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# The concept of professionalism in media from the journalists' perspective in Jordan

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## Abstract

The study aimed at identifying the level of awareness of Jordanian journalists and social media activists of the professionalism concept in the media. This study was based on the survey method, which is an organized approach in obtaining information, data, phenomenon descriptions. As a result, there is a statistically significant difference in the awareness of Jordanian journalists and activists of social networking sites of how each group perceives their nature role towards their society in what they publish. In conclusion, journalists are more likely to violate ethical practices in journalism for the public good than activists.

**Keywords:** Social media, Professionalism, Activists, Liberty.

## El concepto de profesionalismo en los medios desde la perspectiva de los periodistas en Jordania

### Resumen

El estudio tuvo como objetivo identificar el nivel de conciencia de los periodistas jordanos y los activistas de las redes sociales sobre el concepto de profesionalismo en los medios. Este estudio se basó en el método de encuesta, que es un enfoque organizado para obtener información, datos y descripciones de fenómenos. Como resultado, existe una diferencia estadísticamente significativa en la conciencia de los periodistas y activistas jordanos de los sitios de redes sociales de cómo cada grupo percibe su papel de naturaleza hacia su sociedad en lo que publican. En conclusión, es más probable que los periodistas violen las prácticas éticas en el periodismo para el bien público que los activistas.

**Palabras clave:** Redes sociales, Profesionalismo, Activistas, Libertad.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

With the increasing use of social media platforms, and the widespread dissemination of various issues, topics, events and the dissemination of opinions and ideas, new problems have emerged in the extent to which media professionals and activists on social media platforms understand the concept of Professionalism in the media, in the face of what is published and what is not, and its relation to the common good of the society.

The events and issues of public interest have revealed numerous abuses committed in the name of freedom of expression by some

activists on social media platforms in publishing fabricated news, images, unrelated images and comments on current events without realizing the professional origins of publishing, especially the information neutrality and credibility, and to ensure that there is no privacy violated(1) as well as affecting the conduct of justice in investigative cases and national security, which prompted the Public Prosecutor's Office in some Arab countries to take decisions to ban publishing every time there is a crisis or incident that concerns the local public.

Social media platforms are considered the catalyst for the growth and spread of rumors and fabricated news, which have a very negative impact on individuals and society, especially in a period of crisis and heated events. For example, the publication and circulation of many fabricated rumors in the Jordanian society were monitored through social media platforms. One of these events was the security raid in the city of Irbid, which took place on March 2, 2016, where alleged pictures of the martyr Rashid al-Zayoud, who was killed in action, were published on the background of the raid, which later they turned out to be pictures that belong to an Officer of the Jordanian Arab Army, Lieutenant Mohammed Hilal al-Haniti, which had nothing to do with the martyr, in addition to the circulation of alleged images of the security raid, which later turned out to be untrue. The events of the Karak terrorist operation that took place on December 18, 2016, had the biggest share of pictures and live broadcast on Facebook that included voice comments that had nothing to do with the events of the real operation, and other events that formed a vital medium for rumors.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

Professionalism in media is a fundamental pillar of forming a sound public opinion that contributes to promoting citizens' participation in democratic life and the decision-making process, this comes only through the production of media content that respects the foundations of professionalism based on neutrality, objectivity, pluralism, balance, and inclusiveness in the offering and adhering to these professional standards, which means that the media professionals have their responsibilities towards their communities, and their shortcomings negatively affect public life and leave room for spreading rumors and misleading and false news.

This study was based on the survey method, which is one of the most prominent approaches used in the field of media studies, particularly descriptive research, which is an organized approach in obtaining information, data, phenomenon descriptions and aiming at creating a basic database of data on a particular topic. The study population consists of journalists, media professionals and social media activists in Jordan. The number of study sample members was also determined in accordance with the objectives and questions of the study, and in a way that would allow the study results to be generalized.

There are 1,215 members of the Jordanian Journalists Syndicate (JJS), who work for daily newspapers, news sites, television stations, and radio stations, which was chosen by using the simple random

sampling method. As for the sample of activists in social media, their list was obtained through the Klout program, which uses social network statistics to rank their users according to their influence on the users of these networks, through the Klout score, which is a 100 points that measure the strength of the activist's influence. For the purposes of this research, those who have 40 points have been chosen as an impact measure to enter the study sample. Klout measures impact by using data such as: The number of following, followers, and the number of retweets, as well as the influence impact of users who retweeted or mentioned reference to the account, the number of members of the lists, and the number of fake and non-interactive accounts that follow the user (DONSBACH & KLETT, 1993).

A total of 300 individuals were selected for the study, divided by 150 journalists and 150 activists. The researchers designed a questionnaire as a tool for study, and distributed the questionnaire electronically via the available e-mails for the researchers through the register of the syndicate and the Klout list of the activists, to identify the elements of professionalism in the media and the roles related to the press in the community. They are made up of several categories depending on the research objectives: The nature of the journalist and activist's awareness of his role and perceptions of society was determined by a quadruple scale of and roles and perceptions were divided into several categories, including fifteen phrases that measure the four roles (see table 1). The ethical perception variable was measured by a quadruple scale of, and the extent of perception of

ethical practices was divided into several categories, including 10 ethical practices (see table 2).

Vision and philosophy were measured over a five-way scale distributed between highly agreeable to highly unfavorable, consisting of eight phrases that measure the concept of freedom and ten phrases that measure the concept of social responsibility (see tables 3 and 4). For this study, the researchers, after the completion of the data collection, merged the categories very acceptable and acceptable into one acceptable category, and also merged an unacceptable category and an unacceptable category into one unacceptable category. At the same time, the approved and strongly approved categories were merged with one category: Approved, and the two categories disapproved and strongly disapproved were merged with one category, Disapproved. As for the important and very important category, they were merged into one Important category, as well as the two categories that are unimportant and unimportant at all were merged into the Unimportant category.

To confirm the validity of the tool, and the questionnaire designed is measuring what it was developed to measure, the virtual honesty face validity was conducted by presenting it to arbitration by several academics in the field of media which provided the researcher with several observations that were taken and modified in form and content to make the questionnaire ready for data collection. The (Cronbach Alpha) coefficient was used on the questionnaire questions where the Cronbach alpha coefficient = (0.876) of the concept of role,

(0.86) of the concept of ethical practices, and (830.) of the concepts of freedom and social responsibility, all of which indicate that the instrument has a high and strong correlation factor.

The researchers used the statistical package of social and human sciences through The Statistical Program (SPSS) and after collecting, reviewing the data, the percentages, frequencies, arithmetic averages, and standard deviations were calculated. Use the t-test to calculate the differences between the mathematical averages of activists and journalists 9 (HACKETT, 1984).

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Data in Table 1 indicates that the nature of the perceptions of journalists and social media activists are divided into four professional roles played by the journalist and activist towards their community, 1- interpretive role, 2- adversial role, 3 – disseminator role, 4 – mobilizer role. The results of the table indicate that there is a significant difference in the perception of both journalists and social media activists about the nature of their respective roles towards their communities. While journalists see their role as primarily explanatory (average is 3.5 out of 4) and then the mobilizer role (average is 3.4), social media activists see their role towards their communities as adversial to the governments and the private sector (average is 3.3) and then the information dissemination role (BEAM, BROWNLEE, WEAVER, & DICICCO, 2009).

The table data shows, according to the t-test, that there are statistically significant differences between journalists and activists regarding each group's understanding of the nature of their roles towards their communities, as the level of significance was (0.001), which indicates that differences are indicating that it is below the level (0.05), where the value of t is 2.434. According to the data, journalists see themselves as less like information publishers (average is 2.2 out of 4) as well as the role of government and private sector litigation (average is 2.1). Quite the contrary, social media activists find that their role is not very much inclined to be mobilizer (average is 1.4) or interpretation (ERICSON, 1998).

This result can be explained by the fact that journalists are more appreciative of the press' roles towards society, especially in the serving the common good, specifically in the interpretation of facts, issues and events, which are based mainly on the mobilizer role that sets the agenda for people (95 percent), directing people towards the solutions of the social problems (88%), unlike activists who are absent from the importance of presenting the concept of the public good, which is one of the most important pillars of the professionalism in journalism concept, therefore the results showed that there is a tendency to review and stardom and the activists tend to provide speed in publishing (95 %) and focus only on the news that interests their followers (99%) and contradict the liabilities (91%) At the expense of the explanatory and tactical role (see Table 1).

Overall, it was the difference in the perceptions of professional elements and journalism that made the interpretive and mobilizing role the most important in the sample of journalists, while the two, adversarial and publishing roles, and were the most important among the sample of activists. This study is consistent with the study BEAM, WEAVER, BROWNLEE (2009) which showed that journalists became more ethically cautious during the study period and therefore have a moral responsibility towards their communities.

Table 1: The nature of the study sample's awareness of the most important professional roles

The role	Journalists			Activists		Average	Rank for the role
	Important	Unimportant	Average	Important	Unimportant		
Analysis and interpretation of complex problems	130 87%	20 13%	2.9	56 37%	94 63%	1.2	Interpretative
Surveying and verification of government data	136 91%	14 9%	2.6	36 24%	114 76%	1.4	
Analysis and interpretation of international developments	132 88%	18 12%	2.8	136	14	1.5	
Discussion of local policy developments	144 96%	6 4%	2.9	89	61	2.1	
Total			2.8			1.55	
The opposition of	34 23%	116 77%	2.6	136 91%	24 9%	3.1	The adversarial

government officials							
The opposition of businesses and the private sector	26 17%	124 83%	1.8	121 81%	29 19%	3.6	
Total						3.3	
The delivery of information to the public quickly	66 44%	84 56%	1.4	142 95%	8 5%	2.6	Dissementator
Providing recreational and leisure	31 21%	119 79%	1.1	127 85%	23 15%	3.7	
Avoid unverifiable news	127 85%	23 15%	3.2	132 88%	18 12%	2.9	
The focus on news that interests the largest percentage of followers	84 56%	66 44%	2.9	148 99%	2 1%	3.7	
Total			2.1			3.21	
Giving ordinary people a chance to express their views by posting their comments	80 53%	70 47%	2.9	143 95%	7 5%	1.2	mobilizer
Developing people's intellectual and cultural interests	116 77%	34 23%	3.1	37 25%	113 75%	1.7	
Motivating ordinary people to participate	121 81%	29 19%	3.6	29 19%	121 81%	2.1	
Guiding people towards solutions to social problems	131 88%	19 12%	3.9	76 51%	74 49%	2.3	
Developing and defining political agendas	143 95%	7 5%	3.8	34 23%	116 77%	1.1	
Total			3.4			1.48	

**Table 2: The importance of adhering to ethical practices**

Ethical practices	Journalists		Activists	
	Acceptable	Un acceptable	Acceptable	Un acceptable
Paying the news sources for confidential information	21 14%	129 86%	10 7%	140 93%
Impersonating someone else to get information	121 81%	19 19%	32 21%	118 89%
Failure to fulfill the pledge of confidentiality	136 91%	14 9%	17 11%	133 89%
Pressuring a news source for information	118 79%	32 21%	6 4%	144 96%
Usage of personal documents without permission	76 51%	74 49%	133 89%	17 11%
Getting a job to get inside information	42 18%	108 72%	90 60%	60 40%
Using microphones, hidden cameras or secret methods	61 41%	89 59%	53 35%	97 65%
Using dramatic news representation	8 5%	142 95%	77 51%	73 49%
Uncovering the victims of terrorism and crimes names	3 2%	147 98%	31 21%	117 79%
Getting popularity prioritized on any goal	25 17%	125 83%	17 11%	133 89%
<b>Total</b>	339 39.9%	601 60.1%	310 31%	690 69%

Data in Table (2) indicates that journalists are more inclined to break the ethical rules of publishing and are more acceptable for non-compliance, as 39.9% of journalists consider these ethical practices acceptable in violation of work compared to activists on social media platforms who showed a 31 percent lower acceptance rate for these ethical behaviors. According to the t-test, there are statistically

significant differences between journalists and activists regarding the understanding of each group of adherence to ethical practices in publishing, as the level of significance were (0.02), which indicates that there are significant differences because it is below the level (0.05), with a t value of 11.324 (HOLTON, CODDINGTON & GIL DE ZÚÑIGA, 2013).

This result can be explained by the fact that activists are less willing to break the ethical practices of publishing within three possible interpretations, the first is that journalists are more aware of the concept of the common good in journalism, which is a concept that allows a professional journalist in special cases to justify the violation of these morals and practice these behaviors because the interest of society and its right to know is prioritized on any personal, private or limited rights. Second, most of these practices are related to the journalist's relationship with sources, i.e. individuals or entities that provide the journalist with information about events and developments by assigning published information to their sources, a process that gives the journalist legitimacy in what is published and credibility in what is reported about any event, unlike the activist on social media, which lacks this deep awareness of the importance of having an information resources network of analysts, experts, reports and others, therefore the activist relies on his personal experience or social relationships rather than access to specialized sources of information in what he publishes.

Third, the researchers believe that the activists tended to present themselves in the form of idealism, by making sure that the practices mentioned are unacceptable, such as not resorting to methods that violate morality, the rules of conduct and perhaps the closest explanation for this result is the activists' attempt to defend themselves from the accusations that the government makes every time which is that social media platforms are the cause of the chaos in the formation of a deviant public opinion and the cause of all the practices that the society sees, from assassination, cursing and vilification and other practices that have given the society a negative impression of activists as they are the source of rumors and the promotion of fabrications and lies.

This result is consistent with a study which, by assessing the ethical standard of media credibility to determine predictions about their perceptions about the roles, shows that citizen journalists view their roles as generally similar to professional journalists, and see their roles as generally similar to professional journalists, they even classify themselves that they are playing more prominent roles.

Looking at the data of Tables (3) and (4), which show that the journalists and the activists are aware of the concepts of freedom and social responsibility during the publication of topics, the data indicate that there is a different perception between the two samples of the study to each concept. The t-test indicates that there are statistically significant differences between journalists on the one hand and activists on the other for the concept of freedom in the publishing

process as the level of significance reached (0.001), which indicates the existence of statistically significant differences below the level (0.05) where the value of t is 9.365 as well as the case in the perception of both samples as for the concept of social responsibility, the level of significance was (0.003), which indicates that there are statistically significant differences below the level (0.05) where the value (t) was 12.112.

Table 3: The study sample's understanding of the concept of freedom during the publication

Narration and Philosophy	Journalists		Activists	
	Approve	Disapprove	Approve	Disapprove
The nonsubjectivity of the media to previous censorship	131 87%	19 13%	141 94%	9 6%
The right to publish and address ideas and opinions without restrictions on any subject	122 81%	28 19%	148 99%	2 1%
What is published should only be controlled in exceptional circumstances and situations of war and emergencies.	106 71%	44 29%	145 97%	5 3%
It is not permissible to criminalize what is published on any media	86 57%	64 43%	138 92%	12 8%
Private lives of individuals and their handling through the media comes out of freedom	69 46%	81 54%	126 84%	24 16%
Everyone has the right to have a media outlet through which expresses without objection from the government.	52 35%	98 65%	150 100%	Zero
Displaying media material that includes excitement is a form of freedom	11 7%	139 93%	74 49%	76 51%

Media freedom to obtain news and freedom of reference to sources of information	118 79%	32 21%	142 94%	8 6%
Total	473 47%	527 53%	909 91%	91 9%

From the tables (3) and (4) data, it is easy to conclude that Jordanian journalists working in press organizations are more inclined to adopt the concept of social responsibility in their dissemination of media content than activists on social media platforms which are more inclined to adopt the concept of absolute freedom theory in the content they post across the platforms. According to Table (4) data, journalists are more likely to adopt the concept of social responsibility, with a total of 78 percent compared to the 57 percent of activists.

The vast majority (91%) of the activists, according to table data, are more inclined to embrace the concept of freedom in what they publish versus (47%) of the journalists. In the philosophy of social responsibility, journalists are unanimous (100%) believe that the media are required to set professional standards, such as objectivity, neutrality, balance, pluralism, and accuracy, while according to 99 percent of the activists believe that they have the right to publish ideas and opinions without restrictions, on any subject, and 92 percent of them believe that what is published in any media should not be criminalized

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This result is consistent with LEWIS (2006) study, which showed that there is a need for a new generation of media laws, which face challenges regarding the issue of ethics and excessive freedom in modern media and deliberated several ethical violations caused by freedom of publication. This result is consistent with the study of LEWIS, KAUFHOLD & LASORSA (2010). The results showed that some newspaper editors prefer citizen journalism based on theoretical grounds, while others resent its use for practical reasons.

Contributing to the increase in content created by citizen journalists, the study also recommended the need for a better understanding of the social responsibility theory, which its importance to the citizen press is increasing daily. LEWIS's study (2006) based on a combination of two competitive philosophical approaches and normative theories, specifically using the principles of social responsibility theory, because of its professional independent criteria. The results concluded that the term socially responsible is a journalist who chose to be a reliable source of information that serves the public interest and applying this framework by looking at blogs and the proliferation of sources of information.

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