

**Readership and Readers' Perception
of Omani Newspapers**

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Abstract

Readership of print newspapers has been the focus of many studies and analyses because of the advancement of online journalism, information technologies and socio-economic changes in recent years. This study focuses on the perception and readership of Omani newspapers in the age of globalization. It investigates people's reading habits and their attitudes towards the content and layout of 9 dailies and several free weekly tabloids. This survey study was conducted on 747 subjects selected on the basis of the non-probability convenience sample from Muscat, the capital of Oman. The results indicated that only 5.5% of the respondents said they don't read newspapers. The salient reasons for not reading newspapers were the availability of other media sources and lack of time to read newspapers. Most readers of Omani newspapers are males with diploma and university degrees who work in the public sector. Hard copies are still popular in Oman, since only 3% read the online version of newspapers. Reading frequency was found to correlate with the type of content and professionalism aspects more than the appearance and presentation (layout & design) of Omani newspapers. The images of private newspapers are more favorable than those of the public ones. However, readers' views about certain newspapers were found to be subjective and judgmental. News was the most frequently read type of content and Omani newspapers were found to cover local news better than other topics.

Print Media vs. New Information Technology:

Some existing and dominant media players in the market alongside scholars, tend to perceive new information and communication technology as a threat. For nearly two decades, most of the available literature speculated a competitive relationship between print media and digital media, because the latter is often seen in the context of replacement, challenge and threat. Sulaiman Saleh (2002) identified four challenges posed by new information technology to print journalism; death of some newspapers, reduction in circulation, decrease in advertising revenue and emergence and popularity of electronic journalism.

However, in depth analysis reveals a very complex picture regarding the status of print media in different countries. Despite the death of some newspapers in places like North America and Europe, they actually continued to grow in other parts of the world such as Africa, Asia and South America. According to the World Association of Newspapers (2008), the number of newspaper titles rose by 5.3% in Asia, 4.55% in Australia and Oceania, 3.99% in Africa and 2.54% in Latin America. The number of newspaper titles world-wide reached 12,477 in 2009, with a 1.7% increase from the previous year (World Association of Newspapers, 3 August 2010). To give an example, in the Arab Gulf region several newspapers came out in the last five years. These include **Azzaman**, **Muscat Daily** and **Al-Ro'yah** in Oman and **Emirates Today** & **Alimarat Alyawm** in UAE. In 2006, North Africa witnessed the launch of two new newspapers; **Almassae** in Morocco and **Mouwatoun** in Tunisia, according to the Arab Press Network Website (2010). In addition to the emergence of paid newspapers, the world has also witnessed a noticeable expansion of free daily & weekly tabloids and newspapers. These free newspapers are heavily supported by advertising revenue.

Nevertheless, many Arabic newspaper titles have also closed down across the region. Kuwait's **Awan** and Bahrain's **Alwaqt** ceased their operations in

2010, only two years after their inception. Egypt's *El Badeel*, which was launched in 2006, closed down in July 2009. Groupe Maroc Soir, a major Moroccan publishing company, also closed down in 2009 two of its titles, *Assabahia* and *Assada El Massaia*. Similarly, the *Daily Star* in Lebanon, the only English language newspaper, has been battling a difficult financial situation since January 2009 when it closed down before re-launching, and continues to have an uncertain future (Dubai Press Club, 2010: 26). Certain measures have also been taken by publishers in the Arab world. Saudi Arabia's *Al Majalla* and UAE sport magazine *Super* became purely online publications in 2009. Other print media industries in the Arab region have downsized their operation and went through a redundancy plan (Op cit: 27).

The closure of some newspapers in the Arab region happened partially because the market was saturated with new titles at a very disproportionate rate to the total population and to the strength of the market. Kuwait, for instance, has awarded 10 new licenses since 2006, which led to a flood of new titles in 2007 and 2008. Newspaper titles in Kuwait jumped from 8 titles in 2006 to 17 titles in 2009 (Op cit: 29). Some newspapers in Oman, especially the new private ones that are not part of an existing cartel are also vulnerable, *Azzaman* is an example.

It might be argued that the recent decline in advertising revenue can mainly be attributed to the global economic crisis, which has affected many industries including print media since late 2007. Until 2006, US newspaper revenues were flat and their pre-taxation earnings were 8% of total revenue (State of the news Media, 2007). However, experts say that, despite the problems of falling advertising revenues and pressure from new competitors, the global newspaper industry is far from facing an apocalypse (World Association of Newspapers, December 2009). On the other hand, Sulaiman Zaid (2009: 24) argued that electronic journalism will not be able to catch up with the print media before the year 2017. He added that, if newspapers continue to increase annually by 3%, it will even be far longer for the electronic journalism to take over the lead. A recent report published by Dubai Press Club gave support to this assertion. Global advertising revenue made by the internet

during the years 2008, 2009 and 2010 accounted for 10, 12 and 14 percent, respectively. In contrast, the shares of newspapers for the same years were 25, 23 and 22 percent. By 2013, the share of the internet is projected at 18% while that of the newspapers is 19% (Dubai Press Club, 2010: 22). These projected figures are showing a steady trajectory in the internet's share of advertising revenue at the expense of print media allotment. According to the World Association of Newspapers (3 August 2010), the Middle East is the only region where newspaper advertising revenue remained stable. Other regions showed a decline ranging from 2.9% in Latin America to 18.7% in Eastern Europe.

From the circulation perspective, the World Association of Newspapers published in June 2008 a report revealing that newspaper circulation worldwide rose by 2.57% in 2007 and by 2.3% in 2006. If free tabloids and newspapers were added to the paid dailies, global circulation would increase by 3.65% in 2007. In its 2010 report, the World Association of Newspapers indicated that global paid-for daily newspaper circulation fell in 2009 by .8% and by 1.7% when free papers were added. However, regionally, newspaper circulation was up by 1 percent in Asia and 4.8 percent in Africa. It fell by 3.4 percent in North America, 4.6 percent in Latin America, 5.6 percent in Europe and 1.5 percent in Australia and Oceania. Most of the increase in circulation figures was witnessed in Africa and Asia (World Association of Newspapers 3 August 2010). However, country-by-country analysis reveals great discrepancies. For example, circulation of Dziennik Zachodni, the largest newspaper under Polska brand in Poland, dropped 11% in 2008 from the circulation figure of 2007 (Dubai Press Club, 2010: 28). In the Arab region, circulation of daily newspapers is expected to grow by 2.3% from 2009 to 2013, especially in Egypt and the Arab Gulf states (Op Cit: 30).

In terms of readership, the 2008 World Press Trends report published by the World Association of Newspapers revealed that more than 532 million people buy a newspaper every day while the number in 2003 was 486 million. Average readership was estimated at more than 1.7 billion each day (World Association of Newspapers, 2 June 2008). The report in 2009 revealed an

increase in readership worldwide regardless of the circulation decline of .8%. About 1.9 billion or 34% of the world population read newspapers every day, while only 24% of the world population use the internet. In 2010, newspaper readership went back to 1.7 billion. In the Arab World, studies revealed asymmetrical growth between print and electronic journalisms, simply because of the weak internet infrastructure and high internet charges in many Arab countries, and hence, low internet penetration or reach (Sulaiman, 2009: 4). Readership and circulation are expected to be indicative of each other, however, it is very difficult to rely on the circulation figures of most Arab print media because they are not audited.

This quick review of the state of newspapers in the world shows that US print media have been hardest hit. In 2005, American newspaper circulation fell 2.8% amongst dailies and 3.4% amongst Sunday newspapers, according to the 2007 report published by the State of the News Media website. American print advertising revenue showed a continuous decline from \$42,209 million in 2007 to \$22,795 million in 2010, whereas the decline in the online advertising revenue between the two years was very marginal, from \$3,166 in 2007 to \$3,042 in 2010 (State of the News Media, 2011). The decline in US newspaper advertising revenue can mainly be attributed to the recent economic crisis and the migration of consumers to the online platforms, which have just exacerbated the status of some newspapers and forced them to close down. News & Tech website estimated the decline in 2010 at 5 to 10%, with a remarkable improvement from the 22% decline in 2009. The decline in advertising revenue is expected to be in the margin of 2% in 2012, the time when the US economy is also expected to recover from the crisis (News & Tech, June 14, 2010).

The impact of new digital media especially the internet on print journalism is indisputable. However, this impact is not imminent and does not follow the same pace across all countries of the world. The focus on the death of some newspapers and the decline in advertising revenue and readership in the USA and some European countries have dominated the scene and overlooked the

growth that newspapers are experiencing in other parts of the world. In many countries, circulation figures are steadily increasing, readership is not severely affected by the digital news sources and the decline in advertising revenue has affected print and digital media alike because of the economic crisis since 2008. From the beginning of the 20th century, the issue of influence and competition between electronic media, then radio, and print media has been widely debated. Yet, newspapers continued to grow and continued to have their audience. The fact that every single medium has its own merits and characteristics allows different media to complement each other. Competition in a free and open market is inevitable, but it is the duty of the newspaper industry to become proactive and to work towards meeting the needs of its readers in this age of globalization.

Print Media in Oman:

Oman is located on the southeast coast of the Arabian Peninsula, bordering Saudi Arabia in the west, United Arab Emirates in the north, Yemen in the south and Oman and Arab sea in the east. Oman is a monarchy with a population of slightly over three millions according to a 2009 estimate by the Ministry of National Economy (abolished by a royal decree in March 2011). Historically, Oman was an empire until the mid 20th century, with colonies extending from the east coast of Africa to the shores of the Indian subcontinent. Omanis established a Sultanate in Zanzibar (Tanzania) that remained for more than a century (1832 – 1964), and perceived Zanzibar and other parts of east Africa as their second home (Al-kindi, 2008: 22). The settlement of Omanis in Africa contributed to the establishment of newspapers in Zanzibar as early as 1911, when ***Alnajah*** (success) was established by Abu Muslim Al-Bahlani. *Alnajah* died in 1914, but a number of publications followed, including ***Alfalaq*** (dawn) in 1929, ***Almurshid*** (the guide) in 1942 and ***Alnahdha*** (renaissance) in 1951 (Op cit: 33). All of these newspapers died by the end of the Omani rule in east Africa in 1964. In 1971, a new era for journalism had just begun, but this time in mainland Oman.

In 1970, Sultan Qaboos bin Said took the throne (an is still in power) and started the renaissance of modern Oman. His modern vision and openness

to the world brought in many positive changes to the country, including the growth and expansion of the media sector. As a result, the first newspaper to appear in Oman was the privately owned ***Alwatan***, established by the Al-Tae family in 1971. The government started its own newspaper, ***Oman***, in 1972, and several other new newspaper titles started to emerge erratically over the years with a very a long interval between one another. However, this trend has changed since 2006, as four dailies and more than 10 free weekly tabloids have come into existence.

According to the list of publications obtained by the researcher in October 2010 from the Ministry of Information, the licensing body in Oman, there are 84 publications in Oman ranging from the mere newsletters to refereed journals. Amongst those are 9 daily newspapers, 22 private commercial magazines, 17 governmental magazines, 10 free weekly tabloids, 3 quasi refereed journals and 8 refereed journals. The rest are either newsletters or erratic publications.

Five out of the nine daily newspapers are in Arabic and four are in English. The English ***Muscat Daily***, published by Apex Press and Publishing, is the newest in the market, it appeared in October 2009 and is published from Saturday to Wednesday. Oman's three other English dailies are the ***Times of Oman, Oman Observer and Oman Tribune***. The most recent Arabic dailies are ***Alr'oyah***, which was launched in 2009 by Arro'yah Establishment for Press and Publishing and ***Azzaman*** in 2007. The remaining Arabic dailies, ***Alwatan, Oman*** and ***Alshabiba*** are the oldest. The free weekly tabloids are published both in English and in Arabic. The first free weekly tabloid was introduced to Oman by Apex Press and Publishing, which launched ***The Week***, an English tabloid, in 2003 and its Arabic version, ***Al Isbou'a***, in 2006 (MediaSource, 2011:45). Muscat Press and Publishing House launched its own free weekly tabloids in 2007, namely ***Hi*** (English) and ***Al Youm Al Sabe*** (Arabic).

Circulation figures, readership rates and advertising revenue of print media in Oman are not authentic, as auditing is not a common practice amongst

newspaper publishers with the exception of Apex which hired BPA Worldwide to audit its two tabloids. Most of the claimed circulations are exaggerated by the newspapers in order to attract advertisers. However, according to Dubai Press Club (2010: 135) total dailies circulation in Oman is estimated at 274,000 copies sharing an advertisement market of US \$85 million. Table 1 gives details about all dailies while Table 2 gives details about most free weekly tabloids in Oman.

Table (1)
Omani Daily Newspapers

Publication	Launched	Circulation	language	Ownership	Owned By
<i>AlWatan</i>	1971	* 47,000	Arabic daily	Private	Omani Establishment For Press, Printing, Publishing & Distribution LLC
<i>Oman</i>	1972	* 41,721	Arabic daily	Government	Oman Establishment for Press, News Publication & Advertising
<i>Alshabiba</i>	1993	* 37,000	Arabic daily	Private	Muscat Press & Publishing House
<i>Oman Observer</i>	1981	7,000	English daily	Government	Oman Establishment for Press, News Publication & Advertising
<i>Times of Oman</i>	1975	21,000	English daily	Private	Muscat Press & Publishing House
<i>Oman Tribune</i>	2006	NA	English daily	Private	Oman Establishment For Press, Printing & Publishing
<i>Azzaman</i>	2007	* 25,000	Arabic daily	Private	<i>Azzaman</i> Establishment for Press, Publication & Advertising
<i>Muscat Daily</i>	2009	NA	English weekly	Private	Apex Press & Publishing
<i>ARro'yah</i>	2009	NA	Arabic daily	Private	ARro'yah Establishment for Press and Publishing

Table (2)
Omani Free Weekly Tabloids

Publication	launched	Circulation	Language	Ownership	Owned By
<i>The Week</i>	2003	* 254,000	English	Private	Apex Press and Publishing
<i>Futoon</i>	2005	NA	Arabic	Private	Omani Establishment For Press, Printing, Publishing & Distribution LLC
<i>Alosbou'a</i>	2006	**20,884	Arabic	Private	Apex Press & Publishing
<i>Al Youm Al-Sabe</i>	2007	* 45,000	Arabic.	Private	Muscat Press & Publishing House
<i>HI</i>	2007	NA	English	Private	Muscat Press & Publishing House
<i>Al Malaib</i>	2006	NA	Arabic	Private	Omani Establishment For Press, Printing, Publishing Distribution & LLC
<i>Waseet</i>	2008	NA	Arabic	Private	Alwaseet International
<i>Koooorawabas</i>	2008	NA	Arabic	Private	SABCO
<i>I'elanak</i>	2008	150,000*	Arabic		Al-Imtyaz for Press & Publishing
<i>Zedni</i>	2008	NA	Arabic	Private	Zedni For Press & Publishing

* Claimed circulation by newspapers ** Figures from Middle East Media Guide website (2011).

Three of the above mentioned free weekly tabloids are purely commercials, specializing in classified advertizing. These are **Waseet** (broaker), **I'elanak** (your ad) and **Zedni** (get me more). **AlMalaib** (playgrounds) and **Koooorawabas** (just football) focus on sport issues besides advertisements. The remaining free tabloids try to provide diverse editorial content but most of their pages, especially **Futoon**, are occupied by advertisements.

Scope of Omani newspapers:

The scope of editorial content and interest of Omani newspapers is not remarkably different. **Alwatan** is a general daily with some focus on politics, arts and literature. It is the first newspaper in Oman and was launched in January 1971 by Nasr Al-Tae. Now, it is published in 48 pages using paper size 40 x 60cm, with some pages printed on glossy paper since 1999. The paper also publishes three main supplements for sport, economy and arts. In 1997, **Alwatan** started its internet version. About 290 employees are working for **Alwatan**, 74% of whom are Omanis. Both **Alwatan** and **Oman Tribune** are issued by the same publishing house, Oman Establishment for Press, Printing, Publishing & Distribution LLC.

Oman was launched in 1972 by the Omani government under the supervision of the Ministry of Information. **Oman** was published weekly every Saturday until 1975, and began to appear daily only in 1982. **Oman** publishes a number of supplements focusing on sport, culture, economy, health, family and arts. In addition, it publishes special supplements for some Ministries such as *Ruaa* (vision) for the Ministry of Higher Education, *Na'mal* (we work) for the Ministry of Manpower, *Haytuna* (our life), for the Ministry of Social Welfare and *Nafithah Tarbawayiah* (Window for education), for the Ministry of Education. In 2009, **Oman** updated its electronic version to become the first interactive newspaper website in Oman. Nearly 95% of employees are Omanis. Both **Oman** and **Observer** follow the same editorial policy as they are considered the mouthpiece of the Omani government.

Alshabiba is also a general daily newspaper with a focus on sport. The paper was started by the entrepreneur Eisa bin Mohamed Al-Zidjali in 1983. **Alshabiba** began as a sport magazine until it stopped in 1991. In 1993, **Alshabiba** reappeared but in a newspaper format. In 2009, the paper has undergone major changes including its design, layout, paper size and even its logo in an endeavour to attract more readers in a small but competitive market. The paper has also improved its content by focusing more on investigative reporting and opinion and analysis. It reprints translated articles of well-known columnists and writers, such as Robert Fisk and Thomas Friedman. Both **Alshabiba** and **Times of Oman** come from the same publishing house; Muscat Press and Publishing House. **Times of Oman** is the first English daily in Oman. It appeared in February 1975, but became a daily only in 1991. The main reasons for starting **Times of Oman** were to publicise Oman abroad and to address non-Omanis in the country. This explains why the newspaper dedicates more pages to news about the Indian Subcontinent since the majority of expatriates in Oman are from that region.

Azzaman is the fourth Arabic daily in **Oman**. It was launched in 2007 by Ibrahim Al-Mamery who had worked as editor in chief for **Oman** daily before starting **Azzaman** Establishment for Press, Publication & Advertising. **Azzaman** is the only daily in Oman which uses tabloid size. It differs from other newspapers in its news writing style and its focus on human interests. In the last three years, it published many controversial issues and that led to many lawsuits against the newspaper, the most publicized of which was **Azzaman vs. Minister of Justice** in 2011. The court ruled against **Azzaman** for publishing defamative and false information against the then Minister of Justice.

ARro'yah is the fifth Arabic daily. It was started in 2009, by Hatim Altaee, a member of the Al Tae'e family that owns **Alwatan**. **ARro'yah** was thought to be the first business newspaper. However, the newspaper covers far-fledged topics ranging from politics to health and beauty. It also dedicates a section to youth news and activities, especially those of college and university students.

Literature Review:

Makkawi (1991) conducted one of the earliest survey studies on 300 university students in order to find out their uses of different mass media. He found that students spent more time watching TV than reading newspapers or magazines, which were ranked fifth and sixth, respectively. Books, radio and audiocassettes were ranked second, third and fourth.

However, Al-Abd (1995), conducted the first readership study in Oman. He used a stratified sample of 400 students and employees selected from schools and public and private institutions. The study found that 55% of the sample, males in particular, frequently read newspapers and magazines. Their favorite newspapers, in order of preference, were **Oman**, **Alwatan**, **Times of Oman** and **Observer**. **Oman** was mostly favored by males working in the public sector, while **Alwatan** was favored by male students and private sector employees. **Oman** and **Alwatan** were read most because of their writing styles, news analyses and layout and design. **Alwatan** elicited more positive attitudes about its content and design from its dedicated readers than did **Oman**. However, readers were not loyal to their favorite paper, as 69% of them indicated they would read any Omani or Arabic newspaper if they could not get a copy of their favorite one. The majority (64%) of the readers acquire their copies through buying, 17% at work and another 16% through borrowing. Most (70%) prefer to read newspapers at home. Hard news, whether international, regional or local, was the most read item followed by soft news, sport, religious and scientific topics. It should be noted that Makkawi (1991) and Al-Abd (1995) conducted their studies before the advent of the internet to Oman and at a time when satellite channels had just started to stream in.

Al-araimi (2002), studied readers' perceptions of **Oman** daily. The study was conducted on 200 readers of the newspaper selected purposively from the city of Muscat. Income, age and education of the readers correlated negatively with their image of the newspaper. For example, the higher the age and income, the less positive the image of **Oman** daily. However, the

study lacks robust statistical and theoretical analyses. For example, no information has been provided regarding where, when and how frequently the subjects read the newspaper.

Al-Ghabshi (2002) studied Omani women's general use of different mass media including newspapers. She conducted her study on a stratified sample totaling 400 female subjects. The study found that 84% of the sample read newspapers in general, and 98% read **Oman** daily newspapers, but the majority (62%) read them occasionally. The most read newspapers were **Oman, Al-Watan, Al-Alshabiba** and **Observer** respectively, a result that partially conforms to the findings of Al-Abd (1995). The majority (75%) of the subjects buy their favorite newspapers, 25% get them free at work, and about 11% borrow them. Most of the subjects (84%) prefer reading newspapers at home while only 25% of them read them at work. However, these percentages add up to more than 100%, a case that can only be explained by having some respondents selecting more than one option. Most readings take place during the weekend. In line with some other findings, hard news is the most preferred subject, followed by literary arts, crimes, religious and soft news. The most important motives for reading newspapers were to get information and learn new things, especially about female issues and entertainment. The study also indicated that Omani newspapers were helpful in satisfying subjects' needs for local, international and regional news. However, there was no prior indication about how important these issues were to Omani women in the first place.

Al-Mukhaini (2006) studied the uses of Omani newspapers and the resulting gratifications amongst Omani readers. He conducted his study on 400 respondents aged 18 years and above from the city of Muscat. Similar to the findings of Al-Abd (1995), Al-Mukhaini found that the majority (60%) of respondents frequently read newspapers. However, his study indicated a preference shift in which **Alwatn** has become more preferred and frequently read than **Oman**. This result lends support to the assertion made by Al-Uraimi (2002: 42) that **Oman** daily was suffering from sharp decline in both readership and advertising revenue because of advertisers' and readers'

negative perception of the paper stemming from their view of it as the mouthpiece of the government. Reasons for preferring certain newspapers were writing style, habitual, accessibility to the paper, different views and in depth analysis, respectively. The most read subjects in a descending order were politics, human interest, scientific, religion, sport and medicine.

Al-Shaqsi (2011) conducted a survey study on 517 university students in Oman investigating mainly their uses of mobile phones. Students were asked to rank in a descending order the importance of 9 personal and mass media. Books were ranked fourth and newspapers fifth, while mobile phones, TV and the internet occupied the first three ranks, respectively. The fact that mobile phones and the internet are interactive media, very accessible especially on campus and more than just a source of information, would partially explain why students found them very important.

Al-Shaqsi (2012) studied expatriates' uses of different media in Oman. Amongst 10 different mass and personal media, expatriates expose themselves to TV, books, friends, newspapers and use fixed and mobile phones more than other media. This result shows that amongst expatriates in Oman, electronic media, other than TV, have not constituted a threat to the readership of books and newspapers. Fixed and mobile phones and the internet were ranked fifth and seventh, respectively.

In 2010, two international media research companies, Effective Measure and Spot On PR, studied between 9th – 12th July 2010, internet users' exposure to other print and electronic media in the Arab world. The study used 2587 subjects selected randomly via an intercept invitation and the survey was conducted online. Countries covered in this survey were Egypt, accounting for 69% of the total sample, Arab Gulf countries (20%), Arab North African countries (5%), Syria, Lebanon and Jordan (4%), and other countries (2%). The ages of the respondents range from 15 to 60 years, with the age group 21-30 being the highest (42%) with most (57%) of them having tertiary education. The study found that 88% of the internet users in these countries access the internet daily, 71% watch television daily, 27% listen to radio daily,

43% read newspapers daily with 80% of them reading for an hour or less per day, 29% read magazines more than once a week and 54% use mobile applications daily. It was also found that office hours are the peak time for reading newspapers and magazines. This result indicates that nearly half (43%) of the daily users of the internet also read newspapers, while the least used media are radio and magazines.

AlShehri & Gunter (2002) conducted a survey study among 800 readers of Arabic electronic newspapers. Arabs prefer reading the print version of their favorite newspapers to the electronic one. For example, while only 10.6% of the respondents reported reading the electronic version of ***Al-Hayat***, 16% said they read the print copy of the paper. In fact, 63% of the sample were not willing to pay fees for reading online newspapers. This result was also reached by Skogerbo & Winsvold (2011) who studied young Norwegians use of print and online newspapers. Among the daily readers, 80% read the print versions while only 5% read the online ones. Moreover, AlShehri & Gunter (2002) also found that the popularity of the internet versions is drawn mainly from the popularity of the hard copy. Most Arab readers of the electronic newspapers were predominantly male, young to middle-aged adults and business professionals or students in higher education.

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman's neighboring country where expatriates outnumber the nationals by a ratio of 8 to 2, Ipsos-Stat and Business Compass, two international research companies, conducted in 2004 a large scale readership research based on interviews. The study used a proportional multi-stage sample totaling 2,403, aged 15 years and above. The results showed that daily newspapers have a 59.5% penetration amongst the UAE's resident population (Rahman, 15 June 2004). The study also found that "best news coverage" and "habit" are among the top reasons for choosing a newspaper. Favorite topics include current affairs, politics and celebrities' lives. About 90% of the samples buy newspapers at least once a week and only 5% get them through subscription. In the UAE, print remains the dominant platform for news, but a quarter of the respondents use the internet more than print and nearly 50% of these read news online.

Elvestad & Blekesaune (2008) used the data of the European Social Survey (ESS) of 2004/5 to conduct a comparative multilevel analysis on newspaper reading in 23 European countries. The overall sample of the ESS survey was 32,765. The results indicated that Irish, Norwegians and Finnish, respectively spend more than 40 minutes a day reading newspapers. The European countries that have the highest number of non-readers were, in descending order, Greece, Spain, Belgium and Portugal. The analyses indicated that gender, age, education and income were strong predictors of the time spent on reading newspapers in most European countries. Men spent more time reading newspapers than women. Age, education and income correlated positively with time spent reading newspapers.

Raeymaeckers (2002) studied young Belgians, aged between 16-18 years old, reading habits and attitudes towards newspapers. The study found that young Flanders (n=1200) spent more time watching TV and listening to radio than reading magazines, books and newspapers. Only 19% of the respondents read newspapers on a daily basis, 18% read them regularly and 20% never read newspapers. The study also found that male respondents spend more time reading newspapers than females and they read them frequently. This result lends support to the findings of Makkawi (1991) and Al-Shaqsi (2011) in which young adults are found to spend more time viewing TV than reading newspapers and books.

In the United States of America, the Readership Institute at Northwestern University published in 2001 the results of a comprehensive study aiming at investigating people use and attitudes towards American newspapers and their content. More than 37,000 readers and non-readers were surveyed, and 47,500 news stories, photos, graphics and other content from 100 American newspapers were analyzed. The study used Reader Behavior Score (RBS) with a 17-point scale questions to measure time, frequency and completeness of reading. About 21% of the sample were heavy readers, 11% skimmers, 6% selective readers and 28% non-readers. The top content topics were in order; local and people-focused news; lifestyle news; governance and global relations; natural disaster and accidents; movies and weather; business and

personal finance; science, technology and environment; police, crime and justice and finally sport.

This literature review has indicated that all readership studies in Oman except Alabd (1995) used Omani subjects, whereas this study uses a more heterogeneous sample including Omanis and non-Omanis. Moreover, since 2006, several free and paid newspaper titles have emerged, but there is little information available about the characteristics of their readers and their reading habits. Previous studies in Oman and elsewhere have also pointed to several variables that influence reading habits such as, gender, age, education and income. Therefore, it is important to examine the role these variables play in the current study. It was also found that readers' attitudes towards a given newspaper were influenced by the content and layout of that paper. These factors are also considered in this study. It is worth noting that some newspapers in Oman have already changed their layout and design and reduced the dimension of their paper in an endeavor to attract readers.

Study Problem:

The previous discussion showed that at a time when many publications in the USA and Europe closed down, went online or took certain measures in order to survive competition and recession, new newspaper titles appeared in Oman. Since 2006, 8 new dailies and a number of free weekly tabloids have emerged. Overall, there are more than 15 daily and weekly newspapers in both the Arabic and English languages available to a population totaling 3,173,917 people, according to the population statistics of 2009 published by the Ministry of National Economy. Oman has a high proportion of young people with over 72% of the Omani population (n= 2,017,559) aged between 0 – 29 years. In 2003, the illiteracy rate amongst Omanis aged between 15-45 years, was 9.1% (Ministry of National Economy, 2003). Non-Omanis account for 36.43% (1,156,358) of the total population. Most of the expatriates come from the Indian subcontinent and about 36% of them work in the construction field, which does not require any form of Arabic or English language proficiency (Ministry of Manpower, 2009:53). The age group (30 – 44) accounts for 34.3% of the expatriates population, followed by the age

group (15 – 29) with approximately 33%. Thus, in light of these figures and recent development in the newspaper industry, accompanied by the lack of any robust readership study in Oman, there is a need to investigate readers' perception of Omani newspapers and their reading habits.

Objectives:

The main purposes of this study are to explore audience reading habits of newspapers and readers' attitudes towards the editorial content and layout characteristics of daily newspapers. It also investigates the role of some socio-economic factors in the issue of readership and perception.

Significance of the study:

The significance of this study stems from the fact that it is the first study in Oman that uses Omani and non-Omani subjects. It also covers dailies and free weekly publications while previous studies focused only on one or the other. Moreover, this study is the most recent, since all readership studies in Oman were conducted before 2006, the year when many new dailies and free publications were just starting to emerge.

Limitation:

This study was not intended to provide a conclusive account of readership of all print media in Oman. From a methodological perspective, the results cannot be generalized because the study used a none-probability sample. However, the results provide valuable information regarding newspapers readership and readers' views and perceptions of daily newspapers in Oman.

Research Questions:

With reference to the aims of this study and to the literature review, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1- What are the general characteristics of the readers and non-readers of Omani newspapers and do readers use electronic or print copies most?
- 2- What are the types or forms of journalistic writings that readers read most? And are there differences between readers in this regard based on age, gender, education, ethnic group, income and employment status?
- 3- To what extent are readers satisfied with their favorite newspaper's coverage of different topics?
- 4- Is there any correlation between reading certain types or forms of journalistic writings and readers' satisfaction with newspaper coverage of certain corresponding topics?
- 5- How do readers perceive the design and layout and professionalism of Omani newspapers?
- 6- Is there any correlation between reading frequency on the one hand and readers' satisfaction with the layout and appearance and the professionalism of Omani newspapers, on the other hand

Methodology:

This study is based on a survey questionnaire to investigate readership and readers' perceptions of Omani newspapers. The following section discusses readership measurement, the data gathering instrument and its variables.

Measuring Readership:

Readership is a very complex term to measure, though it is widely used. One can simply define readership as the number of readers of a specific publication. In Europe, the newspaper reading pattern is often based on the circulation of paid newspapers (Elvestad & Blekesaune, 2008: 430). However, circulation is not a valid measurement of newspaper reading because it does not reflect the people who actually read newspapers and their characteristics. The Magazine Publishers of America uses "average issue

audience" for readership, and defines it as "the projected number of people who have read or looked into an "average issue" of a magazine" (The Association of Magazine Media, 1st June 2000). The Audience Dialogue website defines readership as "the number of readers of a newspaper, magazine, etc which can only be assessed by a survey" (Audience Dialogue, 26th June 2006). Bottle PR, a UK based agency established in 2004, defines readership as "a general term that refers to the number of people reading a particular publication, including both the individual who purchased the publication and others who have read it (Bottle PR, 8th February 2011). The Huntsville Time website (8th February 2011) defines readership as "the number of adults (18+) in a specified geographic area who "read or looked into the publication yesterday".

It is obvious that there is no consensus as to what readership precisely means and how it can thereafter be measured. In retrospect, does readership refer only to the people who have read or looked into a specific publication, or does it also include by default those who have purchased the publication? If both views are equally valid, this would raise a serious question about how to classify an illiterate person who buys a newspaper for his disabled daughter. Then, how can a researcher operationally define the terms "read or looked into" a publication? Can a researcher consider the act of flicking through the pages of a newspaper or a magazine as reading? To what extent can a researcher rely on the assertion of the audience that they read without seeking further details about their reading habits and the content and publication they read? Does the duration of the act of reading, its frequency and the method of reading (skimming, scanning and thorough) affect our measurement of readership? Is readership assessment limited to the adults whose age are 18+ as The Huntsville Time website has suggested?

These series of questions show how complex is the operational definition of the term readership. Dennis List (2007) offered six different ways of measuring readership. These are average issue readership which in itself includes another five subcategories, reach or the circulation audience, frequency, the Startch method, readers per copy and eye tracking. For the

purposes of this study, these ways are not discussed in detail, but their general principles are used to outline how readership is operationally defined and measured. In this study, the question of readership is examined by a set of questions aiming at finding out:

- 1- Whether or not the respondent reads newspapers.
- 2- The name of the paper he/she reads most.
- 3- The frequency of reading his/her favourite newspaper, as well as other newspapers.
- 4- The days when and the places where reading is happening, and the means by which the reader gets a copy of the newspaper.
- 5- The content he/she reads most and forms of writing he/she prefers in the newspaper.

The survey questionnaire:

A survey questionnaire in the Arabic and English languages was generated. The English version was mainly targeted at non-Arabic speaking subjects. The questionnaire consisted of 22 main questions with scales ranging from the nominal yes-no answer to the ordinal 5-point Lickert scale. In addition to the demographic variables, the questions cover reading habits, forms of journalistic writings, newspapers' coverage of certain content areas, design and layout characteristics and professionalism.

The researcher hired three individuals to distribute and collect 1000 questionnaires. The distribution process started in 2010. Each person was given a formal letter from the researcher's institution requesting any given administration where questionnaires had been distributed to facilitate the distribution process. Subjects from the army and police sectors were very scarce due to the inaccessibility of their headquarters. Overall, 800 questionnaires were filled up by respondents, but only 747 of them were valid for SPSS analysis. Several statistical analyses have been used including frequencies, crosstabulations and correlations.

Sample Characteristics:

The study used a non-probability sample, namely convenience, since no sample frame has been identified for the population. Subjects were selected based on their existence in the places where questionnaires were distributed,

which mainly academic institutions, ministries and private companies in Oman's capital, Muscat. According to the statistics of the Ministry of National Economy of mid 2009, Muscat is the most populated place in Oman with 949,694 people. Expatriates constitute 53% (502,293) of the inhabitants of Muscat and 43.4% of the total expatriates in Oman (n=1156358). Because it is the capital, Omanis from different regions come to Muscat for work and for study, and a great deal of them make it a second place of residency. Therefore, choosing Muscat as a venue for conducting this study, is cost and time effective in finding a representative sample with Omanis, non-Omanis, Arabs, non-Arabs, students, employees and other demographic characteristics. Moreover, all of the paid and free newspapers in Oman are printed and published in Muscat.

Of the 747 respondents in this study, 62% were males and 38% were females. Their ages range from 15 to over 40 years old. Omanis account for 87.6% of the sample, while foreigners, including Arabs, Asians and Europeans, account for 12%. The age group 21-30 years comprises 45%, and the age group 31-40 comprises 30.7%. Most of the respondents (29%) fell in the middle-income category (551 – 850) Rial Omani (RO) a month (1 RO = US\$ 2.6), and 20% in the low income category (250 -550 RO). More than 62% of the respondents have diploma and university degrees, 11% have postgraduate degrees, and more than 25% have high school diplomas or less. Nearly 48% of the subjects work in civil government institutions, 22% in the private sector, 19% as students and 6% in the military sector.

Results:

General Characteristics Of Readers And Their Reading Habits:

Only 5.5% of the total sample (n= 747) said they didn't read daily newspapers, and half of those (2.7%) worked in the public sector. The most important

reasons for not reading newspapers were the availability of other media sources, hate of reading and not finding newspapers as interesting, respectively. Most readers of daily newspapers are males (63%), their ages range between 21 – 35 (65%) from low and middle income background (48.8%), who have diploma and university degrees (62.8%) and worked in the public sector (48%).

More than 41% of the respondents read newspapers during the weekdays, 23.4% during the weekends and 35.6% daily. In line with this result, 43.5% said they read newspapers at work and 49.6% at home, whereas only 6.8% said they read newspapers in public places. Most of the respondents (42.2%) get their copies for free at work, 32.2% buy them from news stalls or vendors, 7% borrow them, 6.4% obtain them through annual subscription and 5.3% read them in public places, such as cafes. What is worth noting here is that only 3% read the electronic version of their favourite newspapers, a case that explains why print copies are popular in Oman and are not challenged by the new information technologies. Hard copies of newspapers in the Arab World are still popular because of low internet penetration and high internet charges (Alshehri & Gunter 2002; Nemeth 2006). Moreover, Arabs use the internet mainly to browse their emails, search for information about their hobbies and connect with others through social networking sites (Spot on PR & Effective Measure 2010). The Arab diasporas are found to browse the electronic version of either their national or popular newspapers more than those who reside in their home countries (Negm, 2005).

Respondents were asked to name their most read and favourite newspaper. The results showed that amongst Arabic dailies, ***Alwatan*** was favoured by 49.6% of the respondents, followed by ***Oman*** (27.2%) and ***Alshabiba*** (9.5%). The new Arabic titles, namely ***ARro'yah*** (vision) and ***Azzaman*** (time), claimed only 3% and .7%, respectively. Amongst the English dailies, ***Times of Oman*** was favoured by 5.4% of the respondents followed by ***Tribune*** (2.7%). The least read newspapers were the newly launched ***Muscat Daily*** and ***Observer***. **Table 3** shows that ***Alwatan*** is more frequently read (61%) than any other newspaper, followed by ***Oman***. On the other hand, ***Times of***

Oman is the most frequently read amongst English dailies. Both **Oman** and **Alshabiba** are more read occasionally.

Amongst free weekly tabloids, **Futoon** appeared to be the most read publication (29.6%), followed by **Almalaib** (16.8%), **Alosbou'a** (7.5%), **Al Youm AISabe** (6.5%) and **The Week** (6.1%)

Table 3

Reading frequency of dailies based on valid percents

	Always		Occasionally		Don't Read		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Alwatan	390	61.3	212	33.3	34	5.3	636	100
Oman	225	36.7	337	55	51	8.3	613	100
Alshabiba	121	20.3	363	60.9	112	18.8	596	100
Azzaman	30	5.7	141	26.6	359	67.7	530	100
Times of Oman	56	11.2	121	24.2	322	64.5	499	100
Observer	21	4.4	116	24.5	337	71.1	474	100
Tribune	10	2.3	65	14.8	364	82.9	439	100

Crosstabulation analyses of the whole sample reveals that both **Alwatan** and **Oman** appeal to the same readers. Their predominant readers are Omani males within the age group 21-30 years who work in the public sector and have a university degree.

Most Read Forms Of Journalistic Writings:

In a 3-point scale (always, occasionally & don't read), respondents were asked to identify how frequently they read 9 journalistic forms of writing. **Table 4** shows that the majority (67%) of the respondents read news always, and about 40% of them always read caricatures and comics. The most occasionally read forms of writing are opinion and analysis (63%), interviews (57%), investigative reporting (53%), classified ads (49.7%) and daily columns (48%). What is worth noting here is that 37% and 35% of the respondents said they do not read letters to the editor and puzzles, respectively.

Table 4

Most Read Forms of Journalistic Writing

Forms of writing	Always		Occasionally		Don't Read		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
News	470	67.3	217	31.1	11	1.6	698	100

Opinion & Analysis	161	23.9	421	62.6	91	13.5	673	100
Interviews	171	25.8	381	57.1	114	17.1	667	100
Investigative Reporting	187	28.4	348	52.8	124	18.8	659	100
Caricatures & Comics	290	43.8	266	40.2	106	16	662	100
Daily Columns	227	34.4	316	48	116	17.6	659	100
Classified Ads	191	28.5	333	49.7	146	21	670	100
Letters to the editor	135	21.2	266	41.7	237	37.1	638	100
Puzzles	173	25.4	266	39.1	241	35.4	680	100

Further analyses revealed statistically significant differences between the mean scores of males and females in reading three forms of writings. Females read letters to the editors ($m=2.01$), advertisements ($m=2.16$) and puzzles more than males. Amongst ethnic groups, statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between Omanis, Arabs and Asians were observed in three writing forms. Asians ($m=2.71$) read letters to the editor more than Omanis ($m=1.80$) and Arabs ($m=1.81$), whereas Omanis ($m= 2.32$) and Arabs ($m=2.00$) expose themselves to caricatures and comics more than Asians ($m=1.87$). The differences between the mean scores in these two forms of writings were significant at .01 probability level. On the other hand, Asians ($m= 2.43$) read advertisements more than Arabs ($m=2.02$) and Omanis ($m=2.05$), but the differences in the means were only significant between them and Omanis at 95% level.

Table 5 shows that older age groups, 31 years and above, read news, daily columns and classified ads more than younger age groups. The differences in their mean scores are statistically significant at 99% level. Younger age groups, however, read caricatures & comics and puzzles more than older ones.

Table 5
ANOVA on age & reading different forms of writings

Topics	Means based on age groups					SD Total	SS Total	F	Sig
	10-20	21-30	31-40	40 +	Total				
News	2.39 C	2.64 b	2.78 a	2.68 a	2.66	.51	179.16	13.17	.000
Daily Columns	1.95 b	2.12	2.28 a	2.30 a	2.17	.71	324.30	5.91	.001
Caricatures & Comics	2.31	2.42 a	2.16 b	1.91 b	2.28	.72	344.86	12.38	.000

Classified Ads	1.83 b	2.14	2.01 a	2.21 a	2.07	.71	333.98	5.64	.001
Puzzles	2.45 a	1.97 b	1.64 b	1.69 b	1.90	.77	407.20	27.21	.000

The respondents' level of education was a significant factor in predicting their reading of certain journalistic writings. **Table 6** shows only the results where statistically significant differences were observed. Respondents with MAs & Ph.Ds read news, opinion & analysis and classified ads more than others, while those with a high school qualification or less read puzzles more than other groups. Investigative reporting appeared to be more frequently read by all groups apart from respondents with a high school qualification.

Table 6
ANOVA on education & different forms of writings

Topics	Means based on education					SD Total	SS Total	F	Sig
	> HS	HS	Dip/B A	MA/Ph. D	Total				
News	2.49 b	2.62 b	2.65 b	2.93 a	2.66	.51	176.64	10.41	.000
Opinion & Analysis	1.98 c	1.93 c	2.12 b	2.36 a	2.10	.60	243.05	8.91	.000
Investigative Reporting	2.35 a	1.88 b	2.12 a	2.36	2.10	.69	304.90	6.24	.000
Classified Ads	1.84 b	1.89 b	2.11	2.25 a	2.07	.70	328.80	6.78	.000
Puzzles	2.07 a	2.16 a	1.86 b	1.55 c	1.89	.77	401.07	11.30	.000

According to **Table 7**, respondents from the high income category frequently read news, opinion & analysis, daily columns and investigative reporting. The differences between their mean scores and other income categories are highly significant. On the other hand, letters to the editor and puzzles are more frequently read by readers from the low income category.

Table 7
ANOVA on Income & reading different forms of writing
Low= (R.O. 100-550) middle= (R.O. 551 – 1150) high= (R.O. 1151 & above)

Topics	Means based on income				SD Total	SS Total	F	Sig
	Low N= 233	Middle N=289	High N=141	Total N= 663				
News	2.54C	2.70b	2.84 ^a	2.67	.50	167.98	17.94	.000

Opinion & Analysis	1.96C	2.14b	2.31^a	2.11	.60	233.90	15.00	.000
Daily Columns	2.05b	2.21 ^a	2.28^a	2.17	.71	315.33	5.22	.006
Investigative Reporting	1.89b	2.21 ^a	2.21^a	2.10	.68	291.85	15.74	.000
Letters to the editor	1.99^a	1.77b	1.77b	1.84	.74	338.06	5.87	.003
Puzzles	2.10^a	1.78b	1.62b	1.86	.76	369.44	20.56	.000

* R.O. (1 Rial Omani = \$2.6)

Readers' Satisfaction With Newspapers' Coverage Of Different Topic Areas:

Readers' satisfaction with 13 different topic areas was assessed by a 5-point scale (excellent, very good, good, fair & unsatisfactory), where excellent was rated 5 and unsatisfactory 1. The topics under investigation are the most prominent ones that appear in any average newspaper (local news, Arab news, international news, opinion & analysis, business news, art & artists, current affairs, ads, sport, culture, religious, medicine and games & puzzles). The analysis in this section is limited to the readers of the four most read newspapers; *Alwatan* (n=350), *Oman* (n=190), *Alshabiba* (n=67) and *Times of Oman* (n=36). These four newspapers make up 86% of the total newspaper reading indicated by the sample (n=643). **Table 8** shows ANOVA results on readers' satisfaction level with the newspapers' coverage of 13 topics.

Table 8

ANOVA on readers' overall satisfaction with newspaper coverage of different topics (mean scores with the same subscripted letters= no significant differences)

Topics	Means					SD Total	SS Total	F	Sig
	<i>Oma</i> <i>n</i>	<i>Alwata</i> <i>n</i>	<i>Alshabib</i> <i>a</i>	<i>Time</i> <i>s</i>	<i>Tota</i> <i>l</i>				
Local News	4.02 ^a	4.01 ^a	4.24 ^a	3.44b	4.00	.967	596.99	5.46	.001
Sport	3.72b	3.74b	4.26 ^a	3.25b	3.76	1.040	670.73	7.66	.000
Ads	3.60	3.68	3.68	3.67	3.66	1.121	777.82	.266	.850
Arab News	3.67	3.57	3.87	3.35	3.62	.889	493.37	3.20	.023
Inter. News	3.42b	3.63C	3.95 ^a	3.11b	3.57	1.056	697.73	7.06	.000
Business	3.53 ^a	3.46 ^a	3.63 ^a	2.75b	3.46	1.053	670.63	5.88	.001

Culture	3.40	3.33	3.54	3.06	3.36	1.030	658.35	1.84	.138
Current affairs	3.28	3.20 ^b	3.74 ^a	3.18	3.27	1.198	891.99	3.61	.013
Opinion Anal.	3.27 ^a	3.29 ^a	3.62 ^a	2.13 ^b	3.26	1.124	791.10	13.97	.000
Religion	3.43	3.19	3.15	3.31	3.26	1.142	808.22	2.04	.108
Art & Artists	3.02 ^b	3.20 ^b	3.92 ^a	2.63 ^b	3.19	1.183	841.82	12.44	.000
Games/puzzles	2.95	2.85 ^b	3.39 ^a	3.06	2.95	1.194	884.14	3.52	.015
Medicine	2.86	2.79	2.79	3.06	2.82	1.231	934.42	.57	.637

The results in **Table 8** show that Omani newspapers in general provide satisfactory coverage of local news, sport, advertisement and Arab and international news more than other topics. The total mean scores of these topics are higher than others. It also appears that respondents found *Alshabiba's* coverage of local news, sport, international news, business news, current affairs, arts & artists and puzzles (crosswords) better than other newspapers. The differences are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Readers were equally satisfied with the Arabic dailies' coverage of local news. From a journalistic point of view, opinion & analysis is the backbone of any newspaper, yet Omani dailies' coverage of this topic did not seem to meet their readers' expectations.

The results also show that gender, age, ethnic group and income were significant factors in predicting readers' satisfaction. The results in **Table 9** show that females were more satisfied than males with newspapers' coverage of local news, culture, games & puzzles, religious and medical topics. The differences between the mean scores of males and females in these topics are statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Table 9

t-test on gender & readers' satisfaction with newspapers coverage of different topics

Topics	Means			SD	SS	F	Sig
	M	F	Total	Total	Total		
Local News	3.95	4.12	4.01	.951	632.88	4.87	.028
Culture	3.28	3.50	3.36	1.03	719.00	6.76	.009
Games/puzzles	2.83	3.27	2.99	1.20	976.96	22.11	.000

Religious	3.22	3.42	3.29	1.15	894.76	4.89	.027
Medical	2.76	3.03	2.86	1.26	1072.95	7.50	.006

The age of the respondents also appears to be an important factor. The results in **Table 10** show that the younger age group (10-20 years) and youth (21-30 years) appeared to be more satisfied than other age groups with their favourite newspapers' coverage of all topics except ads, where the differences were statistically insignificant. Their mean scores are higher than those of readers aged thirty one years old and above. The differences are statistically significant at 95% level of confidence.

Table 10

ANOVA on Age and readers' satisfaction with newspapers coverage of different topics
(mean scores with the same subscripted letters= no significant differences)
Age, 1= (10-20yrs), 2= (21-30yrs), 3= (31-40yrs), 4= (41+yrs)

Topics	Means of age groups					SD	SS	F	Sig
	1	2	3	4	Total	Total	Total		
Local News	3.90	4.13^a	4.00	3.71 ^b	4.01	.951	632.88	5.03	.002
Arab News	3.90	4.13	4.00	3.71	4.01	.951	552.96	3.68	.012
Inter. News	3.63	3.65	3.47	3.27	3.55	1.06	768.72	3.65	.018
Opinion Anal.	3.10	3.45^a	3.22	2.76 ^b	3.26	1.14	886.71	8.71	.000
Business	3.64^a	3.48^a	3.55 ^a	2.91 ^b	3.46	1.07	759.69	7.57	.000
Art & Artists	3.40^a	3.36^a	3.03 ^b	2.71 ^c	3.19	1.22	983.33	8.25	.000
Current affairs	3.84^a	3.33 ^b	3.14 ^b	2.97 ^b	3.30	1.21	993.96	9.49	.000
Sport	4.15^a	3.78 ^b	3.63 ^b	3.53 ^b	3.75	1.05	757.12	6.52	.000
Culture	3.62^a	3.49	3.19 ^b	3.03 ^b	3.36	1.03	719.01	8.25	.000
Games/puzzles	3.45^a	3.12 ^b	2.69 ^c	2.78 ^c	2.99	1.20	976.96	11.27	.000
Religious	3.84^a	3.34 ^b	3.09 ^b	3.01 ^b	3.29	1.15	894.76	10.86	.000
Medical	3.36^a	2.89 ^b	2.69 ^b	2.62 ^b	2.86	1.26	1072.95	7.12	.000

The respondents' level of education has influenced their satisfaction with newspapers' coverage of five different topics. **Table 11** shows statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between readers with a high school education and others. Readers with a high school education are more satisfied than others with newspapers' coverage of sport, culture, ads, religious and medical topics.

Table 11

ANOVA on education and readers' satisfaction with newspapers' coverage of different topics
(mean scores with the same subscripted letters= no significant differences)
Education: 1= less than HS, 2= HS, 3= Diploma & Degree, 4= Master & Ph.D

Topics	Means based on education levels				SD	SS	F	Sig	
	1	2	3	4	Total	Total			
Sport	3.79	4.14 ^a	3.65 ^b	3.73	3.75	1.06	755.12	6.72	.000
Culture	3.44	3.61 ^a	3.31	3.16 ^b	3.36	1.03	711.99	3.61	.013
Ads	3.28 ^b	3.66	3.73 ^a	3.49	3.65	1.12	836.52	3.39	.018
Religion	3.36	3.67 ^a	3.25 ^b	2.87 ^b	3.29	1.15	887.14	8.01	.000
Medicine	3.13	3.11	2.79	2.66	2.86	1.27	1068.94	3.54	.015

The ethnic background of the respondents has also influenced their satisfaction level with newspapers' coverage. The results in **Table 12** show that Omanis and Arabs appeared to be more satisfied than Asians with their favourite newspapers' coverage of local news, Arabic and international news, opinion & analysis and sport. The differences in respondents' mean scores for these topics are statistically significant.

Table 12

ANOVA on ethnic group and readers' satisfaction with newspapers coverage of different topics

(mean scores with the same subscripted letters= no significant differences)

Ethnic group: 1= Omanis 2= Arabs 3= Asians

Topics	Means by ethnic groups				SD	SS	F	Sig
	Omanis N=618	Arabs N= 42	Asians N= 32	Total N= 692	Total	Total		
Local News	4.05 ^a	4.00 ^a	3.25 ^b	4.01	.96	630.93	10.98	.000
Arab News	3.61 ^a	3.67 ^a	3.13 ^b	3.59	.89	545.66	4.64	.010
Inter. News	3.58 ^a	3.60 ^a	2.81 ^b	3.55	1.06	760.56	8.23	.000
Opinion Anal.	3.32 ^a	3.43 ^a	1.93 ^b	3.26	1.14	874.59	22.96	.000
Business	3.50 ^a	3.67	2.47 ^b	3.46	1.07	758.41	14.67	.000
Art & Artists	3.24 ^a	3.05	2.50 ^b	3.20	1.22	968.80	4.42	.005
Sport	3.80 ^a	3.76 ^a	3.07 ^b	3.77	1.05	744.37	7.10	.001

Based on income, readers from the middle income category (\$1430 – 2990) are more satisfied than other groups with their favorite newspapers' coverage of Arab and international news, opinion and analysis, business news, ads and medical topics. The differences between the mean scores of the three income categories are statistically significant. However, readers from the low income category appeared to be more satisfied than other groups with newspapers' coverage of cultural topics.

Table 13

ANOVA on ethnic group and readers' satisfaction with newspapers' coverage of different topics

(mean scores with the same subscripted letters= no significant differences)

Income: 1= low (R.O*. 100-550), 2= middle (R.O. 551 – 1150), 3= high (R.O. 1151 & above)

Topics	Means by income				SD Total	SS Total	F	Sig
	1 N= 233	2 N=294	3 N=139	Total N= 666				
Arab News	3.44 _b	3.71^a	3.62	3.59	.90	608.88	5.59	.004
Inter. News	3.39 _b	3.63^a	3.57	3.53	1.05	716.83	3.49	.031
Opinion Anal.	2.97 _b	3.45^a	3.32 ^a	3.26	1.13	829.54	12.13	.000
Business	3.24 _b	3.63^a	3.43	3.44	1.06	716.76	8.73	.000
Culture	3.46^a	3.35	3.16 _b	3.35	1.03	684.63	2.63	.027
Ads	3.33 _b	3.79^a	3.78 ^a	3.62	1.12	811.20	12.92	.000
Medicine	3.01	2.76	2.69	2.83	1.26	1015.86	3.62	.027

* R.O. (Rial Omani). 1 Rial Omani = \$2.6

Reading Certain Forms Of Writing & Satisfaction With Newspaper Coverage:

Respondents' reading frequency of nine types or forms of journalistic writing was correlated with their satisfaction with a newspaper's coverage of different corresponding topics. For example, news, which was found to be the most frequently read form of journalistic writing, was correlated with readers' satisfaction with newspaper's coverage of local, regional and international news. Therefore, a series of two-tailed *Spearman rho'* correlations were run. The results revealed statistically significant and positive correlations between the frequency of reading, news as a form of journalistic writing, and respondents' satisfaction with newspaper coverage of local news ($r = .91$, $p = .017$), Arabic & regional news ($r = .146$, $p = .000$) and international news ($r = .135$, $p = .000$). No significant correlation was observed between reading news and satisfaction with business, sport and arts news. Another set of statistically significant positive correlations was also observed between readers' satisfaction with newspapers' coverage of political analysis and frequency of reading opinion & analysis articles ($r = .198$, $p = .000$), daily columns ($r = .85$, $p = .031$), investigative reporting ($r = .193$, $p = .000$) and interviews ($r = .137$, $p = .000$). Reading classified advertisements correlated

positively and significantly with readers' satisfaction with newspapers' coverage of advertisements ($r = .236$, $p = .000$). Reading puzzles also correlated positively and significantly with readers' satisfaction with newspaper coverage of advertisements ($r = .331$, $p = .000$).

In light of these findings, it can be argued that the more readers are satisfied with a newspaper's coverage of certain topics, the more frequently they read the form of journalistic writing that relates to these topics, and vice versa. So the frequency of reading certain journalistic writings can be taken as an indicator of readers' satisfaction with certain topics.

Readers' Views About The Design And Layout Of Newspapers:

Good newspapers treat graphical elements, such as photos, charts, graphs and maps as the editorial equivalents of stories (Baskette et al.1992: 213). Technological advancements have helped newspapers with their design, layout and presentations. All newspapers in Oman are now using computers to design and sketch their pages. They use popular software including Publisher, InDesign, Illustrator and Photoshop. However, the final presentation depends mainly on the creativity of the designers or the artists. Many newspapers in Oman have also undergone layout changes. ***Alshabiba*** changed its design and look in 2009 and is now printed on paper with the dimension 58 x 32cm, making its width smaller by 4cm approximately than other standard newspaper dimension in Oman. ***Oman*** and ***Alwatan*** also went layout and design changes several years ago including the logo and appearance of their mastheads. ***Azzaman*** is the only daily newspaper in Oman that uses a tabloid format.

Newspapers design and layout refers to colors, fonts, spaces and arrangements and presentation of the editorial and non-editorial content in the pages of the newspaper. In this study, the operational definition of design and layout covers seven areas that attest to the appearance and presentation of the content in any given newspaper. These areas are; layout & design, pictures, graphic & comics, print paper quality, printing quality, fonts type & size and headlines. Respondents were asked to indicate their views about

these items in a 5-point scale (excellent, very good, good, fair & weak), where excellent was rated 5 and weak 1.

Table 14 shows statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the four newspapers in three areas. *Alshabiba* was rated highly by respondents for its layout & design, graphics & comics and headlines. This could be attributed to the fact that *Alshabiba* has recently undergone major typographic and layout changes. The differences in the mean scores of the four newspapers were statistically significant in the three previously mentioned areas, especially between *Alshabiba* and *Times of Oman*.

Table 14

ANOVA on readers' view of the design and layout of newspapers:

Topics	Means					SD	SS	F	Sig
	Oman	Alwatan	Alshabiba	Times	Total	Total	Total		
Layout & Design	3.90	4.00 ^a	4.21 ^a	2.50 ^b	3.97	.966	588.30	4.71	.003
Pictures	3.81	3.81	3.86	3.50	3.80	.985	609.99	1.21	.304
Graphics & comics	3.48 ^a	3.50 ^a	3.57 ^a	2.88 ^b	3.47	1.041	675.42	3.99	.008
Paper Quality	3.64	3.55	3.75	3.22	3.58	1.102	753.64	2.13	.096
Printing Quality	3.73	3.86	3.77	3.41	3.78	1.015	648.64	2.29	.078
Font size & Types	3.79	3.84	3.86	3.79	3.82	.993	618.70	.17	.920
Headlines	3.73 ^b	3.84	4.16 ^a	4.06	3.85	.984	611.42	3.60	.013

Readers' Image of The Professionalism of Omani Newspapers:

Every newspaper has its own image, which can sometimes become either a brand or a stigma. The images engraved in the minds of the readers affect newspapers' credibility and readership. There are a number of image characteristics assigned to newspapers, mostly relating to professionalism derived from news values. Readers' might develop an image about a newspaper as a result of a direct experience but they might also rely on stereotypes and indirect experiences. However, readers' image of Omani newspapers was examined through the subjects' responses to six professional values and characteristics; censorship, credibility, responsibility, sensationalism, audacity and timeliness.

Table 15 shows that **Oman** daily cultivated the highest percentage for censorship. About 62% of the respondents believe that censorship is widely practiced in **Oman**. This result conforms with the finding of Al-ariami (2002). The fact that **Oman** is a government newspaper and has always been perceived as the mouthpiece of the government might have influenced respondents' views. In terms of credibility, 40% of the respondents found **Alwatan** a credible newspaper but fewer than 25% said the same thing about **Oman**. In terms of responsibility, 39.2% of the respondents believe that **Alwatan** is a responsible newspaper followed by **Oman** with 37.1%. The differences between **Oman** and **Alwatan** in this respect are marginal. About 37% of the respondents viewed **Alshabiba** as a sensational newspaper, and 35.2% said the same about **Alwatan**. Respondents also viewed **Alwatan** as a courageous newspaper in reporting news that is not in line with the mainstream media and policy. Slightly more than 39% and 25.4% found **Alwatan** and **Alshabiba** to be so, respectively. **Alwatan** was also viewed as a timely newspaper in covering events with 47% of the respondents indicating this, followed by **Alshabiba** with 25.7%.

In sum, **Alwatan** was viewed more positively than other newspapers. From respondents perspectives, it is viewed as a credible, responsible, courageous and timely newspaper. This result would also explain why **Alwatan** is more frequently read than any other newspapers. On the other hand, **Oman** was singled out as the most censored newspaper.

Table 15

Valid percents on respondents' perceptions of Omani newspapers

Newspaper	Censorship		Credibility		Responsibility		Sensationalism		audacity		Newness	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Oman	330	61.7	136	24.9	198	37.1	50	9.6	88	17.1	138	25.7
Alwatan	151	28.2	299	40	209	39.2	104	35.2	203	39.3	253	47
Alshabiba	21	3.9	70	12.8	63	11.8	193	36.9	131	25.4	87	16.2
Azzaman	6	1.1	8	1.5	16	3	60	11.5	55	10.7	18	3.3
Observer	8	1.5	14	2.6	13	2.4	12	2.3	13	2.5	8	1.5

Times	19	3.6	18	3.3	32	6	16	3.1	18	3.5	22	4.1
Tribune			2	.4	2	.4	4	.8	4	.8	8	1.5
Mct Daily							4	.8	4	.8	4	.7
Total	535	100	54 7	100	533	100	523	100	51 6	100	53 8	100

Discussion and Conclusion:

Oman is setting an example where print newspaper titles are increasing regardless of the advancement of new information technologies. Since 2006, four new dailies and several other free weeklies came out. The survival of the new titles, such as **Azzaman** and **ARro'yah** is questionable without government subscription and indirect subsidies. The indirect government subsidies come in the form of paid advertisements and announcements.

Hard copies of newspapers are still popular in Oman since only 3% of the sample reads the online version of their favourite newspaper. However, this result was expected because previous studies indicated that the internet in Oman is not commonly used to browse newspapers (Nagm & Alrawas 2004, Al-Shaqsi 2011). Most newspaper readers are males with college and university degrees. The privately owned **Alwatan** is favoured and read more than other newspapers followed by **Oman**. Perhaps, the image of **Oman** in the minds of the readers as dashed in censorship, might have affected its readership. However, when readers' image or view about the professionalism of **Oman** was correlated with the frequency of reading, a different result was observed. Frequent readers of **Oman** were less likely to see the newspaper as dashed in censorship. This means that occasional readers and non-readers of **Oman** were advancing a subjective judgment, based on their previous encounters with the newspaper regardless of any editorial changes the paper has made in the recent years.

News was the most read form of journalistic writing followed by caricatures & comics and daily columns, respectively. However, when socio-economic factors were examined, statistically significant differences were observed.

Gender, education, age, income and ethnicity of the respondents played a strong role in their preferences of certain forms of journalistic writings. Respondents with a university degree or a higher qualification from the high income category whose age is 30 years and above, read news, opinion & analysis, daily columns and investigative reporting more than other respondents.

The respondents overall satisfaction with Omani newspapers' coverage of different content topics was relatively high. Respondents were more satisfied with newspapers' coverage of local news, sports, ads, Arab news and international news, respectively. Their level of satisfaction differs from one newspaper to the other. Respondents found ***Alshabiba***'s coverage of local news, sports, international news, current affairs and arts & artists more satisfactory than other newspapers. On the other hand, age, ethnicity and income were very strong factors in explaining the differences in respondents' satisfaction level with newspapers' coverage of different topics. The results also indicated statistically significant and positive correlations between reading certain forms of journalistic writings and satisfaction with newspapers' coverage of certain topics. Reading news correlated with the satisfaction with newspapers' coverage of local, Arabic and international news. Reading opinion and analysis, daily columns and investigative reporting correlated with readers' satisfaction with the coverage of topics relating to opinion and analysis.

In terms of layout, design, appearance and presentation of Omani newspapers, the overall result indicated that respondents were to a greater extent satisfied with the look of their favourite newspapers. However, readers of ***Alshabiba*** were more satisfied with the layout and presentation of the paper than readers of other newspapers. This was explained by the changes in the typographic, design, layout and physical appearance that ***Alshabiba*** made about three years ago.

Newspapers in Oman, whether private or public, work under the guidelines of the Print & Publication Law. Yet, the general perception amongst Omani

readers is that private newspapers are more freer than the public ones in their coverage and reporting. This is not true from a legal perspective, but private newspapers are not strictly obliged to reflect the official viewpoints in all matters as do the public ones. The results of this study indicated that readers in general perceived **Oman** (public) as dashed in censorship more than other newspapers by a sizable difference. The private **Alwatan** was seen as credible, responsible, courageous and timely in its coverage and reporting. **Alshabiba**, (private) was perceived as a sensational newspaper. These results encourage future researches to thoroughly examine and study the factors that shape readers' perceptions and images of different media in Oman.

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