

Presenting a Model for News Coverage of Cultural Events in Iraq in the Arab Electronic Press

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The present study was conducted with the aim of designing and explaining a model of news coverage in Arab electronic press regarding cultural events in Iraq. Considering the multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and culturally diverse context of Iraq, the media coverage of cultural events in Arabic-language outlets is not only a reflection of cultural realities but also a mechanism for the reproduction of meaning, identity, and social discourses. This research adopts a mixed qualitative–quantitative approach and employs Strauss and Corbin’s grounded theory methodology. In this study, 15 in-depth interviews were conducted with experts in the fields of media and culture, and thematic analysis was utilized to extract conceptual codes and categories. The findings indicated that the media coverage of Iraq’s cultural events follows a paradigmatic model comprising five key components: Causal conditions (e.g., the necessity of representing cultural identity after security crises), Intervening conditions (such as political and economic pressures), Contextual conditions (including Iraq’s multilayered cultural landscape and media structure), Strategies (like narrative-centered coverage and audience engagement), and Consequences (such as increased cultural literacy and the consolidation of the media’s role in cultural representation). The final model offers a systematic framework for understanding the processes of cultural representation in Arabic-language media and holds potential applicability in media policymaking, cultural journalism education, and strengthening Iraq’s cultural diplomacy.

Keywords: News Coverage, Grounded Theory, Arab Media, Iraqi Culture, Cultural Journalism, Paradigmatic Analysis.

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1. Introduction

In the contemporary media landscape, the role of electronic press in shaping sociocultural narratives and framing collective identities has become increasingly pivotal. In contexts such as Iraq—where the interplay of culture, politics, ethnicity, and religion is deeply entrenched—the manner in which cultural events are represented in the Arab electronic press carries critical implications for national identity, social

cohesion, and international perception. Media content not only reflects existing realities but also constructs new layers of meaning through selective framing, discourse reproduction, and ideologically driven narratives (Ardakani Fard & Azimi Hashemi, 2021). As the media evolve into strategic actors in shaping public consciousness, understanding their role in cultural coverage becomes imperative, particularly in post-conflict societies such as Iraq where representation is inherently political and multilayered.



The Arab electronic press, as part of a broader digitized media ecosystem, has experienced a rapid transformation with the proliferation of social media platforms, digital journalism, and citizen reporting. These changes have blurred the traditional boundaries between producers and consumers of news content, giving rise to participatory models of communication and expanding the scope of cultural storytelling (Ahmad & Murad, 2020). In Iraq, the proliferation of digital media has amplified the visibility of cultural events such as festivals, literary conferences, art exhibitions, and heritage preservation campaigns, which had previously received limited coverage in mainstream outlets. However, while this digital shift has enhanced access and visibility, it has also raised questions about authenticity, ideological filtering, and representational biases—issues that are central to the current study.

The representation of culture in media is closely tied to the construction of public opinion, particularly in societies marked by historical trauma, pluralism, and sectarian complexity. Iraq is emblematic of such a context, where the media often serve dual roles: as platforms for cultural dialogue and as arenas for political contestation. As Engin (2022) shows in the case of Syrian refugees in Turkey, media outlets frequently adopt selective representation strategies that reflect nationalistic or ideological objectives rather than objective reporting (Engin, 2022). This observation applies with equal force to Iraq, where coverage of cultural events may be filtered through the lens of ethnic, religious, or geopolitical affiliations. The consequences of such selective framing are not merely symbolic but have tangible implications for national cohesion and regional diplomacy.

A related challenge pertains to the professional competencies of cultural journalists in Iraq and the Arab world more broadly. As Golpira et al. (2016) argue, the relationship between cultural intelligence and job performance among journalists is a critical determinant of media quality and representational fairness (Golpira et al., 2016). Journalists who lack the intercultural sensitivity and analytical tools required for nuanced cultural reporting may unwittingly perpetuate stereotypes or overlook key cultural dynamics. This is further compounded by the scarcity of specialized training programs and editorial policies that prioritize cultural content. In the Iraqi context, these limitations

are often exacerbated by fragile institutional support, politicized media ownership, and limited access to verified cultural data, all of which contribute to fragmented and inconsistent cultural narratives.

Furthermore, the socio-political climate in Iraq has rendered cultural journalism a contested field. As Kobrlo (2024) highlights in the domain of domestic violence media coverage, Arab press often oscillates between normative silence and reactive sensationalism, depending on the political stakes involved (Kobrlo, 2024). This dynamic is mirrored in the coverage of cultural events, which are at times ignored, depoliticized, or selectively elevated to serve elite interests. In this environment, cultural representation in Arab electronic press becomes an act of meaning-making that is both strategic and contested. The absence of transparent editorial policies, consistent guidelines for content selection, and institutional mechanisms for accountability further complicate the credibility of cultural media.

In parallel, the digital transformation of media has shifted the architecture of public engagement, introducing new challenges and opportunities for cultural representation. Social media platforms in particular have enabled new forms of visibility for cultural issues while also facilitating the spread of misinformation, distortion, and politically motivated framing. As noted by Numan (2023), the disinformation ecosystem in Iraq—especially during crisis periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic—has exposed the vulnerabilities of youth to manipulative narratives disseminated through social networks (Numan, 2023). This phenomenon underscores the urgency of integrating media literacy and critical discourse training into both journalistic and public education programs, especially in relation to culture.

Moreover, cultural representation in the media cannot be disentangled from the broader discussion on soft power, public diplomacy, and national branding. As Obaid and Kishore (2022) demonstrate through their case study on sport marketing, social media and digital platforms have become key instruments for projecting identity and cultural capital in Iraq (Obaid & Kishore, 2022). This insight is equally applicable to cultural journalism, where media framing plays a direct role in shaping Iraq's image across the Arab world. The narratives constructed through cultural coverage have

the potential to foster regional solidarity, correct orientalist misconceptions, and attract global partnerships in fields such as heritage preservation, tourism, and education.

The significance of these dynamics is further underscored by Ahmad and Murad (2020), who highlight how the digital media sphere in Iraqi Kurdistan contributed to public panic and psychological stress during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ahmad & Murad, 2020). Their findings suggest that media representation—whether of crises or culture—has direct social impacts. In a similar vein, Aljuboori et al. (2020) emphasize that social media use among university students in Iraq significantly influences knowledge production and civic behavior (Aljuboori et al., 2020). Given that many cultural consumers and producers in Iraq belong to the university-educated youth demographic, the ways in which culture is presented in the media has direct bearing on intergenerational knowledge transfer and identity formation.

While the digital media ecosystem presents opportunities for inclusive cultural dialogue, it also invites scrutiny of the regulatory, ethical, and epistemological frameworks within which such dialogue occurs. As Tirgar Fakheri et al. (2021) argue in their foresight study of Iranian media, the future of public media systems depends on their ability to adapt to technological disruptions while maintaining institutional legitimacy and cultural responsiveness (Tirgar Fakheri et al., 2021). This argument is particularly salient in the Iraqi context, where the absence of coherent long-term media strategies often leads to reactive rather than proactive cultural coverage. Without strategic planning, investment in editorial capacities, and integration of audience feedback mechanisms, Arab electronic press may remain limited in its ability to construct cohesive and representative cultural narratives.

Additionally, Iraq's post-2003 media environment is characterized by pluralism on the surface and polarization underneath. According to Ardakani Fard and Azimi Hashemi (2021), media platforms—especially digital outlets—often serve not as neutral spaces of information dissemination but as battlegrounds of ideology, nationalism, and identity politics (Ardakani Fard & Azimi Hashemi, 2021). In the case of cultural coverage, this means that what is reported, how it is

reported, and which cultural expressions receive visibility are all deeply political decisions. Such editorial selectivity can either reinforce ethno-sectarian divides or contribute to national reconciliation, depending on the values and practices that guide media institutions.

Finally, the growing recognition of culture as a strategic resource—both domestically and internationally—calls for a reevaluation of how Arab electronic press engages with cultural subjects. As Ding et al. (2022) have shown in the context of China's cultural industry innovation, media systems that align cultural narratives with development goals tend to produce more coherent and sustainable representational frameworks (Ding et al., 2022). Iraq, facing the dual imperatives of reconstruction and identity consolidation, stands to benefit from a similar approach. A structured, inclusive, and dialogic model of cultural representation in Arab electronic media could not only amplify Iraq's cultural diversity but also serve as a foundation for cultural diplomacy, regional dialogue, and intercommunal understanding.

This study therefore aims to design and validate a model for news coverage of cultural events in Iraq within the Arab electronic press.

2. Methodology

Given that the objective of the present study is to develop a model for news coverage in Arab electronic press concerning cultural events in Iraq, the research methodology is divided into two parts. The first part adopts a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is defined as any type of inquiry that yields findings not obtained through statistical procedures or any form of quantification. Qualitative research is a complex process that typically requires a relatively long period of time and involves inductive inference based on the perspectives of participants. In this process, emphasis is placed on participants' viewpoints, and the data are analyzed inductively. Subsequently, the research report presents the process in a clear and persuasive manner.

In the second part, the validity and fit of the proposed model are examined. For this reason, grounded theory methodology was employed in this dissertation. Based on the dimensions under investigation, this study utilized grounded theory or data-driven theory. Specifically, the systematic design and structured method of Strauss and Corbin were adopted. Grounded theory is a systematic and qualitative method for

generating a theory that broadly explains processes, actions, or interactions related to a subject with personal identity.

The statistical population for this study consisted of ten individuals, including managers, activists, experts, and researchers in the fields of media and women's culture, as well as producers and executives of television programs and satellite channels in Iraq. These individuals were interviewed to gather their perspectives on the research topic. The selected experts were required to have knowledge and experience in social media and be actively involved in the domain of women's media and cultural representation.

In the quantitative section, a descriptive-survey research method was employed. The aim of this stage was to validate the model developed in the qualitative phase. The population in this phase also included media executives, activists, experts, and researchers in Arab-language news media in Iraq. Using convenience sampling, 384 participants were selected. The measurement instrument used was derived from the analysis of qualitative data and was presented to 15 specialized experts for evaluation. The instrument's validity and reliability were subsequently assessed. For evaluating construct validity and reliability, first- and second-order confirmatory factor analyses and item analysis were conducted. Cronbach's alpha was employed to assess internal consistency.

The sampling method for the qualitative phase was purposive. Initially, interviews were conducted with 10 individuals from the targeted group. As the interviews began to show redundancy, the results were presented to relevant experts for validation. Based on expert feedback and consultations, it was determined that further interviews should be conducted. As a result, three additional informed individuals were interviewed. With a total of 15 interviews, theoretical saturation was reached. Upon expert validation, the researcher concluded that no further interviews were required, and the final number of participants in the qualitative phase was confirmed at 15 experts and key informants.

3. Findings

At the first stage, all 15 in-depth and semi-structured interviews were thoroughly analyzed. Utilizing thematic analysis, the researcher examined the latent content of the interviews and extracted key concepts and initial

codes. These conceptual codes, generated using MAXQDA software, constitute a major outcome of the analytical process. A full list of these codes is provided in the appendix of the dissertation.

A central element of this study's analysis is the examination of the conceptual and internal content of interview transcripts. In this phase, the main criterion is not the frequency of code repetition but rather the depth of information within each interview and the quality of the extracted concepts. To assess the contribution of each document to the analytical process and its role in reaching theoretical saturation, scientometric visualizations were developed for all 15 interviews. These visual aids, produced using MAXQDA, illustrate the distribution and frequency of codes from each interview and assist in better understanding the document's position within the model-building process.

Axial coding represents a key stage in qualitative data analysis, aimed at organizing and reconstructing the initial codes derived during open coding. In this stage, the researcher seeks to form systematic and coherent structures of conceptual relationships by establishing meaningful links between categories. Unlike open coding, which emphasizes the identification of individual concepts, axial coding focuses on mapping causal, contextual, strategic, and consequential connections between those concepts.

During this process, a central phenomenon is selected as the conceptual core, around which related concepts are structured. These relationships are typically explored through four analytical dimensions: causal conditions (factors and motivations leading to the emergence of the phenomenon), contextual and intervening conditions (the background and influencing factors shaping the manifestation of the phenomenon), strategies (actions and reactions in response to the phenomenon), and consequences (the final outcomes and impacts of the phenomenon). This multidimensional framework enables the researcher to analyze the studied phenomenon in its real-world complexity.

Ultimately, axial coding functions as a bridge between raw data and theoretical interpretation, allowing the researcher to construct a coherent and intelligible narrative of the research reality—one in which concepts are interconnected and contribute to the development of the study's final theoretical model.

Causal conditions refer to the foundational factors that contribute to the emergence and development of the main phenomenon in the research. These may include prior experiences, structural dynamics, organizational transformations, or external stimuli that have directed actors along specific trajectories. Essentially, these conditions represent the starting point of a chain of events leading to the formation of the core category. Analyzing causal conditions enables the researcher to more accurately explain the underlying reasons and contexts of the phenomenon's occurrence.

Analysis of interview data revealed that several recurring and significant elements influenced motivations or pressures driving particular decisions and behaviors. These conditions serve as the bedrock upon which other aspects of the phenomenon—such as strategies and consequences—are built.

The analysis identified a set of codes and concepts considered the foundational roots of the central phenomenon. Table 1 provides an overview of these causal conditions and illustrates how they contributed to the evolution and reinforcement of the phenomenon under study.

Table 1

Identified Concepts and Categories Related to Causal Conditions

Main Categories	Subcategories (Concepts)	Extracted Codes
Necessity of Media Coverage of Iraq's Cultural Events	Enhancing Iraq's cultural image in the media	- Highlighting Iraq's cultural and civilizational diversity - Showcasing underrepresented cultural capacities in the media - Reinforcing Iraq's cultural position in the region through media
	Expansion of Cultural Events in Iraq	- Holding festivals, exhibitions, and cultural conferences - Emergence of prominent cultural, artistic, and literary figures - Government and institutional focus on soft diplomacy
Empowerment of Arab-language Media	Enhancing journalists' professional skills	- Training cultural journalists in in-depth reporting - Capacity to analyze cultural events from a regional perspective - Familiarity with Iraqi local culture to avoid stereotyping
	Upgrading media tools and mechanisms	- Access to reliable news sources on Iraqi culture - Use of interactive platforms for content creation - Editorial structures tailored to cultural content
Need to Redefine the Role of Media in Cultural Representation	Gap between media and cultural realities in Iraq	- Media's neglect of cultural dimensions in Arab news - Excessive focus on politics and security over culture - Weakness in local and human-centered narratives of cultural events
	Necessity of reforming editorial decision-making structures	- Ineffectiveness in cultural prioritization in editorial policies - Dominance of political perspectives in media cultural policy - Lack of coherent strategies for continuous coverage of cultural events

The central phenomenon represents the conceptual core of the research—a prominent concept around which all other analytical dimensions revolve. It is derived from

the integration and synthesis of key concepts identified during open coding and serves as the backbone of the emerging theory. The central phenomenon reflects the

most significant issues, behaviors, or processes that were repeatedly and meaningfully highlighted in the data.

Careful selection of the central phenomenon enables the researcher to pursue a coherent and purposeful analytical path, organizing other categories—such as causal, contextual, strategic, and consequential conditions—around it. The central phenomenon plays a decisive role in constructing the final conceptual model and serves as a point of reference for interpreting findings and addressing the study’s research questions.

Table 2

Identified Concepts and Categories Related to the Central Phenomenon

Main Categories	Subcategories (Concepts)	Extracted Codes
Comprehensive Model for Electronic News Coverage of Iraq’s Cultural Events in Arab Media	Discourse and content coherence in cultural coverage	- Formulation of shared guidelines for selecting cultural topics - Use of indigenous and non-stereotypical narratives in cultural representation - Creation of a priority-based database of cultural topics tailored to Arab audiences
	Enhancing professional structure in cultural editorial units	- Clarifying the roles and positions of cultural journalists in Arab-language media - Adopting successful international models for culture-focused coverage - Assigning a dedicated section for cultural news within editorial structures

Contextual conditions refer to the set of environmental, structural, cultural, or organizational settings that influence the formation, continuity, or transformation of the phenomenon under study. These conditions play an indirect role in the development of the phenomenon and may either facilitate or constrain it. Unlike causal factors, which initiate the occurrence of a phenomenon, contextual conditions relate more to the environment in which the phenomenon is allowed to emerge and evolve. Identifying such conditions enables the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the settings in which actions and decisions take place. These factors may include institutional structures, social norms, ongoing

In this research, a concept was systematically identified from the interviews that exhibited the strongest connection to participants’ primary concerns. This concept was selected as the central phenomenon and became the foundation for subsequent analyses, ultimately leading to a structured and precise understanding of the research subject. **Table 2** presents the components and indicators of the central phenomenon.

policies, cultural characteristics, available resources, or even the level of access to information. Analyzing these settings is essential for a realistic understanding of the phenomenon, as many actions and reactions cannot be properly explained without considering the context in which they occur.

In this study, a detailed analysis of interview content led to the identification of contextual conditions that, in the form of organizational, cultural, and communicative environments, influenced the formation of the central phenomenon (ibid.).

Table 3 classifies these conditions and illustrates their role in the final analytical framework of the research.

Table 3*Identified Concepts and Categories Related to Contextual Conditions*

Main Categories	Subcategories (Concepts)	Extracted Codes
Cultural and Social Contexts of Iraqi and Arab Society	Ethnic and cultural diversity in Iraq	- Multicultural structure of Iraqi society - Tension between tradition and modernity in the cultural system - Role of minorities in producing cultural events
	Social beliefs about culture and media	- Instrumental view of culture in society - Decline in cultural media literacy - Public distrust in media regarding cultural coverage
Media and Institutional Structures Governing Arab Electronic Press	Professional status of Arab media in Iraq	- Weakness in training systems for cultural journalism - Lack of specialized personnel in the cultural sector - Absence of educational platforms for cultural journalists
	Governmental interaction with the press	- Role of the state in supporting or supervising cultural production - Influence of cultural policies on media agendas - Lack of transparent frameworks for supporting independent press

As shown in Table 3, contextual conditions comprise two main categories—"Media and Institutional Structures Governing Arab Electronic Press" and "Cultural and Social Contexts of Iraqi and Arab Society"—as well as six subcategories and twelve initial codes.

Intervening conditions refer to those factors that mediate the relationship between causal conditions and the central phenomenon, acting as either facilitators or constraints. These conditions often exert indirect influence over the formation and continuation of the phenomenon and may alter the intensity or direction of the effects caused by causal factors. In other words, intervening conditions function as moderators, shaping the course of individual or collective actions in relation to the phenomenon.

These conditions may be structural, organizational, psychological, or technological. Examples include prevailing laws, implementation policies, participant skill and awareness levels, available resources, or communication technologies. Identifying such conditions helps the researcher attain a more nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in how causal factors influence the phenomenon.

In this study, through content analysis of the interviews, a set of intervening conditions was extracted that significantly moderated the relationship between causal categories and the central phenomenon. These factors are presented in a categorized form in Table 4, laying the foundation for subsequent analysis of strategies and consequences.

Table 4*Identified Concepts and Categories Related to Intervening Conditions*

Main Category	Subcategories (Concepts)	Extracted Codes
Influence of Media Politics and Economics on Cultural Coverage	Political intervention in electronic press operations	- Pressure to suppress the publication of certain cultural events - Redirecting cultural content toward political group interests - Threats to the independence of cultural media by political institutions
	Economic limitations of cultural press	- Preference for clickbait topics over cultural content - Budget reductions for cultural reporting - Inability to attract advertisements for cultural topics

As shown in Table 4, intervening conditions are represented by one main category—"Influence of Media

Politics and Economics on Cultural Coverage"—and two subcategories, encompassing six initial codes.

Strategies refer to the set of actions, responses, and decisions undertaken by individuals or organizations when confronted with the central phenomenon and influenced by causal, contextual, and intervening conditions. These strategies reflect the observable manifestations of how actors interact with the phenomenon and delineate the paths chosen to manage, adapt to, confront, or capitalize on it.

In grounded theory development, strategies form a critical part of the analysis as they highlight the agency of actors responding to the prevailing circumstances. These responses may occur at individual, collective, or institutional levels and may range from grassroots efforts to high-level organizational interventions.

Strategies can be based on deliberate planning, past experiences, available resources, or even environmental pressures.

In this research, following an in-depth examination of interviews and identification of the central phenomenon, participant strategies were extracted and categorized. These strategies illustrate how individuals and institutions responded to the challenges and opportunities posed by the central phenomenon. A comprehensive list of these strategies is provided in Table 5, offering a clear picture of the adopted action paths.

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Table 5

Identified Concepts and Categories Related to Strategies

Main Categories	Subcategories (Concepts)	Extracted Codes
Enhancing Quality of Cultural Content Production and Representation in Arab Media	Developing professional guidelines for cultural coverage	- Designing specialized news formats for Iraqi cultural events - Establishing language, visual, and structural standards for cultural content - Modeling successful media practices from the region and globally (adapted to Iraqi context)
	Empowering human resources in cultural media	- Specialized training of cultural journalists in discourse-building and storytelling - Involving local and cultural analysts in content development - Producing in-depth field reports on cultural events by local journalists
Expanding Media and Cultural Engagement with Arab Audiences	Strengthening interactive networks between media and cultural communities	- Launching interactive campaigns for cultural event coverage - Utilizing social media to increase public engagement - Creating multimedia platforms for two-way communication with Arab audiences
	Promoting cultural community participation in news production	- Inviting artists, writers, and researchers to contribute cultural content - Engaging citizen journalists to cover local cultural events - Organizing workshop-based programs to teach cultural content creation to the public

As shown in Table 5, strategies encompass two main categories—“Enhancing Quality of Cultural Content Production and Representation in Arab Media” and “Expanding Media and Cultural Engagement with Arab Audiences”—as well as four subcategories and twelve initial codes.

Consequences refer to the direct or indirect outcomes resulting from the strategies and actions undertaken by actors in response to the central phenomenon. These consequences may be positive or negative, short-term or

long-term, and individual or organizational. Analyzing consequences enables the researcher to accurately assess the effectiveness of strategies and the extent to which the implicit goals of actions have been realized. In grounded theory, consequences play a critical role in completing the theoretical narrative. They illustrate the outcomes of actions and decisions taken under specific contextual conditions and indicate the degree of their impact on the existing situation.

In this regard, consequences not only represent practical outcomes but also contribute to a cyclical understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

In the present study, through detailed analysis of interview data, consequences resulting from the implementation of various participant-driven strategies were identified and categorized. These consequences are

listed in Table 6 and reflect the diverse effects of actions on individual, organizational, and even structural levels relevant to the research subject. This analysis constitutes the final part of axial coding and serves as a critical bridge to the stage of selective coding and the development of the final theory.

Table 6

Identified Concepts and Categories Related to Consequences

Main Categories	Subcategories (Concepts)	Extracted Codes
Enhancing Cultural and Media Literacy in Society	Increasing public awareness of Iraq's cultural heritage	- Effective media reflection of local cultural events - Broader societal recognition of Iraq's cultural diversity - Reduction of cultural and ethnic stereotypes
	Strengthening critical and analytical thinking in audiences	- Promoting cultural critique in media content - Enabling audience ability to distinguish realism from propaganda - Expanding public participation in feedback on cultural content
Establishing the Role of Arab Media in Representing Iraqi Culture	Legitimizing Arab electronic press as cultural authorities	- Increased academic and media citations of cultural reports - Invitations to Arab media to cover official cultural events - Participation of Arab journalists in regional cultural movements
	Enhancing professional credibility of cultural journalists	- Elevated status of journalists within editorial teams - Growing demand for cultural journalism as a specialty - Inclusion of journalists in cultural policy-making processes
Strengthening National Cohesion and Iraqi Cultural Identity	Reinforcing intercultural ties across the country	- Highlighting commonalities between ethnic and religious groups via media - Prominence of coexistence narratives in news production - Increasing cultural interactions among Iraqi provinces and regions
	Advancing Iraq's cultural diplomacy in the Arab world	- Increased cultural exchange with Arab-language media across the region - Promoting Iraq as a vibrant cultural nation - Utilizing media as a tool of cultural foreign policy

As demonstrated in Table 6, the consequences are categorized into three main areas: "Enhancing Cultural and Media Literacy in Society," "Establishing the Role of Arab Media in Representing Iraqi Culture," and "Strengthening National Cohesion and Iraqi Cultural Identity." These encompass six subcategories and eighteen initial conceptual codes.

Ultimately, following in-depth analysis of the MAXQDA output and comprehensive model evaluation, the final theoretical framework of the study was constructed. This model was developed based on the grounded theory approach as formulated by Strauss and Corbin and derived from the three-phase coding process—open,

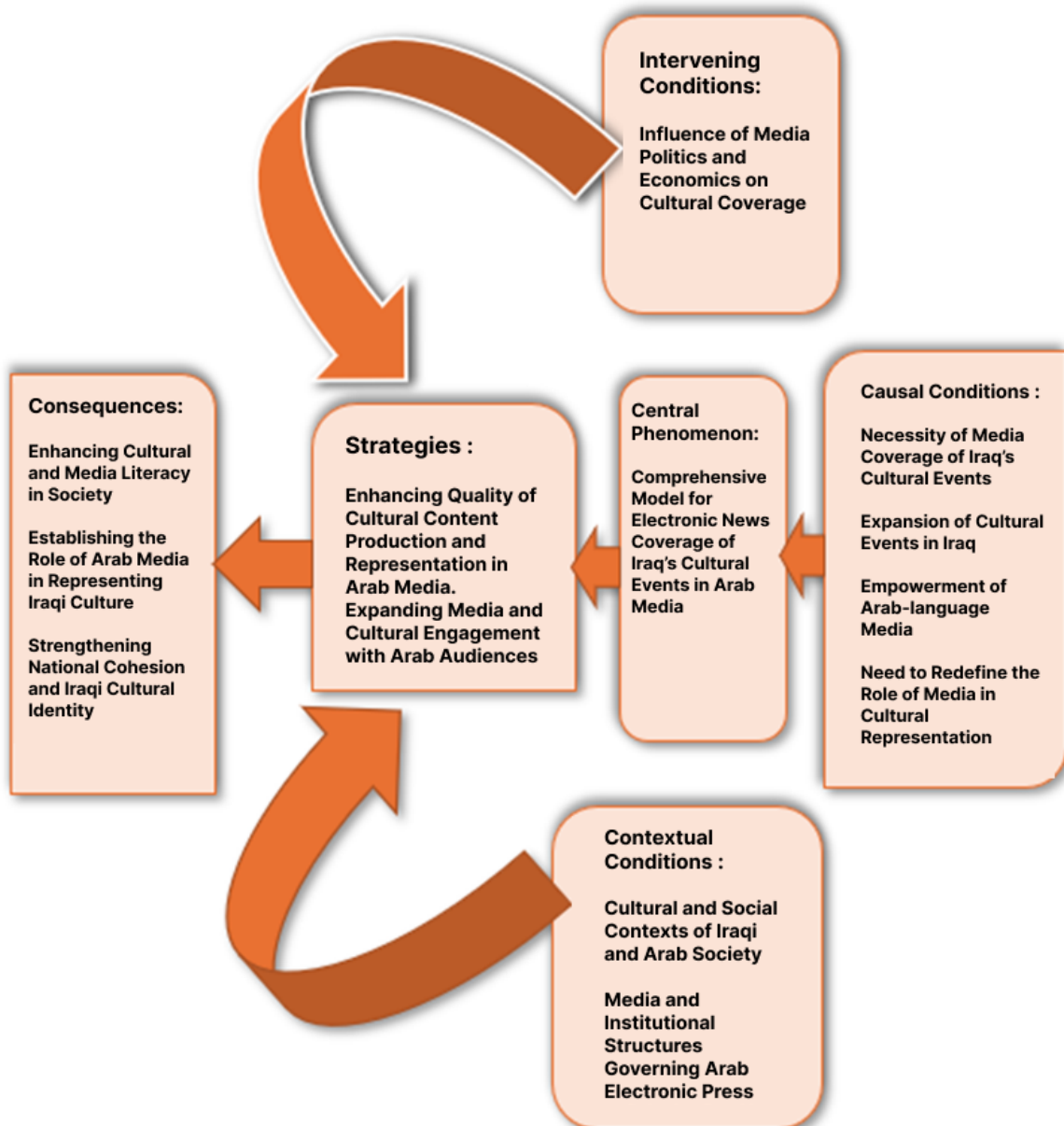
axial, and selective—and presented in the form of a paradigmatic model.

Within this framework, twelve core categories or axial codes were identified, grounded in the data analysis and validated through scientific overlap and credible software outputs. The final model of this research can serve as both a theoretical and practical framework in the field of the study, paving the way for future research and development of actionable strategies. It may also be empirically tested in statistical populations.

The integration of qualitative and quantitative methods in this study not only enriched the conceptual depth but also enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings.

Figure 1

Final Model of the Research Based on Strauss and Corbin's Grounded Theory Approach



4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to construct and validate a conceptual model for the coverage of cultural events in Iraq by Arab electronic press, employing a grounded theory approach. Through a sequential exploratory design, the study extracted five major dimensions influencing cultural representation: causal conditions, contextual factors, intervening variables, strategic

responses, and consequences. These dimensions converged into a paradigmatic model elucidating how media institutions, journalists, and sociopolitical environments interact to shape the portrayal of culture in a society as pluralistic and transitional as Iraq. The findings demonstrate that media representation of cultural events is neither neutral nor uniform, but rather, is governed by layered dynamics of institutional

capacity, political pressures, professional competence, and audience engagement.

Among the most salient findings was the identification of causal conditions such as the necessity of reconstructing national identity, the state's investment in soft power tools, and the desire to counterbalance the long-standing dominance of political and security discourses in Arab media. Participants emphasized the urgency of repositioning Iraq's cultural diversity as a narrative of unity rather than division. This aligns with the argument that media, in post-conflict societies, assume an instrumental role in identity formation and reconciliation (Ardakani Fard & Azimi Hashemi, 2021). However, unlike traditional approaches that reduce cultural coverage to elite-driven heritage promotions, participants in this study advocated for participatory and grassroots-oriented representations that reflect the lived experiences of diverse communities.

Contextual factors such as Iraq's multiethnic and multi-religious social structure, weak journalistic training infrastructures, and low levels of cultural media literacy emerged as significant. This confirms prior findings suggesting that the depth and integrity of cultural representation in media are constrained by systemic challenges, including the lack of specialized editorial resources and educational platforms (Golpira et al., 2016). Furthermore, the persistence of instrumental views on culture—whereby cultural topics are only leveraged for political or diplomatic ends—was noted as a barrier to authentic representation. These observations echo concerns about the performative nature of cultural policy in media systems under transition, where representation is often subordinated to non-cultural objectives (Kobrolo, 2024).

Intervening variables were found to play a moderating role in determining the direction and tone of cultural reporting. Chief among these were political interference and economic constraints. Journalists reported pressure to avoid certain cultural topics, especially those associated with marginalized communities or politically sensitive events. Simultaneously, media organizations exhibited a tendency to favor sensationalized or "clickable" content over nuanced cultural reporting, which they deemed less monetizable. These pressures undermine the editorial independence essential for professional journalism and reinforce findings by Engin (2022), who observed similar patterns of politically

instrumentalized reporting in the Turkish context (Engin, 2022). The convergence of political gatekeeping and commercial logic thus produces an environment wherein cultural journalism is both deprioritized and depoliticized.

Strategic responses by journalists and media organizations varied in response to these constraints. The study identified multiple professional and institutional strategies, including the formulation of cultural reporting guidelines, engagement with local analysts, and adoption of international best practices. Journalists with higher cultural awareness and local familiarity were more effective in resisting homogenizing narratives and producing content that reflected cultural complexity. This supports Golpira et al. (2016), who emphasized the role of cultural intelligence in enhancing journalistic performance (Golpira et al., 2016). In addition, the deployment of participatory platforms such as social media and citizen journalism tools enabled the co-creation of cultural narratives, consistent with Obaid and Kishore's (2022) observation that digital platforms have reshaped identity projection in Iraqi sport media, a phenomenon equally relevant in the cultural domain (Obaid & Kishore, 2022).

One of the most compelling findings pertains to the long-term consequences of improved cultural representation. The model showed that coherent and authentic cultural coverage leads to enhanced public cultural literacy, reduced stereotyping, and increased audience engagement. It also contributes to professional legitimacy among cultural journalists and fosters regional recognition of Iraqi media outlets as credible narrators of culture. These outcomes are congruent with those reported by Ahmad and Murad (2020), who demonstrated that information integrity and content credibility have psychological and social consequences for media consumers, especially during crises (Ahmad & Murad, 2020). In a non-crisis context such as cultural reporting, credibility fosters trust, engagement, and national pride.

Importantly, the study found that well-structured cultural representation also bolsters Iraq's soft power and cultural diplomacy across the Arab region. Media narratives that emphasize cultural vitality and pluralism position Iraq not as a site of division but as a hub of creativity and coexistence. These dynamics mirror the findings of Ding et al. (2022), who noted that states that

integrate cultural narratives into developmental and diplomatic agendas are more likely to achieve coherent media policies and international legitimacy (Ding et al., 2022). Therefore, enhancing cultural coverage in Iraqi electronic media could serve not only domestic cohesion but also Iraq's regional rebranding efforts.

Moreover, the study highlighted the reciprocal relationship between media practices and audience perceptions. As shown by Aljuboori et al. (2020), social media consumption among Iraqi youth significantly influences their social behaviors and political awareness (Aljuboori et al., 2020). This suggests that improving the quality of cultural representation in electronic press could indirectly shape audience preferences and civic engagement. A literate, culturally aware public is more likely to demand accountability from media institutions and participate in the production and dissemination of inclusive cultural narratives. This participatory potential was underscored by Numan (2023), who warned that in the absence of media literacy, youth are susceptible to misinformation and identity fragmentation (Numan, 2023).

The findings also reinforce the need for long-term institutional planning in the field of cultural media. As noted by Tirgar Fakheri et al. (2021), future-oriented media strategies must account for both technological disruptions and cultural adaptability (Tirgar Fakheri et al., 2021). The results of the current study support this by demonstrating that effective cultural journalism depends not only on individual competence but also on structural reforms, such as dedicated editorial units, updated educational curricula, and cross-institutional partnerships. Without these systemic changes, isolated improvements in content quality are unlikely to be sustained.

Finally, the study's results validate a paradigmatic model that integrates structural, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of media representation. This model is not only analytically robust but also operationally applicable. It allows for the mapping of specific challenges—such as editorial bias, content fragmentation, and audience disengagement—and suggests targeted interventions. The integration of both qualitative and quantitative methods has further strengthened the model's validity, offering a multi-dimensional tool for policymakers, educators, and journalists seeking to enhance the quality of cultural

representation in the Iraqi and broader Arab media ecosystem.

Despite the contributions of this study, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The qualitative component was based on interviews with a relatively limited number of media professionals and cultural experts, which may constrain the generalizability of findings. Additionally, the focus on Arab electronic press excluded television and print media, potentially omitting other influential forms of cultural representation. The structural equation modeling, while statistically rigorous, was dependent on self-reported measures that might have introduced social desirability bias. Lastly, geopolitical and infrastructural constraints in Iraq may have limited access to more diverse data sources or participants in remote regions.

Future research could expand the scope of this study by incorporating comparative analysis with other post-conflict societies in the Middle East and North Africa. A cross-national study would help identify whether the model holds across different political and media systems or is context-specific to Iraq. Moreover, longitudinal studies could examine how changes in editorial policies or media literacy interventions affect cultural representation over time. Including ethnographic methods or content analysis of media outputs alongside stakeholder interviews could also deepen insight into how cultural narratives are constructed, mediated, and consumed.

Practically, media institutions should invest in the creation of specialized cultural journalism units with trained staff, editorial autonomy, and clear content guidelines. Educational institutions need to incorporate cultural media literacy into journalism curricula, focusing on ethics, diversity, and representation. Policymakers should establish support mechanisms—such as grants, fellowships, and recognition programs—for cultural reporting. Lastly, cross-sector collaborations between cultural ministries, NGOs, and media platforms can foster a more inclusive and authentic media ecosystem that reflects Iraq's rich cultural tapestry and enhances its regional and global cultural standing.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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