

# TRANSFORMATION OF BUSINESS PRACTICES IN NEWS ORGANIZATIONS OF EMERGING DEMOCRACIES: A CASE STUDY OF EGYPTIAN NEWSPAPERS

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**ABSTRACT:** This study analyzed journalistic standards and management styles at two major government-owned newspapers in Egypt, al-Ahram and al-Gomhuria, as the country transforms from an autocracy to a more liberalized democracy. Findings indicated if the goal of Egypt media is to become professionally and economically stable, a need exists for privatization, as well as the use of more news sources, and coverage of more local and human interest stories. Such changes would serve to broaden the definition of news in Egypt, thereby appealing to a more diverse audience interested in health, culture, or labor issues in addition to stories on government, business, and politics. While the use of unofficial sources in 2011 stories increased, the majority of stories used only one or two sources. The study also indicated management and leadership training of professionals would result in commitment and understanding of organizational and management theory with the potential of increasing profits.

**KEYWORDS:** Egypt media, newspapers, management, news sources

## INTRODUCTION

Since the 2011 Arab Spring, a number of dramatic changes in Egyptian media organizations have occurred, including staff changeover and an increase in freedom of expression. However, some say most managers of major news organizations in Egypt continue to be comfortable with the traditional ways of conducting business (Beeman, 2011). Furthermore, those replaced are often hired as consultants to promote business as usual. For example, in 2010, *al-Ahram* altered a photo of Hosni Mubarak in peace talks with world leaders. The original photo showed U.S. President Barack Obama walking in front, while the doctored photo showed Mubarak in the lead. The newspaper defended the photo as being an expression of Egypt's leading role in the peace process. However, Egyptian critics said the picture was an example of the regime's use of the media to deceive citizens (Mackell, 2011).

With the world's eye on Egypt, questions arise as to whether or not such practices will continue or whether a different level of professionalism will take hold in Egyptian media. In the fall of 2010, analysis of journalistic standards and management styles was conducted at *al-Ahram* and *al-Gomhuria*. These newspapers were chosen for analysis because they are the preeminent sources of news in Egypt and because of their influence on Egyptian society (Ghoraba, 2012; Ismail, 2010).

## BACKGROUND

Some predict the upheaval in Egyptian media will be similar to the media revolution that occurred in Eastern Europe in the 1990s as democracy took root (Brown, 2010). According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), there is a tendency for countries to borrow and benefit from practices of other countries. This would likely hold true as Egyptian media strive to reform their news operations. *Table 1* indicates Hallin and Mancini's Polarized Pluralist Model prevails in the Mediterranean countries of southern Europe, northern Africa, and some former Soviet-block nations and is characterized by the integration of the media into party politics, weaker historical development of commercial media, and a strong role of the state. Their Liberal Model prevails across North America and is characterized by a relative dominance of market mechanisms and of commercial media. Their Democratic Corporatist Model prevails across northern continental Europe and is characterized by a historical coexistence of commercial and government-sponsored media and ties into organized social and political groups. While it is not totally clear that the Polarized Pluralist Model can be

transferred to countries outside of Europe, a cursory look indicates Egypt may fall into this category as it moves toward transformation.

**Table 1.**  
Media System  
Characteristics  
(adapted from  
Hallin & Mancini,  
2004).

	<b>Pluralist Model</b>	<b>Liberal Model</b>	<b>Democratic Corporatist Model</b>
<i>Newspaper Industry</i>	Low circulation, elite politically oriented press, advocacy journalism	Medium newspaper circulation	High newspaper circulation, mass circulation
<i>Political Parallelism</i>	High, commentary-oriented journalism, broadcast governance, politics-over-broadcasting system	Neutral commercial press, information-oriented journalism	External pluralism, strong party press, shift toward neutral commercial press, politics-in broadcasting with substantial autonomy
<i>Professionalization</i>	Weaker	Strong professionalization, non-institutionalized self-regulation	Stronger, institutionalized, self-regulation
<i>Role of the State</i>	Strong state intervention, censorship	Market dominated	State intervention but with protection for press freedom, press subsidies, public-service broadcasting
<i>Electronic Media Industry</i>	Advocacy journalism, government controlled	Commercial and public	Public broadcasting centered on government/ business, commercial centered on society

As countries such as Egypt strive to evolve from a Pluralist Model to a Democratic Corporatist Model with a shift toward a neutral commercial press with state intervention but press freedom, research indicates such change will be incremental and occur as a result of economic or political pressures, as well as the mindset of the people.

Brikse (2009) outlined different economic stages of transition that have occurred in Lithuanian media since 1989. In the first stage (1989-1995), Lithuania established privately owned media enterprises, the birth of advertisements, and the commercialization of government channels. The second stage (1995-1998) involved tough competition among media and the formation of media corporations. In the third period (1998-2000), the media experienced huge losses, economic crises, as well as continued foreign investments from countries such

as Sweden. Since 2000, the media has been experiencing convergence and growth in advertising revenues; however, growth has been slow. During each of these stages of democracy, media played a role of “watchdog” and functioned as the “public eye” by actively participating in the political discourse, which helped move the country forward (Harro-Loit, 2005). The “velvet revolutions” that took place in Lithuania and the larger Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) region were dominated by anti-government demonstrations by students and citizens (Beitz, 1994). Similar demonstrations are now occurring in the Middle East and Egypt.

Economic theory also points to market structure variables that may impact change in Egyptian media (Busterna, 1988). According to the Industrial Organizational Model (I/O Model), firms perform well when they are able to effectively study the external environment as the foundation for identifying appropriate strategies. Companies that develop or acquire the internal skills needed to implement strategies required by the external environment are likely to succeed, while those that do not are likely to fail. The I/O model is composed of five elements: external environment, attractiveness of the industry, strategy formulation, assets and skills, and strategy implementation (Hill, Ireland & Hoskisson, 2011). The model is useful in evaluating the market forces affecting how firms and entire markets function. Market structure determines market conduct, thereby affecting market performance (Busterna, 1988).

Using the I/O model, Powers, Krisjansdottier and Sutton (1994) looked at increases in competition in a study of Danish media. Denmark offered a unique opportunity to study the effects of increased competition and commercialism on broadcasting. Broadcasting in Denmark had traditionally been a government entity. Danish society thought broadcast communication was too expensive and could not be developed to its potential by private industry. In addition, government officials believed it would have been improper to allow private companies to benefit from revenues created from public property – the airwaves (Dahl, 1977). Only public broadcasting was available until 1986 when the first commercial station, TV2, was allowed.

TV2 differentiated its product by aggressively reporting stories about the people of Denmark, rather than on government and business. In fact, the commercial television network located its operations in Odense, away from the capital of Copenhagen. In a content analysis of news coverage five years after the introduction of commercial television, there were significant differences in coverage that benefited Danish television audiences. The commercial station differentiated its product

by providing lengthier news stories and using more sources and soundbites than the public station. It also presented more feature and human-interest stories. The traditional, government-funded network followed suit and expanded news coverage in order to compete. This competition was a positive influence on broadcasting content in Denmark at the time. With two stations vying for audiences, both had to produce better news. It raised the level of reporting by broadening coverage from business and government to coverage of education, arts, international affairs, sports, and health, as well as crime and disaster (Powers, Krisjansdottier & Sutton, 1994).

Utilizing the I/O Model, Powers (2006) analyzed news content after the introduction of commercial broadcasting in Lithuania as well following the revolution. During the years of Lithuania's dependence on the Soviet Union, only one Lithuanian national broadcaster (LR) existed, which was used to spread propaganda. In 1989, the first Lithuanian commercial radio station came into existence. M1 (Music First) was initiated by the Communist Youth Organization in order to form a station geared toward young people (Starkeviciute & Tabor, 1999). This commercialization of media brought about open-market forces and new forms of ownership. For the first time, media was shaped by factors other than dependence on the political regime. According to Balcytiene and Lauk (2005), this was an important prerequisite to an emerging democracy and expanded news coverage in Lithuania.

*Table 2* indicates differences between government and commercial radio news coverage in 2001 Lithuania. These figures indicate that the traditional public station was covering stories similar to the types of stories that the public stations in other parts of Europe covered in the 1980s, with a focus on the city center, business and politics. In order to compete and draw listeners, the newer, commercial station, M1, expanded the definition of news by covering more local issues on labor and other human-interest stories. Looking at the category of "Labor" for example, the public station LR1, provided only 11.5 percent of its coverage on labor issues, while M1 provided nearly double the coverage, devoting 20.5 percent to labor issues. The category of "Spot News" included stories on crime and accidents. These stories tended to be more sensational, and the commercial station devoted 6.1 percent of its coverage to spot news, while the public station devoted only 1.9 percent of its coverage to this type of news.

The public station, on the other hand, continued to prominently cover international news and governmental stories. Nearly 44% of LR1's coverage focused on international issues, while only 8.2% of M1's coverage focused on this. The commercial station was much more focused on local issues and on issues pertaining to local citizens. This was the largest category difference between the two stations.

Issue	LR1	M1
Lithuanian–Russia Relations	6%	2.0%
NATO	1.9%	1.0%
EU	1.3%	2.0%
Labor	11.5%	20.5%
Culture	3.2%	4.1%
Economy	1.3%	2.0%
Government	20.6%	37.8%
Foreign Investment	10.3%	13.3%
Spot News	1.9%	6.1%
Health	0.6%	0%
International	43.6%	8.2%
War Crimes	1.3%	1.0%
Other	1.9%	2.0%
<i>Total:</i>	100%	100%

**Table 2.**

Issues Covered  
in Public (LR1)  
and Commercial  
Radio (M1).

\* Chi-Square Tests Value 157.090; df 32; Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) .000

Although some differences in coverage were evolving, there was a need for further expanding the definition of news to cover more stories on issues such as health and education. Mintchev (1999) found that while an institutional framework was put in place to ensure political stability through political parties and regular elections in the early stages of a post-Communist region, the hopes for a quick transition to a democratic society diminished, partially due to the mindset of the people. Nevertheless, media's influence on the social consciousness of the people played a major role in the development of attitudes, acceptance of new lifestyles, and the ability to cope with the challenges of a post-modern society. According to Balcytiene and Lauk (2005), the media was critical as a socializing agent, fulfilling different expectations, and playing different roles at various stages of transition.

Such studies provide a path of discovery for Egyptian media. These studies indicate that the traditional public stations in countries such as Lithuania and Denmark prior to dramatic changes, such as revolution or commercialization, focused on the city center, business and politics. It was not until commercial-

ism in media increased that consumers were able to more frequently access stories on everyday citizens, culture, labor, and issues common to everyday life. The traditional newspapers of Egypt may similarly focus largely today on issues similar to those of pre-commercial Denmark and Lithuania broadcast media—mainly the operations of the government. Furthermore, Egyptian newspapers have traditionally served as mouthpieces of the ruling party.

## EGYPT

Egypt is likely in the first stage of transition as it moves toward a more liberalized society. Major electronic and print outlets are still mostly owned and controlled by the government. This control manifests itself in bureaucracy within government media. One employee of the Nile Television Network (*MDP*, 2010) stated:

“The current organization chart for NTN doesn’t allow creativity and flexible decision-making because every decision needs approval from layers of hierarchy. There is a need to delegate more. We need to change the structure to permit more flexibility in decision-making. Every channel should be communicating with other channels, so they can have meetings together and change ideas and strategy. Also, there is a need to hire chief executives who meet the criteria for these positions and have a record of success, so we can depend on them and be certain that they will do their best. We need to make decisions more quickly”.

Additional concerns include people entering journalism based on friendships or relationships (Khouri, 2011) rather than qualifications. In addition, journalists tend to be strongly opinionated and politically engaged and often run for political office. Khouri (2011) states normal accountability systems are lacking in Egypt. There is no press council at the national level because the government controls decision making. As such, the absence of such institutions reflects a general lack of consensus on ethical standards. Weak consensus of journalistic standards up to this point and limited development of professional self-regulation reflect that journalism in Egypt has not been autonomous, but rather ruled by the government.

Egyptian newspapers have also traditionally been political instruments rooted in ideological divisions and tied to the government. Newspapers have often taken an activist role, mobilizing readers to support political causes and participate in events. As the 2011 revolution occurred, for example, newspapers and radio stations were taken over by journalists representing particular political agendas (Mackell, 2011). Historically, however, both print and broadcast have served the ends of the state,

whether in the form of promoting national culture, reinforcing state authority, or promoting political pluralism and wielding influence (Ismail, 2010).

Hallin and Mancini (2004) assert that newspapers overall are directed to an educated elite interested in the political world. This is particularly true for Egypt. According to Mackell (2011), there is a traditional exclusion of women from newspapers because of high illiteracy. The local press is also undeveloped; human interest stories and stories concerning everyday citizens are lacking. These practices, over time, have been detrimental to profitability as newspaper expenditures surpass revenues.

### STRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

The newspaper *al-Ahram*, was established in 1875 and is considered one of the top newspapers in the world. It is the most widespread newspaper in the Middle East, with a circulation of about 800,000. It moved from Alexandria to Cairo in 1900 and then to its current address in the center of Cairo's business district in 1968. *Al-Ahram* is funded through the *al-Ahram* Foundation, with the Egyptian government owning a controlling share. The government appoints the editors and other major management positions. As appointees of the state, little censorship is officially exercised; however, it is understood that the newspaper is loyal to the state (Ismail, 2010; *al-Ahram*, 2011). Nevertheless, the credibility of this newspaper is among the highest in the Middle East.

In addition to six newspaper editions in Egypt, *al-Ahram* publishes four weekly magazines, along with a number of other periodicals. The organizational structure is extensive with multiple managers and layers at each level. The company employs more than 10,000 staff members. The newspaper company also owns a university with a Canadian affiliation, as well as a tourism company (Mackell, 2011).

The second newspaper analyzed in this paper, *al-Gomhuria*, is part of El Tahir Publishing whose editor is appointed by the Shura Assembly (upper house of the Egyptian Parliament). This company was established after the 1953 revolution and played a great role in ending British occupation. Four separate divisions exist: advertising, printing, news, and distribution. The company produces four daily newspapers and five weekly publications, as well as one periodical. Each publication has a separate advertising department. The circulation of *al-Gomhuria* is about 200,000 with about 160,000 copies selling per day.

Discussions and experience with managers indicate their strengths include multi-lingual publications and circulation outside of Cairo. For weaknesses,



however, they point to a lack of interactivity between readers and publishers and a lack of synergy within the organization, as well as dated technology. Their goal, according to managers, is to provide readers with credible, objective news that is both informative and entertaining (MDP, 2010).

Discussions on financial information indicate *al-Gomhuria*, *al-Ahram*, and the government-owned press operation in Egypt have struggled with profitability. Both net and gross profits by some estimates are in the negative range impacting shareholder equity. Numerous discussions have centered on the newspapers' needs to privatize in order to survive and that the profit orientation of government-owned media overall must change (MDP, 2010).

### NEWS COVERAGE

Cooper (2008) conducted a content analysis of *al-Ahram* and two other private newspapers that indicated different priorities in both overall coverage and front-page story selection, reflecting editors' opinions, the divergent composition of the papers' readerships and disagreements about journalism's mission and Egypt's social realities. They found *al-Ahram* provided less domestic news even though the state-run daily published more pages of news than the other newspapers. It also relied more heavily on official sources than the private newspapers. In *al-Ahram*, the most frequent subject on front pages was government. Furthermore, no more than six percent of the front-page stories in any two papers matched on the same day. Cooper also expressed concern that in a developing country where at least 20 percent of the population is poor, none of the newspapers devoted much attention to poverty, illiteracy or job training. All three allowed the government to shape business coverage. Across the board, officials were the dominant source of news about business and the nation's economy at a time when Egypt's economic liberalization was a major story.

In looking at how coverage has changed since the revolution in 2011, *The Egyptian Gazette* was chosen for analysis because it is part of *al-Gomhuria*, and offers online and hard copy versions in both Arabic and English. About 10,000 copies are printed, and 6000 copies are sold each day (*al-Gomhuria*, 2012). *The Egyptian Gazette* is the Middle East's oldest English-language newspaper and first appeared on January 26, 1880. It was founded by Britons and originally set and printed in Alexandria as a four-page weekly tabloid. The newspaper was moved to the Egyptian capital in the 1930s when Cairo became more important as a news center than Alexandria.

A random sample of newspaper articles from *The Egyptian Gazette* was collected from the last week of September and the first week of October in 2010. *Egyptian*

*Gazette* online stories from corresponding days one year later were also collected in 2011. The unit of analysis was the news story. For hard copies, stories on the front page (about six each day) were analyzed. For online content, the top 6 stories each day were chosen for analysis. Two coders analyzed each story. A pretest indicated 60% coder reliability. After training, coder reliability was increased to 89%.

*RQ1.* Is there any difference in the top stories covered before and after the revolution?

Stories were categorized as Egypt Politics, Crime/Disaster, Business/Economics, Middle East Conflict, International, Regime Change, Arts/Entertainment, Health, and Other. As Table 3 indicates, the news coverage of the Middle East conflict decreased from 16.7% in 2010 to 7.5% in 2011. Other international news decreased as well. Instead, the focus became more local in 2011. Coverage of Egyptian politics increased from 27 to 35 percent, for example. Stories about the regime change occupied 17.5 percent of coverage in 2011 compared to 2.1 percent in 2010. In 2011, news was also expanded to cover more stories on health and entertainment, indicating some change in story coverage between years (Chi-square: 15.032 Value; 8 df; 0.059 (>0.05)).

ISSUE	YEAR	
	2010	2011
Egypt Politics	27.1	35.0
Crime/Disaster	20.8	10.0
Business/Economics	18.7	12.5
Middle East	16.7	7.5
International	4.2	0
Regime Change	2.1	17.5
Arts/Entertainment	0.0	5.0
Health	0.0	2.5
Other	10.4	10.0
Total:	100%	100%
	N=48	N=40

**Table 3.**  
Percent of  
Issues Covered  
in *The Egyptian  
Gazette*.

*RQ2.* Did the quality of news coverage change after the revolution?

Variables analyzed to answer the second research questions included “sides presented,” “number of sources,” and “type of sources” in stories. No significant differences were found between 2010 and 2011. The average number of sides

presented in news stories in 2010 was 1.5, while it was 1.8 in 2011. The average number of sources used in stories in 2010 was 2.1, and it was 2.3 for 2011. The type of sources (official or unofficial) used in stories changed somewhat between the two years. In 2010, only 16.7 percent of sources used were unofficial sources; that increased to 37.5 percent in 2011.

### MANAGEMENT STYLE

Management variables also tend to have an impact on progress. While there is little research on Egyptian media management, studies of media management in other countries lend insights. Joseph (1983) surveyed television reporters and general managers and found work dissatisfaction existed because management made most of the decisions without consultation. Joseph found that in television newsrooms, job satisfaction increased when journalists were involved in decision-making. Most TV reporters wanted to be consulted by management before work-related decisions were made. Adams and Fish (1987) found similar results with upper management when looking at television news directors and their perception of station management. They found employees were more satisfied in their positions when managers were concerned about the welfare of staff members and consulted them on decisions.

Powers (1991) identified differences in leadership behaviors in small and large television markets. Relationship behavior was defined as being concerned with friendship, mutual trust and respect, and good human relations between him/her and subordinates. Task oriented behavior was when the manager tended to organize and define relationships and concentrated on getting the job done, scheduling, criticizing, etc. Findings indicated that in both markets, relationship behavior related to job satisfaction and to how well subordinates agreed with news directors on the priority of departmental goals. She also found that as relationship-oriented behavior increased, news staff members were more successful at attaining departmental goals. She further found, however, news subordinates who were less experienced and working in smaller markets often responded positively to task-oriented behavior. Less experience called for more directive behaviors from managers.

A cursory look and discussion of leadership at the Egyptian newspapers indicated subordinates perceived their own styles as equally task and relationship oriented. They perceived themselves to be more “selling” in their management style, which is a combination of high task/high relationship. A selling style is indicative of the leader deciding on a course of action and selling it to sub-

ordinates. While subordinates saw themselves as selling, they perceived their managers, on the other hand, as more “telling” or “delegating.” A telling style is high task/low relationship and is indicative of leaders who make decisions on their own. A delegating style, on the other hand, is when a leader allows the subordinates to make decisions on their own. A participating style is when the leader involves subordinates in the decision making process and is high relationship/low task; however, this was one style that was not evident of managers in this study.

In prioritizing goals, discussions indicated subordinates perceived they placed a higher value on employee development than did upper managers. In addition, subordinates perceived that they placed a higher priority than their managers on increasing profits. Subordinates perceived, however, that their managers, on the other hand placed a high priority on job satisfaction when prioritizing goals.

## CONCLUSIONS

Democratic societies benefit from openness in media, freedom of speech, and sound management and journalistic practices. The economic environment and Egypt’s revolution in 2011 will likely lead to positive developments for journalists and news consumers across the Middle East. Based on the observations of this case study, the following points of discussion were identified.

Increased professionalism for newspapers in Egypt calls for incorporating more objectivity through the use of a wider range of sources, as well as covering a wider range of issues. The definition of news in Egypt could be broadened to include more stories on health, culture, or local spot news. One positive finding in 2011 was that reporters were citing unofficial sources more often, which was certainly a change from Cooper’s findings in 2008. However, while use of unofficial sources in 2011 stories increased, the majority of stories used only one or two sources.

The need for more management and leadership training is also recognized as younger professionals become increasingly interested in organizational and management theory, as well as increasing profits. As previously noted, hiring in the past was often based on friendships and associations rather than qualifications, resulting in over-employment. Management styles in this study were perceived as either autocratic or laissez-faire. Job satisfaction and agreement on group goals may suffer as a result. One important goal of younger employees, for example, was profitability for the newspaper. Ghozlan (2012) further pro-

poses that by reducing the income gap between the top and bottom levels of newspapers, a sense of loyalty and belonging, as well as more effort and higher quality would be created. Journalists would be freed from financial constraints and bribes. The professional standards of journalists would also be raised through education and training. However, such changes will call for increased discussions and participative leadership in order to reach agreement on goals and ultimately job satisfaction.

Overall findings of this study indicate that Egypt operates under a Pluralist Model and that it is further behind than countries such as Lithuania in establishing freedom of speech and a more liberalized system of the press. There is a need and a desire among young professionals to privatize government-owned Egyptian media to become profitable. As occurred in Lithuanian media, addressing inefficiencies such as over-employment throughout departments and duplication in job responsibilities would yield large savings and progress toward profitability.

Recommendations for future research would include sampling more news stories across media to monitor source usage and agenda-setting issues. An in-depth study on management styles and their impact on goals would also be beneficial. More research is also needed on news judgment. For example, a content analysis of *al-Ahram* and the *New York Times*' coverage of the 2012 story of Egyptians holding hostage Americans who had been working with pro-democracy NGOs, would likely yield interesting differences in journalistic practices. Limitations of the current study include the sample size of newspaper articles analyzed, as well as the limited financial information available. While the differences in story coverage from 2010 to 2011 were interesting, a much larger sample is needed to determine whether change will hold up overall or over time. Differences in coverage found in this study could have been due to the dramatic difference in circumstances with the regime change. In addition, since this was a case study, findings cannot be generalized to the population of newspapers in Egypt. Nevertheless, the research provides a glimpse of the state of two major newspapers at crossroads in Egypt.

Increased press freedom can be expected in this burgeoning democracy; however, as in Lithuania, these freedoms will come slowly. For example, reporters will most likely avoid direct criticism of the top officials or of the ruling system as long as the government controls the press. Press is not yet free; however, there is a feeling of increased freedom because Egypt is under scrutiny, and journalists are speaking more openly. Newspapers are including more opinion

pieces and writing about change. As barriers of fear come down, Egypt and perhaps other countries in the Middle East will move toward democracy with their own unique brand of liberalization encompassing both the values of the East and the West.

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