

The role of the international Arab press in shaping Arab public opinion: An analytical study of the international newspapers Asharq Al-Awsat and Al-Ahram

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Abstract

This study aimed to determine the level that the international Arab newspapers has reached to informing the Arab public opinion, addition to its value in the Arab region, and beside that Identify the challenges faced in achieving the desired interaction for the positive contribution in raising the intellectual and cultural level of the Arab audience with transfer of advanced journalistic experiences of the other among the Arab sector.

The researcher has taken both newspapers: Middle East and Al-Ahram International, as a sample of international newspapers targeted content and influence, as they are more Arabic newspapers which are proportions great follow-up of Arab citizens abroad, and that compared to the history and capabilities to reach the largest segments of them in different parts of the world.

The researcher found through the study of theses newspapers several results, including: there is a clear disparity in the international Arab newspapers capabilities, and it seems clear that some of them get better financing allowed to stand, and affects in its orientations. Also, there is a large proportion of Arab citizens outside the Arab countries believe that they are getting limited affect of the international Arab newspapers, so that its index to a clear decline of impact on the readers.

Keywords: International press – Public opinion – Arab media discourse – Arab public opinion – Middle East – Al-Ahram.

Introduction

The launch of international Arabic journalism has fostered a necessary cultural interaction between Arabs in the diaspora and the political and cultural currents in their host countries, on the one hand, and between Arabs in the Arab region and external cultures, on the other. This necessitates editorial techniques and a media discourse that differ somewhat from the journalistic practices of Arabic newspapers in their respective countries.

While international journalism has enjoyed freedoms in its host countries and benefited from modern production and printing technologies, as well as the ease of access to information from its sources, it has faced challenges in shaping public awareness and influencing public opinion. This is due to the perception that it is an external entity lacking the cultural and educational authority to influence the convictions of Arab citizens.

The formation of Arab media discourse in general, as a means of shaping public opinion, whether decisively on some pivotal issues of the Arab nation or circumstantially on current issues, requires confronting many of the challenges faced by national newspapers, which have not been very successful in formulating content that rises to the concerns of the nation and the movement of the masses and is free from the sloganeering and superficiality that surrounds many aspects of their lives.

2 .Related Studies

2.1 Africa and Arab Public Opinion - Awatif Abdel Rahman(1983)

Methodology: Survey study – Content analysis

Study Results:

- Most Arab newspapers did not present a unified vision regarding the issues of the African struggle.
- Some Arab newspapers presented views that contradicted their governments' positions on African issues.
- Some Arab newspapers sided with the Western perspective in defining their positions on the issues of the African struggle and the issue of Arab-African cooperation.

2.2 The Role of Arab Satellite Channels in Shaping Regional Public Opinion: A Case Study of Al Jazeera and Al Manar - Yasser Mahjoub Al-Hussein(2008)

Methodology: Survey Study – Questionnaire – Content Analysis

Study Results:

- Al Jazeera's media discourse is far removed from the political climate of Qatar, the channel's sponsor, and attempts to be shaped by the realities of the Arab world and the aspirations of the Arab public. In contrast, Al Manar's media policy is based on a logic of constant mobilization, and its content is formulated in language and presented using techniques aimed at promoting the ideology and political approach of Hezbollah.
- Al Manar's affiliation with a known political entity, namely Hezbollah, has negatively impacted its role in shaping Arab public opinion, as there is a degree of directness in its political discourse. In contrast, Al Jazeera's affiliation with the Qatari government has not had the same effect, as Qatar's political objectives are achieved indirectly, perhaps through the nationalist discourse adopted by Al Jazeera.

2.3 Iraq News on Arab Satellite Channels - Fares Hassan Shukr Al-Mahdawi(2009)

Methodology: Survey Study – Historical Method – Content Analysis

Study Results:

- The differences in content between Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya satellite channels stem from professional, ideological, and political factors. The professional factors relate to flaws in certain aspects of the editorial process, which ultimately affect the overall results, perhaps without the channels being aware of these flaws due to workload and a lack of scientific content analysis.
- Reviewing the role of the reporter on both Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera channels and distinguishing between their role as a news correspondent and their role as an expert or commentator, which can explicitly or implicitly favor one side or the other.

4 .Problem of the study

The problem stems from the role of the international Arab press in presenting and disseminating media discourse that contributes to shaping an objective and genuine Arab public opinion on critical issues. The international press has limited its scope of publication to the same standards set by Arab states regarding freedoms and journalistic content. This restricts its ability to contribute positively to shaping public awareness and opinion, conveying the experiences of others in freedoms, and improving journalistic performance.

Due to the international Arab press's adherence to national media policies, these newspapers have continued to face subtle constraints in their handling of journalistic events, mirroring the experiences they have in their host countries. Consequently, they have faced challenges in shaping Arab public opinion, as well as challenges related to the Arabic language in conveying Arab issues to others around the world.

5 .Study Objectives

This study aims to determine the level of influence wielded by international Arab newspapers in shaping Arab public opinion, their media value in the Arab region, and the challenges they face in achieving the necessary interaction to contribute positively to raising the intellectual and cultural level of the Arab audience by sharing advanced journalistic experiences with others in the Arab world.

Since shaping public opinion requires tools and mechanisms related to journalistic content, it is essential to study and analyze the content of a sample of international Arab newspapers, particularly regarding issues of concern to Arab citizens, and to assess whether these newspapers, through their international identity, have been able to play an influential role in shaping public opinion on these issues.

6 .Significance of the Study

The importance of this study stems from studying the experience of Arab international newspapers in shaping Arab public opinion. This is due to the advanced human and technological resources available to them, as well as their significant experience in interacting with the advanced technologies of international journalism. These technologies fall under the standards and conditions of international media, which in turn possess the mechanisms necessary to present strategic media content to achieve its objectives among its audiences.

Because shaping public opinion is of paramount importance, this study examines the values that guide the work of Arab international newspapers, studies the challenges they face, and analyzes the media planning systems they employ to achieve their mission and goals.

7. Methodology

Given the study problem, the most suitable methodology for reaching logical conclusions is the descriptive analytical approach, which focuses on studying the current facts related to the nature of the phenomenon (Hussein, Samir Mohammad, 1976). The researcher also employs several methods and tools to address the study problem, including the comprehensive survey method.

The survey method helps in discovering specific relationships between different phenomena within the study framework. It is a process through which we obtain accurate information related to the study topic (Badr, Ahmed, 1986). This methodology aims to record, analyze, and interpret the phenomenon in its current state, after collecting the necessary and sufficient data about it and its components through a set of organized procedures that define the type of data, its source, and the methods of obtaining it (Abdul Majeed, Mohammad, 1992).

8 .Study Tools

The researcher uses several tools to collect the study data, including:

8.1 Observation: This refers to everything the researcher observes and must document. Direct observation is considered an important method of data collection because it contributes significantly to descriptive study (Badr, Ahmed, 1986). In this method, the researcher must pay attention to everything unexpected, which leads him to observe phenomena that he did not intend to observe for their own sake. Observation may be quantitative or qualitative (Mohammad Ali, Maher Abdul Qader, 1985).

8.2 Questionnaires: They help the researcher collect information from a large sample, and they do not interfere with the respondents' self-reporting. They also provide a high degree of objectivity and internal validity (Abdulmajeed, Mohammad, 1992).

8.3 Interviews: These are a tool used to collect data through personal interviews between the researcher and the respondents to explore new dimensions of the study. They are considered one of the most flexible methods for collecting data and information (Al-Bah, Khalifa Shehata, 1992) and are largely considered oral questionnaires (Badr, Ahmed, 1986).

8.4 Content Analysis: This is defined, within the framework of combining descriptive and inferential approaches, as "a set of methodological steps that seek to discover the meanings inherent in the content and the correlational

relationships between these meanings, through quantitative, objective, and systematic study of the features apparent in this content" (Abdalmajeed, Mohammad, 1992).

9 .Study Sample:

The sample is a segment (a part) of the study population that possesses the characteristics and attributes of this population and represents it with regard to the phenomenon under investigation (Al-Kalaldeh, Thahir, and Jawdeh, Kazem, 1997).

The sample represents a part of the study population in terms of characteristics and attributes and is used when it suffices the researcher to avoid studying all units of the population (Zuwailif, Mahdi, and Al-Tarawneh, Tahseen, 1998).

This study examines the journalistic performance trends of the Saudi newspaper Asharq Al-Awsat, published in London and distributed worldwide, and the international edition of the Egyptian newspaper Al-Ahram, during the period 2011–2013.

9.1 Newspaper Sample, including:

9.1.1 Asharq Al-Awsat:

An Arabic newspaper founded by the brothers Hisham and Mohammed Ali Hafez, with its first issue published on July 4, 1978. It is published in London in Arabic by the Saudi Research and Marketing Group.

It is a comprehensive daily newspaper with a general news focus, aimed at Arab readers everywhere, and is transmitted via satellite to Dhahran, Riyadh, Jeddah, Kuwait, Casablanca, Cairo, Beirut, Dubai, Frankfurt, Marseille, Madrid, and New York.

9.1.1 Al-Ahram International:

Since 1984, the international edition of Al-Ahram newspaper has been published daily in London and printed in London and Paris for distribution in cities across Europe, America, and Canada.

In 1986, it began printing in New York for distribution in Canada and the Americas, and in 1994, it began printing in Frankfurt for distribution in North Africa in addition to Europe.

9.2 Sample of Arab citizens, including:

9.2.1 Citizens residing outside the Arab world.

9.2.2 Citizens residing within the Arab world.

10 .The nature of international journalism

Journalism reflects a continuous human need for communication and connection within a single society and human societies in general. Therefore, it is an authentic behavior and cognitive system that expresses that need, which is fundamentally cognitive and seeks to be satisfied through the transmission of news and information. Given that it is possible to transmit from a newspaper in the international sphere, any local newspaper issued in a society is considered, in part, to be international because it conveys to the whole world what is happening in that society.

The tremendous technological advancements in modern communication have contributed to the creation of what is now known as the global village, where information travels instantly. This has had a profound impact on societies, allowing them to know what is happening around them moment by moment, thus making media more widespread and influential. Jehan Rashti points out that this has "brought about radical changes in the perceptions of citizens worldwide, and broadened individuals' horizons and semantic frameworks to an unprecedented degree, such that no one can isolate people from one another mentally or psychologically anymore, because what happens in any part of the world leaves its mark on all other parts of today's world. Today's world has become yesterday's village" (Rashti, Jehan Ahmed, 1978).

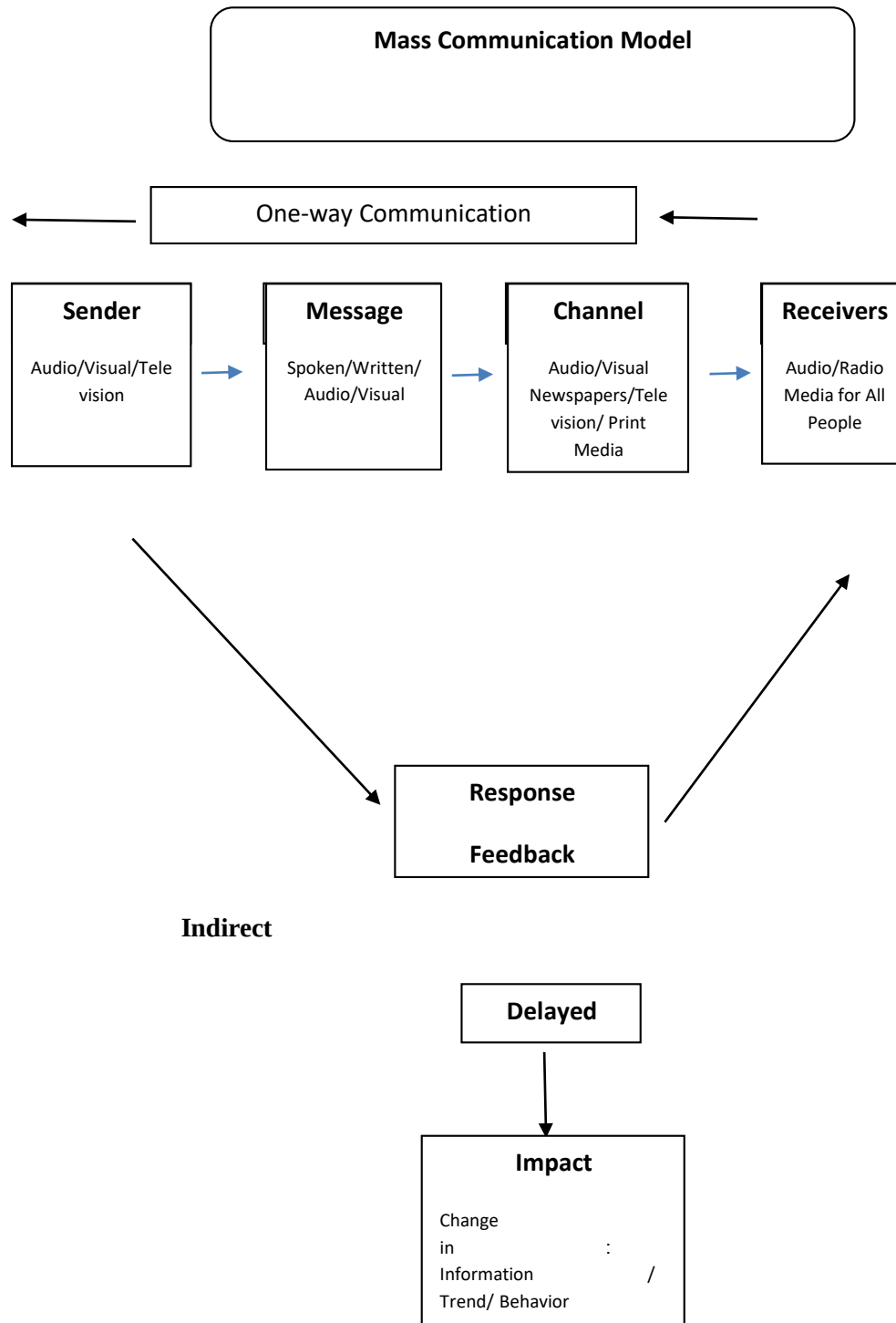
However, with the overall development of technologies related to the journalistic process, newspapers are no longer limited to the print edition. Several other technological systems, inherent to communication development, have accompanied this evolution, along with the expansion of internet use and the emergence of new media applications and social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

The emergence of communication technologies via social networking sites has, in turn, generated new concepts regarding the media's value and the necessity for it to adhere to the principles and concepts of communication. This ensures it remains a means of communication without losing its journalistic essence. While it can still function as a media outlet, it may lag behind modern communication applications. The fundamental journalistic value of media, including journalism, is reflected in the linguistic meaning of "media" as "the rapid transmission of information to others through words or other means." Al-Raghib al-Isfahani points out that media was characterized by rapid dissemination of information (Al-Washli, Abdullah Qasim, 1994).

Although the imbalance in information flow between the Global North and South is no longer as significant as it was before the widespread technological boom in communications and online applications, it still constitutes a substantial portion of information exchange. This necessitates, according to the McBride Report, the establishment of a new, balanced international media and communication system that safeguards the right of developing countries to rectify the distorted media landscape, free from interference by other countries, particularly developed ones, and thus prevents their control over information (Mirdad, Adel Siraj, 2001).

International journalism is more exposed to broader social segments than local newspapers, and this expands its media and communication values, making mass communication theories more amenable to theoretical frameworks. Mass communication is defined as "organized and deliberate communication based on sending public messages from a mass communication institution (radio, newspaper, advertising agency, publishing house, or television station) via a mass communication medium (audio, visual, or audio/visual) to a broad audience with the intention of influencing their information, attitudes, or behavior," as illustrated in the following figure (Abu Arqoub, Ibrahim, 2012):

(Figure 1) - The Mass Communication Model



11.1 Functions of International Press

The basic functions of journalistic institutions in any social system can be summarized in the following points (Al-Masoudi, Mustafa, 1985):

- **The Informational Function:** This involves gathering news, data, images, and commentaries, processing them, and framing them appropriately to facilitate understanding of personal, environmental, and international circumstances, enabling the news recipient to make sound decisions.
- **The Unifying and Participating Function:** This function involves providing a shared body of knowledge that fosters synergy and enables members of society to coexist and work together.
- **Creating Incentives and Motivations:** It is well-known that media outlets stimulate ambition and encourage individual and collective aspirations.

- **Dialogue and Debate:** Media outlets facilitate the exchange of information, the pursuit of ideas, the clarification of different viewpoints, the elucidation of key data, and the creation of a framework for action that aligns with the public interest at all levels: local, national, and international.
- **Integration and Understanding:** This task entails empowering individuals and groups to voice their opinions and perspectives, ensuring opportunities for understanding and awareness of others' living conditions, viewpoints, and aspirations.
- **Community Service:** In addition to these key functions, which we have examined from an individual's perspective, we must also highlight a growing phenomenon of importance: the needs of groups and communities as a whole.

12 .Challenges and Problems Facing International Journalism

The journalistic production process in international journalism faces the same problems and obstacles as national newspapers. These problems and obstacles are related to journalistic regulations and the ethical dimensions of professional practice. Financial constraints may be a major obstacle, given the decline of print newspapers and the growth of their online counterparts, which negatively impacts advertising, the primary source of newspaper funding.

However, financial obstacles are not the only challenges facing international newspapers. There is also widespread public opinion regarding the credibility and objectives of this type of press.

Another obstacle is the restrictions imposed by some countries that prevent journalists from accessing news sources. Journalists may be denied entry to certain countries, and sometimes countries obstruct the transmission of news and impose various forms of censorship on correspondence and journalistic reports.

Media exchange is another problem facing international journalism, particularly when parties fail to adhere to objectivity, distorting facts and highlighting one viewpoint at the expense of others. Often, these parties focus only on aspects of the issue that benefit them, deliberately distorting the facts to serve one side of the conflict (Al-Bukhari, Mohammad, 2009).

Mohammad Al-Bukhari identifies many problems and obstacles that limit the work of international press, the most important of which are (bukharimailru.blogspot):

- Confusion between international, regional, and local media functions, and the requirements and distinct characteristics of each.
- Confusion between the state's domestic, regional, and foreign policies when planning international media campaigns, and confusion in setting priorities.
- Weaknesses in the equipment and technology of national media institutions, their lack of advanced equipment and resources, and the necessary financial capabilities for international media campaigns, or their poor or ineffective use of available funds for the required purposes. This is compounded by the superficiality of foreign aid received by these countries from wealthy nations and specialized international organizations.
- A glaring shortage of media personnel specializing in local, regional, and international media, and a scarcity of those with academic qualifications, leading to:
- The selection of unqualified personnel for international media work, often for political reasons. This, in turn, leads to:
 - A lack of coordination between planners, implementers, and monitoring bodies in international media campaigns.
 - A lack of understanding of the characteristics of foreign media audiences and the absence of a logical, appropriate, and sophisticated media approach capable of effectively conveying the message to the target audience of international media campaigns.
 - A lack of cooperation and coordination between media institutions, specialized higher education institutions, and scientific research institutions regarding the development of national media personnel and applied scientific research, particularly concerning the study of media feedback, the impact of media content, and the effectiveness of media plans.
 - A reliance on purely theoretical research that focuses solely on descriptive and historical aspects, neglecting studies that address the core of planning, analyze the content of the media message, and assess both the planned and actual media feedback.

13 .Technological Developments in International Press

Computers have become an integral part of our daily lives, from cash registers to digital calculators, CD players, video games, copiers, fax machines, and smartphones. Even the watches we wear are essentially computers in disguise. It is now difficult to imagine any electronic device that does not contain a computer. Reality has surpassed the science fiction of the recent past (Kelch, Frank, 2000).

In the context of the contemporary information revolution, the technologies through which information is accessed have evolved, and new media applications and social networking sites have expanded, allowing for a reversal of the imbalance in the flow of news in the modern era. Some argue that the depth of this revolution is similar to the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society, a fundamental shift—a change in the pattern and habits of material and intellectual production—and a transformation in the basic structures of society (Al-Miyah, Abdul Latif Ali, and Al-Ta'i, Hanan Ali, 2003).

14 .Publishing and Communication Technologies

Publishing and printing technologies have evolved in the modern era, and newspapers now utilize them to become more relevant and appealing to their readers in terms of both form and content. Research and development in the field of printing have continued, culminating in the G3 method, where sending and receiving an A4 page anywhere in the world takes no more than twenty seconds (Al-Musallami, Ibrahim Abdullah, 1991).

This technology, which supports the dissemination of newspapers across various media and communication channels, is constantly evolving and developing. It cannot be considered a static variable; rather, it is one of the factors that change and evolve daily, thanks to modern innovations and inventions, and the development of sciences with diverse applications, particularly in the field of satellite communications, and the resulting political, economic, social, and cultural repercussions (Mirdad, Adel Siraj, 2001).

Satellite technology has helped in printing newspapers in more than one edition in more than one printing press around the world. The goal of communication via satellites, like any other means of communication, is to transmit information of various kinds, and then retrieve it with high efficiency and quality. Satellite technology has achieved most of what human civilization aspires to in terms of ambitions that were not available to achieve before (Mirdad, Adel Siraj, 2001).

15 .International Newspaper Websites

The Internet is considered one of the most prominent and important achievements of the communications and information revolution in the modern era. Therefore, media and communication outlets have benefited greatly from it due to its influential communicative and interactive role in their activities. The Internet has been able to serve media of all kinds, and especially newspapers, as it has many advantages in the publishing process, including:

- The Internet is an interactive journalistic media tool, where it conducts a search for specific news information and chooses the appropriate time for this search, in addition to the interactivity it provides through the pages of the “ASP” program, which allows interaction between journalistic institutions and readers.
- The ability to gauge user reactions by answering questions posed.
- The low cost of publishing news and advertising content for newspapers online.
- The ability to flexibly modify and update newspaper news and advertising content.
- The integration of the internet and its networks with digital printing methods for newspapers.
- The speed of publishing journalistic content online.
- The internet boasts a vast and massive user base.
- The internet facilitates high-volume audience subscriptions to news publishing websites.
- Newspaper organizations with online presence have benefited from advertising companies that wish to place advertisements online.

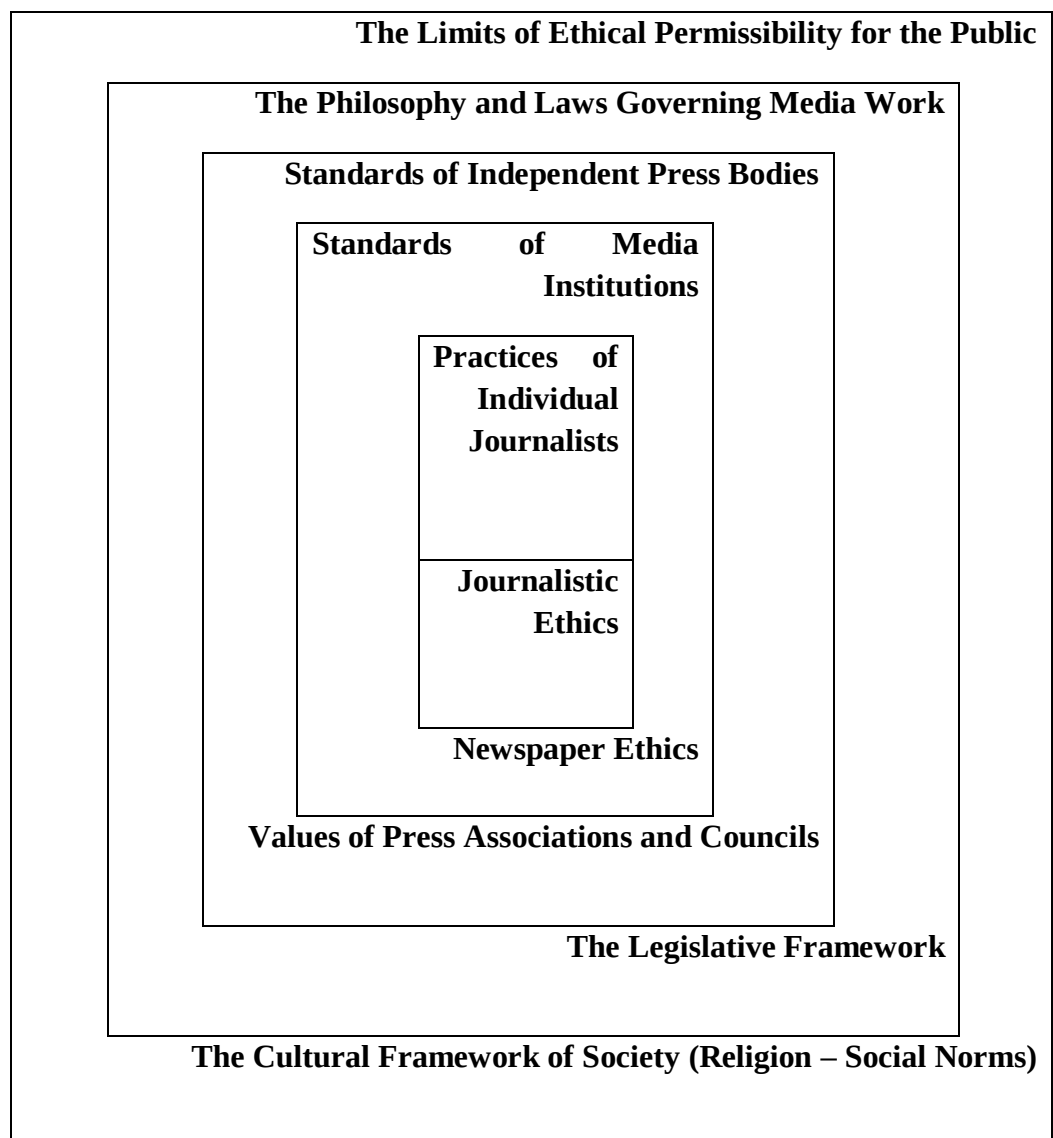
-The ease of embedding audio, motion picture, or video files within media content publishing sites (Mohammed Alam El-Din, Ahmed, 2007).

Asharq Al-Awsat was the first Arabic electronic newspaper published via the internet, on September 9, 1995. The second Arabic newspaper to be published online was the Lebanese newspaper An-Nahar, on January 1, 1996, followed by Al-Hayat on June 1, 1996, and the Lebanese newspaper As-Safir at the end of the same year (Bakheet, Al-Sayed, 2000).

16 .Standards of Journalistic Practice

There are many standards related to the ethics and rules of journalistic practice in handling and publishing news. Standards for news gathering include respecting privacy, avoiding deceiving sources, and avoiding conflicts of interest. Standards for news writing include accuracy, objectivity, balance, and comprehensiveness (Hossam El-Din, Mohamed, 2003).

Table (1) – **Reference Frameworks for Standards of Journalistic Practice** (Hossam El-Din, Mohamed, 2003)



Adherence to professional ethics largely determines the level of reader acceptance, trust, and respect for the newspaper. A major newspaper like the Washington Post sets multiple ethical rules that journalists adhere to in all their professional details. Its professional charter states, “We must avoid sexual language, and we must also avoid rudeness, vulgarity, and obscene language unless its use is essential to a story so necessary that without such language the meaning of the story is lost. Under no circumstances may such obscenities be used without the approval of the executive editor, managing editor, or deputy managing editor” (Hossam El-Din, Mohamed, 2003).

17 .Arab Public Opinion

The press plays a significant and influential role in shaping and directing public opinion through a number of tools that can have a positive or negative impact on this formation. Public opinion cannot be a precise measure of the trends in social segments regarding a particular issue; rather, it provides inconclusive indicators of those trends. Some definitions even suggest that it is not the opinion of the entire population. Instead, it is more accurately described as the opinion of a class that holds the majority or influence among the other classes. It is likely that the opinion of the middle class in a nation is the dominant opinion, or the opinion that holds sway and precedes the opinions of other classes (Hamza, Abdel Latif, 2006).

Arab public opinion, in turn, reflects an ethnic and social system within the international community. Therefore, its stance on various issues stems from its level of interest in them and its approach to dealing with them. Arabs, by definition, are distinct from non-Arabs (Ali ibn Ismail ibn Sidah, Abu al-Hasan, 2000). The word "Arab" is feminine, hence the feminine form used to describe them, as in "the pure Arabs" (al-Arab al-`Aribah) and "the pure Arabs" (al-`Arab al-`Arba`). They are distinct from non-Arabs (Al-Maqqari, Ahmad ibn Mohammad ibn Ali, 2000).

The media is linked to the idea of forming or shaping public opinion, as it broadcasts or publishes news or information that helps the recipient determine their position on issues. However, it is not true, as is commonly believed, that the media shapes public opinion absolutely. This is confirmed by Walter Lippmann's* assertion that "the media always fails to guide the public on how to think, but it always succeeds in informing them what they should think."

Rowe found slight differences between the media in Arab countries, differences that were in degree rather than kind. Accordingly, he classified Arab media into three categories: loyal, as in monarchies; propagandistic, as in republics; and diverse. He considered the third type the best because it offered a minimum of pluralism of opinion, as seen in the press of Lebanon, Morocco, and Kuwait (Al-Mousa, Issam Suleiman, 2009).

To obtain public opinion that provides strong and honest indicators consistent with reality and its data, the pollster must be impartial, neutral, and free from bias. Neutrality in this context is a crucial and fundamental factor, one that Schiller describes as a myth, indicating its difficulty in being achieved: "The people must believe that the government, the media, and education are all far removed from the arena of conflicting social interests. The government, and the national government in particular, remains the cornerstone of the myth of neutrality" (Schiller, Herbert, 1999).

The entity that prepares and conducts public opinion polls acts as the communicator with all its characteristics and media roles that feed the recipient with truthful and objective information and news devoid of bias. The communicator can provide information to the recipient within the framework of his message and try to add it to their awareness, and try to influence trends and behavior. He can perform a civilizational function such as confirming the feeling of belonging to the nation (Al-Awaini, Mohammad Ali, 1986).

18 .The Journalistic Developments of Asharq Al-Awsat Newspaper

Asharq Al-Awsat is considered one of the largest Arabic newspapers. It was launched in London on July 4, 1978, by the Saudi Research and Marketing Group, and its publishers were two Saudi journalists, Hisham and Mohammad Ali Hafez. Its editor-in-chief was Jihad Al-Khazen, a Palestinian journalist, who was later succeeded by Mohammad Marouf Al-Shaibani, a Saudi journalist.

A notable feature of Asharq Al-Awsat's history is that it was launched in the late 1970s, a time of increasing Arab migration to Europe, particularly Lebanese fleeing the horrors of the civil war. This period also witnessed a surge in Arab tourism to Europe, fueled by the opportunities provided by the oil boom (Abu Zeid, Farouk, 1993). This helped the newspaper establish itself as an Arabic newspaper that Arab expatriates could find informative and newsworthy.

In addition, the newspaper benefited from the technological revolution that modern journalism was able to employ successfully, as the fax machine supported by computer technology and satellite communication emerged, enabling the newspaper to print in London, Cairo and Jeddah at the same time. After that, the printing centers extended to a number of other Arab and international capitals, and it was a common sight to see employees of British newspapers

* Walter Lippmann (1889-1974) was an American journalist who gained international fame as a political writer and the author of a controversial theory on "manufacturing the masses," in which he "analyzed" the media to build a public opinion that turns society into an obedient majority that repeats what it hears and considers what it hears to be an unblemished truth.

visiting the newspaper building in London to learn about this journalistic technological progress (Abu Zaid, Farouk, 1993).

18.1 Asharq Al-Awsat Coverage

Asharq Al-Awsat primarily focuses on covering crisis zones, such as Palestine, Iraq, Sudan, and Afghanistan. It also provides near-comprehensive coverage of political news across the Arab world, consisting almost entirely of news agency dispatches translated into Arabic.

Asharq Al-Awsat offers in-depth analyses and insightful opinion pieces by prominent Arab, Muslim, and Western writers, including the leading liberal writer Abdul Rahman Rashid, media expert Diana Mikdad, and the Egyptian writer Anis Mansour. It is currently the only newspaper holding the Arabic publishing rights for international media outlets such as The Washington Post, USA Today, and Global Viewpoint.

18.2 Technological Developments

Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper has kept pace with technological advancements that support its reach and communication with its readers worldwide. This is achieved through the use of smartphone technology, allowing users to access the daily newspaper pages, along with breaking news, through dedicated applications. Among these applications is the iPad, which the newspaper utilizes in its English edition under the name Asharq Al-Awsat English iPad app.

The newspaper has also adopted Android technology, keeping pace with these modern devices. This allows users to access the daily edition's content with a simple finger gesture, and articles can be saved to the device. Furthermore, the application offers a search function across all sections of the newspaper via smartphone. This application is named Asharq Al-Awsat Android app.

Recent developments for the newspaper include an iPhone app, also available on smartphones, which allows readers to browse the daily issue in PDF format with a simple swipe. Articles can also be saved to the device, and the app features a search function for all sections of the newspaper. This app is called the Asharq Al-Awsat iPhone app.

18.3 Website

Asharq Al-Awsat has an interactive website that provides access to all its articles. Users can also browse scanned copies of the pages and subscribe to receive copies via email. The diversity of topics covered, combined with its comprehensive approach, has made Asharq Al-Awsat the preferred and most influential Arabic newspaper, reaching the interests of all political, social, economic, and sports groups. It also conducts in-depth interviews with prominent and influential figures.

18.4 Asharq Al-Awsat on Social Media

The newspaper created an official Twitter account, describing it as "the main account of Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper. You can follow all the news across various fields, in addition to a special reading of the most prominent articles that will be covered in the international edition of Al-Arab newspaper." The account can be found at https://twitter.com/aawsat_News.

Asharq Al-Awsat also has an interactive presence on the social networking site Facebook at <https://ar.facebook.com/asharqalawsat.a>, where it presents itself as the first Arabic newspaper in the world, printed on four continents in 12 cities worldwide. Founded in London in 1978, Asharq Al-Awsat was established as a publisher specializing in Arab and international affairs.

19 .The Journalistic Developments of Al-Ahram International Newspaper

Al-Ahram is considered one of the oldest Arabic newspapers. The Al-Ahram Foundation was established in Alexandria by the brothers Salim and Bishara Taqla after the government of Khedive Ismail granted them a license to publish the newspaper on August 5, 1876, making it the oldest continuously published Arabic newspaper. It began as a weekly newspaper, but less than five years later, on January 3, 1881, it became a daily newspaper. Al-Ahram newspaper embarked on the international edition experiment after newspapers across the Arab world and internationally had already adopted this approach, in keeping with its long history and its greater focus on international affairs compared to other Egyptian newspapers. This edition did not differ significantly from the content of the parent newspaper. The

first issue of "Al-Ahram International" was published on June 18, 1984, in London, under the title "Al-Ahram: International Edition." Then, starting Tuesday, January 13, 1987, it began using the phrase "Al-Ahram International." The Al-Ahram International edition printed in New York and published starting January 19, 1987, bore the heading: "Al-Ahram North America Edition." (Abdullah Al-Muslimi, Ibrahim, 1993)

The launch of Al-Ahram's "International Edition" came after three months of extensive research and study. This study was conducted by a multi-departmental team, each comprised of several experts (as discussed in an interview with Ayman El-Sisi). This included the editorial department, where two opposing viewpoints emerged. One emphasized the necessity of maintaining the editorial content published in "Al-Ahram International," arguing that Al-Ahram's readers want to read their newspaper exactly as they read it in Cairo, without any alterations. The other viewpoint asserted that Al-Ahram is not merely Egyptian, but primarily Arab, and should not be subject to local standards. Its focus should be Arab first, and Egyptian second. Furthermore, given that Europe has two types of Arabic readers—regular residents and temporary visitors—Al-Ahram's international edition should prioritize Arab interests over those of the local Cairo edition. For several reasons, especially economic ones, it was decided to send the pages as they are, like the pages of the local newspaper published in Cairo, at least initially, with the development to be carried out gradually.

As for the technical aspects, they were divided into two parts. The first involved the equipment for transmitting the pages from Cairo to the satellite, and then the equipment for receiving these pages in London. Al-Ahram's engineers developed the specifications for the machinery required for the project, and an international tender was issued, attracting four companies specializing in machinery production. The second part concerned the printing location in London. The decision was made to print at a printing press located outside London in the Harlow district. This press already printed the daily newspaper Al-Arab in London, as well as the American newspaper The Herald Tribune (interview with Ayman El-Sisi).

Regarding distribution, Al-Ahram had no direct experience with distribution in Europe. When it decided to launch its international edition, a number of distribution experts began traveling to Europe to explore the best methods for distributing Al-Ahram International, especially given the intense competition in European cities among several Arabic-language daily newspapers, including Asharq Al-Awsat, Al-Ahram, Al-Hayat, and Al-Arab (interview with Ayman El-Sisi).

The process of publishing the international edition of Al-Ahram was not easy, as it faced many challenges and problems. These included issues related to page layout and preparation, printing, and distribution. In the early issues of the international edition, printed in London, it was observed that some lines of text appeared as if on a dark gray grid, and some paragraphs appeared gray and unclear. Meanwhile, the same printing press received pages from the Herald Tribune, which did not exhibit the same defect. Upon investigation, it became clear that the defect was caused by the use of adhesives to hold the bromide clippings together, resulting in the issue appearing when the paper was sent from Cairo and received in London (interview with Ayman El-Sisi).

Another problem facing the international edition of Al-Ahram was related to technical factors, primarily any unforeseen disruptions in communication between Al-Ahram and the other entities involved in transporting its pages. On the evening of Thursday, February 21, 1985, the telephone lines connecting the satellite ground station in Maadi and the Al-Ahram building were disrupted, so the transmission of the pages of the weekly Friday edition was disrupted until Al-Ahram was able to obtain an alternative telephone line (Interview with Ayman El-Sisi).

Among the problems that Al-Ahram International continued to face was distribution in Europe, stemming from a lack of knowledge about where Egyptians congregate or the neighborhoods they inhabit. Were they in large or small cities? Was their population in London greater than in Paris, or vice versa? Consequently, Egyptian distributors encountered considerable difficulty in identifying the locations of Egyptians abroad to send them larger quantities of copies, especially since the international edition of Al-Ahram was not widely known and had no subscriptions.

The international edition of Al-Ahram was distinguished by its editorial content, which resonated with readers. Most notably, it transcended the limitations of the local edition, enjoying greater flexibility and freedom in addressing many Egyptian and Arab issues. This was because readers living abroad also possessed greater freedom, had easier access to information, and benefited from the free flow of news and data through various media outlets (interview with Ayman El-Sisi).

The international edition of Al-Ahram successfully maintained its Arab and Egyptian readership and their connection to this prestigious newspaper until the international print edition ceased publication on April 30, 2013, due to a crisis with advertising. At that time, it had become a substitute for the daily edition abroad (interview with Mohamed Abdelkader). Prior to its closure, the print edition had declined from 20 pages daily to 12, then to two international pages and two Arabic pages, and finally to one Arabic page and one international page.

19.1 Technological Developments

Keeping pace with communication advancements, Al-Ahram successfully implemented several smartphone applications to stay connected with its readers. These include the Al-Ahram iPhone application, developed by the Egyptian Al-Ahram Foundation. This application provides breaking news from Egypt as it happens, as well as the front-page articles from the Egyptian Al-Ahram newspaper, daily columns, and the obituaries page. The application also offers news on accidents, the economy, and the latest stock market updates. Furthermore, it covers Egyptian sports news, particularly the Egyptian Premier League, as well as Arab and international news.

The "Al-Ahram Mobile" application enables users to access the latest news as it happens, in addition to many other services such as real-time updates on breaking news, sports scores, and various other services like temperature, currency exchange rates, and prayer times.

20 .Study Procedures

The two sample newspapers are considered among the most widely read Arabic newspapers by Arab citizens abroad, based on their history and ability to reach large segments of the Arab diaspora worldwide. For many years, these newspapers have remained important sources of news for Arabs abroad, fostering a strong connection between readers and the publications. This is particularly true given their distinctive content, which covers a wide range of reader interests, and the presence of prominent writers in Arab societies.

20.1 Study Community

The study community comprises the Saudi newspaper Asharq Al-Awsat and the Egyptian newspaper Al-Ahram International, along with a number of Arab citizens. This was determined through a comprehensive study of their attitudes regarding the extent of these newspapers' influence on shaping Arab public opinion. This method, known as a comprehensive enumeration, is used to avoid the errors of generalization. Many researchers agree that every study has three main domains: the geographical domain, the human domain, and the temporal domain (Mohammad Musad, Muhi, 2000).

Within the framework of the study methodology, the study community was defined as the sample newspapers and Arab citizens. This was achieved by monitoring the role of the international Arab press in shaping Arab public opinion, whether through journalistic interviews, opinion articles, or other editorial forms. Methodologically, the study community refers to all elements of the phenomenon under study (Samir Hussein, 1976).

21 .Analysis of Results

21.1 Use of Editorial Forms

The sample newspapers used the main editorial forms to cover a number of key topics and issues of concern to Arab public opinion, both before and during the study period. This was achieved through news, reports, interviews, and articles written by elites (articles and columns). News and articles had the most prominent presence in publishing any topics related to important Arab issues of significance to the Arab citizen.

The focus on these issues was determined by identifying a number of terms related to Arab issues, namely: Palestine, Jerusalem/Al-Aqsa, peace, negotiations, occupation, settlements/settlement, and terms related to the revolutions known as the Arab Spring that occurred during the study period, including: revolution/revolution, demonstrations, democracy, and political forces/parties.

Both newspapers used a number of editorial formats in covering these issues, with news articles and opinion pieces being the most frequently used. Regarding the news published in them between 2011 and 2013, noting that Al-Ahram International ceased publication in April 2013 and the monitoring of its content for this period ended, the number of

such news items reached (52,116), representing (68.1%) of the total number of editorial formats used in the sample newspapers, which amounted to (76,482) articles. The article came in second place, having been used in various issues monitored, totaling (18,006) articles, representing (23.5%). Next were readers' letters published in the two newspapers, totaling (3,481) items, representing (4.6%). Press reports were used (2,458) to address topics and issues of interest to readers, representing (3.2%). Finally, the press interview was used (421) times, representing (0.6%) of the total editorial formats that addressed Arab issues, as illustrated in the following table:

Table (2) – **Press Formats for Arab Issues Published in the Two Sample Newspapers**

Journalistic format	Number of topics	Percentage
News	52116	68.1%
Articles	18006	23.5%
Reports	2458	3.2%
Interviews	421	0.6%
Readers Post	3481	4.6%

Based on the density of its press coverage across all journalistic formats, it is clear that Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper surpasses its counterpart, Al-Ahram International, in the quantity of topics covered. Asharq Al-Awsat published a total of 66,713 articles on the monitored issues, distributed across the identified journalistic formats, representing 87.2% of the total. In contrast, Al-Ahram International published 9,769 articles, representing 12.8%. It should be noted that Al-Ahram International does not dedicate significant space to international coverage due to its smaller page count and less extensive international distribution and printing capabilities compared to Asharq Al-Awsat. Furthermore, Al-Ahram International ceased publication approximately eight months prior to the study period. Table 3 below illustrates the difference in the volume of press coverage in the two newspapers:

Table 3 – **Topics on Arab Issues Published in the Sample Newspapers**

Newspaper	News	Articles	Reports	Interviews	Readers' Post	Total	Percentage
Asharq Al-Awsat	47318	14334	1496	148	3417	66713	87.2%
Al-Ahram International	4798	3672	962	273	64	9769	12.8%

21.2.1 Arab citizens residing outside Arab countries

215 questionnaires were distributed to citizens residing outside Arab countries, some directly to them and others via email and social media.

21.2.2 Arab citizens residing in Arab countries

231 questionnaires were distributed to citizens residing within Arab countries, some directly to them and others via email and social media.

22 .Results

- The Arab international press primarily used news reports and, secondarily, opinion pieces in its coverage of topics.
- There is a clear disparity in the capabilities of Arab international newspapers. It appears that some receive better funding, which allows them to continue operating and influences their editorial direction.
- The coverage and editorial content of Arab international newspapers depend on the orientations and biases of their sponsors or countries of origin, and are therefore subject to national media policies.
- There is little attention given to reader responses, opinions, and contributions. Readers are allocated only half a page daily, which is a mere repetition of their journalistic contributions, without any initiatives to create broader interactive spaces, either in print or online.

- A significant percentage of Arab citizens living outside the Arab world perceive the Arab international press as having limited influence on them. This indicates a clear decline in the press's impact on readers, especially given its focus on local issues, which are published according to national journalistic standards.
- The limited level of freedom in the international Arab press reduces its chances of distinguishing itself from national newspapers and diminishes its ability to help readers form opinions and reach decisions on issues that concern them.
- The international Arab press needs to exert greater effort to become capable of presenting an Arab media discourse that reflects the issues of the Arab nation and to broaden its influence beyond Arab borders through its writing and publications.
- Large segments of the Arab public have a low level of satisfaction with international Arab newspapers at a time when print newspapers are generally declining and the need for clear, objective, and bold opinion journalism is growing.

23 .Recommendations

- It is essential for Arab international journalism to keep pace with modern media production technologies and expand its reach globally, targeting Arab citizens with distinctive topics that differ from those they read or that are presented by local media.
- Avoiding strict adherence to national media policy guidelines that restrict freedoms and steer journalistic content in directions dictated by national authorities, which weakens public trust and undermines the objectivity that characterizes journalism.
- Adopting boldness and objectivity in journalistic presentation. With the proliferation of modern communication applications that provide access to information and news previously unpublishable, there is no longer anything that cannot be criticized or commented on.
- Utilizing new media platforms to retain existing newspaper readers and attract new ones, and providing them with spaces to express their opinions and publish on newspaper websites.

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