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Identifying Skills and Knowledge Gaps in Media Institutions in Lebanon

Within the Framework of the Journalists' Pact
for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon

Report written by

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1. Why this report?

This report comes nearly five years after the official launch of the Journalists' Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon on June 25, 2013 with the participation of 32 media outlets and under the auspices of the Ministry of Information in Lebanon. Over the past years, UNDP Lebanon, in cooperation with Maharat Foundation, has conducted several media monitoring studies on media outlets that signed the Pact to determine the extent of their commitment to its clauses.

The monitoring studies addressed the main themes covered by the Pact, such as the role of news bulletins introductions in consolidating civil peace; news coverage sources; preventing violence, incitement and hate speech; positive initiatives; elections; the religious media; etc. Based on the results of these monitoring studies, conclusions were drawn and recommendations put forward on the work of Lebanese media outlets that seeks to strengthen civil peace in Lebanon.

The problem that transpired was the ability of media outlets to abide by and apply the Pact in their daily work if the skills and knowledge gaps of these outlets and their employees are identified. Given that media outlets in Lebanon operate in an environment that is under financial, political, social, economic and other strains, the media study called for investigating the following two questions: What are the skills and knowledge gaps that media outlets have to deal with in the course of their work to strengthen civil peace and what are the causes of these gaps? What are the obstacles that hamper building these capacities in media employees?

As part of the work to identify skills and knowledge gaps in media employees in Lebanon regarding the Pact, the adopted methodology was based on reviewing the conclusions drawn by media monitoring studies conducted by Maharat Foundation's experts during the years following the declaration of the Pact. The review aims to identify the skills and knowledge gaps in media employees regarding the issues addressed in the Pact, in order to subsequently set a standards system required to close them and identify the training needs to build their capacities.

Based on the results of these monitoring studies over the five years following the launch of the Pact, skills and knowledge gaps have been identified in employees of media outlets that signed the Pact and the causes of these gaps presented.

Monitoring has also led to a number of conclusions that serve as criteria for closing skills and knowledge gaps and that can contribute to closing the gaps if the outlets take them on board. These standards cover awareness, education and capacity building, subsequently leading to greater adherence to the Pact.

Based on the aforementioned conclusions, staff training needs were identified and then work towards capacity building of the employees of media outlets that signed the Pact. Many workshops and training courses have been included, which would contribute to closing the skills and knowledge gaps in media employees in Lebanon.

2. Study problem

Media monitoring studies offered a number of conclusions and recommendations regarding the work of Lebanese media outlets towards strengthening civil peace in Lebanon. These conclusions have contributed to painting a picture of the reality in these institutions, years following the signing of the Pact and the pledge of signatory institutions to abide by it. Given UNDP Lebanon's continuous work over the years with media outlets to strengthen civil peace, this report was necessary to publish.

The research problem this report investigates is the extent to which media outlets are able to abide by and apply the Pact in their daily media work if the skills and knowledge gaps in these outlets and in their employees are identified. Given that media outlets in Lebanon operate in an environment that is under financial, political, social, economic and other strains, the media study called for answering the following questions:

- What are the skills and knowledge gaps and their causes in media outlets as to strengthening civil peace?
- What are the skills and knowledge gaps and their causes in media employees?
- What are the required standards in order to close the skills and knowledge gaps in media employees?
- What are the obstacles to capacity building of media employees?

3. Methodology

To identify the employee skills and knowledge gaps in media outlets in Lebanon in relation to the Journalists' Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon, the following methodology was adopted:

1. A review of the media monitoring studies conducted by Maharat Foundation's experts following the release of the Pact with a view to identifying the skills and knowledge gaps in Pact-related themes (including violence, racism, religious discourse, talk shows, news bulletin introductions, etc.).
2. A study of the conclusions specific to each of the aforementioned studies with a view to identifying the skills and knowledge gaps in each theme relating to the Pact.
3. Putting in place the standards system required to close the employee skills gap in media outlets.
4. Putting in place the standards system required to close the employee knowledge gap in media outlets.
5. Identifying the training needs to build the capacities of media employees.

4. The Lebanese media outlets covered by the study

The monitoring and analysis studies have covered the following media outlets, depending on the subject of the study:

1. Daily newspapers: Annahar, As-Safir, Al-Akhbar, Almustaqbal, Al Balad, Al Joumhouria, Addiyar, Aliwaa, Al Sharq, L'Orient-Le Jour, and The Daily Star.
2. TV stations: LBCI, OTV, MTV, Future TV, Al Jadeed, Al Manar, and Télé Liban.
3. News websites: National News Agency, Al Modon, Elnashra, Lebanon Files, Now.
4. Radion stations: Radio Liban, Sawt Lebnan Radio-Achrafieh (100.5), Voice of Lebanon-Dbayeh (93.3), Sawt el Shaab, Radio Orient, Sawt el Mada, Al Nour Radio, and Radio Liban Libre.
5. Satellite television channels: Télé Lumière, Charity TV, and Al-Iman TV.
6. Radio stations: Radio Al Bashaer, Irtiqaa Way Radio, Nidaa Al Maarifa Radio, Albachaer Radio, Alsalam Radio, Sawt Al Haq, Al Tawhid Radio, Holy Quran Radio, Fajr Radio in Lebanon, Voice of Charity, and Voice of Gospel.
7. Magazines: Manarulhuda Magazine, Duha Magazine, Ora Magazine, Risalat Al-Kalima, and Taqwa Magazine (for religious media studies).

5. Overview of the ten media monitoring studies

I. Monitoring Racism in Lebanese Media: The Representation of the “Syrian” and the “Palestinian” (Article 2 of the Pact)¹

This study sought to investigate manifestations of racism or the lack thereof in the Lebanese media discourse and to survey their orientations and positions regarding the Syrian and Palestinian issues mainly through a descriptive and analytical approach based on observing and analyzing direct or masked racism towards Palestinians and Syrians in the discourse of the Lebanese media that signed the Journalists’ Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon. The monitoring and analysis study, which covered the period between February 5 and 25, 2015, aimed to:

- Define the subject of the media discourse regarding the issues of the Syrians and Palestinians in Lebanon.
- Measure the magnitude and position of the media material and the tone used.
- Analyze the forms and manifestations of racist media discourse and the categories it targets.
- Analyze the journalistic framework and the various trends and patterns of media discourse.

It should be noted that the results of this study were presented to the media outlets targeted by the monitoring process and they were discussed during a discussion session. The opinions and comments raised about the study were taken into consideration, both those presented directly and those sent by email later.

¹ Article 2: Journalists shall commit to strengthen national unity and coexistence, respect religions, refrain from instigating sectarian or confessional strife, and reject violent disobedience movements, crime and abasement

II. Religions Incitement and Hate Speech and the Risks They Pose for Civil Peace (Article 2 of the Pact)²

This study aimed at finding out whether there was any incitement to religious hatred in the Lebanese media outlets signatories of the Journalists' Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon. The study also sought to monitor manifestations of this incitement, if any, and to present the main trends and positions of these media outlets regarding the pledge to respect all religions, refraining from stirring sectarian tensions, religious intolerance, and seeking or responding to incitement in accordance with Article 2 of the Pact.

Based on the central role of these media outlets, the research question sought to find out the extent of Lebanese media's responsibility in the process of disseminating and stirring incitement to religious hatred, how the Lebanese media handle religious discourse, and whether Lebanese media contribute to producing religious hate speech in a country so distinctly sectarian.

III. Monitoring News Coverage of Positive Initiatives by Lebanese Media (Article 14 of the Pact)³

This study sought to find positive initiatives covered by Lebanese media outlets that signed the Journalists' Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon. The study also looked at what these initiatives were about, given that such initiatives can be found in each society, albeit at different rates in different societies and cultures. This study contributed to shedding light on the extent to which the media apply this article.

² Ibid

³ Article 14: In the context of strengthening civil peace in Lebanon, Lebanese media institutions and their staff shall emphasize, promote, and encourage the initiatives, projects, and activities started by individuals or organizations to reject violence and discrimination and strengthen civil peace in Lebanon. This can be achieved by allocating ample time and space to shed light on issues that bring the Lebanese citizens together, and focus on values and morals that all religious communities agree upon, such as respect for the homeland. Media institutions shall carefully select the guests that they host and the writers that they recruit, as these shall enjoy a decent level of thinking and a high spirit of citizenship

IV. Images of Violence in the Lebanese Media (Article 4 of the Pact)⁴

This study sought to examine “the violence portrayed in the media” and study its repercussions at all levels, including the social, political and educational levels. The study covered the Lebanese media outlets that signed the Journalists’ Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon. It monitored the manifestations of violence in their journalistic work and clarified the trends and positions of the media outlets primarily regarding their commitment to rejecting violent insurgency and crime, acting with professionalism and social responsibility when broadcasting live coverages and violent scenes, refraining from spreading a spirit of violence and sedition, and working towards rejecting violence.

V. Monitoring Talk Shows at TV Stations (Article 11 of the Pact)⁵

This study examined talk shows to understand what values, concepts and opinions they promote and to determine how consistent they are with the Journalists’ Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon. The study raised pivotal questions about the role of the media in promoting democratic dialogue and their ability to represent different viewpoints and parties to a conflict during a particular crisis.

The corpus consisted of 56 talk show episodes over four months: April, May, August and September of 2015. It included 7 talk shows:

Bi Mawdouiye (Objectively), MTV; *Al usbu fi saa* (The Week in One Hour), Al Jadeed; *Interviews*, Future TV; *Hadith al saa* (Talk of the Hour), Al Manar; *Kalam Ennas* (Talk of the People), LBC; *Bila Hasana* (No Immunity), OTV; and *Kalima hurra* (Free Word), Télé Liban.

The methodology aimed to monitor the messages of talk shows to glean the nature of their content in terms of the use by the host and the guests of violent, instigatory and accusatory expressions. Thus the expressions used in verbal altercations during

⁴ Article 4: The Lebanese media shall act with professionalism and social responsibility when broadcasting a live coverage of events, violent scenes, or the immediate reaction and behavior of journalists that may influence the public opinion

⁵ Article 11: Journalists shall regulate the tone used in newspapers editorials, TV and radio breaking news, in addition to talk shows of the audiovisual media, in compliance with the principles and basics of journalism. Journalists shall also refrain from spreading a spirit of violence and strife

discussions were surveyed. In addition, the study monitored the performance of hosts and measured whether they were biased. It also investigated to what extent participants represented the different political, social and civilian sides, among others. Naturally, the study looked at how discussion topics were selected.

VI. Sources of News Coverage and the Right to Access Information (Articles 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 of the Pact)⁶

This study focused on the importance of sources in the work of Lebanese media outlets and the effects of these sources on the veracity of facts, on public opinion and on the democratic process. The ambiguity in using information sources in media coverage raises a number of issues that are closely linked to the professionalism of journalists, journalism ethics, media outlet credibility and the trust of readers and viewers about what the media present to them.

In view of the effect of the phenomenon on the media's credibility and the readers' confidence in their information, in addition to its effect on professionalism and ethical and legal obligations, the research question was formulated thus: Do the Lebanese media handle sources properly? What is the relation of this phenomenon to media outlets respecting their sources, for example? Why do media outlets resort to reporting news with anonymous sources?

⁶ Article 6: Journalists shall safeguard their right to obtain -from various sources-, analyze, publish, and comment on information, news and statistics that are of prime importance to the citizens. They shall also safeguard their right not to disclose the source of confidential news as such disclosure would expose the source to danger, or silence it gradually or completely, thus lead to a weaker flow of information in the future

Article 7: Journalists shall refrain from resorting to illegal means in order to obtain news, pictures, documents or other pieces of information. They shall preserve the confidentiality of the sources, unless otherwise required in cases that threaten national security. Unsupported slander or accusation is considered a blatant breach of the profession ethics; consequently, any information proved wrong shall always be corrected

Article 8: Journalists shall refrain from publishing off-the-record information while keeping the use of this information informally is possible upon verification of its accuracy and reliability or publication without indicating the source

Article 9: Journalists shall apply the highest levels of objectivity when "associating" published materials to their sources and mentioning the source of every piece of information. "Associating" information to unidentified sources shall not be allowed unless in cases where access to information is otherwise impossible

Article 10: Journalists shall commit to applying accuracy and objectivity in the drafting, editing, directing, and diffusion of information, documents, images, and scenes on all subjects 8 related to the press and to the audiovisual and electronic media, without distorting the facts

The sample consisted of monitoring the most widely covered and hottest issue at the time over one week in newspapers, TV news bulletins and on radio. The methodology was based on studying and analyzing the indicators relating to journalistic sources. The study relied on a questionnaire to show the importance of sources in journalism and the practices of journalists when attributing a piece of news and dealing with sources, and to determine the challenges and obstacles to the access of journalists to media sources. The questionnaire included a set of questions answered by 20 journalists from the editorial staff of 20 print, television, radio and electronic media outlets.

VII. The 2016 Municipal Elections (Article 12 of the Pact)⁷

This study aimed to analyze the media coverage of the municipal elections in light of the Journalists' Pact for Strengthening Peace in Lebanon signed by Lebanese media outlets. The study raised pivotal questions about the role of the media during the electoral period, especially with regard to their mission in democratic systems, particularly in shaping public opinion by providing accurate information and sufficient facts to enable the public to understand its environment and to enable it to take the appropriate positions accordingly.

Based on the 2016 municipal elections, this study sought to find out the following things, among others: the contribution of the media to education about the electoral and democratic processes, raising the awareness of voters and politicians, the volume of media coverage of democratic civilian forces striving to implement electoral reform, the contribution of the media to putting pressure on the political power to hold the elections and whether the media was a driving force in any direction, covering electoral campaigns, the mechanisms of media coverage, and the extent of the commitment of the Lebanese media in presenting news and reports about municipal and mayoral elections in accordance with the principles of the Pact.

⁷ Article 12: Media institutions shall commit to presenting news and programs related to parliamentary, municipal, union, or student elections with fairness, equality, and impartiality, and with the highest level of justice in order to give equal opportunities to all candidates. They shall also commit to educating citizens on democracy and elections through the dissemination of information on elections and their importance in democratic systems, the principles and standards of holding elections, as well as the role, rights, and duties of the voter

VIII. The Discourse of Religious Media and Its Consistency with the Principles of Civil Peace (Article 2 of the Pact)⁸

The study problem was limited to the following question: To what extent do the messages disseminated by religious media outlets contribute to strengthening the civil peace process? The methodology was based on surveying and analyzing the programming on radio and television channels. The study sample consisted of religious media outlets working in Lebanon, which include: Télé Lumière, Charity TV, Al-Iman TV, Irtiqaa Way Radio, Voice of Charity, Holy Quran Radio, Albachaer Radio, Fajr Radio in Lebanon, and Al Tawhid Radio. There was cooperation with the monitored media outlets to provide the researchers with the listings of the TV and radio channels.

The results of the study clearly showed similarities in professional performance when presenting general topics. This was contrasted with presentations of issues relating to creed, religion and confessionality and their implications for behavior, guidance, instruction, mobilization and education that target the different segments of society.

IX. Role of News Bulletins Introductions in Strengthening Civil Peace⁹

This study aimed to survey TV and radio news bulletins introduction first in terms of their content and, second, in terms of whether they are necessary in the first place to determine the values, concepts and opinions they promote and find out to what extent they are consistent with the Journalists' Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon signed by the Lebanese media outlets.

The study linked the news bulletins introductions to the war, as these introductions were first created by private radio stations that were launched during the war and were used as an instrument of war, and this situation later applied to the news bulletins introductions that made their way into TV bulletins. The study raised pivotal questions about the reality and role of news bulletins introductions in terms of their utility, content and format, that is, their performance and the concepts they disseminate. The study addressed

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

the following questions: How are news bulletins introductions created? Is ethics taken into account? Are there controls applied with the producer and host being personally responsible for not disturbing civil peace, and refraining from sowing sedition and inciting to violence? The research problem focused on the role of news bulletins introductions in strengthening civil peace based on their impact during crises on increasing partisanship and factionalism and at times of political détente. What is their role, impact and future?

The study aimed to determine the importance of news bulletins introductions in the daily journalistic practice of media outlets, the level of compliance of news bulletins introductions and newspapers with the principles outlined in the Pact, the size of the news bulletins introductions and the extent to which they respect the principles and rules of journalism. It also sought to measure the influence of the memory of war and its concepts on news bulletins introductions, and the level of commitment of these introductions to the principles of strengthening civil peace and refraining from spreading violence, sedition and division.

The study also sought to determine the political figures and parties/confessional groups targeted negatively or positively (locally) by news bulletins introductions and those targeted internationally, and drew up a list of war terms used in these introductions.

X. Religious Media (Article 2 of the Pact)¹⁰

The Journalists' Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace included in its first stage the political media outlets in Lebanon, as they are directly involved in covering daily news, directly communicating with citizens and addressing issues of public interest. However, there are many other media outlets that were not contacted regarding this project, including those owned by religious institutions on various media platforms: television, radio, print and online.

This study sought, in the first instance, to survey these outlets and answer the following questions: What is the reality of the media outlets owned by religious organizations, i.e. their number, reach, platforms, disseminated content, and the goals set for their roles? In the second instance, the study sought to answer the following questions: What role does the media owned by religious institutions play? What types of message does this media broadcast and how diverse are they in terms of political, religious, social and other content? What is the content of the messages broadcast and how are stories relating to public affairs treated? Are the messages broadcast by this media consistent with the requirements of civil peace? Based on the answers to these questions, it is possible to understand the role played by the religious media, and consequently learn whether engaging them in the civil peace document is necessary.

¹⁰ Ibid

6. Identifying the skills gap and its causes

The term *skills gap* refers to a demand shortage for certain skills. Researchers tend to believe that the lack of or gap in skills is due to a low level of investment in training. For example, according to Snower and Booth (1996)¹¹, investment in human capital may decline as a result of the belief that the cost of training is high while economic returns are uncertain. Schomann and Neugart (2002)¹² note that factors such as knowledge gaps and inadequate formal education may contribute to this situation. In addition, according to Martin and Haskel (2001)¹³, the skill shortages in the UK are linked with insufficient education that has failed to keep up with skill-biased technical change.

The concept of skills gap refers to the situation where the skill level of employees, especially in terms of knowledge and capacities, is lower than the level sought by employers. Some researchers have revealed that gaps are more widely present at the level of personal skills such as communication, entrepreneurial attitude, problem solving and teamwork (Fetsi and Masson, 2008)¹⁴.

The World Bank's Enterprise Survey (2002-2010)¹⁵ presents estimates relating to the extent of the professional obstacle represented by the skills gap from the perspective of companies in more than 125 countries. Data shows that the skills gaps persists in economies that undergo rapid technological change and restructuring, including many countries in Latin America and Eastern Europe. The same report notes that nearly 24 per

¹¹ Booth, A & Snower, D, Ed. (1996), *Acquiring Skills: Market Failures, Their Symptoms and Policy Responses*, Cambridge University Press, New York

¹² Neugart, M & Schömann, K, (2002), "Employment outlooks: Why forecast the labour market and for whom?," Discussion Papers, Research Unit: Labor Market Policy and Employment FS I 02-206, Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB)

¹³ Haskel J, & Martin C, (2001) *Technology, wages, and skill shortages: evidence from UK micro data*, Oxford Economic Papers, academic.oup.com

¹⁴ Masson, J., & Fetsi, A. (2008). Human capital and education reform in the Western Balkans. *Labour Markets in the Western Balkans: Challenges for the Future*, 71-110.

¹⁵ <http://www.enterprisesurveys.org>

cent of companies in the Middle East and North Africa mentioned that they face major skill gaps.

To identify the potential causes of the skills gap, researchers examined the low level of investment in training and failures in the education system. Others stressed the role of poor corporate practices towards human capital and resources, such as failure to provide training for employees and not retaining them. These shortcomings may be the results of factors associated with uncertainties resulting from economic restructuring or a weak investment climate.

Therefore, some say that closing the skills gap is part of corporate management responsibilities, which can be achieved by providing employees with appropriate training and incentives to upgrade their skills (See the Annual report of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training 2010, CEDEFOP)¹⁶.

With regard to employee skills gap of the media outlets that signed the Journalists' Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon, and based on the results of the monitoring studies conducted by UNDP Lebanon in partnership with Maharat Foundation during the five years following the launch of the Pact, a number of gaps and their causes can be identified.

From monitoring racism in Lebanese media, we note that media employees lack journalistic skills relating to conducting media coverage in general and how to deal with daily report writing on the Syrian and Palestinian other in particular. There are two reasons for this gap. First, media professionals tend to confine media coverage to a number of stereotypical aspects. Perhaps the main factor behind this is the knowledge gap on the subject. This was revealed by the analysis of the results of the racism monitoring study that showed the tendency of reports to use stereotyping expressions such as “illegal flow”, “assimilation problems in the host country”, “crime”, and “delinquency”. Overall, representation of the other emphasizes difference, delinquency and threat. Stereotypical representation is reinforced by giving in to the use of easy formulas and ideological formulas that the media can disseminate or produce. The second reason is the gap or lack of journalistic

¹⁶ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4100>

skills in media professionals when treating the subject in terms of journalistic writing mechanisms and dealing with sources.

The study on religious incitement and hate speech showed that the skills gaps in media employees is illustrated through the rebuilding of trust in the media's daily discourse practices. We can attribute the cause to agitation and pursuing writing that lacks objectivity, that does not make use of dialogue and that includes content stirring sectarian tensions during crises. It is possible to view this skills gap at two levels: the individual and the social. At the individual level, the lacking employee capacities in media outlets are linked to an inability to deal professionally and responsibly with the widespread sectarian rhetoric. Instead of using an objective approach that would contribute to easing tensions, we find media professionals dragged into the same current. The social level is linked to the process of information control and distribution, the available communication means, the relation of that to the nature of the social structure, and the media outlet's policy and interests arising from that.

Based on monitoring positive initiatives in news coverage, we note that there is an employee skills gap in media outlets in terms of positive and constructive journalism that lays the foundation for a positive trend in media performance. The cause of this gap can be attributed to the focus of media employees on negative news coverage and foregrounding bad news – what has come to be known as “action” – to a certain extent by resorting to the common practice of interviewing the victim. This becomes clear when the results of the monitoring studies on racism, incitement and violence are examined, as negative coverage prevails. This has led to the proportion of positive coverage appearing small, if not rare, when compared to pessimistic news coverage.

With regard to images of violence in news coverage, the skills gap emerges at several levels. The first has to do with individual journalistic skills relating to images of violence, and the absence of guidance and training required to deal with this issue. The second level has to do with the media outlet and its attitude towards violence, as most media outlets lack clear professional, ethical and institutional standards to determine how to approach this issue. The third level is represented by the absence of the regulatory role of the National Media Council and other organizations and unions in setting ethical controls.

The cause of this gap can be generally attributed to a lack of commitment on the part of the employees to the ethical and professional controls on violence. This results in an increase in the number of images of violence and reports about it, not to mention the professional errors of the media in televised violence reports (such as live broadcast from the scene of action and analysis dominating the coverage).

Monitoring studies of TV talk shows have shown that despite the professional experience in those shows on Lebanese TV channels and despite the awareness of the host of his role in getting across the argument and the counter-argument with civility, there is a skills gap in the host's instigatory and partisan attitude in favor of one side, and this attitude is more dangerous than that of political guest. The cause of this gap is likely the effect of the widespread debates in certain talk shows on some TV stations and show hosts, which can be described as mediatized altercations that many journalists like to fuel, even provoking them, as they make for good spectacle. On-air debates serve the market media, which is expressed in sales figures and viewership and ratings.

The result of the monitoring study on news coverage sources and the right to access information revealed skills gap in media professionals in the way anonymous sources are used in news coverage, which directly affects perceptions of the veracity of the information attributed to the sources, especially that the "analysis" of the nature of the information disseminated on radio, on television and in the press revealed contradictions in the information transmitted, which was sometimes attributed to the "same sources". In addition, the study showed an imbalance in the presentation of viewpoints related to the subject, which can be included in the so-called "bias" of the media towards one point of view over another. The media bias was clear, especially in TV and press reports, in adopting a certain viewpoint, presenting evidence to support it, and using a partisan journalistic language that leads to distorting the facts and passing judgement on one of the sides. The reasons for these gaps can be attributed to the absence and/or lack of employee adherence to any professional standards in dealing with journalistic sources. Things depend on the nature of the relationship between the journalist and his own sources, and this relationship can be "independent" or "dependent", or in the form of an "exchange of interests", the fact which affects the angle of the media message.

The results of the monitoring study on the 2016 municipal elections showed insufficient professional training and skills in the field of electoral process coverage among most media professionals. The cause of this gap is probably that the media professionals working in Lebanon have gained skills and expertise of coverage from their own work and experience, which makes electoral process coverage arbitrary in the absence of professional standards that set a good professional foundation for news coverage.

In the study on religious media discourse, the employee skills gap in this field showed clear similarities in professional performance among show presenters when handling general subjects. This is contrasted with differences when treating subjects relating to creed, religion and religious groups, and their implications for behavior, guidance, instruction, mobilization and education targeting all segments of society. The reason for the similarity in performance is the fact that show presenters in the media outlets are primarily clerics, experts in religious affairs (Muslim or Christian), *haji* or *sister*, in addition to the necessary presence of a cleric as a contributing guest in most shows.

The monitoring study on the role of news bulletins introductions in strengthening civil peace showed that the skills gap relates to the performance of the presenter who uses instigation, both verbal and gestural, which is apparent on the most critical days. At such times, the presenter goes into using harsh language, at times even vulgar, and exclusionary language about the other side, through a performance that would not escape the attentive viewer as being very unprofessional. The gap in the presenter's performance is about exercising his role to influence and push for appeasement. The cause of this gap is probably the use of language in introductions that is far removed from the journalistic writing style in terms of using vulgar words, debasement and instigation, incitement and accusations and using body language that goes hand in hand and mimics the content of the news bulletin introduction.

In the context of religious media, the results of the monitoring study showed that the employee skills gap in the religious media appears in not framing this media as an exemplar of a pluralistic media and a media of dialogue between cultures and religions if they seek to consolidate peace and adopt the values of recognizing the other, citizenship and human rights. The reason for that may be that many of these stations hide behind religious goals to exercise other roles, including political, financial or promotional roles. This has led the majority of Arab countries to create self-defense tools, including technical and legal ones, and mostly a religious and educational counter-media.

7. Identifying the knowledge gap and its causes

The knowledge gap is one of the hypotheses of long-term media effects research. It is based on the idea that the flow of information is differential between individuals and different groups of society. Some groups may know more about a subject than others; as a result, gaps vary depending on the subject.

This hypothesis first appeared in 1970 thanks to three researchers: P.J. Tichenor, G.A. Donohue and C.N. Olien¹⁷ and their names were linked to this hypothesis and trying to develop it. They tried to formulate the hypothesis by offering a definition of the term *knowledge gap*: as the flow of mass media information into a social system increases, segments of the population of a higher socio-economic level acquire information at a faster rate than those of a lower socio-economic status. Thus, the knowledge gap tends to widen rather than close.

Some researchers tried to develop the main idea of the knowledge gap by proposing alternatives to explain the emergence of knowledge gaps between segments of the population in the same society. Ettena & Kline (1977)¹⁸ suggested that the difference in interest levels leads to knowledge differences between individuals and not the difference in education level, that is, the knowledge gap arises between different individuals in their levels of interest and motivation to acquire information, and these gaps will disappear or narrow between individuals with similar interests or equal levels thereof.

A number of studies have supported this trend, as the main factor influencing people's

¹⁷ p. J. Tichenor g. A. Donohue c. N. Olien (1970), Mass Media Flow And Differential Growth In Knowledge, Public Opinion Quarterly, Volume 34, Issue 2, 1 January 1970, Pages 159–170

¹⁸ Ettema, J & Kline, F (1977), "Deficits, Differences, and Ceilings", Communication Research 4(2): 179-202

acquisition of knowledge is interest. For example, Genova & Greenberg (1979)¹⁹ introduced the interest variable as an alternative to education in the knowledge gap theory, arguing that the interest-based model helped explain the differences in knowledge among media audiences to a larger extent, in addition to the socio-economic level and the education level, as there is a knowledge gap between individuals with different level of interests and it narrows between individuals with similar interests. This model argues that acquired knowledge that is transmitted by the news in the media increases relatively faster between the most interested groups during the early stages of dissemination of knowledge about an event. However, the knowledge gap tends to narrow or close completely if the information flow about this event maintains its intensity for a relatively long period of time by:

- Topics being increasingly lined to a worsening social conflict.
- Coverage intensity allowing greater access to information.

Political and social media campaigns are considered to be an appropriate area for testing the knowledge gap theory as a result of an increase in the flow of information about candidates during election campaigns, which helps voters make voting decisions in accordance with the information flowing from different media outlets.

The researchers also classified knowledge gap studies according to two main levels:

1. The individual micro-level: This level focuses on the importance of people acquiring knowledge from the media depending on their social and economic status, which is combined with other variables such as communication skills, interest levels and cognitive abilities.
2. The social macro-level: This level focuses on the process of information control and distribution and available communication means, and the relationship of all this to

¹⁹ GENOVA B & GREENBERG B, (1979), Interests in News and the Knowledge Gap, Public Opinion Quarterly, Volume 43, Issue 1, 1 January 1979, Pages 79–91

the nature of the social structure. As there are social variables that affect the level of the society as a whole, such as the level of social conflict, pluralism and information control in media outlets, among other things.

The results of some studies have confirmed that knowledge gaps narrow or widen over time among individuals of a high or low socio-economic status. D. McQuail & S. Windahl²⁰ coined the term “ceiling effects” which is reached when individuals of a higher socio-economic status who have more access to knowledge, over time are no longer able to obtain more information flowing from the media, that is, they reach a state of knowledge saturation. Then individuals of a lower socio-economic status continue to receive information until they are able to catch up with the individuals of the higher status and the knowledge gap levels off in the long term.

On the other hand, the American researcher Donohue et al. (1975)²¹ argues that the failure in closing many knowledge gaps resulted in a widening of the gap between the less and the more educated groups, and this gap increases in the level of information differentiation when a subject is dropped from public interest and debate, so that no one talks about it anymore.

Some studies suggest that knowledge gaps are constantly emerging in modern societies. As the subjects that interest the social strata increase in variety, knowledge gaps increase. The favorable and unfavorable conditions differ for each gap depending on the complexity of the subject. Rogers (1976)²² noted that media outlets are not the only actor in creating the knowledge gap. In many cases, there are knowledge gaps resulting from the effect of personal contact between individuals, which can be more clearly seen in some groups of society than in others.

When identifying employee knowledge gaps in the media outlets that signed the Pact, and based on the results of Maharat Foundation’s monitoring studies conducted in the

²⁰ McQuail D & Windahl S (1993), *Communication Models for the Study of Mass Communication*, London: Longman.

²¹ Donohue, et al (1975), *Mass Media and the Knowledge Gap: A Hypothesis Reconsidered*, *Communication Research* 2(1): 3-23

²² Rogers (1976) *Communication and Development: The Passing of the Dominant Paradigm*, *Communication Research*, 3(2): 213-240

five years following the launch of the Pact, a number of gaps and their causes can be identified.

The results of the study on racism in Lebanese media showed that the knowledge gap is in media discourse in not only verbal. It is a widespread and active social practice, manifesting tangibly at the level of refugees and the displaced through inequality. The underlying causes of this gap may be situated on the social level of the knowledge gap. Racist discourse (elites) focuses on the process of information control and distribution, the available means of communication, their relation to the nature of the social structure, and its connection to the existing social reality. Racial discourse manifests through prejudices, demagoguery and fear of difference; generalization; speed and stereotypes; and the use of terms that reinforce discrimination between people.

The monitoring study on religious incitement and hate speech showed that the knowledge gap appears in the absence of efforts to stimulate critical thinking in the media, which can be achieved by expanding the horizons of how subjects are treated and giving space to the educated to motivate people towards an in-depth approach. The cause of this gap is the war of words that, just like actual conflicts, is harmful. To redress this, there should be a move away from violent writing and escalation especially that the country is sectarian, the majority of the region is governed by religious systems and the situation is unstable. As a result, discourse can easily slip into incitement. The dissemination of political and security news through a religious lens makes it easy to slip towards incitement, stirring up emotions and appealing to instincts. This gap comes within the social dimension of the knowledge gap, focusing on the process of information control and distribution, the available means of communication, their relation to the nature of the social structure, and its connection to the existing social reality.

The results of the study on news coverage of positive initiatives revealed that the knowledge gap appears in the pessimistic state that impregnates media content produced by some media outlets. This is probably due to its connection to the existing social reality in terms of disseminating information that tends to be pessimistic and negative, and the use of clichés, which quickly brings to mind the negative past experiences of Lebanon. Closing this gap requires highlighting more positive initiatives and their good uses in the interest

of civil peace. In addition, each attempt to overcome that should be highlighted as much as possible.

The monitoring study on violent images in news coverage showed that the knowledge gap appeared in overlooking the seriousness of images of violence and handling violence as a toy for the “production of reality”, “production of the other” and “production of the self”. When we show a scene about a distant country, we are talking about ourselves in “how” we show it, “what” we show and “the reality” we want for ourselves. The cause of this gap can be attributed to the two levels: individual and social. The individual level of media employees focuses on the importance of people acquiring information from the media depending on their socio-economic status and other variables, such as communication skills, interest levels and the cognitive abilities of the employees. The social level focuses on the process of information control and distribution, the available means of communication, their relation to the nature of the social structure. There are also social variables affecting the level of the society as a whole, such as social conflict, pluralism, information control in media outlets, etc.

The results of the monitoring study on TV talk shows showed that the knowledge gap in those responsible for the talk shows in TV stations appeared in the overlooking of a basic function of these shows, that is, seeking to guiding the target audience towards civility in dialogue on various political and social issues that are treated in-depth. This kind of show has an educational goal for the target audience, while accounting for media airtime conditions that ensure a high number of ads, without steering away from real and meaningful dialogue. We can include the cause of that knowledge gap in the social level, which is manifested the process of information control and distribution, the available means of communication, their relation to the nature of the social structure. There are also social variables affecting the level of the society as a whole, such as social conflict, pluralism, information control in media outlets, etc.

The results of the monitoring study on media sources of news coverage and the right of access to information showed that the knowledge gap is manifested in the nature of the disseminated information, with some media outlets using direct accusations. By that, they appear as if to be playing the role of the judiciary, where some media outlets have

delivered judgments and levelled personal accusations against citizens and politicians in Lebanon, which led to the targeted parties to demand that “media abuses be stopped in terms of what is being disseminated without proper proof and solid evidence”. After all, journalists are not judges and should not deliver judgements or level accusations. Their job is to present facts after checking them and present different viewpoints on the same subject. The cause of this gap can be attributed to the lack of legal knowledge among some media employees.

The results of the monitoring study on the 2016 municipal elections showed that the knowledge gap appeared in the form of insufficient voter education as a guidance subject, which includes voter and candidate rights and duties, as well as the legal and regulatory texts that govern the electoral process. The cause is the lack of knowledge of municipal, union and parliamentary elections laws. Intensive electoral coverage on laws and legislation offers greater access to information. Election campaigns are considered to be an appropriate area for testing the knowledge gap theory as a result of an increase in the flow of information about candidates during election campaigns, which helps voters make voting decisions in accordance with the information flowing from different media outlets.

The results of the monitoring study on discourse of religious media showed that the knowledge gap appears in the fact that the religious and social discourse broadcast by the religious media outlets carries a special ideological logic, even though it alludes to participation between religions, religious groups and denominations. The cause for that knowledge gap lies within the societal level, focusing on the process of information control and distribution, the available means of communication, their relation to the nature of the social structure. There are also social variables affecting the level of the society as a whole, such as social conflict, pluralism, information control in media outlets, etc.

The monitoring study on the role of news bulletins introductions in strengthening civil peace showed that the knowledge gap lies in the presence of introductions/opening segments as a closed text that obscures meaning. Judgements are conclusive, and introductions do not shy from using conclusions, descriptions and labels. The terms used bring back the memory of the war, which remains a source of inspiration in language-

both as terminology and meaning, in performance, and in means (a war of words through the media). We can include the cause for this knowledge gap in the social level, focusing on the process of information control and distribution, the available means of communication, their relation to the nature of the social structure. There are also social variables affecting the level of the society as a whole, such as social conflict, pluralism, information control in media outlets, etc.

The results of the monitoring study on religious media showed that the knowledge gap manifested in the absence of the idea that religious media, just like secular media, is capable of contributing to the strengthening of civil peace and consolidating the pillars of national unity. There is a great need for such a role. The current performance of some of these media can lead to increasing tensions between the components of the same country, which poses a danger for civil peace and national unity. We can include the cause for this knowledge gap in the social level, focusing on the process of information control and distribution, the available means of communication, their relation to the nature of the social structure. There are also social variables affecting the level of the society as a whole, such as social conflict, pluralism, information control in media outlets, etc.

8. Conclusions: Closing the skills and knowledge gaps

The media outlets monitoring studies have reached a number of conclusions, which if taken into account by the outlets can contribute to closing employee skills and knowledge gaps in media outlets in Lebanon. This will subsequently lead to a broader adherence to the Journalists' Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon. These conclusions were the result of studying each of the aforementioned subjects.

Below is a list of the standards (relating to education, awareness and capacity building) to be adhered to in order to close the gaps:

Subject	Standards for closing employee gaps in the skills and knowledge gaps in media outlets
Sources of media coverage and the right of access to information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Benefit from the law of access to information on the part of the media outlets first, then promoting it to the citizens to spread a culture of transparency and responsibility;• Organize a workshop to formulate professional standards that determine how to deal with sources, especially anonymous sources;• Hold trainings for journalists on the use of sources (sources map, agenda and standards);• Hold trainings on the principle of “pluralism” to promote the idea of diversity of moral principles depending on the diversity of positions and situations on the one hand, and the diversity of media outlets, on the other. It would also clarify the issue of precedence of editorial policies of outlets over journalists' pacts.

**News coverage of
images of violence by
Lebanese media**

- Support the initiative of establishing a media body to comprise journalists, experts, academics, jurists, and civil society activists to monitor and evaluate the performance of media outlets, including print and electronic media;
- Work to strengthen the role of the National Media Council and activate it with decision-making powers to set ethical controls in terms of the increased display of images of violence and how to deal with them, in addition to monitoring the errors the media makes;
- Form a crisis unit to study how to cover a crisis and how to deal with scenes of violence;
- Hold meetings at the editorial department to discuss the subject of violent images when present or before taking them, and the need to proceed from the rule that not all images are necessarily appropriate for display;
- Media employees and heads need to understand that the issue of media and images of violence is extremely dangerous;
- Working to develop a Lebanese media vision that is different from the prevailing one in terms of televised violence.

Racism in the Lebanese media Representations: of the “Syrian” and the “Palestinian” in the news coverage

- Organize media awareness campaigns for media professionals on the situation of refugees and the displaced, and address the rights of the “other” and his duties in Lebanon;
- Work on media awareness campaigns that allow the media to play an active role in combating discrimination;
- Include data and investigative journalism as media materials within the general media and news product, and support the establishment of new electronic platforms. These platforms can offer material that is of interest to people and investigations based on their concerns, needs and aspirations.

Religious incitement and hate speech

- The need to activate the Pact in media outlets by moving away from inflammatory discourse and blunt expressions and refraining from disseminating any discourse that incites to hatred;
- Draw up a strategy for media outlets outlining how to deal with inflammatory religious discourse and extremist ideologies, which would include not being dragged into hasty reporting, but rather preparing in advance for how to edit the media material; how to use terminology and show images or not show them; and how to comment on them;

<p>Religious incitement and hate speech</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work on selecting guests in a way to help reduce inflammatory discourse and promoting moderation and dialogue in media shows; • Verify sources and confirm their stories by fact-checking before disseminating any information characterized by hate speech and religious incitement, out of respect for the reader and to avoid rumors and disinformation; • Filter news stories appearing in social media and purging them of religious incitement before dissemination; not treat these media as reliable journalistic sources whose content can be turned into media material.
<p>News coverage of positive initiatives by Lebanese media</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present positive news as part of the main, valuable news and not part of entertainment news; • Activate constructive news, which include presenting positive reports, discussing the problem and offering suggested solutions; avoid negative warnings on their own, but rather present results instead of reporting conflicts and problems and provide a more comprehensive picture, uncovering the main causes of the problems and offering ideas and perceptions of a neutral society; “constructive journalism” aims to highlight the role of each individual and enhance their participation;

**News coverage of
positive initiatives by
Lebanese media**

- Professional news trends, such as: positive journalism, constructive journalism, good news, etc. These are trends that establish a positive direction in media performance in terms of broadcasting positive news and solutions, which extends to journalistic writing styles. For example, “constructive interviews” aim to find solutions to the problem and not just illuminate cooperation to solve the situation; it is necessary to avoid the widespread “victim interview”;
- Support the creation of new electronic platforms that offer material that is of interest to people and investigations based on their concerns, needs and aspirations, which would serve as a media model for currently operating platforms and sites. A group of journalists with the relevant expertise would contribute to the work of these platforms, and it can be agreed with the media outlets to use materials published on these new platforms and re-publish them through their platforms in support of a new and specialized generation of journalists;
- Seek to strengthen the media’s ethical rules by avoiding distortion of information in favor of offering a more realistic view of the world that would narrate the facts without exaggerating figures or facts.

<p>Talk shows on TV stations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The duties of media outlets towards citizens requires allowing to tackle the subjects and issues that the media should shed light on; • Adopt editorial policies that can activate initiatives or give them space on TV talk shows; • Adopt editorial policies that ensure diversity in the choice of guests, contribute to the promotion of diversity by varying guests and expanding the field of difference, and respecting marginalized and vulnerable groups;
<p>The role of news bulletins introductions in strengthening civil peace</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the host and political shows are neutral and highly professional and that he/she doesn't show his/her bias ostensibly or provocatively and exercises self-censorship in his/her work; • The need to improve the performance of instigator hosts; • The need to work towards the adoption of a language in introductions that that is far removed from the journalistic writing style in terms of using vulgar words, debasement and instigation, incitement and accusations and using body language that goes hand in hand and mimics the content of the news bulletin introduction.

<p>Religious media in Lebanon</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to engage the religious media outlets in the Pact, as the goals set by the religious media outlets in Lebanon clearly show that they operate based on a certain vision of the general social reality: religious, political, national; although they are mostly focused on the religious aspect, they have broader goals relating to the development of society and people.
<p>The 2016 municipal elections</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a lack of professional training and experience in election campaign coverage; most media professionals have gained coverage skills and knowledge from their own work and experience; it is therefore necessary to spread the idea of election coverage training; • Train and enable media professionals to analyze the media strategies of competing forces so that they treat competing media messages without falling into the trap of serving the interests of one election campaign; • Disseminate the idea of election coverage training; • Ensure transparency during elections; there is a need to institute legal immunity in particular for media professionals while they cover elections and to facilitate their presence in polling and counting centers;

The 2016 municipal elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The media play the role of a preventive mechanism, allowing the verification of claims relating to electoral irregularities and the expansion of investigations on them; therefore, the media must play this critical and supervisory role.
Religious media discourse and its conformity to civil peace	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offer spaces for civil discourse and citizenship values within the religious media; this will contribute to creating citizens and not just believers, which is necessary in a pluralistic country to strengthen civil peace and promote common values among citizens;• Promote civic education nationally, as the religious education disseminated by the religious media outlets is insufficient to build basic common values to ensure true citizenship and the establishment of common denominators to bring together everyone in the country;• Promote a religious discourse of moderation and bring it out of the individual status of each outlet to a more unitary position, making the religious media taken together a general authority in building a culture of civil peace that affects the behavior of individuals and communities;

**Religious media
discourse and its
conformity to civil
peace**

- Organize trainings for media professionals working in religious media outlets to qualify and correct concepts and terminology to reflect the culture of dialogue and openness to others;
- Conduct further in-depth studies on religious media discourse aiming to determine similarities and differences between them, as this can help address contradictions and encourage religious media outlets to contribute to building civil peace.

9. Recommendations:

Based on the aforementioned conclusions, it is possible to identify employee training needs in the media outlets that signed the Journalist's Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace and thus build their capacities. Many workshops and trainings can be included, which if implemented would contribute to closing the knowledge and skills gaps of media employees in Lebanon. The workshops can include:

A. Workshops:

1. A workshop to formulate professional standards that determine how to deal with sources, especially anonymous sources;
2. A workshop on how to cover and deal with scenes of violence during a crisis;
3. A workshop on violent images, whether when they reach the editorial department or when being taken, emphasizing that not all images are appropriate for dissemination;
4. A workshop to develop a media strategy on how to deal with inflammatory religious discourse or extremist ideologies;
5. A workshop on activating professional news trends, such as positive journalism and constructive journalism. They include presenting positive reports that discuss the problem and offer solutions, instead of just offering negative warnings, but rather present results that can, in turn, establish a positive trend in media performance.

B. Trainings:

1. Hold trainings for journalists on the use of sources (sources map, agenda and standards);
2. Organize trainings for media professionals working in religious media outlets to qualify and correct concepts and terminology to reflect the culture of dialogue and openness to others;
3. Organize trainings on positive journalistic writing styles;
4. Organize trainings on coverage of municipal and parliamentary elections.

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