurdish online journalism is financial stability. The crippling financial conditions that befell on the Kurdistan Region since 2014 following oil price crash and budget cuts by the Iraqi government, the drop-in oil prices, and then the anti-ISIS war, resulted in severe financial constraints

for almost every media platform (Kuruuzum 2018.). Problems related to financial resources have led to the closure of some independent media platforms in recent years, because they cannot react to internal challenges of economic and political nature in the Iraqi Kurdistan region. Except of some channels belonging to some senior officials within political parties, both partisan and independent Kurdish media platforms have faced serious challenges since the financial crisis dented their income. While some newspapers dropped their print edition such as Hawlati and Cawder, other media organizations have begun to reduce the size of their editorial staff and reduce their salaries. Aram Ghafur, news editor in Dwarozh.net believes that the deteriorating economic situation in the region has had a significant impact on the independent media, which financially cannot compete with partisan media outlets:

After 2003, the economic situation in the region improved and, of course, this economic awakening led to the development of independent media. The level of advertising in independent media channels has increased relatively quickly. But this situation did not last long. Because the independent media in Kurdistan did not able to compete media financially supported by the ruling parties. independent Kurdish media organizations pockets could not afford it anymore. some of them such as Awene and Hawlati have been crippled and cannot pay back their huge debts (appendix 3.8).

In contrast, reduction of advertising budgets became a significant problem for the online journalism in the Kurdistan region. Unlike other news website models in developed countries, web media sectors do not win any advertising positions and do not attract advertisers. The advertising share in news websites is very low. According to Xalaf Ghafur (appendix 3.5), editor in chief of Xendan.org, the lack of commercial advertising has a negative impact on the current state of the Kurdish online journalism. While economic challenges arise due to negative processes in the macroeconomic situation of the Iraqi Kurdistan region, scarce investments into the online journalism industry and decline of advertising has remained a negative factor for Kurdish online

journalism.

Traditional media such as newspaper has a business model, but for Kurdish online media still there is no business model. For example, newspapers which can get money via advertising, selling content to readers. television channels also could collect money by advertising. But for news sites online it's different. Companies do not give news websites advertisement or ads, this has become so popular in Kurdistan, companies do not trust the ability of news websites to attract consumers, so do not find commercial ads on the Kurdish websites' pages only rarely (appendix 3.5).

The interest of Kurdish political elites in online journalism and media at all cause's problems for independent news websites, and became a negative factor in front of the creation, development and continuation of economically successful online media enterprises, as Sirwan Gharib, editor in chief of Westganews.net stated that:

The Westganews.net website is editorially independent; our editors and reporters are free from commercial bias and not influenced by company's owners or political parties. This is important for independent media platforms because it enables them to challenge the corrupt officials and hold them to account. But unfortunately, we are afraid that we cannot continue this way, we do not give in to the desire of the politicians, but in the end if we do not get ads we will have to close our media (appendix 3.2).

In addition, the increase in effectiveness of personal advertising on a social networking website (Tucker 2014) causes headache for Kurdish news websites, according to Hazhar Osman (appendix 4) Kurdish advertisers and companies prefer newer forms of advertising via social media sites such as Facebook, other platforms such as newspapers, televisions and news websites need to find ways to save themselves. Also, in terms of online journalism, business and financial aspects negatively influence the news

media in the Kurdistan region, so that the pressure from monopolized business by ruling parties can tamp down accountability journalism and become an obstacle to the development of the independent press.

6.4.2.3 Formal legislation and Social aspects

At the time of writing this thesis, there is no law regulating internet in the Iraqi Kurdistan region. Thus, Kurdish online journalism is governed in the same way as radio, television and newspapers (Shwan 2017). The absence of a comprehensive law covering all aspects of the use of the internet and new information technology has impacted the nature of Kurdish online journalism in several aspects. The internet is actually heavily regulated in the neighboring countries of the Kurdistan region and Middle East countries (Salem 2017; Chiba 2017), In contrast, Kurdish online journalism is struggling with rapid changes taking place in new information technologies because since the internet was set up in the Kurdistan region, there were still gaps in many areas, such as regulating online publishing and violation of intellectual property rights. The Kurdistan Parliament, Kurdistan Region government and Journalists Syndicate were not sufficiently established to organise the introduction of legislation relating to online journalism. Although that the Kurdistan Parliament finally approved a Press Law on the 22nd of September 2008, this law did not deal with aspects related to the internet and the online journalism and publishing.

Most often, Kurdish authorities and officials always use laws related to the use of means of communication as phones to create restrictions on the rights of freedom of expression and freedom of access to information. Violence against journalists and media in the Kurdistan region has increased over the last years. According to the report by Metro Center for Defending Journalists' Rights (2015), 173 cases of violations against journalists in Iraqi Kurdistan Region occurred in 2015. For example, the security authorities in Sulaimani city have arrested the Kurdish journalist, Weriya Jamal after he wrote a comment on Facebook, his comment was about corruption and poor services in Kurdistan region (Metro 2015). Also, several journalists and bloggers are facing prosecution for their reporting on websites or social network sites such.

Isa Barzani, whose Facebook posts were critical of President Masoud Barzani, was arrested on August 2015, by the security forces and held for six months, then released and barred from travelling outside the region (Human Rights Watch 2016). Shno Othman, a Kurdish journalist highlights the seriousness of the press work in Kurdistan and emphasizes the exploitation of a law by the authorities to punish journalists and bloggers:

It is true that there is no comprehensive law to regulate online journalism, but such a law does not benefit journalists because the authorities use the laws to punish journalists, especially those working for the independent websites. In some cases, the officials arrest the bloggers and those who resort to social media sites to express their views on the rampant corruption in the region (appendix 3.6).

In the other hand, some Kurdish journalists think that internet regulations always have negative impact on online journalism, they believe that the adoption of comprehensive legislation on the internet and the means of communication in Kurdistan will have a negative impact on freedom of expression and speech. Dashty Salar (appendix 5), argues that:

I do not see the need to legislate a comprehensive law to regulate the work of the press on the internet, it is better not to take such a step. Simply put, there is now more freedom for journalists who rely on the Web to spread what they produce. If the authorities enact laws on online publishing, they will censor and negatively affect the independent press (appendix 3.3).

It is possible that the lack of strict laws regulating online journalism has a positive effect on the Kurdish online journalism. For example, Kurdish news websites still do not exist from an administrative point of view. Kurdish news websites do not have to obtain a license from the Ministry of Culture as television, radio and newspapers do. So, independent journalists can create news sites without permission from authorities that may oppose them.

Moreover, this view is considered as a part of a misunderstanding about what laws do. It is true that there is a great possibility of suppressing freedoms through legislation, but these laws can protect journalists if there is a fair authority in the country. Without journalism and internet laws, there would be many frictions between media organizations, citizens and authority.

In addition, lack of enforcement regarding the protection of intellectual properties in the Kurdistan region has become a major obstacle to the evolution of the professional Kurdish online journalism. It has been a stemming factor hindering innovation and creativity in the path to professional development of independent online journalism (Shwan 2017). Saman Mohammed, a journalist at Westganews.net, talked about the problem of stealing and republishing their reports by other journalists, arguing that the lack of protection of intellectual property rights was a serious challenge to the Kurdish online press, as these actions make journalists lazy in the performance of their duties because they know that their work will be stolen and published in other websites:

Intellectual property rights must be extended to the websites in order to protect journalists from stealing their news reports and republishing them at other websites without their permission. I have plenty of experience with this problem, sometimes I worked hard to prepare a news report, and my organization spent money for me to do this job, after we posted it on our website another one copied and republished it without taking our permission, he did not even mention that this report was prepared by me. This is a great challenge for us. We are frustrated by these actions. There is no law that preserves our rights. We have contacted many competent authorities to resolve this problem. They have promised to solve it, but these promises have not been kept and there have been no measures so far (appendix 3.11).

If the authorities become a threat to the independent online journalism in the Kurdistan region, sometimes religious figures and groups are a bigger threat

against independent liberal journalists. There are some cases where Kurdish editors, bloggers and journalists have been the subject of *fatwas* from clerics who claim they posted articles offensive to the Muslim religion, which in some cases have also led to lawsuits or criminal charges (Baban 2010). For example, Sarwar Penjweny is a Kurdish writer and blogger, after he published some critical articles about Islam in 2011, a huge campaign started against him from different religious groups and he was under death threat (Wadi 2012). On the other hand, it is particularly difficult for Kurdish female journalists to perform their job due to discrimination that is embedded in the religion, but also because of the way Kurdish society perceives woman. Sometimes, when Kurdish female journalists criticize something related to religion on social media and websites, they are attacked more than men (Fazlić 2018).

Rapid developments and increase in the internet usage in Iraq have encouraged the Iraqi authorities to declare a new law that manages internet usage in the country. Committees of The Iraqi Council of Representatives (ICoR) have suggested the first draft of the Iraqi Cyber-Crime Law and are moving it forward. However, the Iraqi Kurdistan government does not always abide by Iraqi laws (Hamid 2016; Kittichaisaree 2017).

6.5 Conclusion

To conclude, online journalism in the Iraqi Kurdistan region and the use of social media among Kurdistan region citizens in the past ten years remains unprecedented, aided largely by offering internet technology services for public, also indeed mobile telephone services. The use of internet and smartphones for social communication purposes has spread rapidly among the Kurds. Kurdistan region now has more than a million internet users who are heavy users of the new media and social network sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube, where they express their opinions and comments about political and social developments in Kurdistan. Major Kurdish media organizations have also set up news websites. Independent journalists have also established their own websites and play a great role in the Kurdish society through the publication of sensitive and important topics on the political, administrative and financial corruption in the region.

Chapter Seven

Quantitative Data Discussion

7.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the interactive features of standard Kurdish news websites of the Iraqi Kurdistan region and discusses how news is displayed. In addition, to what degree these sites applied interactive features to pave the way for users to become an active generator of journalistic materials of the websites and how these websites' interactivity managed to improve the contents such as photos, videos, internal and external links are also discussed. The focus of this chapter is on the variety among the Kurdish news websites with respect to existing levels of interactivity. This chapter will present the results of the content analysis based on the adopting of a code sheet, showing interactivity features among the selected Kurdish news websites of the Iraqi Kurdistan region, as has been described in the methodology chapter. The researcher conducted a content analysis of three Kurdish news websites to examine the presence and use of interactive features such as social media buttons, lists of hyperlinks, polls, comment sections and mobile sites. The findings reveal many differences in the adoption and use of interactive features among Kurdish news websites. Reasons for differences across these sites are also discussed. These news websites are: Sbey.com, Nrtrv.com and Awene.com. The code sheet and the explanation of interactive characteristics of each one of the tools can be found in the methodology chapter (chapter four). The results will be presented following the same structure as the code sheet, divided according to different types of interactivity. As suggested in the methodology mentioned in Chapter four, the content analysis was structured by an adaptation of the four-part Chung (2008) typology of interactivity in order to classify the interactive features found on Kurdish news websites: Medium interactivity, Human Interactivity, Medium/Human interactivity and Human/medium interactivity.

To examine the interactive features offered in the Kurdish news websites the accompanying following questions were examined:

1. What are the interactive features offered in the Kurdish news websites?
2. How do the diverse news websites fluctuate in their levels of Interactivity?
3. What is the Interactive list for the news websites?

The above enquiries were answered through substance examination of the interactive features offered in the Kurdish news websites. The four interactive factors were coded after the substance examination of the websites and the information was utilized to create a list that would answer the research questions. Moreover, the sites were coded for the nearness or nonattendance of interactive features that were arranged under the four interactive factors. To build up a list of interactive features, the measurements were estimated on a five-point score of very High (4), High (3), Medium (2), Low (1) and very Low (0).

This research began with the online analysis of content and layout of eight Kurdish news websites; the researcher analyses interactivity data for each news websites separately. Every site' s factors are analysed on web-based content analysis as its reviewed deeply and intensively. Analysing interactive features for each site alone might be helpful in getting a clear image about the sites and the weakness. As a result, the shortages can be fixed, and the interactivity can be applied fully.

7.2 Interactive features in the Sbey.com

7.2.1 Sbey.com profile

Sbey.com is a main news website of Wusha media Corporation which is managed from a city of Sulaymaniyah In the Iraqi Kurdistan region. Wusha media Corporation established in 2006 by Nawshirwan Mustafa (22 December 1944 – 19 May 2017) (Kurdish: *نەوشیروان مستەفا*); he was an Iraqi Kurdish politician who served as the General Coordinator of the Movement for Change and also as the leader of the official opposition in the Kurdistan Region from 1 April 2009 till his death on 19th of May 2017.

With the emergence of the Sbey.com in 2007, the independent media model in Kurdistan became more active because this news website was seeking to

promote political reforms by exposing corruption in the Iraqi Kurdistan region through in-depth analyses and also by addressing the negative aspects of the system instead of only highlighting the positives. It has played a major critical role in reporting on corruption and human rights violations in the Iraqi Kurdistan region. From the beginning of its founding until several years later, Sbeiy.com was a pioneering media website in the development of online content in the Iraqi Kurdistan region by introducing the first special section as a free platform for Kurdish internet users to express their ideas freely on social, economic and political issues without censor. According to a Sbeiy message, which was posted on the website on 21st of March 2007, this organisation is aiming to enhance awareness regarding a culture of democracy. Their main focus is particularly on ideas such as free elections and parliamentary work, peaceful conflict management and de-militarizing political parties, and the acceptance of minority rights. According to Dashti Salar, Editor in Chief of Sbeiy.com, Wusha media Corporation's primary reason for going online was to provide the Kurdish citizens with more news and information that is not usually published in the media of the ruling parties in the Kurdistan region; they also aspired to reach a wider geographic audience, especially Kurdish living abroad. Although Sbeiy.com was more critical in the beginning, but it has changed somewhat with the founding of the Change movement (Goran) as a political party by Nawshirwan Mustafa, the founder of Wusha media. Finally, Sbeiy.com became the main concern for Goran's propaganda. Nawshirwan was the head of the main opposition list, Change List, in the Iraqi Kurdistan legislative election. in 2009.

7.2.2 Human/Medium Interactive Features

Table 7.1 Human/Medium Interactive Features in Sbeiy.com

Factor 1: Human/Medium Interactive Features	Very low	Low	Medium	high	Very high
"Submit stories" function		1			

“Submit photos” function	0				
“Submit videos” function	0				
“Submit news tip” function	0				
Reporter/editor e-mail links			2		
Letters-to-editor			2		
Readers’ blogs	0				

In 500 published news articles of Sbeiy, , the news editors of only 143 articles indicated that readers can send information about the news articles. These 143 articles are only 28.6% of all articles published during the study period which include news and articles written by writers and had news prospective. Despite the low level of interaction regarding the submission of story functions, this feature is not technically appropriate in the Sbeiy.com. Instead of requesting more information about the news articles, an option or a section should be available on the homepage, to allow and encourage users to submit news stories. Receiving users’ stories and publishing those articles on the websites is an important for the progress of Kurdish online journalism, especially in developing civic journalism. Moreover, these stories contribute in improving the sites contents generally.

On Sbeiy.com, special function in connection with submitting photos is not available on the homepage and also in the other sections. This aspect can be considered a weakness of the website, while it is a news site. Especially nowadays technology facilitates taking photos and sharing photos easily with the use of smart phones. Only 74 users’ news photos were published over the study period and this is 14.8% of all the articles; this percentage is in low level. Sending photos by users was not arranged systematically and photos had to be sent through personal emails of the news editors and specific users. In general, photos are important for the traditional media; nowadays photos seem to be more significant for journalistic phase dominated by the web. In addition, it might be easier for users to send photos compared to editing a news story.

Similarly, news editors and the website staff might be more comfortable with uploading photos compared to editing news stories.

Regarding the feature of submitting video functions on sbeiy website, this option is not available in any of the sections. Fourteen videos were published through news stories and it is mentioned that the users forwarded those videos to the site, this consists of only 2.8% of the total sample of sbeiy website; this percentage is very low and equals zero. It is understandable that capturing, sending and publishing video is not as convenient as forwarding photos; however, small number of users' videos were published on Sbeiy.com site for online journalism. Most of the users were not encouraged to forward videos as the website does not provide video submission feature on the homepage and also in other sections of the site.

News tips submission function, like other functions, is not found on the homepage or in the other sections. Despite the fact that in a sample of articles taken from Sbeiy.com site only 43 news articles indicated that the data or information of those news stories were sent by users; these stories might have been sent through the personal connection between news editors and users rather than through a systematic way. Therefore, it is assumed that the users' participation in generating news is very low and equals zero in spite of some contribution in content generating.

In the Sbeiy.com website, neither on the homepage nor in other sections, Reporter/editor e-mail links are not available; however, some editors included their emails in some parts of the news stories and the articles. This trend paved the way for connection between human and medium. Among the whole of the website sample, only 203 articles had emails of editors; this consists of 40.6% which is medium level and equals two. If the attention to other features is as high as this feature, the level of interactivity becomes high for the website.

Regarding the Letters-to-editor feature in the sbeiy.com website, this function is not available, and the place address of the site is also not posted, so it is

impossible to send letters to the editors in this organisation. This trend might be popular because of the reality that the post service in the Kurdish region is not available. Those who run the site believe that applying this feature is not necessary. Email contact with the users is mostly used; this trend is not always practical because some materials such as documents that users archived in physical format might not be in digital format. Based on this function, the level of interactivity in Sbey.com is very low and equals zero.

Finally, the feature of Reader blogs is not available on the Sbey.com website, although a section called opinions is designed, most of the writers include their blog links, Facebook or twitter links in their articles. On the whole sample, only 15 cases were found which consists 3% of the sample. This shows a very low level of reader blog interactivity of the site and equals zero.

7.2.3 Medium/Human Interactive Features

Table 7.2 Medium/Human Interactive Features in Sbey.com

Factor 2: Medium/Human Interactive Features	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
Customized weather	0				
Customized topics	0				
Customized headlines			2		
Search feature	0				
E-mail updates/alerts	0				

Languages feature	0				
SMS alerts	0				

Sbeiy website sometimes provides information about weather through short news articles. While Kurdistan region consists of three governorates, this news site post weather information only about Sulaymaniyah where the organisation is based. As this website lacks the weather section, the feature of customized weather is very low and equals zero. Having data about weather is very important for users, lacking a section about weather can be considered a significant shortage.

Regarding Customized topics, similar to the previous feature, sbeiy.com has not offered its users the option of selecting the topics they prefer when they access the website. For example, the site does not allow users to see their favourite news when they access the same for the first time. This can be considered another shortage of the site which affects the interactivity of the website. The level of interactivity of this feature in Sbeiy.com is very low and the rating equals to zero.

In terms of Customized headlines, the level of this feature in sbeiy.com is medium with a rating of two because the site detected a specific space on the homepage for headlines; however, users are not allowed to know which headline was accessed more or printed etc. It would be beneficial to have, the headlines that are e classified as most commented on or most shared. This enables users to know which headlines are very popular.

Search feature is neither available on the homepage nor in other sections, . Users who are interested in finding specific articles cannot search due to the absence of this interactive feature. Technically, including search feature is easy; therefore, the website designers do not have a logical excuse for ignoring this button. Regarding this feature, the level of interactivity in Sbeiy.com is very low and the same equals to zero.

In sbeiy.com, the feature of E-mail updates/alerts are neither available on the homepage nor in the other sections, so the interactivity level of updating emails or alerts is very low and this also equals to zero. This feature is very important for maintaining contact with the users; especially when they are not surfing the website, email alerts can be used to inform about breaking news. This further reduces the level of interactivity.

With respect to Languages feature, sbeiy.com posts news only in Sorani Kurdish dialect; while several users in Kurdistan region, speak kurmanji Kurdish dialect and and these users are facing difficulty in understanding other Kurdish dialects. It is important for the website to have published news in kurmanji dialect, specifically, the news related to the Iraqi Kurdistan region. The absence of language features reduces the interactivity of Sbeiy.com to very low and this equals to zero.

Finally, regarding the feature of SMS alerts, sbeiy.com ignored this feature and users cannot receive information from the website via SMS. This can be considered as another shortage of the news site. The rate of this feature is very low and equals to zero.

7.2.4 Human Interactive Features

Table 7.3 Human Interactive Features in Sbeiy.com

Factor 3: Human Interactive Features	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
Users comments			2		
Chat functions	0				
Q&A (live chats)	0				
Discussion forums			2		

e-mail-a friend	0				
share	0				

In sbeiy.com, the features of users' comments are not provided, in other words, users can not make comments on news articles within the site. Instead users can make comments on the website Facebook page. It is preferable to pave the way to make comments on the news website because it is not guaranteed that all users access social media. Because of the hypothesis that part of users might not be ready to make comments through accessing their Facebook accounts in order not to be recognized. Regarding of this feature, the level of interactivity in Sbeiy.com is medium and equals to two.

The feature of chat functions is not provided, while the existence of it is very important in connecting editors and users and the users themselves to pave the way for rising interactivity among them. Thus, the interactivity scale of this feature is very low and equals zero.

For subjects relevant to political events, health materials and other issues, having Q&A (live chats) feature on the news websites is very significant. For example, a political character can participate in an open debate with website's users. Similarly, doctors or specialist physicians can employ this feature for discussing health issues with users. Sbeiy.com did not include this feature and the scale of Q&A (live chats) interactivity is very low and equals to zero.

The feature of discussion forums is not existing in Sbeiy.com, but there is a section called (dwangai sbeiy- sbeiy forum) for discussing daily issues. In this section, a topic is initiated by editorial staff and users show their point of view on this topic. Having this section raises the scale of interactivity; however, the topics selected by the editorial staff might not be updated on time. Thus, the rate of interactivity in Sbeiy.com regarding this feature is medium and equals to two.

Similarly, share feature is not placed under posted articles in the Sbeiy.com, this restricts users from sharing articles from Sbeiy.com to their social media

accounts such as Facebook or twitter. This feature is very important for interactivity; thus, the lack of it can be considered a severe shortage and the interactivity scale of share feature in Sbeiy.com is very low and equals to zero.

7.2.5 Medium Interactive Features

Table 7.4 Medium Interactive Features in Sbeiy.com

Factor 4: Medium Interactive Features					
Photo files			2		
Audio files		1			
Video files		1			
streamline video/audio	0				
News graphics, mobile version of site, apps	0				
Internal Hyperlinks		1		3	
External Hyperlinks	0				

From all the samples taken from sbeiy.com, including the homepage and other parts of the website, it is noticed that only one photo is attached with each article. It means that journalists did not attempt to post more photos with news stories and reports. In addition, it can be noticed that part of photos attached to the news are irrelevant to the subject of the article because some of the images are just graphic photos or a logo of the website. This is another shortage as only 206 news stories have their related photos; this percentages equivalent to 41.2. This shows a medium level of the interactivity based on the scales adopted and equals to two.

The percentage of audio files in sbeiy.com website is low. It indicates that the site did not pay attention to post its news stories and journalistic materials in audio files; in addition, this website lacks links to podcasts and audio files. This shows the shortage of interactivity as producing audio files does not require too much time. Among the materials chosen over a short period when the sample was taken, there were only 83 audio files which were mixed with the text of news stories. Based on the interactivity scales, it has a low level of 16.6 percent and equals to one.

Video files are very important for online journalism and news websites, especially for those users who pay less attention to reading news stories or listening to the news. These can receive information via video clips. In sbeiy.com, posting video was not taken into consideration. Moreover, only a small number of videos were posted with news stories and news reports without any dedicated link relating to video clips. Totally 96 video clips were found among the whole sample materials, which is a tiny rate and has a low level which is 19.2 percent and equals to one.

Although the Weshe company that runs the Sbeiy.com website also owns a television channel and a radio station, there are no streamline video/audio links on the website to broadcast KNN television and Goran radio. The level of this interactive feature, according to the scale adopted to measure the interactivity, is very low and equals to zero.

News graphics is another journalistic material that receives a high level of attention in the news websites due to its importance in giving users large amounts of data quickly and easily. In another word, it supports news texts. In sbeiy.com producing news graphics is in a very poor level. Among the whole sample for the site, only 6 news graphics are posted. None of these are created by the website's staff, the graphics are from international and local news sources, so according to the scale adopted to measuring the interactivity, the level is very low with only 1.2 percent and equals to zero.

Sbeiy.com does not have any application regarding the different smart phone systems of android, windows and IOS. Users can browse the website through google chrome browser and also the mobile version of the browser works and displays the site as one column with the same content. Having special mobile applications is very important because huge number of users access the internet via smartphones. Sbeiy.com did not pay attention to this matter; therefore, according to the interactivity scales adopted, the level of interactivity of the website is low and equals to one.

There are internal links in the Sbeiy.com where the users can navigate within the website through several sets of links such as sections links but the only shortage regarding internal hyperlinks on Sbeiy.com is that the news stories are not linked to the relevant news or data posted previously. So, according to the interactivity scales adopted, the level of interactivity of the Sbeiy.com regarding the internal hyperlinks feature is high and it equals to three.

In contrast to the internal hyperlinks, there are no external hyperlinks in the Sbeiy.com and the web site users cannot navigate from the site to other sites through external hyperlinks; this can be considered as a one of the main shortages of the Sbeiy.com regarding interactivity. Hyperlinks always create an element of interactivity for the users. So, according to the interactivity scales adopted, the level of interactivity of the website is very low and equals to zero.

7.2.6 An overview of interactivity in Sbeiy.com

In general, the results of the quantitative content analysis of the Sbeiy.com (see figure 6.1) show that the level of interactivity is low in this news website. Sbeiy.com did not show interest in the presence of interactive features on its homepage, other sections and articles. Overall, availability of medium interactive features scored high rate at 28.50%. On the other hand, Medium/Human interactive features scored lowest rate at 7.10%; Human/Medium interactive features scored 17.50%. Finally, Human interactive features scored 16.60%. These results are not good for a news website in terms of interactivity.

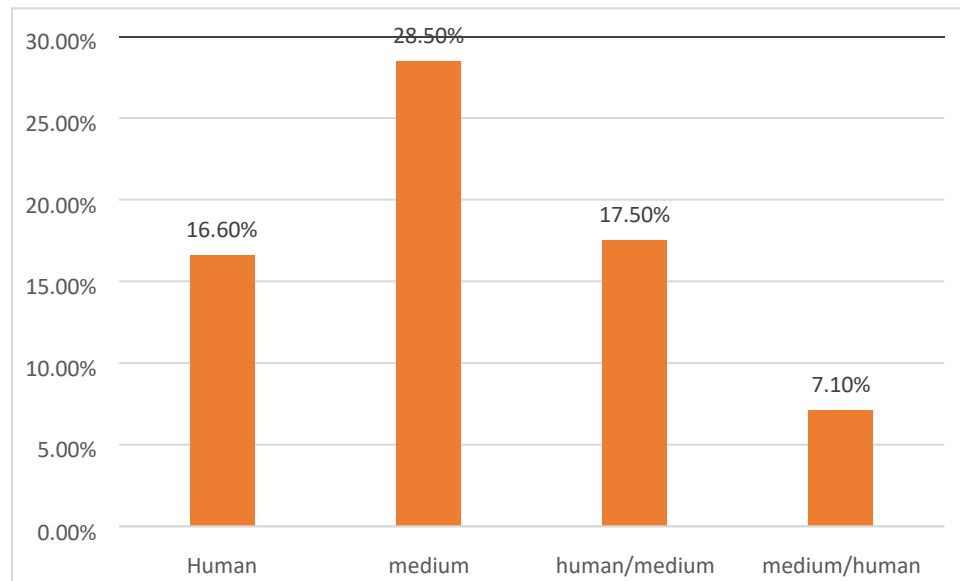


Figure 7.1 An overview of interactivity in Sbeiy.com

7.3 Interactive features in the Nrttv.com

7.3.1 Nrttv.com profile

Nrttv.com is a main website of Nalia Media Corporation, which is one of the Independent Kurdish media in the Iraqi Kurdistan region. Operating across the broadcast, publishing and digital media sectors, this is managed from the city of Sulaymaniyah in the Iraqi Kurdistan region. According to Shawsvar Abdulwahid, the founder of Nalia Media Corporation, this media is a pioneering Kurdish media organization and differs from other Kurdish media organizations in its independence, innovation and quality. Nalia Media Corporation comprises of a number TV and radio channels including: NRT HD, NRT2. The various TV, radio and press channels provide quality materials; each according to its competence and in accordance with a comprehensive strategy to meet the aspirations of all segments of the public in various categories and ages in the Iraqi Kurdistan region.

The idea of establishing the Nalia Media Corporation dates back to 2010 when a group of freelance and independent journalists agreed with the owner and Shaswar Abdulwahid Qadir, a founder of Nalia Construction Company, to establish a large independent Kurdish media organization. In February 2011,

NRT television channel and NRTtv.com news website started broadcasting under the slogan of “Courage, Balance and Truth”. In the first week of its launch on Feb 17, 2011, NRT TV was burned down to the ground because of its independence and courage in the transmission of reports related to political, administrative and financial corruption in the Kurdistan region; and also as a result of promoting free speech, and coverage of the protests which were organized by citizens against corruptions in the region. Two years later on October 26, 2013 there was an assassination attempt on owner and founder of NRT, Shaswar Abdulwahid; but he survived from the assassination attempt in Sulaymaniyah.

The NRTtv.com website promotes freedom of expression by allowing users to express their views freely through the sections and pages of the website. Several reports have also been published about important and sensitive issues related to corruption in the Kurdistan region; whereas, other Kurdish media outlets often avoid publishing such news. However, Nalia Media Corporation has been subjected to fierce criticism since its founder entered the political arena, established a political party and contested in general elections in the Kurdistan region and Iraq.

Some Journalists believe that Nalia lost some of its independence in favour of the political party which was set up by its founder. This is what the Nalia Media Corporation and its Journalists totally reject, insisting that its owner has the right to take part in politics and that this media is not under the influence of the opinions and political orientations of its owner. Rather, it operates as an independent Kurdish media organization.

7.3.2 Human/Medium Interactive Features

Table 7.5 Human/Medium Interactive Features in NRTtv.com

Factor 1: Human/Medium Interactive Features	Very low	Low	Medium	high	Very high
“Submit stories” function			2		
“Submit photos” function				3	
“Submit videos” function	0				
“Submit news tip” function			2		
Reporter/editor e-mail links	0				
Letters-to-editor					4
Reader blogs	0				

In the Nrttv.com website, there is no specific section as “Submit stories” function, and there is no major announcement on Nrttv.com homepage asking users to send their news stories in order to be published on the website. Instead of that, there was an announcement under every news item that requested users to send their news articles to the Nrttv.com website; however, specific email address to forward information was not provided. Although this process may affect users as the website urges them to send news, this is not dynamic process. The site can allocate a small space on its homepage with Submit stories function, a button or a section should be available on the homepage. This access button on the homepage encourages users to submit news stories. In term of Submit stories function, the level of interactivity in Nrttv.com is medium and equals two.

In the Nrttv.com, there is a special function on the homepage in connection with submitting photos. There is a specific section asking users to submit their photos. This aspect can be considered as a positive side of the website, this is one of the participatory features which is available on Nrttv.com and makes

it citizen media site because it explicitly invites their users to participate in the website. This function encourages audience participation in online media and supports participatory journalism in the Iraqi Kurdistan region. On the other hand, the lack of attention to this interactive feature leads to the slowdown of audience participation in the online journalism. The only negative point related to this feature is the lack of a special section on the site to publish the photos that were captured and sent by users. Thus, this function based on the level of interactivity in Nrttv.com is high and equals three.

Regarding the feature of submitting video functions on Nrttv.com, did not pay attention. Submitting video button was not found on the site's homepage or in other sections. Surprisingly, the user is not directed to send video clips to the website, while most people can capture video of events using their smartphones. These clips are useful for editors and users at the same time; this also encourages citizen journalism as the user plays an active role. The other negative point related to this feature is the lack of a special section on the website to publish the video that were captured and sent by users. Therefore, in terms of this function, the level of interactivity in Nrttv.com is very low and equals zero.

Regarding submitting news tips function, specific button cannot be found on the home page of the website to refer users to submit their news tips to news editors. Instead of that, there was an announcement under every news item that asked users to send their news tips to the Nrttv.com news editors. This is a good opportunity for the website and the users because it leads to the creation of communication and interaction between the users and editors. Also, it increases the sources of news and ideas for editors. However, it is better to customize a special button on the homepage of the website for this interactive feature. Thus, in term of Submit stories function, the level of interactivity in Nrttv.com is medium and equals two.

In the Nrttv.com website, there is no special button on the homepage or on the news stories regarding Reporter/Editor e-mail links. This is a negative point in the Nrttv.com website because it excludes the user from contacting the editors and establishing an interactive connection with them. Sometimes a user may

react to a news report to correct an error or add new information, but the lack of this feature hinders this connection. Therefore, the level of interactivity in Nrttv.com is very low and equals zero in terms of this function.

Regarding to Letters-to-Editor feature in the Nrttv.com website, this function is available, and the address of the website is placed at the bottom of the homepage and also in other sections and articles. Users have a choice to send digital or non-digital format posts such as documents to the website. So, the level of interactivity in Nrttv.com in term of this function is very high and equals four.

Finally, the feature of Reader blogs is not available on the Nrttv.com website. This is considered as a shortage of the website in terms of interactivity because users are often excited to see their articles on the website's pages; however, the lack of this interactive feature hinders the promotion of citizen journalism, which has become a bright face of the online journalism. So, the level of interactivity in Nrttv.com is very low and equals zero for this function.

7.3.3 Medium/Human Interactive Features

Table 7.6 Medium/Human Interactive Features in NRTtv.com

<i>Factor 2: Medium/Human Interactive Features</i>	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
Customized weather					4
Customized topics	0				
Customized headlines					4
Search feature			2		
E-mail updates/alerts					4

Languages feature					4
SMS alerts	0				

The Nrttv.com website is very interested in having space on the home page to provide their users information about weather. While Kurdistan region consists of three governorates, this news website posts weather information about all of them. Based on availability of information in the weather section, the feature of Customized weather is very high and equals four. Having data about weather is very important for users, customizing a specific section about weather can be considered a significant positive point of Nrttv.com in terms of interactivity.

Regarding Customized topics, Nrttv.com has not offered its users the option of selecting the topics they prefer whenever accessing the website. For example, the site does not allow users to see their favourite news such as sport news or local news when they access it. This can be considered as a shortage of the Nrttv.com website which impacts the level of interactivity. As a result, the level of interactivity in Nrttv.com is very low and equals to zero.

In terms of Customized headlines, Nrttv.com offered their users to see headlines of posted articles in several ways. In the homepage of the website there is a headlines bar, also there are headlines of most read and most printed articles on all pages. The level of this feature of Nrttv.com is very high and equals to four because the site detected a specific space on the homepage for headlines, and users are allowed to know which headlines are more popular.

About Search feature, there are search areas on the top of the homepage of Nrttv.com website and also in other sections and pages. This feature is available on Nrttv.com for users who are interested in finding specific articles; the users have a choice to search for the same and find the articles. The only limitation in how to customize this feature in Nrttv.com is that the search process is comprehensive, so that the user cannot search for specific news in

a specific section; however, the user must search in all sections. Regarding this feature, the level of interactivity in Nrttv.com is medium and equals to two.

Nrttv.com has taken a keen interest in providing email updates / alerts on the homepage and also in other sections as well. This allows the users to register their e-mails on the website to receive news and other published articles directly. This feature is very important for making interactive connections with users, especially for users who are usually busy and cannot visit the websites continuously. The users could be informed about breaking news through email alerts. Regarding this feature, the level of interactivity in Nrttv.com is very high and equals to four.

With respect to Languages feature, Nrttv.com posts news in Sorani Kurdish dialect, Kurmanji Kurdish dialect, Arabic and English languages. In Kurdistan region, part of users speaks kurmanji Kurdish dialect and are not facing any difficulty in understanding the other Kurdish dialects. It is important for the website to have published news in kurmanji dialect, specifically, the news related to the Iraqi Kurdistan region. Interest in publishing news in different languages and dialects is very important to support interactivity. So, regarding of this feature the level of interactivity in Nrttv.com is very high and equals to four.

Finally, regarding the feature of SMS alerts, Nrttv.com ignored this feature and users cannot receive news and other articles from the website via SMS. This can be considered as a drawback of the Nrttv.com beside other shortages. The rate of this feature is very low and equals to zero.

7.3.4 Human Interactive Features

Table 7.7 Human Interactive Features in NRTtv.com

Factor 3: Human Interactive Features	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
Users comments					4
Chat functions	0				
Q&A (live chats)	0				
Discussion forums			2		
e-mail-a friend					4
share					4

In Nrttv.com, the features of users' comments are provided, in other words, users can leave comments on news articles within the site. Also, social media users can leave comments on the Nrttv.com pages on the social networking sites such as Facebook and twitter pages. It is preferable way to leave comments on the news website because it is not guaranteed that all users access social media. Because of the hypothesis that part of users might not be ready to comment through accessing their social networking site accounts in order not to be recognized especially in The Iraqi Kurdistan region. All comments can be seen on the pages under the articles to which the comment was added. Regarding this feature, the level of interactivity in Nrttv.com is very high and equals to four.

The feature of chat functions in the Nrttv.com website is not provided, the existence of it is very important in making connections between editors and users and among the user themselves to pave the way for increasing interactivity. Thus, the interactivity scale of this feature on Nrttv.com is very low and equals zero.

In addition, Nrttv.com did not seem to be interested in adding Q&A (live chats) feature. For subjects relevant to political events, health materials and other issues, having Q&A (live chats) feature on the news websites is very significant. For example, editors could invite a political character to participate in an open debate with websites users. Similarly, doctors or specialist physicians can employ this feature for discussing health issues with users. Regarding this feature, the level of interactivity in Nrttv.com is very low and equals to zero.

Likewise, the feature of discussion forums is not provided in Nrttv.com and there is no specific section on the website for discussing daily issues by users. Having this section is very important for boosting interactivity and it raises the scale of interactivity and participatory journalism. Thus, the rate of interactivity in Nrttv.com regarding to this feature is very low and equals to zero.

In contrast of previous feature, e-mail-a friend interactive feature is available on Nrttv.com. This feature is placed under posted articles in the Nrttv.com, users can easily send articles from Nrttv.com to their friends via their email address. This feature is very important in increasing the level of interactivity of the websites. The interactivity scale of this feature in Nrttv.com is very high and equals to four.

Similar to previous feature, share feature is placed under posted articles in the Nrttv.com; users can share articles from this website to their social media accounts such as Facebook or twitter. The presence of this feature can be considered as a positive point for Nrttv.com as it facilitates the delivery of the content of the website to a larger number of Internet users; especially, users of social networking sites and also this feature supports citizen journalism and social media. The interactivity scale of this feature in Nrttv.com is very high and equals to four.

7.3.5 Medium Interactive Features

Table 7.8 Medium Interactive Features in NRTtv.com

Factor 4: Medium Interactive Features	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
Photo files				3	
Audio files			2		
Video files		1			
video/audio live stream					4
News graphics,		1			
mobile version of site, apps				3	
Internal Hyperlinks				3	
External Hyperlinks		1			

The interest in adding photos within the posted articles in the Nrttv.com website had a noticeable presence. Although from all samples taken from Nrttv.com photos published with all topics, including the homepage and other parts of the website, the researchers noticed that more photos were attached with most articles. This is a proof that editors are very interested in adding images and the journalists attempted to post more photos with news stories and reports. In addition, among 500 samples taken from the website, 294 news stories were combined with more than one photo; there is also a special section for publishing photo stories on Nrttv.com. This shows a high level of the interactivity based on the scales adopted and equals to three.

Although there is no special section on the Nrttv.com site providing news in the audio format, or podcasts, the site has shown an average interest in providing audio files within the textual news stories. The percentage of audio

files in Nrttv.com website is medium. It indicates that this Kurdish website pays attention to post its' news stories and journalistic materials with audio files; this leads to an increase of interactivity and offers their users to get information in many forms. Nrttv.com probably benefits from the audio news stories produced by Nalia FM radio station, which is also owned by Nalia media. Among the materials selected over a period when the sample were collected, there were 281 audio files with the text of news' stories. Based on the scales for the interactivity scales, it has a medium level with 56.2 percent and equals to two.

While interest in video news increased significantly on websites, video files have become more important for online journalism and news websites. Despite the presence of video programs broadcast on NRT television channel, Nrttv.com did not focus well on providing video news to users by investing in new visual storytelling formats. Website consumers are embracing news videos; basically, users who pay less attention to reading news stories or listen to news stories can receive information via video clips. In Nrttv.com, specific sections for news video files are not available; totally 179 news video clips were found among the whole news stories collected as a sample. This shows posting video files has a low level which is 35.8 percent and equals to one. Online video news provides a powerful and popular way of covering compelling stories.

Regarding video/audio live stream feature, Nrttv.com offers live NRT TV and Nalia FM radio online broadcasting to their users. It could be considered as a positive point for Nrttv.com because interactive live stream video and audio could get higher audience participation and more response for the news websites. Regarding this feature, the level of interactivity of the website is very high and equals to four.

The Nrttv.com is interested in posting an infographic or news graphic with some news stories that contains information and data that can be converted to charts or graphics. For online journalists, the use of news graphics gives them more ways to tell the story. It is also about how the media complements each other; the words, text, audio, video and graphics can combine to give a

detailed picture about facts and events in quite a short space. News graphics is a significant element in online journalism because it provides large amounts of data quickly and easily. In Nrttv.com, producing news graphics is in good level; however, it seems impossible to put News Graphic with every news stories posted on the sites. So, among the whole sample from the Nrttv.com, 147 news graphics were posted; the level of interactivity has 29.4 percent and equals to one.

Except of Windows phones app, Nrttv.com website has adapted to the new smartphone systems such as IOS and Android apps. Also Nrttv.com users can browse the website through the mobile versions of web browsers. Having special mobile applications is very important because large number of users access the internet via smartphones. Furthermore, the mobile phones are no longer used only to receive calls. Among the new uses of mobile phone devices is the informative use based on the mobile web and the news applications. So, according to the interactivity scales adopted, the level of interactivity of the website is high and equals to three.

Regarding to internal hyperlinks feature, Nrttv.com was very interested in applying this feature in the home page, in other sections and also on the pages. The users of Nrttv.com are able to navigate within the website through several sets of hyperlinks; the only shortage regarding internal hyperlinks on Nrttv.com is that the articles are not linked to the relevant items or data posted previously. So, according to the interactivity scales adopted, the level of interactivity of the Nrttv.com regarding the internal hyperlinks feature is high and equals to three.

In contrast to the internal hyperlinks, Nrttv.com website was not interested in providing external hyperlinks. This can be considered as a one of the main drawbacks of the Nrttv.com regarding to interactivity because providing this interactive feature enables users to get more accurate information and data about facts and events. This also boosts their confidence in the accuracy of the news stories posted by the site by linking them to the original sources and documents. There are only 127 articles posted on the website that have been linked to external websites; this is 25.4 percent. So, according to the

interactivity scales adopted, the level of interactivity of the website is low and equals to one.

7.3.6 An overview of interactivity in NRTtv.com

In general, the results of the quantitative content analysis of the Nrttv.com (see figure 6.2) shows that the level of interactivity is medium in this news website. Nrttv.com shows medium interest in the presence of interactive features on its homepage, sections and articles. Overall, availability of Medium/Human interactive features scored high rate at 64.28%. On the other hand, Human/Medium interactive features scored lowest rate at 46.42%. Also, Human interactive features scored 58.33%. Finally, Medium interactive features scored 56.25%. It can be said these results are good for a Kurdish news website in terms of interactivity.

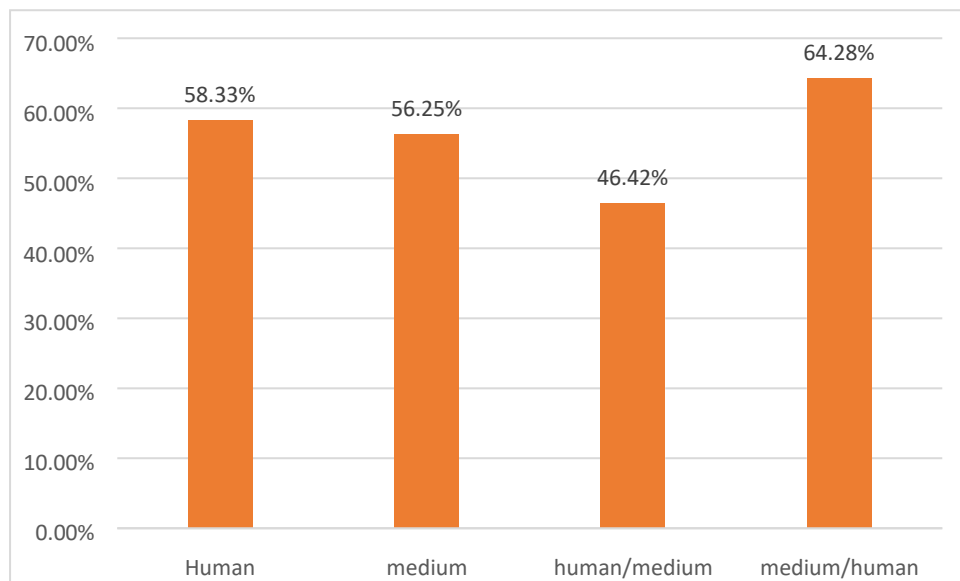


Figure 7.2 An overview of interactivity in NRTtv.com

7.4 Interactive features in the Awene.com

.4.1 Awene.com profile

Awene.com is a news website of Awene Press and Publishing Company, established in 2006 in the city of Sulaymaniyah in southern Kurdistan by independent Kurdish Journalist Asos hardi, who was an editor in Chief of

Hawlati, the first independent Newspaper in Iraqi Kurdistan for five years (2000- 2005), then editor in chief of Awene Newspaper for more than two years (2006- 2007) with the Awene.com. This media organisation also has Awene or Kurdish weekly newspaper, it is 20-page publication and covers wide-range of aspects of Kurdish life and international issues.

Awene.com is an independent media outlet In the Iraqi Kurdistan region; according to their editor, this news website was established at a time when the newspaper’s hardcopy version struggled to survive in a meagre print media market. However , in a region such as Iraqi Kurdistan the online media market is growing daily. According to Dana Assad, a journalist at Awene.com, they are working to strengthen their online presence with a news website which is amongst many basic elements of online journalism.

The critical newspaper Awene and Awene.com news website has received support from Free Press Unlimited since its establishment. In addition to reporting on social and political developments in The Iraqi Kurdistan region, Awene also provides a platform for opinion and debate. In 2010, support was mainly focused on Awene's online work in order to facilitate their financial independence. From 2011, Free Press Unlimited started helping Awene Company with a new online strategy. Because of investigating sensitive political and financial issues of government officials in Iraqi Kurdistan, reporters and journalists of Awene were often intimidated, beaten and arrested. For example, Asos Hardi who is the director of the Awene Press and Publishing Company has been the victim of a violent attack in the city of Sulaymaniyah in 2011.

7.4.2 Human/Medium Interactive Features

Table 7.9 Human/Medium Interactive Features in Awene.com

Factor 1: Human/Medium Interactive Features	Very low	Low	Medium	high	Very high
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“Submit stories” function					4
“Submit photos” function				3	
“Submit videos” function	0				
“Submit news tip” function					4
Reporter/editor e- mail links	0				
Letters-to-editor					4
Reader blogs	0				

In the Awene.com website, there is specific section as “Submit stories” function, and there is an announcement on Nrttv.com homepage asking users to send their news stories in order to be published by the website. Also, there was an announcement under every news item that requested Awene.com users to send their journalistic or non-journalistic articles to the Awene.com website; however, the users were not provided specific email address to send news articles. Unlike some other Kurdish sites, adding this feature in the homepage of Awene.com news website is a dynamic process as the website has allocated specific space on its homepage with Submit stories function to allow and encourage users to submit their news stories. In terms of Submit stories function, the level of interactivity in Awene.com is very high and equals four. It is good for the online journalism as this supports citizen journalism and increased interactivity.

In the awene.com, there is a special function in connection with submitting photos, its available on the homepage of the website which encourages users to submit their photos. This aspect can be considered as a positive point regarding interactivity of the Awene.com. Especially nowadays as technology is available for many internet users, it’s easier to take photos and email the same to the website specifically via their own smart phones. In online journalism, photography plays a key role in representing the situation that is being reported. Unlike traditional media such as newspapers, websites can publish a large number of images in one page or in several interactive ways.

The only drawback is the lack of a special section on the Awene.com to publish those photos in interactive way. Therefore it can be concluded that the level of interactivity of this function in Awene.com is high and equals three. .

Unlike the previous interactive feature, the Awene.com did not show any interest in encouraging users to send videos to the site. Regarding the feature of submitting video functions of Awene.com website, submitting video button was not found on the site's homepage or in other sections. Surprisingly, the user is not directed to send video clips to the website, while most people can easily film events using their smartphones. Videos could play significant role in online journalism and interactivity because video is changing the way we create and absorb information via websites. Furthermore, outlets such as Awene.com should make a serious effort to solidify the growing focus on video. The other negative point related to this feature is the lack of a special section on the website to publish the videos that were sent by users. So, the level of interactivity in Nrttv.com is very low and equals zero for this function.

Regarding submitting news tips function, specific button was available on the homepage of Awene.com website; this encourages users to submit their news tips to news editors. In addition, there was an announcement under every news item that requested users to send their news tips to the Awene.com news editors. This is a good opportunity for the Awene.com website and the users because users' news tips are important for news website editors, especially these days hundreds of website users are very enthusiastic and offer tips to journalists; this may help websites to benefit from third-party (Users) fact checkers about news stories. On the other hand, this process may lead to the increased interaction between the users and editors. So, the level of interactivity in Awene.com is very high and equals four for Submit stories function.

In the Awene.com website, neither on the homepage nor on the news stories, a special button for Reporter/editor e-mail links is not included. This is a major drawback for the Nrttv.com website, because it excludes the users from contacting the editors and establishing an interactive connection with them.

Especially for independent media such as Awene.com in the Kurdistan region, it is necessary to offer their production in creative ways to encourage the users to ‘meet’ the news website editors and reporters. It is better to add personal email addresses of news editors or reporters and also include photos of the staff members along with their personal email addresses. Through these interactive features, the users are able to continue the dialogue with the editors and reporters after the stories are published. Therefore, in term of this function, the level of interactivity in Nrttv.com is very low and equals zero.

Regarding Letters-to-editor feature of the Awene.com website, this interactive feature is available, and the website has the address of Awene media company with a link at the bottom of its homepage to allow users to send letters or any other digital or non-digital journalistic material such as video tapes or paper documents by post to the website office. Thus it can be said that in term of this function, the level of interactivity in Awene.com is very high and equals four.

Finally, the feature of Reader blogs is not available on the Awene.com website, this is considered as a drawback for the website in terms of interactivity. While independent media are supposed to pay much attention by allowing users to post their opinions through adding the feature of Reader blogs on the homepage; however, Awene.com neglected this interactive feature without any justification. Also, the lack of this interactive feature hinders the promotion of citizen journalism, which should be bright face of the Kurdish online journalism. Therefore, in term of this Interactive feature, the level of interactivity in Awene.com is very low and equals zero.

7.4.3 Medium/Human Interactive Features

Table 7.10 Medium/Human Interactive Features in Awene.com

<i>Factor 2: Medium/Human Interactive Features</i>	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
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Customized weather		1			
Customized topics	0				
Customized headlines			2		
Search feature			2		
E-mail updates/alerts	0				
Languages feature	0				
SMS alerts	0				

Although it is not technically difficult, Awene.com is not well interested in having space on the home page to provide its users information about weather of Kurdistan region cities. While this news website posts weather information, it does not provide users the option to specify or customize the location they prefer. Based on availability of the weather section, the feature of customized weather in Awene.com is Low and equals one. Having data about weather is very important for users in online journalism.

The development in the web design technique provides the users with the opportunity to control the design of the website and choose display of the topics on the websites according to their desire and preferences. Regarding customized topics, Awene.com has not offered its users the option to select the topics they prefer while accessing the website. For example, the site does not allow users to select their favourite news such as local news when they access it for the first time. This can be considered as a drawback of the Awene.com website as this has an impact on the level of interactivity which is very low and equals to zero.

Regarding customized headlines interactive feature, Awene.com allows the users to see headlines of posted articles in some ways. For example, there are headlines of most read and most printed articles on all pages, but

headlines toolbar is not included on the Awene.com homepage. Therefore, the level of interactivity in Nrtrtv.com for this feature is medium and equals to two.

In terms of Search feature, there are search areas at the top of the homepage of Awene.com website and also in other sections and pages. Users who are interested in finding specific articles have a choice to search and find the same by writing the textual words, phrases or sentences. The only limitation is lack of customizing this feature as the search process is comprehensive and the users cannot search for specific news in a specific section; however, the users have an option of searching for information in all sections. The widespread use of text-based search in the websites has led to increased interactivity, website users often have information seeking goals which affect the use of search features. Also, search feature in the websites can alter the data that users explore and how they engage with it. Regarding this feature, the level of interactivity in Awene.com is medium and equals to two.

With respect to email updates / alerts interactive feature, Awene.com has not taken keen interest in providing this feature on the homepage and also in other sections and on other pages as well. The users can receive news and other published articles directly via their emails without visiting the website. Email alerts are relatively an easy technique in the online journalism, website users receive an email every time the website posts an article. This feature is very important for interactive connections between users and the website, especially for users who are usually busy and cannot visit the websites continuously. The users could receive news stories and they could be informed about events and breaking news. Regarding this feature, the level of interactivity in Awene.com is very low and equals to one.

The Languages feature is a major drawback for Awene.com as articles are only in Sorani Kurdish dialect, without any specific sections or pages for journalistic items in Kurmanji Kurdish dialect, Arabic and English languages. While in Kurdistan region, part of users speaks kurmanji Kurdish dialect and have difficulty in understanding the other Kurdish dialects. It is important for the websites to have news articles in kurmanji dialect, specifically, the news

related to the Iraqi Kurdistan region. The lack of posts in Kurmanji Kurdish dialect could be considered as a shortage for Awene.com as one of the few independent media outlets in the Iraqi Kurdistan region. Thus, the level of interactivity regarding this feature in Awene.com is very low and equals to zero.

Finally, regarding the feature of SMS alerts, Awene.com has. ignored this feature and users cannot receive news and other articles from the website via SMS. This can be considered as a shortage of the Awene.com because there are many citizens who do not have Internet service in the Iraqi Kurdistan region, and they have to receive news articles via SMS. Therefore, interactivity level of this feature in Awene.com is very low and equals to zero.

7.4.4 Human Interactive Features

Table 7.11 Human Interactive Features in Awene.com

Factor 3: Human Interactive Features	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
Users comments		1			
Chat functions	0				
Q&A (live chats)	0				
Discussion forums	0				
e-mail-a friend	0				
share					4

While there are positive significant social, political, and journalistic effects of user comments on online news items, Awene.com does not provide the feature to their users in good way. Although Awene.com allows users to add their comments on news articles within Nrtrtv.com pages on the social networking sites such as Facebook and twitter, users can not add their comments about articles on the Awene.com website. It is not preferable to provide an option for

comments on the news website because it is not guaranteed that all internet users access social media. In general, online news discussions are often described as an interactive aspect of online journalism. Regarding this feature, the level of interactivity in Awene.com is low and equals to one.

On the other hand, the feature of chat functions in the Awene.com website is not available. The existence of this feature is very important in making connections between editors and users; furthermore, the connection with political figures or among the users themselves can pave the way for increase in interactivity. Regarding this feature, the level of interactivity in Awene.com is very low and equals to zero.

Likewise, Awene.com did not seem interested in adding Q&A (live chats) feature. For subjects relevant to social, commercial, political and other subjects, offering Q&A (live chats) feature for users on the news websites is very significant; especially for the citizens in the Kurdistan region because there are less options for ordinary people to discuss social or political issues with officials via traditional media. For example, news website editors could invite a political character to participate in an open debate with websites users. Similarly doctors or specialist physicians can employ this feature for discussing health issues with users. Regarding this feature, the level of interactivity in Awene.com is very low and equals to zero.

The feature of discussion forums is not included in Awene.com. There is no specific section on the website for discussing daily issues by users. Having this section is very important for users to express their ideas about several subjects and issues. Also, offering this interactive feature boosts interactivity and it raises the scale of interactivity and participatory journalism. The rate of interactivity in Awene.com regarding this feature is very low and equals to zero.

News websites always try to communicate their news to a large number of people and strive to increase the number of users by following all possible methods. However, Awene.com did not benefit from the technical advantages of the Internet to achieve this goal. For example, e-mail-a-friend interactive

feature is not available on Awene.com, this feature is not placed under posted items on the website, users can not send articles from Awen.com to their friends directly from the website pages. This feature is very important in increasing the level of interactivity of the websites. The interactivity scale of this feature in Awene.com is very low and equals to zero.

In contrast to the previous feature, share feature is available under posted articles in the Awene.com, the website offers great way to their users to share articles from Awene.com to their social media accounts such as Facebook or twitter. The presence of this feature can be considered as a positive point for Awene.com, as it facilitates the delivery of the content of the website to a larger number of Internet users, especially users of social networking sites. The interactivity scale of this feature in Awene.com is very high and equals to four.

7.4.5 Medium Interactive Features

Table 7.12 Medium Interactive Features in Awene.com

Factor 4: Medium Interactive Features	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
Photo files		1			
Audio files	0				
Video files	0				
video/audio live stream	0				
News graphics,	0				
mobile version of site, apps		1			
Internal Hyperlinks				3	
External Hyperlinks	0				

While photos are of great importance in the online journalism, this kind of journalistic material does not have a good presence on the pages of Awene.com website; including images in the posted articles on Awene.com website did not have a noticeable presence. Although all samples taken from Awene.com, including the homepage and other parts of the website, had photos posted with all topics; the researcher noticed that there is only one photo added with each article, some of these were irrelevant with the subject of the articles. It is important for editors of Awene.com to add more photos to their articles because they work as independent media and there do not not censorship on posting photos about subjects; especially these days, since taking photos by smartphones has dramatically changed the face of online journalism. Almost all smartphones now have both a camera and a microphone that allow capturing photos to a standard suitable for posting. Journalists and ordinary people are benefiting from the opportunities that new technology provide. Based on the scales for the interactivity, the level of interactivity regarding this feature in Awene.com is low and equals to one.

Adding audio files to news stories or other articles, news websites have an opportunity to tell a story via audio media and reach a new and growing world of audiences who prefer to be listeners rather than the readers. Awene.com is not providing news in the audio format or podcasts, the site has shown just a little interest in providing audio files within the textual news stories. The percentage of audio files in Awene.com website is very low. It indicates that this Kurdish website is not keen to post news stories and other journalistic materials with audio files. Creating or producing news audio files are relatively easy and inexpensive to produce, and audiences often need this kind of journalistic material; however, Awene.com does not mix audio files with the text of news stories and also there is no specific section on the homepage for audio news articles or programs. Based on the scales for the interactivity, the level of interactivity regarding this feature in Awene.com is low and equals to one.

In general, today most of the online news organizations around the world are approaching online video news; many news websites add video to their articles

in a proactive and pragmatic ways. Today focusing on the online video news by news websites are clearer than the past. In contrast, Awene.com as a news website does not pay attention to video news as there are just few video files on the pages of this website. Awene.com does not focus well on providing video news to users by investment in new visual storytelling formats. Website users are mostly embracing news videos and users who pay less attention to reading news stories or listen to news can receive information via video clips. In Awene.com, specific section for news video files is. Not available, totally 15 news video clips were found among the whole news stories taken as a sample, which shows video files has a very low level of interactivity which is 3% percent and equals to zero.

Regarding to video/audio live stream feature, there are no Live Tv or Live radio on the homepage of Awene.com, this website does not offer this service to their users. It could be considered as a disadvantage for Awene.com because interactive live stream video and audio could get higher audience participation and more response for the news websites. Regarding this feature, the level of interactivity of the website is very low and equals to zero.

The use of graphic elements, from which infographics emerges, provides a more immediate and at times interactive way of communicating. Infographics can be regarded as a visual element composed of charts, maps, diagrams and images that help the understanding of the content of a base text. Awene.com is interested in posting infographics or news graphic with some news stories that contain information and data that can be converted to a charts or graphics. This kind of interactive feature is significant for news websites because this gives journalists more ways to tell the story. It is also about how the media complements each other; the words, text, audio, video and graphics can be combined to give a detailed picture about facts and events in a short space. In Awen.com, producing news graphics is not at good level. It seems impossible to put News Graphic with every news stories posted on the sites. So, among the whole sample taken from the Awene.com, only 16 news graphics were posted and this is 3.2 percent. Regarding this feature, the level of interactivity of the website is very low and equals to zero.

The technological convergence of mobile phones and media has become a bright face of online journalism with the commercial birth of touchscreen-enabled mobile devices; this changed the ways that media organisations offer their products to people. Awene.com website still is not available to the new smartphone systems such as IOS, Android and Window apps. The website users can browse the website only through the mobile versions of web browsers such as google Chrome and Edge browsers. Having special mobile applications is very important because huge number of users access the internet via smartphones. So, according to the interactivity scales adopted, the level of interactivity of the Awene.com is low and equals to one.

Regarding internal hyperlinks feature, Awen.com was interested in applying this feature in the home page, and also in other sections and other pages. The users of Awen.com are able to navigate within the website through several sets of hyperlinks; the only shortage regarding internal hyperlinks on Awene.com is that the articles are not linked to the relevant items or data posted previously. So, according to the interactivity scales adopted, the level of interactivity of the Awene.com regarding the internal hyperlinks feature is high and equals to three.

A prevalence of hyperlinks in news website posts asserts on the importance these types of interactive features. It is significant for news website users because everyone has different preferences on how they would like to get the content. Several users prefer external links in an article, in order to further explore the subject and learn more details. In contrast of the internal hyperlinks, Awene.com website was not well interested in providing external hyperlinks. This can be considered as one of the main drawbacks of the Awene.com regarding interactivity. Providing this interactive feature of linking the articles to the original sources and documents enables users to get more accurate information about facts and events; this also increases users' confidence regarding the accuracy of the news stories posted by the site . There are only 27 articles posted on the website that have been linked to external sources and it has 5.4 percent. So, according to the interactivity

scales adopted, the level of interactivity of the website is very low and equals to zero.

7.4 .6 An overview of interactivity in Awene.com

In general, the results of the quantitative content analysis of the Awene.com (see figure 6.3) shows that the level of interactivity is low in this news website. Awene.com shows low interest in interactive features on its homepage, and also in other sections and articles. Overall, availability of Human/Medium interactive features scored high rate at 53.57%. On the other hand, Medium interactive features scored lowest rate at 15.62%. Also, Human interactive features scored 20.83%. Finally, Medium/Human interactive features scored 17.85%. Therefore, it can be concluded that these results are not good for a Kurdish news website in terms of interactivity.

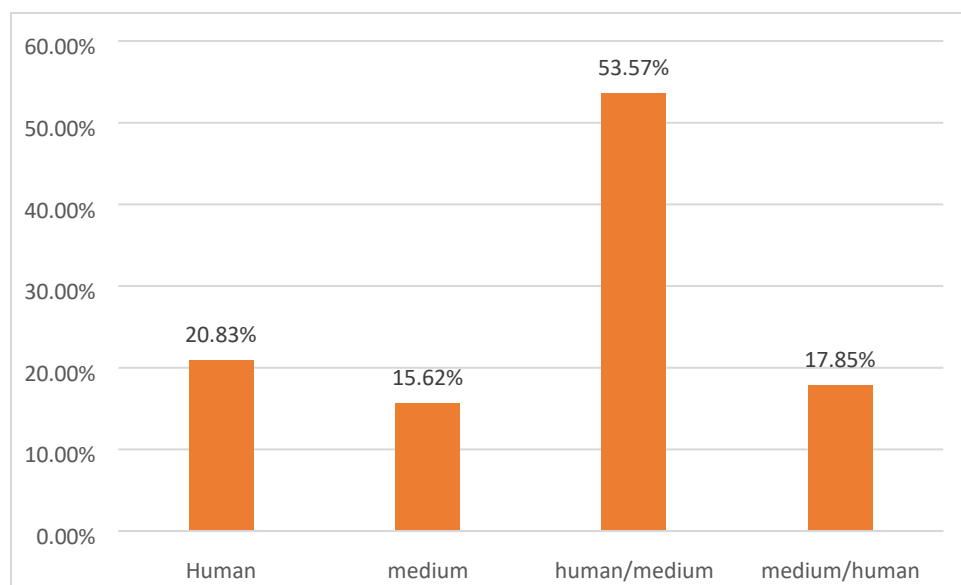


Figure 7.3 An overview of interactivity in Awene.com

Chapter Eight

Qualitative Data Discussion

8.1. Introduction

This thesis aims to investigate how Kurdish news websites applied interactivity features on their articles and understand how journalists are used to interact and their perceptions about their impact on civil society, democracy and political participation. In chapter seven the quantitative data from the web-based content analysis were analysed. The results indicated that the proposed research model was accurate in its forecast. In a substantial attempt to complement the quantitative findings, a number of semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect expert perspectives from the journalists, editors, web developers and media experts who performed their duties in the Kurdish media organizations. The main purpose of the chapter was to elicit insights into the relative effectiveness of each of the dimensions of interactivity and selected user motives through an understanding of the subjective experiences of the journalists in the Kurdish news websites in more depth.

This chapter is organized as follows: Section 8.2 provides general perceptions about interactivity concerning the interview participants' perceptions. In Section 8.3 the researcher focusses on interactivity and citizen journalism. Section 8.4 provides an analysis of interactivity and customization. Section 8.5 is about interactivity and social media. In section 8.6 the researcher examines the use of interactive features within Kurdish news website articles. Section 8.7 of this chapter highlights editorial skills and interactivity in the Kurdish news websites, and finally section 8.8 is about interactivity, political and social impacts.

Interviews with Kurdish media producers, journalists, editors in chief, editors, website developers, and media experts will explore their perceptions of interactivity in the Kurdish online journalism and reasons for adopting or not adopting interactive features in their news websites which facilitate interpersonal communication in the Kurdish community. They will discover whether they are interested in interactivity or not and points out the problems

that Kurdish journalists face in integrating these interactive features over the internet on their news websites.

8.2 General perceptions about interactivity

Most Kurdish news website producers and journalists emphasize the importance of interactivity and integrating interactive features into their news websites. They see that the internet, especially the news websites, gives users ample space to participate by writing comments on published topics. Surprisingly, a majority of the interviewees define online interactivity and count it in the possibility of adding commenting by users on topics. Their perceptions of interactivity are confined to spaces of websites for online users to share information in a more horizontal, many-to-many way. Upon further discussion about interactivity in Kurdish online journalism, some news website journalists and editors talked only in terms of the technology, they are asserting on the webs significant ability to exchange ideas between websites users and journalists.

Adding comments on the articles of news websites is one of the most popular forms of user participation in interactive online journalism. Interactive nature of websites creates the opportunity for interactive communication process, that enables ordinary users to be an active element in these important forums of the public sphere (Weber 2014). Xalaf Ghafur, the editor in chief of the Xendan.org notes that the interactivity is very important for the online journalism. Interactivity features of news websites open up space for Kurdish citizens to express their views freely through the news websites:

Kurdish news websites provided unlimited possibilities of interactivity. Therefore, these sites encourage direct interactive communication between senders and receivers and the exchange of roles between the parties of communication process. Of course, there is the utmost importance of interactivity through the new media, I mean the online journalism. Today, because of the nature of news websites, Kurdish people freely express their views on political, religious or any other topics, they could add their

comments without any censorships. This is the importance of interactivity via internet. (appendix 3.5).

Scholars pay attention to user comments on website articles as a significant aspect of interactivity. User comments on news website articles have always been discussed intensively from the interactivity perspective. The user can interact with the website or with the editors and improve his knowledge ability based on the information presented interactively and also by adding comments on the topics posted on the website (Ziegele et al. 2014). According to Bahadin Usuf, editor of Sbeiy.com interactivity is an original feature of the new digital media. Interactive includes the relationship between audience and media content by writing comments. He compares between news websites, newspapers, radio and television in terms of allowing users to express their opinion more freely:

I consider that interactivity is the most significant feature of new media, it is a positive characteristic of news websites. Interactivity is a vital part of online journalism and makes it more influential than old or traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television. You can easily follow an important thing, namely that listeners for radio programs or viewers of television channels do not have a good opportunity to participate in order to express their views on the topics being discussed between the presenter and the person being interviewed. However, internet users can write comments on all news reports or articles via websites in abundance (Appendix 3.7).

Similarly,, Shno Osman, a journalist in Basnews.net believes that internet is a great medium to communicate with the mass because of its interactive features, and the essence of interactivity of online journalism lies in allowing users to add comments on topics. In interactive media, the recipient cannot be seen only as a reader, hence the website can modify its content and interact with readers' comments. She states that:

It seems that the most important feature of internet media (online journalism) is the interactivity and fast delivery of information to the public unlike the traditional media. Interactivity, especially with the ease of adding comments and opinions to published articles, has made the websites better than other media (Appendix 3.6).

Among all the interviewees, Bahroz Ali, a journalist and lecturer at Media Department at the University of Sulaimani, has a deeper understanding of interactivity than others. From his point of view, the concept of interactivity is complex, interactive process in the online journalism is not limited to the comments of readers or how users use the websites but depends on several human and technical aspects. According to him:

We could define interactivity in terms of technology and in terms of human-to-human exchange. However, interactivity is far more than adding comments by users to website articles or some technical functions involving the user clicking on buttons of website pages or selecting options. Interactivity is the degree to which communication technology can create an environment in which participants can communicate and exchange messages, in order to gain their experience and increase their awareness (Appendix 3.1).

Similarly, Saman Mohammed, a journalist at Westge.com argues that interactivity is the most important feature of new media, especially news websites. If there are some dimensions of online journalism, then interactivity is the most significant dimension. He (Appendix 3.11) thinks that “interactivity is the space through which the user can leave comments on articles. It enables and facilitates for any user to leave an impact on the websites. Thus, the website becomes dynamic and involves the recipient in the interactive communication process”.

In addition, the interactive nature of the web has helped online journalism combine all other media forms in one way. Online journalism has been able to create other types of news content, making it easier to produce and share

content with others. The interactivity nature of news websites makes it technically possible to filter content on the basis of the preferences of each user. This empowers users to customize the product and consume it in the way that best suits their needs (Kenney et al 2000; Pavlik, 2001). Raza Manuchehr, news editor pointed out that currently there is a lot of arguments about users voicing opinions via websites, when asked about the concept of interactivity, he also asserted on the technology aspect, such as multimedia, video and audio. It is possible for the user to choose what he needs to read, and not to receive it in the form of text only but be heard or visible on a computer or a smartphone through the internet. He explained that the idea of interactivity is allowing the user of websites to have access to observing information through several options and forms. Users can get news services of a wide range of expressions of interactivity, text, photos and video in the same web page. They can thus experience the news story by seeing, listening and reading. Today, news websites are offering users a huge amount of interactivity and data accessibility:

After the development of the internet, new and distinctive media outlets such news websites and social websites have emerged. These media possess unique techniques that are not found in the traditional media. The most important characteristic of the new media is their possession of interactive tools, which increase the level of interactive communication between journalists and audiences. Interactive is the ability of the new media on the transfer of live information very quickly, and its ability to integrate multimedia such as sound and image and text in one article (Appendix 3.10).

In general, the perceptions of Kurdish journalists and practitioners in the field of online journalism regarding to interactivity are superficial, and there are those who believe that interactivity is not so important. Even for online journalism. Pshtiwan Zahir, news editor at Xendan.org (Appendix 3.9) said: "interactivity is not the most significant key point of online journalism, we can manage our news website without interactivity. I do not rule out the possibility of getting a lot of users by republishing news articles in the form of texts,

without voice, photos and videos on our news website. I do not think of interactivity as much as I think about the credibility of what I edited, it is more important than the interactivity for our news website and our users as well”.

On the other hand, editor of Nrttv.com referred to immediacy as a main interactive feature of news websites which makes online journalism different from other forms of media. He argued that interactivity is about immediacy: "there is a lot of interactive functions and features of news websites. I believe that the main and most important interactive features of online journalism is immediacy. We can post news articles faster than TV and radio in an instant manner, also update news reports immediately as new information arrives for events. This is interactivity" (Appendix 3.10).

In general, it can be seen that Kurdish journalists have a superficial overview of interactivity, the majority of them believe that interactivity means allowing the users to add comments on news and articles posted on the websites, while others preach the integration of text with voice, and video and connect them interactively. These views reveal that the Kurdish news websites do not care about interactivity systematically and thoughtfully and reflect the lack of crystallization of the concept of interactivity by Kurdish online journalists. However, this superficial understanding of the interactivity in online journalism by Kurdish news website editors does not mean that the Kurdish online journalism lacks interactivity, nor does it mean that the Kurdish journalists or news website editors are not interested in interactivity, but as mentioned, the lack of understanding of the interactivity in online journalism could affect the level of interactivity in the news websites. When a journalist understands what interactivity is and how he can apply interactivity to his website, the level of interactivity will increase significantly in his website.

8.3 Interactivity and Citizen Journalism

Interactivity of online journalism is not only about the nature of the content, or the medium of interactive features, but interactivity could push a little bit further, especially when it becomes possible to enable website users to become citizen journalists. News websites could play better role regarding

paying attention to their users by offering wide space to them in order to participate in producing journalistic content. If they do that, website users can be part of the professional news production process in online journalism (Gillmor 2008). Changes in the citizen journalism during the past few years have revitalized the idea that the web technology and online journalism will make journalism more interactive. This is where users have become an active collaborator with online journalists and demonstrated their presence and abilities in the process of producing and publishing journalistic articles via websites or social media pages (Kim and Lowrey 2015.). While print or visual media provides limited space for the public to participate by incorporating their views in news stories, reports or radio and television programs, online journalism has proved that individuals have a choice to play a role via web environment to become reporters and journalists, who could produce and post journalistic articles, or expert commentators on topics they are keen on (Domingo 2008). It seems that the most important feature of internet media is the interactivity and fast delivery of information to the public unlike the traditional media. Interactivity, especially with the ease of adding comments and opinions to published articles, has made the news websites better than other media for users.

Much of the studies on citizen journalism has examined the ways it has interacted with mainstream news websites. In the early stages of the online press, news sites tried to publish different forms of user-generated content. In contrast, in advanced stages, scholars focused on identifying patterns of advanced participation for users in news websites such as commenting on stories, message boards, polls, etc. until the stage of the allocation of key sections in the news websites for citizen journalism content (Wall 2015). In general, news websites can encourage individuals to become citizen reporters and journalists at least in two ways, first, via creating specific section for users so that they could produce and post their pieces in those sections or even in the other sections of the website. Second, they can also encourage individuals to become reporters or add their comments on news articles. Online journalists can also ask website users to express their personal experiences, ideas, data and suggestions that would improve the content of the websites. Some editor

in chiefs of Kurdish news websites believe that it is difficult to assign a special section in their websites to post user-generated content. The reason for this is that these reports lack professionalism in terms of content and form. Indeed, the response by many Kurdish news websites toward citizen journalism is not on the level of ambition, even they appear to have been initially intended to contain expectations of their user's participation, to keep their involvement at low levels and on the professional's terms. Kurdish citizen journalists were not welcome on the field of online journalism, their content was dismissed or criticized by Kurdish news website editors. Citizen journalistic production has been viewed as untrustworthy, too subjective, always rejected because of poor technical quality or no real news value. Xalaf Ghafour, the editors in chief of the Xendan.org indicated that they tried to allocate space in their site to publish news products to users, but they failed to continue this plan:

Regarding Kurdish online journalism, citizen journalism is not an essential part of news gathering and posting in Kurdistan region. Indeed, there are a lot of Kurdish citizens willing to produce journalistic content, but their reports usually lack professionalism, and sometimes we cannot verify the authenticity of the information contained therein so that we publish them through our website (Appendix 3.5).

In other cases, some Kurdish mainstream news websites have a responsibility to support citizen journalism to encourage its interactions with mainstream news media, ignoring defects, errors and faults of independent citizen initiatives. Westgenews.net is one of the Kurdish news websites that is interested in publishing news stories produced by users, their editor in chief stated that:

It is important for us to play a role in term of creating a wide space to produce interaction between citizen journalism with professional news media. We are as a mainstream Kurdish news website experimented with accommodating different modes of citizen content. We always asked our users to send us their journalistic

articles to post them in our website. Of course, we did it (Appendix 3.2).

In addition, some other Kurdish news websites responded to their user's participatory tendencies by creating sections of limited spaces for citizen journalism such as Sbey platform by Sbey.com (Appendix 3.3). It allows users to publish their views in the form of text paragraphs or even long articles on political, economic or social issues. This step has had a significant impact on encouraging users to express their opinions freely and publish their articles through a mainstream news outlet. Some Kurdish news website editors hold positive attitudes toward user-generated content, but they do not hide the fact that citizen journalist contents often lack professional journalistic values. One of the editors focused on the importance of interaction between mainstream news websites and users who want to play a role as a citizen journalist, Shno Osman journalist at Basnews.net noted: "if we support those ordinary website users, it means we support citizen journalism. Then, they will be able to express themselves via creating some news stories or other forms of content, we accept their works even if do not have professional journalistic values" (Appendix 3.6). This editor does not deny the fact that some of the editors working in the news websites lack professionalism. In contrast, there are some citizen news writers who have the ability to work as a professional editor, those who respect journalistic values. Therefore, he insisted on the importance of interaction between citizen journalism and mainstream news websites.

However, Kurdish news website editors expressed their concerns about the news value and quality of user generated content. Due to the simplicity of user-generated content, it seems difficult for mainstream news websites to adapt with citizen journalism easily, because news website editors are often committed to organizational and technical conditions and are also committed to traditional editing practices (Thurman, 2008). The editor of Xendan.org believed strongly that 'users generated content always need editorial intervention by news website editors, because user contributions were often "extremely dull", providing a strong justification for editorial intervention. He suggested that the reason why internet users visit their website is to obtain

valuable and a well-edited news stories by professional journalists" (Appendix 3.9). She suggested that users should be allowed to place their content in the form of comments on the news website stories, rather than convert that content into articles by news website editors to post them within website sections. The Xendan.org approach toward user-generated content moderation was reading everything the users put up about posted news articles, but after a short period of time, they discovered that their approach was not practical and cost them very much, they have required more than one editor to follow user feedback accurately which can be expensive to run (Appendix 3.9). Kurdish news website journalists suggest that user-generated content should be accepted by editors from a traditional professional perspective, this type of content always needs to evaluate its benefits in terms of its contribution to the development of news content in terms of increasing information related to news reports and supplemental source of information, rather than focusing on allowing differing views on political or social issues. They argue that user-generated content can undermine high journalistic norms and values unless carefully examined, monitored and evaluated.

The fear of users bypassing and defaming others through the content they produce on social media has been a major factor in reducing editors' interest in user-generated content initiatives in some news websites. Since the advent of websites, the problem of defamation has been the subject of controversy among media and legal experts (George and Scerr 2007; Singer 2010). Some Kurdish news website editors expressed enormous suspicion of bloggers or people who use social networking sites, because they are often not familiar with the law of journalism. Bahadin Yousuf (Appendix 3.7) says: "we are bemoaned the way social media users freely copies articles, photos or videos from other websites, they believe that they have the right to use everything they find on the web". He stresses that he could not post most of the user generated content on his website, even if this content is effective and attractive.

Interviews with professional Kurdish journalists about their attitudes toward interactivity in online journalism regarding citizen journalism revealed the fact

that most of the Kurdish professional journalists working in Kurdish news websites do not benefit from citizen content as possible raw material for their own reporting, although they feel they have to use their website users content as part of operating in a networked digital environment. The editor in chief of Nrttv.com admitted this matter and presented his opinion in detail as follows:

Of course, we do not hide that there is a problem with the Kurdish news websites related to the vulnerability of communication between journalists and website users. Journalists are not trying seriously to communicate with their website's users. In general, building relations with users could be useful because they always have good information or data about what our news stories, so their information supports our articles (Appendix 3.4).

The huge boost of new information technologies has affected media everywhere and led to innovation of new kinds of journalism such as Citizen Journalism which has become an integral part of online journalism. There is a great opportunity for mainstream news websites to benefit from citizen journalism, by offering the chance for individuals to participate in the production of journalistic content, because the common users can provide resources and information beyond the scope of the traditional media. In line with this, another editor talked about the importance of using the information that any users may provide about events that have a news value, which is sometimes more important than official information obtained by the editor from official organizations. Some news website users were originally witness to the occurrence of some events and may have recorded those events. According to Aram Ghafur, Editor of Dwarozh.net:

A journalist who edits a news story or writing an article is one person, the users who read this news are hundreds of people or even thousands. They know a lot about what a reporter writes about. In some cases, users give useful tips to improve journalistic reports. So, if this journalist could handle opening up his or her article to open more information, knowledge and advice from their

website users, then their news websites improves. In the same way, the news website journalist should ask users to give additional details about his or her stories if they have any additional data or information about the event, such as photos and videos. It is possible that one of the users is close to where things happen, he becomes a reporter if there is a communication between a journalist in the website and this user (appendix 3.8).

Also, another website editor expressed concerns about posting news stories in which there are objective errors or even linguistic errors, because news website editors have become under the heavy scrutiny and strict control from website users. Radha Manucheri, News editor of Nrttv.com (Appendix 3.10) He said: "In the past, I was a journalist with a daily newspaper, and we rarely faced criticism because of publishing reports in which there were objective or linguistic errors". He added: "but now the situation has changed radically, we have many criticisms, I have to pay attention to user's comments on my articles, so I will not be a bad editor. Our products are constantly changing and evolving because of the contribution of users" (Appendix 3.10).

For their part, Kurdish activist citizen journalists have been able to boost interactions with news websites, their works invent connections between citizen journalists and professionals. In some cases, individuals or bloggers posted news articles and videos on events were not covered by journalists in news sites because they feared being prosecuted by government authorities, then, that gave courage to website journalists to cover this event later as well (Appendix 3.11). Today, the act of ordinary Kurdish people creating news content has become an important accepted practice in Kurdish online journalism, even if the posting of those products via news websites did not meet the required level.

Likewise, it is worth mentioning that the interactive features of the web played an important role in creating interaction between professional journalists and website users, which in turn encouraged the emergence of citizen journalism.

Kurdish news website editors must rely increasingly on interactive features of their websites to allow the users to assume a more active role in the production of contents. Emergent phenomena such as citizen journalism and user-generated content are becoming more and more significant for interactivity in online journalism and in the online public sphere. It is better for Kurdish news websites to open their gate to active users and have them in the editor or reporter team rather than competing with them. As a result of the availability of modern techniques such as PC or smartphones for individuals, websites users have gained a good experience in gathering information. Even in some cases users can edit that information and produce news stories. Thus, users can be part of online journalism. To some extent, through what has been discussed from the perspective of Kurdish news website editors, we discover that Kurdish online journalism has made the consensus and good relationship between mainstream news websites and citizen journalists. By playing a great role in the news production process, these citizen journalists have created positive relationships with journalists and editors of Kurdish mainstream news websites. These reflect the interactivity produced by the online journalism by taking advantage of the interactive features of the web and new information technology. The conclusion of this section suggests that most of Kurdish news website editors evaluate citizen journalism alongside mainstream journalists' work, for they are now part of the same news production process.

8.4 Interactivity and Customization

The benefit from the features of web technology and digital management of news websites will provide the possibility to filter or select the content based on the preferences of each user as desired so as to give the users the ability to customize content for news websites based on their needs and desires. In online journalism environment, media platform can be customized, or personalized, in a way not possible in traditional media such as newspapers or television (Pavlik 2001). For the websites there are two different types of personalization (Thurman 2012), explicit personalization uses direct user inputs to the websites; implicit personalization focuses on website user's preferences from data and information collected via a registration process by

users or by using specific sophisticated software that monitors user activity on the website.

Customization factors of news websites are those whose presence make a website functional and serviceable, and whose absence causes user dissatisfaction. Happy users always mean more visits to websites, customization factors, on the other hand, are those that add more value to the news websites by attempting to get user satisfaction (Zhang and Von 2000; Sundar et al. 2010), and more engagement by users with the website. This in turn means more impacts of media content and more interactivity in online journalism. Customization features in the news websites provide the means for users to tailor information to their liking, but customization functions do not offer the chance to website users to exchange their ideas. In general, customization interactive features of news websites include information customization features such as weather customization, and content submission features such as customization of news tips, news stories and photo (Chung 2008). There are some Kurdish news website editors who pay attention to the importance of customization features in their news websites. For example, Aram Ghafur, the editor at Dwarozh.net, pointed to the importance of customization in the websites in term of interactivity, which could encourage users to spend more time browsing via website pages, and it is significant to meet users wishes so as not to leave the website permanently. The longer website users stay on the website, the more engaged they are, because users always spend more time looking at a website's content if they have a choice to customize topics depending on their needs:

We always have to pay attention to the lack of customization personalization in our website, because this feature is very significant in regard to making users feel that our website meets their needs and their desires. As a result, they devote more time to follow the site and return to it constantly and do not leave us permanently (Appendix 3.8).

Majority of website editors asserted that customization of news websites sometimes allows users to be more interactive, unique and distinct, and gives them a big opportunity to choose what they like and reject what they dislike and support their needs and wants in the website. For example, Shno Osman (Appendix 3.6) stated that: “in term of Kurdish online journalism, I believe that customization is another step of evolution of news websites towards interactivity. In general, news website strategy should focus on the user’s customization to engage them interact with our medium”.

Customization as it is manifesting itself on the news websites today is more an issue of obtaining news customized to a web user needs than a screening out of significant news. Hazhar Osman, the editor in chief of Nrttv.com, explained that many website users want to obtain financial news customized for their own investment portfolios. Young users always customize sports news and information’s depending on their favorite sports or teams. Also, users which have health issue, customize health articles related to their own health situations. In particular, he emphasized the importance of having a customization feature in terms of weather:

Day by day, the needs and wishes of people are increasing, the nature of modern society imposes it. Users of websites always want the existence of weather information and data on the websites. Each website user needs the data by the area in which he or she lives. Unfortunately, there are few Kurdish websites news use customization feature to their homepages (Appendix 3.4).

The researcher noted that the customization interactive features did not exist on most Kurdish news websites, especially customization weather feature, despite the insistence of the managers and editors of those websites on the importance of the presence of these features in their websites. About why the Kurdish news websites did not care about the customization weather feature, Sirwan Gharib (Appendix 3.2) pointed to the difficulty of adding data on the website, which needs a person interested in this subject and updates the data continuously.

Kurdish news website editors, especially those whose websites do not meet user needs, often complain about the lack of financial resources and technical and human expertise to add interactive features as customization features to their websites. They always blame their media organization and web developers who manage their websites financially and technically. Bahadin Yusuf (Appendix 3.7) talked about the obstacles that hinder adding customization features to news websites in the Kurdish online journalism environment. He focused on the need to pay attention to these features that make the news websites more sophisticated compared with traditional media:

The issue of adding customization features to our website has been widely discussed among the editors and the site manager, as well as with the web developers. We have not shown enough interest in this aspect, perhaps the main reason is the management policy of the organization in which we operate, or the lack of sufficient technical expertise to add those features. From my point of view, this is an important issue, but how we apply it is a question that depends on our ability to redesign the entire site, and this requires financial resources and technical and human capabilities, which we do not have now (Appendix 3.7).

Contrary to what has been presented, others believe that the main reason for the lack of customization features on Kurdish websites is that their roles are not sufficiently understood by Kurdish media organizations, news website managers and web journalists. Bahroz Ali (Appendix 3.1) ruled out the impacts of other factors such as the lack of technical and human expertise to cover this aspect. He pointed out that there are some Kurdish news websites that have enough or too many reporters, editors and technicians, however, "when you visit their website, you see that it is very simple in terms of interactive features such as customization". Generally, all Kurdish news website editors that were interviewed, argued that customization features for news websites are very appealing and important for interactivity, because the users feel the content of the website is tailored for them. They also admitted that the number of website

users increase when the content had customizable interface such as customizable weather data.

8.5 Interactivity and Social Media

With hundreds of thousands of daily Kurdish active users on social networking sites (SNS), as well as given the possibility of Kurdish news consumers direct interactions with journalists through social media, Kurdish news websites have strong presence on these social platforms and benefited from them by sharing their journalistic products in order to boost interactivity in Kurdish online journalism. At a time when Kurdish news websites are struggling to grab the attention of internet users in an online media-saturated environment, social networking sites have created novel opportunities for online journalists to connect with internet users, especially those who use social networking sites - raising questions about the level of accreditation of journalists and their websites from social networks to stimulate interactivity between users and their websites. Indeed, using social media has become an essential part of journalists practice (Powers and Vera-Zambrano 2017).

Emphasizing enabled interactivity, there are Kurdish news websites trying to get or produce acceptable level of interactivity via adopting social media for news sharing and gathering purpose. This is because social media platforms contain many active users and lots of interactive exchanges, but that does not apply to all news websites. For example, the Facebook page of Nrttv.com is very active and has many users and interactive exchanges. Their editors interact with their users and exchange information about facts, events and posted articles, and they are answering users' questions and comments. In contrast, Sbeiy.com Facebook page is noninteractive or reactive, it has a few visitors and exchanges. Incising of using social media among Kurdish internet users encouraged journalists in Kurdish news websites and other media platforms to use social media to share their articles and to accomplish their journalistic routine tasks (e.g. gather information, monitor sources, and develop story ideas).

However, Kurdish users are utilizing social media platforms such as content sharing sites, blogs and social networking sites to create, modify, share, and discuss journalistic content. This is a social media which can now significantly impact mainstream news websites. Nearly every Kurdish news website editors admitted that the spread of the use of social media by Kurdish internet users influence or will affect the Kurdish online journalism, so that internet users rely on the social networking to obtain news information. Of course, this does not mean that the other media have lost their place as the main source of news. On the contrary, most of the Kurdish audience still obtain news via television and radio. However, social media have become another media platform which is imposing itself recently in the Kurdish media landscape. One of the Xendan.org editors described using social media, in particular Facebook, for more easily obtaining news by users saying:

We noted that today more Kurdish users access news and other forms of journalistic articles through social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. They interact with journalists and news websites more directly through such platforms. The increasing of social media users among Kurdish news consumers will affect the ways in which those people consume news and think of news websites, as Kurdish online journalism has been influenced by social media (Appendix 3.9).

At the same time, another Kurdish news website editor explained that the incorporation of social media into journalistic practice has already created opportunities for Kurdish journalists to interact with social media users, they were able to bring them to their websites. They were also able to engage users in positive political and social discussions, “we are always incentivizing our journalists to orient social media use toward users, I think other Kurdish media platforms motivate their editors to use social media for these purposes” (Appendix 3.8). In Westgenews.net news website, a journalist said that he uses social media to attract users and to bring them to discuss several political, commercial and social issues, he clarified that saying:

We started relying on social networking sites especially Facebook, we created our pages there. News editors share their news stories via social networking sites and increasingly conduct their work. It also gave opportunities to social media users to get a lot of articles, information and data produced by Kurdish news websites and they could also engage in discussions with their peers about those topics that were re-posted on the social media pages. Of course, it creates a good interaction between the users and their peers, and between users and website editors as well (Appendix 3.11).

In contrast, through these interviews, the researcher noted that the process of interaction between Kurdish news website journalists and editors with social networking sites users do not pass regularly. Some editors communicate with social networking sites users when they wish, and sometimes do not show any interest in that. Radha Manucheri A news editor in Nrttv.com stated that he interacts with audiences infrequently:

In our website, we still do not have a person to work as a social media manager in order to go through users' comments and social media news articles. It is important for news websites, because sometimes there will be a question by users about our stories, if we have a social media manager, he could let me know then I will respond to the users' comments and questions (Appendix 3.10).

This reflects the lack of explicit strategy for the heads of those websites to regulate how to benefit from those interactive features that are unevenly utilized. In such cases, the features of web technology, in particular social networking sites are seen as impractical and thus are not integrated by most Kurdish news websites. It was supposed to be the Kurdish media organisations, especially the news websites, to show more interest towards social media in order to create continuous communication with the users and support citizen journalism, as well as to be an essential part to increase interactivity.

In some cases, Kurdish news website journalists rely on social media to gather information, get in touch with news sources, and obtain story ideas from other posted items. Adopting social media pages has always been considered as an easy way for editors and reporters to invent news story ideas. Social media caused a revolution in terms of getting in touch with new ideas, sources and using information (Barnard 2016). A few of editors which were interviewed suggest that using social media to aid reporting is a good idea. One of the editors of Sbeiy.com pointed to the importance of the adoption of editors on the government or official organisation Facebook pages, which often post their press releases. He noted that "government or official organisation social media pages could be great official source for us, they always post their press releases through their Facebook before sending them to stream media outlets" (Appendix 3.7). Similarly, another editor (Appendix 3.6) with a similar practice said: "Today due to social media especially Facebook, it has become easier for journalists to accomplish all journalistic tasks, even if they stay in their office without going out".

In conclusion, the rise of social media in the Kurdistan region has invented a new space of interactivity. Facebook, which is widely used among internet users in the Kurdistan region, asserts itself as a powerful new media platform. Facebook allows both Kurdish internet users and journalists to build their own personalized, interactive pages. Proliferation of social media tools in the Kurdistan region has led to the increase of interactivity throughout the journalistic field. Kurdish professional journalists and citizen journalists rely on social media for a growing portion of their journalistic practices. As the Kurdish news website editors suggests, social media has become a basic interactive element of Kurdish online journalism. Journalists and social media users exchange information, data, experiences via social networking sites and produce journalistic items to share. News websites have also benefited from users' posts and comments on social media platforms and deal with them as news raw materials and sources. Hence, technological features of social media platforms boost the level of interactivity and sociability of Kurdish online journalism, which should be seen as affordance basic element that enables

interactivity. Kurdish website editors and users are using social media with referring to one another's content and they are encouraging further interaction.

8.6 The use of Interactive features within stories

It is now standard practice for online journalists to maintain a digital presence within their works which they post on their websites and smartphone apps. Website news stories can provide interactive features that are not possible in traditional media especially print media, such as hyperlinks, photos, videos, and comment sections (Batsell 2015). Adding affordances interactive features to news articles in relation to editors and journalists makes news websites different from traditional news media such as printed newspapers, radio, and television, in that they offer a different and unique form of information for users (Bardoel & Deuze,2001; Deuze 2003; Domingo 2008). Those features make posted articles on websites unique by including images, videos, and internal or external links which are supposed to lead to interaction with the users. These features are, however, only technical potentialities that they could gain actual value when they are used by news website editors. Nevertheless, in the researcher's interviews with the Kurdish news website editors, almost all of them acknowledged that they are highly attentive to using all of those interactive features in their websites, albeit to different extents.

Although web interactive features are always considered as a strength point that makes online journalism different from other traditional media such as newspapers and television, the posted articles of Kurdish news websites are not similar in the provision and use of interactive features such as photos, videos and hyperlinks. In some cases, those features used to be rare on Kurdish news website items. In general, there are many differences among Kurdish news websites in the adoption and use of interactive features on their content. Within this section, Kurdish news website editors discuss main reasons for differences across their journalistic products such as articles, news stories and reports in term of the presence and use of interactive features.

Some website editors create their stories in creative ways to encourage the users to provides many options for the user to follow up posted items on the

website. According to the editor at Dwarozh.net (Appendix 3.8), his news stories obtain images, videos, hyperlinks as much as possible. Through those types of features users have several choices to examine the news in many ways. Interactive news content features play an important role in the interactivity of online journalism. Editors on Kurdish news websites should think of what they produce for users, they have to focus on the availability of multimedia features in every news story they produce. In line with this, Radha Manucheri the editor of Nrtrtv.com expresses his attitude to include multimodal and hypertextual features on his news stories. He argued that his style of editing and producing journalistic articles has a positive impact on the level of interactivity on their news website:

In order to boost interactivity in our journalism, as much as possible, I do my best to produce interactive news stories that contain many photos, videos and audio files. I have a serious ambition that my news stories must be more than text. It is better for website users to have stories containing rich content. This makes our news stories quite different from stories that are published through newspapers or broadcasted via television channels. Thus, we have to produce news stories quite differently on the web (Appendix 3.10).

In Kurdish online journalism most of news articles posted on websites are still presented in text formats, in a nonlinear format, with no links, interactive graphics, photos and videos. Those features would add many layers to the news stories, all of them are considered as important characteristics of the web technology that boost interpersonal and content interactivity in online journalism (Foust, 2011). Kurdish news editors do not deal with multimedia elements of online news. They often ignore paying attention to these issues. One Kurdish media scholar focused on this issue and noted the emergence of indifference within the newsrooms of news websites, explaining that the news editors do not devote part of their time to make or edit videos to post them with the news stories that they produce, or even they do not publish with their reports many photos, they usually add one photo only. He said:

I was especially disappointed by their lack of interest for using features such as bullet points, graphics, photos, audios, or videos in their works. Of course, an online journalist should have a host of skills, from scripting news stories to layout and design of news infographics to video and audio production. If a news website editor had no other background and skills in one or more of these areas, then he should try to learn in order to create a rich format of news stories that could have positive influence of interactivity in online journalism (Appendix 3.1).

Although managers of Kurdish news websites have tried to address this problem by providing technical support to teach editors new skills, but some of these attempts have yielded nothing. Dashti salar, the editor of Sbeiy.com argued that he is always researching on how he can better manage and support their news producers with technical skills, but they often do not respond to these attempts and are showing little interest in order to make interactive stories with videos and graphics:

Despite the availability of many photos and videos about local and universal events, the way that journalists deal with these and varied data reveal the special challenges that our website face. We do not ask them to capture photos and record video tapes such as what reporters doing. We just need to deal with available data in a professional way (Appendix 3.3).

In line with this, the editor of another news website blamed news editors for the lack of rich content with interactive features in their news website. He stated that:

Although I do not see this as a huge problem, I admit that the lack of videos or photos in our newsroom is not the main reason, but the reason is the editors themselves. They mainly focus on the number of news stories they post within one day, they do not care about the

quality of the content of their reports as much as they are concerned about their quantity (Appendix 3.5).

Applying multimedia content to Kurdish news websites is affected by two factors, the first factor relates to the lack of focus of news editors of the websites on the importance of these interactive features, which were referred to by the editors themselves. The second factor relates to copyrights. Those two factors are still impeding the progress in developing multimedia content in the Kurdish online journalism. One of the editors (Appendix 3.7) talked about the low number of photos and videos about local and international events in their newsroom and explained that they could not use any image or video they did not have, because if they do that they would break copyright laws. He explained in detail how citizen journalists or ordinary social media users violated copyright laws and posted videos of others without permission from their real owners. Today, social media users do not spend their time to create content for their pages, they just search online to find some items such as photos or videos and share them. For example, both Twitter and Facebook allow users to get photos, videos from other websites and share or integrate them into their profiles or pages without getting permission from the original source:

Mainstream news website is different from social media pages regarding to Kurdish online journalists, we are working for formal media organizations, the copyright doctrine of fair use is integral to our daily routine works. Ordinary people who have social media pages do not usually care about copyright and fair use. They obtain photos, videos and even sometimes full movies then post them in their pages, but we cannot do that, because we are a media organization. My position as a journalist does not allow me to break the copyright. I have to inform the public legally and ethically. So, how I can act illegally?! (Appendix 3.7).

Some Kurdish websites allow news editors to add their personal email addresses to their posted news stories to encourage the users to meet the online editors staff. This reflects the importance of user control and interaction in online journalism which can foster accessibility for the audience in ways that were never possible through newspapers, television and radio (Chung 2007). The editor at Dwarozh.net said he always adds his personal email to every article he posts on the website. Through his email address he enables users to continue the dialogue with him after the stories are posted: "If they have a suggestion or a question about a topic, they sometimes email me. Some users send us news tips via our personal emails" (Appendix 3.8). The Westgenews.net editor in chief also argued that adding email address of editors with their published report on the site has an effect on increasing interactivity with users. However, it is difficult to answer all the users' questions. "I noticed that some editors do not actually open the email they added with their articles. Sometimes this feature becomes very useful, and sometimes becomes useless" (Appendix 3.2). Most editors tend to pay attention to adding an email address with each article they post because it results in user feedback and new ideas for working on new stories. In contrast, the Nrtrtv.com editor in chief asserted that so far, they have not allowed their editors to put their email addresses with their articles, in order to avoid problems that may be directed by the editors themselves. "Sometimes we have to be careful, in the internet environment there are stupid, bullies and arrogant users" (Appendix 3.4). While exploring ways to incorporate interactive features into their news stories some editors experienced problems. A Sbey.com editor (Appendix 3.7) initially offered users to contact him via his email address but, after experimenting it, he experienced some problems, then decided to take down such interactive feature:

At one point, I decided to add my email with every news story I posted on our website, and indeed this resulted in creating good communication with our website users and there was interaction between us, but this did not continue, I also received threats, scolding and contempt messages from unwanted users. So, I decided to stop giving my email to website users (Appendix 3.7).

When analyzing the quantitative content of the Kurdish news sites, which were presented in the previous chapter, the researcher noted that there are few stories on the Kurdish news websites containing editors email addresses or their links of their social networking sites profiles. These may reflect the concerns of these sites of problems and conflicts between some users and editors that each site wishes to avoid. It appears that Kurdish news websites are trying to avoid editors to user's communication when necessary. Instead of embracing the opportunity to speak directly to their users, the Kurdish news websites appear to be turning them away from direct contact. Overall, the use of interactive features on news stories at Kurdish news websites varies depending on the editors' interest in interactivity and the creation of relationships with users and depends on the editorial strategy of the news websites regarding interactivity.

The results of interviews with websites editors suggest that interactive features have yet to occur fully in news stories on Kurdish news websites. Based on what was discussed, every Kurdish news website producer and editor would like to have all users' interactive features available in the articles. However, some news editors avoid spending much of their working time creating rich content to their websites. While news website producers and editors realize the importance and potential benefits of rich content stories on their websites, it appears that those benefits do not outweigh the importance of preserving the human and technical resources and the time and space on those websites. Although some news sites are owned by media organizations that also have television channels and radio, the editors of those websites do not benefit well from a legacy from their traditional news media. Better for online journalists to be motivated for using the multimodality on their articles, which web technology affords.

8.7 Editorial skills and interactivity

The issue of what should be considered the core skills of journalism has been influenced by the technological changes and transformations of the media over the past decades (Örnebring and Mellado 2018), Since the appearance of newspapers and advent of broadcast media, the role of the journalist was

mainly to search for and collect information, then shape and edit it in a news story or journalistic article and publish it through the media medium to the audience. Today, this role is affected by new information technology, it is easy to find information and also publish it to the public via websites. In contrast, the journalism profession has become somewhat complicated. Journalists have to acquire editorial and technical skills to produce unique news stories (Mensing 2010). Those who work in the website newsrooms often have been forced to produce news stories for a multimedia world which should be more than a text because nowadays technological advents and developments are coming faster and faster. Everywhere online journalists are coming under increasing pressure, their news stories have to be tailored for websites, social media, and video journalism. There are many new factors which affect production and distribution methods of journalism such as mobile reporting and live video streaming services.

With the increase of adopting multimedia creation techniques and software and video and audio editing as a professional entry points into online journalism, the training of editors, in a professional environment markedly different from traditional publications, has also become increasingly important, because the professional requirements for news online journalism reporters and editors enable them to play an active role in the digital environment by participating in a mutual shaping of the processes of creating news stories with rich content (Agarwal and Barthel 2015). The emergence of online journalism has changed the way journalism is practiced. The internet has become a powerful force in the transition from traditional news production to digital news production based on the interactive features of the web. Online news media organizations have started using new editing technologies to produce high-quality content for their websites. In order to exercise their professional roles in today's digital media landscape, journalists or editors in online journalism have to learn technical skills that go beyond mere information and data gathering and processing to also include technical activities such as photographing, creating multimedia and editing videos and voice news stories. The issue of what should be considered the core skills of online journalism has a strong relationship with interactivity, where the skillful journalist can edit his

articles and prepare them specifically for websites using many forms of information such as texts, images and video. Then, he enables the user to interact with him through the interactive features contained in these news reports (Örnebring and Mellado 2018).

Editorial skills vary in online journalism compared to newspaper and television journalism. Although editors or desk reporters at news websites usually focus on elements such as multimedia production skills, design/layout skills, newspaper and television editors focus on skills such as editing/subediting and management skills (Ursell 2004). Journalists with new skills can work within an editorial board in their website news newsrooms and perform all the editorial tasks such as selecting subjects to working on, researching for news resources and gathering information, writing or processing and editing news more exclusively for the World Wide Web with rich content (Deuze and Bardoel 2001). This means that the editor in the newsroom of the website plays several roles.

Especially in recent years, the use of technology in news editing for Kurdish online journalism has become increasingly and effectively more important. This is what Bahroz Ali, a Kurdish media scholar insisted on (Appendix 3.1), when he explained how the emergence and development of new forms of journalism such as citizen journalism and social media has forced journalists to learn technical skills and master using new techniques in the design and production of videos and graphic illustrations as part of their journalistic work. He argued that new editing technology has changed the role of journalists, today they could create new forms of digital and visual storytelling, they also affect interactivity positively in Kurdish online journalism by applying this way of telling stories. He said:

Multi skills is the matter for online journalists because interactive journalism depends on the ways by which journalists create stories with rich content and encourage their audiences to examine media more effectively. If editors have online journalism skills, then their stories become more efficient and impactful by using interactivity

features than via a static piece of text or photo. In other words, interactivity in online journalism depends on the journalist's ability to apply interactive features to his website. If the online journalist cannot offer interactive features to website users, he will leave little difference between his website and traditional media. They need to learn skills by training and getting knowledge that enable them to create interactive journalism (Appendix 3.1).

Some editors pointed out that when they started working in the online journalism, they had no skill other than writing news reports. Radha Manochari, an editor at Nrttv.com explained in detail how he started in the newspaper, then went to a website and started to learn how to use the computer and the internet, then benefited from the expertise of their website graphic designers to gain experience in photo editing software such as Adobe photoshop:

At the beginning of my career, I was a news editor at one of the Kurdish newspapers, then I started working in online journalism. In the beginning when I joined the news website editors' team, I did not know how to use the computer and internet. In terms of editing photos, I benefited from the expertise of our website graphic designers. I received a lot of help and guidance from them. I improved my editorial and technical skills step by step. Now I can make multimedia for our website (Appendix 3.10).

To encourage interactivity in Kurdish online journalism, most news website editor in chiefs argue that they support their journalists and news editors to learn new skills in news editing and using new software, especially editing news video clips and podcasts, and even learning how to design web pages and changing design when needed. They believe that learning these skills can achieve a higher level of interactivity in their news websites. The editor in chief of the Westgenews.net stressed that he often encouraged their editors to acquire new experiences and provided them with many opportunities to learn. This way, an editor working in the online journalism can accomplish several

tasks and play more than one role which used to be assigned to other types of news workers inside and outside the newsroom. He said:

As editor in chief we always encourage them to learn new skills so that they can edit and produce news stories suitable for websites, with interactive features, many photos, videos and podcasts. And you can say, it is the best way to increase interactivity level in our website. The good thing is that the news editors learn to set it up rich content news stories. (Appendix 3.2).

In the same context, the Sbeiy.com editor in chief stressed the importance of encouraging editors to learn the skills that should be enjoyed by every news website editor, especially technical skills, because this type of multiple skills may increase interactivity in online journalism and may be useful for media organizations in terms of economics, because the editors attend to a number of tasks which used to be assigned to other persons in the news rooms. He said that: "I tried a lot to encourage them to learn skills, it helps us financially, instead of spending money for two people, we spend it for one person, that is better" (Appendix 3.3). However, some journalists believe that only focusing on the technical aspects or technical skills of editors may negatively affect the quality of news articles, because editors neglect other important aspects of editing at the expense of interactive features. There are more mistakes and more bad quality news stories when editors attend to technical tasks as well.

On the other hand, some news editors denied their inability to work as skilled journalists in the online journalism, but they attributed the lack of interactive articles on their websites to the scarcity of raw journalistic materials as videos and photos in their news rooms when they edit the news. One editor of Xendan.org pointed out that their website manager does not spend enough money on buying photos and videos of local events, and that users rarely send them pictures and videos, and therefore they cannot produce news of an interactive nature:

When we start to write any news or article for our website, we think about how should be the content of the story in terms of interactivity. Of course, it is better if there are more photos and videos with every article we create, but there are not enough raw materials such as videos and photos and there is not enough time. Therefore, the lack of news stories rich in video, images and other interactive features is not due to the fact that we do not have the skills to produce such stories (Appendix 3.9).

By comparing the opinions of editors about the skills that news website editors should have, the researcher discovered that the demarcation of online journalists in the Kurdish news websites is unclear, in most cases the factor that negatively affected the performance of all skills was time constraints. All editor in chiefs and news editors of the Kurdish news websites stress that all technical and professional skills and competencies are important for editors, but the lack of staff in the news rooms, time pressure and the absence of deadlines stand in the way of applying these skills and reduce the performance of skills to a minimum. Also, some editors deny a close link between their low level of technical skills and the paucity of interactive news reports on their news websites but stress that the main reason for this problem is due to lack of time for them to create their stories well. One Sbey.com editor (Appendix 3.7) said "we think there is no urgent need to learn new skills to use in the preparation of news stories. The newsroom bureaucracy forces us to focus on producing as many news as possible in short time. We are no longer able to prepare video reports or even podcasts". He also pointed out that they are interested in learning and increasing their news editing skills if they had more time, but they often work under the pressure of time and are asked by their editor in chiefs to concentrate on producing a lot of news. Even if they try to learn something, it should be done in their spare time.

In addition, Nrttv.com editor in chief (Appendix 3.4) pointed to the tasks of online journalists, as they sometimes become "journalists on the chairs" and refuse to go out of their newsrooms to investigate facts and events, but instead turn to Kurdish newsroom online journalists. "The tasks carried out by Kurdish

journalists in most of the time are just regrouping, editing, and finetuning the news of foreign media channels or official government institutions websites". He explained how most of the news articles on the Kurdish news websites consists of modified reports from international media websites or other institutions websites. They rarely leave their newsrooms, they often collect information online and even conduct interviews via the internet or telephone. "The new technology has facilitated the process of information gathering for journalists to a high degree, but this has affected the quality of content. Journalists have become inefficient and inactive. They have become skilled in using the internet to gather information, but they have lost other skills or rather neglect to use those skills", he said.

The academic institutions and the media training organizations in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region are supposed to play a significant role to expand technology training for online journalists and website news editors. However, all the interviewees expressed deep skepticism about the ability of media academic institutions to participate journalism education in a more productive and vital role in the online journalism. Saman Muhammad, the editor of Westgenews.net, however, said he understood the importance of experiential learning in online journalism education and getting lessons in the practice of multimedia journalism, but saw that the academic institutions in Kurdistan have not played a significant role in this field:

We are working for news websites, so we have to produce multimedia news stories that meet the demands of our website users. To achieve this goal, we need training that improve our journalistic and technical skills and keep us up to speed. Unfortunately, media education programs in the Kurdistan universities and institutions are basically unprepared to respond to such deeply technical changes in the online journalism. Most of the media department teachers or trainers in our universities are not professional journalists and never worked for media such as television, radio and news websites. They practically do not have the skills we need for online journalism (Appendix 3.11).

The role of journalism education in the colleges has been the subject of debate among Kurdish media organizations and journalists, these discussions and contentions were intensified with the appearance of the online journalism, particularly citizen journalism and social media. Kurdish news website journalists often question the justification for the existence of media colleges in the age of online journalism and social media, while they continue graduating hundreds of students. The majority of graduates of these colleges cannot work in media institutions and especially online sites without being trained by professional journalists. Bahroz Ali, media teacher at the University of Sulaimani, stated that the model of journalism taught in the media colleges of Kurdistan has remained unchanged for many years and there are no tutorials about online journalism, multimedia and using new storytelling techniques:

Journalism education in the Kurdistan universities need serious reform. First, we as teachers have to admit that there is a professional crisis in journalism education, then bring new bloods onto our colleges. We need to experiment with a new tutorial in media education which can create links between the teaching of media and practicing online journalists (Appendix 3.1).

According to Bahroz, students in the media colleges now need to develop many skills to deal with online journalism and take part in interactive communication process. Multimedia training is a must significant skill they should learn but he did not hide that they lack technical devices such as advanced computers and interactive news rooms to teach journalism students how to work in news sites and produce interactive news stories. In summary, the lack of new skills in the field of online journalism has made it difficult to achieve greater interactivity in Kurdish news websites. The responsible of this issue is the journalists themselves, then the Kurdish media organizations that do not pay enough attention to solve this problem, and the Kurdish academic media institutions which still have not been able to play an effective role to improve the skills of online journalists in the Kurdish news websites.

8.8 Interactivity, political and social impacts

In the preceding sections of this chapter, we followed some of the basic aspects of the interactivity of Kurdish news websites from the online journalists and news editors' point of view. We also discussed problems in practicing interactivity in Kurdish online journalism. There is another aspect that is important to focus on, which is the outcomes and consequences of interactivity. Generally, there are many studies analyzing advantages offered by interactivity to the relations of individuals with the social and political processes (Stromer-Galley's 2000). There is no doubt that the use of interactive features in online journalism has increased social and political involvement (Kruikemeier et al. 2013). Particularly in recent decades with the development of online journalism and the widespread use of the internet, politicians and individuals who are already involved in politics tend to take advantage of the interactive features in order to influence the public. They increasingly use the possibilities of the web technology to communicate interactively with website users and vice versa. There is evidence that the online journalism is leading to increased political and social interaction among news website users, especially among younger audience who are considered politically apathetic and indifferent to political issues (Vitak et al. 2011; Gibson and Cantijoch, 2013).

From the beginning of the arrival of the internet and so far, the issue of what constitutes social and political participation via web technology has received considerable attention from scholars, so that opinions and debates are expressed around the extent and level of impacts that websites have on the society and individuals. The impacts of interactive web media on participation has also gained increasing attention within social sciences.

The interviews with Kurdish news website journalists suggest that the use of internet as an interactive communication medium give users a space to express their opinions freely about several social and political issues and share their personal views successfully with others, far from the severe political and legal censorship, which is often imposed on the media by the authorities in the Kurdistan region. Bahadin Yousuf, the news editor of Sbeyj.com, explained

that it seems reasonable to presume that Kurdish online journalism drives and alters the existing social structures in the Kurdish society. It has played a major role in changing the social covenant and influencing people to encourage them to participate in political and civic activities such as demonstrations and protests, sometimes these activities have forced the government to bow down and listen to their demands. He noted:

The interactive online media in the Kurdistan Region has encouraged individuals to participate in political and civic activities in a very intensive manner and consequently has had a positive and effective impacts on the political authorities and the government. If the use of traditional media in the Kurdistan region exclusively on a particular elite, online media provides an interactive environment for engaging more citizens in political discussions over the web, resulting in the activation of individuals in the real world (Appendix 9).

Likewise, another Kurdish journalist argued that political and civic engagement has dramatically increased between Kurdish citizens and politicians, due to the rise of interactive new media such as news websites and social media pages. For example, today there are a wide space for ordinary people to express their idea via their accounts or pages on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Also, some Kurdish news websites enable their users to add comments about several subjects via comment boards. In contrast to traditional media channels such as newspapers, today there are many new interactive media platforms through which Kurdish citizens freely argue and discuss social and political issues. According to Aram Ghafur, the news editor at Dwarozh.net, interactive online media in Kurdistan region helps people engage in civic and political activities online and in real life:

Increasing of interactivity on websites increases civic and political engagement. Over the past few years we have noticed that a lot of Kurdish citizens are slowly starting to rely on the web for the

purpose of communicating and getting news and information, especially the use of social media such as Facebook and Instagram were significant factors in boosting social and political activity among Kurdish youth. Those social networking sites offer a wide space for young people to express ideas, discuss, or plan social and political actions. Today there are many Kurdish social media platforms created and managed by active young Kurdish citizens to discuss social and political issues.

Bahroz Ali, who is a Kurdish media expert and a candidate in two general elections for both Kurdistan and Iraqi parliaments, asserted that Kurdish candidates exploited interactive capabilities of the Kurdish news websites and social media pages during their campaigns. He explained that there are many Kurdish candidates who chose to use the internet to engage in deliberation with citizens. This is because they believe that relying on the interactive capabilities of websites may affect the political tendencies and trends of people and make citizens vote for them in elections. According to Bahroz, "in contrast to the traditional media, candidates and people engage more in civil and political interactions online, because the online media offer greater equality for ordinary citizens. They find news websites and social media platforms more liberal and more open to them than traditional media such as newspapers, televisions and radio channels" (Appendix 3).

Shno Osman, a journalist at Basnews.net, also focused on the importance of using online journalism and social media by candidates. She was a candidate for parliamentary elections which were held in Iraq on 30 April 2014. She believes that political interaction online is necessity for candidates and voters as well, but indicates that "only few candidates have some level of interaction with voters on websites and social media and often that interaction is limited. Most of the candidates are hesitant to listen, interact with, and incorporate feedback from the website and social media users, because of their fear of being defamed and insulted by them" (Appendix 8).

In spite of the fact that the evolution of the Internet is affecting Kurdish society and forcing changes to business and socioeconomic development plans in the Iraqi Kurdistan region, digital divide is one of the challenges faced Kurdish society and online journalism that relate to a number of social, technological, financial issues. The phrase, "digital divide," has been defined as the disparity in access to technology and information along geographical and as a gap that exists in the new society between those who have access to the tools of modern information and communication technologies such as computer and the web and other internet services and the knowledge that they provide access to, and those who don't have access to or skills (Cullen 2001). This gap has a number of causes such as socio-economic, geographical, or educational factors, or even it happens due to physical disabilities. In general, the term of Digital divide referring to the unequal access to new information and communication technologies by members of a given social system.

DiMaggio and Hargittai (2001) describe five dimensions of digital inequality and argue that access to the web or other internet services consists of five dimensions: in equipment, autonomy of use, skill, social support, and the purposes for which the technology is employed. Barriers to accessing any of these five dimensions constitutes lack of the access necessary to develop expertise in the use of digital computing technologies. Today, growing availability of smart mobile phones and internet access, could be an important means of closing some of these gaps. Even now, while a lot of Kurdish people have their smart phones, they cannot access to the internet easily.

Despite the recognition of the influence of the interactive online media on activating individuals towards political participation, Kurdish journalists point out that there are many obstacles facing the Kurdish society that are denied access to the internet and engage in political and civil debates among citizens. Hazhar Osman, the editor in chief of Nrttv.com, talked about those obstacles and pointed out that internet access is a necessity for creating interactive communication, most of Kurdish citizens cannot go online because internet service has not yet been provided to the majority of citizens. He said:

There are many factors that lead to the digital divide in the Kurdish society, the low level of individual income in Kurdistan Region, the weakness of the individual and family income has a significant impact. Education, age, and the user's skill of using the internet and how to benefit from the interactive features of websites are other factors which lead to the restriction of potential Kurdish website and social media users from participating in social and political debates. In most areas people cannot access the internet and in other locations the cost of internet services is excessive. Only a small rate of Kurdish people uses social media (Appendix 6).

Some others argued that the role of the online journalism in the evolution of social and political engagement in the Kurdish society has been minimal. For instance, from the point of view of Radha Manucheri, a journalist on Nrtrtv.com, online journalism enables citizens to participate in social and political activities in the online sphere which is virtual engagement. This is the online interactive form of political engagement, it is not credible alternatives like real world counterparts. He argues that:

Online political engagement cannot be counted as a real political participation. It is true that there are many Kurdish citizens using social networking sites such as Facebook, but social media is just a virtual place for political discussion among friends rather than a real place for organized political activities to influence the political process and government officials.

However, Manuchehri leaves the door open to these interactive forms and does not exclude that these forms of political engagement via the internet lead to more concerted political behaviour in the real life. It could lead into new forms of social or political activity aimed at political influence, especially amidst concerns about declining youth political engagement in the Kurdistan region. Interactive online journalism and social media can provide a solution to this issue and boost political activities from online participatory forms to the real political engagement.

In addition, in terms of the role of gender on interactivity and political engagement via online journalism, some Kurdish news website journalists asserted that the gender of website and social media users influence their interactivity with other users, journalists, politicians, and organizations. According to Shno Osman, a journalist at Basnews.net, there is discrimination of women in general in the Iraqi Kurdistan region. In terms of using internet and social media, "Kurdish females are often afraid to participate in political or social discusses. I noticed that when some female users criticize something on social media, they are attacked more than men. They always face some harassment on the Facebook by other users" (Appendix 8). On the other hand, female social media users were less than apt to engage in responsive dialogue with journalists, other users and politicians than male users.

In conclusion Kurdish online journalism affects various forms of citizens involvement in politics by offering interactive communication. Based on the outcomes of Kurdish news website journalists' viewpoints, we found that Kurdish online journalism, in particular interactive news websites have a positive influence on users' involvement, and this effect is particularly present for Kurdish news websites with high levels of interactivity. Also, Kurdish citizens unregularly attempt to interact with other users and politicians on news websites and social media sites. There are some differences in perception of who they were interviewed about the effectiveness of the online journalism on users' involvement. The impacts of online journalism, especially social media, and other forms of interactive media in the Iraqi Kurdistan region will become increasingly pervasive on both political and social involvements. The proliferation of interactive online media will change the traditional relationship between journalists, politicians, and the public in the Kurdish society.

Chapter Nine

Conclusions

9.1 Introduction

This final chapter provides the conclusion and discussions on the implications of the research. The chapter begins with a summary of the main findings of the thesis, mainly focusing of the points of the quantitative and qualitative results, outlining the key findings via revisiting the research questions it and highlighting the importance of the research in terms of theory and practice in the Kurdish online journalism environment in the Iraqi Kurdistan region. The next section addresses the limitations of the study by revisiting the methodology concerning the sampling strategy, and the rapidly changing contextual impacts on the Kurdish journalists, media organizations and the Kurdish news websites in the online journalism environment. The chapter concludes by providing recommendations for further research on interactivity in online journalism.

9.2 Key Findings

Regarding the Kurdish media, this study has investigated and identified several aspects of the Kurdish media in the past and present. It showed, in Chapter Two, that the Kurdish media have been affected to a large extent by the political and administrative changes witnessed by Kurdistan and the Kurdish people during the past two centuries until now. Kurdish media in the Iraqi Kurdistan region has also experienced harsh conditions. There are many reasons and factors which negatively influenced Kurdish media, some of them were external factors such as censorship and the prevention of the Kurdish press by the central governments and authorities in Iraq. There were also internal barriers and factors affected Kurdish media such as: high levels of illiteracy among Kurds, poverty, lack of journalistic skills and unstable political situation.

However, the resistance of the Kurdish movements against the authorities in Iraq has become a key role of continuation of Kurdish media throughout the decades of the twentieth century. At a time when Kurdish movements were fighting against authoritarianism, Kurdish media played a decisive role in making the Kurdish people aware of what was happening around it and have become effective medium of enlightening the Kurds and educating them. Therefore, despite the lack of journalistic experience, professionalism and the weakness in quality and content, the Kurdish media influenced Kurdish national movements effectively, and these national movements-maintained contact with the Kurdish citizens largely via print publications such as leaflets, periodicals and radio stations.

Moreover, since Kurdistan received autonomy from the authoritarian regime of Saddam Hussein in 1991 after the Kurdish uprising against the Ba'athist regime which launched a Kurd extermination policy that included using chemical weapons, radical and fundamental changes have taken place in the Kurdish media. Kurdistan witnessed a media explosion in the 1990s, Kurdish political parties especially PUK and PDK began to issue daily newspapers and set up several televisions and radio channels, but these media outlets were used as ideological propaganda by ruling parties that had been involved in a civil war for several years. Regarding the Kurdish media and democracy, although some have described Iraqi Kurdistan as a beacon of democracy, others have noted that the region is backsliding and on a downward spiral.

In contrast, the Kurdish media has entered a new phase with the emergence of the first independent newspaper (Hawlati) in 2000, away from the control of ruling political parties. Independent Kurdish media influenced media landscape in Iraqi Kurdistan, where these independent media outlets began publishing reports about sensitive issues related to the administrative and financial corruption of the ruling parties. They prompted the ruling parties to spend large sums of money on the establishment of large media institutions to counter independent media and improve the images of officials and

government in front of people. Also, dominance by the two political parties led to a system of corruption and patronage, these influences thwarted press autonomy in the polarized pluralist media system.

After the internet entered the Kurdistan region and became available to media organizations and ordinary people, Kurdish media outlets and independent journalists have tended to use the internet as a media medium. Researchers have developed a number of theories concerning the impacts of the internet on the Kurdish media but without giving a specific context. These studies focused on the development of traditional Kurdish media such as newspapers and television under the impacts of the web technology. One of the most significant findings of this research is that the researcher tested whether Kurdish journalists were in agreement with these views in the context of Kurdish media in the Iraqi Kurdistan region.

Kurdish journalists agreed that the internet and new information technology had a positive impact on the Kurdish media and made it possible for people to participate effectively in political and civic debates on the internet. Internet also enabled independent journalists to publish their reports away from the censorship and control of ruling parties. These ideas seem, to a large extent, to be recognised and accepted by Kurdish journalists. Nonetheless, they did not ignore their fears that there are negative factors affecting the development of independent online journalism in the Kurdistan region. There are influences on Kurdish online journalism that hinder the proper and professional development of this type of journalism in an environment dominated by political, ideological and material interests, among those influences, are state control and government corruption, business interest pressures, poor internet services, and interests outside of the law through a proxy and violence.

Furthermore, government and political ruling parties' control over the media ranked the most significant challenge for independent online journalism in the

Kurdistan region, as these parties have the majority of the media outlets and organisations and control the internet services through commercial companies founded by government and party officials, or by people close to the ruling authorities. Likewise, public corruption could be ranked among the top challenges for journalists in the Kurdistan region. Corruption has been a major policy issue in Kurdistan where the abundance of large sums of money obtained by the authorities in the Kurdistan region, especially after the fall of Saddam's regime, and led to a system of corruption and patronage. It thus led to the destruction of the Kurdish media landscape and reduced the development of the Kurdish online journalism professionally and independently.

Regarding interactivity in Kurdish news websites, the study's focus has thus been on understanding the nature of the content and layout of the Kurdish news websites, and news website editors and journalists' perspectives on the constant changes in online news in term of interactivity. The mixed- method approach included content analysis of news websites, which gathered objective data, and the semi-structured interview, which unveiled the news website editors and journalists' perspectives and perceptions of interactivity on the Kurdish news websites. The combination of both approaches was considered the most appropriate way to understand how Kurdish online journalism is aligned with the current technology in term of interactivity.

The first phase of the research is quantitative content analysis, it was undertaken to investigate the nature of the content and layout of Kurdish online journalism in terms of the presence and use of interactive features on Kurdish news websites in the Iraqi Kurdistan region. The results generally confirmed that these news websites did not benefit well from the interactive features of web technology. In fact, many of these interactive features do not exist on these websites. This is a professional journalistic issue that needs to be addressed in order to allow online journalism to play its interactive role in a great way. The scholarly and practical questions about adopting interactive

features in journalistic work (e.g., what are these features, why they are important, how those features make news websites different from any other type of media, and how are they different from each other) are complex. Unlike more traditional media, where journalist produce everything and have one platform, in online journalism users able to generate and share their contents on news websites and social media networking (Bradshaw 2017).

Results of the quantitative content analysis of the Sbey.com shows that the level of interactivity of this news website is low. Sbey.com did not show high interest in the presence of interactive features on its homepage, sections and articles so that sometimes there are no significant interactive features such as user comments on their pages. For example, photos are often considered as an important element for traditional media, nowadays for journalistic precited through the web, photos seem to be more significant. In contrasts, Sbey.com did not pay good attention to this interactive feature, because there is not a special function in connection with submitting photos by their users, neither on the homepage nor on the different sections. This aspect can be considered a weakness of the website. Overall, availability of medium interactive features scored high rate at 28.50%. This is a very low rate that reflects the reality in which some Kurdish sites have been involved, where the web technology is used at its best to deliver news and information to the user without giving enough attention to other aspects of the web technology such as interactivity that enhance the position of the online media among the mass media outlets. On the other hand, medium/human interactive features in Sbey.com scored lowest rate at 7.10%. Also, human/medium interactive features scored 17.50%. Finally, human interactive features scored 16.60. These results are not good for a news website in term of interactivity. All these data confirm the need to review the managers and journalists of those sites in the nature of their working style and improve the capabilities of interactivity in their news website. This is because the continuation of this situation means the loss of the Kurdish online journalism the most interactive features that are supposed to have an effective presence.

Likewise, results of the quantitative content analysis of the Awene.com shows that the level of interactivity is low in this news website. Awene.com shows low interest in the presence of interactive features on its homepage, sections and articles. While the Awene.com is an independent news website, it should be more interested in interactive features in order to provide greater opportunity for an exchange of views and an opportunity for users to participate actively in the online journalism. However, these goals have not been achieved because there are no major interactive features on this news website such as user's comments and user's blogs. For example, Awene.com as a news website does not pay well attention to video news. There are just few video files on the pages of this website, it does not focus well on providing video news to users by investment in new visual storytelling formats. This is despite the fact that the importance of video news in the online journalism is constantly increasing. Most media organizations are investing a lot in the video production and increasing the number of online video news. Many news websites are working to add videos to their articles in interactive and practical ways. Today, news websites focusing on online video news is more explicit than the past. Compared to other interactive features, availability of human/medium interactive features on Awene.com scored high rate at 53.57%. On the other hand, medium interactive features scored lowest rate at 15.62%. Also, human interactive features scored 20.83%. Finally, medium/human interactive features scored 17.85%. It can be said that these results are not good for the independent Kurdish news website in terms of interactivity.

In contrast, there are some other Kurdish news websites which are more interested in adding interactive features to their pages and articles, this is compared to other Kurdish news websites such as the sites mentioned above. For example, results of the quantitative content analysis of Nrtrtv.com shows that the level of interactivity is medium in this news website. There is a noticeable presence of some interactive features on the pages articles of this website, and this indicates that the managers and editors of Nrtrtv.com are interested in interactivity and practicing their work as online journalists. Nrtrtv.com is very interested in giving users the opportunity to participate in the

site, evidence of that, is the attention to users' comments. In Nrttv.com, the features of users' comments are provided, users can make comments on news articles within the site. Also, social media users can make comments on the Nrttv.com pages on the social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter pages. Nrttv.com shows medium interest in the presence of interactive features on its homepage, sections and articles. Overall, availability of medium/human interactive features scored high rate at 64.28%. On the other hand, human/medium interactive features scored lowest rate at 46.42%. Human interactive features scored 58.33%. Finally, medium interactive features scored 56.25%. It can be said these results are good for a Kurdish news website in terms of interactivity. These results are very promising, as this kind of online journalism can help encourage other Kurdish sites to give more attention to interactivity in online journalism.

Previous research studies and the professional literature (Steensen 2011) have indicated that while the web has unique interactive features compared to other media such as television and newspapers, news websites often have medium or low levels of interactivity, and this study supports that finding. In fact, since the use of the internet as a news media platform, the extent to which journalists and media organizations have benefited from interactive web features has changed quite well, but the level of interactivity in the online press is still not very high. This study indicates that Kurdish journalists and audience members alike appear to be having some difficulty in adapting to new forms of online journalism in the Iraqi Kurdistan region. Also, there have been important changes in the relationship between Kurdish news websites and their users, with increased audience interaction in the journalistic process (Carpenter 2010; Steensen 2009).

Some Kurdish news websites seem to consider themselves interactive if they provide some features such as hyperlinks or weather customization. Even when more attention is given to interactivity in online journalism, the concept is seldom integrated into participatory journalism. This study, in contrast,

begins by examining interactivity as the basic characteristic of online journalism. This research also stressed that one of the most important aspects of interactivity is to use all the possibilities of the web to improve and diversify the content of news sites, and also give the greatest opportunity for the user to be an effective element in the production and editing of web content.

The second phase of the research is the qualitative study which conducted semi structured interviews with editors and executives of Kurdish news websites to learn why some of the dimensions of interactivity have not been used extensively. The results generally confirm that there is a wide disparity between the viewpoints of Kurdish online journalists about the importance of interactivity and how interactive features should appear in news websites. Kurdish news website editors explored their perceptions of interactivity in the Kurdish online journalism and focused on reasons for adopting or not adopting interactive features in their news websites. This study discovered that Kurdish news website journalists are interested in interactivity, but they often face challenges in integrating these interactive features over the internet on their news websites.

The interviews with the Kurdish news website editors and producers revealed that there is a resistance in fully adopting interactive features in Kurdish online journalism. The results showed that most of the online Kurdish journalists have a superficial overview of interactivity, the majority of them believe that interactivity just means allowing website users to add comments on news and articles posted on the websites, while others preach the integration of texts with voice, and videos and connecting them interactively. These views reveal that the Kurdish news websites do not care about interactivity systematically and thoughtfully and reflect the lack of crystallization of the concept of interactivity by Kurdish online journalists.

In terms of interactivity and citizen journalism, while Kurdish news website editors argued that Kurdish online journalism has created a good relationship between professional journalists and citizen journalists, and offered great opportunity to users to play great role in the news production process, the results show that there are still a lack of creating interaction between professional journalists and website users, which in turn encouraged the emergence of citizen journalism. It is better for Kurdish news website editors to rely increasingly on interactive features of their websites to allow the users assume more active role in the production of contents, because in the Iraqi Kurdistan region websites users have gained a good experience in gathering information. Even in some cases users can edit that information and produce news stories.

Regarding interactivity and customization, the results show that the customization interactive features did not exist in most Kurdish news websites especially customization weather features. According to the view point of editors on these interactive features, the main reason for the lack of customization features on the Kurdish websites is that, their roles are not sufficiently understood by Kurdish media organizations, news website managers and web journalists. They also admitted that the number of website users increases when the content had customizable interface such as customizable weather data.

On the other hand, the rise of social media in the Kurdistan region has invented a new space of interactivity. Facebook, which is widely used among internet users in the Kurdistan region, asserts itself as a powerful new media platform. While some Kurdish news website editors suggest that social media has become a basic interactive element of Kurdish online journalism, there are still obstacles to integrate social media products into news websites. For example, Kurdish news websites still do not have explicit strategies to regulate how to benefit from interactive features related to social media. In such cases, the features of web technology, in particular social networking sites, are seen as

impractical and thus not integrated by most Kurdish news websites. It was supposed to be the Kurdish media organisations, especially the news websites, to show more interest toward social media in order to create continuous communication with the users and support citizen journalism, as well as to be an essential part to increase interactivity.

Furthermore, in terms of the use of interactive features within news stories and other articles, the results show that the posted articles of Kurdish news websites are not similar in the provision and use of interactive features such as photos, videos and hyperlinks. In some cases, those features used to be rare in Kurdish news website content. In Kurdish online journalism most of news articles posted on websites are still presented in text formats in a nonlinear format, with no links, interactive graphics, photos and videos. Applying interactive features such as multimedia content to Kurdish news websites is affected by some factors, such as the lack of focus of news editors of the websites on the importance of these interactive features. The second factor relates to copyrights and technical skills of the news editors which plays an important role in making interactive stories with videos and graphics.

Regarding the lack of new technical skills of Kurdish online journalists, the evidence suggests that this issue has made it difficult to achieve greater interactivity in Kurdish news websites. Also, it could be said that the responsible of this issue is the online journalists themselves, then the Kurdish media organizations that do not pay enough attention to solve this problem, and the Kurdish academic media institutions still have not been able to play an effective role to improve the skills of online journalists in the Kurdish news websites.

At the same time, the findings of this study suggest that Kurdish online journalism affects various forms of citizens involvement in politics by offering interactive communication. Based on the outcomes of Kurdish news website

journalists' viewpoints, the researcher found that Kurdish online journalism, in particular interactive news websites have a positive influence on users' involvement, and this effect is particularly present for Kurdish news websites with high levels of interactivity. The present study of Kurdish news websites found that content was typically produced by small teams of news editors, not sufficiently dependent on their users to generate articles and content of those news websites presented with low levels of interactivity. Taken as a whole, these findings suggest that "interactivity" still has a long way to go before it can live up to the optimism that characterizes Kurdish online journalism.

9.3 Recommendation, Limitations and suggestions for future research

My dissertation empirically examined the factors required for Kurdish online news organization to gain interactivity within the field of online journalism. Despite the importance of this research in opening the door to other studies on the interactivity of the Kurdish online journalism, the other important aspect is the possibility of using the results of this research in improving the level and quality of the layout and content of Kurdish news websites in terms of interactivity.

The results of the research in this thesis have practical implications for the Kurdish online organisations and news website journalists and editors. These results may lead to addressing defects and shortages in those sites in order to encourage interaction between users and editors, and also improve the content of the articles by incorporating them with interactive features:

- 1- Both of online media outlets and online journalists need to reassess the opportunity involved in taking advantage of the interactive capabilities and features of web technology to provide a highly interactive journalistic service to news website users.
- 2- Interactivity is a distinguishing feature of the online journalism, but Kurdish news websites have been slow in recognising interactivity as

an essential condition of effective online journalism. The results of this research show that Kurdish news websites generally Just offer a few interactive features. Therefore, Kurdish news websites need to consider and plan to meet the challenges resulting from the constant changes of designing and maintaining interactive news for their websites.

- 3- Kurdish websites should develop and conduct a comprehensive and clear strategy to deal with technological developments in the field of online journalism and the internet, focusing their efforts on providing maximum interactivity in their content and design.
- 4- Depending on the results, it was apparent that Kurdish online journalists and reporters have made little effort to provide interactive features on the news websites. They have to pay to their news websites the significant attention which they deserve.
- 5- Kurdish online reporters and editors should be equipped with specialised technical skill sets, resources and knowledge as news website journalists and editors, so that they can produce rich content for their sites. In particular, they should be able to produce multimedia and news graphics articles based on their artistic abilities without relying on other people.
- 6- The study highlighted the significance of citizen journalism and social media in online journalism. Thus, journalists should attempt to use interactive options to provide opportunity for citizen journalists to become active characters in the Kurdish news websites. They have also taken advantages of interactive features in order to create a balance between their news websites and social media platforms to become interactive in a participatory way.
- 7- learning what online journalism, should be a construction in progress all times by the Kurdish media organisations. Kurdish news websites could reach a higher level of interactivity by imitating websites of the large media organisations in the western countries such as BBC.com in the UK.

While this study has benefited from the combination of theories, concepts and methods used, namely interactivity dimensions, web-based content analysis and semi-structured interviews, there are some limitations, which need to be considered when reviewing the study.

One limitation of this study came from the task of managing the huge data collection from the Kurdish news websites content analysis study. It was a challenge to study the dynamic technology of online news because the content, layout and functionality of the websites continued to change whilst the data for the study was collected. Controlling the method of data collection, classification and analysis was very complex. This has exhausted the researcher and limited the scope of the sample to include more Kurdish news sites. Moreover, interactivity in online journalism is a complex phenomenon. In particular, the content analysis research method can be applied to the websites in order to measure interactivity, but the researchers should use rigorous and creative ways to ensure they would not lose focus.

However, because this research study also examined the ideas and beliefs of Kurdish news website editors and journalists, it may be appropriate to suspect that other Kurdish news websites and online journalists would aspire to meet these standards. Therefore, the results from this research are very significant in helping researchers and online journalists alike to understand the present state of Kurdish online journalism in terms of interactivity and where it may be heading. This study also had some more benefits, since it has been able to identify the trends and changes in the content and layout of Kurdish news websites, as some of the more advanced features have greatly altered the coding of the units of analysis.

While the chapters included in this thesis all feature their respective sections dealing with limitations and recommendations for future research endeavours, this final section of the final chapter of the thesis presents some of the research

ideas that have grown out of the empirical work during the process of writing. Future research on the interactivity of news websites should examine a simple randomly selected sample to increase the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, this study has focused on the news website editors end of the spectrum. Future research should analyse how Kurdish news website users view and are affected by interactive features. How do news website users define interactivity? How are they using interactive features in online media? Are these features indeed empowering to the website users? An analysis of website user's perspectives would help to bring interactivity research full circle. In addition, future studies will focus on the importance of social media in promoting interaction in the online journalism and examine the extent to which extend news websites have influenced by social media.

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Appendix 1

Biographical details of interviewees

Bahroz Ali Rasul



Bahroz Ali Rasul is a Kurdish Journalist, academic and university lecture. He was born in 1974 in Sulaymaniyah. He has been working for PUK tv since 1998 until 2004. Since 2006 he has joined Wisha Media cooperation and has been working there until now. Where he runs a radio station for those company that works for the Change movement, a Kurdish political party in The Iraqi Kurdistan region. Besides that, he is a lecturer at the University of Sulaymaniyah.

Sirwan Gharib Ahmad



Sirwan Gharib is an independent Kurdish Journalist, He was born in 1976 in Sulaymaniyah and he is currently editor-in-chief of Westgenews.net Kurdish news website. In 1996, he began working in media in Azadi TV. He worked for Hawlatî, the first Kurdish independent newspaper for 6 years, before moving on to contribute to the establishing of the Awene independent newspaper, He was manager of Awene.com News website for few years.

Dashti Salar



Dashti Salar is editor in chief of Sbeiy.com Kurdish news website. He was born in Sulaymaniyah city and has 13 years of journalistic experience. Dashty currently is the editor-in-chief of Sbeiy.com news website which is a news website of Wsha media cooperation. In the beginning he was the editor of the sports section of the Sbeiy.com news website, and then became editor of local news for the Kurdistan region.

Hazhar Osman



Hazhar Osman is Editor in chief of NRTtv.com, and XYZ Digital Media at NRT. He was a former news editor and English language translator at Kurdistan Nwe newspaper. Also, a former Volunteer at Mercy Corps. Hazhar Studied Literature, English at College of Education at University of Sulaimani. He is a founder at Harman Centre for translation.

Khalaf Ghafoor



Khalaf Ghafoor is editor in chief of Xendan.org Kurdish news website. He is proficient in Kurdish, Arabic. He worked as editor and a member of the editorial board of Aso newspaper in the Kurdistan region from 2007 to 2010. He Studied politics' studies at University Of Human Development.

Shno Osman



Shno Osman, journalist at Radionawa.com Kurdish news website. Shno started working in media in 2005 in the Bayani Weekly Newspaper. She worked as a program presenter for radio Nawa, and then became director of Xendan radio station. She is the head of a women's organization to defend the rights of women in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. She studied politics at the university of Sulaimani.

Bahadin Yousuf



Bahadin Yousuf, journalist at Sbeiy.com Kurdish news website which is a news website of Wsha media cooperation. has been working in media since 2000. Yousuf was correspondent then news editor at Aso newspaper, Rojnana Newspaper. He started working for KNN tv from 2008-2001. He graduated from the media department at Sulaimani technical Institute.

Aram Ghafoor



Aram Ghafoor, journalist at Dwarozh.net Kurdish news website. He starts working as a correspondent and news editor at Xendan newspaper from 2005-2008, then at Xendan.org news website from 2008-20012, then Westgenews.net from 2012-2014. He is proficient in Kurdish, Arabic.

Pshtiwan Zahir



Pshtiwan Zahir, journalist at Xendan.org Kurdish news website. He starts working as a journalist since 2005. Zahir Studied at University of Human Development. He is also general director at Rachlaken News. He is proficient in Kurdish, Arabic.

Radha Manucheri



Radha Manucheri, journalist at NRTtv.org Kurdish news website. Started working in the media since 2000, he is a proficient translator from Persian to

Kurdish. He was a news editor for Radio Nawa and a journalist in Aso newspaper, Rojnama newspaper. Manucheri is a civil rights activist. He is proficient in Kurdish, Persian, Arabic.

Saman Mohammad



Saman Mohammad, journalist at Westganews.net Kurdish news website. He starts working as a correspondent and news editor at Xendan newspaper from 2004-2008, then at Xendan.org news website from 2008-20012, He is proficient in Kurdish, Arabic.

Zanst Abdullah



Zanst Jamal, co-founder and managing director of Avesta Group for IT solution. He starts working as a web developer in 2005 at Radio Nawa, then established Group. Avesta Group specializes in web designing and IT solution.

Appendix 2

Interview main questions:

SECTION I: General Questions about the Media in the Kurdistan Region

- 1) Since independence from the Baghdad government in 1992 until now, most of the Kurdistan region media has been largely parties and state-owned. How does this affect the Kurdish media and society?
- 2) Some national and international organization criticized that the Kurdish media is heavily controlled by a variety of legal provisions that prevent Kurdish journalists from operating freely, Do you agree with this statement and if so, why?
- 3) Have the Private or Independent Media managed to break the parties and state monopoly over media? If yes, how so? If no. why not?
- 4) How economic affect media in the Iraqi Kurdistan region?

SECTION II: Questions about Kurdish Online journalism

- 5) What contribution does the Kurdish news websites make to democratic debate among Kurdish citizens at home and abroad? How does it achieve this?
- 6) What pressures (economic. technology. staff shortage. politics etc) threaten Kurdish news websites, how does affect the work that you do?
- 7) Is the news websites play an effective role in political debates for election campaigning?

SECTION III: Questions about Interactivity in Kurdish Online journalism

- 8) In the terms of interactivity and empowering the users through more choices, is this a major consideration in running the site? if yes, how so? If no. why not?

- 9) To what extent are Kurdish online newspaper audiences making use of different types of interactive features?
- 10) What are your personal thought in interactivity without internet?
- 11) According to your experience, do you see any links between News Website Interactive characteristics and participatory online behaviour?
- 12) what do you think the role of journalists should be in the practice of interactive journalism in online environment and how important is this role?
- 13) How as an online journalist do you uphold and practice the ideals a civic journalism, freedom of speech and the extension of democracy in the county?
- 14) What would you say are the key interactive features on the Kurdish news websites?
- 15) How are these features utilized by the users/audiences (i.e. frequency, time spent etc)?
- 16) Do you think interactivity and engaging News website users to be more of a participant in the news process builds participatory behaviour and thus encourages audiences to be more active and involved in topical issues in the country as well as the enhancement of democracy in the country?
- 17) Does the online staff make an effort to be interactive with the user/audience? If yes, how? If no, state why (such as too time-consuming etc)?
- 18) To what extent is your websites collect information about your users? If yes, how? If no, why?
- 19) What aspect of your news website generates the most traffic from users? Why do you think this is?

SECTION III: Questions about Professionalism and the Journalist's Role

- 20) In your opinion, what makes a professional online journalist or what distinguishes a professional journalist from a non-professional one?

21) What support is available for the training of professional online journalists in the Kurdistan region?

22) Do academic departments in the universities play a role in supporting the development of professional online journalists?

SECTION IV: Questions about technical aspect

23) Do you think that wider availability of the internet will develop Kurdish media and society?

24) A major problem in the world of online journalism today is that staff tend to fall into one of two categories: either web/technical experts who have no background or training in journalism OR trained journalists with no background or training in technical aspects of the web. Would you say this is the case with your website?

25) Do you see a need for online journalists to be trained and competent in both journalism and the web? If so, what steps is your organization taking to see this achieved?

Appendix 3

Interview responses

Appendix 3.1: transcript of interview with Bahroz Ali Rasul, Lecturer at media department of The University of Sulaymaniyah.

General Questions about the Media in the Kurdistan Region

Response Question 1: It is true, since independence from the Baghdad government in 1992 until now, the majority of media outlets have been monopolized by ruling political parties. This situation has negatively affected the development of the Kurdish media in terms of quality, content and professionalism, and has limited the development of independent media in the region. To a large extent, the media has not been able to develop civil society and democracy in Kurdistan.

Response Question 2: Journalism in the Kurdistan region has been constrained by several legal and illegal factors. Party and government authorities sometimes resort to the courts and benefit from legal materials that restrict the independence of the media in order to silence independent journalists. In some cases, the authorities do not need the law, they try to silence independent journalists through other illegal ways.

Response Question 3: Since 2000, independent journalists have tried to establish private and independent media outlets such as newspapers. While they have made strides, but they did not manage to break the parties and state monopoly over media. Because the power of the ruling political parties has paralyzed the efforts of the independent media

Response Question 4: The economy is heavily influencing the media landscape in Kurdistan. Because the ruling parties have taken control of financial resources and the economy significantly, the media has also been affected by this situation. Where independent media cannot stand on their feet because of the poor financial returns.

Questions about Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 6: The Kurdish online Journalism has taken some good steps, but it has not been able to compete with traditional media. Because there are significant technical and economic obstacles to the development of the Kurdish online Journalism, since the Internet service is still not available to the majority of citizens in the Kurdistan region. And that the news sites were unable to attract investors and companies to give them ads, all these reasons led to the weakening of the Kurdish online press to some extent.

Response Question 7: Generally, the Kurdish news websites Online journalism has played a relative role in in political debates for election campaigning. Because the Kurdish public tends to rely on television and then radio more than relying on the Internet to follow political issues.

Questions about Interactivity in Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 8: The Kurdish websites, which were mainly used to convey news to users, are a little bit interested in interacting with the internet users, because the main objective is to transmit news and information through the Internet to users not to interactive with them.

Response Question 9: the main reason for the lack of interactive features is the Kurdish websites is that their roles are not sufficiently understood by Kurdish media organizations, news website managers and web journalists. I could say we should rule out the impacts of other factors such as the lack of technical and human expertise to cover this aspect. there are some Kurdish news websites that have enough or too many reporters, editors and technicians, however, when you visit their website, you see that it is very simple in terms of interactive features such as customization.

Response Question 10: the concept of interactivity is complex, interactive process in the online journalism is not limited to the comments of readers or how users use the websites but depends on several human and technical aspects. We could define interactivity in terms of technology and in terms of human-to-human exchange. However, interactivity is far more than adding comments by users to website articles or some technical functions involving the user clicking on buttons of website pages or selecting options. Interactivity is the degree to which communication technology can create an environment

in which participants can communicate and exchange messages, in order to gain their experience and increase their awareness.

Response Question 11: Sure, according to my experience, I could say there are notable links between news interactive characteristics and participatory online behaviour.

Response Question 12: Kurdish news editors do not deal with multimedia elements of online news. They often ignore paying attention to these issues. I noted the emergence of indifference within the newsrooms of news websites, news editors do not devote part of their time to make or edit videos to post them with the news stories that they produce, or even they do not publish with their reports many photos, they usually add one photo only. I was especially disappointed by their lack of interest for using features such as bullet points, graphics, photos, audios, or videos in their works. Of course, an online journalist should have a host of skills, from scripting news stories to layout and design of news infographics to video and audio production. If a news website editor had no other background and skills in one or more of these areas, then he should try to learn in order to create a rich format of news stories that could have positive influence of interactivity in online journalism

Response Question 14: It can be said that the Kurdish news sites are interested in the shadow of the interaction, but there are some interactive features such as user comments or multimedia.

Response Question 15: Kurdish website user can not yet take advantage of the interactive features of online journalism well, because of the lack of how to use those features, I think this process takes some time.

Response Question 16: I believe that interactivity and engaging the users to be more of a participant in the journalistic production process builds participatory behaviour and thus encourages audiences to be more active and involved in topical issues in the region as well as the enhancement of democracy in the Kurdistan region.

Response Question 17: I noticed that the Kurdish online journalists do not pay much attention to encouraging participation and interactivity in their news

websites. Even if users try to interact with them, some journalists refuse to response.

Questions about Professionalism and the Journalist's Role

Response Question 20: Especially in recent years, the use of technology in news editing for Kurdish online journalism has become increasingly and effectively more important. The emergence and development of new forms of journalism such as citizen journalism and social media has forced journalists to learn technical skills and master using new techniques in the design and production of videos and graphic illustrations as part of their journalistic work. New editing technology has changed the role of journalists, today they could create new forms of digital and visual storytelling, they also affect interactivity positively in Kurdish online journalism by applying this way of telling stories. Multi skills is the matter for online journalists because interactive journalism depends on the ways by which journalists create stories with rich content and encourage their audiences to examine media more effectively. If editors have online journalism skills, then their stories become more efficient and impactful by using interactivity features than via a static piece of text or photo. In other words, interactivity in online journalism depends on the journalist's ability to apply interactive features to his website. If the online journalist cannot offer interactive features to website users, he will leave little difference between his website and traditional media. They need to learn skills by training and getting knowledge that enable them to create interactive journalism

Response Question 21: It is best for teachers in media institutes to be journalists, so that they can teach journalists and develop their skills. Media technology is evolving rapidly, keeping pace with this speed is not easy and at the same time not impossible. Our problem as teachers is that we do not want to learn how to use new media technologies, so as to develop the skills of our students to be online journalists, able to work in all media organizations especially news websites. In addition, it is not fair to defend the value of journalism education in our academic institutions, without knowing the main issues journalists face when dealing with new technologies in their news websites.

Response Question 22: the model of journalism taught in the media colleges of Kurdistan has remained unchanged for many years and there are no tutorials about online journalism, multimedia and using new storytelling techniques. Journalism education in the Kurdistan universities need serious reform. First, we as teachers have to admit that there is a professional crisis in journalism education, then bring new bloods onto our colleges. We need to experiment with a new tutorial in media education which can create links between the teaching of media and practicing online journalists. Students in the media colleges now need to develop many skills to deal with online journalism and take part in interactive communication process. Multimedia training is a must significant skill they should learn but he did not hide that they lack technical devices such as advanced computers and interactive news rooms to teach journalism students how to work in news sites and produce interactive news stories.

Questions about technical aspect

Response Question 23: There is no doubt that the provision of Internet service affects the promotion of participation, but the impact of the Internet on democracy in the Kurdistan region will be minimal, because the ruling parties are using other means to reduce democracy.

Response Question 23: Truly, there is a problem. Web developers and technicians do not have experience in the journalism, and journalists do not have technical expertise. Addressing this problem in the Kurdish online journalism is difficult because of poor financial and human resources.

Appendix 3.2: transcript of interview with Sirwan Gharib, Editor in chief of Westgenews.net Kurdish news website.

General Questions about the Media in the Kurdistan Region

Response Question 1: After the departure of the Ba'athist regime from the cities of Kurdistan, the Kurdish parties, especially PUK and PDK, took control of the region completely. Together, those Kurdish parties controlled the Kurdish media. The Kurdish media developed somewhat, but this

development was slow. As a result, partisan journalism became the main aspect of the Kurdish media at that stage.

Response Question 2: I believe that still Kurdish media is heavily controlled by a variety of legal provisions that prevent Kurdish journalists from operating freely. Journalists and civil society organizations have often called for laws that would allow more freedom for journalists, but ruling parties do not want this.

Response Question 3: The emergence of independent Kurdish media has been and continues to have a significant impact on media work in Iraqi Kurdistan. Where independent media have become a major source of news on administrative and financial corruption. Citizens depend on independent channels rather than party channels.

Response Question 4: The economic situation in the Kurdistan region is unstable. The ruling parties control the economy, so the financial situation of media organizations depends on the extent of their vulnerability to the control of these parties.

Questions about Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 5: While many media outlets in Kurdistan operate under the control of ruling parties, the Kurdish online journalism contributes to engaging citizens in political discussions and democratic debate by providing free space for them.

Response Question 6: The Westganews.net website is editorially independent; our editors and reporters are free from commercial bias and not influenced by company's owners or political parties. This is important for independent media platforms because it enables them to challenge the corrupt officials and hold them to account. But unfortunately, we are afraid that we cannot continue this way, we do not give in to the desire of the politicians, but in the end if we do not get ads we will have to close our media.

Response Question 7: There is no doubt that the Internet is a successful and pioneering media outlet for political participation, if television and radio did not cover an event such as the February 17, 2011 events in Kurdistan, online

journalism tried to cover it. where news sites have been able to encourage users to engage in political debates about the event.

Questions about Interactivity in Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 9: many interactive features did not exist on most Kurdish news websites, especially customization weather feature, despite the insistence of the managers and editors of those websites on the importance of the presence of these features in their websites. for example, in term of the customization weather feature, it is difficult to adding data on the website, which needs a person interested in this subject and updates the data continuously.

Response Question 10: From my point of view, interactive web sites are achieving as much user participation as possible by adding interactive features such as user comments and many photos and videos,

Response Question 11: there are notable links between interactive features of the news websites and participatory online behaviour, increasing interactive features in news sites increases user engagement and encourages them to play a larger role more effectively.

Response Question 12: Interactivity in the news websites rely on the technical side, then rely on the ability of editors in how to utilize the most interactive features. Journalists at news websites can encourage users to participate by putting their comments on articles and news reports. That is, journalists have a big role to play.

Response Question 14: The possibility of allowing users to adding thier comments on news reports is the most important aspect of the interactive Kurdish news websites. And the speed of publishing and adding images and video among the most important interactive features of the Kurdish online journalism.

Response Question 16: It is important for us to play a role in term of creating a wide space to produce interaction between citizen journalism with professional news media. We are as a mainstream Kurdish news website experimented with accommodating different modes of citizen content. We

always asked our users to send us their journalistic articles to post them in our website. Of course, we did it.

Response Question 17: adding email address of editors with their published report on the site has an effect on increasing interactivity with users. However, it is difficult to answer all the users' questions. I noticed that some editors do not actually open the email they added with their articles. Sometimes this feature becomes very useful, and sometimes becomes useless.

Response Question 18: we do not collect information about our website users' aspirations. We know this is important, but we haven't reached that level yet. We do not have enough human potential to achieve this goal.

Response Question 19: Entertainment and economic news are more read by users, because those types of news satisfy their needs.

Response Question 20: I often encouraged their editors to acquire new experiences and provided them with many opportunities to learn. This way, an editor working in the online journalism can accomplish several tasks and play more than one role which used to be assigned to other types of news workers inside and outside the newsroom. As editor in chief we always encourage them to learn new skills so that they can edit and produce news stories suitable for websites, with interactive features, many photos, videos and podcasts. And you can say, it is the best way to increase interactivity level in our website. The good thing is that the news editors learn to set it up rich content news stories.

Response Question 22: While some believe that the press is like any science that needs a study to make the media proficient in its profession, I believe that the profession of journalism depends primarily on the general culture that is not taught in universities but is the result of a personal effort on the journalist to do to develop himself. The media colleges in universities in the Kurdistan region focus on theoretical information bases and ignore the practical aspect, that the importance of professional journalist does not lie in the fact that he holds the media certificate.

Appendix 3.3: transcript of interview with Dashti Salar, Editor in chief of Sbeiy.com Kurdish news website.

General Questions about the Media in the Kurdistan Region

Response Question 1: The Kurdish press in Iraqi Kurdistan began its new phase after 1991 by issuing publications, newspapers and magazines. followed by radio stations in cities and towns in Iraqi Kurdistan. These radio stations competed among themselves in broadcasting and disseminating their ideas and directions to the Kurdish masses. The stage has arrived to establish the television stations that accompanied that start. But these media channels were partisan. Therefore, it can be said that the Kurdish party media negatively and positively affected the Kurdish media landscape, there was no chance for the emergence of independent media.

Response Question 2: The ruling parties use the law as a pretext to prevent journalists from covering sensitive topics such as financial corruption. Several lawsuits have been filed against us by some parties in the courts. This will harm the press work in the region. The Journalists Syndicate in the Kurdistan region is a partisan union composed of members of the parties in the region. That is why we do not see it as independent or defend journalists. I do not see the need to legislate a comprehensive law to regulate the work of the press on the internet, it is better not to take such a step. Simply put, there is now more freedom for journalists who rely on the Web to spread what they produce. If the authorities enact laws on online publishing, they will censor and negatively affect the independent press.

Response Question 3: Media in Iraqi Kurdistan in a decade of its new phase after the 1991 uprising could not take its role in criticism and reform, and could not impose itself as the fourth authority in the region. Gradually, the Kurdish media became the prisoner of the parties and a poster for them, but the voices of the independent media after a decade of the new phase tried to break the party ring, and some of these attempts succeeded, especially in the city of Sulaymaniyah and then in Erbil, and these critical voices were able to gradually grow into a short period Independent media strongly contested partisan media in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Response Question 4: Everything depends on money, good media needs good money, there is a lot of money for partisan media organizations, independent media organizations do not have enough money. The economic system in the Kurdistan region is very fragile. Independent media can not count on the financial returns of advertising.

Questions about Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 5: The Kurdish online journalism has encouraged people to participate in politics and influenced the effectiveness of people in society. However, there are always obstacles hindering the real participation of citizens in the political life in the Kurdistan region.

Response Question 6: We always work under heavy financial pressure. If we have good money, we can certainly provide a better model for the Kurdish online journalism. We do not have enough editors and correspondents, and this has negatively affected the nature of our work.

Questions about Interactivity in Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 8: As an editor, I cannot hide that the main objective of our site is to give people as much information as possible about the events and facts in Iraqi Kurdistan. But we are also interested in interactivity, but in second place.

Response Question 9: Users of Kurdish news websites tend to take advantage of the interactive features of those sites and will often use these features to express their opinions freely. They are adding their comments and discuss various issues. However, some users do not know how to interact with news websites or with journalists.

Response Question 10: According to my opinion, interactive journalism is a new type of press that allows the public to contribute directly to the media industry. By taking advantage of Web features, reporters can talk to the public. The Internet has effectively changed the way journalists gather information. The Internet has created a good interaction between editors and users.

Response Question 12: Most of the journalists who work for us either came from newspapers after they were closed or were non-journalists and learned

the vocabulary of the news editing here on this website. They do not know how to produce special news reports for websites, and do not know how to edit videos or add audio to their news reports. We do not have enough experience to teach them web journalist skills, because we focus on increasing the number of news in our website, instead of focusing on improving the reports by adding interactive reports and multimedia features.

Response Question 13: I think the Kurdish online journalism should be a serious substitute for the traditional media that is firmly in the media landscape. This new journalistic practice should be an alternative to newspapers and television journalism, providing an opportunity for citizens to participate effectively in the media in order to play a key role, such as journalists or correspondents. This in turn enhances freedom of speech and democracy in the Kurdish society.

Response Question 14: Interactivity in the Kurdish online journalism focuses on advanced and web-based communication technology as a new tool of communication that changed the parameters of the communication process and media. on the Kurdish news websites, user comments and user blogs are the key interactive features.

Response Question 15: The majority of Kurdish news websites users scan the news stories quickly. We have noticed that our users do not care about the interactive features on our website., but at best they leave a simple comment on the articles if they read them.

Response Question 16: we responded to our user's participatory tendencies by creating sections of limited spaces for citizen journalism such as Sbey platform. It allows users to publish their views in the form of text paragraphs or even long articles on political, economic or social issues. This step has had a significant impact on encouraging users to express their opinions freely.

Response Question 17: I always researching on how he can better manage and support our news producers with technical skills, but they often do not respond to these attempts and are showing little interest in order to make interactive stories with videos and graphics. Despite the availability of many photos and videos about local and universal events, the way that journalists

deal with these and varied data reveal the special challenges that our website face. We do not ask them to capture photos and record video tapes such as what reporters doing. We just need to deal with available data in a professional way.

Response Question 18: We know that the user usually leaves traces after browsing our website but using this data to create a user profile is very difficult for our modest technical capabilities. That user data collection has reached very advanced levels in developed countries, for us as Kurdish news websites, this is very new, and we are not able to benefit from it.

Questions about Professionalism and the Journalist's Role

Response Question 20: encouraging editors to learn the skills that should be enjoyed by every news website editor is very important, especially technical skills, because this type of multiple skills may increase interactivity in online journalism and may be useful for media organizations in terms of economics, because the editors attend to a number of tasks which used to be assigned to other persons in the news rooms. I tried a lot to encourage them to learn skills, it helps us financially, instead of spending money for two people, we spend it for one person, that is better.

Response Question 21: In general, there are many training courses in the Kurdistan region that allow journalists, especially novices, to learn about the experiences of professionals with long experience in the television, radio and newspapers. They can direct them to acquire the techniques of journalism in a specific field to broaden their horizons. They must be followed in every work they have to do. But these courses do not include online journalism.

Response Question 22: Getting a media certificate is not the basic criterion that determines the journalist's success or not, What is important is that the journalist knows how to develop his skills, and thus avoids gaps in the news stories that he produces.

Questions about technical aspect

Response Question 24: Mostly, our journalists do not have technical skills, as well as technicians and web developer and designers do not have

journalistic experience and skills. It could be considered as one of the main issues in the Kurdish online journalism. I see a need for online journalists and web developers to be trained and competent in both journalism and the web designing.

Appendix 3.4: transcript of interview with Hazhar Osman, Editor in chief of NRTtv.com Kurdish news website.

General Questions about the Media in the Kurdistan Region

Response Question 1: The majority of newspapers published in Iraqi Kurdistan after 1991 were affiliated with ruling parties or opposition parties. There was no independent and private media away from the influence of parties or authority. The Kurdish press in most of them was a partisan press. The political parties had the human resources and the financial resources. The media at this stage served the ruling parties well, and the Kurdish media saw a slight development until 2000. But this development is limited to partisan media, not independent media.

Response Question 2: Today, the Kurdistan region of Iraq is witnessing a remarkable development in the field of media in all its forms. It is also proceeding with the development of the judicial system, with the obstacles to enhancing its independence, as there are many shortcomings and gaps in the performance of the judiciary. Certainly, the ruling parties benefit from loopholes in the media law to counter independent media. However, civil society organizations play an active and influential role in strengthening the judiciary through the Judicial Support Project, which publishes annual reports of violations of law, human rights and the rights of the accused in the courts of the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

Response Question 3: It is well known that the independent nonpartisan press, which is not connected to the authority and its institutions, has witnessed an effective presence and a remarkable development in Iraqi Kurdistan. In recent years, it has played an important and serious role in transmitting the news, reversing reality and following events, contributing to

the development of political values and political awareness, raising public opinion and highlighting the lives, needs and suffering of the people. Kurdish independent media contribute seriously to the promotion of dialogue, culture and intellectual work.

Response Question 4: The financial support offered by some political parties to Radio, television channels and news websites has created a financial instability for independent media channels. partisan media gets support from parties, and independent media cannot get the same support. The advertising market is very poor, the media cannot rely entirely on advertising.

Questions about Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 5: There is a role for the Kurdish online journalism in promoting democracy in the Kurdistan region, where news websites allows the possibility of direct communication between the user and journalist and the possibility of accepting comment, criticism and amendment between the them, news websites gives more space for the reader to participate in decision-making. The Kurdish online journalism also succeeded in giving more space for young people to express their opinion, whether by comment, criticism or writing articles.

Response Question 6: There are several difficulties facing the Kurdish online journalism, such as difficulties in obtaining funding. The biggest problem we face is the lack of money for our website, and the lack of absolute faith of the commercial companies operating in the Kurdistan region regarding online advertising on the Kurdish news websites.

Response Question 7: While Kurdish news websites play a role in political debates for election campaigning, we noticed that this role is relative and not very influential. Because television and radio still play a more active and effective role than news websites.

Questions about Interactivity in Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 8: I would like to make sure that the interactivity and user-friendly participation is one of the most important priorities that we are working on in our news website. The interactivity should be the target of all the

Kurdish websites, because the traditional media in Kurdistan does not meet the public's requirements regarding the opportunity to practice. The online journalism should play this role and address this gap.

Response Question 9: Day by day, the needs and wishes of people are increasing, the nature of modern society imposes it. Users of websites always want the existence of weather information and data on the websites. Each website user needs the data by the area in which he or she lives. Unfortunately, there are few Kurdish websites news use customization feature to their homepages.

Response Question 10: The interactive concept has close association with digital technologies and has been linked to informatics. In the midst of the technological developments, the concept of interactivity is becoming more and more connected to multimedia, we can talk about the various forms of interactivity associated with the nature of interactive features of websites. But the most important aspect of interactivity is the user comments, engagement and dialogue.

Response Question 12: The online journalist is the cornerstone of interactivity in online journalism, because interactivity is the two-way relationship in which the journalist plays a key role by using interactive features in his website to be interactive. news website editors able to offer equal opportunity to their users to participate in the communication process. Participants in the interactive communication process can influence the roles of others.

Response Question 13: It is important that a journalist working in a news website benefit from the interactive features of the Web to help others to build a pluralistic democratic society. A skilled journalist can harness the interactivity of news websites for freedom, equality and justice in society. If he works well with users, the journalist succeeds in raising the level of political, cultural, intellectual and social aspects of users.

Response Question 15: many website users want to obtain financial news customized for their own investment portfolios. Young users always customize sports news and information's depending on their favorite sports or teams.

Also, users which have health issue, customize health articles related to their own health situations. In particular.

Response Question 16: Of course, we do not hide that there is a problem with the Kurdish news websites related to the vulnerability of communication between journalists and website users. Journalists are not trying seriously to communicate with their website's users. In general, building relations with users could be useful because they always have good information or data about what our news stories, so their information supports our articles.

Response Question 17: our website staff make an effort to be interactive with the users. but sometimes it's impossible. for example, we have not allowed our editors to put their email addresses with their articles, in order to avoid problems that may be directed by the editors themselves. Sometimes we have to be careful, in the internet environment there are stupid, bullies and arrogant users.

Response Question 18: In our website, we do not collect any information about our users' aspirations. I do not see this process as necessary, and we do not have enough editors to follow this up.

Response Question 19: local news section is the generates the most traffic from our users, because this type of news is important for users, where local events give useful information to the user about what is going on around him.

Questions about Professionalism and the Journalist's Role

Response Question 20: online journalists sometimes become journalists on the chairs and refuse to go out of their newsrooms to investigate facts and events, but instead turn to Kurdish newsroom online journalists. The tasks carried out by Kurdish journalists in most of the time are just regrouping, editing, and finetuning the news of foreign media channels or official government institutions websites. most of the news articles on the Kurdish news websites consists of modified reports from international media websites or other institutions websites. They rarely leave their newsrooms, they often collect information online and even conduct interviews via the internet or telephone. the new technology has facilitated the process of information

gathering for journalists to a high degree, but this has affected the quality of content. Journalists have become inefficient and inactive. They have become skilled in using the internet to gather information, but they have lost other skills or rather neglect to use those skills.

Response Question 21: Several local or international organizations have provided a number of training courses for journalists to learn the basics of journalism and the arts of journalism. Most of these courses were free, but I have never heard about online journalism courses in The Iraqi Kurdistan region.

Response Question 22: I think that the media departments in universities in the Kurdistan region have played a good role in qualifying journalists for the Kurdish media outlets, but these academic institutions do not have the skills to train students to work in the online journalism.

Questions about technical aspect

Response Question 23: I think that the Internet service so far in the Kurdistan region is very poor, the concerned parties must address this problem, the majority of citizens are deprived of the Internet. If this problem is addressed, it will give a greater chance for the development of Kurdish online journalism.

Response Question 24: In terms of technical aspect and design, the Kurdish news websites have reached a good level compared to previous years, but we believe that there are technical problems that must be addressed. It is important to get to the level of global news websites in terms of technical aspect and design.

Appendix 3.5: transcript of interview with Khalaf Ghafoor, Editor in chief of Xendan.org Kurdish news website.

General Questions about the Media in the Kurdistan Region

Response Question 1: I insist that the Kurdish media entered its golden age after the March 1991 uprising. During the first year after uprising, nearly 22 newspapers and magazines were published, from 1992 to 2010, more than 100 newspapers and magazines were published in Kurdistan. Over the past decades, the Iraqi media has not seen the large number of newspapers,

magazines and bulletins issued in Iraqi Kurdistan compared to 15 other provinces in Iraq. Therefore, I think that the media, even if it was partisan, positively affected the community in terms of educating citizens and the development of the Kurdish language and the building of civil society.

Response Question 2: It is true that there is some pressure on journalists by the ruling political parties, but the law protects journalists and the rights of others as well. We do not claim perfection, Iraq's Kurdistan is in a transition to democracy, we have to go through several stages. I think we are moving forward in Iraq's Kurdistan. We want to have a free press. We want journalists to be respected and to listen to people's voices. But journalists lack professional experience, so they make mistakes and violate the rights of others.

Response Question 3: The Kurdish independent media has not been able to compete with the media owned by political parties, because the independent media has not and will not receive financial support to develop itself. But it cannot be denied that the Kurdish independent media was bold, publishing bold articles about government corruption, mismanagement, and human rights abuses. In some cases, the work of these independent media is superior to that of the previously dominant media, which is affiliated with and receives substantial funding from these political parties.

Response Question 4: the lack of commercial advertising has a negative impact on the current state of the Kurdish online journalism. While economic challenges arise due to negative processes in the macroeconomic situation of the Iraqi Kurdistan region, scarce investments into the online journalism industry and decline of advertising has remained a negative factor for Kurdish online journalism.

Questions about Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 5: The digital revolution and the Internet provided a new environment for the Kurdish media and helped them enhance their communicative abilities to influence society and promote democracy. Kurdish online journalism has become more accessible to the masses and to enhancing the participation of users in political and civic dialogues and

debates. So that the Kurdish citizen can express his opinion about political, economic and social issues via online journalism.

Response Question 6: Traditional media such as newspaper has a business model, but for Kurdish online media still there is no business model. For example, newspapers which can get money via advertising, selling content to readers. television channels also could collect money by advertising. But for news sites online it's different. Companies do not give news websites advertisement or ads, this has become so popular in Kurdistan, companies do not trust the ability of news websites to attract consumers, so do not find commercial ads on the Kurdish websites pages only rarely.

Response Question 7: regarding the Kurdish online journalism and elections, the electoral campaigns of Kurdish political parties seek to establish direct contact between the candidate and the target audience of the campaign, which contributes to the arrival of messages clearly and achieve the objectives of the communication process and brings positive results. It is clear that in the Kurdistan region there are a great shift towards the use of candidates for Kurdish news websites in campaigns, in order to communicate with their constituents and to define their electoral programs and their ability to serve them better. This shift may be due to the large increase in the use of computers and smartphones and speed of access to the Internet through the use of advanced technologies.

Questions about Interactivity in Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 8: Yes, we as a news website give priority to interacting with our visitors and users offering them what they want or what they need such as information and news stories, in line with the rapid changes in the online journalism.

Response Question 9: We do not have accurate data about to what extent are Kurdish news website users making use of different types of interactive features. But it's possible to say that our news website users are interested in putting their comments on news and articles.

Response Question 10: In my view, interactive media is the one that combines text, sound, video and image into a single file, and technology played an important role in the interactivity of online journalism, where the users can interact with the news stories and comment on it. for example, news websites allowing the reader to interact with the text and put many comments and ideas on the same subject. this enriches dialogue and discussion on the topics.

Response Question 12: I think the role of journalists should be in the practice of interactive journalism in the online environment. However, journalists in Kurdish news sites do not play this role. They always complain about the lack of raw materials such as pictures and video, Although I do not see this as a huge problem, I admit that the lack of videos or photos in our newsroom is not the main reason, but the reason is the editors themselves. They mainly focus on the number of news stories they post within one day, they do not care about the quality of the content of their reports as much as they are concerned about their quantity.

Response Question 13: Kurdish news websites provided unlimited possibilities of interactivity. Therefore, these sites encourage direct interactive communication between senders and receivers and the exchange of roles between the parties of communication process. Of course, there is the utmost importance of interactivity through the new media, I mean the online journalism. Today, because of the nature of news websites, Kurdish people freely express their views on political, religious or any other topics, they could add their comments without any censorships. This is the importance of interactivity via internet.

Response Question 14: there many interactive features on the Kurdish news websites, such as multimedia, and user comments, but I could say the key interactive features of Kurdish online journalism are multimedia and hyperlinks.

Response Question 15: Unlike previous years, ‘Kurdish news website users are beginning to take advantage of interactive features. In the past users were

not interested in using these interactive features, but the situation changed. step by step they started to benefit from the interactivity of online journalism.

Response Question 16: Regarding Kurdish online journalism, citizen journalism is not an essential part of news gathering and posting in Kurdistan region. Indeed, there are a lot of Kurdish citizens willing to produce journalistic content, but their reports usually lack professionalism, and sometimes we cannot verify the authenticity of the information contained therein so that we publish them through our website.

Response Question 17: news website editors supposed to be very interested in interactivity, so that many users will be brought to our website. unfortunately, Kurdish news website journalists do not make serious effort to be interactive with their website users. The reason is that they get paid monthly according to the number of news they produced, but their interest in interactivity does not affect their salaries.

Response Question 18: I believe that collecting personal information about our website users is not in line with ethics and values of journalism. So, we do not collect information about our users' aspirations.

Response Question 19: In fact, I have no information about this. I spoke with our website designer several times to give us data about what aspect of our website generates the most traffic from users. But we have not got anything yet.

Questions about Professionalism and the Journalist's Role

Response Question 20: One of the most important things online journalist needs to know in the online journalism is that writing for websites is different from writing for newspapers. To find out how good and effective web writing is, a journalist first needs to know how the Internet user reads topics on the web, and then how to apply them to journalistic writing.

Response Question 21: Training courses for online journalists are very important in order to acquire or enhance skills in the field of digital media and to learn about new professional practices in this field. The journalist needs these courses to enrich his information on data journalism and multimedia

production and how to use the new technical tools to obtain useful and reliable data. There are several workshops or training courses for newspapers, tv and radio journalists, However, there is no special training courses for online journalists in the Kurdistan region.

Response Question 22: I think the academic institutions in the Kurdistan region cannot train journalists well. It is necessary to highlight the reality and problems of media training in the media departments of universities and institutes in the Kurdistan region. we should know the deficiencies in the educational process in the media departments to weaken them and activate the positive aspects in them to produce skilled journalists especially in online journalism. Unfortunately, the media departments in the universities of the Kurdistan region did not contribute to the provision of a journalist able to work in the Kurdish online media market.

Questions about technical aspect

Response Question 23: It is obvious that the Internet service in the Kurdistan region is not very good, sometimes citizens, the media and companies suffer from the weakness of the Internet and the deterioration of the Internet service in the Kurdistan region, sometimes this problem become the mainstream talk and debate that occupies users of social networking sites and workers in the fields depends mainly on the internet, where most of the arias of the Kurdistan is poor in providing internet to citizens.

Response Question 24: In the Kurdish news websites there is a technical problem, which is the incompatibility between the online journalist and the web developers شهي designers. Web developers have no experience in the journalism and therefore do not care about interactive features when designing news websites. I think it's hard for a journalist to be a Web designer too, but it's best for online journalists especially news website editor-in-chiefs to have knowledge about the principles of web design.

Appendix 3.6: transcript of interview with Shno Osman, journalist at Basnews.net Kurdish news website.

General Questions about the Media in the Kurdistan Region

Response Question 1: Kurdish political parties have been able to revive the Kurdish media by issuing daily newspapers and establishing radio and television channels. It is fair to respect what these political parties have done. They serve the Kurdish media and have been able to revive the nationalist feeling of the Kurds after decades of marginalization and oppression by the Iraqi authorities.

Response Question 2: It is true that there is no comprehensive law to regulate online journalism, but such a law does not benefit journalists because the authorities use the laws to punish journalists, especially those working for the independent websites. In some cases, the officials arrest the bloggers and those who resort to social media sites to express their views on the rampant corruption in the region.

Response Question 3: According to my opinion, the independent media in the Kurdistan region have not been able to perform their duty professionally, sometimes even some independent media outlets have lost their independence and worked for political parties or government officials. Despite this, the role they played in giving citizens good information about the political, economic and social reality of Kurdish society cannot be denied.

Response Question 4: Like other countries, the economy controls the Kurdish media. of course, yes. The most influential is the ruling parties that have controlled the financial resources in the Kurdistan region, which is undoubtedly the main source of funding for the Kurdish media institutions.

Questions about Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 5: Any media can play an effective role in educating people and encouraging citizens to participate in politics. The generosity in general in Kurdistan supports democracy, encourages people and society to shift towards civil society and democracy. The Kurdish online journalism also had a share in the democratization of society and power in the Kurdistan region

Response Question 6: If there is a problem facing the Kurdish online journalism, it is related to the economic situation in the region. Without

sustainable financing, the online journalism cannot meet the growing challenges to be successful media. We all know that strong capital inevitably affects the content of the news, programs or information provided, and thus affects the credibility of the media.

Response Question 7: I was nominated for Iraqi parliament elections. So, I know that online journalism has played a relatively role in campaigning. Because people in Iraqi Kurdistan rely more on television than on news websites, and of course there are factors that influence people's dependence on online journalism, such as the presence of Internet services.

Questions about Interactivity in Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 8: In the website of our media organisation, we have many goals, all of which relate to how our media functions are performed. We want to give our media message to the public. We want to give citizens the chance to participate in our media and interact with them in all the ways available in our news website. All of these goals are key objectives of our work. Definitely, interactivity and empowering the users to participate, through more choices is this a major consideration in running our news website.

Response Question 9: Because of the political situation and the marginalization of individual freedom in Iraq and the Kurdistan region in the last century, citizens were deprived of participation in the fields of politics and media, so the Internet opened a wide door for citizens to participate in political discussions more freely. Today users of news sites are eager to use the majority of interactive features and special features that allow them to participate.

Response Question 10: internet is a great medium to communicate with the mass because of its interactive features, and the essence of interactivity of online journalism lies in allowing users to add comments on topics. In interactive media, the recipient cannot be seen only as a reader, hence the website can modify its content and interact with readers' comments.

Response Question 11: It seems that the most important feature of internet media (online journalism) is the interactivity and fast delivery of information to

the public unlike the traditional media. Interactivity, especially with the ease of adding comments and opinions to published articles, has made the websites better than other media.

Response Question 12: Today due to social media especially Facebook, it has become easier for journalists to accomplish all journalistic tasks, even if they stay in their office without going out.

Response Question 13: The online journalist can play an important and decisive role in political and social mobility. A journalist can harness the online journalism to rebel against traditional media constants. If the journalist is skilled in his work, he can play an active role in shaping the context of political reform in society, reflecting the nature of the relationship between the state and society, and between the elite and the masses. The contribution and role of the media in the process of political and democratic reform depends on the form and function of these means in society and the size of freedoms, and the diversity of opinions and trends within these institutions.

Response Question 14: In term of Kurdish online journalism, I believe that customization is another step of evolution of news websites towards interactivity. In general, news website strategy should focus on the user's customization to engage them interact with our medium.

Response Question 16: If we support those ordinary website users, it means we support citizen journalism. Then, they will be able to express themselves via creating some news stories or other forms of content, we accept their works even if do not have professional journalistic values.

Response Question 17: I'm not deny the fact that some of the editors working in the news websites lack professionalism. In contrast, there are some citizen news writers who have the ability to work as a professional editor, those who respect journalistic values. Therefore, he insisted on the importance of interaction between citizen journalism and mainstream news websites.

Questions about Professionalism and the Journalist's Role

Response Question 20: Every person working in media should have some journalism basic skills, in order to perform his duty in the best manner. As for

the journalist who works in the news websites, it is better to be an expert in the use of new technologies and software for editing video and graphics. this makes a professional online journalist and distinguishes a professional journalist from a non-professional one.

Response Question 22: The media departments in the universities of Kurdistan region are supposed to prepare the students to work as professional journalists, but this goal is not complete without completing integrated practical projects and journalism training in one of the media channels. Thus, ensuring greater chances of working in various media institutions. In general, the level of the media departments in the universities of Kurdistan is not very good, but they are making an effort to produce journalists for the media channels.

Appendix 3.7: transcript of interview with Bahadin Yousuf, journalist at Sbeiy.com Kurdish news website.

General Questions about the Media in the Kurdistan Region

Response Question 1: Kurdish media passed through many stages, often Kurdish media belonged to the Kurdish political liberation movements or worked under its control, when the Iraqi regime's exit from the cities of Kurdistan in the nineties of the last century, Kurdish political parties were able to establish media channels, such as daily newspapers and television channels. But it was a tool of partisan propaganda more than a medium of transmitting information to citizens. The Kurdish media changed at this stage in form and content but did not reach the required level. also had a relative impact on Kurdish society.

Response Question 2: The Kurdish journalist in the Kurdistan region today became like a man walking through a field of mines, ranging from political, tribal, sectarian and even judicial. And hardly survives a mine until it falls into another. The reason is that the authorities in the region do not want a free and independent media, because they know that an independent media will become a threat to them. Because the independent media reveals the secrets of corruption. Therefore, these authorities intervened in the enactment of laws that threaten the work of the independent journalism.

Response Question 3: Today, newspapers, television, radio stations, websites and social media platforms are filled with people who do journalism tasks at different levels. However, the independent media in the Kurdistan region is almost missing and is in danger of extinction. This is due to the inability of the independent media to stand on its own and rely on itself to earn financial revenues.

Response Question 4: The financial situation of the Kurdish media outlets is not good, especially for independent media organizations that are not supported financially by the government or political parties. In the past, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has supported ruling parties' media organizations. In my view, this step was insufficient because it excluded the independent media sector and the online journalism. Which needs a lot of support, their staff suffer from the deterioration of their situation and exploitation by some owners of media organizations.

Questions about Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 6: Certainly, the main constraint to online journalism in Kurdistan is political and financial pressure. The ruling parties are hunting independent journalists or even individuals, who criticize the government or officials. There are many examples that we do not need to mention here.

Response Question 7: If you ask me, I will answer that democracy cannot be practiced in any country without a free and independent media. The online media can reflect in different directions the views and thoughts of people and offer them opinions and topics of discussion and explain the problems of society. All this leads to a great awareness of citizens and the development of democracy. In the Kurdistan region, the most important source of political culture for most people comes mostly from television and radio. Also, online journalism had an impact on promoting democracy.

Questions about Interactivity in Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 8: Depending on our financial and human capabilities, we tried to get a good interest in interactivity, but we focus more on publishing the largest number of news every day.

Response Question 9: The issue of adding interactive features such as customization features to our website has been widely discussed among the editors and the site manager, as well as with the web developers. We have not shown enough interest in this aspect, perhaps the main reason is the management policy of the organization in which we operate, or the lack of sufficient technical expertise to add those features. From my point of view, this is an important issue, but how we apply it is a question that depends on our ability to redesign the entire site, and this requires financial resources and technical and human capabilities, which we do not have now.

Response Question 10: interactivity is an original feature of the new digital media. Interactive includes the relationship between audience and media content by writing comments.

Response Question 11: government or official organisation social media pages could be great official source for us, they always post their press releases through their Facebook before sending them to stream media outlets.

Response Question 12: there are not required number of photos and videos about local and international events in our newsroom and we could not use any image or video we did not have, because if we do that we will break copyright laws. citizen journalists or ordinary social media users violated copyright laws and posted videos of others without permission from their real owners. Mainstream news website is different from social media pages regarding to Kurdish online journalists, we are working for formal media organizations, the copyright doctrine of fair use is integral to our daily routine works. Ordinary people who have social media pages do not usually care about copyright and fair use. They obtain photos, videos and even sometimes full movies then post them in their pages, but we cannot do that, because we are a media organization. My position as a journalist does not allow me to break the copyright. I have to inform the public legally and ethically. So, how I can act illegally

Response Question 14: I consider that interactivity is the most significant feature of new media, it is a positive characteristic of news websites. Interactivity is a vital part of online journalism and makes it more influential

than old or traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television. You can easily follow an important thing, namely that listeners for radio programs or viewers of television channels do not have a good opportunity to participate in order to express their views on the topics being discussed between the presenter and the person being interviewed. However, internet users can write comments on all news reports or articles via websites in abundance.

Response Question 16: we are bemoaned the way social media users freely copies articles, photos or videos from other websites, they believe that they have the right to use everything they find on the web. we could not post most of the user generated content on his website, even if this content is effective and attractive.

Response Question 18: At one point, I decided to add my email with every news story I posted on our website, and indeed this resulted in creating good communication with our website users and there was interaction between us, but this did not continue, I also received threats, scolding and contempt messages from unwanted users. So, I decided to stop giving my email to website users.

Questions about Professionalism and the Journalist's Role

Response Question 20: we think there is no urgent need to learn new skills to use in the preparation of news stories. The newsroom bureaucracy forces us to focus on producing as many news as possible in short time. We are no longer able to prepare video reports or even podcasts. we are interested in learning and increasing our news editing skills if we had more time, but we are often working under the pressure of time and are asked by our editor in chiefs to concentrate on producing a lot of news. Even if we try to learn something, it should be done in our spare time.

Response Question 21: I am a graduate of the Media Department at the Technical Institute. I can confirm that my experience in journalism has gained within media organizations and not within the university's media department. Therefore, I think that the academic institutions in Kurdistan is not at a good level.

Appendix 3.8: transcript of interview with Aram Ghafoor, journalist at Dwarozh.net Kurdish news website.

General Questions about the Media in the Kurdistan Region

Response Question 1: The Kurdish political parties have initiated the re-formation of the Kurdish media, thanks to them and we can not deny it. However, It is certain that the partisan media serves primarily thought and political ideology, and therefore the element of independence and objectivity is not possible within partisan media. This confirms the extent to which this newspaper or that is linked to narrow ideological and political trends, that often have a negative impact on the process of communication inside a media framework devoid of any partisan political orientation.

Response Question 2: The press and media laws in the Kurdistan region do not serve the independent media, and therefore do not represent independent journalists. Because it includes articles that undermine the stability of media institutions, which threatens the independent media. The law also includes several articles that threaten the profession, infringes the freedom of the media and expression, reinforces pre-trial detention in publishing cases and opens the door to punishment for journalists.

Response Question 3: The independent Kurdish media has contributed to positive change in society in general. Because it is a media that is not sponsored by the state, is not issued by the government, and is not issued by political parties. Which makes them work to spread the news and give the most data and information to citizens in the Kurdistan region.

Response Question 4: After 2003, the economic situation in the region improved and, of course, this economic awakening led to the development of independent media. The level of advertising in independent media channels has increased relatively quickly. But this situation did not last long. Because the independent media in Kurdistan did not able to compete media financially supported by the ruling parties. independent Kurdish media organizations pockets could not afford it anymore. some of them such as Awene and Hawlati have been crippled and cannot pay back their huge debts.

Questions about Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 5: The emergence of the Internet and the online journalism in the Kurdistan region opened the door to freedom of expression in front of people and provided enormous potential that can not be predicted for its impact on democracy. The citizen in the Kurdistan region after the arrival of these means changed his view to many of the policies of the Kurdish parties compared with the policies of countries that respect their citizens and provide them with services and conditions of work and adhere to the ethics.

Response Question 6: If we take a closer look inside the Kurdish media organizations, especially the news websites, we find that the financial crises of the Kurdish online journalism and the fragile economic situation of the Kurdish journalists have become real problems that threaten the independence of the media sector. Thus, creating a shortage of staff and hindering the technical improvement of news websites.

Questions about Interactivity in Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 8: We always have to pay attention to the lack of customization personalization in our website, because this feature is very significant in regard to making users feel that our website meets their needs and their desires. As a result, they devote more time to follow the site and return to it constantly and do not leave us permanently.

Response Question 9: I think the Kurdish internet user does not yet benefit from the interactive features of the Kurdish news websites, while the online journalism relies heavily on the interaction between journalists and users, and sharing their personal lives, through text, images, and even videos. However, this interaction is minimal in the Kurdish online journalism due to lack of user interest.

Response Question 11: Online journalism is characterized by its interaction, adding as much interactive features as possible in news websites that lead users to participate. Through my work I noticed that the user was attracted more to news stories rich with interactive features.

Response Question 12: the incorporation of social media into journalistic practice has already created opportunities for Kurdish journalists to interact with social media users, they were able to bring them to their websites. They were also able to engage users in positive political and social discussions, we are always incentivizing our journalists to orient social media use toward users, I think other Kurdish media platforms motivate their editors to use social media for these purposes

Response Question 13: I always adds my personal email to every article I posts on the website. Through my email address I enables users to continue the dialogue with me after the stories are posted. If they have a suggestion or a question about a topic, they sometimes email me. Some users send us news tips via our personal emails.

Response Question 15: customization interactive features could encourage users to spend more time browsing via website pages, and it is significant to meet users wishes so as not to leave the website permanently. The longer website users stay on the website, the more engaged they are, because users always spend more time looking at a website's content if they have a choice to customize topics depending on their needs.

Response Question 16: A journalist who edits a news story or writing an article is one person, the users who read this news are hundreds of people or even thousands. They know a lot about what a reporter writes about. In some cases, users give useful tips to improve journalistic reports. So, if this journalist could handle opening up his or her article to open more information, knowledge and advice from their website users, then their news websites improves. In the same way, the news website journalist should ask users to give additional details about his or her stories if they have any additional data or information about the event, such as photos and videos. It is possible that one of the users is close to where things happen, he becomes a reporter if there is a communication between a journalist in the website and this user.

Response Question 17: my news stories obtain images, videos, hyperlinks as much as possible. Through those types of features users have several choices to examine the news in many ways. Interactive news content features

play important role in the interactivity of online journalism. Editors on Kurdish news websites should think of what they produce for users, they have to focus on availability of multimedia features in every news story they produce.

Response Question 18: I have no information about this, because it is up to our website editor in chief and our website developer, they do not give us information about users.

Questions about Professionalism and the Journalist's Role

Response Question 20: There are skills that must be present in the online journalist to be considered as a professional journalist. For example, he should be able to obtain data, know its collection, organization, analysis, and finally should know how to design it in the form of interactive news stories.

Appendix 3.9: transcript of interview with Pshtiwan Zahir, journalist atXendan.org Kurdish news website.

General Questions about the Media in the Kurdistan Region

Response Question 1: The Kurdish media after 1991 played a very large role in leading the Kurdish people and moving feelings and emotions in order to support the Kurdish issue In the Iraqi Kurdistan region through its various articles in the Kurdish society. It was and will remain the way that stands alongside the independent Kurdish media in spreading ideas, democracy and education. The Kurdish media at that stage also played a role in socialization, advertising, marketing, guidance and publicity.

Response Question 2: Civil society organizations should not blame the Kurdish authorities for prosecuting journalists. Everyone should respect the law. Even in Western countries there are trials of journalists who attack the rights of others by defaming them. What is happening in Kurdistan is an application of the law and not a violation of the freedom of press.

Response Question 3: The Kurdish independent media is not good enough in the Kurdistan region, it was and still lacks professionalism, It has not changed much in terms of form and content. I do not see that those media outlets that call themselves independent, are completely independent. They have their own ideologies and goals.

Questions about Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 5: In the Kurdistan region, democracy depends on the media, especially the online media, which can provide a platform for democratic debate. Kurdish news websites play a good role in this area because they provide the social space through which the right to expression is exercised effectively.

Response Question 6: Some Kurdish media do not suffer from huge problems, but some have financial or technical problems. Large institutions have been able to solve their financial problems through good government support that affects positively on the Kurdish media landscape. The websites established by some journalists without the feasibility study, certainly suffer from lack of money and technical and human capabilities.

Questions about Interactivity in Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 8: interactivity is not the most significant key point of online journalism, we can manage our news website without interactivity. I do not rule out the possibility of getting a lot of users by republishing news articles in the form of texts, without voice, photos and videos on our news website. I do not think of interactivity as much as I think about the credibility of what I edited, it is more important than the interactivity for our news website and our users as well.

Response Question 9: We noted that today more Kurdish users access news and other forms of journalistic articles through social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. They interact with journalists and news websites more directly through such platforms. The increasing of social media users among Kurdish news consumers will affect the ways in which those people consume news and think of news websites, as Kurdish online journalism has been influenced by social media.

Response Question 11: Sometimes there is a causal relationship between increasing the interactive features in the news websites and increasing the number of users and their active participation in the website. However, as I

have pointed out, good news stories attract users significantly even if they do not have interactive features.

Response Question 12: There is an important role for the journalist in the online journalism. A journalist who works in a news website can not be seen as a newspaper journalist. But must be active and follow what is published on the Internet and know how to edit the news for the Web.

Response Question 14: Our website approach toward user-generated content moderation was reading everything the users put up about posted news articles, but after a short period of time, they discovered that their approach was not practical and cost them very much, they have required more than one editor to follow user feedback accurately which can be expensive to run.

Response Question 16: Users generated content always need editorial intervention by news website editors, because user contributions were often extremely dull, providing a strong justification for editorial intervention. the reason why internet users visit their website is to obtain valuable and a well-edited news stories by professional journalists. users should be allowed to place their content in the form of comments on the news website stories, rather than convert that content into articles by news website editors to post them within website sections.

Questions about Professionalism and the Journalist's Role

Response Question 20: I want to learn, I need to develop my skills and abilities in the field of online journalism, but how. When I come to work, I start editing news, translate world topics in other languages, or make contacts with news sources to get some new information. Time executes quickly. Suddenly you see that the working hours are over. Tell me how to learn, or even if there is anyone who teaches me how to edit news for the websites and how to edit video and how to create multimedia. Kurdish online journalism problems are many, there is no serious desire to address them, especially about the development of journalist skills.

Response Question 21: our website manager does not spend enough money on buying photos and videos of local events, and that users rarely send them pictures and videos, and therefore they cannot produce news of an interactive nature. When we start to write any news or article for our website, we think about how should be the content of the story in terms of interactivity. Of course, it is better if there are more photos and videos with every article we create, but there are no enough raw materials such as videos and photos and there is no enough time. Therefore, the lack of news stories rich in video, images and other interactive features is not due to the fact that we do not have the skills to produce such stories.

Appendix 3.10: transcript of interview with Radha Manucheri, journalist at NRTtv.org Kurdish news website.

General Questions about the Media in the Kurdistan Region

Response Question 1: The Kurdish media outlets that emerged after 1991 was purely partisan. From this point of view, there is no doubt that the Kurdish media at this stage served as the political media platform that served the Kurdish parties then the Kurdish people in general. It served as a mouthpiece for its parties. It worked for the benefit of the party and in order to highlight its intellectual orientations, sometimes this media has neglected the important role that it must play, whether it is news or guidance and framing for the formation of positions, and education, in order to contribute to creating a generation conscious of its responsibilities towards its society and the nation.

Response Question 2: It is best to be very careful in dealing with this issue. There are two aspects. First, journalists must respect the law and not infringe upon the privacy of others. Some journalists, especially young journalists, do not care about the ethics and laws of the media. So they fall into errors. The second aspect relates to the authorities' interaction with the media. It is true that there are some serious violations in the Kurdistan region against journalists. There is a threat, arrest and killing of journalists.

Response Question 3: It is true that in the Kurdistan region there is an independent press, which is not controlled by the political parties. But since its inception, it has faced many constraints and challenges that have made it

unable to carry out its mission. As for the most important roles played by the independent Kurdish media, it can be said that it introduced pluralism of opinions to the Kurdish media, before it was the partisan press with a closed and stereotypical approach that serves the party and not the readers. The second role played by the independent Kurdish media is that it has known the public with a new elite that was not allowed to appear. The third function of the independent media is that it has approached the red lines in the state and society.

Questions about Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 5: The role of the Kurdish online journalism in promoting and consolidating democracy is one of the vital roles in the democratic transformations in the Kurdistan region. Especially in terms of its role in monitoring the acts of the Authority and the Government and holding them accountable by the people. Also, by highlighting society issues that need attention, as well as their role in educating citizens so that they can reach political choices. And its role in creating communication between the masses to create social cohesion that enhances the support of civil society.

Response Question 6: In general, the Kurdish online journalism suffers from the lack of journalistic capabilities that we lack in all fields of news websites, which is reflected in the lack of content and layout, as the Kurdish online press needs qualified journalists, and all the Kurdish news sites suffer from a lack of qualified journalists.

Questions about Interactivity in Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 8: Interest in the interactivity in the Kurdish news websites sites at an average level and comes behind the interest in publishing the largest number of news articles. This is a big issue to stand up to and address. Balance must be created by publishing news stories and taking care of the interactive features of the Kurdish online journalism.

Response Question 9: After the development of the internet, new and distinctive media outlets such news websites and social websites have emerged. These media possess unique techniques that are not found in the

traditional media. The most important characteristic of the new media is their possession of interactive tools, which increase the level of interactive communication between journalists and audiences. Interactive is the ability of the new media on the transfer of live information very quickly, and its ability to integrate multimedia such as sound and image and text in one article

Response Question 10: In term of the concept of interactivity, we can assert on the technology aspect of interactivity, such as multimedia, video and audio. It is possible for the user to choose what he needs to read, and not to receive it in the form of text only but be heard or visible on a computer or a smartphone through the internet.

Response Question 11: the idea of interactivity is allowing the user of websites to have access to observing information through several options and forms. Users can get news services of a wide range of expressions of interactivity, text, photos and video in the same web page. They can thus experience the news story by seeing, listening and reading. Today, news websites are offering users a huge amount of interactivity and data accessibility.

Response Question 12: In our website, we still do not have a person to work as a social media manager in order to go through users' comments and social media news articles. It is important for news websites, because sometimes there will be a question by users about our stories, if we have a social media manager, he could let me know then I will respond to the users' comments and questions.

Response Question 13: In order to boost interactivity in our journalism, as much as possible, I do my best to produce interactive news stories that contain many photos, videos and audio files. I have a serious ambition that my news stories must be more than text. It is better for website users to have stories containing rich content. This makes our news stories quite different from stories that are published through newspapers or broadcasted via television channels. Thus, we have to produce news stories quite differently on the web.

Response Question 14: there is a lot of interactive functions and features of news websites. I believe that the main and most important interactive features

of online journalism is immediacy. We can post news articles faster than TV and radio in an instant manner, also update news reports immediately as new information arrives for events. This is interactivity.

Response Question 16: we concern about posting news stories in which there are objective errors or even linguistic errors, because news website editors have become under the heavy scrutiny and strict control from website users. In the past, I was a journalist with a daily newspaper, and we rarely faced criticism because of publishing reports in which there were objective or linguistic errors. but now the situation has changed radically, we have many criticisms, I have to pay attention to user's comments on my articles, so I will not be a bad editor. Our products are constantly changing and evolving because of the contribution of users.

Questions about Professionalism and the Journalist's Role

Response Question 20: At the beginning of my career, I was a news editor at one of the Kurdish newspapers, then I started working in online journalism. In the beginning when I joined the news website editors' team, I did not know how to use the computer and internet. In terms of editing photos, I benefited from the expertise of our website graphic designers. I received a lot of help and guidance from them. I improved my editorial and technical skills step by step. Now I can make multimedia for our website.

Appendix 3.11: transcript of interview with Saman Mohammad, journalist at Westganews.net Kurdish news website.

General Questions about the Media in the Kurdistan Region

Response Question 1: Kurdish media were on the verge of death before 1991, but the Kurdish liberal political parties managed to save and revive the Kurdish press in the Kurdistan region, through the issuance of daily newspapers and the opening of radio and television. This media certainly had a positive impact on the Kurdish society.

Response Question 2: Intellectual property rights must be extended to the websites in order to protect journalists from stealing their news reports and republishing them at other websites without their permission. I have plenty of

experience with this problem, sometimes I worked hard to prepare a news report, and my organization spent money for me to do this job, after we posted it on our website another one copied and republished it without taking our permission, he did not even mention that this report was prepared by me. This is a great challenge for us. We are frustrated by these actions. There is no law that preserves our rights. We have contacted many competent authorities to resolve this problem. They have promised to solve it, but these promises have not been kept and there have been no measures so far.

Response Question 3: The independent media in the Kurdistan region is often harassed because of the challenge to power. And that this infringement on the independent media is the result of the state's attempt and the authority to control the media field, and the attempt of journalists within the independent outlets, to expand the margin of freedom in which they work.

Questions about Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 5: The Kurdish online journalism as a media outlet has played a role in the transformation of the Kurdistan region in the last few years, to the extent that it has sometimes become an instrument of propaganda on the one hand and an important and effective medium of defending freedom of speech and expression on the other.

Response Question 6: There are certainly serious challenges that threaten the status of the Kurdish online journalism. One of these challenges is the financial instability in the Kurdistan region, which is exacerbating the crisis of downsizing of news website journalists.

Questions about Interactivity in Kurdish Online journalism

Response Question 8: Some Kurdish news websites are interested in interactivity seriously and well, because they consider it as a feature that makes online journalism different from traditional media such as newspapers and television.

Response Question 9: interactivity is the space through which the user can leave comments on articles. It enables and facilitates for any user to leave an

impact on the websites. Thus, the website becomes dynamic and involves the recipient in the interactive communication process.

Response Question 10: interactivity is the most important feature of new media, especially news websites. If there are some dimensions of online journalism, then interactivity is the most significant dimension.

Response Question 12: We started relying on social networking sites especially Facebook, we created our pages there. News editors share their news stories via social networking sites and increasingly conduct their work. It also gave opportunities to social media users to get a lot of articles, information and data produced by Kurdish news websites and they could also engage in discussions with their peers about those topics that were re-posted on the social media pages. Of course, it creates a good interaction between the users and their peers, and between users and website editors as well.

Response Question 16: Kurdish activist citizen journalists have been able to boost interactions with news websites; their works invent connections between citizen journalists and professionals. In some cases, individuals or bloggers posted news articles and videos on events were not covered by journalists in news sites because they feared being prosecuted by government authorities, then, that gave courage to website journalists to cover this event later as well.

Response Question 18: I do not know if my website collects user information or not, so far, I have not had such an idea, I think this could be a violation of users' privacy.

Questions about Professionalism and the Journalist's Role

Response Question 20: For a journalist who works for Kurdish news websites, it is necessary to know foreign languages such as English and Arabic, then he should know how to use computer and editing software such as Photoshop and video editing software.

Response Question 22: I understood the importance of experiential learning in online journalism education and getting lessons in the practice of multimedia journalism, but the academic institutions in Kurdistan have not played a significant role in this field. We are working for news websites, so we have to

produce multimedia news stories that meet the demands of our website users. To achieve this goal, we need training that improve our journalistic and technical skills and keep us up to speed. Unfortunately, media education programs in the Kurdistan universities and institutions are basically unprepared to respond to such deeply technical changes in the online journalism. Most of the media department teachers or trainers in our universities are not professional journalists and never worked for media such as television, radio and news websites. They practically do not have the skills we need for online journalism.

Appendix 3.12: transcript of interview with Zanst Jamal, co-founder and managing director of Avesta Group for IT solution.

Questions about technical aspect

Response Question 23: Internet services are not good enough in the Kurdistan region, there are serious projects to address this problem, if we compare Kurdistan with other parts of Iraq, the Internet infrastructure here is much better than other Iraqi cities. But we always want the best, that's good.

Response Question 24: The web designer does not necessarily have to know the press, because web design is something and journalism is something else. the difference between disciplines should not be confused. I am a web designer and not a journalist. I will not edit news or prepare press reports. We do what we are asked, for news websites, the editor in chief should give us a detailed idea of how the external design of his website, and we are trying to accomplish this idea. For interactive features, if you ask us, we try to put them into the site as much as possible. We are very busy, we have many projects, we cannot accomplish everything quickly.

Response Question 25: The main problem for web developers is trying to hack websites by hackers. Every day we have to allocate a lot of time to address the problems of penetration in sites that we manage technically. In some cases, it is a great breakthrough attempt and creates shocks. The government will not try to address this problem and will not be spared the hackers.