




Reporters' agency and (de) escalation during the 2011 uprising in Egypt: Re-writing the historical role of the news media during the Arab Spring

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ABSTRACT

After more than a decade of the so-called Arab Spring in Egypt, it is perhaps time to carry out in cold an examination of the role the news media played during the uprising. In so doing, this piece examines the way Egyptian newspapers from the government and opposition reported those events. The study investigates to what extent the newspapers' coverage of the political events help to de-escalate or escalate tensions. It analyzed the content of two newspapers in Egypt; Al-Ahram, owned by the government and, Al-Wafd, owned by an opposition party. Our analysis included 366 news articles from 105 issues of the selected newspapers during nine weeks of 2011. The finding indicated that the coverage helped to escalate tension, including that of the government-owned newspaper that had more news coverage of this type than the opposition one. We argue that our findings invite further reflection upon normative assumptions regarding the news media editorial position, its relation to power, and individual agency.

Keywords: Arab Spring, uprising, news media, journalism, Egypt, power

INTRODUCTION

On 25th January 2011, millions of Egyptians turned out in many cities, especially in Cairo's Tahrir Square. The uprising that ultimately brought down the government began with a series of demonstrations in various governorates of Egypt, which coincided with the celebrations of Police Day. Tensions broke out between the police and protestors. As a result, the authorities took a hard line, using riot-control tactics, and shutting down all forms of new tools of communication (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011; Joya, 2011). During 18 days, hundreds of Egyptians were killed, and thousands injured (Rettig, 2011).

The 2011 revolution was the culmination of a series of events and protests representing an outpouring of public anger at corruption, poverty, unemployment, political dissatisfaction, and police brutality (Hassan, 2015, p. 33). In 2011, tensions escalated between the political regime on one hand and the opposition parties, civil society, and movements on the other hand (Mittermaier, 2015). This kind of tension seemed to represent a defining moment for media coverage, as it struggled to shape public opinion by framing these events in their own ways (Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012).

More than a decade after those events, it is perhaps time to examine the relationship between the media and society before, during and after the uprising in the cold light of day. This is because over the years there have been recurrent narratives about the role of the media at that time. From the techno-deterministic assumptions around the 'liberating' power of new technologies to the idea that large segments of the legacy media in Arab countries played a central role in trying to prevent popular mobilization. Commentators,

scholars, and others have tried to offer a variety of explanatory frameworks that could help us elucidate what really happened (Afzal & Harun, 2020; Owais, 2011; Smidi & Shahin, 2017).

The role of the news media in Arab countries is often seen as 'non-adversarial,' which signals a type of news reporting that does not confront power nor challenge power-elite narratives. This is due to the power structures, ownership and political context in which these media outlets operate (Alhumood et al., 2016; Mellor, 2007). Moreover, a lot of the explanatory theoretical frameworks currently used to analyze the media in those countries are deeply inspired by the typology of the press summarized in the four theories of the press (Siebert & Schramm, 1956). Accordingly, the press in many Arab countries is often categorized by many scholars as 'authoritarian', and journalists are seen to be embedded into the wider institutional power structures (Anas, 2013; Khazen, 1999). These analyses see the media as homogeneous and almost monolithic institutional entities that play along to underpin the structures of power prevalent in those countries.

However, by examining the way Egyptian newspapers reported those events at that time, we come to question some of those assumptions. Our study investigates to what extent the newspapers' coverage of these political events help to de-escalate or escalate the tensions between the political regime, other political parties, and movements during 2011. We argue that the traditional analysis has often obviated the fact that these news organizations are formed by reporters with collective and individual aspirations.

Therefore, assumptions about perpetuation of the hegemonic practices by specific organizations might be brought into question in the light of actual empirical evidence that shows that even pro-government media contributed with mobilization through escalating tensions. We are not, however, claiming that agency necessarily had ideological direction or that this reflects somehow orchestration, although there might be some indication of the later. What we are saying instead is that the analysis of the way the news media contributed with escalation, even the pro-government media, reflects a type of agency that requires a nuanced analysis that is often missed in some of the existing research.

In this respect, our study aims to investigate how the online newspapers in Egypt covered events of the January 2011 revolution and to what extent this coverage was de-escalated-oriented or escalated-oriented. It applied the peace journalism (PJ) approach introduced by Galtung (2002) in the seventies. The concept of PJ provides an alternative approach for journalists in which the media focuses on the cultural and structural causes of conflicts and their impact on the lives of citizens. Moreover, It reflects the views of all parties involved in the conflict and suggests viable solutions and initiatives to de-escalate violence (Hanitzsch, 2004).

Lynch and McGoldrick (2007, p. 224) define PJ as 'remedial—a deliberate, creative strategy to seek out and bring to our attention "facts" under-represented, the significant views, and perspectives unheard.' Lynch (2012) identified practical guidance for the media's coverage of conflict. It should explore and analyze reasons for the economic, political, and social imbalance that causes the conflict and reach consensus among the parties involved. Media should also try to prevent manifestations of previous conflicts, ensure that citizens participate in the transition process and de-escalate tensions, and support the capabilities of institutions to manage conflict without reaching the level of violence.

To explore this thesis, we analyzed the content of two newspapers in Egypt; Al-Ahram¹, owned by the government, and Al-Wafd², owned by a prominent opposition party. Our analysis included 366 news articles from 105 issues of the selected newspapers during nine weeks of 2011, which witnessed the main events of the uprising in Egypt that started on 25th January 2011. The findings indicated that the coverage helped to escalate tension, including that of the government-owned newspaper that had more news coverage of this type than the opposition one. We argue that these findings invite further reflection upon normative assumptions regarding the news media editorial position, its relation to power, and individual agency.

¹ Al-Ahram, which has sometimes been called by Americans 'The New York Times of the Arab World', was founded in 1876. It is the closest of all the country's papers to the government. It also has the highest daily circulation among the Egyptian newspapers (Allam, 2018; Badr, 2021). It is usually classified as a state- owned newspaper (Guaaybess, 2021, p. 416), or the semiofficial newspapers because of strong government influence on the content (Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012).

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LITERATURE REVIEW

It is often claimed that the news media within illiberal regimes is called to play a role of appeasement or de-escalation during uprisings that threaten the status quo of these regimes. In South Africa, for example, a series of authors have noted that the news media either controlled by the government or operating within the legal framework of those countries tended to down-play and de-escalate tensions as a way of underpinning existing hegemonic control of power during the apartheid period (Hadland, 2007; Sparks, 2009; Wasserman & De Beer, 2005). Equally, we find that the news media in Israel tends to frame Palestinian uprisings in terms of 'violent' and 'unprovoked' in a way to de-escalate the tensions within the illegally occupied territories (Sharvit & Bar-Tal, 2007; Tenenboim-Weinblatt et al., 2016).

This is not to say that the role of the media in de-escalation is not essential or in many instances, has a positive impact on society. On the contrary, much research concentrated on qualifying de-escalation as part of PJ efforts that bring shared values into the public sphere and open dialogue spaces during the coverage of conflict issues (Galtung, 2003; Tenenboim-Weinblatt et al., 2016). For example, Ersoy and Miller (2020) conducted a study on a sample of editors and journalists of Cypriot press to investigate how they deal with conflict in Cyprus. They concluded that peace journalists could promote a type of public sphere that helps to overcome the inadequacies of the liberal peace agenda and in so doing, seeks to de-escalate existing tensions.

Much research of PJ were conducted in Southern Asian countries, which witnessed some cases of ethnic and political conflict. Imtihani (2014) examined the media coverage of the separatist conflict in Aceh, Indonesia. The main questions of the study were to identify to what extent the media deliver information leading to the peace process or increasing the violence along the conflict. He concluded that the role of media in conflict resolution was mostly affected by the situations and facts happened in the field.

Moreover, Hussain et al. (2021) analyzed war and peacemaking potential of media in the conflict-ridden milieu of Pakistan. Through analyzing news stories telecasted in two leading TV channels relating to seven deadly conflicts, they found that the higher the intensity of a conflict, the higher the escalatory trends is in coverage. Patriotic and elite-controlled media produced more escalation as compared to conflict in which journalists were using relatively free media.

In the same context, Iqbal and Hussain (2017) investigated the reporting of major conflicts in Pakistan by two leading TV channels to ascertain the nature of the coverage in terms of being escalatory or de-escalatory. The findings suggested that Pakistan news TV channels reported the Taliban and the ethno-political conflict in Karachi in an escalatory manner, characterized by a de-contextualized pattern. While on the other hand, the Baluchistan and the sectarian conflict were mainly reported in de-escalatory terms owing to various socio-cultural reasons affecting the coverage.

For his part, Ozohu-Suleiman (2014) examined how the Qatari-based English-language Al Jazeera and the English-language Iranian-based press TV reported the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. His research concluded that these networks provided distinctive perspectives in the global news sphere in relation to how they responded to the conflict in the recent past compared to BBC World and CNN International. However, those findings also suggested that one can find similar patterns of escalation that are reproduced from the alternative perspective, including counter-demonizing language and disagreements on the identity of terrorists. In other words, escalation news happens even when the angle and news agenda are different.

There are some studies conducted in Africa during parliamentary and presidential elections that demonstrated the role of newspapers in times of conflict and violence, including ethnic violence. For example, Onyebadi and Oyediji (2011) found that although the newspapers analyzed did not provide any forewarning about the impending crisis, they relentlessly published news stories that addressed peace-building in the country. They suggested that the media can play functional roles in de-escalating conflicts and that reporters should be society's moral witnesses, not objective bystanders, who watch and report on collapse of humanity.

Demarest and Langer (2021) investigated to what extent Nigerian newspapers practice PJ by emphasizing underlying causes of conflict in their reporting rather than stressing ethnic and religious divisions. They found that Nigerian newspapers do not explicitly use divisive language when discussing conflicts, but they rarely stress underlying structural causes either. While there is a willingness among Nigerian journalists to avoid potentially escalatory language, a dearth of resources and capacities impedes independent and in-depth

analysis concerning the underlying drivers of conflicts. In the same context, Goretti (2007) analyzed Ugandan newspapers' coverage of the ethnic and political conflict in northern Uganda and concluded that the news media could either contribute or not contribute to the escalation and de-escalation of tensions.

While many studies were carried out and explored how news media framed and covered the Arab Spring in 2011, none of these studies have applied the PJ approach. For example, Issawi (2016) conducted a comparative analysis of traditional media industry transitions during the Arab uprisings in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. She concluded that there are similarities between the development of Arab media systems in the recent period of transition and previous media transitional experiences. Further, journalists take on an active role as creators of political messages, affording the media a powerful stake in political struggles. The political alignment of traditional media outlets in the Arab world is apparent and seriously impacts the democratization process.

Hu et al. (2021) investigated how Chinese media frame Arab uprisings by employing content analysis of two Chinese newspapers, the People's Daily (the official newspaper of the Communist Party of China) and Caixin Net (a typical commercial media). They concluded that the widespread attention given to Arab uprisings in the two newspapers declined during the period, but there were shifts in the framing of the conflicts, presentation of issues, and positions. While the coverage of the conflicts in the People's Daily changed from disaster to criticism, and then to comparison—its position towards the events is generally negative—the Caixin Net moved from a disaster to a contextual framing of the events, its position tending to be neutral.

Moreover, Alalawi (2015) investigated how two TV news channels; Fox News and Al Jazeera, covered the Arab spring movement. The study focused on the timeline of the uprising's events and the way each media covered each of those events. Findings indicated that the coverage of both networks is based on independent sources criticizing the way this broadcasting was performed, as Al Jazeera's coverage was more extensive than the Fox News's coverage.

As for Egypt's uprising, Hamdy and Goma (2012) examined the framing of Egypt's January 2011 uprising of the country's government, independence, and social media during the peak of protests. The study concluded that while the governmental newspapers framed the event as a conspiracy against the Egyptian state and a warning of economic consequences and attributing blame and responsibility for the chaos on others, the social media posts used a human-interest frame to define protests as a revolution for freedom and social justice. The independent newspapers used a combination of these frames.

In the same venue, Elmasry and el-Nawawy (2014) analyzed how three Egyptian dailies, one is private-owned (Al-Masry al-Yom), one is opposition-owned (Al-Wafd) and the other is government-owned (Al-Ahram), contribute to the ongoing debate about media freedom and performance during Egypt's one-year Morsi era—June 2012 to June 2013—in comparison to one year of Mubarak's era, 2008. Results suggest that there may have been greater degrees of political diversity, openness, and inclusiveness in Egypt in 2013 than in 2008. In 2013, the Morsi administration was covered in a highly critical manner by both private and opposition newspapers. Coverage of both papers tended to be significantly more critical of Morsi in 2013 than of Mubarak in 2008. Also, the government-owned Al-Ahram seemed to abandon—to a considerable extent—the government mouthpiece role it maintained.

Based on the hypothesis that the Egyptian institutional media played an active role in the Egyptian revolution in 2011, Porat and Berenson (2018) analyzed how Egypt's official newspapers constructed and presented a moderate and positive image of the Muslim Brotherhood. This was conducted through a critical discourse analysis of the most popular Egyptian newspapers—*al-Ahram* and *al-Gumhuriyya*, both of which identify with the Egyptian government's official policy. In addition, an analysis made of three of the Brotherhood's publications revealed that the Brotherhood exploited the printed media not only to replace the regime but also to gain control of its narrative. They also concluded that media contributed to the drawing of a parallel between the motivation that formed the basis of the mass protest and the Brotherhood's agenda.

Hamanaka (2020) explored the relationship between social media and participation in the anti-regime demonstrations during the Egyptian uprising in January 2011. The research examined a hypothesis derived from a diffusion model of information and social movement theory. The results suggested that vanguards of the demonstrations were more active on social media than followers during the revolution, and active bloggers tended to participate in demonstrations against the Mubarak regime. Schielke (2017) argued that

many decisive battles of Egypt's most recent revolution were undoubtedly fought in the media and online networks and that in age of social media, press media, and television remain of crucial importance. While media offer a means to question and protest authoritarian regimes, they can also serve those regimes in many ways.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study applied the principle of the PJ approach, which assumes that the media has the ability to narrow the differences between the parties involved in a conflict through focusing on the commonalities between them. de Fransius (2011) suggests that PJ can give us a better understanding of how and why we interpret the world in a certain way and how journalists report conflict.

Howard (2015) has argued that the media should cover conflict issues more comprehensively and look into the causes of conflict considering that conflict should take into account root causes and basic needs and assumes that solutions must be based on legitimate goals. In so doing, the media can contribute effectively to de-escalation. In the event of mistrust between parties of the conflict in society, PJ comes as a third party that can facilitate communication between these parties and function as means of building rather than destroying (Mitchell, 2012). Although the responsibility for resolving the tensions must be held by all groups and institutions of society and not only the media, journalists, with their ability to access information, can handle the conflict in a manner that minimizes its effects and provide information explaining how to reduce degrees of tension (Hussain et al., 2021).

What is clear at this point is that we need to differentiate between two concepts around de-escalation. One that refers to conflict and the other relating to the use of violence. In fact, conflict does not always carry negative meanings. It may reflect a degree of fair competition between parties involved in the conflict to achieve national interests or legitimate claims for improving the quality of life or additional rights in society. The concept of de-escalation in the context of violence instead refers to reducing tensions to prevent the use of force, which might lead to direct physiological and physical harm to other parties (de Fransius, 2014).

Research in area of journalists' agency has suggested that they comply primarily with the organizational cultures, but they also try to fulfill normative aspirations regarding their role (Hanitzsch, 2004; Mellado, 2015). Coverage of conflicts and escalation narratives can be attributed to the media itself and how much do they correspond to the individual reporter (Tuchman, 1972, 1978). In other words, news reporters often decide content with their editors in the context of the wider organizational discursive regimes as well as their own individual aspirations to perform a particular role that reflects normative aspirations around professionalism. This is true in the West as well as in most countries around the world today. In some cases, where there is a more substantial level of 'professional autonomy', journalists' quest to perform professionally will prevail, while in others, with lower levels of autonomy and independence, organizations' strategic narratives and discursive regimes will dominate (Merrill, 1974; Nygren et al., 2015; Thomsen, 2013). In context of our discussion, this is not as relevant as the fact that, in either cases, journalists have agency, either by omission or by actively engaging in setting a news agenda and imprinting directionality to particular narratives.

While investigating journalists' perceptions and professional principles of how to cover conflict is beyond our research scope, by analyzing the content of the two selected newspapers, in the case of 2011 events, we argue that journalists may reported the uprising through framing the stories in terms of growing unrest and mobilization or focusing on values of diversity and collaboration.

Consequently, we argue here that journalists themselves, both individually and collectively, can either narrow the differences between the parties involved in tensions through focusing on the commonalities between them (Lynch, 2012), or escalate these tensions to the point of violence. More importantly, we need to differentiate between two concepts of de-escalation. One refers to conflict, and the other relates to violence (Howard, 2015).

By now, it should be clear that the notion of de-escalation that we use here refers to the former, which is a way of demobilizing to prevent conflict. If so, one could expect that the media's role should have promoted de-escalation during the uprising of 2011 in Egypt for both, reinforcing existing hegemonies and preventing violence.

Research Questions

To explore this argument, our study looked at how newspapers managed 2011 uprising in Egypt to determine how parties in conflict were portrayed and to analyze what kinds of language were used to cover conflict issues and events. Also, we investigated to what extent coverage of the analyzed online newspapers was de-escalation-oriented against escalation oriented. Therefore, we address the following questions:

1. To what extent did the Egyptian online newspapers cover issues and events of the conflict during the January 2011 uprising in terms of their orientation to de-escalate vs. escalate tension?
2. How did the Egyptian newspapers present parties and actors involved in the conflict?
3. What kinds of language were used to present the conflict's events and parties? Was it de-escalating-oriented or escalating-oriented?
4. Does the ownership and the editorial stance of the newspaper influence the fact that its coverage underpins escalation or de-escalation?

METHODOLOGY

Method of the Study

We carried out a comprehensive content analysis to examine the online version of the selected newspapers. This research strategy provides knowledge, new insights, a representation of facts, and a practical guide to action (Hester & Dougall, 2007; Krippendorff, 2004). Its purpose is not only to quantify salient and manifest features of a large number of texts, but also to make wider inferences about the processes and politics of representation (Hansen et al., 1998).

Sampling

There are three types of newspapers in Egypt: government-owned, political parties, and private newspapers (El-Tarouty, 2016). From 1952, all media were transformed into state-run institutions. Party newspapers were gradually introduced in the early 1970s, and private media emerged in the mid-1990s (Badr, 2021). The government owns controlling stocks in the three leading daily government newspapers, Al-Ahram (the pyramids), Al-Akhbar (the news), and Al-Gomhuriya (the republic). The regime still depends on the government newspapers as a tool for public mobilization and popular support of its political programs, as well as delivering the official line for creating a favorable public opinion. Before the private newspaper's introduction, the only competitors of government-owned media were the political party newspapers, which enjoyed limited censorship from the government and were used to direct harsh criticism to the Egyptian government officials and corruption (Allam, 2018). The main political parties owning newspapers are Al-Wafd and Al-Ahrar, Al-Shaab, and al-Dostour. Our study selected two newspapers: one daily-government newspaper (Al-Ahram) and one daily-party newspaper (Al-Wafd). This is because, at the time, these news media outlets were considered to be some of the most influential, with a national reach in terms of audiences (AlMaskati, 2012; Elmasry, 2012). In Egypt, however, it is challenging to determine the exact levels of circulation or numbers of users, particularly concerning government-owned media. Hence, claims and assertions around levels of penetration need to be taken at face value but with a pinch of salt. The content of the media outlets Al-Ahram and Al-Wafd (The Delegate) from 2011 was analyzed thanks to a sample that included 366 news articles from 108 issues from both newspapers: 204 articles in Al-Ahram (55.7%) and 162 in Al-Wafd (44.3%).

The period of the study covered the year 2011. Nine weeks were selected from January to December 2011, which witnessed main events and issues reflecting conflict situations and tensions between the political regime and other active political parties and movements in Egypt. This included demonstration and riots, resignation of President Mubarak, a referendum on constitutional amendments, violent riots near main Cathedral in Cairo, issuing constitutional declaration, start of Mubarak's trial, riots near national broadcasting headquarter and parliament elections. The events represented a suitable context to investigate how news media covered January's uprising within framework of PJ approach, as it "is likely to find more fertile ground in societies, where media is perceived to have contributed to socially destructive internal conflict or ethnic tensions, and in news organizations (Shaw et al., 2012, p. 10).

Table 1. Coding schedule

De-escalation-oriented	Escalation-oriented
Orientation of covering conflict issues & events	
Embedding conflict in its wider social, cultural, & historical roots	Ignoring causes & context of conflict with simplifications/ generalizations
Focusing on causes & outcomes of conflict	Emphasizing incompatibility of parties' interests
Win-win orientation & presenting structures for possible cooperation	Zero-sum orientation: conflict resolution & agreement are regarded as impossible
Describing benefits that both sides could gain from ending conflict	Emphasizing on incompatibility of parties' interests
Focusing on invisible effects of violence (trauma & glory & damage to structure/culture)	Focus only on visible effect of violence (killing, wounding, & material damage)
Orientation of presenting conflict parties	
Focus on people peace-makers	Focus on elite peace-makers
Including voices from all sides of conflict & people affected by it	One-sided portrayal of conflict, only institutional/powerful sources
Balanced portrayal of victims from all layers of society	Disproportional emphasis on victimization of elites
Unbiased evaluation of opponent's actions	Condemnation of opponent's actions
unbiased evaluation of all parties	Biased evaluation of one party
Orientation of language used	
Focus on objective language/truth oriented	Focus on emotional language/propaganda oriented
Humanization of all sides	Dehumanization of them
Giving a name to all evil-doers	Giving a name to their evil-doers
Giving voice to all parties: empathy & focus on conflict creativity	"Us-them" journalism, propaganda, voice, & for "us"

Coding

We constructed a coding schedule to collect data from the online version of the selected newspapers, with the units of analysis as news stories. The categories used consisted of "de-escalation-oriented" against "escalation-oriented." based on the vision of Galtung (2003) as interpreted by Lynch and McGoldrick (2005, p. 6), we designed coding sheet to carry out the analysis. Given the research objectives, the codebook contains three main categories. The first category codes the orientation of covering the conflict's issues. It includes 12 statements; six reflect de-escalation-oriented and six reflect escalation-oriented content. The second category codes orientation of presenting conflict's parties, with 10 statements; five reflect de-escalation-oriented and five reflect escalation-oriented content. The third category codes orientation of language used and includes eight statements; four reflect de-escalation-oriented, and four reflect escalation-oriented content (Table 1).

Constructing a coding schedule provides an opportunity for inspection of its reliability (Hansen et al., 1998). After designing coding schedules, it is important to test them on selected content samples to explore how easy the variables and values are to understand, use and reveal inadequacies or inconsistencies in the categories system (Deacon et al., 1999). Reliability in content analysis, according to Hansen et al. (1998), relates to consistency in the coding schedule, consistency between different coders, and their validity over time.

In the present study, we utilized the same coding schedule to investigate to what extent the two selected newspapers' coverage was de-escalation oriented against escalation oriented in terms of the three main categories used. A team of two independent coders agreed by discussing a codebook with a unified standard. 10% (36 news stories) of the sample was selected to check the inter-coder reliability in the collected data, which were 0.86 and 0.89, based on Krippendorff's alpha (Krippendorff, 2004). The study applied statistical one-sample t-test to measure the values and significance of variables, one-sample t-test/group-statistics, and independent samples t-test/group-statistics to test the relationship between computed variables.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

On their coverage of the 2011 uprising, it seems that the Egyptian online newspapers concentrated on the visible effects of conflict, such as riots, demonstrations, and violent events, which represent 43.2% of the total analyzed articles. Coverage only presented events in generalizations without discussing embedding conflict in its wider social, cultural, and historical roots, representing 22.1% of total analyzed articles (Table 2).

Results in Table 2 also show that the newspapers' coverage rarely stressed the underlying issues and events that are important in conflict situations, such as "initiatives to solve the conflict", which represents only

Table 2. Main issues of the newspapers' Coverage

Main issues of coverage	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Riots/demonstrations/violent events	158	43.2
Just reporting events with generalizations	81	22.1
Elections/referendum	60	16.4
Political meetings/gatherings	36	9.8
Initiatives to solve the conflict	24	6.6
Others	7	1.9
Total	366	100.0

Table 3. Orientation of covering issues & events of the conflict one-sample t-test*

Orientation of covering issues & events of the conflict	Mean**	SD	T	Sig. #
Peace journalism/de-escalation-oriented				
Embedding the conflict in its wider social and cultural roots	3.2	1.3	3.2	0.00
Focusing on invisible effects of violence	3.0	1.5	0.5	0.30
Focusing on causes and outcomes of conflict.	2.7	1.5	-4.1	0.00
Describing benefits that both sides could gain from ending the conflict	2.7	0.8	-7.9	0.00
Embedding the conflict in its wider economic roots	2.7	1.1	-7.8	0.00
Win-win orientation and presenting structures for possible cooperation	2.2	0.9	-16.7	0.00
War journalism/escalation-oriented				
Conflict resolution and agreement are regarded as impossible	3.7	1.3	10.4	0.00
Concealing peace initiatives and focusing on who threw the first stone.	3.4	1.2	6.5	0.00
Focus only on visible effect of violence	3.2	1.0	3.8	0.00
Reporting conflict as a zero-sum orientation;	3.1	1.0	2.9	0.05
Ignoring causes of conflict with simplifications /generalizations	3.0	1.5	0.1	0.89
Emphasizing on incompatibility of parties' interests	2.4	1.4	-8.2	0.00

Note. *SN (sample no.)=366; **Test value=3; #Confidence interval=95%; SD: Standard deviation; & Sig.: Significance level

6.6% of the total number of articles. "Political meetings and gatherings" to discuss how to solve the conflict and reduce the degree of violence also represents 9.8% of the coverage. These figures may indicate that Egyptian online newspapers are more escalation-oriented in covering the uprising of 2011.

Following the questions of the study and the theoretical framework, findings are presented in four main dimensions. First, the orientation of online newspapers to present and cover issues and events related to the January 2011 uprising in Egypt. Second, the orientation of presenting conflict's parties and actors. Third, the orientation of language used in the coverage. Fourth, the general orientation of conflict coverage, whether it was approaching PJ or war journalism. Through these four dimensions, we may identify whether the Egyptian online newspapers were more oriented towards de-escalating or escalating the covered events.

Orientation of Covering Issues & Events of the Conflict

The orientation of covering issues and events of the conflict was coded into twelve statements; six statements reflect de-escalating-orientated content, and six statements reflect escalating-orientated content. **Table 3** shows to what extent the Egyptian online newspapers were de-escalation-oriented or escalation-oriented in their coverage of issues and events related to the conflict during the study period.

Findings suggest that the coverage considered only one statement related to de-escalating-oriented content. It embedded the conflict in its wider social and cultural roots through giving historical background social and cultural situation, which led to the uprising (mean [M]=3.2, $\alpha < 0.05$). The coverage slightly focused on the invisible effects of violence, but without statistical significance (M=3.0, $\alpha > 0.05$). On the other hand, all other de-escalated oriented statements, such as describing benefits that both sides could gain from ending the conflict, embedding the conflict in its wider economic roots, and the presentation of structures for possible cooperation between political actors received slight attention from the coverage (M<3.0, $\alpha < 0.05$). These findings indicate that the coverage of the uprising tended to escalate the presence of tensions and conflict rather than de-escalate it, even in the government-owned paper.

Six statements reflecting escalating-oriented content were used to measure the orientation of the conflict's coverage. Figures show that the coverage incentivized conflict escalation. Conflict resolution and agreement are regarded as impossible (M=3.7, $\alpha < 0.05$). The coverage also concentrated on concealing peace initiatives and focusing on who threw the first stone to ignite the conflict (M=3.4, $\alpha < 0.05$). At the same time, the coverage

Table 4. Orientation of presenting conflict's parties & actors one-sample t-test*

Orientation of presenting conflict's parties & actors	Mean**	SD	T	Sig. #
Peace journalism/de-escalation-oriented				
Unbiased evaluation of all parties	2.7	1.4	-4.1	0.00
Unbiased evaluation of opponent's actions	2.5	1.1	-9.1	0.00
Focusing on citizens as peace-makers & presenting their point of view	2.4	1.1	-10.1	0.00
Including voices from all sides of conflict & people affected by it	2.1	1.1	-15.2	0.00
Balanced portrayal of victims from all layers of society	2.1	0.9	-17.9	0.00
War journalism/escalation-oriented				
Disproportional emphasis on victimization of elites	3.9	1.3	5.6	0.00
Condemnation of opponent's actions	3.2	1.3	2.3	0.02
One-sided portrayal of conflict & only official/powerful sources	2.7	1.5	-3.5	0.00
Focus on elite peace-makers	2.6	1.4	-5.9	0.00
Biased evaluation of one party	2.5	1.2	-7.6	0.00
Emphasizing on incompatibility of parties' interests	2.4	1.5	-8.2	0.00

Note. *SN (sample no.)=366; **Test value=3; #Confidence interval=95%; SD: Standard deviation; & Sig.: Significance level

focused on the visible effects of violence, such as killing, wounding, and material damage caused by the conflict ($M=3.2$, $\alpha<0.05$). The conflict was also reported as a zero-sum orientation in which only one side would win the conflict ($M=3.1$, $\alpha<0.05$).

The data illustrates that the conflict in Egypt was centered around the political dimension. After more than thirty years of power monopolization by one person and excluding other parties, the newspaper discourse reflected the demands of the protesters during the uprising, which called for social justice, freedom and removing Mubarak's regime from power. On 11th February 2011, when Mubarak stepped down and asked the military council to take power, it seemed that there was no space or time for the media to discuss the causes of the conflict but instead only to focus on the ambiguity of the new political scene. With more than 28 riots events and weekly gatherings of one million in "Tahrir" square, the coverage focused on the visible and violent effects of the conflict.

The orientation of presenting the conflict's parties was coded into 10 statements; five statements reflect de-escalating-oriented content, and five statements reflect escalating-oriented content. **Table 4** shows how the Egyptian online newspapers presented the conflict's parties during the uprising.

The findings show that the Egyptian online newspapers did not consider any statements (variables) related to de-escalated-oriented content. Statistical analysis indicated that the values of all variables' means were less than the test value (3.0), and values of (T) were less than zero and were statistically significant ($\alpha<0.05$). At the same time, there was no balanced portrayal of victims from all layers of society, and the coverage rarely included voices from all sides of conflict and people affected by it ($M=2.1$, $\alpha<0.05$). Findings also indicated that there was a slight focus on citizens as peacemakers and their point of view to solve the conflict was neglected ($M=2.4$, $\alpha<0.05$).

Orientation of Presenting Conflict's Parties & Actors

The orientation of presenting the conflict's parties were coded into 10 statements; five statements reflect de-escalating-oriented content, and five statements reflect escalating-oriented content. **Table 4** shows how the Egyptian online newspapers presented the conflict's parties during the January 2011 uprising in Egypt. Five statements were applied to measure the orientation of presenting conflict's parties, which reflect principles of PJ.

The findings show that the Egyptian online newspapers did not consider any statements (variables) related to the de-escalated-oriented content. Statistical analysis indicated that values of all variables' means were less than the test value (3.0) and values of (T) were by mince and with a statistical significance ($\alpha<0.05$). At the same time, there was no balanced portrayal of victims from all layers of society and the coverage rarely included voices from all sides of conflict and people affected by it ($M=2.1$, $\alpha<0.05$). Findings also indicate that there was a slight focus on citizens as peace-makers and their point of view to solve the conflict was neglected ($M=2.4$, $\alpha<0.05$).

Five statements were also used to measure the orientation of presenting conflict parties, which reflected escalation. Findings indicate that coverage of analyzed online newspapers concentrated on disproportional

Table 5. Orientation of language used in the coverage one-sample t-test*

Orientation of language used in the coverage	Mean**	SD	T	Sig. #
Peace journalism/de-escalation-oriented				
Giving a name to all evil-doers	2.6	1.1	-6.3	0.00
Humanization of all sides	2.6	0.8	-10.1	0.00
Focus on objective language/truth oriented	2.5	1.1	-8.2	0.00
Giving voice to all parties & focusing on conflict creativity	2.4	1.1	-10.2	0.00
War journalism/escalation-oriented				
"Us-them" journalism, propaganda, voice, & for "us"	3.4	1.1	7.5	0.00
Giving a name to their evil-doers	3.1	1.2	0.9	0.07
Focus on emotional language/propaganda oriented	3.0	1.1	0.6	0.09
Dehumanization of "them"	2.6	1.2	-6.3	0.00

Note. *SN (sample no.)=366; **Test value=3; #Confidence interval=95%; SD: Standard deviation; & Sig.: Significance level

emphasis on the victimization of elites ($M=3.9$, $\alpha<0.05$) and condemned the opponent's actions ($M=3.2$, $\alpha<0.05$). At the same time, the coverage was also a one-sided portrayal of conflict, only depending on powerful official sources ($M=2.6$, $\alpha<0.05$), and was biased in evaluating all parties ($M=2.5$, $\alpha<0.05$). It seems that the Egyptian online newspapers presented parties of the conflict with an escalation-oriented approach.

During the uprising in 2011, there was a clear polarization between two opposite parties: the military council and the Muslim Brotherhood. The media reported the conflict as a zero-option orientation and demonstrated a biased evaluation of one party. As de Fransius (2014) argued, this is the belief that only one party can win and that both parties aim to win.

Orientation of Language Used in the Coverage

The orientation of language used in the coverage of the conflict was coded into eight statements; four statements reflect de-escalation-oriented content, and four statements reflect escalated-oriented content. The findings show that the language used in the coverage tended to contribute to the escalation of tensions.

Figures in **Table 5** illustrate that while the language used in the online newspapers' coverage ignored "giving a name to all evil-doers" ($M=2.6$, $\alpha<0.05$), to "giving a name to their evil-doers" ($M=3.1$, $\alpha>0.05$). Instead of giving voice to all parties and focusing on conflict creativity ($M=2.6$, $\alpha<0.05$), the language used in the coverage concentrated on "us-them" and "voice only for us" ($M=3.4$, $\alpha<0.05$). The coverage also slightly concentrated on the use of emotional language/propaganda oriented ($M=3.0$, $\alpha>0.05$) and ignored focusing on using objective language/truth oriented ($M=2.5$, $\alpha>0.05$).

The analysis also showed that both newspapers' discourses used words and expressions that reflected escalating-orientation, such as betrayal of the other, denial of the other, narrow interests, personal interests, counter-revolution, and the deep state. This discourse dehumanized the other side and gave names to their evil-doers. To identify the general orientation of the analyzed online newspapers' coverage of the conflict during the January 2011 uprising in Egypt, we looked at 12 statements. These reflect the coverage of the conflict issues and events and were computed into two main variables: de-escalation- and escalation-oriented.

General Orientation of the Coverage

Findings indicate that the general orientation of analyzed online newspapers' coverage of the conflict was mainly escalation-oriented content (**Table 6**). Orientation of covering the conflict's issues and events was escalation-oriented ($M=15.7$, $\alpha<0.05$) in comparison to de-escalation-oriented ($M=13.7$, $\alpha<0.05$). In the same manner, the orientation of presenting the conflict's parties was escalation-oriented ($M=12.0$, $\alpha<0.05$) in comparison to de-escalation-oriented ($M=10.1$, $\alpha<0.05$). Orientation of language used in the coverage was also escalation-oriented ($M=14.3$, $\alpha<0.05$) in comparison to de-escalation-oriented ($M=11.9$, $\alpha<0.05$).

Findings suggest general orientation of analyzed online newspapers' coverage of conflict was mainly escalation-oriented content in covering conflict's issues, presenting conflict's parties and language used in coverage. It seems that the way analyzed content of selected newspapers contributed with escalation, even pro-government media, reflects a type of agency as they contributed with mobilization through escalating tensions. This finding may support what Anas (2013) concluded journalists in Arab countries are seen to be

Table 6. General orientation of covering the conflict one-sample t-test*-Group statistics

General orientation of the conflict's coverage	Mean**	SD	T	Sig. #
Orientation of covering the conflict's issues & events				
Peace journalism/de-escalation-oriented	13.7	3.5	58.2	0.00
War journalism/escalation-oriented	15.7	3.0	80.4	0.00
Orientation of presenting conflict's parties				
Peace journalism/de-escalation-oriented	10.1	2.2	62.3	0.00
War journalism/escalation-oriented	12.0	3.3	52.3	0.00
Orientation of the language used				
Peace journalism/de-escalation-oriented	11.9	3.9	46.0	0.00
War journalism/escalation-oriented	14.3	3.8	57.5	0.00

Note. *SN (sample no.)=366; #Confidence interval=95%; SD: Standard deviation; & Sig.: Significance level

Table 7. Newspaper ownership & orientation of the coverage independent samples test-Group statistics

Orientation of the coverage	Newspaper	n	Mean	F	Sig.
Coverage of the conflict events & issues					
De-escalated-orientated	Al-Ahram	204	13.4	0.07	0.79
	Al-Wafd	162	13.9		
Escalated-orientated	Al-Ahram	204	15.8	7.47	0.01
	Al-Wafd	162	15.4		
Presenting of the conflict parties					
De-escalated-orientated	Al-Ahram	204	10.2	0.75	0.39
	Al-Wafd	162	10.0		
Escalated-orientated	Al-Ahram	204	11.8	0.78	0.38
	Al-Wafd	162	12.3		
Language used in the coverage					
De-escalated-orientated	Al-Ahram	204	10.7	6.68	0.01
	Al-Wafd	162	12.8		
Escalated-orientated	Al-Ahram	204	14.4	4.10	0.04
	Al-Wafd	162	14.1		

embedded into the broader institutional power-structures. So, we may argue that presence of agency is clear as journalists in both newspapers performed counter-intuitively to what was expected of them.

Newspaper Ownership and Orientation of the Coverage

To understand whether ownership and political stand of the newspaper affect its general orientation of the coverage, **Table 7** shows differences between the newspapers in covering conflict issues, in presenting conflict parties and the kinds of language used.

This suggests that there was a significant difference between the two newspapers in their coverage. For the coverage of conflict issues and events, while the content of Al-Ahram was more “escalated-oriented” (M=15.8, $\alpha < 0.05$), the content of Al-Wafd was less “escalated-oriented” (M=15.4, $\alpha < 0.05$). Concerning presenting the conflict parties and actors, findings showed no significant differences between the analyzed newspapers. Meanwhile, there was a significant difference in the language used by each newspaper to cover and present the uprising. The language used by Al-Wafd was mainly “de-escalated oriented” (M=12.8, $\alpha < 0.05$) in comparison to the language used by Al-Ahram (M=10.7, $\alpha < 0.05$). Al-Wafd also used less “escalated-oriented” language (M=14.1, $\alpha < 0.05$), compared to Al-Ahram (M=14.4, $\alpha < 0.05$).

In general, it may be argued that while the opposition/political party-owned was more committed to the principles of the de-escalated-oriented in its coverage of the uprising of January 2011, the government-owned newspapers were slightly close to the values of escalated-oriented. These findings are similar to those of Goretti’s (2007) study about the coverage of Ugandan newspapers regarding growing tensions and conflict in that country. It seems that the escalated- oriented coverage of the government-owned newspaper, Al-Ahram, reflects views of the political regime, support the structures of power prevalent and does not confront power nor challenge power-elite narratives. This is due to the power structures, ownership and political context in which these media outlets operate (Hassan, 2015). In so doing, this view of the media is techno-deterministic, because it assumes that it is the media that prevails in the articulation of news, while depriving the explanation from the factor of collective and individual agency.

CONCLUSIONS

Many other scholars might give a different reading and interpretation of these results. We do acknowledge that the data itself could suggest support for the then, Mubarak's regime. However, beyond that, it is clear that rather than calming tensions, the private and government-owned news media played a role in increasing tensions by means of an escalatory coverage that further polarized society. Moreover, in these types of scenarios, de-escalation is central to reinforcing the existing status quo.

Indeed, de-escalation is part of re-establishing control and a basic principle in the use of the media to retain power. In the case of Egypt, however, the news media did exactly the opposite and amplified tensions, which led to increasing polarization in public opinion and, ultimately, more confrontation and violence occurred.

Now, it is impossible to say if the effect of this played an ultimate role in the final events that ended a whole era of political control, but the fact remains that it contributed, knowingly or not, to further mobilization and unrest. However, we do know, from various previous studies, that news emphasized the coverage of places that showcase demonstrations and ongoing events, can lead other media to copy what has been communicated and further mobilization, even when the reporters think they are demonizing the government's opponents. This coverage might have an effect in further amplifying the uprising, as it consolidated the idea of ongoing and growing tensions, as shown in other parts of the world, where exposure led to more people joining uprisings and protests (Lugo-Ocando et al., 2015).

This study suggests that the news coverage basically asserted that conflict resolution and broader agreement between political parties and actors was impossible while concealing almost all political initiatives to resolve the conflict. In general, our data confirms that the coverage of the uprising was more 'escalated-oriented' than 'de-escalated-oriented.'

It is also clear that the coverage asserted that conflict resolution and agreement between political parties and actors was regarded as impossible and concealed almost all political initiatives to find a solution for the conflict. Generally, it may be argued that the coverage of the conflict's issues and events was more 'escalated-oriented' than 'de-escalated-oriented.'

As for the second category, presenting the parties and actors of the uprising, the coverage was 'escalated-oriented'. It emphasized the victimization of elites, condemnation of the opponent's actions and one-sided portrayal of conflict and incompatibility of the parties' interests. The coverage also ignored citizens as peace-makers, and little did it show balanced portrayals of victims from all layers of society.

Concerning the language used in the coverage, it concentrated on the propaganda-orientation through focusing on emotional language that reflected the 'us-against-them' mentality. The coverage's language also neglected to name all evil-doers, humanize all sides of the conflict or give voice to all the conflict's parties. Therefore, it may be concluded here that the language used in the coverage was 'escalated-oriented.'

The political stance and ownership of the newspaper were significant factors in determining its coverage orientation. However, paradoxically, while the opposition newspaper was slightly committed to de-escalating tensions, which would have benefited the Mubarak regime, the government-owned newspaper was, instead, escalated-oriented, especially in covering issues and events of the conflict and the language used in their reports, which probably contributed to exacerbating the tensions and ultimately, to its demise.

We do recognize that our data and analysis have important limitations, which makes it an ongoing topic to explore. First, it applied only content analysis to explore how the online newspapers covered the January uprising in Egypt. Therefore, triangulation with quantitative-based data is required to understand better to what extent journalists in Egypt's news media were aware of their role during those events. This might prove difficult, however, given that many reporters are reluctant to speak about these events, which in political terms are still recent. However, it is a task urgently needed to set the historical record for future generations.

Indeed, from this data, it is impossible to precisely determine the orientation and the orchestration. This is despite the fact that the presence of agency is evident as the journalists in both newspapers performed counter-intuitively to what was expected of them. Consequently, further research efforts are needed by scholars to better understand journalists' agency in the context of events such as the Arab Spring. These efforts should investigate the same subject with more in-depth analysis through interviews and focus groups

with journalists from different news organizations in Egypt and the region and triangulate this with discourse analysis of media content from that time. These efforts are needed to move beyond the techno-deterministic assumptions for which it seems to be that the media, rather than the people, are at the center of social movements.

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