

Interpersonal Communication, Media Exposure, Opinion Leadership, and Perceived Credibility of News and Advertising During the December 2012 Parliamentary Election in Kuwait

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This study investigates how a sample of Kuwaiti citizens engaged in interpersonal communication and used traditional and new media during the December 2012 parliamentary election in Kuwait. Hypotheses were developed based on an analysis of macro-level politico-economic and sociocultural factors that affect communication flows in the country and using a two-step flow of information framework. Consistent with predictions, respondents spent more time in interpersonal political discussions than using traditional media. Time spent in face-to-face conversations and on social media to obtain and exchange political information was equal, indicating that social media is an important channel of communication in the region. Newspaper and Internet ads were perceived as the most credible forms of advertising. Opinion leadership positively predicted news and advertising exposure, and perceived credibility mediated these effects.

Keywords: opinion leadership, interpersonal communication, social media, Internet, traditional media, media exposure, perceived credibility, modernization, Kuwait, parliamentary election

The importance of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has been widely discussed in the context of the Arab Spring, which included the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions and protests in other Middle Eastern and North African countries. As part of the region, the Arabian Gulf nations—such as Bahrain and Kuwait—were also affected by the unrest. ICTs contributed to political mobilization through the opening of domestic and global communication channels beyond the control of authoritarian regimes (Allagui & Kuebler, 2011; van Niekerk, Pillay, & Maharaj, 2011). Qatar-based cable channel Aljazeera, social networks (e.g., Facebook), microblogs (e.g., Twitter), and video sharing sites (e.g., YouTube) became hubs for information-seeking and exchange (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011; Lotan et al., 2011; Newsom, Lengel, & Cassara, 2011; Wall & el Zahed, 2011). Although mediated communication has

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become a common theme in discussing the outcomes of the Spring in the region, the role of interpersonal communication should not be overlooked. While modernization has facilitated the development of print and electronic media in the Arab world, people continue to rely on interpersonal sources (Rugh, 2004; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). In the present study, we applied the two-step flow of information approach to explore how mediated and interpersonal communication are used as a source of information about critical political events in the Arab region, how credible the channels of mediated and interpersonal communication are perceived, and if opinion leadership predicts media exposure and face-to-face discussions.

We focused on Kuwait, an oil-rich constitutional monarchy in the Arabian Gulf and a member of the Cooperation Council for Arab States of the Gulf (GCC). Politically, economically, and socially Kuwait represents an interesting mix of tradition and modernization (Farah, 1989; Peterson, 2012), which influences the power of the monarch, distribution of wealth, social connections, and communication. Kuwait has a diverse media market, which coincided with the nation's modernization period. The tradition of oral communication remains strong. Although Kuwait stayed relatively stable during 2011-2012, it witnessed some anti-government protests while the Arab Spring was leading to radical changes of government in several other nations. As in other Arab countries, in Kuwait the Internet in general and social media in particular played a significant role—conveying information and serving as an opinion-exchange and mobilization platform during a time of political uncertainty. The present study examines the extent to which Kuwaiti citizens who participated in the survey were exposed to new media, such as social networking and other websites, or traditional media (print and broadcast), and whether they were engaged in interpersonal political discussions to obtain and exchange information about the December 2012 election.

The two-step flow of information approach was employed to analyze media exposure and interpersonal communication. Following scholars who tested the idea of opinion leadership in different countries (e.g., Marshall & Gitosudarmo, 1995; Nisbet, 2006; Weimann, Tustin, van Vuuren, & Joubert, 2007), we used this concept in our study to determine how political information circulates in Kuwait. While the measure of opinion leadership has been validated in Western nations, it failed to show validity in traditional societies (Weimann et al., 2007). This study contributes to the body of international scholarship on the topic by providing evidence about political information flows in a culture that is moving toward modernization, yet strongly depends on traditional values.

Where Tradition Meets Modernity

Kuwait is a country in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region that gained independence in 1961. This oil-rich state is a constitutional monarchy led by an emir appointed from the ruling Al-Sabah family. The Kuwait constitution guarantees the emir's power (CIA World Factbook, 2014; Constitution of the State of Kuwait, 1962).

Two theoretical approaches are used to characterize Kuwait from a politico-economic standpoint. This nation represents an interesting mix of traditionalism and modernization (Farah, 1989; Peterson, 2012) and is described as a rentier state (el-Beblawi & Luciani, 1987; Farah, 1989). On the one hand, the

power of the emir—the father of Kuwaiti patriarchal society—is traditionally inherited by members of the ruling Al Sabah family. Tribal and family political influences are also strong. On the other hand, Kuwait embraces modernization, including the adoption of new technologies, development of the private sector, and improvements in education and healthcare systems (Tétreault, 2001). Formal political structure in the country is modeled after a number of Western states, with a division of power between executive, legislative, and judiciary branches. While the executive branch is led by the monarch and is hereditary, the legislative body of Kuwait, the National Assembly, is elected (CIA World Factbook, 2014).

Kuwait, as well as other GCC nations, obtains income by selling natural resources —oil—abroad. The economy in a rentier state is directly linked to politics, with the government owning the resources and distributing rent (oil wealth) among elites and the rest of the citizenry. The government gains citizens' loyalty, and hence political power and stability, by ensuring security and providing various financial and social benefits for citizens (el-Beblawi & Luciani, 1987; Peterson, 2012). The monarch's power depends on tradition, which implies the natural right of the emir to rule, and modern government-citizen relationships (social contract) in which citizens trade their political loyalty for economic and social wealth.

A mix of tradition and modernity also characterizes the relationship between the executive and legislative branches in Kuwait. Fifty parliament members are elected by popular vote to the unicameral National Assembly, which is meant to serve as a representative democratic organ despite the constitutional right of the emir to dissolve it. This has led to escalation of political conflicts over the past years, coinciding with the Arab Spring. Tensions between parliament and the monarch led to suspension of the National Assembly five times since 2006, including two times within one year, from December 2011 to December 2012. After the dissolution of the 2009 parliament in December 2011, the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, declared a new election to be held in February 2012. That election resulted in the majority of parliament seats being taken by Islamist-led opposition. After a few months of disagreement over changes in the existing electoral legislation, the emir decided to dismiss parliament again and called for a new election. With this announcement came a new decree that changed voting rules. The emir's decision was called unconstitutional and caused a strong backlash among opposition groups, which boycotted the election. Despite a low turnout and mass protests, new parliament members, described as pro-government, started their work in December of that year (BBC, 2012, 2013; Black, 2012; CIA World Factbook, 2014 Herb, 2012; Ulrichsen, 2012; Westall, 2012).

Interpersonal communication and media played an important role during the December 2012 elections to the National Assembly. On one hand, they served as traditional and modern platforms for people to seek and exchange political information and opinions. On the other hand, the government used both forms of communication as instruments to restrict freedom of expression (Human Rights Watch, 2013; Reporters Without Borders, 2013) and to maintain political stability in the country. The present study determines the extent to which the Kuwaiti citizens who responded to our survey were exposed to political news and advertising and engaged in face-to-face discussions about the December campaign. Credibility ratings were also obtained for each source.

Interpersonal Communication as a Tradition

Despite many political, economic, and social developments, Kuwait remains a patriarchal and family-oriented society in many respects (Barakat, 1993; Tétreault, 2001). This nation, like many in the Arab world, has a strong tradition of interpersonal communication (Rugh, 2004; Peterson, 2012). Social gatherings, known as diwanayahs, play a significant role in political communication in Kuwait (Peterson, 2012). Male members of Kuwaiti society regularly gather in a host's house—in a room also called diwanayah—to exchange news and discuss social, business, and political issues (Peterson, 2012; Terrill, 2007). This phenomenon can be compared with the bourgeois public sphere (Habermas, 1962/1989). Face-to-face interactions and diwanayahs are used not only for socializing and discussion but also for political advertising and nonpaid promotion. Candidates to the National Assembly often visit diwanayahs to fulfill a "social duty" (Alqaseer, 2013, p. 29).

The strength of the oral communication tradition in a family-oriented and rather small country—Kuwait's population is about 3 million, with roughly half being Kuwaiti citizens (CIA World Factbook, 2014)—ensures high credibility of interpersonal communication; information circulates among people who know and trust each other due to family, tribal, friendship, and business ties. Low credibility of mass media in the Arab world (Rugh, 2004), especially when it comes to the coverage of politics, also benefits interpersonal communication. A recent study from Egypt, for example, shows that interpersonal communication (both face-to-face and digital) was more pervasive for Tahrir Square protesters for exchanging information about the 2011 Egyptian uprising than mass media (e.g., television, print; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). The present study compares the levels of engagement in interpersonal communication with exposure to media during the December 2012 election. We measured the amount of time survey respondents spent discussing the campaign face-to-face and using newspapers, television, websites, and social media for news and advertising related to the campaign. We also tested hypotheses to determine which sources of information were perceived as most credible by the study's participants.

H1: Time spent in interpersonal discussions of the election will be greater than time spent using traditional (newspapers and television) and new media (websites and social media) for news and advertising about the campaign.

H2: Perceived credibility of interpersonal communication about the election will be greater than perceived credibility of news and advertising about the election in each medium (newspapers, television, websites, and social media).

Media in Kuwait

Communication in Kuwait is an interesting combination of tradition and modernity, in which strong oral communication rituals co-exist with rapidly growing media use. The expansion of mass media in Kuwait has evolved with the establishment and development of the modern Kuwait state, which started during Emir Mubarak Al-Sabah's reign (1896 to 1915) (Tétreault, 2001) and continued through the oil-boom and independence era.

As of today, more than two dozen daily and weekly newspapers in Kuwait— published in both Arabic and English—provide a wide spectrum of political news and commentary (Kuwait Government Online, 2013). The magazine market in the country is also large (Dubai Press Club & Deloitte, 2012). Two thirds of respondents (67%) surveyed in Kuwait and other Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries indicated that they spend less than 30 minutes with print media daily, while a third (30%) devote from half an hour to three hours a day (Booz & Co. & Google, 2012). A study conducted with students in Kuwait indicated that respondents spent, on average, 4.43 hours per week on print media in 2011 (Kononova & Alhabash, 2012).

As for traditional electronic media in Kuwait, more than 95% of households have television and many enjoy satellite TV and radio services (Kuwait Info, 2011; NationMaster, 2013). Four analog TV stations and multiple satellite TV channels offer viewers news and entertainment (Abdulrahim, Al-Kandari, & Hasanen, 2009; Kuwait Info, 2011). Radio consumption is similar to print media use in the MENA region, including Kuwait, where 62% of individuals spend less than half an hour a day with this medium. Student respondents in Kuwait spent 2.63 hours a week listening to radio and other non-music audio in 2011 (Kononova & Alhabash, 2012). The majority of people surveyed in the MENA region (60%) spend between 30 minutes and three hours with television daily, followed by 22% who watch more than three hours a day (Booz & Co. & Google, 2012). According to the Dubai Press Club and Deloitte (2012), the average daily time spent with television among MENA respondents is 3.11 hours. It was also found that students in Kuwait spent about 10 hours a week watching TV in 2011 (Kononova & Alhabash, 2012).

The new media market in Kuwait has been growing fast (OpenNet Initiative, 2009). Almost 70% of households in Kuwait are equipped with computers (International Telecommunication Union, 2012). Penetration of smartphones in the country increased from 49% to 69% between 2012 and 2013 (Ipsos, 2014). This increase in computer and smartphone use is mirrored by Internet penetration statistics: 74% of the Kuwait population uses the Internet, with 2,771 Internet hosts in the country (CIA World Factbook, 2014; Internet World Stats, 2013). Seventy percent of respondents in MENA countries, Kuwait included, reported spending more than three hours a day online, followed by 29% who spend between 30 minutes and three hours using the Internet (Booz & Co. & Google, 2012). On average, people in MENA countries spend 17.6 hours online weekly; most of that time is devoted to using social media (29%), various online services (17%), and entertainment (13%) (eMarketer, 2013). Students in Kuwait reported spending on average 14.5 hours a week on the Internet in 2011 (Kononova & Alhabash, 2012). Along with the growth of the Internet, the popularity of social media increased tremendously, with about 900,000 Facebook users and 225,000 Twitter users in the country (Arab Social Media Report, 2013; Internet World Stats, 2013). Ipsos (2014) reports a 58% social network penetration rate for Kuwait, with Facebook and Twitter being the leaders (eMarketer, 2013; Ipsos, 2014).

Overall, the media market in Kuwait is saturated with both traditional and new media, and people devote more time to using new media and less time on traditional media, such as print and radio. People spend a moderate amount of time watching television.

The development of traditional and new media in combination with state modernization in other spheres, including commerce, has facilitated the emergence of an advertising industry in Kuwait (Al Najdi & McCrea, 2012). In 2012, Kuwait was the fourth largest market in the MENA region in terms of spending

on advertising, following the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia (Dubai Press Club & Deloitte, 2012). During parliamentary elections, Kuwaiti candidates use political advertising and nonpaid forms of promotion through a wide variety of media. These media include outdoor billboards, posters and fliers, newspapers, television, Internet websites, and social media (Alqaseer, 2013). Since political information circulates not only through interpersonal communication and mediated news but also in the form of paid information and nonpaid promotion during political campaigns, we included these as an important component in the present study.

Based on the growing popularity of new media in the country spurred by the development of information and communication technologies and the recent political transformations in the Arab world, we predicted that the exposure to news and advertising (paid and nonpaid promotion) in new media (social media and other websites such as news sites, blogs) would be greater than the exposure to news and advertising in traditional media (newspapers and television). We also hypothesized that perceived credibility of content about the election would be greater for new than for traditional media.

H3: Time spent on websites and social media for news and advertising related to the election will be greater than time spent with newspapers and television for the same purpose.

RQ1: Will perceived credibility of news and advertising about the election in new media (websites and social media) be greater than perceived credibility of news and advertising in traditional media (newspapers and television)?

Two-Step Flow of Information: International Perspective

While macro-level structural factors—such as the media market, communication culture, and the political system—are important in explaining the extent of media exposure and interpersonal discussions during political campaigns, they are not the sole predictors. Individual factors are of great significance, as well. We applied the two-step flow of information approach in the present study to explain how individual differences in opinion leadership predicted mediated and face-to-face communication during the December 2012 election for the Kuwait National Assembly.

We chose this theoretical framework for two reasons. First, the two-step flow of information is a parsimonious model of how community members use interpersonal and media channels to seek information and form opinions about certain topics. Second, different dimensions of opinion leadership have been tested internationally (Marshall & Gitosudarmo, 1995; Nisbet, 2006; Weimann et al., 2007).

More than half a century ago, Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948) established that political decision-making depends on interpersonal communication more than on mass media. Information disseminated by mass media goes through two stages to reach recipients: first, from mass media to opinion leaders and, second, from opinion leaders to community members. Opinion leaders are “influentials,” or people in a community who are knowledgeable about political affairs and have “expert” leverage. Their opinions become a decisive factor for community members in making political choices (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955/1970). Opinion leaders are heavier media users, especially news users. They are

described as having a high interest in politics, engaging in political activism, and being gregarious, among other personality traits (Marshall & Gitosudarmo, 1995; Nisbet, 2006; Shah & Scheufele, 2006; Weimann et al., 2007). This study focuses on opinion leadership as an individual-level predictor of exposure to political news and advertising and of face-to-face political discussions about the parliamentary elections in Kuwait.

The measure of opinion leadership and its correlates (e.g., media use, personality traits) have been tested not only in the United States, where the theoretical approach emerged, but also abroad. These measures have been validated in countries similar to the United States in media and political structures and culture (predominantly Northern Europe; Nisbet, 2006). The more that countries differed with regard to these macro-level indicators (e.g., Eastern and Southern Europe), the greater were the differences found in the relationship between opinion leadership, mediated/interpersonal communication, and personality traits (Nisbet, 2006). Weimann et al. (2007) suggested that the concept of opinion leadership has been predominantly tested in Western societies, which scholars describe as advanced and modern. Testing scales associated with opinion leadership in traditional communities was not successful (e.g., a village in Skukuza, South Africa; Weimann et al., 2007). The present study contributes to further investigation of the relationship between opinion leadership, media exposure, and interpersonal communication in Kuwait, a traditional country undergoing changes toward modernization.

Opinion leaders heavily engage in interpersonal discussions and monitor news in traditional media (Scheufele & Shah, 2000; Shah & Scheufele, 2006; Weimann, 1994). Direct and indirect positive relationship between opinion leadership and exposure to print and broadcast news has been found in previous studies (Shah & Scheufele, 2006). We hypothesized:

H4: Opinion leaders will be more likely to spend time in interpersonal discussions about the election.

H5: Opinion leaders will spend more time using newspapers for news and advertising about the election.

H6: Opinion leaders will spend more time using television for news and advertising about the election.

RQ2: Will opinion leaders spend more time being exposed to outdoor advertising related to the election?

Since the Internet in general, and social media in particular, emerged as important channels for communicating information during the unrest in several Middle Eastern countries in 2011-2012, we asked if opinion leadership would predict the exposure to news and advertising about the election published on websites and social media during December 2012 campaign.

RQ3: Will opinion leaders spend more time using websites (e.g., blogs, news sites) for news and advertising about the election?

RQ4: Will opinion leaders spend more time using social media for news and advertising about the election?

Finally, we explored whether perceived credibility plays a role in the relationship between opinion leadership and the exposure to political news and advertising in media. As previously discussed, face-to-face communication is considered a common and credible way to exchange information and opinions in the family-oriented Arab world. Since those who score high on opinion leadership are predicted to be heavy media users, we asked if they would indicate a higher level of perceived credibility of news and advertising about the election in traditional and new media.

RQ5: Will opinion leadership positively predict perceived credibility of news and advertising about the election published in traditional and new media?

Furthermore, we asked if perceived credibility would mediate the relationship between opinion leadership and media exposure. A positive association between opinion leadership and media use has been established in previous studies (Scheufele & Shah, 2000; Shah & Scheufele, 2006; Weimann, 1994). It has also been found that greater credibility leads to greater reliance on media and heavier media use (Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Wanta & Hu, 1994). Not much research is available with regard to the perception of media credibility by opinion leaders. In the present study, we not only asked if higher opinion leadership will lead to greater perceived credibility of political news and advertising about the parliamentary election in various media, but also we proposed that perceived credibility would increase the use of media for political information among opinion leaders. In other words, we tested if opinion leaders would be more likely to spend time with various media for news and advertising about the election if they perceived these mediated contents as being credible. Thus, the present study tested the link between opinion leadership and media use and the processes that may underlie such a relationship. In this context, opinion leaders are viewed as "pioneers" who perceive media as trustworthy, fair, and believable sources of political information and, as a result, use them more than their counterparts who score lower on opinion leadership measure.

RQ6: Will perceived credibility mediate the relationship between opinion leadership and time spent with traditional and new media for news and advertising about the election?

Method

Sample and Procedure

A total of 285 respondents participated in a cross-sectional survey administered in Kuwait in December 2012 and January 2013. Responses from a few non-nationals and those who were not eligible to vote (nationals under the age of 21) were deleted from the sample, leaving 257 valid cases. About 57% of respondents were females; the average age was 32 years old ($SD = 10.02$). About seven in 10 respondents (68%) reported they had associate or bachelor's degrees, 11% indicated having completed graduate education, and 21% did not have college degrees. A total of 39% of the sample reported being

married, 48% were single, and the rest selected other options. As for personal income, 39% reported it to be from 800 to 1,500 Kuwaiti dinars a month (roughly \$3,000-\$5,000 a month), 26% identified it to be higher than 1,500 Kuwaiti dinars a month, and 35% reported it to be lower than 800 Kuwaiti dinars monthly.

The survey was administered in a paper-and-pencil format. A snowball sampling was used to reach target participants: Kuwaiti citizens who could legally participate in elections for the National Assembly. Questionnaires were distributed in two locations. First, they were handed out at diwanayahs (one of the research team members, a Kuwaiti national, helped distribute the instrument at those social gatherings). Second, questionnaires were disseminated among students at a university in Kuwait. Students were asked to recruit respondents from among their family members and friends. Each student received extra credit for helping with data collection, but the number of extra credits was not based upon the number of questionnaires distributed (i.e., students who helped with one questionnaire received the same credit as students who distributed several). This policy helped control the quality of data collected.

The survey instrument was administered in Arabic. The questionnaire was translated from English. Back translation was performed to ensure instrument validity.

Measures

Exposure to political news. Political news exposure was measured as time spent on a regular weekday during the December 2012 election campaign using newspapers, television, Internet (websites), and social media to obtain news about the parliamentary election. Respondents were offered several time choices indicating 30-minute intervals from "Half an hour or less" to "Three hours or more." They rated how much time they spent using each of the four types of media for news.

Exposure to political advertising. Exposure to political advertising was measured as time spent on a regular weekday during the December 2012 election campaign viewing, hearing, or reading paid or unpaid promotional information about the election in newspapers, on television, Internet (websites), and social media. Similar to measuring political news, respondents were offered time choices from "Half an hour or less" to "Three hours or more." They rated each medium on time-spent scales. Respondents also used the same time-spent scale to rate their exposure to outdoor political advertising, including billboards, street banners, flyers, and posters.

Interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication was measured as time spent on a regular weekday during the December 2012 election campaign talking with other people (e.g., relatives, friends, coworkers, and other community members) about the parliamentary election. Respondents rated time spent using the same scale from "Half an hour or less" to "Three hours or more."

Opinion leadership. Opinion leadership was measured with four items borrowed from Flynn, Goldsmith, and Eastman (1996). Using a 7-point scale anchored by "Not at all" and "A lot," respondents indicated the extent to which 1) other people come to them for political advice, 2) people they know participate in politics (e.g., vote) based on what respondents tell them, 3) respondents often persuade

other people to support political candidates that they like, and 4) whether they often influence people's opinions about politics (Cronbach's $\alpha=.70$).

Perceived credibility. Perceived credibility was measured with five 7-point items ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (A lot). Respondents rated information obtained through interpersonal discussions (Cronbach's $\alpha=.71$), news and advertising in newspapers (Cronbach's $\alpha_{news}=.74$; Cronbach's $\alpha_{ads}=.81$), television (Cronbach's $\alpha_{news}=.76$; Cronbach's $\alpha_{ads}=.81$), websites (Cronbach's $\alpha_{news}=.79$; Cronbach's $\alpha_{ads}=.83$), social media (Cronbach's $\alpha_{news}=.64$; Cronbach's $\alpha_{ads}=.75$), and outdoor advertising (Cronbach's $\alpha=.76$) as 1) fair, 2) trustworthy, 3) accurate, 4) comprehensive, and 5) unbiased (Mayo & Leshner, 2000; Meyer, 1988).

Results

Hypothesis 1 predicted that time spent in interpersonal discussions of the election would be greater than time spent using traditional and new media for news and advertising about the campaign. Nine pair-sampled t-tests were run to compare time spent using each source of mediated political news and advertising with time spent in interpersonal communication. Respondents were engaged in interpersonal communication ($M=2.53$; $SD=1.64$) more frequently than in the use of traditional media (newspapers, television, and outdoor) for news and advertising (newspaper news: $M=1.60$; $SD=1.11$, $p<.001$; newspaper ads: $M=1.53$; $SD=1.11$, $p<.001$; TV news: $M=2.13$; $SD=1.40$, $p<.001$; TV ads: $M=2.02$; $SD=1.34$, $p<.001$; outdoor ads: $M=1.72$; $SD=1.12$, $p<.001$). No difference between website news ($M=2.42$; $SD=1.69$; $p=.414$) and ads ($M=2.32$; $SD=1.69$; $p=.121$) and social media news ($M=2.66$; $SD=1.87$; $p=.371$) and ads ($M=2.68$; $SD=1.89$; $p=.401$) and interpersonal communication were found. H1 was supported when interpersonal communication was compared with traditional media.

Hypothesis 2 stated that perceived credibility of interpersonal communication about the election would be greater than perceived credibility of news and advertising about the election in each medium. Nine pair-sampled t-tests were run to compare perceived credibility of news and advertising in traditional and new media with perceived credibility of interpersonal communication. Respondents perceived political advertising in newspapers as more credible ($M=3.73$; $SD=1.38$) than information obtained in interpersonal political discussions ($M=3.53$; $SD=1.25$; $p=.01$). They also reported greater perceived credibility for website political ads ($M=3.69$; $SD=1.40$, $p=.03$) than interpersonal political discussions. H2 was not supported.

Hypothesis 3 posited that time spent on websites and social media for news and advertising related to the election would be greater than time spent with newspapers and television for the same purpose. Ten pair-sampled t-tests were run to compare respondents' exposure to news and advertising in newspapers and television with news and advertising on websites and in social media. Time spent with website news ($M=2.42$; $SD=1.69$) was greater than time spent with news in newspapers ($M=1.61$; $SD=1.12$, $p<.001$) and television ($M=2.15$; $SD=1.41$, $p=.02$). The same was true for news in social media ($M=2.65$; $SD=1.86$) compared with newspaper news ($p<.001$) and TV news ($p<.001$). Time spent with website advertising ($M=2.30$; $SD=1.68$) was greater than time spent with ads in newspapers ($M=1.54$; $SD=1.12$, $p<.001$) and on TV ($M=2.02$; $SD=1.35$, $p=.01$). Social media ads occupied more of the

respondents' time than ads in newspapers ($M=2.67$; $SD=1.88$; $p<.001$) and on TV ($p<.001$), as well. H3 was supported.

RQ1 asked if perceived credibility of news and advertising about the election in new media (websites and social media) would be greater than perceived credibility of news and advertising in traditional media (newspapers and television). Pair-sampled t-tests indicated that political advertising on websites ($M=3.69$; $SD=1.40$) was perceived as more credible than political advertising on TV ($M=3.56$; $SD=1.34$, $p=.04$). Perceived credibility of newspaper ads ($M=3.73$; $SD=1.37$) was higher than perceived credibility of advertising in social media ($M=3.52$; $SD=1.28$, $p=.002$).

Hypotheses 4, 5, and 6 stated that opinion leaders would spend more time talking with others face to face and using newspapers and television for news and advertising about the election. Research questions 2, 3, and 4 asked if opinion leaders would spend more time being exposed to outdoor advertising and using websites (e.g., blogs, news sites) and social media for news and advertising about the election. Multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was performed with opinion leadership as an independent variable and time spent in interpersonal communication and using newspapers, television, websites and social media, as well as outdoor media, for news and advertising about the election as dependent variables. Opinion leadership positively predicted interpersonal communication, newspaper, television, and social media news exposure, and exposure to television ads (Table 1). Opinion leadership explained most of the variance in interpersonal communication ($R^2=.13$) and exposure to television news ($R^2=.06$) and newspaper news ($R^2=.04$). Hypotheses 4, 5, and 6 were partially supported.

RQ5 asked if opinion leadership would positively predict perceived credibility of news and advertising about the election in traditional and new media. MANCOVA with opinion leadership as an independent variable and perceived credibility of news and advertising in newspapers, on television, websites, social media, and outdoor media as dependent variables showed that opinion leadership positively predicted perceived credibility of news and advertising in all media, explaining most of the variance in perceived credibility of social media news ($R^2=.20$) and advertising ($R^2=.27$; Table 2).

Table 1. Opinion Leadership as a Predictor of Interpersonal Communication and Exposure to News and Advertising about the Kuwait Parliamentary Election.

Dependent	$df(df)$	R^2	F	B	Standard	t	95% confidence
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variable	error)			error			interval	
							Lower	Upper
Interpersonal communication	1(231)	.13	33.698***	.464	.080	5.805***	.307	.622
Newspaper news	1(231)	.04	10.074**	.184	.058	3.174**	.070	.298
Newspaper ads	1(231)	.01	1.583	.074	.059	1.258	-.042	.191
Television news	1(231)	.06	13.877***	.270	.073	3.725***	.127	.413
Television ads	1(231)	.02	5.641*	.166	.070	2.375*	.028	.304
Outdoor ads	1(231)	.01	2.148	.083	.057	1.465	-.029	.194
Website news	1(231)	.004	.918	.085	.089	.958	-.090	.259
Website ads	1(231)	.002	.431	.058	.089	.657	-.116	.233
Social media news	1(231)	.03	5.847*	.230	.095	2.418*	.043	.417
Social media ads	1(231)	.01	2.677	.160	.098	1.636	-.033	.352

*** $p \leq .001$; ** $p \leq .01$ * $p \leq .05$

Table 2. Opinion Leadership as a Predictor of Perceived Credibility of News and Advertising about the Kuwait Parliamentary Election in Different Media.

Dependent variable		df(df error)	R ²	F	B	Standard error	t	95% confidence interval	
								Lower	Upper
Newspaper credibility	news	1(250)	.16	49.216***	.395	.056	7.015***	.284	.507
Newspaper credibility	ad	1(250)	.18	54.826***	.453	.061	7.404***	.333	.574
Television credibility	news	1(250)	.16	46.360***	.405	.059	6.809***	.288	.522
Television credibility	ad	1(250)	.17	51.132***	.429	.060	7.151***	.311	.547
Outdoor credibility	ad	1(250)	.17	49.291***	.396	.056	7.021***	.285	.507
Website credibility	news	1(250)	.15	43.405***	.410	.062	6.588***	.287	.532
Website credibility	ad	1(250)	.15	44.178***	.422	.064	6.647***	.297	.548
Social media credibility	news	1(250)	.20	63.126***	.451	.057	7.945***	.339	.563
Social media credibility	ad	1(250)	.27	92.507***	.510	.053	9.618***	.406	.615

*** $p \leq .001$; ** $p \leq .01$ * $p \leq .05$

RQ6 asked if perceived credibility would mediate the relationship between opinion leadership and exposure to mediated news and advertising about the election. To answer this research question, models of indirect effects were run with the use of bootstrapping (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Bootstrapping is a robust statistical method that allows testing for mediation in small samples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Mediation models tested for the direct effect of IV on DV (c' path), the effect of IV on mediator (a path), the effect of mediator on DV (b path), the indirect effect of IV on DV through mediator (ab path), and the total effect of IV on DV (c path). Opinion leadership was included in the models as an independent variable, news and advertising exposure were treated as DVs, and perceived credibility of news and advertising was considered a mediator (Figure 1). A total of nine models were run for 1) newspaper news, 2) newspaper advertising, 3) TV news, 4) TV advertising, 5) outdoor advertising, 6) website news, 7) website advertising, 8) social media news, and 9) social media advertising.

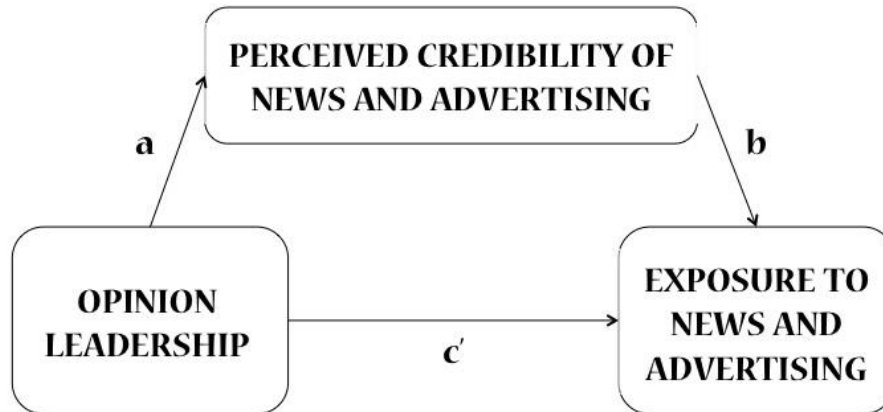


Figure 1. Model of indirect effect of opinion leadership on media exposure through perceived credibility of mediated content.

Bootstrapping analysis revealed significant mediation effects (ab paths) in five models related to news in four media (newspapers, television, websites, and social media) and newspaper advertising (Tables 3-4). Model 1 shows a significant effect of opinion leadership on newspaper news credibility (a path) and a significant effect of perceived newspaper news credibility on newspaper news exposure (b path). The total effect of the independent variable on the dependent measure (c path) and indirect effect (ab path) are also significant. In Model 2, the effects of opinion leadership on perceived credibility (a path) and perceived credibility on newspaper advertising exposure (b path) are significant while the direct and total effects (c and c' paths) are not. The indirect effect (ab path) is significant. In Model 3 (TV news), all five effects (a, b, c, c', and ab paths) are significant. Model 4 shows a significant effect of opinion leadership on perceived credibility (a path) and on perceived credibility on website news exposure (b path). The total and direct effects (c and c' paths) are not significant, while the indirect effect (ab path) is. In Model 5, a and b paths (opinion leadership to perceived credibility and perceived credibility to social media news exposure) are significant. The ab path is also significant in the model. Overall, the five models indicated that even when total and direct effects of the independent variable on dependent measures are not significant, indirect effects are. This means that even when opinion leadership does not predict exposure to mediated political contents directly, it does so through the mediating effects of perceived credibility. The more that news in newspapers, on TV, websites and social media, and advertising in newspapers are perceived as credible by those respondents who scored high on opinion leadership scale, the greater is their exposure to the mediated content.

Table 3. Opinion Leadership (IV) and Perceived Credibility (Mediator) → Exposure to News and Advertising about Kuwait Parliamentary Election in Different Media (DV).

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
Model 1 (newspaper news exposure)			
IV to mediator (a path)	.402	.057	7.07***
Mediator to DV (b path)	.147	.060	2.46*
Total effect of IV on DV (c path)	.156	.054	2.88**
Direct effect of IV on DV (c' path)	.097	.059	1.65
DV model 1 summary	$R^2 = .06; F(2,249) = 7.24***$		
Model 2 (newspaper ads exposure)			
IV to mediator (a path)	.469	.061	7.65***
Mediator to DV (b path)	.212	.054	3.90***
Total effect of IV on DV (c path)	.069	.054	1.27
Direct effect of IV on DV (c' path)	-.031	.059	-.522
DV model 2 summary	$R^2 = .06; F(2,250) = 8.44***$		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
Model 3 (TV news exposure)			
IV to mediator (a path)	.427	.061	7.03***
Mediator to DV (b path)	.183	.071	2.59***
Total effect of IV on DV (c path)	.257	.068	3.76***
Direct effect of IV on DV (c' path)	.179	.074	2.41*
DV model 3 summary	$R^2 = .07; F(2,246) = 10.56***$		
Model 4 (website news exposure)			
IV to mediator (a path)	.411	.062	6.60***
Mediator to DV (b path)	.213	.085	2.51*
Total effect of IV on DV (c path)	.054	.084	.647
Direct effect of IV on DV (c' path)	-.033	.090	-.369
DV model 4 summary	$R^2 = .03; F(2,247) = 3.38*$		
Model 5 (social media news exposure)			
IV to mediator (a path)	.444	.058	7.64***
Mediator to DV (b path)	.184	.101	1.83
Total effect of IV on DV (c path)	.273	.092	2.95**
Direct effect of IV on DV (c' path)	.191	.102	1.87
DV model 5 summary	$R^2 = .05; F(2,246) = 6.07**$		

*** $p \leq .001$; ** $p \leq .01$ * $p \leq .05$

Table 4. Indirect Effects (ab path) of Opinion Leadership on News and Advertising Exposure through Perceived Credibility of News and Advertising in Different Media.

	Product of Coefficients			Bootstrapping	
	Point Estimate	SE	Z	Lower	Upper
Newspaper news	.059*	.025	2.33*	.0209	.1171
Newspaper advertising	.099	.029	3.48***	.0019	.0290
Television news	.078	.032	2.44*	.0166	.1473
Website news	.087	.037	2.36*	.0235	.1699
Social media news	.082	.046	1.78	.0040	.1698

*** $p \leq .001$; ** $p \leq .01$ * $p \leq .05$

Discussion

With the rich media market that has been developing along with country's modernization, information flows in Kuwait heavily depend on the tradition of oral communication. This hypothesis was supported in the current study, which showed that survey respondents spent a longer time in interpersonal political discussions than in using traditional media (newspapers and television). No difference was found in the time spent engaging in face-to-face discussions and in the use of social media and websites, such as blogs and news sites. Such findings, which are consistent with some recent research in the region (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012), have two possible explanations. First, the more interactive, personalized, and immediate nature of the Internet and, in particular, social media, offers users new opportunities to move interpersonal conversations online. Second, the timing of the study in 2012, during a period of political uncertainty in many Middle Eastern countries, was an important factor. Social media have become vital sources of information and platforms for the exchange of opinions and mobilization of the public, contributing to the popularity of this communication tool.

While engagement in interpersonal communication and exposure to new media did not differ in terms of time spent with these channels, significant differences were found between traditional and new media. Respondents spent more time using social media and non-social-media websites than on newspapers and television. This supports our conclusion about the vital role new media play in the region.

We also measured the perceived credibility of interpersonal and media channels used by respondents to learn about the election. We predicted that—due to cultural characteristics of the Arab world, where face-to-face communication is viewed as more trustworthy than mediated communication—respondents would indicate greater levels of perceived credibility of the former than the latter. Contrary to our predictions, most of the differences were not significant. This finding shows that media, while not

being used as often, are perceived to be as credible as talking with relatives, friends, and other community members face to face. This finding is important as it reflects changes in communication landscape that Kuwait, among other Arab countries, may have experienced due to the development of media. Although interpersonal communication is still the dominant way to exchange information about politics—people still spend more time using it than traditional media—its dominance is challenged by the development of new media that digitize face-to-face conversations (e.g., social media, texting). That there is no difference in perceived credibility between media and face-to-face interactions may indicate that media are becoming more trustworthy channels for communication of political information. Alternatively, this finding could be due to the political event being a parliamentary election, which is considered hard news (Scott & Gobetz, 1992), therefore resulting in higher perceived credibility not only of information but also of media sources. Future studies should further explore the link between a medium credibility and the nature of information published in this medium (i.e., hard vs. soft news).

Some commercial mediated content, such as advertising in newspapers and on the Internet, was perceived as more credible than information obtained in interpersonal discussions. As for differences in perceived credibility of news and advertising between traditional and new media, political advertising on websites was perceived as more credible than political advertising on TV, while perceived credibility of newspaper ads was greater than perceived credibility of advertising in social media. Thus, advertising in newspapers and on websites received greater levels of credibility. Future research should explore such differences further, perhaps by focusing on the format in which advertising appears in different media (e.g., newspaper and online ads, such as display banner ads, that share some similarities). As for the lower credibility of interpersonal communication and ads on social media, compared with newspaper and web advertising, it could be further explored with regard to source attribution. It could be the case that traditional source attribution (e.g., affiliation with a political group or candidate) in newspaper and online advertising are perceived as more credible than attribution on social media and in interpersonal communication—where the borders between news, gossip, and commercial information are somewhat blurred.

The present study analyzed not only macro-level factors in explaining information flows during the December 2012 parliamentary election in Kuwait but also individual-level predictors of interpersonal communication and media exposure, such as opinion leadership. The two-step flow of information approach was applied to investigate whether opinion leadership is a relevant concept to discuss with regard to political communication in traditional nations that are moving toward modernization. It was found that opinion leadership positively predicted interpersonal communication, exposure to news in newspapers, on television, and social media, and television advertising. This individual-level factor was especially strong in explaining the variance in interpersonal communication and exposure to news in traditional media (newspapers and TV). The result is consistent with previous literature and theory and is of great importance because it contributes to further investigation of the two-step flow of information approach, opinion leadership, and its correlation internationally. Interestingly, opinion leadership positively predicted most of the news exposure variables, while it was weak to explain the variance in advertising exposure. This difference should be explored in future studies.

Opinion leadership was examined not only in relation to media exposure but also in terms of perceived credibility of media. We stated that opinion leaders in a culture that has a strong tradition of

interpersonal communication and a lower level of trust in media, would indicate greater exposure to media and, as a result, greater perceived credibility of mediated contents. Our prediction was supported for news and advertising conveyed by all traditional (newspapers, TV, outdoor) and new media (websites, social media). Opinion leaders surveyed in the study happened not only to use certain media for news and advertising about the election more than others, but also perceived media as more credible than those who did not score as high on the opinion leadership scale.

Finally, the present study posited that opinion leaders would be more likely to use media if they perceived mediated contents as credible. Five mediation models indicated statistically significant indirect effects of opinion leadership on media exposure through perceived credibility of mediated contents. The more that news in newspapers, on TV, websites and social media, and advertising in newspapers was perceived as credible by those who scored high on opinion leadership scale, the greater their exposure to the mediated content. Even when total and direct effects of the independent variable on dependent measures were not significant, indirect effects were—meaning that even when opinion leadership did not predict exposure to mediated political contents directly, it did so through the mediating effect of perceived credibility.

The present study has a number of limitations. First, engagement in interpersonal communication and media exposure were measured as time spent with each information and communication channel. While being an important measure, it does not fully reflect all nuances of media exposure, including attention paid to media content. Second, although we considered the distinction between news and advertising contents important and found some interesting differences between the two, the study did not reflect specific media outlets, programs, or promotional campaigns that respondents preferred to satisfy the need for information about the election. Third, the sample used in the current study can be considered both a strength and a limitation. We used a sample that included members of the general population in Kuwait, which is an advantage of the present study. At the same time, we used snowball recruiting rather than random sampling to reach respondents, which limited the generalizability of findings because the sample used is not representative. In addition, the sample size is rather small. Fourth, snowballing recruitment strategies could pose some risks to the quality of collected data because we did not have an opportunity to supervise the process of filling out each survey.

Another matter that has to be mentioned is the relationship between gender and politics in Kuwait. The majority of respondents (57%) who participated in the study were females. The fact that the number of males who have jobs in Kuwait is nearly double that of females, coupled with the extremely low political participation by women (only 6.3% of parliamentary seats are occupied by women; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2013) poses the question of whether women can be opinion leaders. In the present study, we argue that they can. Kuwaiti women and men are somewhat on the same level in terms of education attainment and opportunities (UNDP, 2013). They also have equal voting rights (women obtained the right to vote in 2005; Shultziner & Tétreault, 2011). Taking these into consideration, we argue that women can be opinion leaders with the power to persuade, and especially that opinion leadership can be based on persuasion that happens informally, not on the official political or work levels. Thus, females don't have to hold high-rank positions to be opinion leaders. They can, for example, persuade other women in the family or community with regard to political views and decisions.

Overall, the study revealed interesting results with regard to information flows during the December 2012 parliamentary campaign in Kuwait. From an international perspective, it analyzed differences in the use of traditional and new media compared to interpersonal communication, and the perceived credibility of these channels. It also tested the concept of opinion leadership and its correlates in a traditional nation that is moving toward modernization.

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