SOURCES OF MEDIA COVERAGE

AND RIGHT TO ACCESS

INFORMATION

1. Why this Study?

The International media charters, whether professional or ethical, gives great importance to the sources of information considered as a major pillar of professional journalism. The international charters emphasize the duties of journalists toward their sources: respecting the truth, not publishing news from unknown sources, refusing any temptation to publish or not, respecting the audience right for accurate news, distinguishing between journalism, advertisements and publicity, etc. These charters also cover the journalists' rights, especially the right of access to the sources of information.

Dealing fairly with the sources of information is a real and permanent challenge for the media due to the risks that journalists face because of the huge flow of information, particularly in the digital age where rumors and fake news flood the internet. Additionally, we see an increase in the role of media professionals who try to exploit the media in order to channel news to their own benefit.

These risks endanger the real mission of the media which is to offer accurate and truthful news to the public. They also jeopardize the other objectives of this profession such as striving to present facts, refrain from misleading the public opinion with regards to the facts and accusations related to the management of public funds and public affairs, protecting citizens' health and citizens' interests and ensuring their constitutional and legal rights as well as other matters that cannot be dealt with without ascertaining the accuracy of the information.

On the basis of these principles, the study aims to analyze the way media deals with the sources of coverage in light of the "Journalists' Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon" that was officially launched on June 25, 2013 by the "Peace Building in Lebanon" project and signed by the majority of the Lebanese media. The pact clearly stipulates, in the articles mentioned below, how to deal with the sources of media coverage:

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 related to the press and to the audiovisual and electronic media, without distorting the facts.

PART I:

FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Analyzing sources of information used by the media widely spread after Janet Cook of the Washington Post was stripped of her Pulitzer Prize in 1981 for inventing the news story for which she won the prize. It was the story of an eight year old child addicted to heroin and it became evident that the sources she relied on were all fabricated.

In the aftermath of this event, the number of studies in this field increased dramatically, especially when other cases appeared in which unconfirmed sources were used. It is worth mentioning here the case of football player O.J. Simpson, accused of killing his ex-wife and her boyfriend. In this case, newspapers and other media developed large details of the story based on unspecified sources[1]. It is to be noted that the Simpson case was in the headlines of the American media for over a year.

The verification of the sources of media coverage is becoming more complicated since this coverage doesn't originate anymore from specific sources such as agencies or direct human relations. In fact, there are presently numerous other fields, especially with the emergence of the digital media that formed the "Information Society."

The sources of media coverage are the basis of journalism. However, dealing with journalistic sources requires experience and great awareness to the fact that what originates from the sources may not necessarily be correct; sources sometimes manipulate a journalist by providing him with information they want published, not necessarily for truth's sake or in the public interest, but for their own benefit. For the same purpose, they can also provide shortened or incomplete information.

Quite often journalists cite anonymous sources, either with the purpose of not disclosing the real identity of the source in order to protect them, or because the information published is not confirmed but the source wants to disseminate it in order to serve different agendas and interests. However, at the end of the day, whatever is published is the responsibility of the journalist who is supposed to verify the accuracy of his reports. The reader does not have the ability to check the news since he forms his opinion on the basis of what the media offers him.

Therefore, dealing properly with the sources of information is becoming essential in journalism. In addition, there is an increasing demand for media professionals to have the right to access the sources of information in order to serve the public interest and to achieve transparency.

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1. Sharkey, Jacqueline (1994). Offside on O.J. American Journalism Review. December 1994. P.21.

1. Why this Study

Controversial issues are common in Lebanon, in the environmental, political, economic, social or other fields. Different media outlets continuously try to leak contradictory news, some attributed to known sources while others to anonymous ones, with the purpose of "supporting the facts" that they publish and which often contradict other facts attributed to other sources.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to research the importance of the sources in the performance of the Lebanese media and the impact on accuracy of news that may shape the public opinion and influence the democratic process. The study will then try to answer the following questions:

- How do the Lebanese media deal with sources according to the above-mentioned articles of the pact?

- To what extent are the media committed to attributing the material they publish to the sources of their information?

- What are the different kinds of sources of information and to what degree are they accurate?

- To what extent do journalists verify the information directly from the original source and cross-check it with other sources?

- How professional are the media outlets in dealing with their sources of information and reacting to the challenges they face when they collect information?

- To what extent are the electronic media committed to respecting copyrights when mentioning the source of the news or attributing a picture to its original source?

2. Problems Raised in the Study

The ambiguity regarding the use of sources of information in media coverage raises a number of issues closely related to the professional performance of journalists and to the ethics of the profession as well as to the credibility of the media institutions and the trust of readers and viewers in the published material.

Professional and ethical rules affirm the necessity for the journalists and media institutions to attribute the published information to its original source. In fact, journalism is the profession of collecting and publishing information and providing the public with facts and realities.

Due to the impact of the use of sources on the credibility of media and the trust of readers, in addition to its impact on professional performance of journalists and legal and ethical standards, the main issue in this study revolves around a principal question: do the Lebanese media deal properly with the sources of information? Besides, how is this topic related to some resulting changes such as the respect of the media to the source of the information? And why do the media sometimes deliver news without mentioning their source?

3. Methodology of the Study

In order to answer the questions raised in this study and other relevant questions, a method of research based on three major pillars was adopted: Surveys for professional journalists, case study analysis, and fact checking of news and images in specific outlets.

a) Surveys for Professional Journalists

The study surveyed chief editors from twenty media outlets through a questionnaire in order to know how they deal with the sources of information. These media institutions were printed media, televisions, radios and electronic media. They were chosen among those who signed "Journalist's Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon".

The survey comprised a number of questions that could be helpful in analyzing and explaining the most important topics related to journalistic sources and the right to access information, including:

- The importance of the sources in the profession of journalism

- The culture of attributing the news to their original source

- The difficulties and obstacles that hinder the access of Lebanese journalists to the information and how journalists deal professionally with these difficulties

- The importance of the right to access information in order to promote the use of sources, the profession in addition to transparency and credibility

- The importance of adopting a law on the right to access information?[2]

b) Case Study Analysis

Analyzing a case study and how media dealt with the news sources will answer our research questions. The illegal internet case was selected for the current research as it was widely debated by the public opinion and the political class and was the subject of numerous investigations and clashes since it was related to corruption and waste of millions of dollars.

Our sample focused on monitoring the coverage of this issue during the week where it was in its peak and mostly mentioned in newspapers and radio and television news bulletins. The method applied for this specific matter was based on studying and analyzing the indicators related to the journalistic sources including:

- Defining the basis of the news: accusation or information?

- Is the news item originating from a source? Yes/No?

- Nature of the source: Government, private?

- Is the source clearly identified or is it anonymous?

- Fact-checking, variety of sources, professionalism in dealing with the sources?

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2. The text of the survey appears at the end of this study (p72).

c) Comparing the Sources of News and Pictures

We also monitored local news posted on news websites during the entire day of 15 November 2016. The method of analysis was based on:

- Determining the space allocated for the news, their type and the original source of the news items.

- Determining the origin of the attached pictures and respect of copyrights (protection of intellectual property).

The news item was used as a unit for the analysis.

4- Corpus of the Study

The sample of the corpus comprises:

a- Answers to the survey sent to 20 editors inchief in the following media outlets:

- Televisions: MTV, Al-Manar and Al-Jadeed

- Radios: Al-Nour, Sawt-Loubnan (Ashrafieh), Sawt-Al-Shaab, Sawt-Loubnan (Dbayeh), Sawt-Al-Mada, Radio Liban.

- Newspapers: Assafir, Annahar, Alliwa, Al-Mustaqbal, Al-Sharq, Al-Akhbar, L'Orient-Le-Jour.

- News websites: National News Agency, Elnashra, Lebanon Files and Al-Modon.

b- News reports monitored about the illegal internet in newspapers, television and radio broadcasts during the period from 12 to 20 April 2016. The media monitored were:

- Televisions: Tele-Liban, LBC, MTV, Al-Manar, OTV, Al-Mustaqbal and Al-Jadeed.

- Radios: Al-Nour, Loubnan al-Hourr, Al-Sharq, Sawt-Loubnan (Ashrafieh), Sawt-Al-Shaab, Sawt-Loubnan (Dbayeh) and Sawt-Al-Mada.

- Newspapers: Assafir, Annahar, Alliwa, Al-Mustaqbal, Al-Sharq, Al-Diyar, Al-Balad, Al-Akhbar, Al-Joumhouriyah, L'Orient-le-Jour and the Daily Star.

c- Local Lebanese news in the two websites: Lebanon Files and Elnashra on 15 November 2016 from 7:00 am until 3:00pm.

SOURCES AS SEEN BY MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

The study relied on the survey prepared in order to demonstrate the importance of the sources in journalism as well as the culture of attributing news items to their source. It also aimed to show the importance of how journalists deal with the sources and discover the difficulties and obstacles they face in trying to have access to the sources of information. For this purpose, 20 questions were addressed to Editors-in-chief in 20 newspaper, television, radio and electronic media institutions. The answers were then analyzed and the results were as follows:

1- Enabling Access to Information:

Figure 1 shows that 65% of those surveyed find difficulty in having access to information that would support their reporting, while 35% find it easy to access the required information.

Possibility for Journalists to Access Information
Sample of 20 questionnaires served to 20 different media

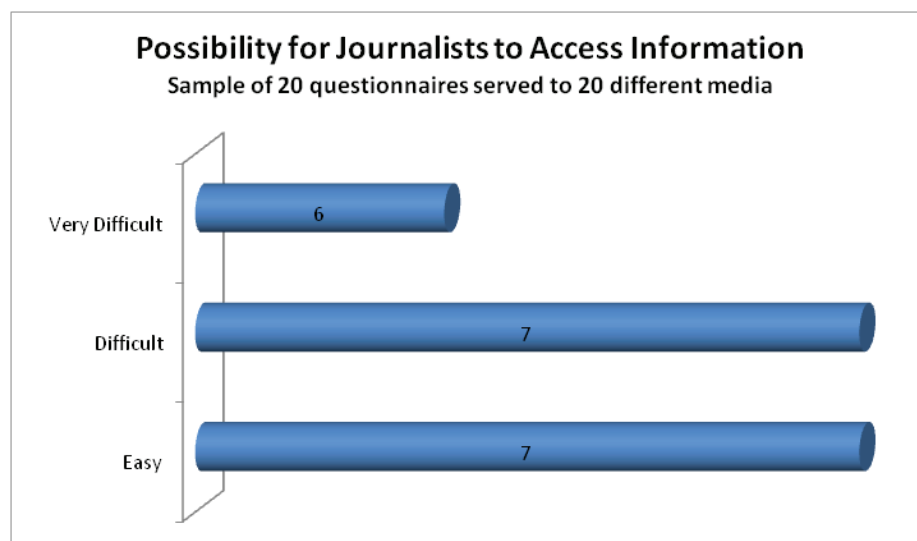| Category	Value
Very Difficult	6
Difficult	7
Easy	7

Figure 1

The following factors could explain these results:

- Absence of access to information laws.

- Restraints imposed on civil servants that forbid them from making public statements or disclosing information without authorization from their hierarchical superiors.

- Absence of the culture of transparency in public departments and private institutions as well as the absence of the culture of sharing information.

- Affiliation of the media and lack of intent to access information due to ownership and interests of media institutions.

However, there is a certain category of journalists who have their own connections that allow them to access information outside the legal constraints.

2- Dealing with the Sources of Information

Unified Standards adopted by the Media which Editors Abide by in Newsrooms
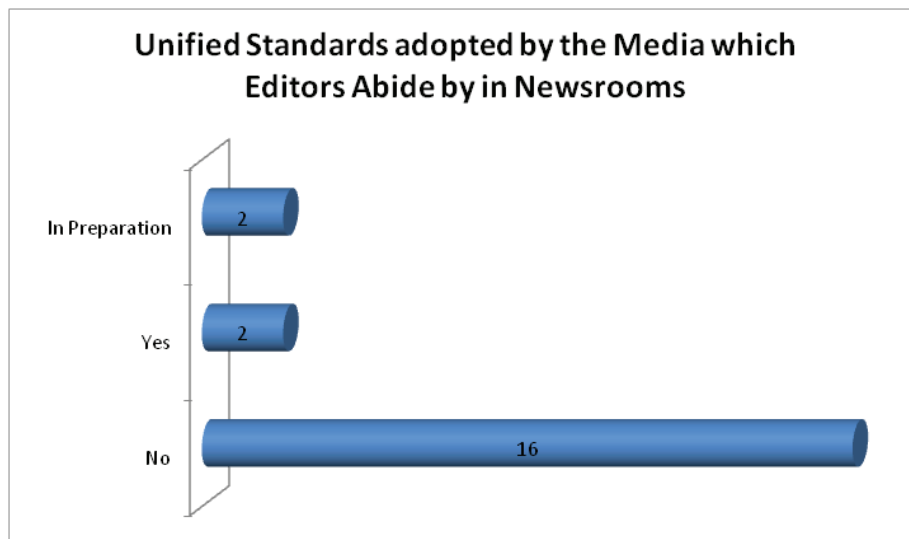
In Preparation — 2
Yes — 2
No — 16

Figure 2

Figure 2 shows the answers to the question: Are there unified principles and standards regarding the journalistic sources that the editors abide by in newsrooms?

According to the answers received, 80% of the media do not have clear professional standards for dealing with the sources. This means that the relation between a journalist and his news sources is the main factor that defines the type of message the journalist is conveying. The nature of the message varies between independence, exchange of interests, affiliation or conflict.

3- Types of Sources

Distribution of the Most Used Sources in Newsrooms

Unknown Sources — 8
Sources Known by Name — 12
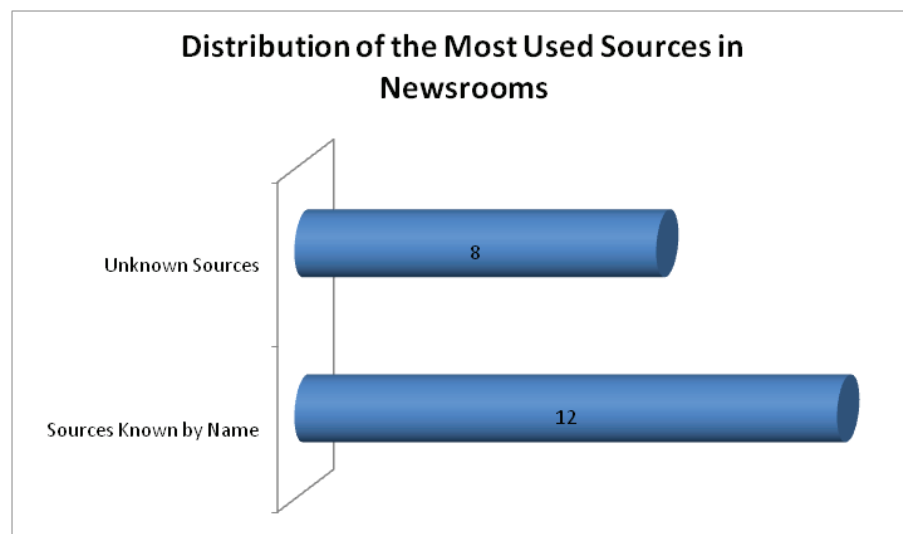
Figure 3

As per Figure 3, unknown sources, or "anonymous" ones, still constitute 40% of the total coverage in Lebanese media. At the same time, 60% of the sources are known. This information came as the answer to the question: What types of sources are mostly used in your journalistic work: known or anonymous? This phenomenon is not limited to the Lebanese media but it is also seen in Arab and international media in certain circumstances. A study conducted by "Denham" about the use of anonymous sources in the Los Angeles Times and the Washington Post during the Bosnian and Somali conflicts showed that the Washington Post used 37% anonymous sources while the Los Angeles Times used 29%[3].

3. Denham, Bryan (1994). Anonymous Government Sources in the New York Times'
Coverage of the Middle East Peace Accords, the Conflict in Bosnia, and the Clinton Health Care Package.
Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Telecommunication
Atlanta, Georgia, August 1994, Pp. 11-15

It is to be noted that 65% of chief editors in the surveyed media believed that ignoring to mention the sources affects the credibility of the news and the trust of the public, while 35% disagreed (Figure 4).
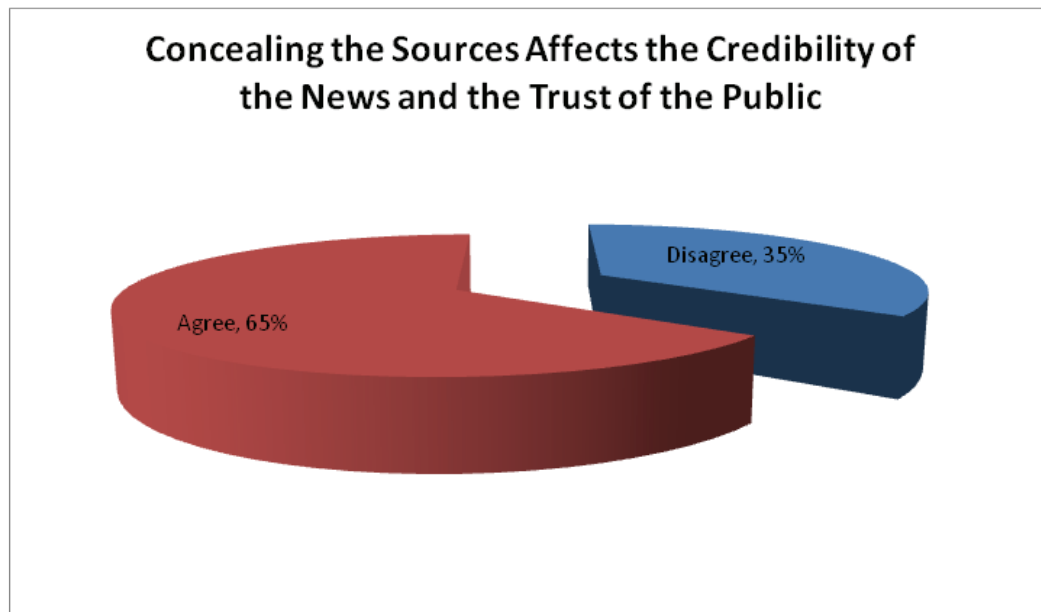

Figure 4

4- Transparency in Disclosing or Concealing Sources

Any decision to publish information attributed to a anonymous source requires that the media institution clarifies to the readers the reason for concealing the source of their coverage. In response to the question "Do you have a policy of notifying the readers as much as possible of the reason for not disclosing the name of the source that deserves to be protected?," 80% of the chief editors said that they do not notify the public while 20% answered that they inform their public of the reason for not disclosing their sources (Figure 5).
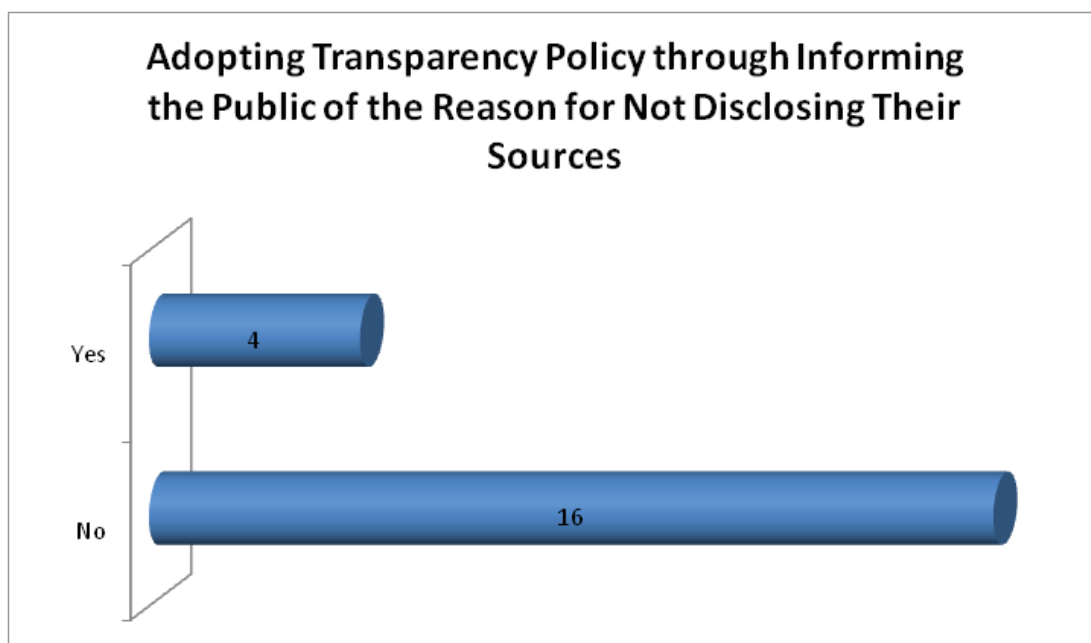

Figure 5

5- Credibility of the Information and Concealment of the Sources

Eighty-five percent of the surveyed chief editors in Lebanese media confirmed that concealment of the sources facilitates the promotion of false news (Figure 6). This leads us to believe that numerous journalists attribute their personal information to anonymous sources in order to earn some acknowledgment and recognition and to confer a higher degree of credibility to the news item they are publishing or to their media coverage. Fifteen percent of the surveyed chief editors did not agree with this hypothesis.
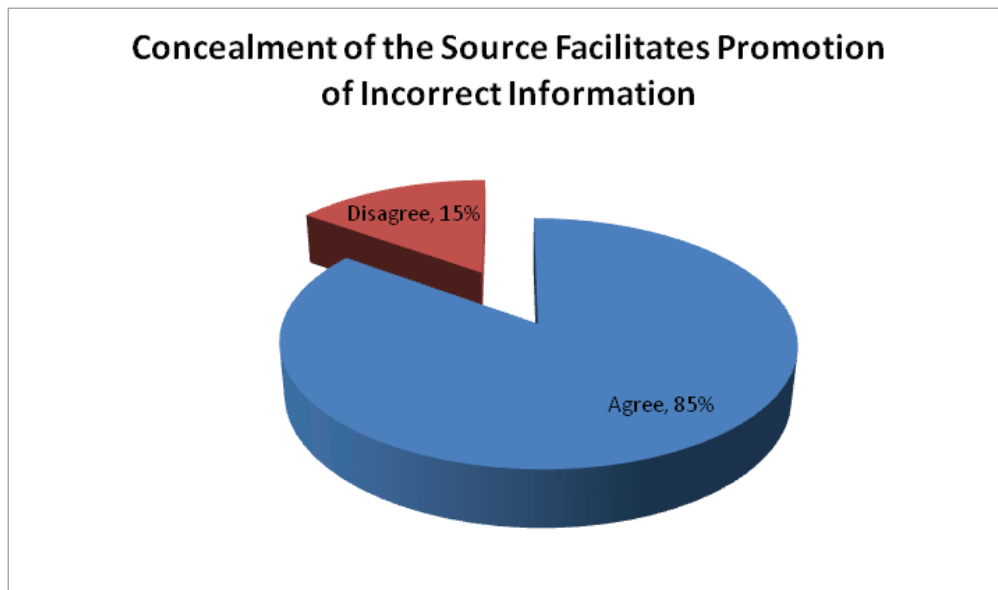
Figure 6

However, it is known that concealing the sources of information is strongly linked to "leaking information" in order to create what is known as a "trial balloon" with regard to certain issues. This is confirmed in Figure 7 whereby 80% of the chief editors agreed that concealing the name of the sources allows the journalist to fabricate news and attribute them to unknown sources, while 20% did not agree.
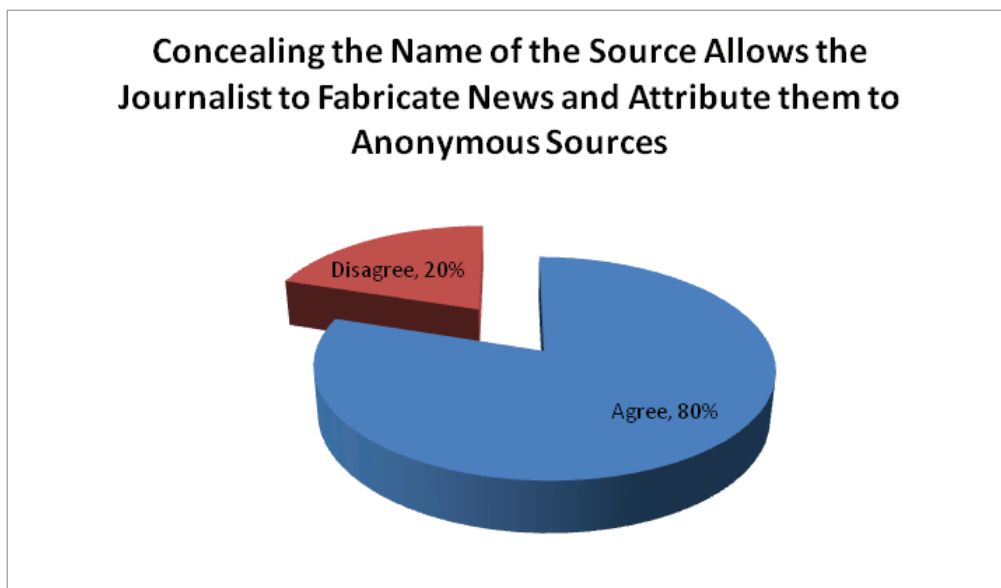

Figure 7

6- Difficulties in Dealing with Anonymous Sources

There are several reasons to conceal sources:
- By the source's own request and for their personal protection;
- To achieve a journalistic "scoop;"
- To compete with other newspapers;
- Importance and sensitivity of the information;
- Fear of negative consequences;
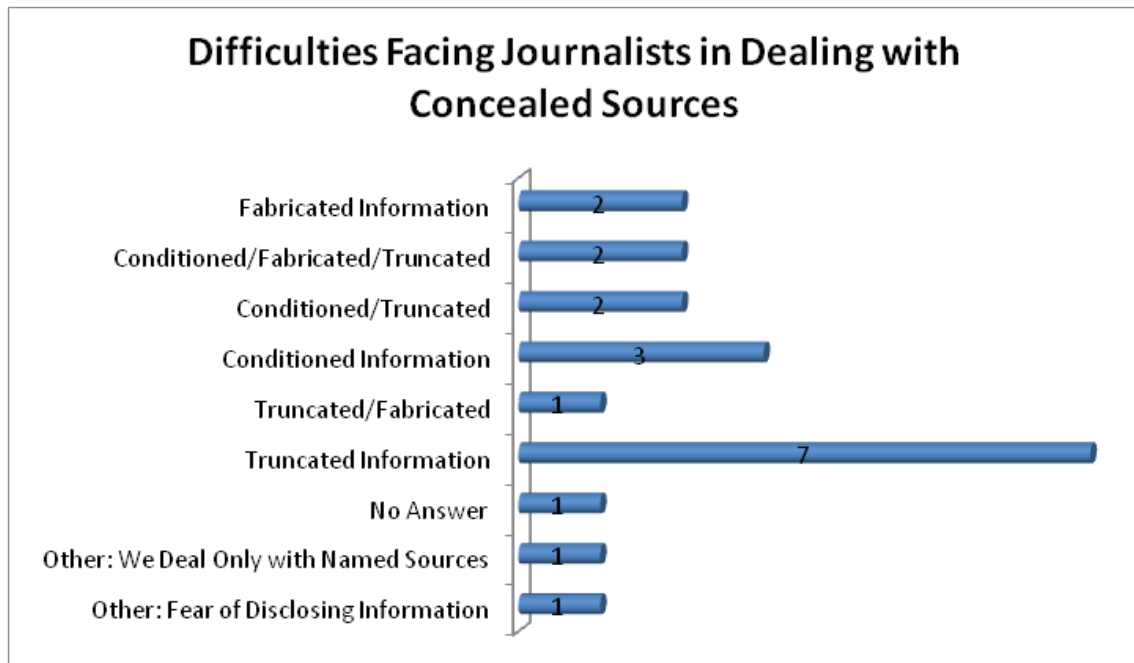- Lack of validity of information; or
- Time constraints

Figure 8

The rest of the surveyed persons considered that the difficulties and challenges reside in the fear of disclosing information or the fear that fabricated information could serve some specific interests. Professional journalism standards require crosscutting sources. All the surveyed chief editors confirmed this rule (Figure 9).
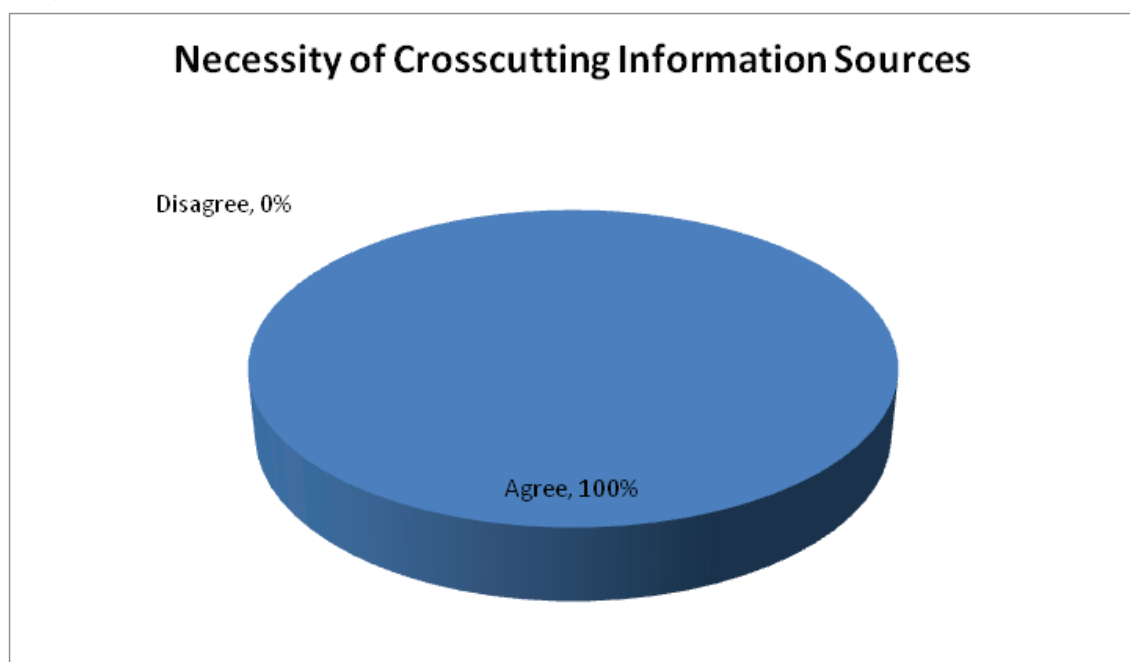

Figure 9

7- Importance of the Access to Information Law

International pacts and jurisprudence ensure the right of access to information as a basic human right which contributes to consolidating the freedom of opinion and expression as well as the development of democracy and transparency. United Nations General Assembly Resolution number 59 of 1946 stipulates that "freedom of information is a fundamental human right and the touchstone of all the freedoms to which the United Nations is consecrated."

In order to guarantee the implementation of the right of access to information in any country, it is imperative to enact a law that clearly stipulates this right. Eighty percent of the surveyed chief editors in Lebanese media consider that the existence of a law that regulates the right of access to information has an impact on the transparency of journalism, while 15% did not agree with this idea (Figure 10).

Impact of Access to Information Law on Transparency in Journalism
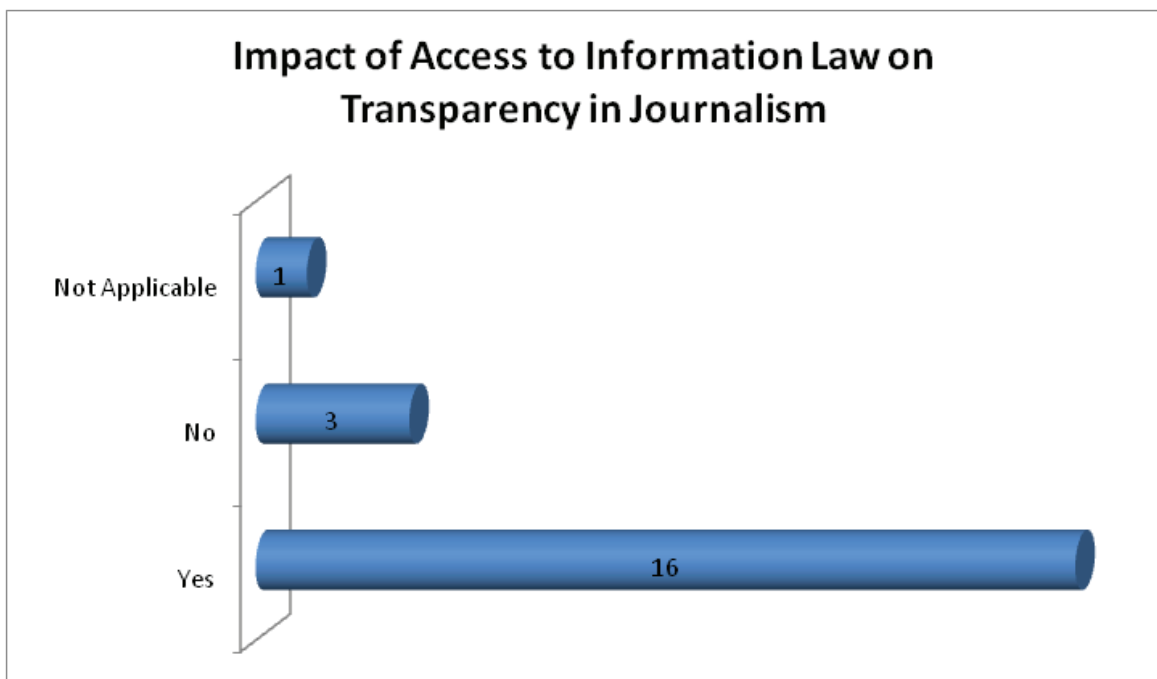
Not Applicable — 1
No — 3
Yes — 16

Figure 10

Additionally, the right of access to information helps citizens to document the violations and corruption, in addition to raising the awareness and knowledge of citizens regarding corruption and transparency and accountability.

Ninety percent of the surveyed chief editors believed that adopting a law that guarantees the right of access to information in Lebanon would help limit corruption in the public sector while 10% did not agree with this opinion (Figure 11).
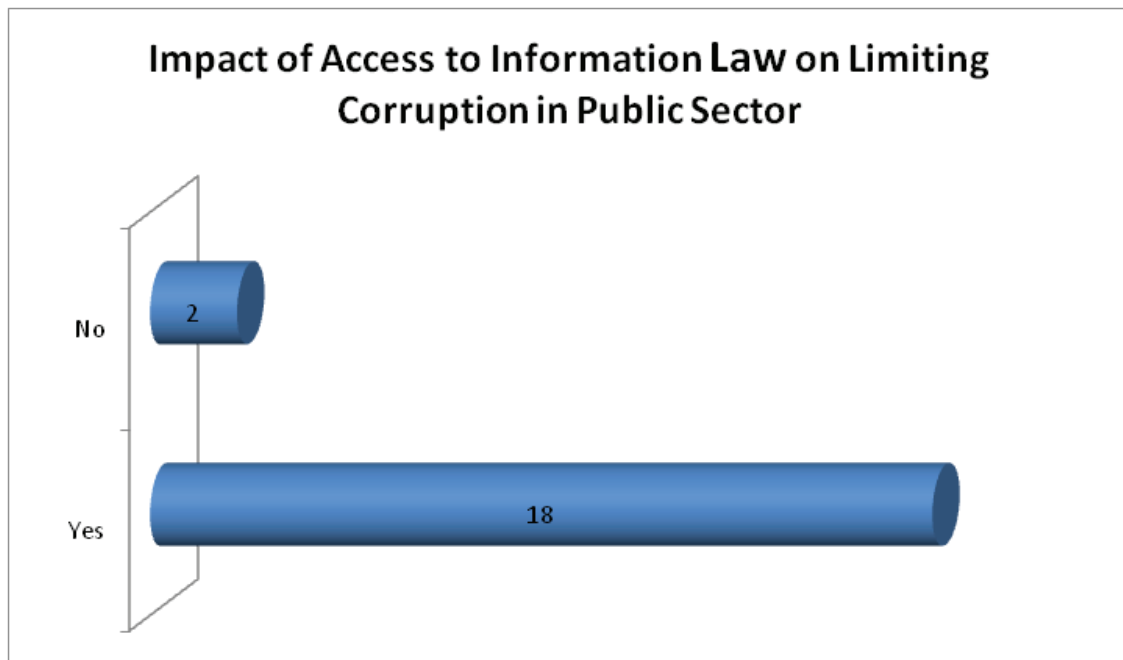

Figure 11

The results of the survey show the importance of adopting an access to information law. Such a law is of great significance for journalists in accessing and treating information as well as fighting corruption. The first article of the draft law confirms that the purpose of this law is to promote transparency in the administration and assist in fighting corruption by allowing people to practice the right of access to information and official documents.

On the other hand, Article 12 of the draft law allows the public to know the motives of administrative decisions that have an impact on citizen's rights. This would allow journalists to interpret these decisions bearing in mind that Article 13 requires the justification of administrative decisions in order to "ensure transparency and to avoid abuse and arbitrariness."[4]

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4. This study was done before the draft law was adopted by the Parliament in January 2017.

8- Incitement and Concealment of the Sources

Maxwell McCombs considers some journalists have tendency to favor one side of a conflict over the other, and this includes the types of media coverage that are biased.[5] Journalists sometimes resort to concealing their sources with the purpose of aggravating the accusations and inciting.

Figure 12 shows that 75% of chief editors surveyed consider the increase of the level of incitement and accusation in the media is often connected to the concealment of the sources.
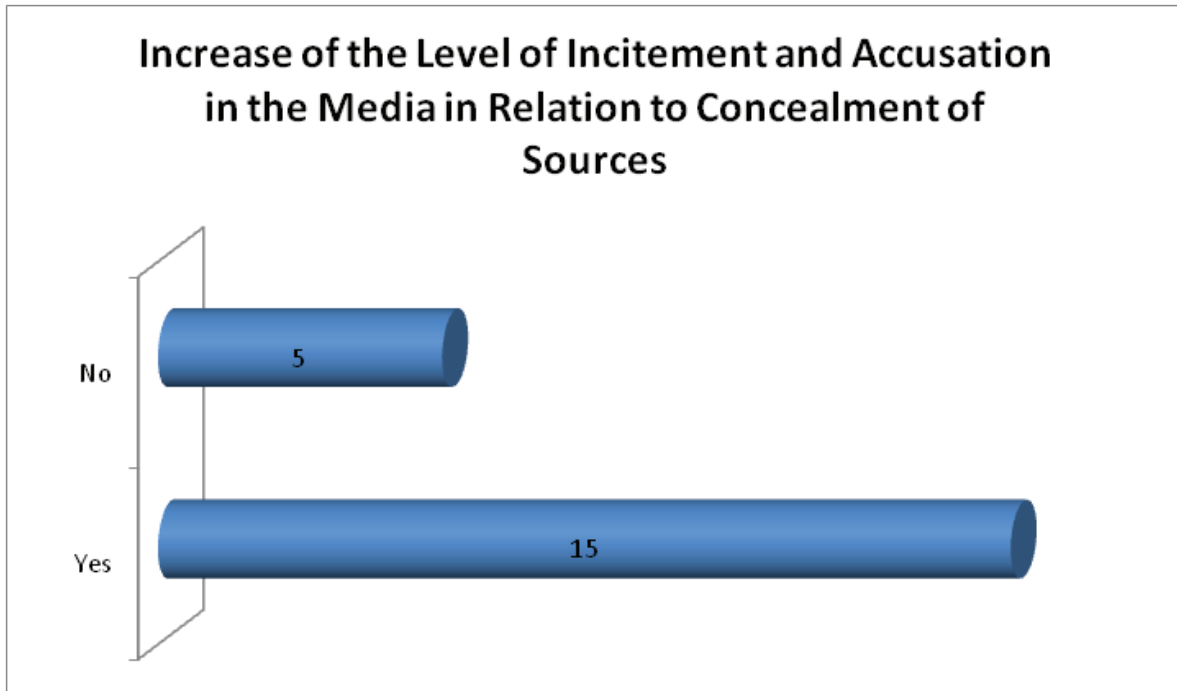

Increase of the Level of Incitement and Accusation in the Media in Relation to Concealment of Sources

No — 5
Yes — 15

Figure 12

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5. Sleiman Saleh, Media and the Management of World Conflict, first edition, Kuwait: Al-Falah Library.

PART III:

SOURCES IN THE PRACTICE OF JOURNALISM

The issue of the illegal internet raised a large and heated debate in the Lebanese public opinion and among politicians, due to the level of corruption involved that included many parties. It is noteworthy that the coverage of this issue was full of contradictions in information and sources that each media institution relied on, which resulted in a biased coverage, accusations and indirect political attacks.

This study monitored the media coverage during the week where it was in its peak and mostly mentioned in newspapers and radio and television news bulletins from 12 April to 20 April 2016.
Additionally, the study monitored the Lebanese news posted on the websites Lebanon Files and Elnashra for one day (15 November 2016) from 7:00 am until 3:00 pm.

First: Printed Media Coverage

1- Space Allocated for Coverage

During the monitoring period, 77 reports about illegal internet were tracked. Figure 13 shows the different levels of interest of Lebanese newspapers in this topic.

Printed Meia Coverage of Illegal Internet
Sample of 77 Reports 12-20 April 2016

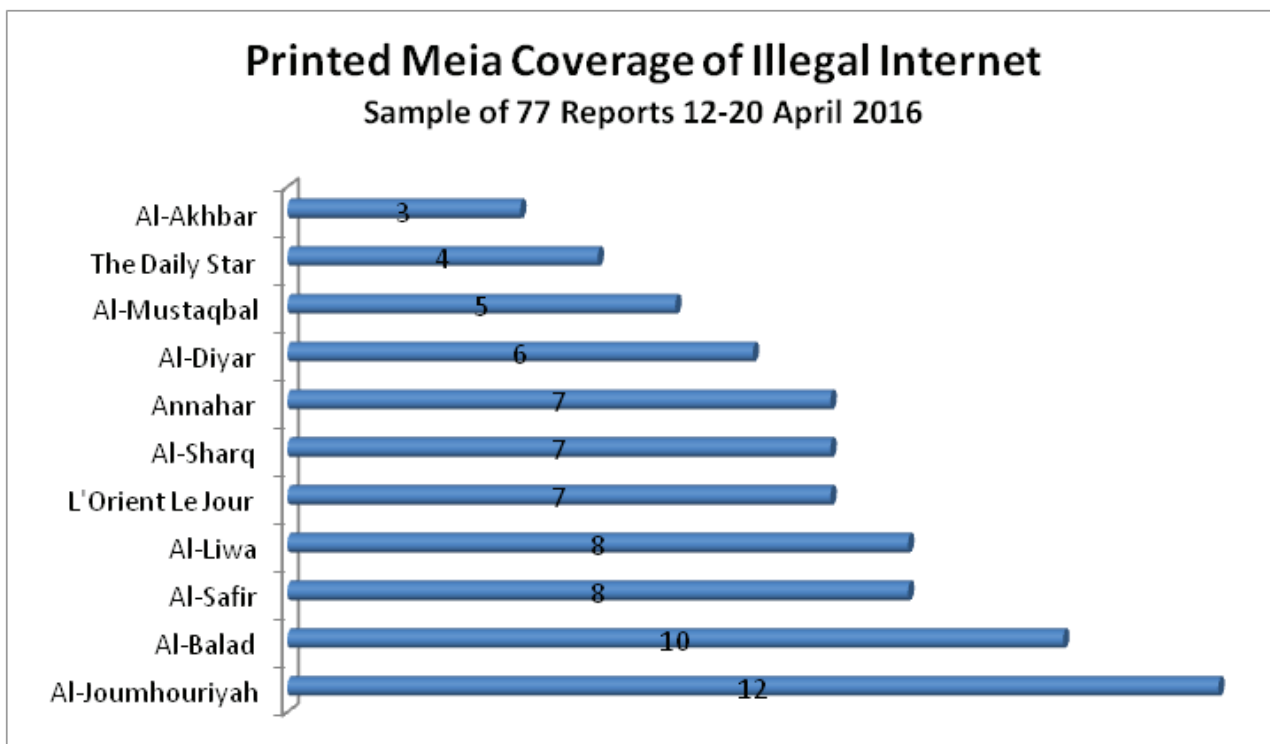| Newspaper	Reports
Al-Akhbar	3
The Daily Star	4
Al-Mustaqbal	5
Al-Diyar	6
Annahar	7
Al-Sharq	7
L'Orient Le Jour	7
Al-Liwa	8
Al-Safir	8
Al-Balad	10
Al-Joumhouriyah	12

Figure 13

Al-Joumhouriah and Al-Balad had the most coverage on this issue, followed by Assafir and Al-Liwa; then the three papers Annahar, Al-Sharq and L'Orient Le Jour had equal coverage.

The figures show clearly that this issue was present in at least one report in most Lebanese papers. This is due to the effects of this political, security and economic file that took the attention public opinion and authorities equally.

2- Types and Identification of the Sources

Official sources constituted the majority of the monitored sources. Figure 14 shows that 48.3% of the sources are governmental and 23.7% are from the Parliament. These figures concern primarily the Minister of Telecommunications and the members of the Parliamentary Committee for Telecommunications beside security and justice officials.

Anonymous sources, also known as anonymous sources were 18.6% of the total and they mostly concern what is mentioned as "according to information" or also "relevant sources;" otherwise sources are not mentioned at all.

Non-governmental sources were mostly copied from other media or from experts or related companies.

**Types of Printed Media Sources
Coverage of the Illegal Internet**
Sample of 118 Different Sources 12-20 April 2016

- Non-Governmental: 11
- Anonymous: 22
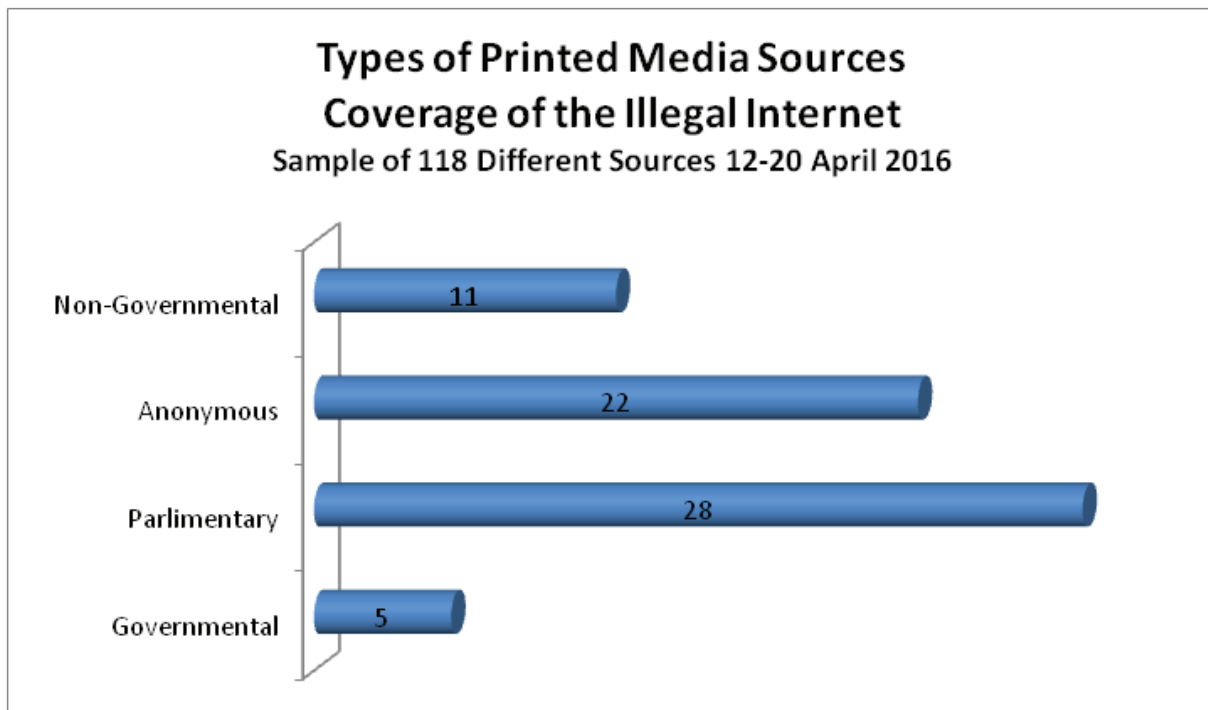- Parlimentary: 28
- Governmental: 5

Figure 14

Figure 15 shows the information sources by name with the Ministry of Telecommunications and the Minister per se occupying the majority since it is the concerned department in this issue.

These were followed by comments made by politicians and resulting from the conflict that emerged among some political leaders exchanging accusations. With regard to the concerned authorities in the Committee of Telecommunications and the judiciary, Ogero, the Ministry of Defense and the Security Forces, their presence as principal sources of the illegal internet was, of course, evident as principal sources.
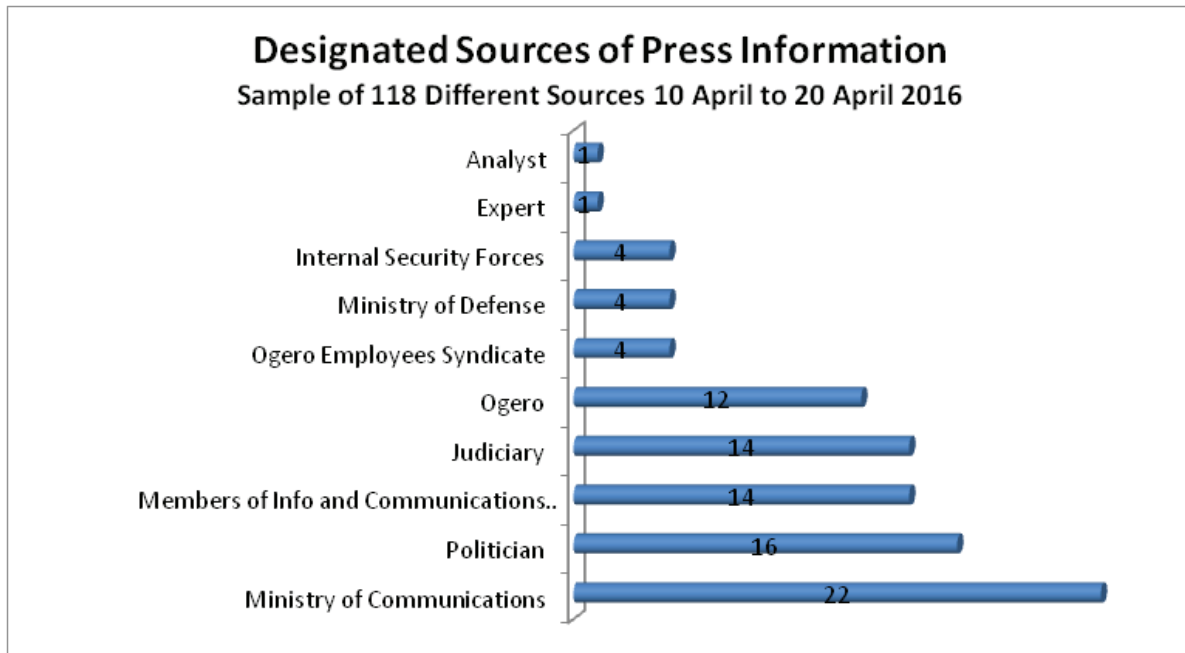

Designated Sources of Press Information
Sample of 118 Different Sources 10 April to 20 April 2016

Source	Value
Analyst	1
Expert	1
Internal Security Forces	4
Ministry of Defense	4
Ogero Employees Syndicate	4
Ogero	12
Judiciary	14
Members of Info and Communications..	14
Politician	16
Ministry of Communications	22

Figure 15

3- Nature of Information

Figure 16 shows clearly that the Lebanese newspapers made sure 87 % of the time that their sources include information and facts. This is due to the fact that newspapers relied on reports prepared by experts in the Lebanese army, the cybercrime bureau and Ogero. The other 13% were mostly accusations.
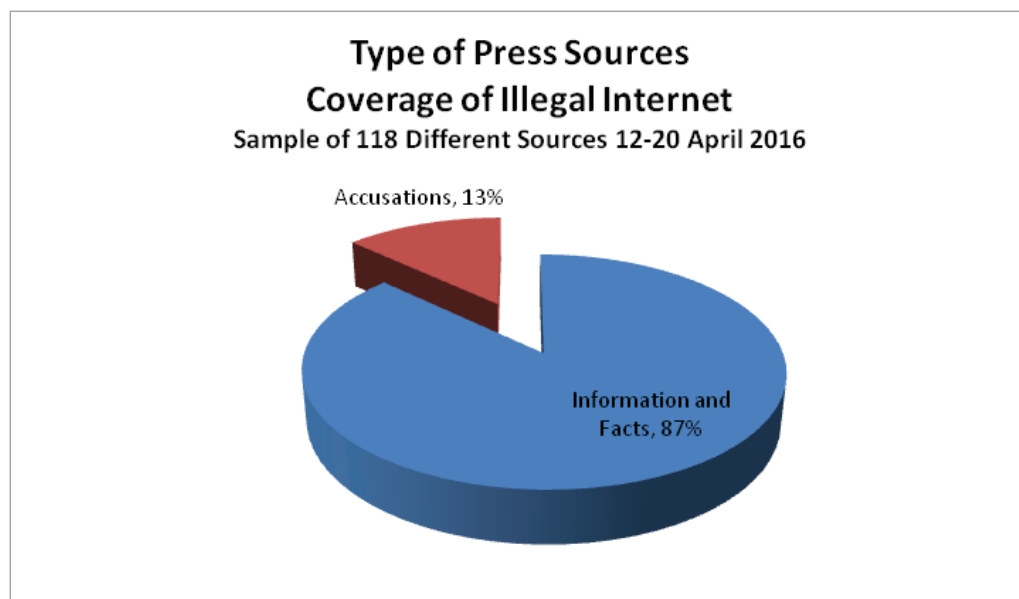

Type of Press Sources
Coverage of Illegal Internet
Sample of 118 Different Sources 12-20 April 2016

Accusations, 13%

Information and Facts, 87%

Figure 16

The Assafir newspaper described the Director General of Ogero, Mr. Abdel-Monem Youssef, as a "Web ruler," "Ali Baba," "Emperor of Ogero" and a "persona non grata." The Minister of Health, Mr. Wael Abou Faour, was quoted by Assafir newspaper as saying "It is not acceptable to put the killer [in a hint to Abdel-Monem Youssef] with the victim." Additionally, the leaders of the 14 March group were accused of "pressuring" the Justice department.

Al-Akhbar newspaper, writing in the same political inclination, rushed to place accusations of "messing with the crime scene in the Zaarour station." It also stated that there were contradictions in the experts' reports in order to cover-up the issue.

Al-Joumhouriyah reported on the mutual accusations and the political conflict that emerged between the president of the Socialist Progressive Party, Walid Joumblatt, and the Al-Mustaqbal movement. It also reported that Joumblatt said that the Minister of the Interior informed him of the involvement of top politicians in the illegal internet case.

Addiyar mentioned the accusations exchanged between Joumblatt and the Al-Mustaqbal movement and stated that there was a "convergence between the network of interests and the network of scandals." Annahar wrote about the existence of a "web under high protection" while Al-Sharq newspaper reported that "the internet gang is of the size of the state" relying on reports from Al-Jadeed television mentioning that "prominent personalities" are involved with partners outside Lebanon. It also reported, together with Al-Balad newspaper, a tweet posted by Joumblatt in which he wonders: "Has the investigation been lost in the jungle of high level military, security and administration personalities?"

In addition, it reported a demand made by Ogero to stop the violations of the media with regard to "circulated news that have no basis or evidence." This was also reported by L'Orient Le Jour.

The Daily Star newspaper reported accusations about pressures made by 14 March on judiciary. It also mentioned the accusations exchanged between Joumblatt and the Minister of the Interior.

4- Attribution and Distribution of Sources

Figure 17 shows that 78% of media sources are clearly identified compared to 22% of anonymous sources.
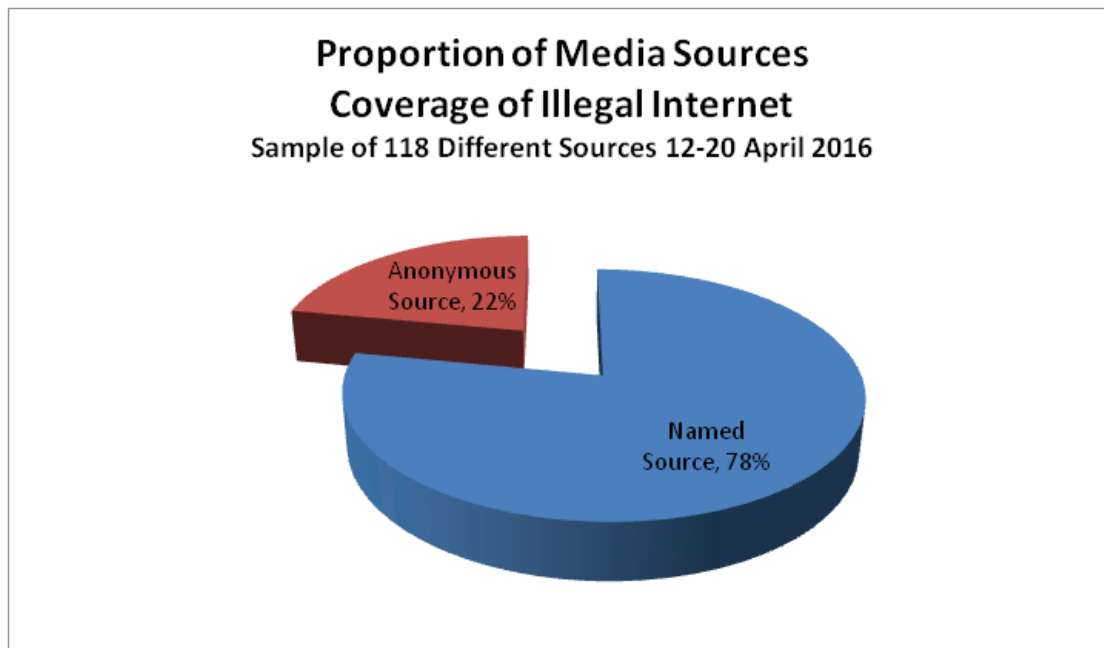

Figure 17

The identified sources were governmental 60% of the time and parliamentary (29%), including government and security meetings as well as other issues that accompanied this case. Also to be included is the role of the Telecommunications Committee and its chair MP Hassan Fadlallah who confirmed the necessity to "follow-up this issue till the end." Non-governmental sources reached 11% and were distributed between "persons with experience" and other media (Figure 18).
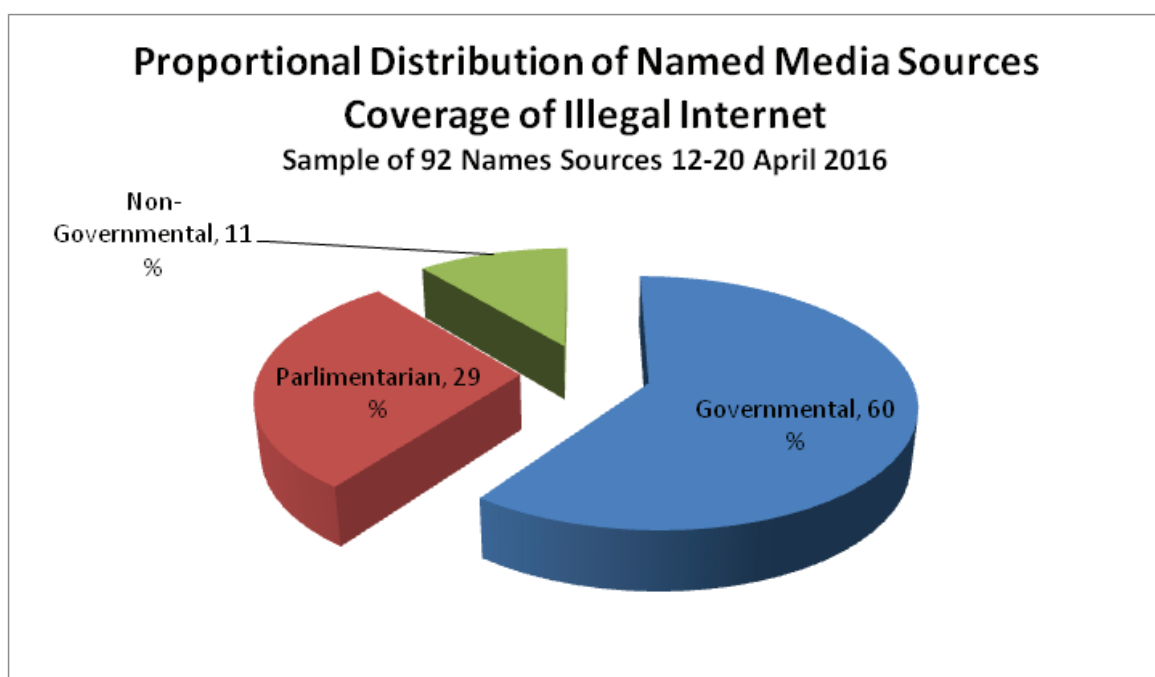
Figure 18

5- Verifying the Information

Seventy-three percent of the information presented by the Lebanese media originated from one single source and was adopted as a principal source without cross-checking to verify its accuracy (Figure 19). Only 27% of the information has been verified with other sources.
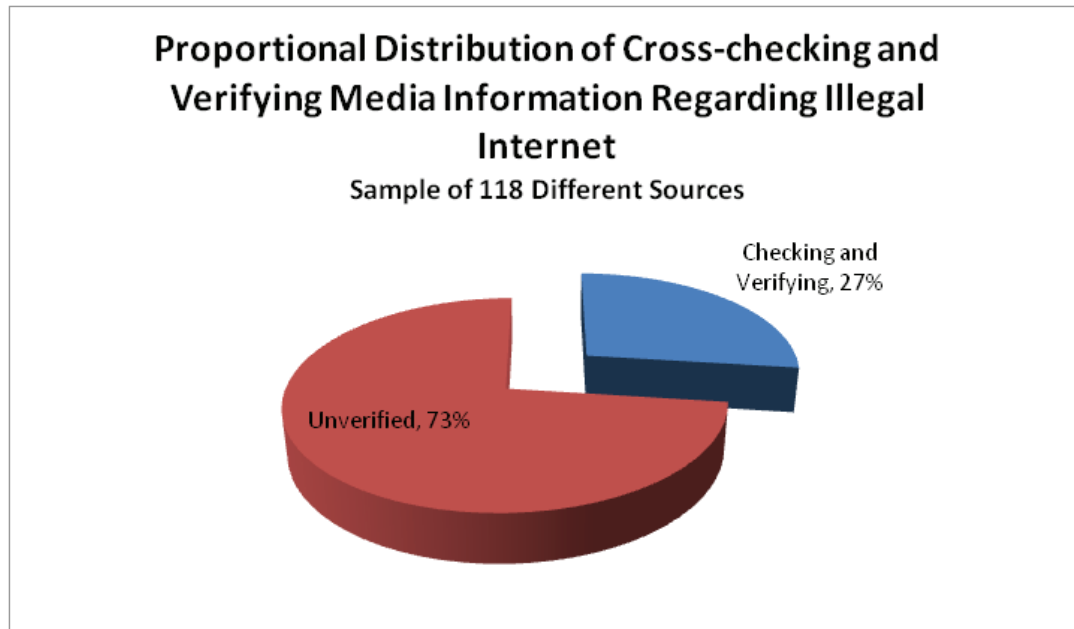

Figure 19

Al-Liwa newspaper verified some information with Radio Sawt-Loubnan; so did Al-Akhbar newspaper "with more than one party concerned with this issue;" this came in addition to what was reported by Al-Jadeed television.

6- Exclusivity of the Information

Exclusive sources of newspapers constituted 15% of the total monitored sources in printed media coverage of the illegal internet issue. The majority of the newspapers clearly referred to "relevant information" they possess. Reports prepared by agencies and other parties involved in inspecting the suspected companies constituted another 15% of the total (Figure 20).
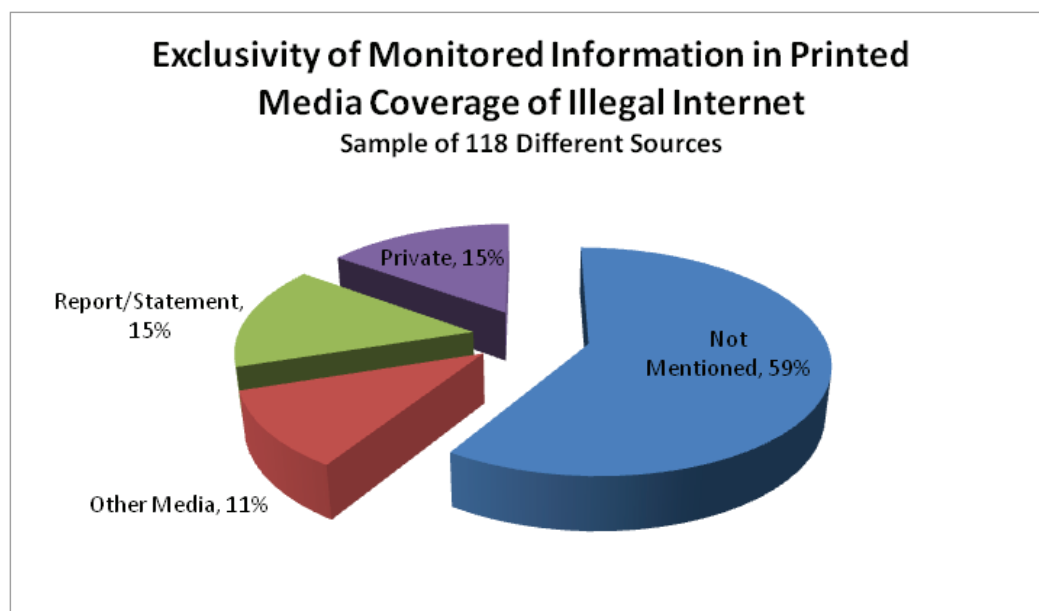

Figure 20

It is to note that 11% of the sources refer to other media and this constituted a part of the cross-checked information with newspapers. Finally, the remaining 59% of sources are undetermined, meaning that they are sources shared by all newspapers.

Second: Television Coverage

1- Space Allocated for Coverage

Figure 21 indicates that, in television, there was disproportionate coverage of the illegal internet issue. Out of the 56 reports monitored during the period 12 to 20 April, 23.2% of this coverage was from MTV. This is due to the direct relation of this television with the so called "Zaarour Station". LBC came second, followed by OTV and Al-Jadeed. The latter covered the case from MTV opposing point of view.
The political, security and financial repercussions of this issue constituted rich material of coverage for television news bulletins. It is, however, remarkable to see that Tele-Liban avoided covering this topic due to its sensitivity.
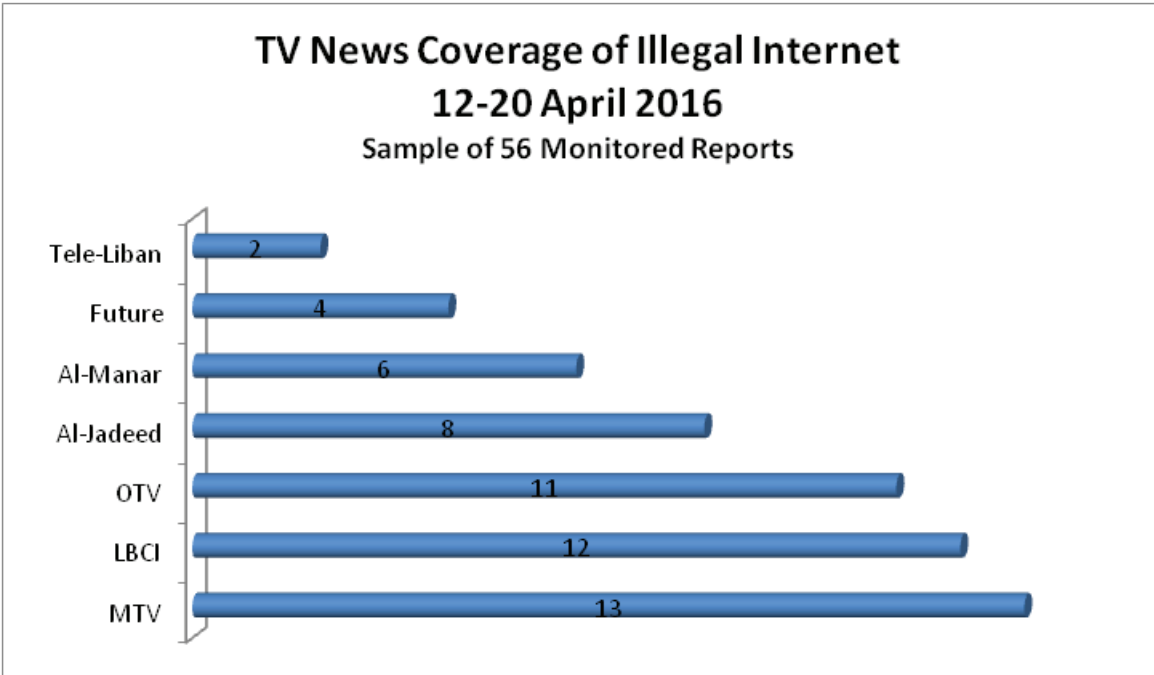

Figure 21

2- Types and Identification of Sources

There is a large similarity between the types of television news sources and printed media sources as sources are the same. Figure 22 shows that 48.18% of the sources are governmental and 17.27% are parliamentary, as it relates to the Ministry of Telecommunications and the Parliamentary Telecommunications Committee.
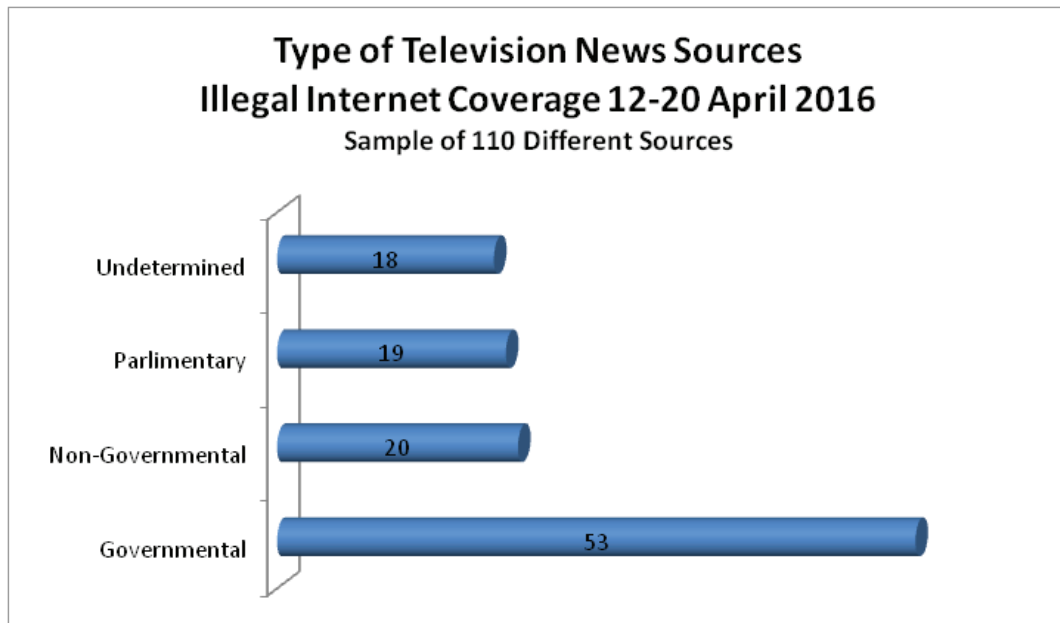

Figure 22

Non-governmental sources were of 18.18% of the total while anonymous sources were 16.36%. This final proportion increases to 23.63% (Figure 23)

It is often considered that was is referred to as "confirmed information", or "according to sources" without mentioning these sources, or "It has been revealed/known" without stating the way it was revealed/-known; all the above mentioned are considered as anonymous sources.

Ogero and teletelecommunication ministry came first regarding the identified sources of information, followed by politicians then internet companies and stakeholders.
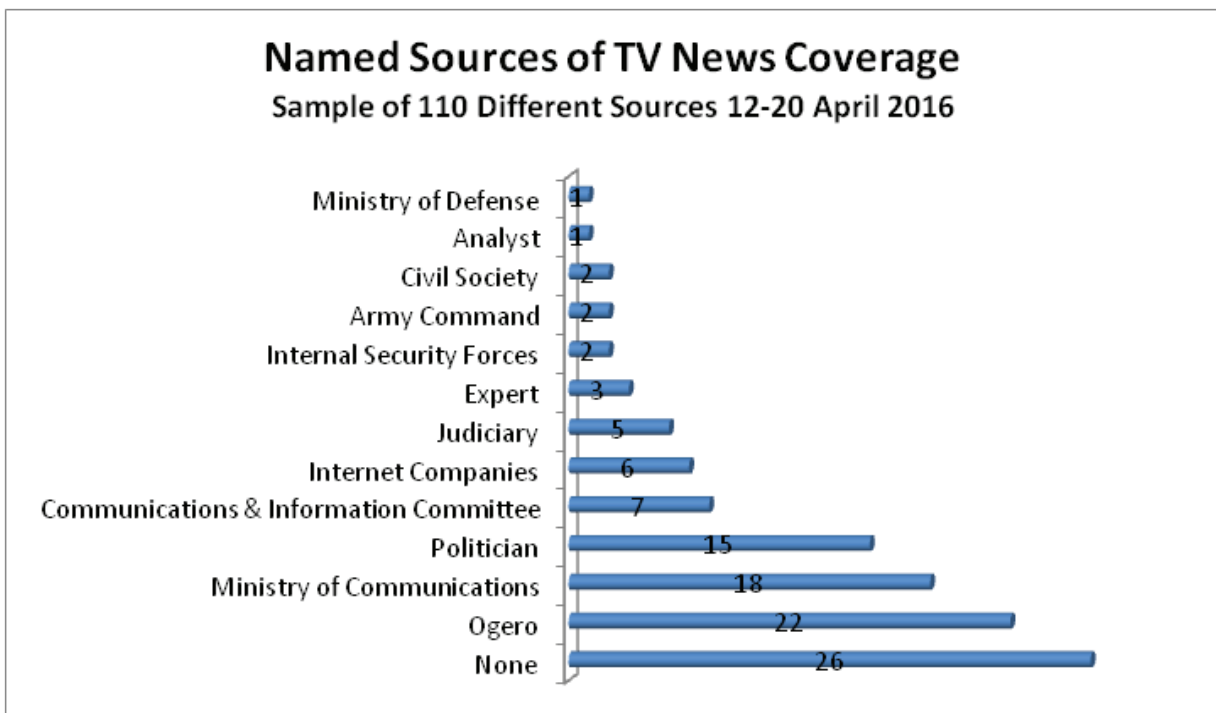

Figure 23

3- Nature of the Sources

It is clear from Figure 24 that 76% of the television news coverage offered information on the illegal internet issue based on sources or guests in the studio, while 24% were accusations not based on evidence.
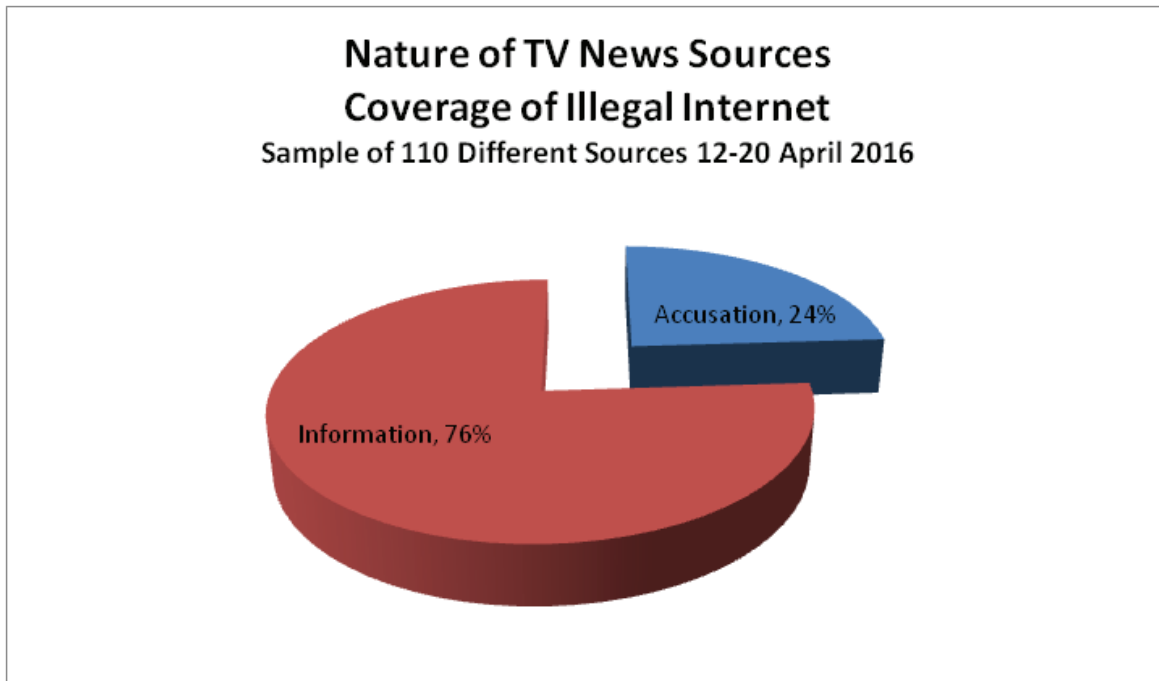

Figure 24

MTV described Abdel-Monem Youssef as the "head of the Ogero grotto" or as a "whole state regardless of his violations" and it mentioned that he "illegally occupies three positions."
It also accused Toufic Haisso of being "the partner of Abdel-Monem Youssef in wasting 43 million dollars." Youssef was additionally accused by MTV of preventing the use of the fiber optics network which cost 55 million dollars. However, MTV defended the security chief of the "fake" Zaarour station.
On the other hand, LBC reported through sources following this case that "there are doubts with regard to the attempts to close some internet companies for the benefit of the Haisso Company." It also pointed out the political accusations exchanged between the Minister of Health, who represents the president of the Socialist Progressive Party Walid Joumblatt, and the Al-Mustaqbal movement, which protects Abdel-Monem Youssef, with accusatory mentions to the following facts:

- One of the judges is an employee on the board of Ogero;
- The husband of one of the persons involved in the investigation is the agent of an internet company; and
- The brother of one of the accused persons is the son-in-law of a prominent minister.

Additionally, LBC raised doubt about the cover-up of the case because of the arrest of some persons as there is a sort of "balance in corruption." It seems that the political disagreement extends to a disagreement in determining the type of maritime cable and whether it is a dish cable for television stations transmissions or a fiber optics cable for high speed internet connections.

Al-Manar television, which belongs to Hezbollah, pointed out political pressures exerted on the judicial system to protect the owners of the Zaarour station (hinting here to the owners of the MTV) who are also implicated in the Barouk station.

It focused on the role played by the chairman of the Telecommunications Committee, MP Hassan Fadlallah, and warned of concerns related to the deviation of the judicial process by politicizing it. It also mentioned the political involvement of the Al-Mustaqbal movement to protect "high level politicians" from these accusations.

OTV adopted the statement issued by the office of the military attorney general which considered that the maritime cable is meant for television stations transmissions. It also accused Abdel-Monem Youssef of trying to "mislead the investigation" and deflect the attention from those involved in the case and other big shots.

OTV also reported prominently the tweets posted by Deputy Walid Joumblatt and the commissioner of the Socialist Progressive Party who attacked Abdel-Monem Youssef and accused him of having a stake in the Danniyeh cable. This is a new process that the investigations did not take into consideration, in addition to mentioning the "financial empire" supported by Abdel-Monem Youssef, Toufic Haisso and Mr. Chebaro, as well as the attack of Joumblatt on the Ministry of Telecommunications and its Director General who both perform "organized thefts in very cheap style."

The station also considered that Toufic Haisso is the right hand of Abdel-Monem Youssef and is the owner of the illegal satellites that were discovered in the Safi Mountain.

We should add here that OTV reported movements of youths in the Free Patriotic Movement and the Socialist Progressive Party against Abdel-Monem Youssef. Tele-Liban, in the meantime, was very cautious and limited its broadcasts on this issue to official statements. The same was done by Al-Mustaqbal TV which displayed positions that were supportive of Mr. Youssef.

On the other hand, direct accusations were made by the Al-Jadeed television which considered the internet stations as "stations protected by political leaders." It also pointed to a confidential report accusing the "Al-Murr family and their acolytes." Additionally, it displayed the names of companies and "Broadmax Israeli connections," in addition to publicly broadcasting some names such as Emile Lahoud, Nasri Lahoud and another member of the Murr family.

4- Attribution and Distribution of Sources

Eighty-four percent of sources used in television news bulletins are identified by name (Figure 25) while 16% are anonymous.

Proportion of TV News Sources
Coverage of Illegal Internet
Sample of 110 Different Sources 12-20 April 2016

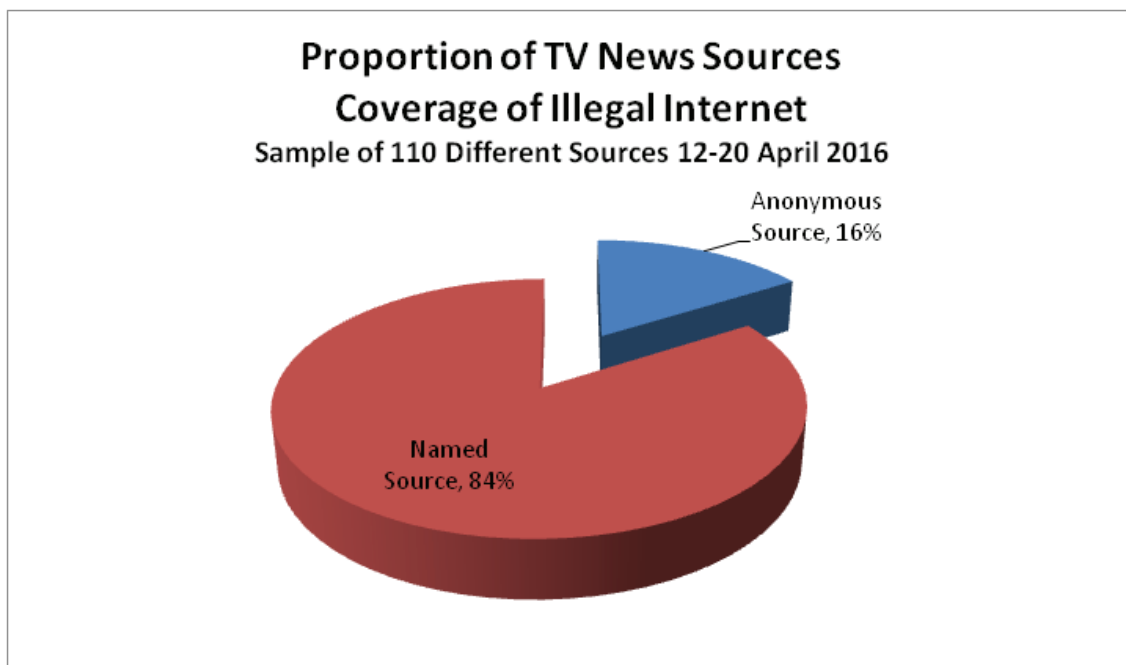Anonymous Source, 16%
Named Source, 84%

Figure 25

Governmental sources had the highest proportion (57%) of all television news coverage (Figure 26), followed by the parliamentary sources. These proportions are due to the nature of the relationship between the illegal internet issue, the Ministry of Telecommunications and the Parliamentary Telecommunications Committee. Non-governmental sources (experts and company owners) were at 22%.
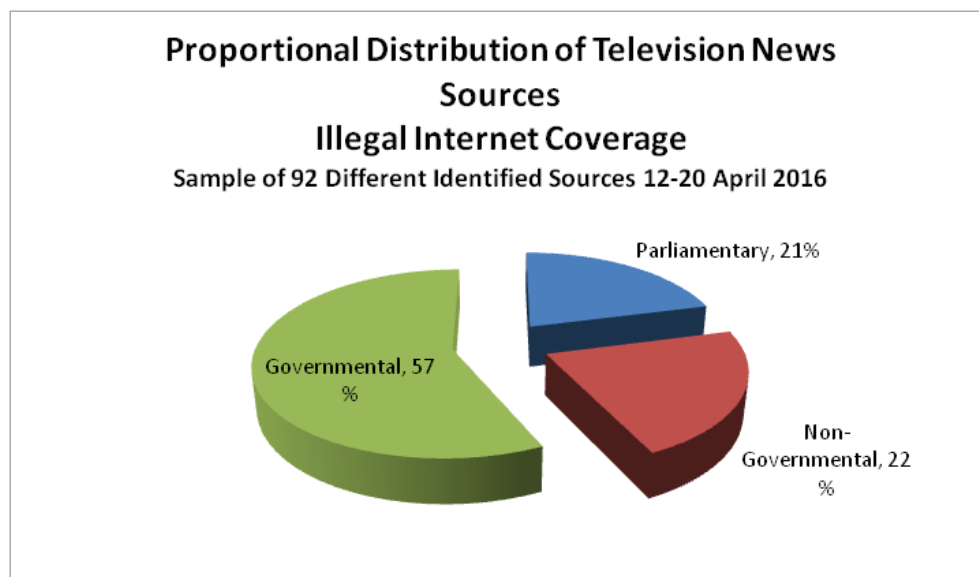

Proportional Distribution of Television News
Sources
Illegal Internet Coverage
Sample of 92 Different Identified Sources 12-20 April 2016

Parliamentary, 21%
Governmental, 57%
Non-Governmental, 22%

Figure 26

5- Verifying the Information

Figure 27 shows that 62% of the information in television news bulletins were broadcast without being verified. The information that was cross-checked with other sources and verified constituted 38% of the total. This was mentioned by MTV television citing Al-Akhbar newspaper and "according to documents" and "statements made by politicians."

OTV presented documents and pictures about the maritime cable; so did Al-Manar basing its information on what was published by Assafir newspaper and the National News Agency.
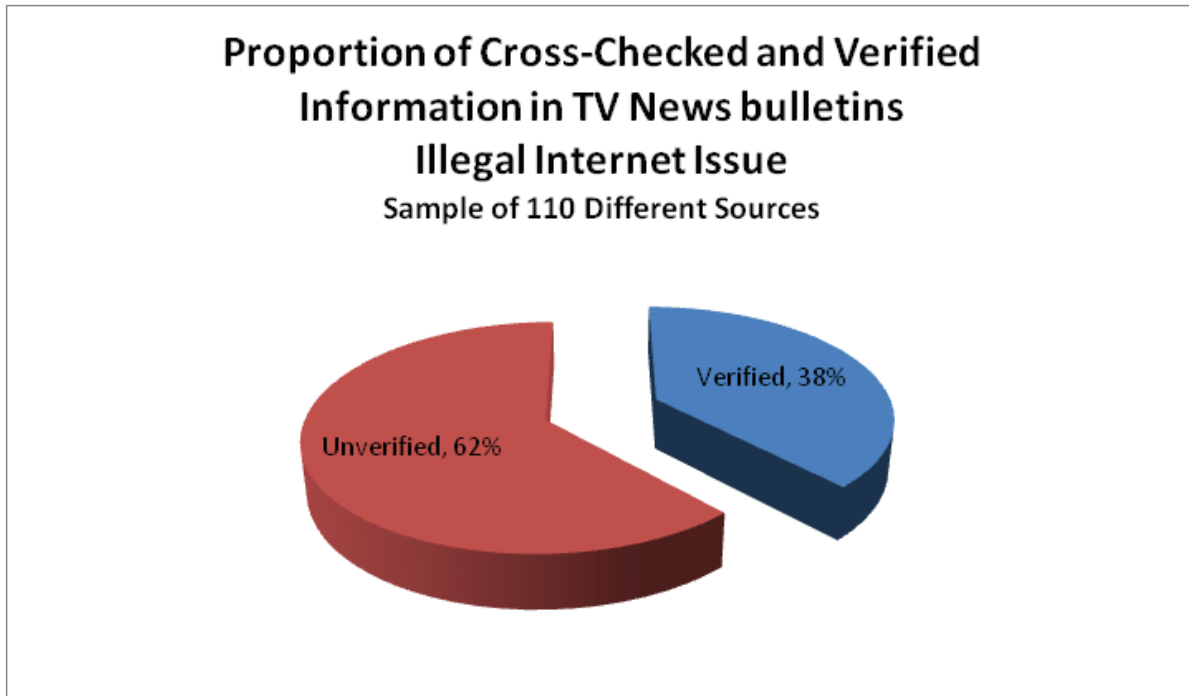

Figure 27

6- Exclusivity of the Information

The proportion of private information presented in television coverage registered a large figure (40%) in comparison with a lower figure for the anonymous sources (31%) as shown in Figure 28.
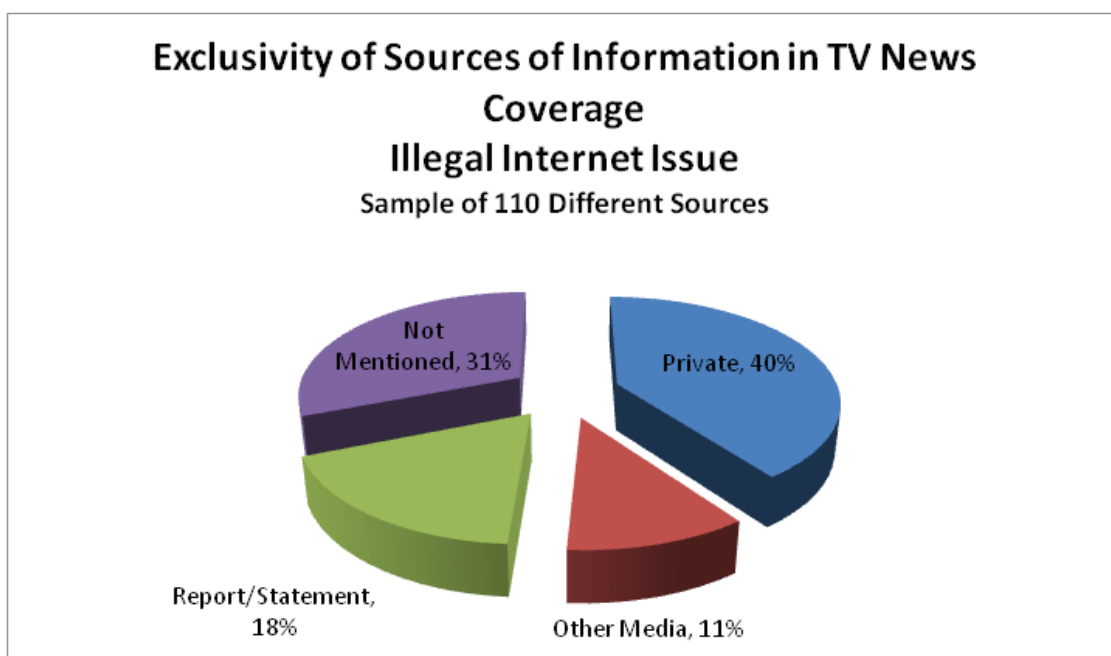

Figure 28

Television outlets along with newspapers had the same percentage of 11% and this is considered as cross-checking that supports the television coverage. The rest is simply official reports from those in charge of the investigations and inspections.

Third: Radio Coverage

1- Space Allocated for Coverage

The coverage of the illegal internet issue in radio was much less extensive than it was in printed media and television. There were 44 reports covering this issue, mainly on radio Al-Nour with a proportion of 27.27%, which translates into a strong and daily presence of this issue in news bulletins (Figure 29).

Radio Coverage of the Illegal Internet
Sample of 44 Monitored Reports 12-20 April 2016

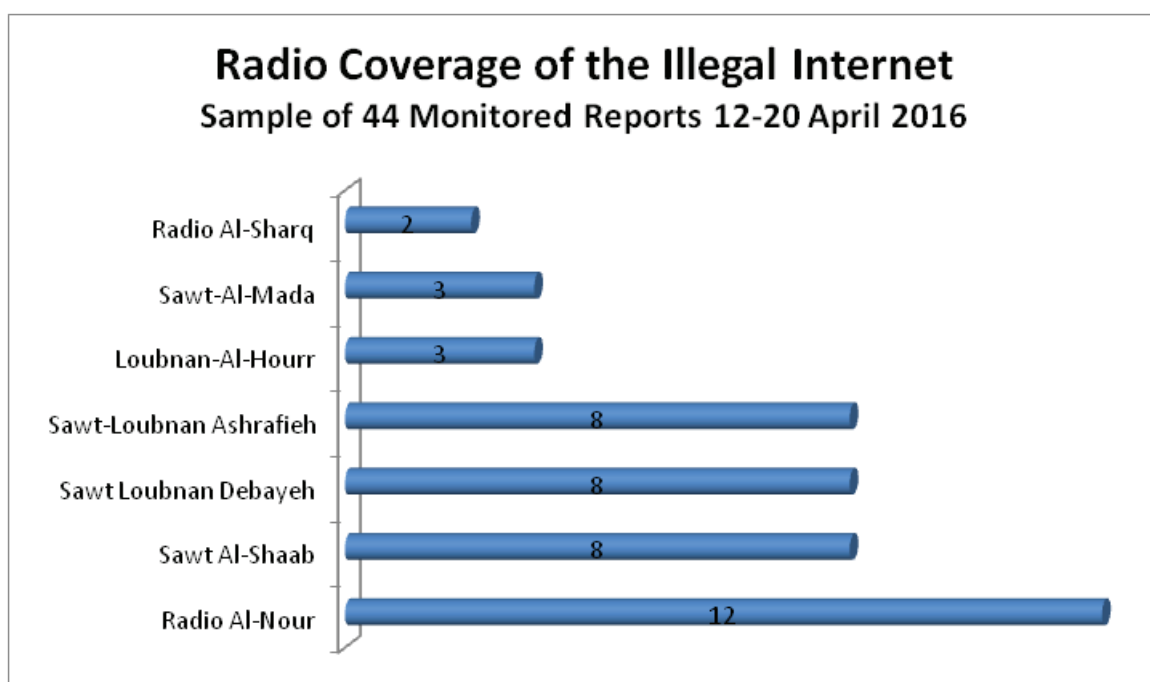| Station	Reports
Radio Al-Sharq	2
Sawt-Al-Mada	3
Loubnan-Al-Hourr	3
Sawt-Loubnan Ashrafieh	8
Sawt Loubnan Debayeh	8
Sawt Al-Shaab	8
Radio Al-Nour	12

Figure 29

The two radio stations Sawt-Loubnan Debayeh and Ashrafieh had the same number of reports as Sawt-Al-Sahaab, while this issue was mentioned only partially during a whole week in Radio Loubnan-Al-Hourr, Sawt-Al-Mada and Radio Al-Sharq.

2- Types and Identification of Sources

The 44 monitored radio reports originated from 72 sources, half of them are governmental sources (Figure 30), followed by parliamentary sources. These results are more or less similar to the ones registered in television coverage because they are directly connected with the Ministry of Telecommunications and the Parliamentary Committee on Information and Telecommunications.
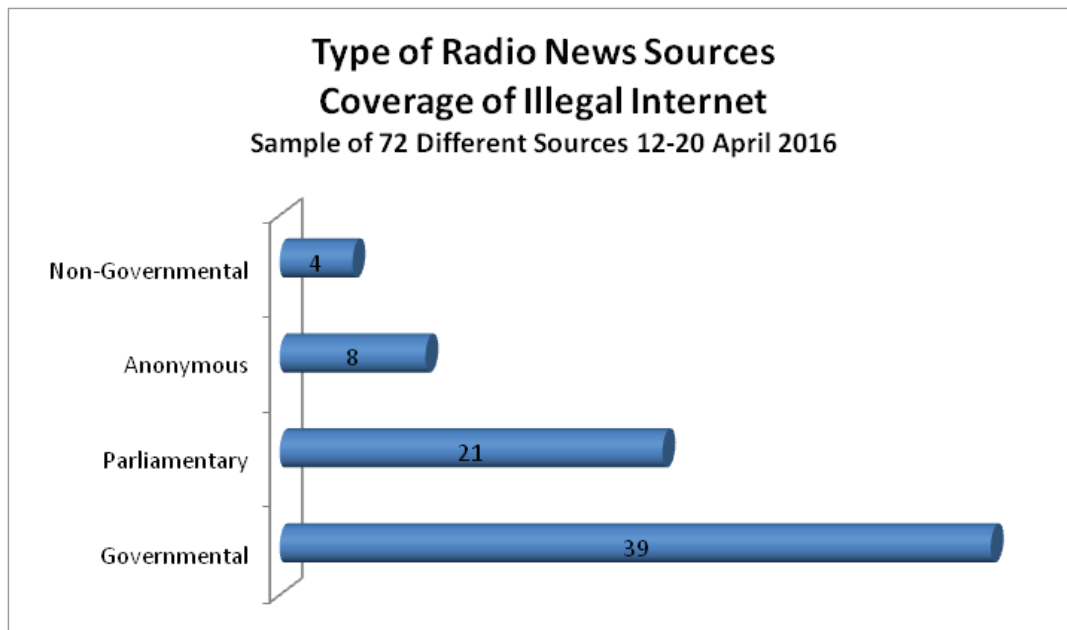

Figure 30

With regard to the anonymous sources, their proportion did not exceed 11%, and the non-governmental sources were no more than 5.6%.
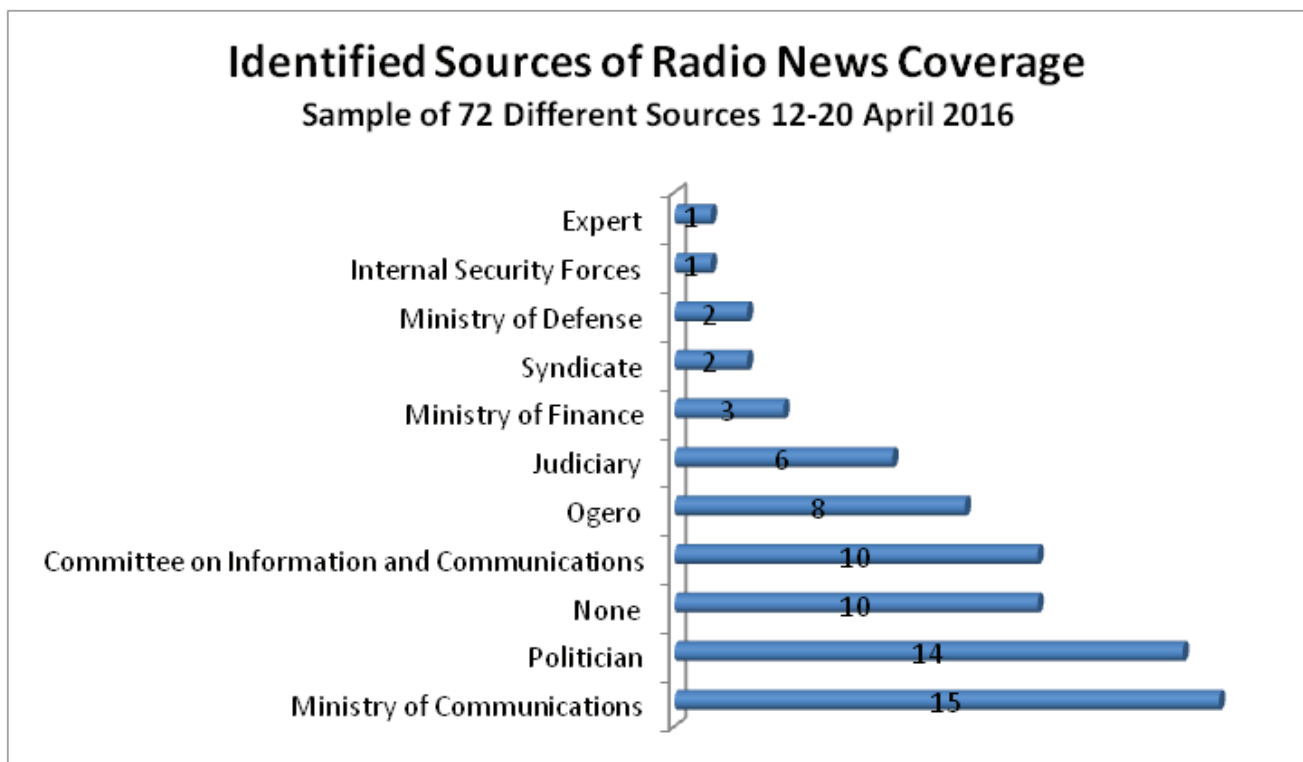

Figure 31

Figure 31, above, shows that the sources of the Ministry of Telecommunications directly concerned with this issue and the positions of politicians constituted about 20% each of the total sources. The sources from the Committee of Information and Telecommunications and the parties concerned with this case such as Ogero, the Ministries of Finance and Defense and the Internal Security Forces followed. The civil society institutions were completely absent from this coverage.

It is also worth noting the large proportion of anonymous sources reached 14% due to the fact that unclear sources were mentioned such as "media sources" and "according to information." The radio stations Sawt-Al-Shaab, Sawt-Al-Mada and Radio Al-Nour, when mentioning sources, did not go beyond "Sources mentioned" or "data were revealed."

3- Nature of the Sources

Radio news coverage was 85% about facts and information concerning the issue of the illegal internet (Figure 32) while the accusations were reduced to a proportion of only 15%.
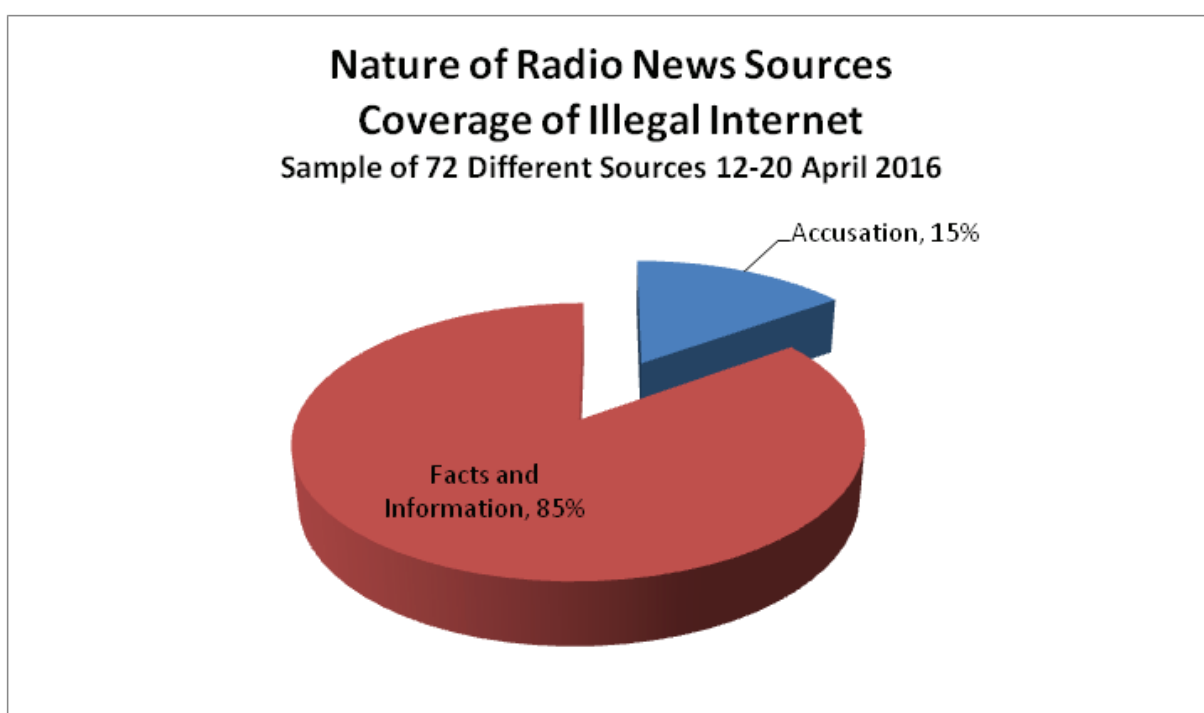

Figure 32

According to Radio Al-Nour, "leaders from 14 March intervened with judiciary in favor of the security officer at the Zaarour station." It mentioned that "the main cartel in the internet scandal is now well known." The station also emphasized the statements made by the chair of the Committee on Information and Telecommunications, MP Hassan Fadlallah, and it reported, citing an official source, that "the assumption that Israel's infiltration of the internet network in Lebanon is still ongoing."

Radio Loubnan-Al-Hourr and Radio Al-Sharq reported the accusations made by the Minister of Health Wael Abou Faour against Abdel-Monem Youssef in the Information and Telecommunications Committee as well as the accusation made by the chair of the committee that "the equipments were brought in through legal ports of entry, but with forged documents." These same accusations were also reported by radio Sawt-Al-Mada.

Sawt-Loubnan (Ashrafieh) denied, in a statement made by the Minister of Telecommunications Boutros Harb "the unjustified accusations that were targeting his team" and it considered these accusations "far-fetched interpretations."

4- Attribution and Distribution of the Sources

Figure 33 indicates that 86% of the information reported in radio news coverage of the illegal internet issue is attributed to identified sources.
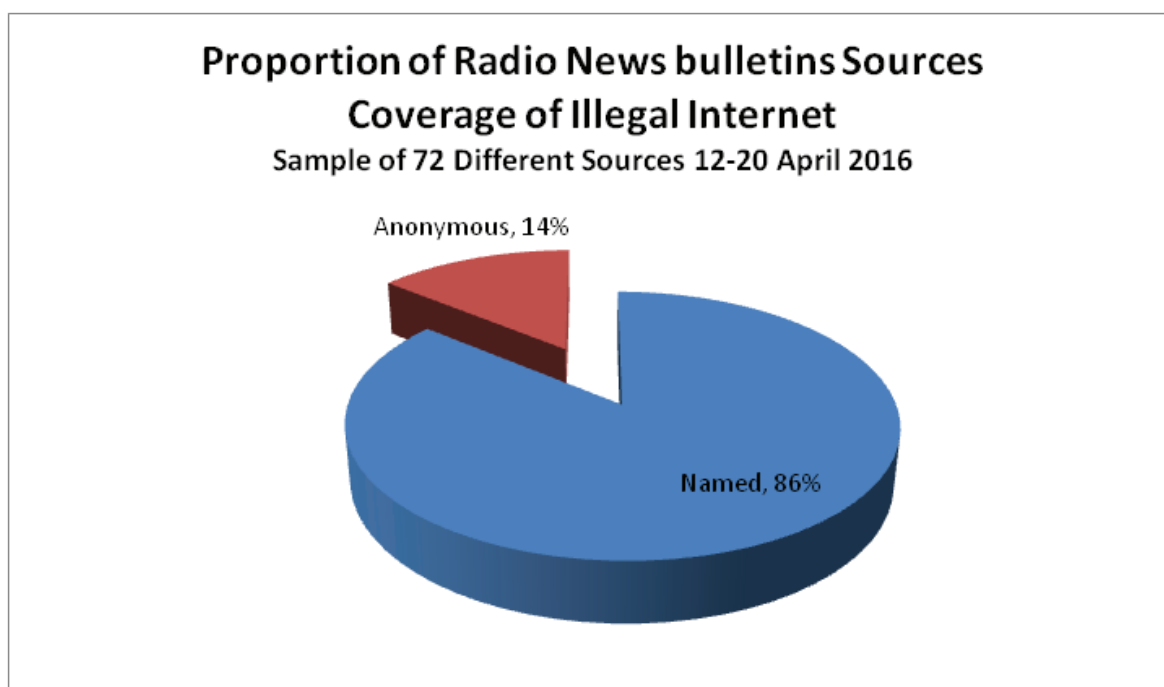

Figure 33

The anonymous sources are at a proportion of 14% of the total. The information is either completely anonymous, or partially anonymous through the usage of terms such as "sources" or "information" or even "relevant sources." Government sources occupied 60% of the identified sources, followed by the parliamentary sources (34%) and finally the non-governmental sources with 6% (Figure 34).
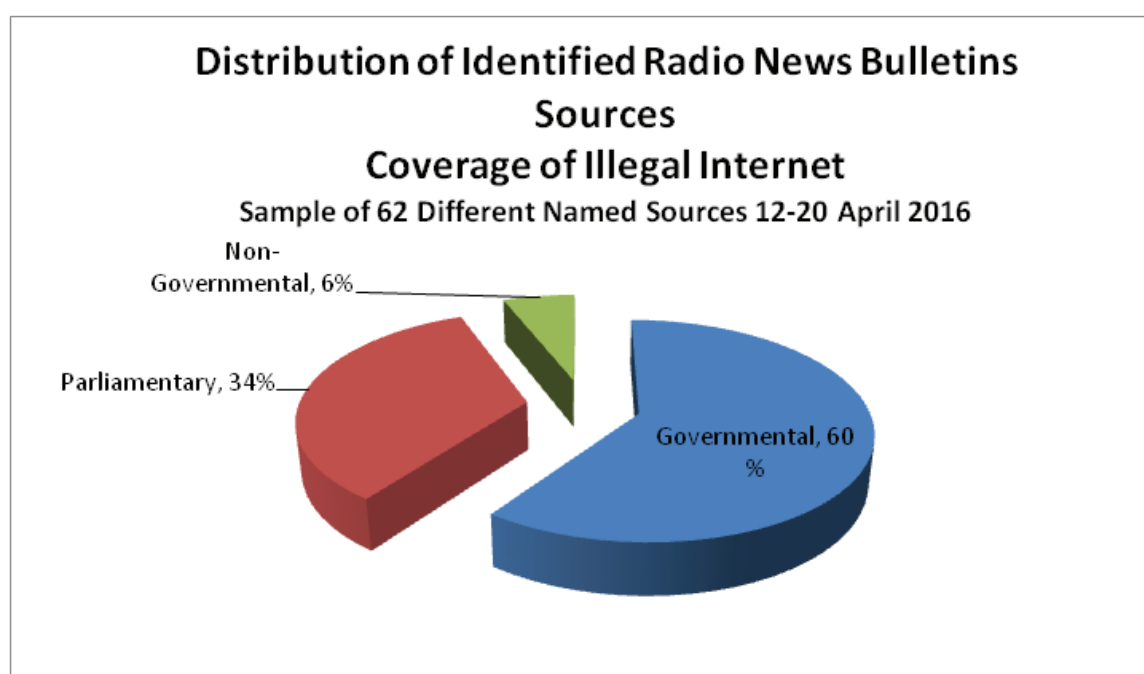

Figure 34

The same explanation could be adopted for these results, bearing in mind that the illegal internet issue is linked to some specific ministries, to the Committee of Information and Telecommunications and to some positions taken by officials in the government and the parliament on this issue.

5- Verifying the Information

Figure 35 shows that 81% of the information mentioned in radio news coverage have been broadcast as originating from one single source, whether known or unknown, without cross-checking them with other sources to verify their accuracy.
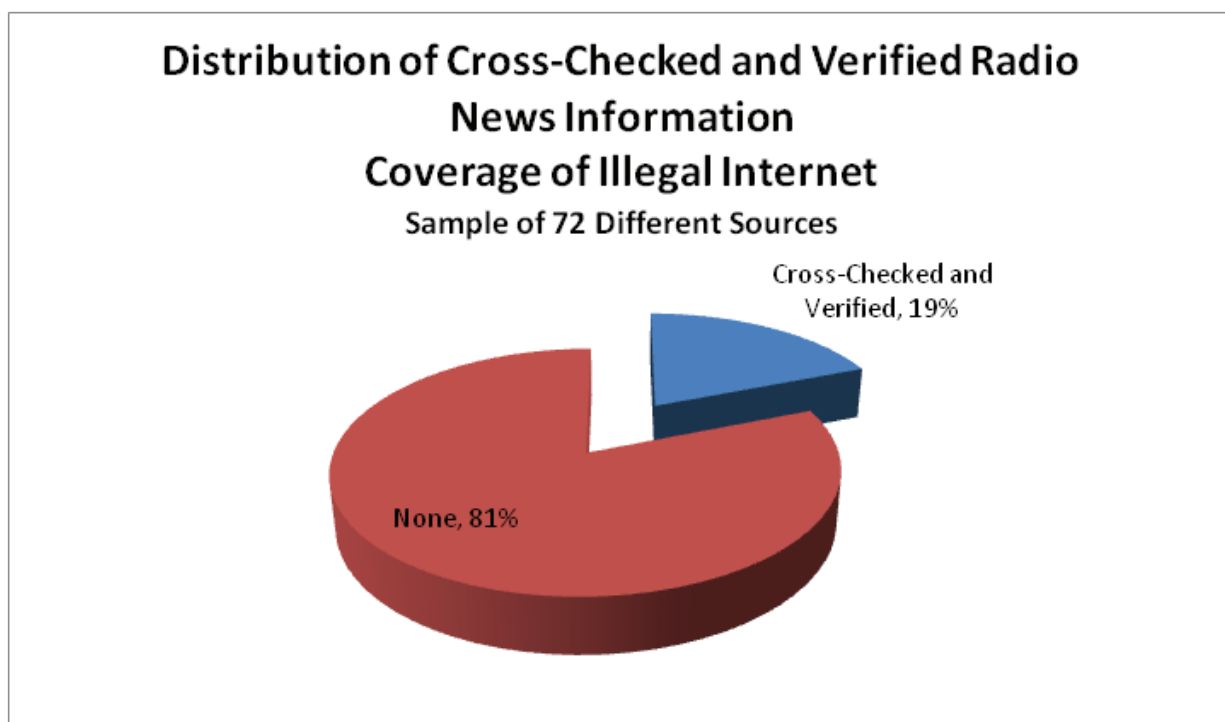

Figure 35

Only 19% of the radio information has been cross-checked with other sources. Radio Sawt-Al-Shaab, for example, relied on "media sources" without specifying who these sources were. Radio Al-Sharq "cross-checked its information with a radio interview of Minister Boutros Harb," conducted with Radio Sawt-Loubnan-Ashrafieh.

Radio Al-Nour cross-checked its information with Assafir newspaper under the following titles: "Data," "Leaderships," "Judiciary sources" and "Informed Sources."

6- Exclusivity of the Information

Only 29% of radio information about the illegal internet issue originates exclusively from radio stations sources, while 64% of the information originates from undetermined sources (Figure 36). Radio stations do not reveal how they collected information even when it is attributed to sources.

Exclusivity of Information in Radio News Coverage
Coverage of Illegal Internet
Sample of 72 Different Sources

Another Medium, 6%
Report/Statement, 1%
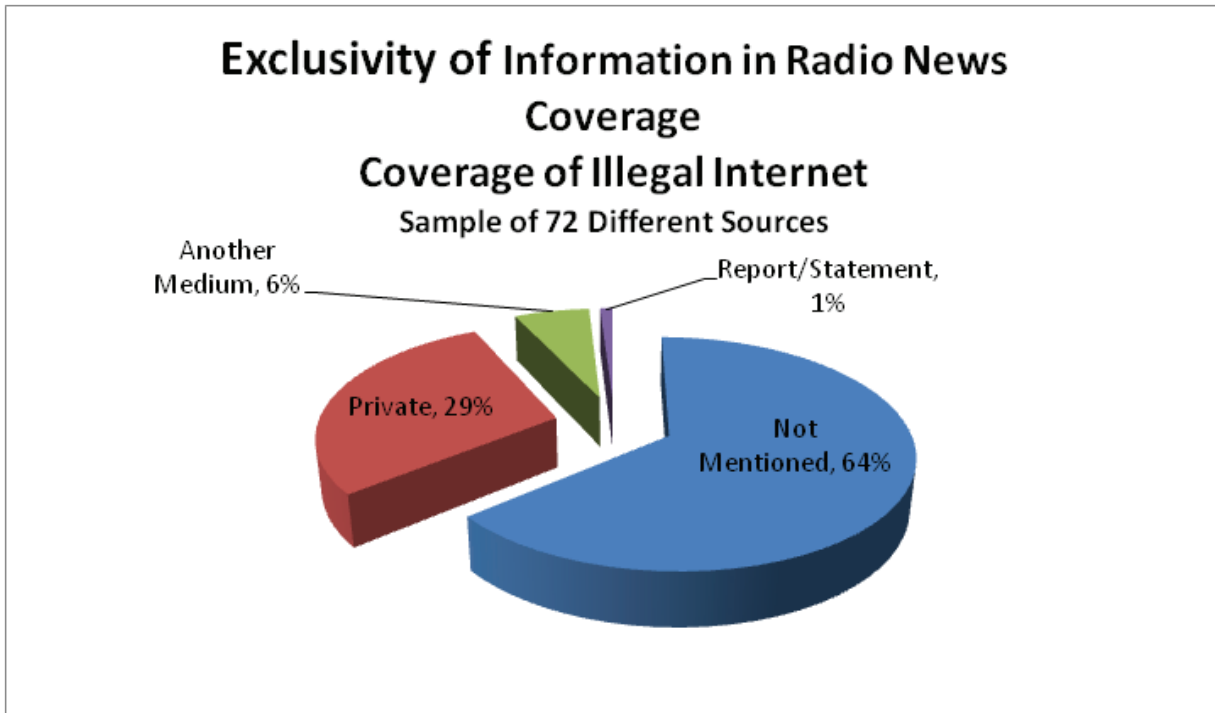Private, 29%
Not Mentioned, 64%

Figure 36

Using other media as sources of information constituted 6% of the total and some of them were used for the purpose of cross-checking while reports published by agencies in charge of dealing with this issue were 1% of the total.

Fourth: News Websites Coverage

In order to study the media sources of the news websites, the Lebanese news posted on the following two websites were monitored: Elnashra and Lebanon Files on 15 November 2015 from 7:00am until 3:00pm.

1- Space Allocated and Attribution of the Sources

The news posted on the Elnashra and Lebanon Files websites totaled 135 news. They dealt with Lebanese events and were posted between 7:00am and 3:00pm (Figure 37) as appears below:
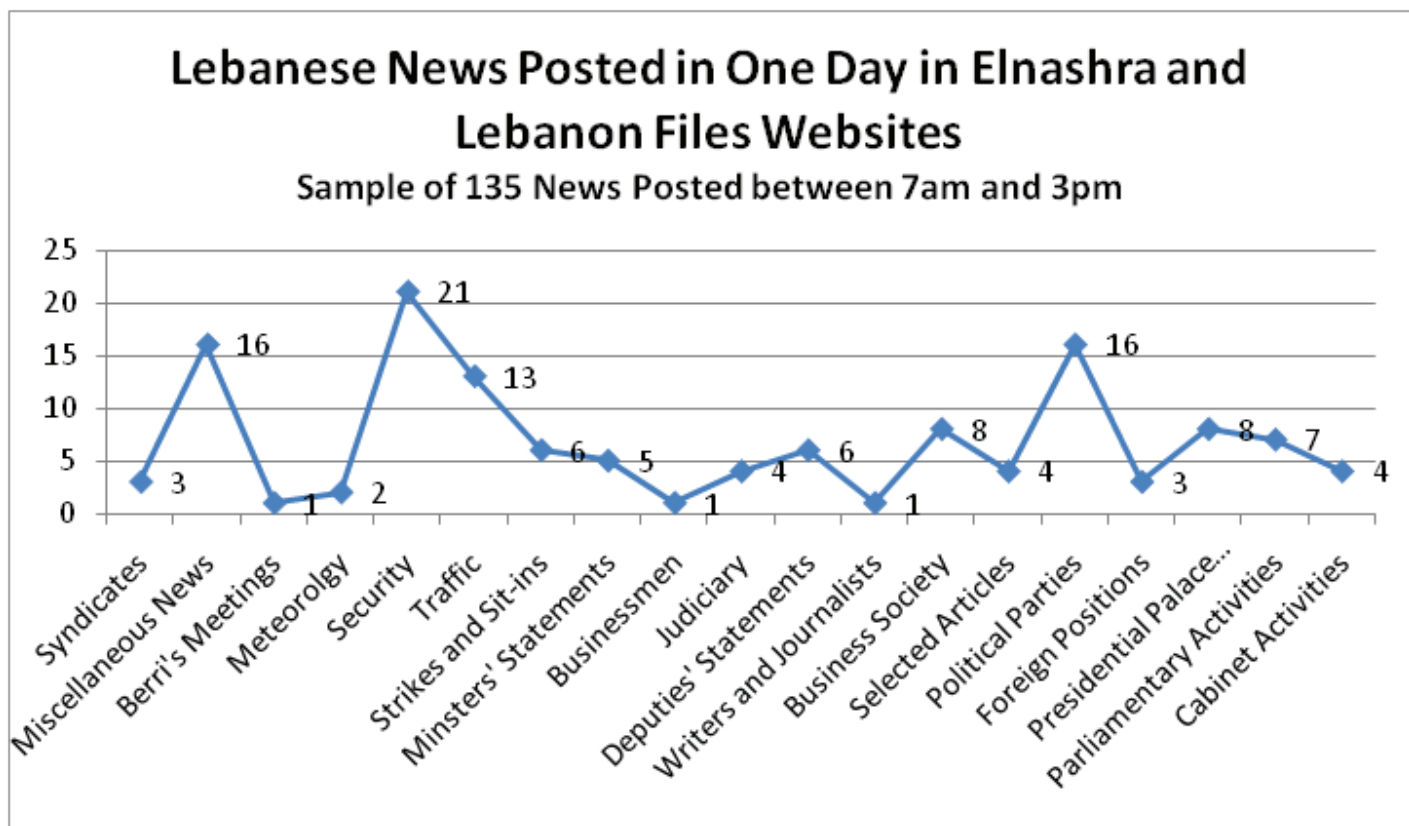-85 news for Elnashra website
-50 news for Lebanon Files website

Figure 37

It is to note that 48.5% of the news posted on the website Elnashra is from unknown sources. This is a very high proportion, to which we can add 0.5% as anonymous sources since this website posts news taken from other media without mentioning them.

In the case of the website Lebanon Files, the proportion of unknown sources reached 62% (Figure 38).
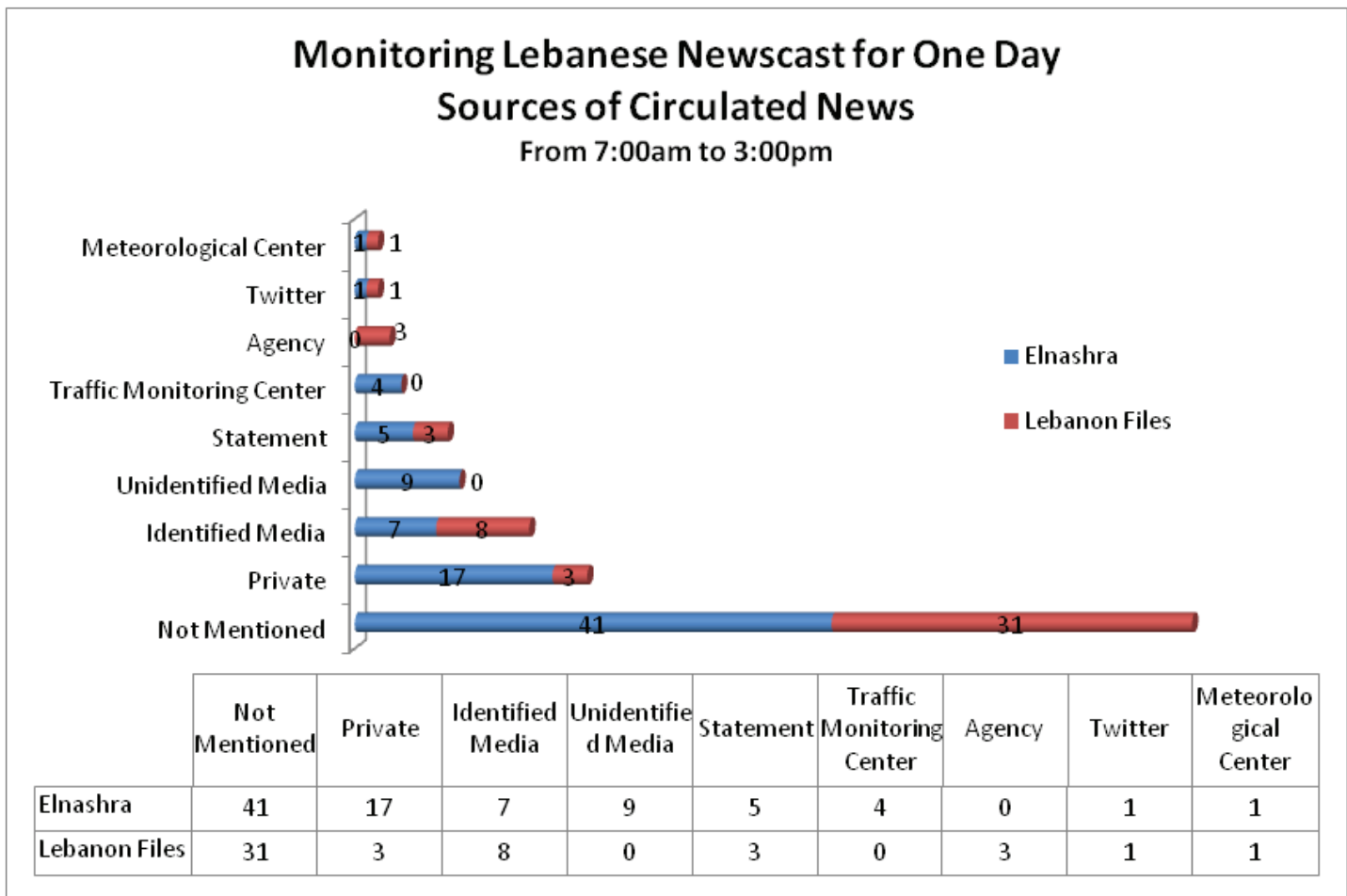

Figure 38

On the other hand, the proportion of special news in these two websites does not exceed 20% in Elnashra and 6% in Lebanon Files. This fact indicates the lack of special sources for these two websites.

2- Attribution to Original Source of the News

One of the requirements of professionalism and objectivity is to refer the reader to the original source of the news in order to allow them to be well informed. However, the results of our monitoring showed that news posted on Elnashra and Lebanon Files did not refer the reader to the original source of the news. This practice does not comply with the ethics of journalism and it can cause doubts about the sources and the credibility of the information that is posted on the websites (Figure 39).
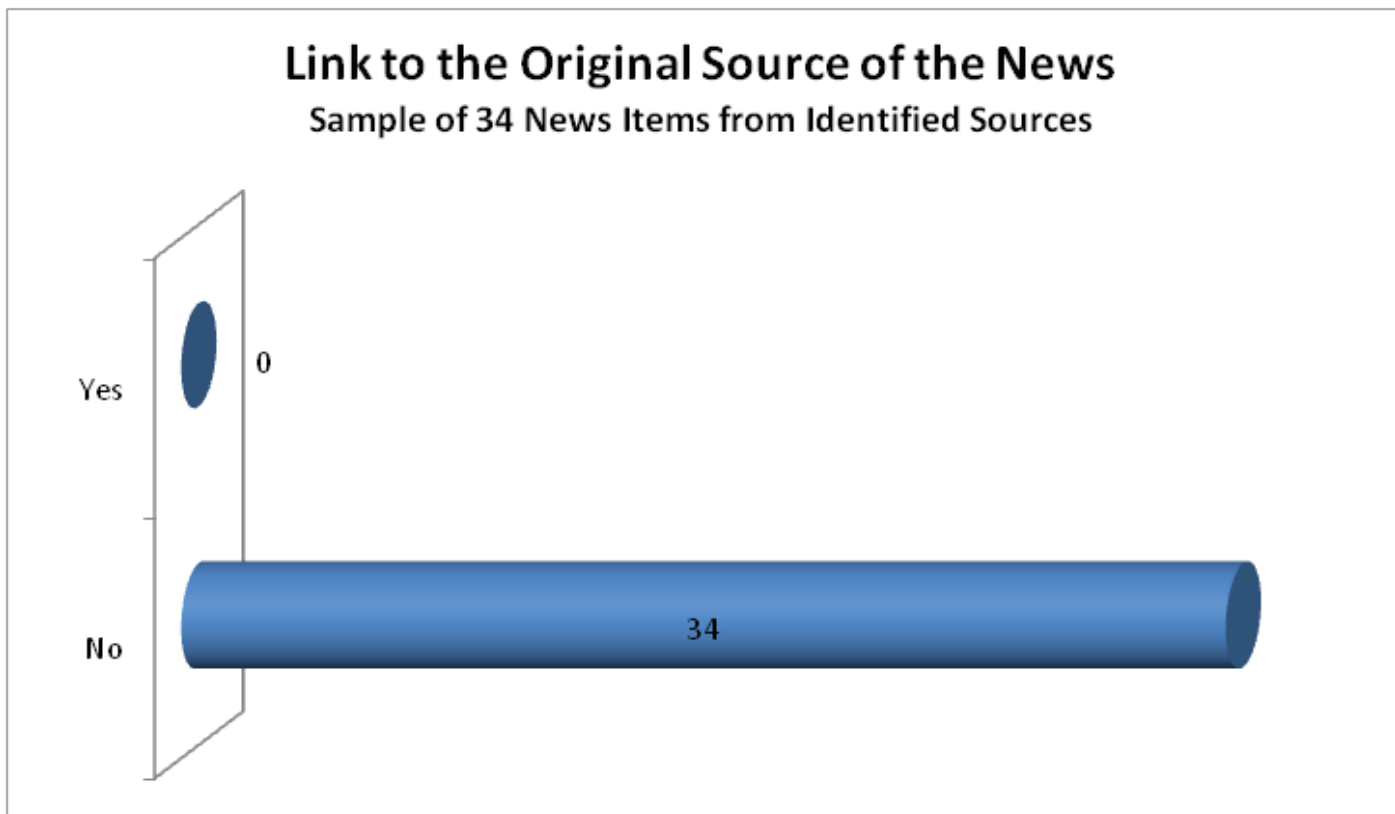

Figure 39

3- News, Pictures and Copyrights

Below, figure 40 shows that 74% of the monitored news on both websites was posted with accompanying images and 26% without pictures.

Posted News Accompanied by a Picture
Sample of 135 Posted News Items

No, 26%

Yes, 74%

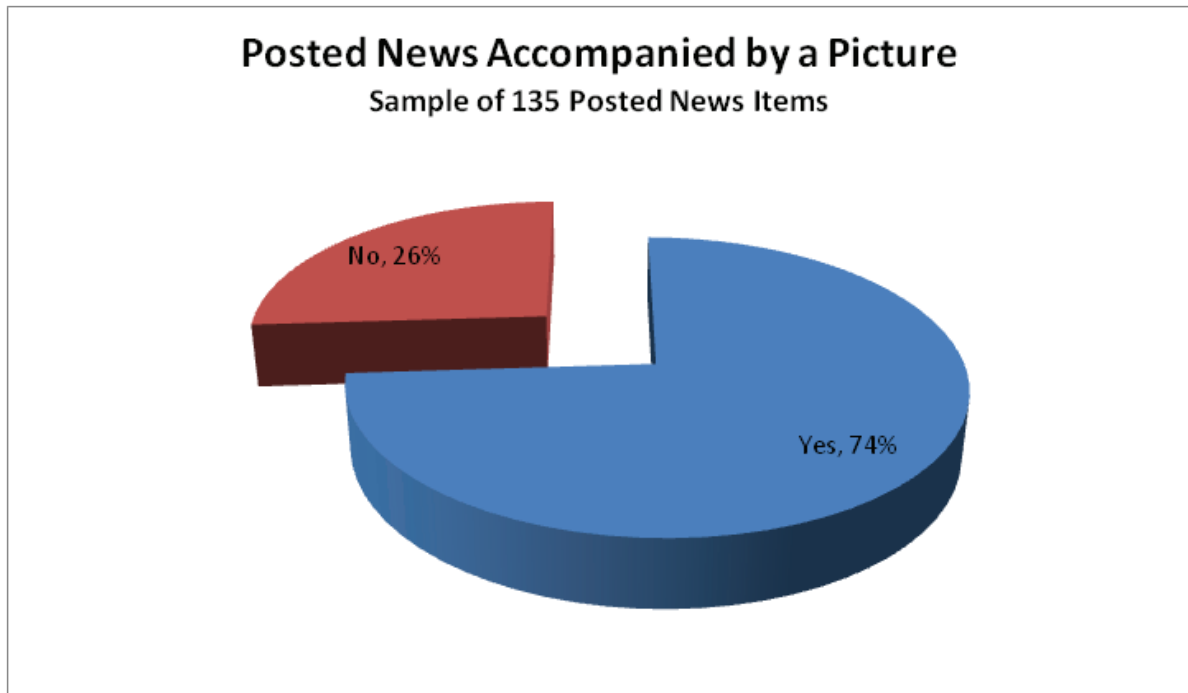Figure 40

It is clear however, that property rights and copyrights were not respected on a large scale by the two monitored websites since 92% of the posted pictures attached to the news did not include the name of the photographer or the source of the pictures (Figure 41).

Mention of Copyrights of Attached Pictures to the News
Sample of 100 Posted Pictures

Yes, 8%

No, 92%
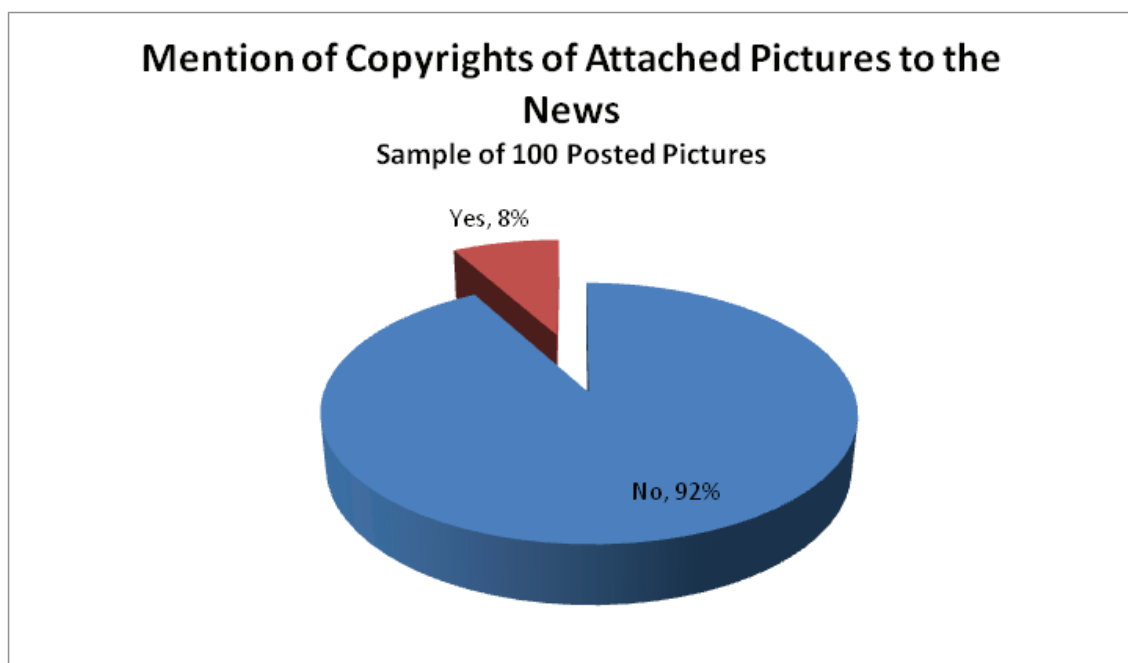
Figure 41

A close analysis of these pictures would indicate that only 11% of them are images exclusively belonging to Elnashra and Lebanon Files (Figure 42) while 31% are images of completely unknown sources and 58% are copied from other websites.
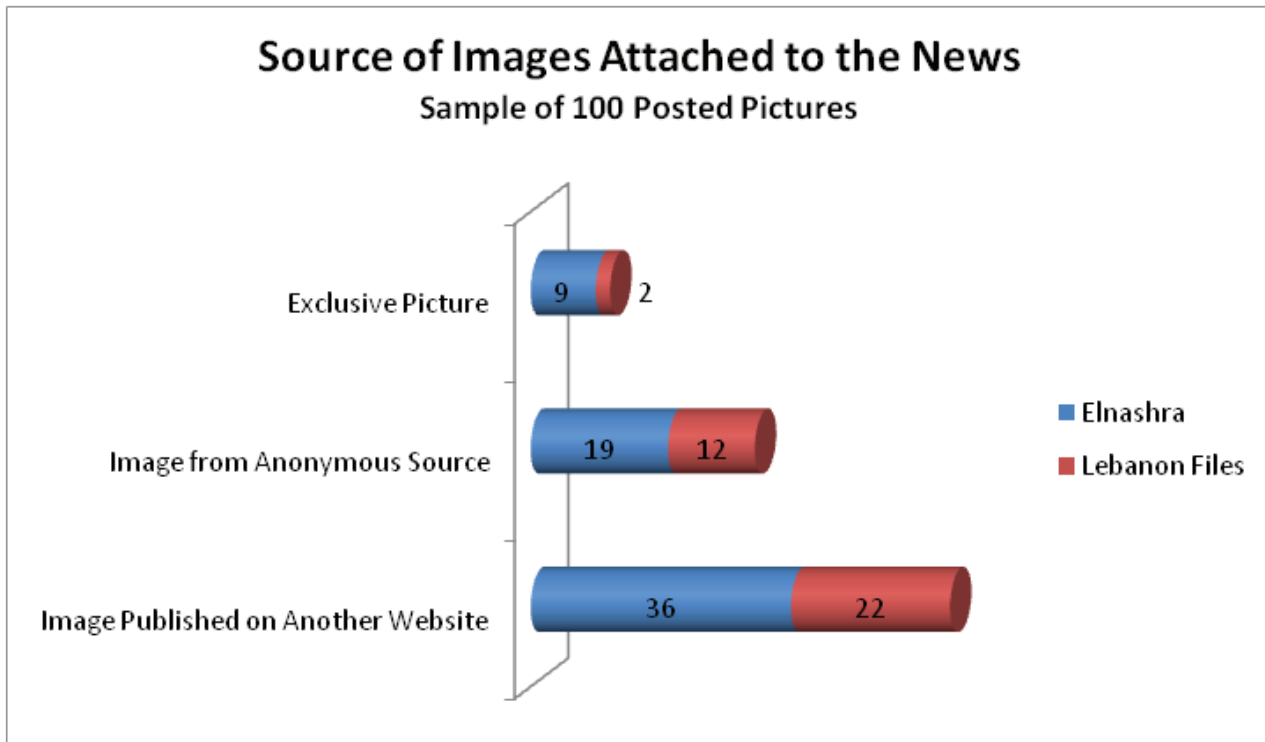

Figure 42

These results reflect a total lack of respect to intellectual property rights as well as copyrights rights and they contradict the professional and ethical principles of journalism.

CONCLUSION

The study confirmed the existence of numerous violations of the Journalists' Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon signed by the media. In this study, we focused particularly on the extent of compliance with Articles 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 of the pact which determine the principles of dealing with the sources of information, and the results were as follows:

1- Article 6 confirms the "right of access to information, news and statistics that are relevant to citizens, from different sources …"

According to 65% of media chief editors, this article was not respected. They also found serious difficulty in accessing information that would have allowed them to consolidate their reports and analyses.

Additionally, no professional standards exist for dealing with media sources. It all depends on the nature of relationship that prevails between the journalist and his special sources. This relationship could be one of "independence" or "affiliation" or even on the basis of "mutual interests." This situation definitely affects the political affiliation of the media.

On the other hand, "striving to not disclose the sources of confidential news" led to keeping the sources of published news anonymous 40% of the time in the absence of professional standards that would determine the method of dealing with unknown sources.

2- Article 7 calls on journalists to "… 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…"

Television, radio and printed media seem to have respected these principles, except for the unjustified proportion of anonymous sources of news and documents.

However, the blatant violations appeared particularly in news websites. The study indicated that 92% of pictures attached to news and articles do not show any signature or source, in addition to the fact that a proportion varying between 50% and 60% of the published news do not show sources.

Part II of Article 7 stipulates that: "Unsupported slander or accusation is considered a blatant breach of the profession ethics; consequently, any information proved wrong shall always be corrected."

Despite this clear stipulation, the study proved that this principle was not respected, especially by television outlets. The results of the analyses of the published news showed that some media use direct accusations, thus taking the role of the judiciary and accusing citizens and politicians. This practice led victims of this slander to request "putting an end to the violations perpetrated by media with regard to news circulated without authentic documentation and firm evidence," according to Ogero.

3- Article 8 of the pact requires that "Journalists shall refrain from publishing off-the-record information (…) upon verification of its accuracy and reliability or publication without indicating the source."

It appears from the coverage that media have taken advantage of this article through publishing news without mentioning their source. However, there is no evidence that Lebanese media resorted to investigate and verify their accuracy. The study proved that the proportion of cross-checking with other sources for authentication varied between 18% and 38%.

4- Article 9 of the pact stipulates that "Journalists shall apply the highest levels of objectivity when "associating" published materials to their sources…" The study proved that media outlets, whether printed, television or radio, have complied to a very large extent with this article. The proportion of compliance was between 78% and 86% for published material attributed to identified sources. However, the proportion of news not attributed to a source was still high, varying between 14% and 22%. Media institutions should make a more serious effort to limit this phenomenon.

On the other hand, news websites did not respect this article of the pact since the proportion of news and pictures from unknown sources was very high.

However, it should be noted that the use of anonymous sources on the issue of the illegal internet has directly impacted the evaluation of the truthfulness of the information attributed to sources. This is true especially when we know that the analysis of the nature of news published in television, radio and prints showed a contradiction in the circulation of information that is sometimes attributed to the "same sources."

The study also showed an imbalance in exposing points of views and opinions related to this issue. This can be considered a case of bias in support of an opinion over another that is practiced by some media. Some media considered that they were exclusively publishing truthful facts and that there was no need to expose other points of view, while it is imperative to present multiple opinions.

It was also evident that the media, especially in television and printed coverage, tended to adopt a certain point of view backed by the evidence supporting this view. They also used a supportive language that distorted facts and expressed judgments of the opposing side involved in the issue (MTV, LBC, Assafır, Addiyar, etc.).

5- Article 10 of the pact stipulates that "Journalists shall commit to applying accuracy and objectivity in the drafting, editing, directing, and diffusion of information, documents, images, and scenes…" However, the study proved that this article was not respected for many reasons, including:

- Absence of cross-checking the information in the case of the illegal internet which led to the transmission of contradictory information from one single source. Some media resorted to copying automatically from each other (intentionally or unintentionally) to the point where it appeared as if the sources were numerous while in fact, it was one single source from which newspapers, radios, televisions and websites copied their information.

- The agendas of different sources contributed in orienting the news in a specific direction; this helped in corrupting the narrative of the illegal internet issue and transforming it into a political case.

- Presenting a comprehensive news report was not respected. The context was not mentioned all the time and news was selected according to the interest of each media such as focusing on surveillance cameras in the capital Beirut and ignoring other factors related to corruption in the internet issue."

Recommendations

Some legal, professional and ethical recommendations could be proposed to improve the use of sources and the access to information:

- Benefiting from the access to information law by the media first, and promoting it among the citizens in order to disseminate the culture of transparency and responsibility.

- Organize a workshop aiming to formulate professional standards that govern the way of dealing with sources, especially anonymous ones.

- Organize training sessions for journalists to educate them on the use of sources (map of sources, agenda and standards).

- Emphasize that journalists are not judges, and they are not supposed to issue verdicts and accusations. They have to expose facts after verification and present the different points of view about the same issue.

- Drawing a line between the use of sources and the ownership of the media institutions and their political affiliation.

- Training on the promotion of pluralism and diversity that can enhance different points of views and basing editorial policies on ethical standards.

APPENDIX

Survey on Journalistic Sources
Questions addressed to chief editors
in media institutions

1- Codes of ethics on practicing journalism confirm the "right of the journalist to have access to all sources of information." According to you, the access to information in Lebanon is:
*Easy   *Difficult   *Very Difficult *Usually Impossible

2- Are there unified principles and standards with regard to journalistic sources that editors respect and comply with?
*Yes   *In Preparation   *No

3- What are the types of sources that you use most in your work?
*Identified Sources   *Anonymous Sources

4- Can the use of "anonymous sources" (such as knowledgeable sources, government sources, responsible sources) in news reports affect the credibility of the news and the trust of the public in the media?
*Agree   *Disagree

5- Do you follow a policy of informing the readers or the viewers as much as possible of the reason for not disclosing the name of the source that deserves protection?
*Yes   *No

6- Can the non-identification of the source facilitate the promotion of false news by this source?
*Agree   *Disagree

7- Can the non-identification the source encourage unethical journalistic practices such as fabricating information and attributing it to unknown sources?
*Agree   *Disagree

8- What professional difficulties do you encounter in dealing with sources?
*Conditional Information   *Trunked Information   *Fabricated Information   *Other

9- With regard to leaked information from unknown sources that prefer to not be disclosed, does a journalist, before publishing it, verify it from another source?
*Agree   *Not Necessarily   *Disagree

10- According to you, could enacting the law of the right of access to information achieve more transparency in journalism?

*Yes   *No

11- Could this law limit corruption through disclosing information from the public sector?

*Yes   *No

12- What are the practical obstacles that hinder the access of journalists to accurate information? Please arrange answers by level of importance according to you:

- Not enacting the project law of the right of access to information

- Absence of governmental information electronically or the impossibility of obtaining documents.

- Lack of interest on the part of media and academic institutions in providing expertise and technical skills in cross-checking and verifying information.

- Other. Please elaborate.

13- Does the fact of concealing the sources of information amplify the magnitude of accusations and incitement in the media?

*Yes   *No

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