

Media system in saudi arabia essay sample

[Media](#)



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Abstract

In general the media system of Saudi Arabia is different as compared to the media systems of the United States. For instance, Television in Saudi Arabia was introduced by the colonial powers in 1940s and 1950s and during their early days the media system was controlled and run by the colonial power. The Saudi Arabia news and entertainment content is nevertheless the same as the American media. This has been made possible through the media evolution currently experienced mainly powered by technology advancement.

Saudi Arabia profile

Saudi Arabia is an Arab country and one of the largest in the Arabian Peninsula. Saudi Arabia is bordered by eight countries namely Iraq, Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and Yemen. Saudi Arabia is just about 864, 869 square miles (2. 24 million sq km) and has a population that is estimated to be 25. 2 million people (Siddiqi, 2004).

Saudi Arabia Media summary

Saudi Arabia has close to 25. 2 million people and a number of newspapers but only one television network, Saudi TV that operates four networks. The fact that it is a Middle East country means that English language is rarely used in media coverage in fact it is only some few news papers among the seven major daily newspapers which are privately owned uses the English language but the rest of the media coverage is through Arabic language. In all of the Middle East, It is only in Saudi Arabia that the media is heavily

regulated by the government through the BSKSA (broadcasting service of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) which watches over all the media. A Saudi royal family directly supervises the newspapers and approves all the authors and editors before any printing of the news papers (Siddiqi, 2004).

As I said earlier, there is only a single television network that is state owned. Therefore, because of this closed television coverage most of the Saudis are informed through other means like the internet, foreign networks and other sources. The Saudi Arabia government condemns any abuse of the royal family or any abuse of the Islamic religious practices through the media. An example to depict this harshness is Fawaz Turki who was a journalist of the government-owned, Arab news. He was particularly fired because of linking the Indonesian government to brutal killings that took place during 1975-99 when they occupied the East Timor. In the recent times, the Saudi Arabian media has begun to write about other contentious issues touching on terrorism, women's rights, political issues as well as education improvements (Curtin, 2007).

Saudi Arabia media is strictly controlled by the Broadcasting Service of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Even though the news papers are mostly privately owned, they are still censored. There are about nine main daily newspapers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

These include; Al-Sharq al- Awsat which is a very influential paper and carries Pan-Arab as well as international affairs, Arab News which was a first English newspaper, Al- Hayat which was founded in 1946 and owned by Prince Khalid bin Sultan, Al- Jazirah founded in 1972 and owned by the Al-

Jazirah press, Al-Watan founded in 2000 and owned by the Assir Establishments, Okaz founded in 1960 and owned by the Okaz Organization, Saudi Gazette and English daily founded in 1976 and also owned by the Okaz Organization, Al-Riyadh is an Arabic paper founded in 1964 and owned by Al-Yamama Press and last but not least the Al-Yaum newspaper which is an Arabic newspaper. Therefore this means the government assembly is still very large because they are responsible for monitoring all the media. The Saudi Arabian government restricts some websites or totally outlaws some websites that are deemed offensive. The newspapers follow strict guidelines on whether or not to publish various articles depending on the sensitivity. It is also true that no private radio station is allowed to operate in Saudi Arabia therefore It is only the Saudi radio which is owned and run by the government that is available to the listeners. According to the Press Freedom Index, Saudi Arabia is ranked one forty eight out of one sixty nine (Curtin, 2007).

Penetration of the satellite communication

Since Saudi Arabia is a member of the Pan-Arabic Satellite Community, it agreed to expand its media coverage and access to its people. This led to the adoption of the new technology that would avail Saudi Arabia to the international viewers. Since then, the Saudi political class is faced with myriad problems since the satellites can go further to destabilize the political purpose by introducing modernization and bringing urbanization. This has led to major changes in regulations in the Arab world including Saudi Arabia because most Arab countries are conservative and satellite TV go against the

cultural rules. Today the Arab world including Saudi Arabia has been more open to the visual media as opposed to the printed one (Ayish, 2002).

Satellite coverage with multimedia communication systems has increased dramatically. Indeed close to one hundred channels using as much as twenty satellites are in use in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Two commonly used satellites are in use for the audio-visual; these are the NILESAT and the ARABASAT. Therefore, these technology advancements suggest that more liberty is guaranteed to the media and in the end it may introduce radical changes in the social and political structure of the Saudi Arabia.

Currently, satellite TV channels are reaching many citizens of Saudi Arabia targeting audience who are interested in sports, cartoons, music, movies, politics, documentaries, politics and so forth. Hence this means that the government has been put in a fix because previously it controlled all what the audience was to see and hear, but now it is the pay-TV customer who chooses what to hear and see (Ayish, 2002).

Penetration of the mobile telephone technology

The best way to determine the technology uptake is through the mobile phone penetration. Saudi Arabia represents 70% of the fastest growing market in the Middle East and also it represents the fastest growing region in the Middle East that adopts the mobile phone technology. In 2006 alone, the Saudi Arabia surpassed the 20 million connection mark. The Saudi Telecom over the recent past has experienced one of the rapid growths primarily attributed to liberalization (Curtin, 2007).

The mobile phone penetration has been brought by different factors. The absence of entertainment activities may be the major reason why the technology is quickly adopted. This is true because 3G market which has close to 3, 000 customers has been the target over this kind of technology. The low internet cost may be also another major reason why mobile telephone phone has penetrated the Saudi Arabia market.

The mobile TV has also been the force in the region. It allows customers to download video content easily to their phones. And bearing in mind the cheap internet cost, this has played a big role in the penetration (Ayish, 2002).

History of the Saudi media

During the pre-colonial era in the 1990s, Saudi Arabia media did not appear to reach the position where it is now. Now with modern technology driven by the satellite communication, Saudi media has out rightly grown to more advanced levels. It is also evident that the state owned media and regulations have been softened to allow for more diversity. In fact newspapers and television were not allowed to report on controversial subjects but since the September 11 and the war on terrorism intensified, the Saudi government compromised some regulations. It was then that it allowed the media to report on women's rights issues like education, marriage and many more human rights issues and terrorism threats that had been directed to Arab states.

A total of 10 privately owned newspapers and 14 weekly magazines were published in Saudi Arabia. Out of this ten seven were printed in Arabic with <https://assignbuster.com/media-system-in-saudi-arabia-essay-sample/>

the mostly widely circulated newspaper being the Al- Riyadh. The widely circulated English newspaper was the Arab news (Rugh, 2004).

The journalist of all the media knew that, government policies had to be respected and adhered to prior to any publication, hence they had to observe self-censorship. The government through the Ministry of Information supervised all the media. Contrary to the local media, foreign media had to go for thorough scrutiny before they report any information but this is not to say the local media was immune to the government policies. The objective of the thorough scrutiny was to get rid of any information or advertisement that was deemed morally offensive to the public (Hafez, 2002).

Since 1991, there have been close to 5 million TV sets and a further 5 million radio receivers. This led to the emergence of more TV stations that broadcasted throughout the country in both Arabic and English Languages. Furthermore, there were 43 radio stations that were channeled through AM frequencies. Since then Saudi Arabia has transmitted many programs overseas in English, Arabic, French, Swahili, Somali and Urdu languages (Curtin, 2007).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had come along way. By 2003, some signs of increased openness had started to filter into the media with some contentious topics now receiving media coverage. The terrorism attack on the U. S. and the domestic militancy led to this candid and unbiased reporting. Though private radio stations are not allowed to operate in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the country is still the key market for the pay-Television broadcasters and the Pan -Arab satellite. The Kingdom of Saudi

Arabia as an investor has been behind this rapid expansion including a major corporation that is based in Dubai called MBC and another corporation based in Bahrain called Orbit assisted in these developments. This meant that the neighbors of Saudi Arabia could view Television Station from more tolerant Gulf close states (Ayish, 2002). Currently Al- Jazeera has dominated the Arab country plus also it has established its footing on the World stage.

Media Evolution

The main success of the Saudi media is the satellite plus internet revolution. Many networks have been available for instance the newspapers which have been available through secondary languages like English. Apart from the internet and satellite revolution, globalization has played a bigger part in the growth of the Saudi media. For instance the English culture is slowly but in minimal portions adopted by the Saudi government through the privatization of newspapers that relay their stories through the English languages. This is a positive sign but prone to many challenges. Therefore, TV formats are being sold and bought worldwide and many English shows are now being translated and aired in Arabic languages (Ayish, 2002).

The Saudi Arabia is experiencing a tremendous transformation in the media technology which translates to a drastic social behavioral change. Saudi Arabia media is under continuous developments hence causing a parallel change in the life of the consumer thus phasing out the principles set out by the government (Boyd, 1987).

There has been an increased satellite TV stations which has now covered major regions in Saudi Arabia. It is now understood that, in the entire Arab <https://assignbuster.com/media-system-in-saudi-arabia-essay-sample/>

world, Saudi Arabia is the leader in the satellite communication. Never the less, Saudi Arabia never enjoyed the liberty of speech due BSKSA censoring. In the near future, it is more obvious that many people will prefer the satellite TV or the pay-TV over the local channels because of some of the reasons below;

1. The local Television stations still lag behind in offering the necessary services deemed necessary, which is to offer entertainment, education and to inform the public at large. It is only the pay-TV and satellite TV stations that offer the full package.
2. The Arab world of which the Saudi Arabia is part of, would like to receive unbiased reports. This is where the media prevails because the media has to succumb to the public interest and the Saudi media system would not want contradictory point of views (Ayish, 2002).

The satellite TV and pay-TV stations have succeeded in meeting the Saudi Arabia government regulations. They engage in providing information that reflects political, economic and educational realities. The media has developed further by educating the masses (Boyd, 1987).

Conclusion

Saudi Arabia commonly referred to as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is far away from being the liberal media. In my point of view, the harsh government regulations intertwined with cultural practices, religious practices and social practices renders the media systems 'closed'. This suggests that it may take several years for the media system in Saudi Arabia to open its doors to freedom of speech. The close watch by the government

overseen by the Royal family or any close member of the family is not at all necessary. Never the less, the media system has been given the go ahead in reporting debatable issues like women's rights, terrorism and education.

However, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Technological developments are taking place in every country and no one wants to lack behind. Satellite revolution has been the source of media evolution in Saudi Arabia. I also believe that it is international standards of quality that drive some conformity to specific products and services that each country may strive to produce or use. Finally if the Saudi media softens some government regulations, they will experience some social-economic developments. That is they will experience different lifestyle, different political views. The Saudi government will also have limited control over the political and economical issues because of the unlimited information over the satellite. The radio station will be affected negatively by the TV continuous growth but however remains the fastest media.

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