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The impact of funders on the media industry in the KRI

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Abstraic:

This paper examines the impact of funders on the media industry in the Kurdistan Region Iraqi (henceforth KRI) The key objectives of the study are also looking at: how the media industry funder influences the media organization and journalists' practices in the Kurdish community; how the media organizations attempt to utilize the available capabilities to serve the goals of the funded entities, whether they are parties, NGOs, governments, commercial companies or have individual ownership of media institutes. Further, the research project seeks to discover the influence and role of the funder on the media content and determine the prioritizing that will broadcast on the media. Furthermore, the project tries to understand to what extent the media organizations have a commitment to achieve the public interest and public affairs by following the key ethical principles. The study also attempts to explain the situation of the public service media.

These variables are measured through a survey questionnaire distributed among a sample of 108 journalists and media practitioners. This research project therefore explores a new topic for study in the Kurdish community, regarding the media industry, funding and financial support. This article adopted surveys (n=108) as data collection tools, by using a statistical method (SPSS 21). The data of the study have been tabulated, coded and presented in a descriptive form.

Introduction

There is no doubt that the Kurdish revolution in 1991 had a huge impact on the media industry development in the KRI. The media organization has started in new forms of media which have adopted new strategies of broadcasting and practising. The key forms of media which appeared in this period are the political media partisans which allow political partisans to own media channels to communicate with their audiences. Zangana (2017) stated that the “period behind the Kurdish revolution in 1991 developed the space for work in the field of media and communication, all of the partisan in Kurdistan controlled their own media industry, including the local radio, print, online and satellite TV stations” (Zangana, 2017, p.8). As Gunter and Dickinson (2013) argue: “Since 1991 all Kurdish media outlets have been affiliated with political parties, the patriotic union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Kurdish democratic party (KDP) being the most dominant” (Gunter & Dickinson, 2013, p.43). In this period, much of the media industry has been sponsored and fully funded via these two main political partisans. As Maisel (2018) points out: “controlling media message has become essential to maintaining a position of political power and influence in the KRG” (Maisel, 2018, p.187).

Another historical change happened in the Kurdish media industry, since the 2003 aftermath of military operation of Iraqi freedom has changed the space of journalists’ expression and developed new types of media channels. In this stage, the media industry takes a variety of forms and types in relation to ownership and funding, which are called media channels, owned by political partisans, private media, independent media and commercial media. Furthermore, during this period, the amount of media industry has increased significantly which influences the journalism and media practitioners in the KRI.

The financial crisis between KRG and Baghdad has impacted directly on many of the media organizations in conducting their journalism practices, especially those media organizations that are fully funded by the political partisans. This financial crisis has created many obstacles in front of the media industry in the KRI, especially, satellite TV stations and other media platforms. As Maisel (2018) points out, many Kurdish satellite stations have been influenced by the financial crisis of the KRG, for instance, the Kurdish News Network – funded by Gorran Party, and Payam TV stations – funded by the Kurdistan Islamic Group (Komal) (Maisel, 2018). These TV stations have reduced their media practitioners and their staff to avoid a financial crisis. Despite the financial crisis that appeared in KRG, many of the satellite stations that are funded by the party have not influenced this situation on their activities and continue broadcasting, such as Rudaw and Kurdistan 24 (Maisel, 2018). Another key reason for the financial crisis that faced media industry is the war between the KRI and ISIS military in 2014, which is a notable example of the media financial crisis.

In this way, many of the Kurdish media industry and satellite stations have been funded directly or indirectly by the political party or political leaders (Taha, 2020). The dependency of the media is on its political ownership and its loyalty and affiliation to the same, as well as the financial support provided by a party (Taha, 2020, p.132). Moreover, the main two political parties in KRI its control and own TV station, digital platform, radio, website and print. This view is supported by Maisel (2018), who writes about media’s future in the KRG, and in this context stated that: “It appears that the media empires of the KDP and, to a lesser degree, of the PUK will control the entire satellite market in the KRG” (Maisel, 2018, p.187). There is no doubt that the media industry in the KRI has always been a part of a political party and their progress has been directly connected with development of political process in the region (Taha, 2020, p.132). Hence, there is a huge interaction between KRG policies and Kurdish mass media. In some way, the media industry obtained financial support from the institution of power such as political parties. This aspect of the circumstance in the KRI illustrates that the connection of political parties and their financial support, benefits of parties for the media organization and also, this link to political parties, provides the media with more technical support (Croucher, Caetano, & Campbell, 2018).

Additionally, the main sources of financial support for other types of media industry in the KRI, such as the commercial media, are based on the advertisement revenue. Also, the same situation applies for the private TV stations – their revenue basically depends on the national marketing and audiences’ competition ratings. Furthermore, this type of media in KRI have suffered in tackling the financial crisis as well, and some of them stopped broadcasting because they are unable to pay the licence fees of satellite transmission frequency.

2. Media organizations and funding support

In general, the nature of funders of the media industry in the KRI is different, which is directly connected to the political parties and the main sources of the media financial support come from political parties, political groups or political leaders. Through this mechanism, the political parties attempt to control the media by their financial support, particularly by broadcasting their political agenda in the Kurdish community. In this circumstance of KRI, there are many media stations and shadow press organizations that directly and indirectly obtained their financial support from the political partisans, for instance, these media channels are funded by political partisans: Rudaw TV satellite belongs to Rudaw Media Network, funded by Nechirvan Barzani President of the Kurdistan Region; K24 News Station is funded by Masrour Barzani Prime Minister of Kurdistan Region; KNN belongs to the Kurdish News Network funded by Gorran Party; NRT belongs to Nalia Radio, funded by Shaswar Abdulwahid leader of Naway Nwe Television; and Kurdsat satellite belongs to the Kurdsat Broadcasting Corporation, funded by the PUK party.

This aspect of media circumstance has impacted the journalism practices, media freedom and pluralism of media in the KRI. Nevertheless, a previous study from the European Commission 2021 has established that: “whereas quality well financed and independent news media and professional journalism are an essential of democracy whereas every effort must be made to increase media pluralism” (Europe Commission, 2021, p.20/135). Hence, from this point of view, the KRI media industry has faced big challenges in establishing professional journalism and independence from the political parties.

However, in recent years, the approach of media funding has changed slightly, some of commercial company appears in KRI to offers media organization financial support and to provide funding and financial support to their channels. This alternative method of funding has changed the journalism practices and provides the media industry great opportunity to come out from the political party hegemonies. This aspect of the shift has widely provided great opportunities to the media industry to compete with each other’s services in quality, especially in the age of new media and digital platforms. In this manner, Branston and Stafford (2010) discussed that: “All the media industries have faced the same challenge in responding to new forms of competition from online services” (Branston & Stafford, 2010, p.219).

The new media has changed traditional media practices to improve and update to provide another source of revenue and financial support for their local media marketing (Johnson-Yale, 2010), especially the new media platform provided by the industry. In this manner, Herzog et al. (2017) stated that: “the public media services organizations across globe are under pressure, patterns and media use, distribution and production are in flux and this has implications for Public Media Service (henceforth PSM funding” (Herzog et al., 2017, p.4). Thus, the key aspect of the non-development of the public services media in the KRI is financial support and a different system of ownership for the channels that service around this concept.

The public services media:

There is a huge gap in the system of cable TV delivery and broadband (Aggarwal, 2005), especially in the KRI. The system is known as the method that is delivering and transporting the television programmes via signals or fibre-optic cables to audiences in their homes by receivers. Also, this circumstance has affected the media industry in order to install a national cable network and broadcasting system which bring more opportunities for channels to provide more information to the audiences. Hence, the development of the media services in the Kurdish community has backwards in order to support and progress the public service media (PSM) which has become a core challenge of media services in the KRI.

During the last 30 years, the media industry has faced big challenges, particularly in relation to funding and revenues. For instance, the non-appearance of the PSM in the KRI, the situation linked to the hegemonies of political parties and their control for the media sector especially, the concept of traditional media and currently the digital platform. Previous studies mostly defined public broadcasting as “a forum where ideas should be expressed freely, where information, opinion, and criticisms circulate, this possible only if the independence therefore” (Price & Raboy, 2003, p.3). This circumstance has led to the establishment of an environment that has impacted the media practitioners and also the shape of the delivery information and news stories to audiences in the KRI. Hence, the journalism managing and journalists practising under various funders, ownership structure, different policy, political agenda, different funding company, regulatory systems and wider media cultures (Cushion, 2012, p.7), which influence the enhancing public trust in the media sector and establish a good relationship between them. Furthermore, these aspects have created many issues for media practitioners, such as identifying their identity as professional media workers and obtaining in-depth understanding for their tasks in the field of media and, also, the media organization in the KRI has faced a crisis in order to update and improve their ability of media practising in using new technology.

However, the lack of resources for the media sectors’ funding and grants to develop this field by the government has directly impacted the media industry in the KRI. In this context, Jeanrenaud and Késenne (2006) demonstrated that “the public services broadcasters are funded by government grants” (Jeanrenaud & Késenne, 2006, p.30). However, from this point of view, the Kurdish government has failed to support and develop the public services media in wide boundary. The political situation in the KRI has affected the means of funding to the PSM as essential sources of public information as unbiased media which has space to present various political opinions and views. Thus, Rasul and Ali (2019) argue that: “there are different barriers to establishing PSM ‘national media’ in the Kurdistan region, such as the preference of personal interests on the public interests, political constrains and absence of a national unified speech and strategy” (Rasul & Ali, 2019, p.136).

Since 2003, economic growth in the KRI has influenced the media industry and influence on the financial support viability of the media organizations specifically, increasingly expansion of the growth advertising revenue in the media sector and availability of grants for media channels. Further, the new environment has provided the media organization with new sources of financial support, funding and advertising revenue, such as election campaigns, anti-terrorism advertising campaigns, funding from energy companies and oil campaign sponsor news outlet. Mercille (2014) argues that the “advertising revenue are crucial to today’s news industry” (Mercille, 2014, p.22). Furthermore, Carpini (1994) demonstrated that the “advertising provides financial support for the mass media, virtually all of commercial radio and television broadcaster revenue comes from advertising” (Carpini, 1994, p.7). Hence, many donors have engagement in the

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media growth and, also, many of the donor-funded media projects support independent media and professionalism practices.

3. Methodology

The current research is based on the quantitative approach. The research project mainly used data collection methods such as online survey and the researchers used an established technique tool, namely the content analysis method, to analyze the data. The online survey data were collected through Facebook in order to reach the majority of respondents in the Kurdish community. The key obstacle and difficulty in front of the researchers was to reach the eligible participants in order to fill in the online questionnaire form. For this purpose, this research project has employed online survey data collected from a total of 108 participants (journalists) which were sampled from November and December 2020, and January 2021. Also, the process of data collection for this online survey took three months. The data are illustrated in tabulation and, also, for the analysis purpose the researchers used SPSS software. This research project depends on the quantitative approach in order to find data from the participants that use Facebook, working within media industry. The questionnaire was created in the Kurdish language for participants that use social media and then was sent to 108 journalists that use Facebook that were selected as a sample for this research project. Furthermore, the research is based on the use of descriptive content analysis method in order to examine the data collected from the journalists who participated in the online survey. Also, the study used SPSS (V25) to categorize and test the results obtained in the survey. This online survey was sent by email or Facebook to the journalists who work in the Kurdish media organizations in the KRI, who mainly participated in an online questionnaire to answer the question related to “the impact of sponsorship on the media channels in the KRG”.

4. Analysis and findings

In this research project, the researchers mainly used statistical analysis SPSS 25V, also, the researchers attempted to organize the data in a good way, including encoding, analysis, illustrating and presentation in the form. Further, the research project basically used the most common tool in order to test the reliability of the questionnaire, which is Alpha Cronbach. During the project, the researchers used the basic statistical measure, which helps to identify statistic test. The basic statistical measures include: measure frequency, percentage and descriptive measure such as mean. Furthermore, the research used standard deviation measure and coefficient of variance. The project mainly used descriptive statistical analysis for the demography, policy of channels and level of education to understand the influence of sponsorship on their journalism practice and their attitude.

The data analysis process was managed by using the following procedures: the researchers used the Pearson Bivariate Association in order to show the association between the influence of the sponsorship of channels and journalists’ practice. Additionally, the study used the Simple Regression Model in order to determine the impact of sponsorship and channels’ funder on the journalists’ practice.

4.1 Questionnaire Reliability

Questionnaire reliability conduct by the correctness, reliability, and stability of the research project. The data has been gathered from more than 15 respondents of the journalists that participates in the project, in this way, the researchers are considered a suitable sample size for conducting such type of research.

4.2 Resolution Test

Reliability of Questionnaire

Table (1): Reliability

Variables	N. of class	Alpha Cronbach's
Sponsorship	5	0.859
media channels	4	0.945
sponsorship and media channels	9	0.923

Resolution tests:

It can be detected in table (1) that Alpha Cronbach was used to get the result of the participants’ reliability. On the other hand, the Alpha Cronbach coefficient was used to ensure the scale’s stability to determine the efficiency of the research sample members’ answers. Depending on the results of the computer analysis, it became clear that the value of the Alpha Cronbach coefficient is equal to (0.923) at the total level of the two variables (sponsorship and media channels).

As a result, the value of Alpha Cronbach equals (0.923), then the result of Alpha Cronbach shows the high reliability of the questionnaire.

Section 1: Demographic variables

Table (2): Demographic data

Items	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	66	66.0
Female	34	34.0
Age		
18-25 years old	26	26.0
26-34 years old	28	28.0
35-44 years old	39	39.0
45-more than	7	7.0
Level of education		
Secondary	17	17.0
Diploma	32	32.0
Bachelors	44	44.0
MA degree	7	7.0
Do you agree with the policy of the channel and do you have the same point of view		
No	68	68.0
Yes	32	32.0
What makes you continue working with the same media institution? If there were disagreement with the policy of the channel?		
I don't care for any ideology	20	20.0
I want to continue work until I find new job	8	8.0
I like environment of work in this organization	26	26.0
There is no good job	3	3.0
Less chance of work	7	7.0
I can not find another channel to work have same ideology	19	19.0
Others	17	17.0
Does the channel work for public interest or just for commercial aims views, comments, and likes on the social platform?		
Audience mood	86	86.0
Gathering like through social media network	14	14.0
During the unstable situation in the country, does the channel broadcast news letter against to the sponsorship agenda or their views?		
Yes	6	6.0
Some time	40	40.0
No	54	54.0
The companies that broadcast advertising in the channel, does the channel produce report on their activities in order to introduce them to the audience?		
Yes	23	23.0
Some time	32	32.0
No	45	45.0
How long did take to comprehend the policy of the channel?		
Before head I have awareness	36	36.0
For Long term	7	7.0
For short team	56	56.0
Others	1	1.0
Total	100	100.0

Table (2) shows that most of the gender respondents were male, giving 66% of the result. The rate of males was more than females and 34% were female. The most frequent age range was between 35-44 years old, 39% of the total; 28% and 26% were between 26-34 years old and 18-25 years old respectively, and only 7% were 45 or more years old. The first rank of the level of education was Bachelors, which was 44% of the total, and 32% was Diploma. The minority of the level of education was MA degree, which was equal to 7%; 68% did not agree with the channel's policy and have the same point of view; 26% continue working with the same media institution and 20% do not care for any ideology; 86% of the channel work for the public interest, or just for commercial aims, views, comments and likes on the social platform was audience mood, and 40% was some time of unstable situation in the country; does the channel broadcast newsletter against the sponsorship agenda or their views – 54% was not an unstable situation in the country; does the channel broadcast newsletter against the sponsorship agenda or their views – 45% was not broadcast advertising in the channel; does the channel produce a report on their activities in order to introduce them to the audience. Moreover, 56% of the time taken to comprehend the policy of the channel was for short term, and 36% was I have awareness beforehand, and only 7% was for long term.

Section 2: The study's main variables

Table (3): Description of variables

N	variables	Questions
1	X1	To what extent do you implement the policy of the channel in your journalistic practice?
2	X2	To what extent the news producer follows the terms and instructions of the sponsorship?
3	X3	If the journalists have reflect their views in their editorial tasks and their production? Does suspend or unpublish their work ?
4	X4	Do companies that broadcast advertising in your channel they have impact on editorial aspect of the production?
5	X5	Do the companies which own ads in the channel, have authority to determine the topics in the broadcasting agenda or ignore some topics that they do not like?
6	Y1	In the finalising phase of the production, do managers re-check your production and give you advices to improve it?
7	Y2	Has it ever occur to you to suspend or unpublish your work only because it go against policy your media institution?
8	Y3	Is there any journalists having different ideological, in your channel?
9	Y4	Does Variety of ideological/political standpoint have not make the journalists to editor for their item upon their ideological view ?

Statistical Methods

All statistical computation is enhanced using the statistical method (SPSS 21). The data have been coded, tabulated and presented in a descriptive form. The statistical procedure that was applied to determine the results of the present study included:

1. Alpha Cronbach has been used for testing the reliability of the questionnaire

2. Descriptive statistical data analysis (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation)

3. Inferential data analysis:

A. Simple correlation

B. Simple regression model

- There are criteria of the probability level of determining the significance of the test: P-value as:

1. Highly significant ($P < 0.001$)

2. Significant ($P < 0.05$)

3. Non-significant ($P > 0.05$)

4. Very highly significant ($P < 0.000$)

Statistical Methods

Table (4): Description of variables (Use of social media)

Questions		Strongly disagree	Disagree	I don't know	Agree	strongly Agree	Mean	S.D	C.V	RI
X ₁	N	1	5	12	39	43	4.18	0.9	21.53	83.6
	%	1	5	12	39	43				
X ₂	N	3	11	37	33	16	3.5	0.95	27.14	70
	%	3	11	37	33	16				
X ₃	N	9	16	29	28	18	3.3	1.2	36.36	66
	%	9	16	29	28	18				
X ₄	N	19	7	22	38	14	3.21	1.32	41.12	64.2
	%	19	7	22	38	14				
X ₅	N	24	12	21	20	23	3.06	1.49	48.69	61.2

	%	24	12	21	20	23				
Sum	N	56	51	121	158	114	3.45	1.17	34.97	69
	%	11.2	10.2	24.2	31.6	22.8				

C.V: is the coefficient of variance

RI: is the relative important

The data of Table (5) on repeat distributions (mean, standard deviation, coefficient of variance and relative importance) indicate explanatory variables that focus on sponsorship. This variable has a mean of (3.45), and a standard deviation of (1.17) and the relative importance of (69%). The rate of somebody who responded with 'strongly agree' to (22.8%), who were (agree) by (31.6%), who were somewhat (24.2%), while the proportion of somebody who did not agree with the paragraphs has reached the rate (20.4%).

Table (6): Description of variables (academic performance)

Questions		Strongly disagree	Disagree	I don't know	Agree	strongly Agree	Mean	S.D	C.V	RI
X ₁	N	4	10	21	34	21	3.58	1.06	29.61	71.6
	%	4	10	21	34	21				
X ₂	N	14	25	19	23	19	3.08	1.35	43.83	61.6
	%	14	25	19	23	19				
X ₃	N	2	9	27	38	24	3.73	0.99	26.54	74.6
	%	2	9	27	38	24				
X ₄	N	10	14	42	20	14	3.14	1.14	36.31	62.8
	%	10	14	42	20	14				
Sum	N	30	58	109	115	78	3.38	1.14	34.07	67.65
	%	7.5	14.5	27.25	28.75	19.5				

The data of Table (6) on repeat distributions (mean, standard deviation, coefficient of variance and relative importance) indicate explanatory variables that focus on (media channels). This variable has a mean of (3.38), and a standard deviation of (1.14), and the relative importance of (67.65%). The rate of people who answered with 'strongly agree' to (19.5%), who were (agree) by (28.75%), who were somewhat (27.25%), while the proportion of individuals who did not agree with the paragraphs has reached the percentage (22%).

Table (6): A relationship between the sponsorship and media channels

Independent variable	Dependent variable		
	media channels		
	Correlation	Sig.	Sample
Sponsorship	0.859	0.000	100
*The level of significance at level 0.05			
*There is a relationship between the statistical function between sponsorship and media channels			

Ho: There isn't a relationship between sponsorship and media channels

H1: There is a relationship between sponsorship and media channels

It is seen from table (6) that there is a significant positive statistical correlation between (response variable and explanatory variable), which is (0.859), and that the significance value is (0.000) and this means accepting the second hypothesis because the p-value was less than (0.05). Then, there is a positive correlation between the (sponsorship and media channels).

**Table (7): Regression analysis of a dependent variable (media channels)
The impact of sponsorship on the media channels in the KRG**

Model	Coefficients				Model Summary			ANOVA Table	
	Unstandardized Coefficients		T Test	Sig.	R	R ²	Adj.(R ²)	F Test	Sig.
	B	Std.Error							
Constant	0.759	0.164	4.63	0.000	0.859	0.739	0.736	276.839	0.000
Sponsorship	0.794	0.048	16.64	0.000					

Ho: There isn't effect of the sponsorship on the media channels in the KRG

H1: There is effect of the sponsorship on the media channels in the KRG

This table shows that the regression model predicts the dependent variable significantly well. This indicates the statistical significance of the regression model that was run. Here, the (p-value) was (0.000), which is less than 0.05, and indicates that the regression model statistically significantly predicts the outcome variable (it is a good fit for the data). This means that the method is possible to analyze this data, which indicates acceptance of the alternative hypothesis.

The R2 value shows how much of the total variation in the response variable (media channels) can be solved by the explanatory variable (sponsorship). In other words, R square for this study is (0.739). In this case, 73.9% can be explained, which is very big.

In other words, this means that 73.9% of the variance of (media channels) must be explored in (sponsorship); this illustrates that only 73.9% of factors affect (media channels) in (sponsorship) and the other variables (26.1%) are due to random error.

5. Conclusion:

In this study, the aim was to assess the role of media funders and how these funders are able to provide financial support to the media industry in the KRI. Also, this paper has argued that the current circumstance is of a media industry under the control of political partisans and how politicians fund media to their agenda. Thus, this aspect of the funding provides in-depth understanding surrounding the journalism and journalists' practices. The key purpose of this study was focused on the media industry funding and the main factors that drive media organizations in the KRI. Also, the research project determines the key elements that have influence on the journalists' practice and how the media industry financially manages in the KRI. The study illustrated that the majority of the media organizations in the KRI have been controlled by the political partisans or their ownership by the political leadership.

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