Original Article

The Institutional Roles of Journalism Cultures in Post-Conflict Societies

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ABSTRACT

This study contends that the traditional occupational values underpinning journalism are becoming increasingly ambiguous, while established normative frameworks have diminished in their prescriptive influence. Employing Hanitzsch's (2011) typology of journalism cultures—namely, the Populist Disseminator, Detached Watchdog, Critical Change Agent, and Opportunist Facilitator—the research analyzes responses from a structured survey of 142 media professionals. Through the application of the Priority Model, the study examines how these professional role orientations intersect with neo-Gramscian perspectives on hegemony, particularly in shaping journalists' priorities during news production and dissemination. This study examines the institutional roles of journalism cultures within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), with particular emphasis on their shifting involvement in wider societal responsibilities in the aftermath of regional conflict in the Middle East. Within these transitional societies, where political and media landscapes are in the process of democratization, journalism operates amid ongoing tensions between professional norms and partisan interests. Although traditionally defined by institutionalized practices, normative values, and a distinct occupational identity—serving as a buffer against forces such as commercialization—the conception and enactment of journalistic 'professionalism' among Iraqi Kurdish journalists necessitate critical reevaluation. Building on contemporary scholarship, the study redefines professionalism as a dynamic and discursively constructed notion, frequently mobilized in moments of institutional fragmentation and declining legitimacy.

Keywords: Journalism Cultures, Institutional Roles, Professionalism, Hegemony, and the Kurdistan Region

INTRODUCTION

1. RESEARCH INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the Iraqi Kurdish society, by examining the professional role orientations of journalists operating within a post-conflict and transitional media landscape. The evolving status of journalism in such contexts has garnered increasing scholarly attention, particularly as media institutions and journalists themselves function within fluid and often volatile political environments. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) presents a pertinent case, characterized by profound political, cultural, and institutional transformations. Against this backdrop, the research aims to conduct a comparative analysis to assess Kurdish journalists' awareness of their professional responsibilities and ethical obligations—situated between the ideals of democratic media practice and the realities of political party influence, both of which are central to most democratizing media systems. Journalistic professionalism in post-conflict societies is increasingly conceptualized as a contested domain. While journalism is traditionally understood as a profession defined by normative standards, technical competencies, and a collective occupational identity, these foundations are routinely challenged by political pressures, market-driven imperatives, and ideological divisions. In the Kurdish context—marked by a complex interplay of socio-political forces—there is a pressing need to critically reassess the meaning and enactment of 'professionalism.' This research contributes to broader debates by treating professionalism not as a fixed consensus, but as a flexible and discursively constructed reference point, subject to contextual interpretation and contestation (Aivas, 2020). Drawing on literature that highlights the discursive nature of professional identity—particularly in times when its legitimacy is perceived to be in decline—this study locates professionalism in the everyday practices of Kurdish journalists. It argues that traditional notions of professional roles are

increasingly untenable when grounded in normative ideals, and that contemporary journalistic identities may more accurately reflect processes of strategic negotiation and identity formation than strict adherence to conventional norms. To investigate these dynamics, the study employs Hanitzsch's (2011) typology of journalism cultures—Populist Disseminator, Detached Watchdog, Critical Change Agent, and Opportunist Facilitator—as its analytical framework. Utilizing survey data from 142 Kurdish media professionals, the analysis explores how these role orientations reflect broader ideological patterns and hegemonic structures within Kurdish media discourse. Adopting a neo-Gramscian perspective and applying the Priority Model (PM) as a lens through which journalistic practice is examined, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of professionalism, hegemony, and transformation within media systems in post-conflict settings.

2. Research Theoritical Framwork

The normative obligations and practical contributions of journalism culture within society originate from the foundational domain of institutional roles. Early research has described these roles as "professional role perceptions or conceptions, news or press functions, and media roles" (Aivas, 2017). Contemporary approaches have more introduced concepts such as journalistic paradigms or news ideologies. In light of this, Hanitzsch and Maximilians (2013) have examined global perspectives on role perceptions and professional values, adhering to the concept of role perceptions to maintain clarity. This study consistently employs the term "role perceptions" to avoid unnecessary conceptual complexity, as the phrase is well-established in academic discourse and recognized to some extent by practitioners. Several scholars have explored role perceptions as a "shared set of professional parameters or imperatives" (see Hussein et al., 2025; Aivas, 2020; Relly et al., 2015; Pihl-Thingvad, 2014; Pintak & Nazir, 2013). Some researchers interpret this concept as the secularization of news media system models or as an indicator of the "limits of homogenization" (Hallin & Mancini, 2010). In recent years, journalism cultures have reflected the tensions of globalization, particularly between homogenizing forces and cultural heterogeneity (Waisbord, 2013). Consequently, journalists' professional role perceptions continue to evolve due to the dynamic nature of global journalism practices and the interaction of diverse cultural, religious, regional, ethnic, and political identities (Aivas, 2022; Relly et al., 2015; Pintak, 2014; Waisbord, 2013; Rawnsley & Rawnsley, 2012; Kim & Hama-Saeed, 2008; Hanitzsch, 2007; Duez, 2005; Gross, 1996). The conceptual ambiguity surrounding role perceptions arises from their ability to diminish distinctions within role orientations when applied to journalistic professional values within specific societal contexts. Consequently, scholars have struggled to differentiate between subjective and normative role orientations. Additionally, "role perceptions" may further overlap with "role performance" as observed in journalistic practices (Hanitzsch & Maximilians, 2013). Cohen (1963), in her seminal critique of role conceptions, categorized journalists' role perceptions into two fundamental sets: "neutral" and "participant." Within this framework, journalists either function as neutral observers who provide information for policymakers or actively participate in shaping policy decisions (Qaradakhi & Aivas, 2020). The former aligns journalists with the public as partners in the policy process, whereas the latter situates them at the formal policy-making level (Cohen, 1963). Johnstone et al. (1972) were among the first to empirically examine these distinctions in a study of 1,313 full-time journalists. Their findings revealed that the neutral role perception received limited support in the U.S., whereas the participant role was widely endorsed. However, these roles are not mutually exclusive, as many journalists incorporate elements of both perspectives in their professional beliefs (Hanitzsch & Maximilians, 2013). Further elaboration on journalistic roles was provided by Johnstone et al. (1976, 1972), who introduced the "interpreter" role, wherein journalists analyze complex issues, and the "disseminator" role, which prioritizes rapid information dissemination to the public. Additionally, Weaver and Wilhoit (1996, 1986) introduced the "adversarial" role, which emphasizes journalists' responsibility to scrutinize government claims. Donsbach and Patterson (2004) later proposed a model-distinguishing journalist along two dimensions: passive-active and neutral-advocate. Based on their comparative study of journalists in the U.S., U.K., Germany, Sweden, and Italy, they concluded that journalists' independence from

interested parties is reflected in the passive-active spectrum, while their willingness to take a stance on an issue is captured in the neutral-advocate dimension. In the 1990s, the "populist mobilizer" role emerged within public journalism, advocating for ordinary citizens' participation in governmental discourse, a feature commonly observed in democratic societies (Weaver et al., 2007). For instance, during the rule of the former Iraqi Ba'ath regime, Kurdish citizens were prohibited from expressing political views. However, the populist mobilizer role aligns with Western journalistic traditions, as outlined in Weaver and Wilhoit's (1991) research on American journalists' role perceptions. The normative professional model shaping survey questionnaires may have influenced responses in these studies (Hanitzsch, 2007; Josephi, 2006). More recently, Hanitzsch (2013) has conceptualized the professional role of journalists as an integral aspect of journalism culture, shaped by competing pressures such as detachment versus involvement, loyalty versus adversarial journalism, and an audience-oriented approach that treats the public either as consumers or as citizens. Similarly, Christians et al. (2009) identified key tensions in journalistic roles, including neutrality versus participation, gatekeeping versus advocacy, and fact reporting versus interpretation and commentary. The increasing commercialization of global news media has exacerbated these tensions, as journalists balance broad audience engagement with civic responsibilities (Tandoc et al., 2013). While commercialization is a prevailing trend, the traditional gatekeeping role of journalists has diminished significantly in the digital age, particularly following the rise of platforms like WikiLeaks (Aziz & Aivas, 2025). The interventionist role of journalists has been conceptualized as an "involvement sequence," ranging from "passive" (low involvement) to "interventionist" (high involvement) (Himelboim & Limor, 2005). Hanitzsch (2007) further identified interventionism as one of three core institutional dimensions of journalism culture, distinguishing between two journalist types. The interventionist journalist is characterized by active involvement, assertiveness, motivation, and social commitment, while the detached journalist maintains neutrality, impartiality, fairness, and objectivity (Aivas and Abdulla 2021). In the context of this study, both interventionist and detached

journalists have been surveyed to analyze their role perceptions within Kurdish culture, as well as their journalistic approaches to gathering and disclosing private and public information in Iraqi Kurdistan—a region undergoing democratization following a period of conflict. Many scholars argue that the roles of "gatekeeper" and "neutral disseminator" align with the passive extreme of the interventionism spectrum. Within this framework, journalism cultures emphasize principles such as impartiality, detachment, fairness, neutrality, and objectivity—values deeply embedded in the historical foundations of Western journalism, particularly in the United States (see Hassan & Aivas, 2024; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991; Janowitz, 1975; Cohen, 1963). In this context, newsrooms are primarily governed by occupational cultures in which journalists adhere to professional journalism norms, focusing on the informational role of media. Consequently, journalists perceive their function as that of impartial news providers, facilitating vertical communication within societies. In most liberal democracies, the commercial imperatives of media organizations align with these professional standards, reinforcing impartiality and neutrality while upholding the institutional separation of the press from the state. Conversely, in countries such as Russia and China, media institutions are frequently subject to political influence and ideological control (Aivas, 2022; Hanitzsch et al., 2014; Rawnsley & Rawnsley, 2010; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Lee, 2001; Golding, 1977). In many regions of South America, journalism continues to transition from a politically engaged model to a more passive approach. As a result, journalists in these contexts often adopt interventionist-reporting methods. When functioning in roles such as "participant," "advocate," or "missionary," journalists exhibit a stronger commitment to active engagement in news reporting, embodying the interventionist end of the spectrum (Donsbach & Patterson, 2004; Köcher, 1986; Janowitz, 1975; Cohen, 1963). Globally, different journalism cultures have adopted interventionist practices, often advocating on behalf of marginalized groups, such as victims of sexual offenses, or acting as spokespersons for political parties and other interest groups. Changes in these journalistic patterns are closely linked to democratization, as they reflect the evolving political and media landscapes in both Western and non-

Western contexts. Aivas (2020), in his study of *Kurdish journalism cultures*, explored these connections in greater depth, particularly in relation to the democratization of Kurdistan and its evolving media environment in northern Iraq. Beyond media transformations, broader policy, economic, and social changes have influenced responses to issues such as sexual crimes, including rape, pedophilia, and violations of information privacy. The prevalence of such offenses has risen globally, and responses to these crimes vary across cultures. While some societies have resolved these issues through social agreements rather than legal prosecution, others have implemented stringent legal frameworks to address and prevent such behavior. For example, the United Kingdom enforces strict legislation regarding sex offenders, as demonstrated by the implementation of "Sarah's Law." This law, named after Sarah Payne, an eight-year-old murder victim, grants parents and guardians the right to access information about convicted child sex offenders residing in their communities. The Sun as the British tabloid newspaper played a significant role in advocating for this law by publicly disclosing the identities of 157 convicted pedophiles to concerned parents. While this initiative aimed to enhance child safety, it also led to unintended consequences, such as the wrongful targeting of a pediatrician due to confusion with the term "paedophile" (Sun, 2016). According to the UK Home Office, Britain has established one of the world's most rigorous systems for monitoring known sex offenders. The discourse surrounding professionalism in journalism remains ongoing. Various journalistic cultures indicate that the concept of power distance plays a significant role in shaping journalists' positions relative to centers of authority within society. This concept aligns with the "adversary sequence," initially introduced by Himelboim and Limor. Additionally, Hofstede (1980) originally conceptualized power distance as one of the core dimensions of cultural differences. Within journalism, the "adversary" pole (high power distance) represents a stance that openly challenges authorities (Hanitzsch, 2005). In liberal democracies, this function is closely linked to the "fourth estate" concept, where journalism operates as a counterbalance to governmental power. The tradition of "adversarial journalism" positions journalists as agents of social oversight often referred to as "watchdogs" (Aivas, 2014; Gans, 1979; Schramm, 1964). According to McQuail (2000) and Fuller (1996), adversarial journalism serves to provide independent and radical critiques of societal institutions, driven by skepticism and resistance to official narratives due to persistent censorship and pressures on the press. While adversarial journalism in some Asian and Eastern cultures may face challenges due to societal preferences for harmony and consensus, in other regions, journalists have circumvented press restrictions by openly challenging authority (Hanitzsch, 2007). For instance, Ma (2000) observes that Chinese media professionals employ "double coding," embedding critical messages within censored content, which a discerning audience can interpret subversively. A similar approach was observed in Suharto-era Indonesia, where journalists strategically conveyed serious messages in a seemingly non-serious manner (Nasution, 1996). Conversely, the "loyal" pole (low power distance) of this dimension represents journalism that aligns closely with state ideologies. In such contexts, journalism functions as an instrument of state propaganda, either through "agitator journalism" (Wu et al., 1996) or by assuming a "propagandist role" (Pasti, 2005). Journalists in these environments serve as mouthpieces for the government or political parties, defending authorities and practicing self-censorship. They perceive their role as guiding public opinion and influencing governance on behalf of the people (Lee, 2001). Agitator journalism refrains from questioning authority, instead reinforcing established norms and leaders, often in indirect ways. This is evident in "protocol news" in Uganda (Mwesige, 2004) and the Mexican tradition of "oficialista" journalism (Hallin, 2000). Hanitzsch (2007) notes that such journalists devote disproportionate coverage to authorities and rarely challenge official narratives. They typically regard government-provided information as credible and authoritative, effectively functioning as public relations intermediaries. From a Gramscian perspective, dominant political and social groups manipulate media institutions to propagate their ideology as common sense. In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, partisan media, whether official or unofficial (also known as shadow media), operate similarly. However, journalists in Western democracies may either conform to this model or adhere to professional principles by independently

verifying information rather than relying solely on governmental sources. Within professional journalism cultures, market orientation represents the third dimension of institutional roles, influencing how journalists address audiences, whether as citizens or consumers (Hanitzsch, 2013). A study by Marr et al. (2001) on Swiss journalists highlights the dichotomy between market-driven journalism and journalism that prioritizes public needs. The latter is essential to democratic societies, ensuring an informed citizenry and fostering political participation (Aivas et al., 2025; Hanitzsch, 2007). In journalism cultures with lower market orientation, journalists prioritize public interest by focusing on political information and civic engagement. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) argue that journalism's fundamental objective in such cultures is to provide citizens with the information necessary for autonomous decision-making. Conversely, in cultures where market orientation dominates, journalistic priorities are subordinated to commercial imperatives. Here, emphasis is placed on audience preferences rather than on the information, they should be aware of. Campbell (2004) notes that such journalism prioritizes consumer interests, emotional engagement, and entertainment over substantive political and social issues. A ratings-driven mentality characterizes market-oriented journalism, which is particularly prevalent in commercial media, where individual viewpoints are increasingly foregrounded (Hanitzsch, 2007; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Bourdieu, 1998). Across various media organizations, journalism that provides guidance, advice, and practical information for everyday life reflects a market-driven approach. This form of "service journalism" offers "news-you-can-use" (Underwood, 2001; Eide & Knight, 1999), which easily transitions into entertainment-oriented journalism. Empirical studies in Germany and Indonesia confirm a trend toward combining informational content with entertainment, as evidenced by the rise of lifestyle journalism and infotainment (Aivas, 2020; Hanitzsch, 2007; Scholl & Weischenberg, 1998). The notion of social responsibility differs significantly between Eastern and Western journalism cultures. While Eastern journalism often incorporates social responsibility principles, market orientation is perceived as a negative influence. In many Asian media environments, journalistic responsibility is associated with maintaining social harmony and respecting leadership, leading to reluctance in covering content that may disrupt societal stability. Rosen (2000) links public journalism to civic engagement, emphasizing journalism's role in serving the public interest. This perspective aligns with scholars such as Aivas (2020), Hanitzsch (2007), Gunaratne (2006), and Xiaoge (2005), who highlight the importance of journalism in facilitating political discourse and civic participation.

3. Research Data Collection

As part of the data collection process, this study employed a quantitative questionnaire survey to explore the perspectives of journalists with e*ditorial responsibilities in the production or dissemination of news and information,* following the definition established by Weaver and Wilhoit (1986, p. 168). A total of 142 Iraqi Kurdish journalists participated in the survey, including two freelancers, representing 29 media organizations. The respondents were active across a range of platforms, including print (newspapers and magazines), broadcast (radio and television), and digital media (news websites and agencies). The survey encompassed a diverse spectrum of media institutions, including both officially affiliated and unofficial partisan outlets, as well as those claiming editorial independence within the Iraqi Kurdish media ecosystem. According to Berelson (1952), three systematic processes underlie media sampling: the selection of media titles, the sampling of publication dates or issues, and the sampling of relevant content. Probability sampling methods—such as simple random sampling, systematic sampling, stratified random sampling, and multi-stage cluster sampling—are typically used to mitigate sampling bias. However, this study employed a non-probability sampling strategy, acknowledging the lack of certainty regarding the sample's representativeness of the broader journalist population (Bryman, 2012). Details regarding the sampling process and population size are outlined in Table 01.

Table 01: Sampling size of a Survey Questionnaire

Types of News- organization	Provinces of news worker	Types of media ownership		
		State or Government media	Partisan media (Official and unofficial)	Private media (Non-Government and Non-Partisan)
Daily newspaper	Slêmanî	-	-	1(7)
	Hewlêr (Erbil)	-	1(6)	-
	Dhok	-	1(11)	-
General interest weekly (magazine/ newspaper)	Slêmanî	-	-	3 (9)
	Hewlêr (Erbil)	-	2(10)	-
	Dhok	-	-	-
Television	Slêmanî	-	4(37)	1(19)
	Hewlêr (Erbil)	-	1(1)	-
	Dhok	-	5(9)	-
Radio	Slêmanî	3(9)	-	2(9)
	Hewlêr (Erbil)	-	-	-
	Dhok	-	-	-
Web journalism networks — News sites	Slêmanî	-	2(10)	-
	Hewlêr (Erbil)	-	1(1)	-
	Dhok	-	1(1)	-
News agencies	Slêmanî	1(1)	-	-
	Hewlêr (Erbil)	-	-	-
	Dhok	-	-	-
Total	29 (142) including 2 Freelancers	4(10)	18(86)	7(44)
Numbers in parentheses represent the total subsample of working journalists in the respective media category				

The conceptualization of the term "journalist" stems from the Latin *diurnalis* (daily), derived from the French *journal* (day of work), with its academic usage tracing back to Cayne (1983). Despite ongoing scholarly debate, there is general agreement on the evolving roles, professional identities, and ideological orientations of journalists across varying media cultures. In scholarly literature, the term "journalist" typically refers to individuals engaged in producing journalism tailored to specific audiences using diverse methods of news collection, selection, and dissemination (Aivas, 2020; Bainbridge et al., 2011). This study adopts Weaver and Wilhoit's (1986) definition of a journalist as someone with editorial responsibility for news content, thereby distinguishing journalists from professionals in creative or entertainment media. In the context of Iraqi Kurdish media, editorial responsibility is categorized into three hierarchical tiers (Hanitzsch et al., 2014): (a) **Senior management**, including editors-in-chief, managing editors, chief editors, and deputies, who supervise overall editorial direction; (b) **Middle management**, consisting of senior editors, department heads, and desk heads, who manage daily newsroom operations; and (c) **Non-managerial staff**, such as reporters and writers, responsible for the production of news content.

4. RESEARCH DATA ANALYSIS

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of their professional functions, Iraqi Kurdish journalists were asked to report four primary tasks they regularly engage in during a typical workday. As shown in Table 02, the most frequently reported activity was **"gathering information and conducting investigations,"** which yielded a mean score of 33.0 with a standard deviation of 21.9. The standard deviation, as described by Helen (1931) and further elaborated by Bland and Altman (1996), measures the degree of variation or dispersion within a dataset. A higher standard deviation indicates greater variability in responses, whereas a lower value suggests that responses are more closely clustered around the mean. While it shares interpretative clarity by being measured in the same unit as the data, the standard deviation is less robust algebraically than the mean

absolute deviation, though both metrics can be used to assess data spread. The second most frequently cited activity was **"news production,"** encompassing tasks such as writing, editing, and general content creation. This category had a mean of 28.8 and a standard deviation of 22.6. Following this, the activity **"presenting news or managing visual layout and design"** recorded a mean of 16.3 and a standard deviation of 17.1. The fourth most reported task,

"editorial coordination and management"—which includes responsibilities such as participating in meetings and overseeing editorial workflows—had a mean of 17.7 and a standard deviation of 16.0. These statistical findings offer a clear and structured depiction of the day-to-day professional responsibilities of journalists working within the media sector in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Table 02: Four professional activities of the Kurdish journalists

Professional Activities	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean ± Standard. Deviation
Information gathering and investigation;	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	33.0 ± 21.9
News production which includes writing, editing and producing;	100%	0%	100%	28.8 ± 22.6
Presenting news or design and layout;	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	16.3 ± 17.1
Editorial coordination and management, which includes attending meetings.	85.0%	0.0%	85.0%	17.7 ± 16.0

The results suggest that most respondents demonstrate a stronger inclination toward engaging in professional tasks related to information gathering, rather than activities associated with editorial coordination and management. Within the spectrum of editorial responsibilities, the role of news reporter appears to be both more common and more readily accessible in the context of Iraqi Kurdish journalism. In addition, participants were asked to assess eleven specific techniques used for information acquisition, using a three-point scale: "always justified," "justified on occasion," and "never acceptable." As depicted in

Figure 01, 32.8% of respondents considered gaining employment within an organization to access internal information as consistently justifiable. Similarly, 27.7% approved the use of confidential business or government documents without permission as an acceptable method of obtaining information. Moreover, 26.8% of journalists expressed no ethical reservations about compensating sources for sensitive information, publishing unverified content, or accepting monetary incentives from informants. These findings underscore the prevailing investigative practices and ethical attitudes among Iraqi Kurdish journalists in their professional conduct.
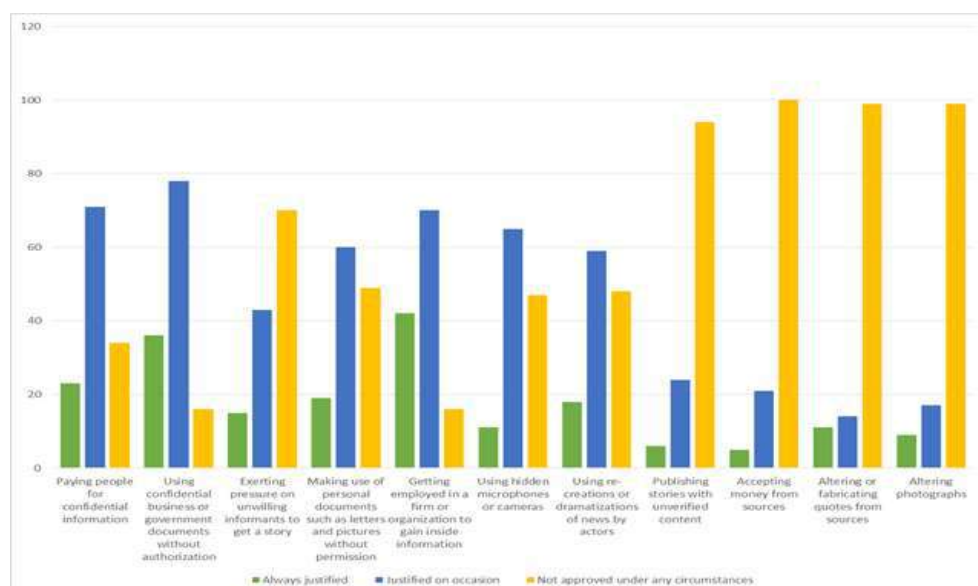
Figure 01: Justifiable methods of Iraqi Kurdish journalists in gathering information.

A significant proportion of respondents (60.0%) indicated that the use of confidential business or governmental documents without authorization was justifiable under certain circumstances. In line with global journalistic practices, 55.5% of participants considered it acceptable to pay individuals in exchange for sensitive information. Additionally, more than half (54.7%) regarded securing employment within an organization to obtain insider information as a legitimate information-gathering method, while 52.8% supported the occasional use of covert recording devices, such as hidden microphones or cameras. Moreover, 47.2% of respondents acknowledged some justification for dramatizing events using actors, and 46.9% expressed approval for the unauthorized use of personal documents, including letters and photographs. Conversely, a strong majority (79.4%) unequivocally opposed practices such as accepting financial incentives from sources, fabricating or altering quotes, and manipulating photographic content, categorizing these methods as wholly unacceptable. Similarly, 75.8% rejected publishing stories based on unverified information, and 54.7% were opposed to coercing reluctant individuals into providing information. These findings illustrate the range of investigative strategies employed by journalists in Iraqi Kurdistan and suggest that ethical standards play a critical role in shaping their decisions about acceptable practices. Variations in ethical perspectives among respondents appear to be influenced by socio-demographic diversity, with some journalists demonstrating stricter adherence to professional norms than others do. For instance, fewer than half of the participants expressed a willingness to misrepresent their identity or journalistic role as a strategy for acquiring information—a tactic more commonly utilized in Western journalism but relatively uncommon in the Kurdistan Region. This hesitancy may be attributed to systemic challenges faced by Kurdish investigative journalists, including restricted access to sensitive information and limitations imposed by a constrained media environment, which curtails press freedom and other civil liberties. As previously noted, journalism has its roots in the routine publication of news via print media, such as newspapers and journals. Over time, the field has expanded to include a diverse array of platforms, including digital commentary, radio, television, and, to a lesser extent, documentary filmmaking (Cayne, 1983). Within the specific context of the Kurdistan Region, it is essential to explore the distinct characteristics that shape Kurdish journalistic culture. This culture encompasses the practices, values, and ideologies—both explicit and implicit—that inform how journalists operate and perceive their role in society. To analyze these professional orientations, this study draws upon Hanitzsch's (2007) framework, which categorizes global journalism cultures into four primary role models: the **Populist Disseminator**, **Detached Watchdog**, **Critical Change Agent**, and **Opportunist Facilitator**. Within this framework, the institutional roles of journalists are used as a lens to interpret the cultural underpinnings of journalism in Iraqi Kurdistan. Accordingly, the research evaluates three core dimensions of professional journalism culture—**interventionism**, **power distance**, and **market orientation**—by analyzing journalists' self-assessments of twelve role-related statements. These statements were rated using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "not important at all" to "extremely important." As outlined in Table 03, the most valued professional functions included informing citizens about political matters (49.6%), maintaining strict objectivity (47.2%), and producing content that is engaging to audiences (33.8%). Additionally, attracting large audiences (30.5%) and fostering civic and political participation (29.6%) were deemed important by a substantial proportion of respondents. When compared to previous cross-national studies by Hanitzsch et al. (2007, 2011), the journalism culture in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq shows similarities to those observed in countries such as Spain, Romania, Israel, Germany, Austria, the United States, Switzerland, and Australia—particularly aligning with the **Populist Disseminator** and **Detached Watchdog** models. This alignment is further supported by the 42.3% of respondents who prioritized influencing public opinion, 39.4% who emphasized advocating for social change, and 31.7% who underscored the importance of the watchdog role in monitoring government actions. By contrast, certain institutional roles were perceived as relatively insignificant. For example, portraying political and business leaders in a favorable light (45.1%) and setting the political agenda (24.8%) were generally regarded as unimportant. Meanwhile, roles such as scrutinizing business elites and supporting

government policies to promote development were viewed as moderately important by 34.3% of participants. These insights suggest that the dominant journalistic culture in Iraqi Kurdistan closely reflects the **Critical Change Agent** model, characterized by an interventionist orientation, which is also prevalent in countries like Turkey and Egypt, and to a lesser extent, Bulgaria, Mexico, and Indonesia. Moreover, similar to trends observed in Russia, Chile, China, and Uganda, Kurdish journalists also appear to exhibit traits associated with the **Opportunist Facilitator** model (Hanitzsch, 2011, p. 481).

Table: 03 Institutional roles of the Kurdish journalism cultures

Institutional roles of journalism cultures	Extremely important N (%)	Very important N (%)	Somewhat important N (%)	Little important N (%)	Not important at all N (%)
To be an absolutely detached observer.	67 (47.2)	46 (32.4)	20 (14.1)	7 (4.9)	2 (1.4)
To act as watchdog of the government.	60 (42.3)	45 (31.7)	28 (19.7)	7 (4.9)	2 (1.4)
To provide citizens with the information they need to make political decisions.	70 (49.6)	42 (29.8)	20 (14.2)	7 (5.0)	2 (1.4)
To concentrate mainly on news that will attract the widest possible audience.	43 (30.5)	41 (29.1)	43 (30.5)	9 (6.4)	5 (3.5)
To set the political agenda.	17 (12.1)	19 (13.5)	47 (33.3)	23 (16.3)	35 (24.8)
To convey a positive image of political and business leadership.	7 (4.9)	9 (6.3)	30 (21.1)	32 (22.5)	64 (45.1)
To provide the audience with the information that is most interesting.	48 (33.8)	34 (23.9)	41 (28.9)	15 (10.6)	4 (2.8)
To influence public opinion.	49 (34.5)	60 (42.3)	24 (16.9)	3 (2.1)	6 (4.2)
To support official policies to bring about prosperity and development.	18 (13.1)	39 (28.5)	47 (34.3)	19 (13.9)	14 (10.2)
To advocate for social change.	30 (21.9)	54 (39.4)	31 (22.6)	13 (9.5)	9 (6.6)
To act as watchdog of business elites.	28 (20.0)	41 (29.3)	48 (34.3)	15 (10.7)	8 (5.7)
To motivate people to participate in civic activity and political discussion.	42 (29.6)	40 (28.2)	40 (28.2)	7 (4.9)	13 (9.2)
Total number of participants: 142					

5. RESEARCH CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the institutional roles of journalism cultures in Iraqi Kurdish society are largely shaped by partisan influences. Through an investigation of journalists' professional role perceptions in the post-conflict and transitional context of Iraqi Kurdistan, the research reveals that journalistic practices are molded by a complex nexus of political partisanship, organizational constraints, and deeply embedded cultural norms. Professionalism, rather than being a universal or static concept, emerges as a fluid and contested construct, continually redefined by hegemonic tensions that characterize transitional societies. Within the institutional roles of Kurdish journalism cultures in Iraq, the role of "providing citizens with the information necessary for informed political participation" was identified as the most significant. Conversely, roles such as "being an absolutely detached observer" and "acting as a watchdog of the government" were perceived as considerably less important. These findings suggest a dominance of the Populist Disseminator and Opportunist Facilitator cultures among Iraqi Kurdish journalists, while the Detached Watchdog and Critical Change Agent cultures appear to be marginalized. Drawing on Hanitzsch's (2011) typology of journalism cultures and informed by a neo-Gramscian interpretation of hegemony, this study finds that Kurdish journalists frequently assume hybrid professional identities. These identities reflect pragmatic positioning—

negotiating between normative journalistic values such as objectivity, autonomy, and service to the public, and the constraints imposed by a politically polarized and ideologically fragmented media environment. Analysis of survey responses from 142 media professionals indicates that professional role conceptions are more deeply embedded in wider ideological and power structures than in historically inherited occupational norms. As a final point, this research enriches the scholarly discourse on media systems in transitional societies by illustrating the malleability of journalistic professionalism under shifting socio-political conditions. The Iraqi Kurdish case reveals a pronounced divergence between idealized journalistic values and actual media practices, emphasizing the need to reconceptualize journalism not merely as a technical occupation, but as a cultural and ideological construct. Future inquiries may expand upon this work by examining longitudinal developments in journalistic role perceptions or by undertaking comparative analyses in other post-conflict contexts across the Middle East.

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