

# **Media Coverage of Recent Crises in Middle East: Daily Jordanian Press Coverage of Events in Syria 2011-2013**

**Mohammad Nasr-Allah Farej Farej<sup>1</sup>, Ahmad Rasmi Albattat<sup>2</sup>, Abdul Azeem Noor Eldeen Alhasan<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Institute of Researches and Strategic Studies, Omdurman Islamic University  
Omdurman, 382, Republic of Sudan

<sup>2</sup>School of Housing, Building and Planning, Universiti Sains Malaysia Pulau Pinang, 11800,  
Malaysia

Correspondence: Ahmad Rasmi Albattat, School of Housing, Building and Planning, University  
Sains Malaysia, Penang, 11800, Malaysia.  
Email: battat\_ahmed@yahoo.com

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## **Abstract**

The current paper investigates the media coverage of recent crisis affecting Syria. It focused on an essential research topic that deals with an important issue which covers the Jordanian Newspaper study sample of the current events in Syria, as well it identified the mechanism, methods and coverage language that newspapers used in their coverage of events in Syria and identified the most press forms used by newspapers to cover events. Thus, the background of the study has a scientific professional nature. This crisis started in Tunis after decades of bureaucratic spontaneous protests and demonstrations which later spread to Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya and Syria known as Arab Spring Revolution. This research marked one of the first attempts to investigate the media press coverage for such event. Then it discussed the most famous theories used in the Science of media. This study is one of descriptive scanning studies based on content analysis style in media research. Three local Jordanian newspapers, which are Arai, Addustour and Alarabelyawm newspapers were used to identify the content of studying Jordanian newspapers and how to process news events in Syria. The right content of the media that analyze its shape and content to meet the research needs, which formulated as research questions or requirements according to a set of classifications and determinants. The informational analysis process was applied regularly, according to methodological and objective criteria. The result of the study added a simple path to the Arab library which needs more media researches, especially, in concerning with the studies of content analysis relating to wars, crises, conflicts and revolutions.

**Keywords:** Media Coverage, crises, Newspaper, Middle East, Syria

## **1. Introduction**

There is no doubt that Arab media in all of its forms and types play a vital role in transferring the events of Arab spring revolutions. So, the researchers in media field have taken up this role from all of its sides to identify the importance of those revolutions. Press is a tool that helps individuals in the community to be aware of the political, economic, military and social events or any important events in their country or in the neighboring countries. This study has focused on the current events in Syria due to its geographical location nearby Jordan. As well, Jordan is the sole shelter for Syrian refugee survivors of being killed (Al-Mashat, 2011). The military and political events have changed quickly in Syria, beginning with Syrian protests in 2011, such the popular revolution that occurred on Tuesday, 15 March 2011 against people who are involved in the political and peaceful movement has called corruption, repression and restriction of freedom (Kneissl, 2011), which was formed by activists on Facebook and with unprecedented defiance for the Syrian regime influenced by a wave of massive protests so-called the Arab Spring, which began in Arab World in late of 2010 and in 2011, specially the Tunisian revolution and the January 25 revolution in Egypt (Ardıç, 2012). The protests have started against the Syrian regime, which governed Syria since 1971 and al Baath Party (Syria) under the authority of emergency law since 1963 (Ajami, 2012). These protests led by the young Syrian who demanded to make political, economic and social reforms, and they raised the slogan: (Allah, Syria, Freedom and nothing Else), but security forces and Syrian intelligence and loyal militias regime so-called "Allshbiha" used live bullets against them which turned the slogans day after day to "overthrow the regime". Whereas, the Syrian government has reported that the extremists and terrorists were behind these actions to destabilize the national security and to establish Islamic Emirate in some parts of the country.

The Arab revolutions and the downfall of political regimes in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya have attracted the attention of media in various countries and Jordanian newspapers which have variance attentions from one newspaper to another. This reflected on the knowledge and opinions of Jordanian public about the Arab Revolutions, events in Syria and democratic transition in the Arab region (Cronin & Ludes, 2004).

## **2. Media coverage of Crises**

In his study about the Media Treatment of the American Occupation of Iraq: Network magazine content analysis, Istabrag (2009) aims to identify the elements of public image about Iraqi situation that is displayed on New York magazine, and disclosing the elements were displayed on New York magazine that justifying the U.S. occupation of Iraq, and the most important pillars of its advertising campaign. The content analysis method was applied through three time study before and three times after the U.S. occupation of Iraq-on sample of newspapers for six months. The study revealed that the Newark magazine role contributed in the American advertising campaign that's supporting the Occupation of Iraq, and mobilized the international public opinion against Iraq through the biased role to American opinion, in which the magazine used pretexts and arguments in order to topple the regime in Iraq. Which later demonstrate to the world that it is fake and unreal.

The magazine also contributed to the disinformation campaign that were led by the U.S. pre-war to distort the Iraq picture and its leadership, and ignored the point of views that disagreed with American policies toward Iraq, even if it's belonging for regional power, international and regional organization, or its international opinion. This caused at the end to damage the credibility of the magazine and the way of displaying new.

While Wolf (2009) studied the Gaza war coverage in British and German newspaper editorials, the study aims to examine press performance, covers it all conflict aspects, and how the conflict was displayed through nation newspaper editorials in UK and Germany. The study revealed that there is no difference in Gaza war media coverage in both counties, which was surprising result, especially when the difference between the national history of Britain and Germany are taking into account, and it also revealed that there are slight differences between the attitude of Arabic and western media.

From his point of view (Idris, 2007) examined the media coverage fields in the Sudanese press (Analytical study of the Afghanistan war. August 1998 - July 2002). The study aims to displaying Sudanese press news coverage of Afghanistan wars issues in period of August 1998 to July 2002, whereas the researcher used the descriptive method in order to describe the research issues, then researcher analyzed it through the content analysis method, in order to get accurate scientific results that contribute on establishing methodological bases of how Sudanese press dealing with Afghanistan war issues, and the researcher also used observation method and holding personal interviews in order to recognize media experts' motivates and directions toward the research issues.

Catherine and Mark (2008) Examined the statement in the news and articles through converging marches and demonstrators in America which were supporting the American role in the third Gulf war, in which statement was the unit of analysis, whereas the units had classified according to certain analysis categories, in terms if it supports the war or not. The study was applied through gathering (182) news texts, and accuracy dismantling and classifying its words. The study examined phrases and banners that demonstrators were raised through all marches and its effects on the news were displayed.

### **3. Media Theories**

This study used the most famous theories in the media, to identify the press coverage of recent crises in the Middle East, and its vital role to cover all the subject phases.

#### *3.1 Gate Keeper Theory:*

One of modern theories which mean that the media message passes through many stages from the source to the receiver. These stages are like a chain consisting of several rings. The media studies of Gate Keeper have ended but there are many actions that affect the one who make contact to determine what should be published and what should not be. The concept of Media Gate Guarding is one of the oldest theoretical ideas that journalist researchers work to study and to demonstrate its importance to the media process (Syeed *et al.*, 1988, P.176). The favor returns to Kurt Lewin (1977), the Australian psychologist of American nationality, in developing the Gate Keeper theory (Burnes, 2004). Lewin reported that it's along the path of transferring

the media material to the public there are gates where decisions are made including inputs and outputs. Also, when the path takes a long time before reaching this material to public, there is being gates that use to make decisions including outputs and inputs. For this, the power of persons who manage these gates, the rules implemented in it and the personalities that have the authority to make decisions have a great importance in transferring information (Syeed *et al.*, 1988, P.176).

As well, the commitment of the one who make the contact with property owners' policies and those who work on it inside the Media Foundation is important to the permanence of the foundation and its stability in the society (Syeed *et al.*, 1988, P.115) . These studies pointed that a media message goes through many stages and then it conveyed from the source into the forum, and it is like a series of many rings. i.e. The definition of communication concept is only a series of connected rings according to the information theory term.

The definition of "Gate keeping" concept is the process of taking the control on communication series in which the gate administrator will be the authorized decision maker in regard of what's published through his/her electronic gate and the way of how it will convey to the target audience (Syeed *et al.*, 1988, P.177). So the communicator performance will be affected by the guidelines and policies that formed by legislators or officials of the career, determine what should and shouldn't be according to the media institutional goals in society. Which insures setting the media process according to authority point of view (Abd Alhameed, 1997, P.116).

Syeed *et al.*, (1988) have mentioned a group of factors that effects on securing the media gate. In which they are divided into five basic factors (Syeed *et al.*, 1988, P.177): First, Social criteria, values and traditions. Second, Self- criteria including: socialization, education, interests, affiliations, reference groups, and directions factors. Third, Professional criteria, including medium policy, available news sources and job relations and pressures. Fourth, Audience criteria. And finally, Political regimes criteria which is being the most important in the Arab world.

On other hand Hebert has differentiated between misrepresentation and random deformation especially when a gate security feels that their role is only a job or a daily routine and not a decision making (Syeed *et al.*, 1988, P.120). The role of gate security in the information flow process to the audience can be summarized in two points: first, Self-considerations for a gate security in regard of inserting or preventing what he/she please of media materials. In which these considerations may be a limited policy applied in order to change the target audience minds. Secound, A gate security and his/her decision of allowing publishing media materials through his/her media gate, so he/she has deprived the audience of watching other media materials. Whereas sometimes media may turn to withholding the truth or some of media materials, for reasons related to the society and its structure, and reasons related to the medium policy and method.

The most important features of communications policies in developing countries are the numbers of instructions and directions for a communicator. In which some of it is objective, another part is in equilateral, the other is justified by the authority, and another part has not convinced justify. Also there are no clear lines (clear borders) between the restricting or controlling instructions and policies, that vary from a society to another, and impose one of the pressures facing the communicator during controls on the content of media message that conveys to the receiver. Whereas the communicator edit the information he/she got, and

interfere with the organizing message process by omitting, adding or modifying and changing (Syeed *et al.*, 1988, P.117).

### *3.2 Agenda Setting Theory:*

The core idea in this theory that there is a close relation between the way of displaying media materials on news media (broadcasting, press, and television), in which the importance of subjects is sorted as it is viewed by news viewers. And research agenda that discusses the correlation between order resulting of content vocabularies through analyzing, and order through systematic procedures for surveying. According to the results of this relation - which has confirmed its positives through the majority of studies- audience agenda structure are influenced by the media, and topics and issues are displayed.

Agenda setting theory related basically on news media's ability to highlight the importance of political issues, and its form on audience minds. Simply the theory suggests that the media take the role of selecting and highlighting on some events, persons or certain issues, through the frequent use of this process, and due to consistency in what media displays, the audience begins to adopt the agenda is displayed in news media. Which will lead them at the end to fully believe and convince of the importance of highlighting these events, persons, issues than others.

Also there is another close relation between agenda setting theory and gate security theory, since a gate security is the one who passes the information for the audience, and sometimes identifies their agenda (Syeed *et al.*, 1988, P.288). Since newspapers are number of pages or sites on pages that vary in importance from each other, and can't set and identify the same level for all pages and sites. And there are no spaces or sites have the same importance of all news or variability issues. According to this perspective, newspapers and media must organize displaying news articles, issues, and topics in a way that points to the importance of these materials, through the relation of it to each other (Abd Alhameed, 1997, P.273).

Media set news in forms that help to find out its importance, especially for those who are more interested in newspapers. In which prioritization is considered as the outcome of several options to express media interest through media materials and messages, and sort it in a way that reflects interest levels (Abd Alhameed, 1997, P.274). Abd Alhameed (1997, P.273) mentioned that Lang Wlang found out in the fifties that the power of media and its ability to raise the attention toward certain issues emerge through establishing the public image of policy, and presenting suggested topics of what a person feels and thinks. Which are controlled by its nature and content, and which gradually stimulates peoples' attention, and makes them realize, think, and worry about it. Therefore these topics will relatively take a greater interest of audience than other topics is not displayed on media. The researcher has found ample evidence that support agenda setting theory. Such as in (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) studies, in which the correlation coefficient between the volume of media coverage on the issues and the order of these issues for the voters, was estimated, since that time the supporting research for the theory were increased. Also audience believes in this issue's importance usually is based on the media coverage more than the real indicators and facts (Al Hadedy, 2006 P.61-62). Also

audience doesn't only know public issues and events from the media, but also know its importance through its order in a medium (Abd Alhameed, 1997, P.274) .

The origin of this theory related to "agenda setting" research for "Walter Lipmann" in his book "public opinion 1992" . Lipmann mentioned that the media contributes to establishing a mental image in audiences' minds, often (these images are pseudo-environments) establishes a pseudo-environments in audiences' minds, and form public opinion through displaying issues are important to society (Ferguson, 2000).

(Syed & Mekawy, 1998) argued that the theory focuses on the ability of media to change directions according to unified effected form in media studies, although this theory has been totally ignored on fifteens and fourteens of twenty centuries. But the researcher Cohen revived Limpanns' point of view after 40 years, whereas he claimed that the media usually successes on telling audiences how to think (interests) but it usually successes telling them how should they think about information (Abd Alhameed, 1997). Furthermore, the symbolic uses of policies that "policies are a series of mental images are conveyed through television news, newspapers, magazines and dissections into the majority of people most times, whereas this image is an animated panorama and its events occur in a world that the most of the audience are unaware about, and that the media contributes to identifying audience agenda through identifying controversial issues, in order to be a public discussion (Abd Alhameed, 1997, P.274).

From their point of view, Chaffee and Choe (1980) have described communication forms as a transformation from persuasive form in journalistic form, whereas persuasive form orients toward evaluating communication practice according to its ability to mobilize the masses, and in which journalist form considers media as a tool providing the audience with the information necessary for establishing their interests about public issues.

#### **4. Methodolgy**

This study focuses on the analytical and descriptive approach which contains survey approach. Survey approach means a group of research topic phenomena from the limitative number of vocabulary that consisting the research community and for a sufficient period of time for study in order to form the major basis of data and the information that is required in a particular specialization area (AlMashagbeh, 2010 P.60). In this field, we will use content analysis method which is one of scientific research methods especially in the field of media. This study is one of descriptive scanning studies that based on content analysis style in media research. The Analysis style is one of media research styles that aim to identify the content of studying Jordanian newspapers and how to process news events in Syria.

Study Scope consists of three local Jordanian newspapers, which are Arai, Addustour and Alarabelyawm newspapers in coverage the events of Syria since its beginning, 2011, till now. The study sample is going to be determined from the beginning of events in Syria by getting a comprehensive summary for a certain sample, where an edition of each newspaper will be selected every week which is known as industrial week by adding one edition for Stempel sample that consists of 6 editions to form the industrial week.

The style of content analysis will be used as a tool to achieve the objectives of this research. Content analysis is one of scientific research that aims to describe the visible content up to the

right content of the media that we need to analyze its shape and content to meet the research needs which formulated as research questions or requirements according to a set of classifications and determinants. Content analysis aims to identify the informational purposes of those who make contact process. The informational analysis process should be applied regularly, according to methodological and objective criteria. Also, it should be based on quantitative methods to collect data basically (AlMashagbeh, 2010 P.60). In addition to this, the researcher used the relevant references, books and studies in mentioning the theoretical side of the study to enrich it. The researcher used a group of statistical methods in this study: Frequencies, Percentages and CHI-SQUARE to find the differences between the 3 newspapers in each category of analysis.

## **5. Findings, Discussion, and Conclusion**

As mentioned in the previous studies and the mindfull image for the audience. The study Confirmed Lipmann (1992) study that audience more response to world image that they establish in their minds than to real-world events. Also he clarified Lazarsfield & Merton "1048" pointed that media mission is to identify current society situation through focusing on the most important persons and issues in the society. Syeed *et al.* (1998, P.291) in his book mentioned Cho & Marten who have established models in order to set agenda order. Their model based on measuring the priorities of the audience, and the priorities of the interests of mass media based on the collective information, focused on a group of issues, based on one case study on media tools, and study one case and raised from the individual. The two researchers think that agenda setting theory that's applied by gate security and information flow explains side of the study problem that belongs to media coverage of Syrian crisis. Therefore, this study is consistent with the two basic strategies are identified by Cho and marten for setting the agenda. These two strategies are (Syeed *et al.*, 1998, P.292): first, Study for a group of the prevailing issues of media and for audience about what is happening in Syria. Second, Studying of Syrian crisis through certain duration (extending study). Whereas the content analysis were used through this study in order to count topics that take the majority interests of media (such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television), focusing on all media outlets.

Considering having critics of the theory of arranging the priorities, (Rogers) and (Derng) are indicating to the importance of considering the following (Syeed *et al.*, 1998, P.299): first, Understanding the cognitive processes that involved in the agenda setting process on a personal level. Second, Putting reality indicators to determine the extent of raising the issues on the level of media tools. Third, The selection of research generalization that allow controlling the variables, despite of all these critics but there is agree that the researches of arranging the priorities have increased the understanding of the role of media means in the society.

Within the beginning of events in Syria, 2011, Arab media had been fast and simultaneous media coverage of these events. Among media, Arab daily newspapers were in a massive competition in this field with what space station channel broadcasts to transfer the direct events to the public. The Jordanian press is concerned with the popular movement, its impacts and its political and geopolitical extensions. Especially, the important location of Jordan as an

Arab neighbor in Syria and a part of the historical Levant so the Jordanian national security totally linked to regional security from one side and Arab security from another.

The analysis appeared the attitude and perspectives of studied newspapers about the reasons behind the outbreak of events in Syria. And the importance of study the major topic which is an extension of Arab Spring Revolutions to countries was considered safer and more stable. Also, the interaction occurred among Syrian youth sector in affecting with revolutions that happened in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya and how Jordanian newspapers covered these events. According to this, the importance of study shows in the fact that it adds a simple path to the Arab library which needs more media researches, especially, in concerning with the studies of content analysis relating to wars, crises, conflicts and revolutions.

On the methodological side, the study explained the Jordanian newspaper's coverage of events from 2011 the beginning till these days. By recognizing the developments of journalistic means, Jordanian press performance in crises and wars after starting to question about Jordanian newspapers' ability to compete with other means, especially satellite channels, the sites of electronic press and social networking sites especially Facebook.

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