

**Job Satisfaction and Editorial Freedom at Al-Arabiya:  
Finding the Balance while Covering Volatile Middle East News**

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**Abstract**

Al-Arabiya is one of the most respected television news networks covering all aspects of the volatile Middle East. Its journalistic reputation increased during the Arab Spring protests of 2011, as it came to be regarded as one of the most reliable and accurate sources for news. Like any other television news network, it relies heavily on the professionalism and good will of its news staff. Although Al-Arabiya has the luxury of not being state owned, and therefore of being able to exercise more editorial freedom than most state-owned Arab television news stations, it does have limitations because of its Saudi Arabian ownership. The study found that journalists accepted these news gathering limitations as a trade-off for a secure job and for being able to work at what they consider the best Arabic television station in the region. This is one of the first academic studies to investigate perceptions of job satisfaction and editorial freedom among the news workers at this unique Middle East television news network. The researchers got a 94 percent response rate from a staff survey, and were given full access to interview staff and executives in Al-Arabiya's headquarters in Dubai's Media City.

**Introduction**

Al-Arabiya, an Arab all-news satellite channel headquartered in Dubai, is a key news player in the Arab Middle East. Since its launch in 2003, it has been “consistently rated among the top pan-Arab stations by Middle East audiences” (Feuilherade 2003). Al-Arabiya is often referred to as an alternative media outlet in the Arab world in that it is “alternative to both government or state-controlled Arab media and western media” (Zayani and Ayish 2006: 478).

This study is the first of its kind to look into whether Al-Arabiya journalists' job satisfaction is correlated with their perceptions of editorial autonomy, job roles and professional job dimensions. These dimensions include intrinsic and extrinsic categories,

such as pay, job security, ability to help people, editorial policies, amount of autonomy and ability to influence public opinion.

Surveying the journalists' satisfaction with and perceptions of the above-mentioned categories will help provide insight into the working environment, organizational direction and professional philosophy of Al-Arabiya. Since the uprisings that came to be known as the Arab Spring were ongoing at the time of this study, we also investigated whether there was a correlation between Al-Arabiya news workers' job satisfaction and their perceptions of the channel's level of professionalism in covering the Arab revolutions. We believed that Al-Arabiya news workers' satisfaction, or lack thereof, with how their channel covered these uprisings would be an important indicator of their professional expectations about journalistic autonomy and journalistic roles.

This study is especially important given the fact that there are very few surveys of Arab journalists' professional satisfaction and expectations in general, and of Al-Arabiya news workers in particular. Most of the academic studies conducted in this area deal with western journalists working at western news organizations. "A more universal approach would need to...account for the realities of the journalistic field in non-western countries" (Hanitzsch 2011: 477). Along the same lines, Mellor (2008) argued that little is known "about Arab journalism as a professional and social field, for example, access to the field; reasons for its popularity; how Arab journalists, particularly in the so-called pan-Arab media, perceive their role; and how this can be related to changes in Arab media" (465).

The study utilizes a survey and in-depth interviews with the news staff (editors, writers, reporters, anchors, producers, and photojournalists) conducted at the Dubai headquarters of Al-Arabiya satellite channel. The research method is similar to journalists' job satisfaction and expectation studies conducted in the United States, Taiwan, New Zealand and Australia.

### **Literature Review: Journalists' Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction is important in any profession, but it is particularly important in the news media "where product quality is largely dependent on the individual talents and motivations of key personnel" (Massey and Ewart 2007). Bergen and Weaver (1988) defined job satisfaction as "the attitude that an individual has toward his or her job" (2). Journalists' satisfaction level can possibly influence "job commitment, turnover, productivity, and other factors that affect the successful operation of an organization" (Beam 2006: 170). Lack of journalists' professional satisfaction can have a negative impact on both the personal and organizational levels. "A dissatisfied worker may suffer

more stress, be absent from work more often, and be more likely to leave the organization” (McQuarrie 1999: 20). In contrast, satisfaction can create a positive environment in which journalists are committed and motivated to perform their duties. “Satisfied workers perform better on the job and are less likely than dissatisfied workers to display ‘withdrawal behaviors,’ such as absenteeism” (Chang and Massey 2010: 52).

Several theorists have developed categories for job satisfaction. According to Herzberg et al.’s motivation-hygiene theory, there are “intrinsic” factors that affect job satisfaction, such as “achievement, recognition, growth, etc.” and “extrinsic” factors, such as “salary, status, working conditions, etc.” (Stamm and Underwood 1993: 529). “Intrinsic factors are those which relate to the job the journalist performs (such as worker’s autonomy and a sense of accomplishment); extrinsic factors are those things related to the journalistic work environment (such as salary or a person’s boss)” (Ryan 2009: 650). Or, to state it differently, “extrinsic satisfaction is derived from tangible rewards, such as salary and fringe benefits, while intrinsic satisfaction is derived from the more intangible aspects of work, such as autonomy, the feeling of having a challenging job, etc.” (Chan et al. 2004: 258-259).

Although the literature referred to several factors that affect journalists’ job satisfaction, such as pay, promotion, and ability to influence public opinion, two aspects of professional journalism—job security and editorial autonomy—were highlighted as strong predictors of journalists’ job satisfaction, particularly in the United States.

Job security, one of the extrinsic aspects of the motivation-hygiene theory, has proven to be among the decisive factors in journalist retention rates, according to some studies. A web-based survey of American journalists showed that job security, represented in steady employment, received the highest average rating for job satisfaction, topping 13 other categories (Ryan 2009). Research by Bergen and Weaver (1988) showed that journalists who were satisfied working in small- and medium-sized papers were “willing to trade off some pay for more job security” (9).

In a compilation of journalist attitudinal studies in 22 countries, Weaver and Willnat (2012) concluded that job security was one of the top four factors for journalists. It was rated important by 47.9 percent of journalists, close to helping people (47.2%) and only slightly lower than their company’s editorial policy (48.4%) and editorial autonomy (49.5%).

Editorial autonomy, the *most* significant factor for job satisfaction in Weaver and Willnat’s compilation, is one of the intrinsic aspects of the motivation-hygiene theory. Beam (2006) defined autonomy as an individual’s freedom to decide or control his or her work, and concluded that “control includes autonomy in performing work tasks as well as

the opportunity to impact broader organizational policies” (171). In the literature dealing with journalist job satisfaction, autonomy has always been ranked among the top factors leading to satisfaction (Weaver and Willnat 2012), particularly for American journalists (Chang and Massey 2010).

In this context, Weaver et al. (2007) argued that “one of the hallmarks of professional work—something that distinguishes a profession from other occupations—is the wide latitude that a practitioner has in carrying out his or her occupational duties” (70). Research by Pollard (1995), as cited in Beam (2006), showed that journalists’ professional satisfaction with their job goes up if they are provided with “more autonomy, authority, and control over their work—hallmarks of what he characterized as ‘professional control’” (Beam 2006: 172). In their survey of American journalists, Bergen and Weaver (1988) found that the opportunity to choose the stories they will report and the chance to specialize in the field were among the significant predictors of job satisfaction for journalists at medium-sized American newspapers.

One of the factors that have a negative impact on journalists’ autonomy is the intervention by what Weaver et al. (2007) referred to as “outside agents,” particularly government officials who try to control the news flow, affect the news gate keeping role and deny access to information. Another important factor that negatively affects journalists’ autonomy is news “commercialization” and “the erosion of the ‘wall’ between a media organization’s business and journalistic operations” (Weaver et al. 2007: 71). This trend often elicits fears among journalists that their freedom to make editorial decisions will be compromised and their professional autonomy will clash with their organization’s business requirements (Weaver et al. 2007).

The conflict or tension that can erupt as a result of lack of editorial autonomy is part of a bigger tension that journalists struggle with—namely, that between their idealistic and realistic expectations about their jobs and their news organizations.

### ***Journalists’ Ideal versus Realistic Expectations***

Several scholars have looked into the relationship between journalists’ job satisfaction and their news organizations’ priorities, objectives and culture. The journalists who perceive their organization’s priorities as restricting their autonomy have low job satisfaction levels. In this context, job satisfaction can be regarded as the degree of harmony between journalists’ internal, personally held news values and how they see these values being met in the newsroom (Bergen and Weaver 1988).

“Overall, research has shown that workers are more satisfied with their jobs when they perceive their personal goals and values as congruent with the organization’s goals, values, and culture” (Beam 2006: 171). In other words, when the journalists sense an

incompatibility between their expectations and the actual demands of the job, their job satisfaction levels are drastically reduced (Beam 2006). It is this disconnect between the idealistic and realistic expectations of journalists that can have a negative impact on their job satisfaction levels. In this context, Keith (2005) surveyed 470 copy desk workers at 100 American newspapers and found that “nearly one in five respondents reporting that disconnect [between their idealistic and realistic expectations] was more likely to be dissatisfied with aspects of his/her job and to have a lower opinion of the ethic[al] standards of his/her newspaper. However, it is impossible to tell which came first, the disconnect or the discontent” (Keith 2005: 942).

### **Literature Review: Arab Journalists’ Job Satisfaction**

There are relatively few studies on Arab journalists’ job satisfaction. Existing research has tended to focus on staff profile and political affiliation rather than on employee satisfaction and expectations. Worth noting, however, is a study conducted in the year 2000 on journalists’ job satisfaction among 160 journalists working for 16 different national or local news outlets in the United Arab Emirates, including newspapers, radio and local television stations (Kirat 2012). The study found that more than 60 percent of the journalists were satisfied with their jobs, especially with their job stability, the extent of freedom and peer relationships. Weaver and Willnat (2012) found that journalists in the UAE and Indonesia valued job security as well as material aspects of the job more than journalists from 20 other countries studied. This should not be surprising, considering that most news workers in the UAE are non-residents who come on working visas for jobs that pay better than those available in their home countries.

Although the Kirat study concluded that UAE journalists were relatively happy with their job conditions, it found that they also were concerned with a “lack of depth in reporting and journalists too often being viewed as spokespeople for the government” (468). The Kirat study explored attitudes of journalists working for local UAE media, and did not include pan-Arab media, nor influential satellite television like Al-Arabiya, which operates in the UAE but broadcasts much wider afield.

A large survey of Arab journalists in 14 countries conducted in 2005 and 2006 by Pintak and Ginges (2012) found that journalists were disappointed in their media’s lack of professionalism and high levels of corruption and government control. “Journalists must balance the obligation to inform the public with the need to show respect for those being covered,” they concluded (436). The researchers pointed out that corruption in the form of accepting cash for providing positive coverage is common among journalists in the Arab world. They also found that journalists felt their professionalism was hampered by

media owners “since those individuals are usually closely associated with, or inseparable from, the totalitarian governments that dominate the region” (435).

Although existing studies have not focused specifically on the job satisfaction of pan-Arab television journalists, several have documented the prestige and high salaries enjoyed by these journalists. For example, Valeriani (2010) found that journalists working for Egyptian media tended to view pan-Arab media journalists who work at Al-Arabiya and Al Jazeera as more professional. In a similar vein, Pintak and Ginges (2012) called major satellite channels “elite newsrooms” and found that these journalists can earn seven times the salary of other journalists.

Finally, while the literature reviewed above does not directly address job security—one of the highest indicators of job satisfaction in western studies—new attitudinal research gives us a hint of trends to come. A recent survey of Arab youth found that owning a home and achieving a fair wage—goals intrinsically tied to job security—have displaced living in a democratic country as the highest priorities for young people today (Asda’a Burson-Marsteller 2012).

It imperative to investigate the professional expectations and job satisfaction levels of journalists at pan-Arab satellite channels, such as Al-Arabiya, because these journalists play a critical role in shaping the opinions of the public in one of the most politically driven, volatile, and rapidly evolving media environments in the world.

### **Al-Arabiya Satellite Channel**

Al-Arabiya is one of the two most popular pan-Arab news networks broadcasting from the Middle East—the other being Al Jazeera. Both are considered a uniting voice for Arabs across all countries, but Al-Arabiya has been described as the more moderate, especially during the events of the Arab Spring when Al Jazeera took sides quite obviously with anti-regime protesters (Pintak 2011). Al-Arabiya was launched on March 3, 2003 as part of the Middle East Broadcasting (MBC) group, which is owned by Saudi businessman Sheikh Walid Al-Ibrahim, the brother-in-law of the late Saudi King Fahd.

It was publicly said by Al-Arabiya managers that the channel provides “more balanced” coverage than its main competitor Al Jazeera (Hammond 2007). In an interview with the *New York Times Magazine*, Al-Ibrahim said his goal “was to position Al-Arabiya... as a calm, cool, professional media outlet that would be known for objective reporting rather than for shouted opinions” (Shapiro 2005). Al-Arabiya’s launch, coinciding as it did with the start of the Iraq war, allowed the channel to make a name for itself early on as an alternative to Al Jazeera. A poll conducted in six Arab countries by the University of

Maryland and Zogby International in October 2005 showed that Al-Arabiya was the second choice for viewers after Al Jazeera (Hammond 2007).

The channel's general manager is Abdulrahman Al Rashed, a veteran Saudi journalist who edited the Saudi-owned Arabic-language daily newspaper *Asharq Al-Awsat* before joining Al-Arabiya in 2004. Al Rashed's main goal has been to promote a constructive dialogue among Arab viewers and to aim for a middle-of-the-line, liberal ideal in the channel's programming and talk shows (Shapiro 2005).

An aspect of Al-Arabiya's success is its belonging to the Saudi media empire, a fact that has, however, led to chronic questions about its independence. This media empire is supported by the fact that between 40 and 70 percent of advertising money in the Arab Middle East comes from Saudi advertisers. Arab television networks, Al-Arabiya among them, "are not going to risk jeopardizing their cash flow by upsetting their prime advertising market in the region's largest economy" (Cochrane 2007). In this context, Al-Saggaf (2006) noted that "one might suspect that the channel [Al-Arabiya] favors Saudi Arabia. It is also possible that some of the material broadcast from the station is geared toward the Saudi government's agendas" (Al-Saggaf 2006: 313). A *New York Times* article reported that one of Al-Arabiya's main challenges is to defend accusations of its "Saudi orientation...and to some extent the rulers of Saudi Arabia see it as a vehicle for their own designs" (Worth 2008). Zayani and Ayish (2006) argued that the likelihood that Al-Arabiya's Saudi connection would impact its editorial freedom is "not simply because Al-Arabiya's journalists would be constrained about reporting fearlessly on issues such as the [royal] succession, internal reform and the rise of separatist currents in the Kingdom, but because it may be difficult for the Saudi-backed channel to disengage itself from regional politics" (483-484).

In fact, Al-Arabiya has been subject to pressure from the Saudi royal family on several occasions. In 2007, the channel publicized its intent to air a series about the Saudi King Abdullah. The series was canceled after airing only the first episode which was believed to have angered some members of the Saudi royal family (Worth 2008). The jobs of Al-Arabiya personnel have also been affected by the channel's Saudi ownership. In 2010, Al-Arabiya aired an episode of a documentary ("Islam and the West") that elicited the anger of several Saudi princes. A guest featured on the episode said that "the West equated Islam with terrorism, extremism and violence because of the Wahhabis...Al-Saud [the Saudi royal family] are behind disseminating this ideology in the world" (Trabelsi 2010). As a result, Al-Arabiya's general manager, Al Rashed, attempted to resign, but his resignation was not accepted by the channel's owner Al-Ibrahim (Trabelsi 2010). In another example, in 2011 Al-Arabiya fired a prominent veteran Egyptian journalist, Hafez Al Mirazi, for promising viewers his next show would discuss the effect of the Egyptian revolution on Saudi Arabia. In a dramatic challenge to his employer, Al

Mirazi announced on air that this topic would test the independence of Al-Arabiya, however he never returned to the program (Pintak 2011).

Al Rashed has always been open about the consequences of Al-Arabiya's Saudi connection. He said in an interview with the *New York Times Magazine* in 2005 that "Al-Arabiya can't report freely on the Saudi government because it is Saudi-owned" (Shapiro 2005). And in a more recent interview with *Variety Arabia* magazine, Al Rashed said: "We have a political ceiling that we can't cross. This is also true for all other stations—each has a limit" (Rouda 2011: 14).

Despite the limitations, Al-Arabiya has achieved several journalistic scoops. The most high-profile was the exclusive interview with U.S. President Barack Obama who chose the channel for his first formal interview as president in January 2009 (Lynch 2009). Al-Arabiya's coverage of the Arab Spring was referred to as "sterling" and described as meeting "the highest professional standards" (Ismail 2011).

## **Hypotheses and Research Questions**

**H1:** The higher Al-Arabiya news workers' perceived level of editorial autonomy, the higher their job satisfaction level.

Three survey items were used to measure editorial autonomy. Respondents were asked to rate, on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "complete freedom" to "no freedom," how free they are in getting their ideas covered; in selecting their stories; and in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized. This scale was taken from Weaver et al. (2007: 266). An open-ended question also asked respondents to report the most significant limits on their freedom.

The job satisfaction level was measured by a close-ended question, asking respondents to rate how satisfied they are with their job at Al-Arabiya on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "extremely satisfied" to "extremely dissatisfied." An open-ended question also asked respondents to report the reasons for their satisfaction or lack thereof. Both the close-ended and open-ended questions were taken from Weaver et al. (2007: 264).

**H2:** There will be a correlation between Al-Arabiya news workers' job satisfaction level and how closely they perceive Al-Arabiya journalistic roles to be in alignment with their perceptions of the ideal roles of quality journalism.

Respondents were asked on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "extremely important" to "extremely unimportant" to rate the importance of 11 ideal roles for quality journalism in general borrowed from Weaver et al. (2007: 269). The statements included: "getting information to the public quickly; providing analysis and interpretation of complex



problems; investigating claims and statements made by governments and by opposition groups; staying away from stories where factual content cannot be verified; concentrating on news that is of interest to the widest possible audience; being an adversary of public officials and businesses by being skeptical of their actions; giving ordinary people a chance to express their views on public affairs; motivating ordinary people to get involved in public discussions of important issues; and pointing people toward possible solutions to society's problems."

The same 11 ideal roles were then used to ask respondents to assess the level of importance that they feel Al-Arabiya gives them on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "extremely important" to "extremely unimportant."

**RQ1:** Will there be a correlation between Al-Arabiya news workers' job satisfaction level and their perceptions of the channel's professionalism level in covering the Arab Spring?

Respondents' assessment of Al-Arabiya's professionalism level in covering the Arab Spring was measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "highly professional" to "highly unprofessional." The scale included six countries where public uprisings have taken place: Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya and Syria.

**RQ2:** How important are the extrinsic dimensions (i.e. more tangible rewards from work) versus the intrinsic dimensions (i.e. less tangible rewards from work) to Al-Arabiya news workers' job satisfaction level?

Nine survey items borrowed from Weaver et al. (2007: 189) were used to measure extrinsic and intrinsic rewards, asking respondents to rate on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "extremely important" to "extremely unimportant" the level of importance of these rewards to their job satisfaction. Extrinsic rewards included: "Pay; job benefits; chance to get ahead in the organization; job security; and chance to develop a specialty." Intrinsic rewards included: "Chance to help people; editorial policies; amount of autonomy; and ability to influence public opinion."

**RQ3:** Do Al-Arabiya news workers' demographics (age, gender, education, nationality, academic qualifications and journalistic experience) have an impact on their job satisfaction level?

## **Method**

We conducted a cross-sectional survey method to collect data from a non-probability convenience sample of Al-Arabiya news workers. A convenience sample was the most appropriate for this study given the challenges and complications that researchers in the

Arab world often face, such as political sensitivities and reluctance to participate in surveys out of fear.

We also conducted open-ended, qualitative interviews with 15 news workers who represented a spread of positions (reporter, presenter, writer, producer) as well as a balance of gender, nationality, and seniority. The interviews included the three top executives at Al-Arabiya: General Manager Abdulrahman Al Rashed, Executive Editor Nabeel Alkhatib, and Director of News and Current Affairs Nakhla Al-Hajj.

The survey utilized a paper questionnaire that included close-ended, five-point Likert scales to assess Al-Arabiya news workers' job satisfaction, editorial autonomy, perceptions of ideal versus realistic journalistic roles, and their judgment of Al-Arabiya's professionalism level in covering the protests of the Arab Spring. The questionnaire also included some open-ended questions asking respondents why they are satisfied or dissatisfied with their jobs and inquiring about the limits that they feel affect their editorial autonomy.

The surveys were distributed personally, after face-to-face discussions with the news workers. Other surveys of journalists have shown higher response rates when questionnaires were presented personally, as compared to online or via mail (Weaver and Willnat 2012). The questionnaires were anonymous, and they were written in English since we were told that all staff members are fluent in English. After getting approval from the public relations department to access the Al-Arabiya newsroom in Dubai Media City, we made several visits over a two-week period, during which time we handed out the questionnaires. We made sure to cover all work shifts so as to survey the largest possible number of respondents.

A limitation of any workplace-based research is the uncertainty of the participants' motivation—such as whether they felt their responses will be seen and/or judged by management. This limitation was mitigated somewhat by management not accompanying the two researchers while they were in the newsroom. The researchers were free to roam throughout the six-floor building, and to distribute and collect surveys during quiet times in the work flow.

The qualitative interviews were conducted in either English or Arabic depending on the interviewees' comfort level. The lead author is bilingual in English and Arabic, while the second author is a native English speaker who was previously a television journalist. The average time for the qualitative interviews was between 15 and 20 minutes. Some of the news worker interviewees preferred to remain anonymous, while others did not object to having their names and titles included.

Completed surveys were collected from 176 news workers, a response rate of 94 percent, which is considered well above average (De Vaus 2002). In addition, the sample itself represented a healthy 80 percent of the total 220 Al-Arabiya news workers normally working in the head office in Dubai, which Executive Editor Alkhatib told us consisted of 92 in News; 38 in Current Affairs; 28 in Business; 18 in Sports; 40 in the Al-Arabiya website; and 4 in Weather. Surveys were not given to those away from the office, such as those on sick leave, holiday, or field assignments. Those who chose not to respond gave no reasons, as is their right under ethical research protocol.

The profile of the respondents showed a group that was well-educated and experienced as news workers. All except four respondents had been to university (97.7%), four had PhDs, and 61 percent had formal qualifications in journalism, such as a degree or diploma. Most of them (65%), had worked in journalism for more than seven years, and 30 percent of the employees had worked for Al-Arabiya since its inception in 2003.

Two thirds of the respondents were male (M62.3%, F37.7%) and three quarters were Muslim (Muslim 76%, Christian 13%, other 11%). There were 21 different nationalities, with the majority (60%) from Arab countries, mainly from Lebanon (16%), Saudi Arabia (8.5%), Palestine (8.5%) and Jordan (8.5%).

## Survey Results

The dependent variable in our analysis was the respondents' level of job satisfaction, as determined in a direct question to the respondents. Almost 78 percent of the news workers said they were "extremely satisfied" or "satisfied" with their present job at Al-Arabiya. Only ten people, representing 5.7 percent, said they were "dissatisfied" or "extremely dissatisfied."

*Table 1: Satisfaction Level Overall*

	Extremely satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Extremely dissatisfied
All things considered, how satisfied are you with your present job at Al-Arabiya?	22.2%	55.7%	16.5%	3.4%	2.3%

*N=176*

Knowing their job was stable and secure was mentioned by 14 percent of those with high job satisfaction. Some pointed out that journalist jobs are less secure in other news operations in the region. Another common theme was that they like working for a television station that has such a high public profile. In fact, 10 percent of those satisfied

with their job wrote comments such as, “Satisfaction comes from working at a well-known media company,” and also, “I’m working in one of the most prestigious TV stations in the Arab world.” Eight women used the word “love” to describe their jobs, and another seven respondents mentioned the caring management. “I’m considered a person, not a number,” wrote one. Another wrote that the reason for his job satisfaction was, “two simple words, the management cares.”

The few who were not satisfied with their job tended to comment about having to work with colleagues who were not properly trained or experienced. Several gave comments such as this one: “Unqualified employees being selected to do the job is unfair. I hope the management policies shall change the strategy of hiring friends.” Another comment from a journalist who had low job satisfaction said, “I’m proud and loyal to Al-Arabiya, but my job is below my experience and not rewarding for what I do.”

The level of job satisfaction in Table 1 was correlated with independent variables from the survey to explore the hypotheses and research questions. All correlation tests used significance at the 0.05 level. All frequency means are based on a scale weighted from 5 to 1.

**H1:** The survey supported the hypothesis that the higher Al-Arabiya news workers’ perceived level of editorial autonomy, the higher their job satisfaction level. The news workers indicated that they have slightly above average freedom in the editorial part of their job: autonomy in getting an idea covered (3.78), in selecting their stories (3.75) and in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized (3.66), as shown in Table 2. A Pearson Correlation two-tailed test on the relationship of job satisfaction and the combined rating of editorial autonomy showed there was a moderate positive correlation ( $r=.290$ ,  $n=173$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). This indicated agreement with H1 that the news workers’ level of job satisfaction was influenced by how much editorial freedom they felt they had in their job.

**Table 2:** Editorial freedom perceived by Al-Arabiya news workers

	Mean	Complete freedom	Most freedom	Average	Little Freedom	None
If you have a good story idea, how much freedom do you usually have in getting this idea covered?	3.78	17.1%	49.7%	29.1%	2.3%	1.7%
How much freedom do you usually have in selecting your stories?	3.75	19.4%	46.9%	26.3%	4.0%	3.4%

How much freedom do you usually have in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized?	3.66	14.4%	49.4%	27.6%	4.6%	4.0%
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In the open-ended part of the survey, some respondents said they felt they had as much freedom as necessary, or had an acceptance of their limitations: “A limit of freedom in Al-Arabiya is the same as we can find in all Arabic channels, but in Al-Arabiya it’s better than any other place.” Some pointed out that the limits placed on stories were there to ensure they respect cultural boundaries. For example, one respondent wrote: “Some topics are taboo, such as nudity, religion, etc.” About one third of the comments indicated that there were no limits or very few limits on editorial freedom at Al-Arabiya.

Another one third of the comments, however, indicated that the most significant limits on freedom at the station were political, and that political issues were “to be avoided or treated with a lot of caution.” Three respondents pointed out that anything related to Saudi Arabia has limits. Others were more vague, describing the limits as “political limits related to regional regimes.”

**H2:** There was a strong correlation between Al-Arabiya news workers’ job satisfaction level and how closely they perceive Al-Arabiya journalistic roles to be in alignment with their perceptions of the ideal roles of quality journalism.

The news workers rated the importance of the 11 common journalistic roles. They also rated how much importance they felt Al-Arabiya placed on these same journalistic values. We called the news workers’ views of journalism Idealistic and their views of Al-Arabiya’s journalism values Realistic.

The frequencies in Table 3 show that for many of the values there was a strong alignment, in that the news workers thought their employer had the same journalistic values as themselves. However, the news workers thought their employer had lower journalistic standards in three areas, namely, in giving ordinary people a chance to express their public affairs views, in motivating ordinary people to get involved in important public discussions, and in pointing people towards possible social solutions.

**Table 3:** *Idealistic versus Realistic journalism values*

	Mean <i>Realistic</i>	Mean <i>Idealistic</i>	Alignment difference
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Importance of Journalism values:	Staff view of what Al-Arabiya management thinks is good journalism	Staff view of good journalism	Management compared to staff priorities
Get information to the public quickly	4.14	4.55	+0.09
Provide analysis and interpretation of complex problems	4.32	4.34	-0.02
Investigate claims and statements made by governments	4.01	4.07	-0.06
Investigate claims and statements made by opposition groups	4.03	4.14	-0.11
Stay away from stories where factual content cannot be verified	3.88	3.85	+0.03
Concentrate on news that is of interest to the widest possible audience	4.32	4.29	+0.03
Be an adversary of public officials by being skeptical of their actions	3.60	3.58	+0.02
Be an adversary of businesses by being constantly skeptical of their actions	3.50	3.56	-0.06
Give ordinary people a chance to express their views on public affairs	3.80	4.02	<b>-0.22</b>
Motivate ordinary people to get involved in public discussions of important issues	3.66	3.85	<b>-0.19</b>
Point people toward possible solutions to society's problems	3.6	3.88	<b>-0.28</b>

*Values for means on a 5-point scale ranging from Extremely Important (5) to Extremely Unimportant (1). Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the indexed scales was a strong .861 and .855. ( $r=.649$ ,  $n=151$ ,  $p=.000$ ), (Adjusted R square = .14;  $F(2,148)=12.32$ ,  $p<.001$ )*

A strong positive correlation was shown between the news workers' job satisfaction and how closely aligned the Idealistic and the Realistic scales were ( $r=.649$ ,  $n=151$ ,  $p=.000$ ). The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the indexed scales was strong, and the regression indicated that, indeed, job satisfaction was mediated by how closely aligned the scales were. Combined averages also substantiated that 28 percent of the variance in job satisfaction was accounted for by the linear combination of the two predictions of Realistic and Idealistic, with an adjusted R square = .14;  $F(2,148)=12.32$ ,  $p<.001$ .

**RQ1:** There was a correlation between the news workers' job satisfaction level and their perception of the channel's professionalism level in covering the Arab Spring. Overall, Al-Arabiya's staff felt their organization did a good job in covering the protests in North Africa and the Middle East, rating it above average in all areas. A Pearson Correlation test for the six countries combined showed a moderate positive correlation between the news workers' job satisfaction and how well they felt Al-Arabiya covered the Arab Spring protests ( $r=.221$ ,  $n=166$ ,  $p=.004$ ).

The disaggregated figures, however, indicated that the news workers gave mixed reviews to how professionally they thought their organization covered the protests in the six different countries. They rated the coverage of Egypt the highest (4.38), very closely followed by Tunisia (4.33) and Libya (4.30), and only slightly lower were Syria (4.10) and Yemen (4.09). Coverage of these countries was scored in the "professional" range by the staff. However, the news workers considered that their television network was much less professional in covering Bahrain (3.05). More than 11 percent of the news workers said that Al-Arabiya's coverage of Bahrain was "highly unprofessional" and another 20 percent said it was "unprofessional." This indicates that one third of Al-Arabiya's news workers felt their network was unprofessional in how it covered the Bahrain protests.

The results of a Pearson Correlation test showed that the news workers' job satisfaction levels were, in fact, influenced by how they thought Al-Arabiya covered Bahrain ( $r=.242$ ,  $N=170$ ,  $p=001$ ), and to a lesser extent Tunisia ( $r=.198$ ,  $n=174$ ,  $p=.009$ ) and Egypt ( $r=.209$ ,  $m=175$ ,  $p=.005$ ). As shown in Table 4, how they viewed the quality of coverage of Syria, Yemen, and Libya showed no effect on their job satisfaction.

**Table 4:** Effect of Al-Arabiya's coverage of Arab Spring on job satisfaction

Al-Arabiya's coverage of 2011 protests in:	Mean		Level of Job Satisfaction
Tunisia	4.33	Pearson Correlations Significance (2-tailed)	.98 .009
Egypt	4.38	Pearson Correlations Significance (2-tailed)	.209 .005

Yemen	4.09	Pearson Correlations Significance (2-tailed)	.141 .065
Bahrain	3.05	Pearson Correlations Significance (2-tailed)	.242 * .001 *
Libya	4.30	Pearson Correlations Significance (2-tailed)	.131 .084
Syria	4.10	Pearson Correlations Significance (2-tailed)	.145 .055

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)*

**RQ2:** The results showed that the extrinsic dimensions (i.e. more tangible rewards from work) were more significant than the intrinsic dimensions (i.e. less tangible rewards from work) to Al-Arabiya news workers' job satisfaction level.

News workers rated how important they felt each of the nine job dimensions was to their own job satisfaction. We divided the job dimensions into those that were of extrinsic value to an employee (payment, job benefits, having a chance to get ahead in the organization, job security and having a chance to develop a specialty) and those that were of intrinsic value (having a chance to help people, the company's editorial policies, amount of autonomy, and the ability to influence public opinion). These definitions were in line with Ryan (2009), as outlined in the literature review.

The results also showed clearly that the news workers valued the extrinsic parts of their job more than the intrinsic parts, as illustrated in Table 5. The average mean value for extrinsic dimensions is 4.24 compared to the average mean value for intrinsic dimensions at 4.04. This conclusion was further illustrated by a regression of partial connection which showed that the extrinsic dimensions ( $r=.273$ ) had almost double the effect of intrinsic dimensions ( $r=.123$ ) on job satisfaction.

**Table 5:** *Intrinsic and Extrinsic values for job satisfaction*

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean
Pay	4.23	.748	Extrinsic average 4.24
Job benefits	4.21	.749	
Chance to get ahead in the organization	4.28	.887	
Job Security	4.47	.801	
Chance to develop a specialty	4.21	.855	
Chance to help people	4.03	.866	Intrinsic average 4.04
Editorial policies	4.05	.785	
Amount of autonomy	3.95	.768	



Able to influence public opinion	4.14	.792	
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- *Shaded values are extrinsic, unshaded values are intrinsic.*

Although a weighted frequency test showed that the news workers rated most of the nine dimensions as important (>4.00), there were two results that stood out. One was that job security was considered “extremely important” by more than 60 percent of the respondents and “important” by a further 31 percent—indicating that 91 percent felt that job security was important. The mean average of 4.47 put job security much higher than any other dimension. These results are similar to job satisfaction studies in other countries, such as Taiwan (Chang and Massey 2010) and the United States (Ryan 2009; Weaver et al. 2007), which also found that job security has a strong influence on news workers’ sense of job satisfaction.

The second notable result was that news workers rated their amount of autonomy as the lowest dimension that they felt was important to their own job satisfaction. Autonomy was still rated as “important” but not as highly as the other eight dimensions.

Although they did not rate amount of autonomy very highly in their self-description of job satisfaction in Table 5, further analysis showed that autonomy was, in fact, correlated with respondents’ job satisfaction. Although this may seem on the surface to be incongruent, it simply means that more autonomy in their jobs leads to more job satisfaction; however, this is overshadowed by their desire for extrinsic job values such as job security.

**RQ3:** The dependent variable of job satisfaction was not affected by the respondents’ demographic characteristics, such as whether they were male or female, or how long they had worked for Al-Arabiya. An ANOVA one-way analysis of variance was conducted for seven different variables. The results found no difference in the level of job satisfaction and Al-Arabiya staff members’ gender ( $p=.620$ ), length of time spent at Al-Arabiya ( $p=.800$ ), education ( $p=.794$ ), journalism experience ( $p=.648$ ), academic qualifications ( $p=.094$ ), nationality ( $p=.091$ ), or age ( $p=.249$ ).

### **Interview Results: The Question of the Bahrain Coverage**

Although the survey results showed that the news workers valued their organization’s journalistic values, they also showed that they thought the organization lowered its journalistic standards when covering Bahrain during the period in which that country experienced pro-democracy protests and a security crackdown. The dichotomy is made more acute by the fact that the news workers who expressed this perception were experienced and qualified journalists whose job satisfaction correlated positively with

their feeling of editorial freedom (Table 2). The qualitative data gathered from the 15 interviews conducted with management and non-management personnel shed more light on this apparent dichotomy.

### *Interviews with management*

We conducted interviews with each of the three executives, asking them to rate Al-Arabiya's professionalism in covering the Arab Spring, and also to explain the discrepancy in how it covered the protests in Bahrain in comparison to other countries. The three quickly pointed out that the uprisings of the Arab Spring underscored Al-Arabiya's fearless journalistic presence by showing that it was one of the few news networks in the world with capable reporters already in the field in all the Middle East hot spots. Those reporters were experienced enough to fully understand the context of the protests. Executive Editor Nabeel Alkhatib told us that he was giving interviews to news wires such as Reuters, Agence France-Presse, and Associated Press, as "we became the source of the information."

The executives emphasized the boldness required by Al-Arabiya in order to successfully cover this region's politics. They also said their ability to professionally cover dramatic news events was due to dedicated staff who are willing to work long hours and who are accustomed to volatile and fast-paced news. Alkhatib expressed sadness at the 15 news staff members killed in the line of duty since the station started nine years ago, but he explained, "We are not covering Switzerland. We are covering Iraq, where if somebody is unhappy with me, he just goes and kills my people." He described many more incidents where staff members were hurt or physically threatened, in addition to the news station itself being banned or threatened. Director of News and Current Affairs Nakhla Al-Hajj also gave credit to staff for the network's high reputation, saying they are some of the best journalists in the Arab world. "Luckily, we have so many great people who suggest ideas, and we have so many courageous people who go on the ground."

General Manager Abdulrahman Al Rashed emphasized that Al-Arabiya faces more risks than a lot of television networks working in areas outside of the Middle East. "Unfortunately this is really a vicious area, a risky area. There's no doubt about it." He pointed out that threats and obstructions come from a wide array of sources, including governments, security apparatuses, religious groups, police, institutions and individuals. He said some official and non-official groups object to the media airing both sides of a topic. "You have a society which does not appreciate media freedom... You can read on the Internet; it's full of threats to the lives of our journalists simply because someone spoke his mind on our screen."

Yet despite management's description of a culture of not shying away from dangerous news events, Al-Arabiya did shy away from full coverage of the protests in Bahrain during the Arab Spring. All three of the executives interviewed told us there were solid journalistic reasons for the minimal coverage. They indicated that it was a matter of weighing the relative newsworthiness and available resources. They strongly denied that there was any pressure or directive from their Saudi Arabian owner, even though the regimes of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are closely associated, and much of Al-Arabiya's advertising revenue comes from Saudi Arabian businesses.

Al Rashed pointed out that Al-Arabiya did cover Bahrain, and the viewpoint of demonstrators, but the coverage was overshadowed by much bigger and bloodier protests taking place at the same time in other countries, such as Egypt and Libya. He said that if there weren't larger protests going on at the same time, Bahrain might have received more journalistic attention. Also, according to Al-Hajj, access to Bahrain was not as easy as the countries where Al-Arabiya already had correspondents on the ground.

However, Al-Hajj explained that the "delicate" nature of the Bahrain uprising meant it was different from revolutions in the other countries. "It's not only a revolution against the regime, it has some political and sectarian faces," he said. Alkhatib, who had previously covered the Israeli conflict for many years for MBC, agreed that the issues in Bahrain were more complicated than simply "democracy versus tyranny" as in the other countries. He also said that internally the staff agreed with the executive viewpoint and understood the reasons that Bahrain was not covered as much as the other countries experiencing upheavals in 2011. He said:

If I would do so, I assume I would be risking to shut down the operation, because this is a multi-million news operation that needs to get the money from somewhere... And I cannot cover it the way I want, without thinking about the possible repercussions....If you asked me, if Bahrain was to deteriorate more, would you go and cover it? I believe we would have covered it if it deteriorated more.

### ***Interviews with non-management news workers***

In-depth interviews with 12 operational news workers (producers, reporters, presenters, etc) indicated that staff did not accept the above-mentioned reasons cited by management. The majority of those interviewed quite candidly said the lightweight coverage of Bahrain was not journalistically professional, but most did not condemn their managers for this.

A female reporter said Al-Arabiya's Saudi connection meant that "the Bahrain coverage was purely through Saudi lenses and perspectives... I personally have no problem with

that because before I applied for Al-Arabiya, I knew this was a Saudi channel, and I expected that they would adopt a Saudi point of view.” A male editor added that “there was another problem in Bahrain, which was that the conflict was mainly sectarian between Sunnis and Shi’ites, and we normally try to avoid covering any such conflict that has [a] sectarian nature.” A female producer who acknowledged that the Bahraini regime’s close ties with Saudi Arabia made the issue more sensitive to Al-Arabiya, said, “but of course we have red lines that dictate our coverage... We know our freedoms and our limits.” A male producer justified the stance by saying “There is no news station in the world that does not have limits on the editorial freedom. Even CNN and Fox News have their own red lines.”

## **Discussion**

On the surface, there was some inconsistency in the opinions, such as the news workers indicating that they felt they had a fair amount of editorial freedom (Table 2) while being openly critical of their newsroom’s lack of coverage of Bahrain’s violence and protests. This is where the in-depth interviews helped explain their viewpoint.

The general opinion that the Bahrain coverage was shaped by the television network’s ownership may appear to indicate a lack of editorial freedom; however, the interviewees did not see editorial freedom that way. Many saw editorial freedom as the freedoms they enjoyed *within the newsroom*; that is, the ability to be involved in internal debates and decisions on any news topic.

An example was one female producer who was adamant that she had a high level of editorial freedom, insisting “We discuss every issue and we reach an agreement within the framework of the channel’s editorial policies. We can talk about anything in the newsroom, but that does not mean it is going to be aired. The final decision is not ours.” Another female producer lauded her editorial freedom, “I feel I have more input here compared to other stations.”

Being able to contribute to editorial decisions—whether or not this affected coverage—seemed important to the Al-Arabiya staff. The in-depth interviews had a strong common theme in that the staff appreciated that their managers were easily approachable. “We can even call any of the management members on their cell phones at any time of the night if there is a breaking news story or if we want to ask their opinion on an urgent matter,” said a male producer. One senior male journalist who had worked at Al-Arabiya since its inception said the best thing was that the organization was inclusive: “In fact, it nurtures and accepts differences.” He said that Al-Arabiya was unlike other Middle East operations because it respected and accepted views from all its news workers. He pointed

out:

Al-Arabiya on purpose has widened the mix of people it has employed. You have people from the right wing and left wing, you have people coming from all walks of life: from the countryside, from cities, from all Arabic-speaking countries. So, I believe that this works in the favor of Al-Arabiya overall. Al-Arabiya is the melting pot for people from different cultural, educational and ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, the output for news and the editorial input bring in a bit of everything.

An experienced female senior journalist said she could express her opinion to the general manager at any time, adding that “This makes us feel we are in continuous brainstorming with the administration about the network’s coverage. And that is a very healthy phenomenon.”

A majority of staff members (in the survey and in the interviews) highlighted the high reputation Al-Arabiya has in the news industry, and how proud they were to be part of it. They also pointed out that journalists remain at the network for many years. One male producer explained the positive and supportive environment this way: “The evidence that I can give you is that most of the Al-Arabiya employees who left the channel to work somewhere else have come back to Al-Arabiya after realizing how friendly the environment here is.” The executives confirmed that many news workers are accepted back after leaving to work at competing news organizations.

The professional inclusiveness described by staff underscores a strong feeling of security in their jobs, and it shows that an Al-Arabiya journalist at any level can argue about a topic with management and not worry about losing his or her job. They can leave for a competing news agency and feel secure that they can return.

In summary, the evidence from interviews and surveys backs up the reported positive feeling of job security and editorial freedom among the news workers. These are the same two predictors of journalists’ job satisfaction identified in dozens of studies worldwide, as described in the literature review. However much Al-Arabiya news workers valued editorial freedom, the study found that their job satisfaction levels relied much more heavily on their feeling of job security. This is in line with Pintak’s (2011) assertion that many Arab journalists fear heavy-handed government interference in their work (not commercial interference) and that this impacts negatively on both their editorial freedom and job security. Unlike these other Arab journalists, the Al-Arabiya news workers are free of such heavy-handed government interference, which may explain why they feel they have job security and editorial freedom and thereby are satisfied with their jobs.

## Conclusion

There was a high level of job satisfaction among the Al-Arabiya staff. Although 78 percent seemed high, it was not unusual, as similarly high satisfaction levels were found in journalist studies in Great Britain (78%) and Finland (84%) (Weaver and Willnat 2012). Al-Arabiya news workers' feeling of job satisfaction was not dependent on their gender, nationality, age, journalism qualifications or educational background. Rather, this study supported the theory (Keith 2005) that job satisfaction is dependent on how closely news workers think their journalistic values are aligned with those of their employer. It also supports the theory (Beam 2006) that journalists have higher job satisfaction when they perceive that their employer puts a high value on journalistic goals.

Surprisingly, Al-Arabiya news workers' job satisfaction was correlated with their feeling of editorial freedom, the same as it was with journalists working in countries with more media freedom, such as Finland, Chile, Sweden, Taiwan, and the United States (Weaver and Willnat 2012). As discussed in the literature review, Weaver et al.'s study of American journalists (2007) posits that there is a strong positive correlation between journalists' level of perceived autonomy and job satisfaction. An earlier study (Weaver and Wilhoit 1994) showed that more than half of the respondents highlighted autonomy as a significant predictor of their job satisfaction.

This study showed a positive correlation between editorial freedom and job satisfaction, Hypothesis 2. However, the qualitative part of the study showed clearly that Al-Arabiya news workers feel that their Saudi Arabian ownership and their location in the Middle East prevent them from covering certain stories in a way they feel would be professional. Not only have they accepted these limitations, but they have also incorporated them into how they now view journalistic values. Working within the unique news gathering confines of a Saudi-owned channel operating in the Gulf countries is accepted by these journalists as a trade-off for a secure job and for working at what they feel is the best Arabic television station in the region. The simultaneous high job satisfaction and criticism of the station's weak coverage of Bahrain showed a pragmatic awareness of the sacrifices required for job satisfaction.

Al-Arabiya's executives agreed that Bahrain was covered less aggressively than other protesting countries. They said that it was discussed internally and the staff understood the journalistic reasons for the marginal coverage. The staff, however, did not entirely accept these reasons, as one third of the respondents harshly marked Al-Arabiya's coverage of Bahrain as "unprofessional." In addition, there were widespread comments from participants that their editorial freedom is affected by the fact they are working in the Middle East, at a news station owned by a Saudi Arabian businessman related to the royal family and financially reliant on mainly Saudi Arabian advertisers. Again, this

shows a pragmatic accommodation on the part of the Al-Arabiya staff—one that they may consider journalistically unprofessional, but a necessary one for them to keep a news job in this part of the world.

Despite making these overt adjustments to universal journalism values, Al-Arabiya news workers were still satisfied with their jobs. The reason for this apparent dichotomy is that their job satisfaction is also influenced by job security, and it was a fairly large influence, with 60 percent saying it was “extremely important” to them. Job security is an extrinsic job dimension (Table 5), as is an inclusive employer (Ryan 2009), which also was a strong theme reported by Al-Arabiya news workers. Therefore, this study also supported the theories that job security, and extrinsic values in general, are an important indicator of job satisfaction among journalists (Chang and Massey 2010; Ryan 2009; Weaver et al. 2007).

By job security, the Al-Arabiya news workers meant that the company was financially and politically stable, and that they would not arbitrarily lose their jobs—as long as they follow the unwritten code that certain topics must be avoided. As described in the literature review, one interviewer lost his job when he publically challenged Saudi sensitivities, even though he knew ahead of time the risk he took. Many news workers told us these sensitivities are well known to the staff and therefore easy to avoid.

There were tangible indications that this particular newsroom had high job security, looking at the number of staff who have been there since its inception, the number of older staff, and also the incidents of staff who leave for what they think is a better job, but later return. This indicates that Al-Arabiya news staff members are likely to be rewarded for putting high priority on the extrinsic values of their job—pay benefits, career potential, as well as job security.

Al-Arabiya—with its non-state-owned pan-Arab news operation—is carving out a relatively new and still developing model in the Middle East news industry. Its news workers also seem to be re-framing the definition of journalistic roles. Qualified and experienced news workers accept limitations on their journalism that would not be tolerated in the west, in return for the job security they cherish, and the satisfaction of knowing they work for what they think is the best television news company in the Arab world.

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