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Author(s): Maher Hamoud

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Egypt's Military Coup of 2013: An Analysis of the Private Press in 112 Days

Maher Hamoud*

Abstract

In July 2013, a widely celebrated military coup took place in Egypt – only two and a half years after the 2011 Revolution. This article investigates the hegemonic power of the private press owned by Egypt's business elite during the coup period. In the context of this research objective, this study answers the question of “how did Egypt's private press provide popular support to the 2013 military coup?” through following a critical approach and conducting framing analysis of news headlines in a period of 112 days. This article examines the popular privately-owned newspapers *al-Masry al-Youm* and *al-Watan* as the main case studies. Findings show that Egypt's business elite engaged in significant news framing in support of the 2013 military coup - for the purpose of maintaining their hegemonic position in the country. They particularly used the frame of “fear” (of the Muslim Brotherhood, potential violence and political chaos) and the frame of “promotion” by portraying the military as a saviour.

Keywords: Egypt; 2011 Revolution; 2013 Military Coup; Business Elite; Tamarod; Muslim Brotherhood

Introduction

We saw millions of people pouring out onto the streets to demand the fall of a regime in 2011, and we witnessed this seemingly strong regime quickly submitting to the people's demands only to immediately re-assemble and overthrow an elected government via a popularly supported military coup in 2013. How did all this happen? One article is never enough to go through a complex discourse of reasons answering this question or drawing a full map of mechanisms explaining how the ruling elites outfoxed the masses through persuading them to support the opposite of what the same masses sacrificed for two and a half years earlier. However, highlighting the role of the business elite's private press as a tool of the political elite during the military coup period in 2013 can help us understand what was happening in Egypt at that moment in contemporary history and how exactly the public chose to support a coup.

Today's Egypt has a top-down enforced neoliberal model as many evident realities show. This model created notable social injustices and constituted a key reason for the people to protest against the ruling elites in 2011. However, the 2011 uprising was not born at that moment in history nor did it end with the fall of Mubarak (Abdelrahman 2015). Even though

*Maher Hamoud; Department of Conflict and Development Studies, Ghent University, Universiteitsstraat 8, Ghent 9000, Belgium. Email: maher.hamoud@ugent.be.

President Mubarak was removed from office, his regime and legacy remained intact. As Abdelrahman points out, after the initial euphoria and laudatory comments, the supposedly victorious masses were soon relegated to the back seat while established political actors (i.e. the military, Muslim Brotherhood and regional powers) returned to centre stage. The continuing struggle of millions of Egyptians receive cursory attention and only in so far as they are seen to have been subdued and defeated by counter-revolutionary forces (Abdelrahman 2015: 3-4). In this context, I believe that mass media – especially the private one – overlooks the demands of the masses and sustains Egypt’s authoritarian regime. As the media is still powerful and controlled by the business elite, the masses will keep receiving the same cursory attention.

The media holds an important role in conveying political and economic discourses to the public across the whole world. Egypt’s private media – and those who own it – are in no different position. Journalists everywhere have developed countless ways to frame the news. The most commonly used themes include emphasizing a conflict, an emotional aspect of a story, and grim economic consequences. These frames can promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, or moral evaluation (Entman 1993) and thus influence debates and structure political outcomes. Throughout this article, I argue that news production is heavily influenced by the political and business interests of private newspapers’ owners (Ratta et al. 2015). Nevertheless, regardless of this influence of news coverage on the public, we still have to examine the issue case by case to learn about how this influence prevails within certain news agendas. Each case has the potential to teach us how decision-makers – including members of the business elite in Egypt – formulate their responses to both the news agendas they control and the public they target (Benson 2004).

In their book entitled “Arab Media Moguls”, Naomi Sakr et al. (2015) perceive the Middle East as a fertile ground for media moguldom, where a general business tycoon – coming from the business elite with associations to the political one – invests in the private media. This phenomenon is particularly applicable to the Egyptian case. Autocratic rulers impose media regulations and censorship, not to prevent media monopolies but to curb political opposition and foster a submissive public. Authoritarian power-holders could live with the rise of media tycoons, and media tycoons could co-exist with them (Cook 2006). Ownership concentration has spurred the downswing of pluralism in Egyptian media. For example, the prominent outspoken journalist Ibrahim Eissa, who founded the *al-Tahrir* TV right after the fall of Mubarak, later sold it to Suleiman Amer, a businessman closely connected to Mubarak’s elite (Hafez 2015).

In the case of Egyptian and Arab media tycoons, profit-seeking cannot be an overriding expectation because distortions in the advertising market and restrictions on editorial content severely undermine the commercial potential of media operations. Controlling a network of media is an effective way to demonstrate loyalty and thus carry favours with the rulers of a country (Skovgaard-Petersen 2015: 273), which is the main goal of the investment. In Mubarak’s era, all the major media tycoons tended to be close to the regime. However, being close does not necessarily mean that they approved of the regime or that they actively sought its patronage. Rather, it was often an inevitable consequence of the economic importance and interests of the business groups they were heading (Guaaybess 2015). In this context, our

cases of *al-Masry al-Youm* and *al-Watan* newspapers provide useful samples to analyse the link between politics, business and media in Egypt.

If we take a look at these two most-circulated private newspapers in Egypt (commonly estimated to sell about 150,000 daily copies each, however no reliable sources are available for entirely accurate data), we can see that they dominate access to high-profile official sources and information. We can also observe the close connections between the newspapers' editors, investors, and the government. For example, *al-Masry al-Youm* was founded by Salah Diab, who earlier was the founder and main shareholder of Bico that dominates agricultural trade in Egypt. He also has had very strong relations with Israeli companies since the Camp David Accord was signed in 1978. *Al-Watan* stands as another example, which was founded and board-chaired by Mohamed al-Amin who's a top Mubarak supporter and a business tycoon with a diverse investments portfolio. Al-Amin interestingly hired Magdy al-Gallad as *al-Watan*'s editor-in-chief. Al-Gallad, known for being highly politically connected, is actually a former editor-in-chief of *al-Masry al-Youm*, which as we just mentioned is owned by Diab.

The Egyptian private media market is clearly dominated by the business elite, which largely owns its news outlets and controls them. This control is sustained through being direct managers and/or by delegating highly connected editors to serve the investors' interests. These interests vary between directly economic ones for corporations owned by the same investors, the interests of other business groups and indirectly the interests of the political elite with its two main factions: the civilian and the military.

Operating under the shadow of the aforementioned ties between the business and political elites within the private press market, Egyptian journalists struggled to incorporate the facilitative normative roles in their daily practices after Mubarak's fall. However, the radical-oppositional role against the Muslim Brotherhood government suited them much better, after which most Egyptian journalists re-assumed their traditional collaborative role in the service of the ruling (military) elite. The role was understood by these journalists as the need to liberate themselves from the dictates of the official discourse as well as from the interference of media owners. However again, this was not realistic due to the lack of a tradition of investigative reporting, well-founded professional skills, and the presence of a legacy of reverential journalism. As such, Egypt's private media cannot be evaluated as free and independent media (Cammaerts and El-Issawi 2015: 10). Therefore, I choose to situate this study under the domain of critical theory, while applying framing analysis of news contents produced by the private press during the period around the 2013 military coup. By studying the country's top two newspapers, *al-Masry al-Youm* and *al-Watan* as samples, this article answers the question of "how did Egypt's private press provide popular support to the military coup?".

Theoretical Framework

The instrumental character of media is obvious, not only when one investigates the relationships between the owners of the media and the ruling elite but also when one considers implications of the published material (Richter and Gräf 2015: 32). As a result, this

article adopts a critical approach which occupies a significant space in the history of the political economy of communication from a multidisciplinary perspective (Morgan 2013: 45). Max Horkheimer, one of the founders of critical theory, distinguishes the theory from the “traditional” one based on a specific practical purpose: a theory is critical to the extent that it seeks human “emancipation from slavery”, acts as a “liberating influence”, and works “to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers” of human beings (Bohman 2005). The theory is a normative approach based on the judgment that domination is a problem, which is an essential theme in this study. The theory applies approaches that place emphasis on the unequal distribution of power and criticizes the arrangements whereby such inequalities are sustained and reproduced. The concept of reproducing power is also very important to understand how the business elite and “Mubarak’s state” managed to survive the 2011 Revolution and launch a comeback with the 2013 military coup. The term “critical” is usefully broad and encompassing, but it also has distinctive practices and values of critique in intellectual enquiry such as questioning, interrogating, and challenging the adequacy of explanations of phenomena (Hardy 2014), which are suitable for objectively analysing news contents in a country undergoing challenges between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary powers.

Generally speaking, the vast domain of critical theory stands out with its focus on studying a society in terms of how it is influenced by media (Winseck and Yong Jin 2011). A critical approach in understanding a political phenomenon would question the media as an attack of money and power, and in turn, as a structure that the elites use to dominate a society (Habermas 1987: 375). This attacking media is a system that serves for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace in a world of concentrated wealth and major conflicts of class interests, where fulfilling this role requires systematic propaganda (Herman and Chomsky 2002: 1). The “consent” notion in Herman and Chomsky’s work goes hand in hand with Mosco’s understanding of hegemony, as he argues that hegemony requires the exercise of power to maintain consent under changing conditions. Therefore, communication plays a central role for the successful maintenance of control and hegemonic consolidation in general (Mosco 2009: 209-210). Critical approach has always become popular in times of major crises such as the 1968 protests and the global financial meltdown in 2008. As such, it should come as no surprise that critical approach will also be used here in this article which investigates a military coup supported by mass protests in 2013 – which stands to contradict the emancipatory aims of a democratic revolution launched in 2011.

On 24 July 2013, *al-Masry al-Youm* published a news item with the headline “Tamarod: People’s Demonstrations on Friday for Mandating the Army to Stop Civil War”. Reflecting on this excessively dramatic headline now, one may notice that a civil war did not happen after all. It is clear that this headline and many similar ones had sent strong messages to the public. Hence, I argue that alongside following a critical approach in understanding the hegemony of Egypt’s private press, framing analysis is the most suitable and complimentary approach to apply to this type of content. As we can see in the above headline, the conveyed message is very direct and simple, if not blunt.

Many scholars agree that framing analysis provides a direct and reliable interpretation of the role of certain media in shaping ideas and public views about current affairs, and also tendencies of responses to covered issues (Norris et al. 2003; D’Angelo and Kuypers 2009).

In 1974, Erving Goffman explained that frames are basic mechanisms of understanding what is happening in a society and trying to make sense of occurring events. It conceives the media as a tool used in forming public opinions and determining individuals' trends and ideologies (Mattelart and Mattelart 1998). The press particularly plays an effective role in forming public opinion, where it has become a social necessity (Gamson 1996). It has also been argued that journalists do operate within a set of assumptions or frames, which provide a way of organizing and filtering the information that they receive, and in turn they transmit as news (Abercrombie and Longhurst 2007: 94). In news framing, a journalist might redesign an event in terms of words, meanings and images in order to represent a window for recipients to see the world (Tuchman 1978). Or in other words, journalists highlight parts of reality and ban or tune down the rest of it, while they are producing what they think is news.

As explained above, frames constitute "centrally organizing ideas or storylines that provide meaning to unfolding strip of events" (Gamson and Modigliani 1987: 143), thus they are also essential for the research question of this study which examines the way in which two popular newspapers were "telling the story" of the critical events in 2013. Indeed, the frames put forwarded by these newspapers played a crucial role in social mobilization (Benford and Snow 1988), as millions marched in support of the 2013 coup.

Methodology

Based on the two chosen theoretical domains mentioned above – critical theory and framing analysis – the methodology of this research is designed to conduct critical qualitative analysis of Egypt's private press, which is controlled by the country's business elite. The analysis discusses the news content produced around the military coup period in 2013 using empirical data produced by framing analysis. The focus of analysis is particularly given to the top two private newspapers, *al-Masry al-Youm* and *al-Watan*.

The last section of this article, which is mostly dedicated to framing analysis, is a result of thorough work done on news contents produced by the two sample newspapers around the coup period. For the sake of validity, reliability and introduction to the examined sample of articles, it is always suggested that a pilot study is conducted by selecting a sub-sample (Wimmer and Dominick 1983), then applying the actual framing analysis of the private press (print and online content by the two newspapers) in exactly 112 days around the coup. In this period (26 April – 15 August 2013), I applied one extra day concept at the end of it, the 15th of August, which is the day following the events known as the Rab'a incidents, where hundreds of participants in a pro-Morsi sit-in were killed and thousands were injured. As for the beginning of the same period, I chose the 26th of April as a significant beginning, which is the date the Tamarod (Rebel) Campaign was inaugurated in Tahrir Square (the foundation and related arguments around Tamarod are thoroughly discussed in the following section). I chose 337 headlines by *al-Masry al-Youm* with the word "Tamarod" found in the newspaper's online archive and 345 by *al-Watan* with the same word and same period.

In this research, I only used the headlines of the news stories as most readers in today's digitalized news world tend to take their impressions through headlines and share articles on the social media without necessarily reading the actual content. The sentiment of the headline

is strongly related to the popularity of the news and also with the dynamics of the posted comments on that particular news (Reis, et al. 2015). As such, it is more realistic for one person to manually analyse almost 700 articles by only using headlines. I did not use software for this task as this type of programming is rarely available in Arabic, and it is unfortunately possible that the translation of Arabic phrases into English may cause the texts to partially lose their native linguistic influence – as translations are never perfect.

As a first reading, I skimmed through the selected sample of the 682 articles by the two newspapers and found that there are two major themes that were highly repetitive in their headlines. These themes, i.e. frames, are “fear” and “promotion”. For example, when we look at the following headline published by *al-Masry al-Youm* on 19 June 2013, we can directly sense the words “threaten” and “terrorists” in association with Morsi:

Tamarod: Morsi Threatens Egyptians by Terrorists... Thursday, our Surprise

Having a headline like this clearly sends a message of fear to the public. Thus, I gave the frame of “fear” one frequency in the examination process. As for the following headline, published by *al-Watan* on 25 June 2013, we can see the use of “20 million”, which is an overly exaggerated and never verified number:

Tamarod Announces Signatures Pass 20 Million and Discusses 30 June Scenarios with Heikal

Additionally, mentioning “[Mohamed Hassanein] Heikal” in the headline is considered a great privilege, as he is one of the top intellectual figures in the Arab World, known for his very rare appearances in the media. I consider a headline like this one a “promotion” for Tamarod, which is also an indirect promotion for the army, as Heikal himself is also historically a supporter of the Egyptian military. Thus, the frame of “promotion” serves as a complementary piece to the frame of “fear”, as people would need hope and protection in supposedly dangerous/unstable times. Therefore, with the second reading, I give the frame of “promotion” one frequency in the examination process. Then the process goes carefully and slowly with each headlines of the sample for the sake of estimating the numbers of frequencies of each of the two previously suggested frames in order to reach our final results.

In addition to the empirical data put forward by framing analysis, this article benefits from responses by Egyptian senior media professionals interviewed for this research. These responses are embedded into arguments and analyses throughout this article whenever relevant. These interviews play an additional role because of the special access to information each interviewee has, which is not usually available to average journalists. The sources I interviewed are all influential media professionals who provide a significant portion of the daily news production in Egypt’s private press market. I interviewed five of these high-profile sources via email for this study. Four of them are influential journalists and editors, and one is the CEO of a private media company. Their ages range between late 30s and late 40s. Some of them work for the same two sample newspapers studied here. I provided relatively little details about them in order to avoid exposing them to security risks. These precautions are necessary as they are still living in Egypt. The country is now considered one

of the worst jailers of journalists worldwide (CPJ 2015). Therefore, I decided to process their interviews anonymously by giving them gender-neutral pseudonyms such as Nour Magdy, Alaa Zakareya, Reda Abbas, Wesam Shawkat, and Ihsan Sameer.

The Emergence of Tamarod

“Thank You for Rebellling! The 30 June Revolution Succeeded Thanks to You”. This was the only text that could be found on the Tamarod (Rebel) Movement official website (tamarod.com) for about a year following the coup of 3 July 2013. No forms, arguments, explanations or demands could be found. In fact, the data and information that existed on the movement’s website before the coup were deleted right after the coup succeeded. Now the website itself no longer exists and the domain name is currently offered for sale.

Tamarod was an opposition youth movement founded on 26 April 2013, initially to “withdraw confidence” from Mohamed Morsi – the then president who was elected in 2012 – and call for early presidential elections. The movement had an original idea of inviting ordinary citizens to sign an official document of “no confidence”, aiming to reach a large number of signatures. The objective was to gather a number of signatures that would far outweigh the total votes Morsi had received in the 2012 presidential elections. The movement launched its campaign from Tahrir Square and was planned to end on 30 June, the first anniversary of Morsi’s term. Its co-founder and spokesperson Mahmoud Badr – later a military-supported public figure – declared that the movement managed to collect 22 million confidence withdrawal signatures, which was around 10 million more than the number of votes Morsi received in 2012. Not a single attempt was documented to investigate this figure since its official announcement by the movement on 30 June.

In addition to the expected vocal criticism and hostility against Tamarod by the Muslim Brotherhood and their supporters since its launch, it is observed that following the 3 July military coup, non-Islamist voices of suspicion and criticism started to be heard across the country and the region accusing the movement of being staged and funded in order to facilitate the military coup that quickly followed (Abd el-Latif 2015). Later, two of the movement’s founders were selected to join the committee tasked with re-writing the constitution, which reinforced the suspicions.

In a story published by *France24* – Arabic Service – on their news portal on 26 June 2013, four days before the big day, reporter Houssein Emara copied the following passage from the movement’s Facebook page (which no longer exists):

We [the Egyptian people] are obliged to rebel given the country’s deterioration economically and politically following the arrival of the Muslim Brotherhood Group to the country’s rule with their president, Mohamed Morsi, who disturbed all balances of justice and completely ignored the revolution and the Egyptian people’s will, as if the revolution did not happen. The picture is now clear to the whole world that the Egyptian regime had moved from a gang [Mubarak’s] to another, and that the revolution failed to achieve its goals and failed to fulfil the dreams of those who sacrificed for it in order to have a home that enjoys national independence, freedom and social justice after it has become controlled by traitors and they still do.

Like their website, the above Facebook page no longer exists. While many Tamarod pages have mushroomed over the internet, none of which has this specific passage. However, it is easy to find this exact text on other websites through a Google search as archive or history. It can be that the movement had to remove such idealist and democracy promoting campaign from their website and Facebook page(s). After all, what happened merely three days after 30 June was the exact opposite of what they called for or promised to achieve.

During his tenure, President Morsi took several actions (like his supra-constitutional declaration in November 2012 that he quickly withdrew) that fuelled the discontent against him and his group. Such actions made him a very easy target for most political groups, revolutionary and anti-revolutionary, except for a few sympathetic Islamist ones. The Salafist al-Nour Party was strongly in support of Tamarod. Later the party's position against the Muslim Brotherhood became clear as they allied with the army, supported the coup and provided it with religious legitimacy.

Ahmed Abdo, one of Tamarod's leading co-founders told *France24*: "The movement will head to the High Constitutional Court in order to submit those signatures, demand it to withdraw confidence from President Mohamed Morsi, and announce running early presidential elections". He also added that according to Article One in the Egyptian Constitution [ironically written a few months earlier by a committee largely dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood], "The people are the source of authority" (Emara 2013). Abdo explained that the movement had a large legal team that included Khalid Ali – former presidential candidate with a revolutionary background – and headed by the President of Lawyers' Syndicate, Sameh Ashour, in order to observe all legal procedures of the campaign and guarantee smoothly dealing with the High Constitutional Court and "examining signatures' authenticity", as mentioned in Emara's article. However, this supposed plan – that was promoted before 30 June – has never been implemented or even mentioned since the coup. This issue puts the legitimacy of Tamarod and that of the announcement of having collected 22 million signatures in serious question.

Looking collectively at the interviewees' opinions on the issue of Tamarad altogether, they seem to have variations in their judgement on the movement's relations with the army. One way or another, they seem to have a consensus in terms of noting a certain connection between Tamarod and the military. However, they differ in expressing or assuming how this connection is like or when exactly it started. Ihsan Sameer offers the extreme assumption that the Tamarod movement was totally controlled from the beginning: "I believe that it was highly supported financially and organizationally by factions of the deep state: police, intelligence, businessmen and media".

I would actually argue against the scenario of the full military control over Tamarod since the beginning of their campaign and lean towards seeing Tamarod as a movement that was somehow assumed by the military (and the elites) following its success in creating popularity among the public. Not unlike my understanding, Alaa Zakareya and Reda Abbas were also very clear in their responses by refusing the scenario that Tamarod was controlled by the military from the beginning, and that they believe that it fall under control later. In support of this point of view, there are a few news stories that were published mainly during May or early June 2013, approximately within the first month following the movement's birth:

Cairo University Students Remember the Revolution's Martyrs and the Security Arrests Tamarod Members

Two Tamarod Members Detained for Four Days for Assaulting 8 Policemen in Sadat Metro Stop

Tamarod is Offered to Meet with Interior Minister and Responds: We Won't Sit with a "Murderer"

The above three news stories were consequently published by *al-Watan* on 12 May, *al-Masry al-Youm* on 22 May, and by *al-Watan* again on 6 June. I argue that coordination between Tamarod and the military started at some point right after the first week of June, three weeks before the 30 June mass protests occurred. Here we have to remember that the Ministry of Interior was controlled by the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), since Mubarak's fall, and they openly and directly appointed several interior ministers one after the other. Therefore, having Tamarod members targeted by the police and refusing to sit with the then Minister of Interior (Mohamed Ibrahim, who later fully supported the movement) are all signs that the military – at least not until the end of the first week of June 2013 – did not communicate or directly coordinate with Tamarod. Hence, the control of, or at least the coordination with, the movement did happen from the beginning. Nour Magdy also does not think it was controlled from the beginning: "I am not sure of that. Some rumours say that it was pure revolutionary movement then some security body used it to topple Morsi. Others say that it was totally controlled by the military since the beginning. In all cases, it was used by the military to get rid of the Muslim Brotherhood, and at least that is how I see it".

112 Days of Frames

In order to trace the evolving relationship between the private press and Tamarod, in this article, I analyse articles' headlines by *al-Masry al-Youm* and *al-Watan* in the period from 26 April 2013 (Tamarod's launch in Tahrir Square) until 15 August the same year (the day following the Rab'a incidents). As explained in the methodology section, I chose 337 news stories by *al-Masry al-Youm* with the word "Tamarod" found in the newspaper's online archive and 345 by *al-Watan* with the same word and same period. I initially applied a first reading on these headlines to see what message(s) they might frame to the readers and I found that there are two major themes that are highly repetitive. Many of the headlines would spread "fear" from the Muslim Brotherhood, violence and/or chaos, while others would "promote" Tamarod and/or the army as a saviour or a solution. Here are a few examples:

Tamarod: We Collected 22,134,465 Signatures for Confidence Withdrawal from Morsi

Tamarod Distributes Flowers to the Police and Army in Sharm al-Sheikh

In the first headline above by *al-Masry al-Youm*, published on 29 June 2013, we can see directly a copy of a Tamarod's statement without questioning or investigating facts. Even the body of this news item did not contain any word or thought of fact-checking or suspicion regarding the 22-million figure. This remains a claim that has never been confirmed or investigated to this day. Nour Magdy comments on this: "All that I recall is reports on how fast it [Tamarod] was spreading, and [on] the number of signatures it was collecting". This headline can be portrayed as a celebration of an early victory ahead of 30 June in promotion of the "powerful" Tamarod. In the second headline by *al-Masry al-Youm* as well, published on 4 July 2013, the newspaper did not only promote Tamarod, or the army, they indirectly promote the highly demonized police since January 2011 and before.

Islamist-Related Plan for Fighting Tamarod on 30 June

Tamarod: People's Demonstrations on Friday to Mandate the Army to Stop the Civil War

In the first reading of the sample, the fear theme was clearly present, where it appeared that the nature of news produced on Tamarod would have high tendency to cause fear among the readers by the thoughts of what the Muslim Brotherhood represent as a "violent group", according to the editorial line and what would happen if Tamarod fails in bringing their rule down. The above two headlines by *al-Masry al-Youm*, the first on 9 June and the second on 24 July, are two examples of many within the 112 days' sample that mongers fear among the readers from the Muslim Brotherhood. The second headline portrays the army as the only solution, otherwise the country supposedly drowns in a civil war. I argue that many of the news items produced in this period on Tamarod by *al-Masry al-Youm* were aimed at making the reader feel scared of the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamists in general (the fear frame) and instilling in the reader a hope for the success of Tamarod as a life boat (the promotion frame).

Al-Watan was not so different from *al-Masry al-Youm* in relation to the position they both took towards Tamarod, the army and the Muslim Brotherhood. Regarding the promotion frame, *al-Watan* outweighed *al-Masry al-Youm* in the polishing process and support they both provided to Tamarod. The language and editorial position were more overtly in favour of the movement.

Tamarod: New Videogame that Ends with "Game Over, Morsi"

Al Gallad: Tamarod Has Become a Global Model for Peaceful Protesting... Al-Watan is as Old as the Revolutionary Tide

In the first headline published on 21 June, *al-Watan* – in its promotion frame campaigning for Tamarod – went beyond the idea of mainly positive news. They went for what journalists loosely call "sexy news", something that should attract significant public attention. However, the above-mentioned videogame was poorly designed and did not create significant attention as a game, in comparison to how the article portrayed it. *Al-Watan* did not wait to do a proper

production of the story and quickly made a big headline out of the game’s launch. No proper information or any quotes were provided from those who might have played it.

The second headline, published by *al-Watan* on 3 July, does not need a complex analysis or explanation, as no biased news agenda can possibly be more biased than this. The chief editor of the newspaper, Magdy al-Gallad, stands next to Tamarod’s co-founder Mahmoud Badr (now sole leader), in the newsroom telling the readers in a televised press conference that Tamarod is a “global model”, and that “*al-Watan* is as old as the revolution”. All professional standards and ethics were disregarded by the editor of the newspaper himself.

Brotherhood Rehearsal of 30 June: The Group Attacks Tamarod with Arms in Alexandria and the People Fight Back, Destroy their Office

Tamarod on the Republican Guards Incident: The Brotherhood Pushing Egypt for Civil War

The fear frame in *al-Watan*’s headlines was relatively similar to how it was applied in *al-Masry al-Youm*, however stronger language was preferred. In the first headline above, published on 14 June, *al-Watan* exaggerated a clash in Alexandria (not officially investigated by security) and took a demonizing and overtly anti-Brotherhood position. Details of this news story were anecdotal and one-sided at best. As for the second headline, published on 9 July, again the alleged spectre of the Muslim Brotherhood bringing the country to brink of civil war was raised, although Brotherhood members were actually the ones killed by the military in that specific incident known as the “Republican Guards’ incidents”.

The above first reading of the sample confirmed that the second reading is one with the purpose of spotting the two frames of “promotion” and “fear”, whenever found in any of the 682 headlines of the sample under examination. The following analyses are the results of this second reading and examination of frames’ frequencies:

Regarding *al-Masry al-Youm*’s 337 articles (see **Table 1** and **Graph 1**) on Tamarod published during the 112 days in focus, I found that 197 of them (58.46%) promoted Tamarod (the promotion frame) and 81 articles (24.03%) aimed to cause fear among the public (the fear frame). Regarding *al-Watan*’s 345 articles (see **Table 2** and **Graph 2**) on Tamarod published in the same period with the same hashtag, I found that 221 of them (64.06%) promoted Tamarod (the promotion frame) and 77 articles (22.32%) would cause fear among the public (the fear frame).

Table 1: The Framing Frequencies of al-Masry al-Youm

No. of Articles	Promotion Frame	Percentage	Fear Frame	Percentage
337	197	58.46%	81	24.03%

Graph 1: The Framing Frequencies of al-Masry al-Youm

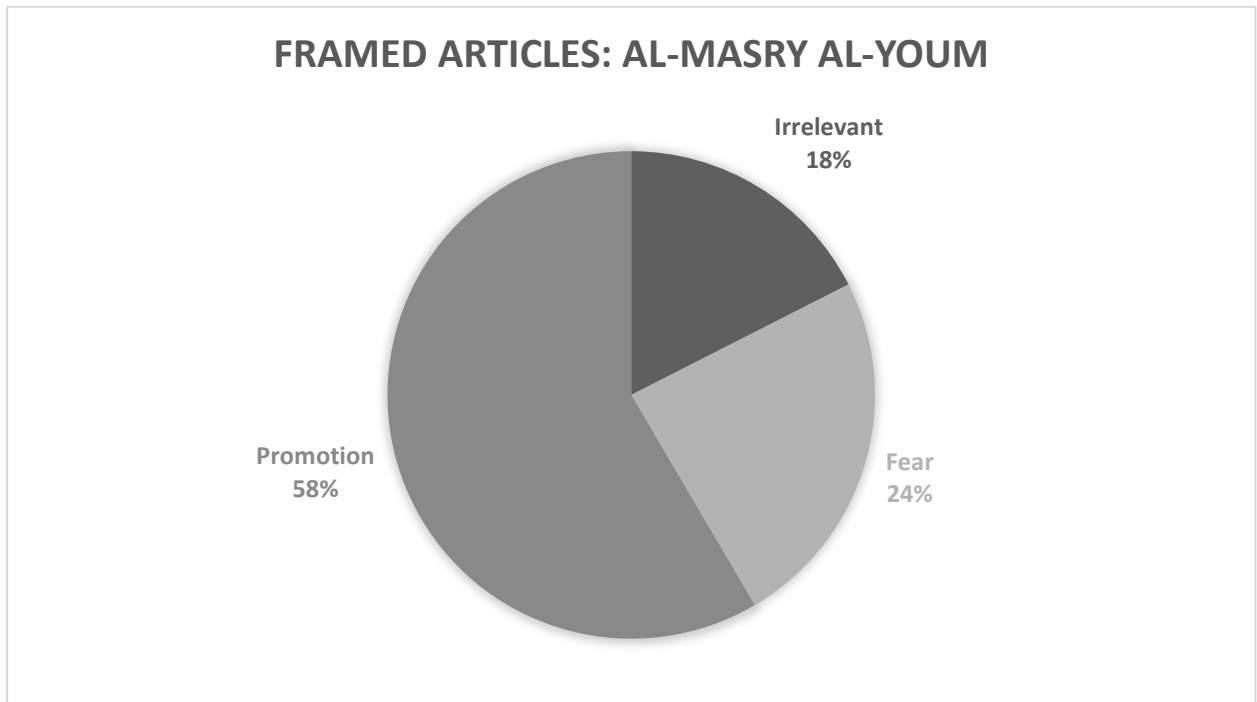
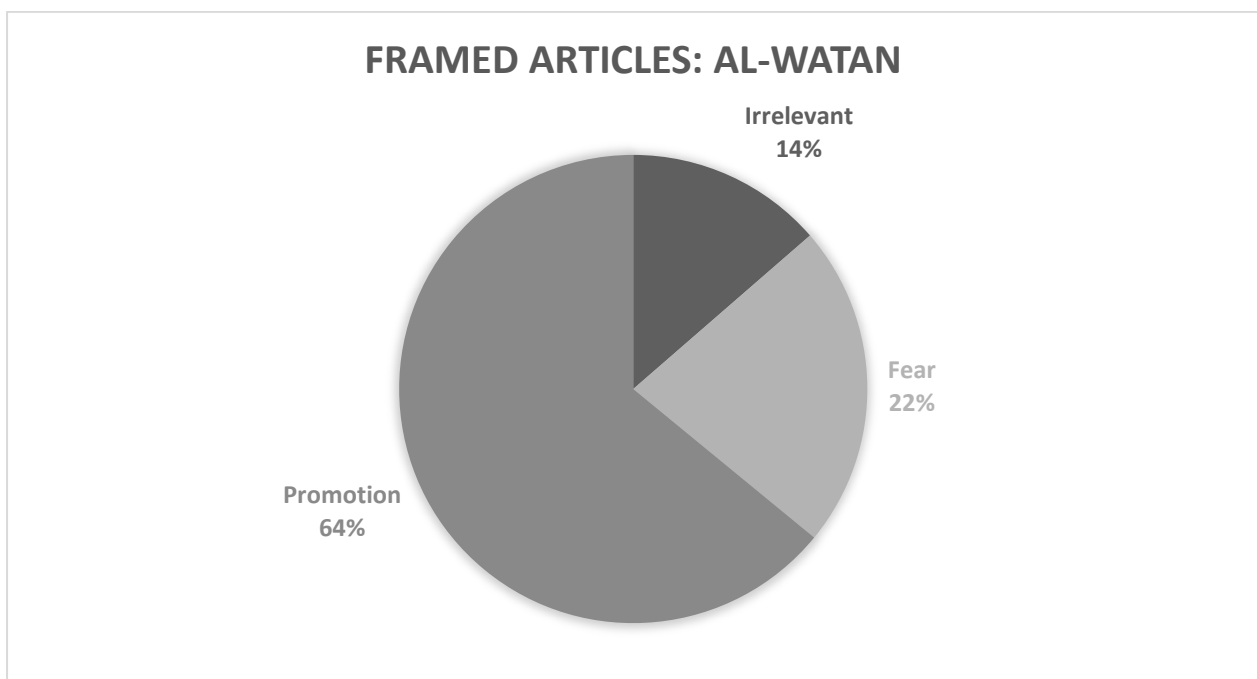


Table 2: The Framing Frequencies of al-Watan

No. of Articles	Promotion Frame	Percentage	Fear Frame	Percentage
345	221	64.06%	77	22.32%

Graph 2: The Framing Frequencies of al-Watan

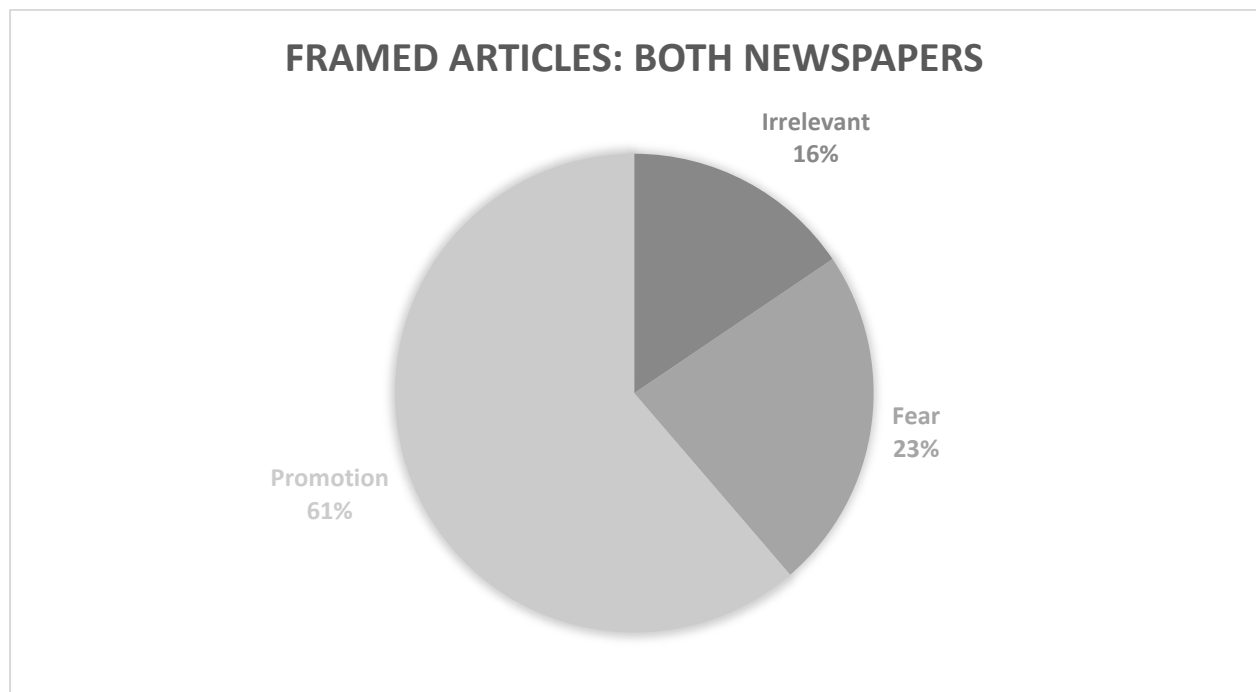


For both newspapers' 682 examined articles altogether (see **Table 3** and **Graph 3**), I found that 418 of them (61.29%) promoted Tamarod (the promotion frame), and that 158 articles (23.17%) would cause fear among the public (the fear frame).

Table 3: The Framing Frequencies of al-Masry al-Youm and al-Watan Together

No. of Articles	Promotion Frame	Percentage	Fear Frame	Percentage
682	418	61.29%	158	23.17%

Graph 3: The Framing Frequencies of al-Masry al-Youm and al-Watan Together



In their news production, *al-Masry al-Youm* and *al-Watan* seem to have engaged in a polishing process of Tamarod and the military, and the demonization of the Muslim Brotherhood. The two newspapers arguably resembled the PR campaigners for Tamarod, however that was clearly not the case in the beginning of the examined period. Nevertheless, later the movement and the military appeared in the two newspapers' content as the only solution out of fear of a "civil war". Alaa Zakareya says that "Tamarod was grown due to the militarization done by the media against the mistakes of the Muslim Brotherhood. Even the movement itself held press conferences in the newspapers' offices, where *al-Watan* was leading [the trend]". The notable difference in Zakareya's response in comparison to other interviewees is that Zakareya added the element of the Muslim Brotherhood's political

failures as a reason for Tamarod's success in addition to the press support the movement received.

Conclusion

Taking a critical approach in understanding a political phenomenon by questioning the media as an attack of money and power, and in turn, as a structure that the elites use to dominate a society (Habermas 1987: 375), this article conducted an analysis of news headlines produced by Egypt's top two newspapers, *al-Masry al-Youm* and *al-Watan*, during a critical period of 112 days covering Tamarod's campaign of "confidence withdrawal" from former president Mohamed Morsi. As we know now, this process quickly turned into a widely supported military coup against an elected government. This article argued that the Tamarod movement was not necessarily created by the military, however it was clearly used by them as a façade to promote the military among the public through the private press. By doing so, the armed forces managed to re-conquer the political space that was earlier given to the Muslim Brotherhood following Hosni Mubarak's fall under the pressure of the 2011 Revolution. The Tamarod campaign paved the way for the return of the military to power, thus ultimately it represented a counter-revolutionary power (De Smet 2014). Supported by interviews with high profile stakeholders of Egypt's media market, this study applied framing analysis as empirical investigation in answering the research question of "how did the business elite's private press support the 2013 military coup?". Many scholars agree that framing analysis provides a direct and reliable interpretation of the role of certain media outlets in shaping ideas and public views about current affairs, and also tendencies of responses to covered issues (Norris et al. 2003; D'Angelo and Kuypers 2009). This research concludes that the framing of "fear" (of the Muslim Brotherhood) and "promotion" (of the military as a saviour) showed that both sample newspapers actively sought to create a basis of popular support for the removal of Morsi by the military. This article also concludes that the business elite's private press had played a pivotal role in reinstating the military on top of the state hierarchy through preparing the public to expect and potentially accept the 2013 military coup as "legitimate" and "necessary".

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About the Author

Maher Hamoud is a visiting professor of political economy at KU Leuven and a researcher at Ghent University, Belgium. His research is focused on political economy of oil, political economy of media, and EU-Middle East relations. He is also a former editor of the Cairo-based *Daily News Egypt*.