

The American University in Cairo
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**NORMALIZATION THROUGH THE VISUAL: HOW
INTERNATIONAL MEDIA DEPICTED THE ABRAHAM
ACCORDS**

A Thesis Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with understanding the political dimensions of the visual coverage of the Abraham Accords and the shift that might have occurred in the visual portrayal of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a result of that agreement. The study offers quantitative and qualitative contributions to examine how international news websites on Google News platform used photographs to draw on and contribute to the narrative of Arab-Israeli relations in the wake of the Accords. By establishing operational definitions for positive, negative, anti-normalization, and pro-normalization visual frames, and exploring the use of the emphasis framing device, this study content analyzed 413 photographs in efforts to evaluate the international media's visual portrayal of the Abraham Accords. The results of the visual framing analysis show that despite the cultural and editorial differences, the vast majority of photographs presented distinctly positive and pro-normalization frames while simultaneously de-emphasized negative frames. As a result, this visual coverage did not widen, but actually narrowed the coverage of the Accords. The study further applied semiotic analysis to investigate whether the visual frames and messages contributed to a broader understanding of the Abraham Accords. The findings suggest that news outlets are not simply carriers of news; rather, they have a substantial influence on the news events they cover through their publication of photographs and captions, which can anchor meaning for readers. This study further finds that captions can play an essential part in facilitating the decoding process of certain visuals, because images are sometimes enriched with great meaning that is less easily accessed by those who lack a certain degree of cultural and contextual understanding.

Keywords: *Abraham Accords, Frames, Normalization, Photography, Semiotics, Visual Framings*

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Chapter One

Introduction

In a remarkable celebration attended by high profile world leaders held in the White House on September 15, 2020, the Abraham Accords which represent a historical shift in the Arab-Israeli relations (Kossaify,2020), concluded between Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Bahrain under the auspices of the United States (U.S.). The Historical Signature Day was attended by then-U.S. President Donald Trump as the essential political mediator, the Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu, Emirati Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani.

The Abraham Accords represent a milestone and a new beginning in the process of normalizing relations between Israel and the Arab world. This qualitative change in relations and diplomatic ties is expected to yield immediate benefits in the Middle East region (Durkin, 2020) with political and economic dimensions. The Abraham Accords seem to end decades of enmity between the Arabs and Israel (Callhan, 2020), as this deal paves the route for establishing new regional alliances, based on a convergence of interest despite the old contested alignments between the countries concluding the normalization agreement. While the agreement aspired for setting positive and peaceful changes in the region, it includes flaws because it did not consider the losing party in this agreement: Palestine (Callhan, 2020). The Palestinian cause continues to loom without a resolution (Hellyer, 2020).

The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain were the first two Arab countries to welcome and sign the normalization agreement in September 2020, but they were not the last to normalize ties with Israel as later on in October and December, Sudan and

Morocco agreed and joined the agreement. However, these four countries were not the first in history to enter into a similar agreement; two other Arab countries: Egypt and Jordan had preceded them and had normalized their relations with Israel in 1975 and 1994. With these two additional Arab countries' declaration of normalization with Israel, the tense environment in the Middle East may either slightly or drastically change. Hence, this newly adopted normalization will be reflected in many Middle Eastern issues such as the dual diplomatic and strategic track between the Arab countries and Israel.

Hopes for establishing Middle Eastern peace may be heading towards an upward trend, but this could be at the expense of issues that have historical dimensions and roots. With the Abraham Accords signed, the political position of some Arab countries changed radically, and this is a bold and decisive step towards normalization. Therefore, the Abraham Accords received global and local attention of the international news media.

The normalization consultations between Israel and the four Arab countries did not appear suddenly but had been preceded by talks announced in August 2020. A month later, the agreement was signed in September with the UAE, Bahrain, and Israel, while ratified by the governments of those countries in October. While Sudan agreed in October 2020 on normalizing relations with Israel but signed in January 2021, and in December 2020 Morocco joined the Accords.

What do News Manufacturers do?

News manufacturers have been working actively toward utilizing frames in the news production process, establishing interpretive packages (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). They can construct sensible definitions (Gitlin, 1980) for different events in various scenarios. Regarding visuals, by shedding light and laying stress on a single side of reality through narrowing the lens on it and excluding other elements or aspects, news manufacturers can change how the audience interpret and amend their perception of the issue, the nature of the involved primary characters and who they are, and who should be held accountable and where accountability exists (Entman, 1993; Gitline, 1980). Hence, images could be perceived as a major visual element in the news framing process (Dan, 2018; Fahmy et al., 2014; Geise & Baden, 2014; Powel et al., 2015). The textual content of the news story itself—most notably, its headline and captions—often helps in informing, understanding and affecting the way of interpreting and processing images (Coleman, 2010; Wilkes, 2015). For this reason, visuals may also generate distinct and independent framing effects.

Images used in printed publications, such as newspapers and magazines, are primarily utilized to shed light on the significance of news narratives, hence, grabbing the audience's attention to communicate the primary argument (Griffin, 2004; Zillmann, Knobloch & Yu, 2001). Visual elements could be used to make certain sides and angles or argumentative points of the covered event easier, better to remember, and more effective (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Thus, visuals can transmit and send messages nonverbally which can be interpreted and processed by the reader subconsciously. As a result, visuals can be used to gradually normalize specific views or perspectives, as well as to affect the perception

of the audience and interpretation of the events at hand, or to effectively influence the emotions of the actors involved (Messaris & Abraham, 2001).

Previous studies have continuously confirmed the effects of news photographs in the interpretations of events with conflicts, disputes, and hostile ties between nations (Butler, 2005). Visuals could help in anchoring more political explanations of the nature of conflicts and identifying the different actors involved (Parry, 2010). To this effect, this study is concerned with understanding the political dimensions of the visual coverage of the Abraham Accords and the shift that occurred in the current situation of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and even how the new normalization agreement could foster friendly relations, cooperative diplomatic ties, and full normalization. The study focuses on the close examination of the recent normalization agreements put into effect on different stages from August 2020 to January 2021 between Israel and the four Arab signatory countries: the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco. The study investigates certain aspects related to the visual framing of the news event, such as the employability of photographs in the visual coverage of the Abraham Accords, the identification, and representation of actors portrayed.

What Visuals Can Do?

Visuals create a state of certainty through the predominant coverage and by assuring the depiction of some aspects as key players, while shedding less light and attention on others (Roger, 2013). Visuals produce a favorable or unfavorable tone of groups or individuals by portraying them in specific situations, scenarios, and relations (Messaris & Abraham, 2001). This viewpoint occasionally interferes with or contradicts the notion of media bias by asking who the media is siding with, whose viewpoint it favors, and which actors are positively or negatively depicted. Hence,

scholars suggest that visuals used in the news reports usually offer other options, and even contradictory readings and patterns which often help in supporting particular views and stances without regard for others (Fahmy, 2010; Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti, 2013).

Visuals can be used to communicate cultural frames and organizing principles that guide journalistic decisions (Resse, 2007), but they could also be utilized to situate events within a favorable political context. (Pan & Kosicki, 2001). As a result, visuals could be regarded as valuable resources for developing narratives (Wells, 2007). To that extent, photographs can help shape political perceptions and provide explanations for events in this way. The visuals interact with long-term historical narratives of international relations rather than current coverage of events in cultural and political aspects where news outlets run (Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010b; Reese, 2010; Vliegenthart & van Zoonen, 2011).

Visual Elements, Cultural Meanings

Visuals have cultural ties regardless of whether they are photographs, graphic representations, or even cartoons. As a result, Rose (2016) preferred to use "visual culture" to illustrate how visuals have become an integral part of daily life (p.347). The photographs with cultural relation are taken from a perfect match to reality; thus, the photographs are only a simulation of the real world. To analyze the image in a visual cultural context, the compositional interpretation is needed to develop a way to understand the meaning of images in a specific sense (Rose, 2016), which requires prior understanding of the photograph's cultural context.

To understand how photographs can convey encoded meaning, it is worthwhile to relate the concept to the process of application (Berkowitz, 2007).

Accordingly, these encoded meanings can be negotiated and redefined, moving toward the reprehended meaning intended by its creator. Furthermore, some of these meanings can be effectively understood based on the prior understanding of the context. However, the audience with more excellent cultural knowledge and prior knowledge can go further and beyond these basic interpretations, and that assures that the audience has a good eye and will not ignore any of the meanings and messages contained in these visuals (Berkowitz, 2007).

The current study asserts that news outlets are not just methods of delivering or carriers of news, but they also contribute to the presentation of this news in different settings and frames, which widens the scope of thinking and understanding of the audience's interpretation of the visual messages. This appears in the selection of media outlets for the accompanying pictures of the news items and the quality of the accompanying texts, both of which contribute to the completion of the picture and anchor the meaning. However, some photographs are culturally bound and affect understanding the real meaning behind them (Rose, 2016). Therefore, the accompanying texts could help in anchoring the meanings of the images, as well.

The data in this study is obtained from a quantitative and qualitative analysis of visual elements for news items in English-language news outlets which visually addressed the featured events of the Abraham Accords. Among those visuals were photos of the Historical Signature Day, officials while signing, smiling, waving hands, flag-related images, historically rooted places with religious characters, and others. This study analyzes how international news websites used these photographs to direct the attention of readers to the contested narrative of the Arab-Israeli relations in the wake of the Abraham Accords.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

1- Background: The Abraham Accords

The Rise of the Abraham Accords

On August 13, 2020, it was announced that the United Arab Emirates (UAE), one of the wealthiest Arab countries in the Arab World (Vaimal, 2020), agreed to normalize diplomatic relations with Israel, a long-standing adversary of the Arabs (Bateman, 2020), under the supervision of the United States (U.S.). The UAE was not the only Arab country in the Gulf to show its desire to establish diplomatic ties with Israel; in fact, on September 11 of the same year, Bahrain, followed in the footsteps of the Emiratis.

On September 15, in a festive historic gathering on the White House's South Lawn in Washington, the two Foreign Ministers of the UAE and Bahrain, Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani, along with the Israeli's Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and then-U.S. President Donald Trump signed the Abraham Accords Agreement of 2020 to mark the birth of new relations in the Middle East (Canal Forgues Alter & Janardhan, 2021).

The Abraham Accords formally laid out a new path for the future of strategic, diplomatic, and economic relationships between the Arab states and Israel after long years of uneasy and fraught relations that dominated the region. The Accords aimed to achieve long-term peace to put an end to radicalization and conflicts throughout the Middle East and the entire the world (U.S. Department of State, 2020).

The Abraham Accords appeared to glorify Trump's foreign strategy in the Middle East; additionally, it served as an excuse to postpone the Israeli attempts to

annex parts of the West bank, especially after mounting local and international censure (Zeller, 2020). Hence, the UAE and Bahrain wanted to reach a compromise in order to achieve their strategic goals without appearing to have abandoned the Palestinian cause (Zeller, 2020).

What Do the Accords Say?

The Abraham Accords requires all ratifying countries to preserve and reinforce peace in the Middle East and worldwide. Enshrining human dignity and respecting everyone's fundamental freedoms, including religious freedom, lie at the heart of the Accords. The Accords states that peaceful coexistence is imperative in order to establish lasting peace among the major Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and all humanity. Once this new peace order is established, interfaith and intercultural dialogue will be able to erase radicalization, and conflict in the region (U.S. Department of State, 2020). Furthermore, the Abraham Accords promotes securing a dignified life for all human beings, regardless of race, faith, or ethnicity. Hence, maintaining cordial relations between Israel and its neighbors under the principles of the Accords equates with a better future (U.S. Department of State, 2020)

The Abraham Accords and Future Prospects

However, three principal questions regarding this document remain unanswered: the first concerns the shape of these new ties with Israel, especially since the Arab-Israeli dispute was closely linked to the Palestinians and their aspirations to regain their lands; the second question, in case of expanding the path of normalization touches on the reactions of the Arab public opinion upon suddenly encountering this peace initiative; the third and final question asks how these formal ties will transition

to peaceful coexistence and absolute normalization despite the sensitivity of the new situation.

The facts indicate that this sensitivity may diminish since neither the UAE nor Bahrain, unlike Egypt and Jordan, were in a state of direct enmity against Israel. It should be noted that both the UAE and Bahrain backed the Arab Peace Initiative (API) proposed at the March 2002 Arab leaders' summit in Beirut. The API has urged Arab countries and Israel to normalize relations, stipulating a full retraction of Israel from the Palestinian territories. Moreover, the Oslo Accords reached in 1993 catalyzed a new peace process between the Arab countries and Israel, reflecting on many political and socioeconomic directions (Bouris, 2010).

Therefore, the announcement of new normalization between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain was not reached by coincidence. However, steps to normalize relations between these countries had been in the pipeline until taking an official form, in addition to cementing earlier diplomatic attempts to promote peace in the region (Jalal, 2020).

However, for Israel, its intentions and plans were conspicuous in this regard. Despite Israel's settlement attempts to impose its sovereignty over the West Bank lands, the agreement was reached in public without hesitation. Israel received unprecedented massive support from Trump's administration before leaving office. That granted Netanyahu's government new privileges to bring quick wins and feel accepted in the Middle East region, named after the apparent marginalization of the Palestinian cause. Moreover, this critical step highlights the change in the Israeli foreign strategy and the preference for its continuation in the normalization processes (Feith, 2020).

Concerning the Palestinians, the reality seems to be stronger in light of the extension of normalization, especially after losing most of their bargaining chips to reclaim their lands. As previous Arab agreements stipulated, the return of the Palestinian territories in exchange for normalization, but this step takes the Palestinians miles away from achieving their dream (Hellyer, 2020).

Who Else?

The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain were not the only Arab countries to foster diplomatic ties with Israel in 2020, but in December 2020, Morocco agreed to normalize ties with Israel, and in January 2021, Sudan inked the Abraham Accords. All these agreements were reached under the supervision of the United States with the direct support of Trump, who sent his advisor and Middle East envoy Jared Kushner to clinch these agreements. Before leaving his office, Trump floated the idea that other Arab countries such as Qatar, Oman, and Kuwait might follow suit and join the Abraham Accords. Meanwhile, Israel wants to push a peace pact with Saudi Arabia, but that matter did not happen yet. The Saudis are balking at the prospect, but they still stick to their rigid condition of the Palestinian statehood (Hincks, 2020).

However, both Israel and Trump's maneuvers would not bring peace into the Middle East as long as there is no guaranteeing resolution for the Palestinians (Young, 2020). Otherwise, these peace and normalization attempts can only serve uselessly and might end to gradient malformation.

The Palestinians' Reaction

Undoubtedly, it was expected that the Palestinians would not welcome the race for normalization with the Arab countries since it jeopardizes their goal of Palestinian statehood. The Palestinian Authority (PA) in Ramallah, President Mahmoud Abbas, Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement) - that controls Gaza Strip since 2007, and Fattah- the dominant faction in Palestinian Authority, confirmed their widespread condemnation and considered the new normalization deals as a betrayal (Estrin, 2020). Upon that, Abbas addressed the UN General Assembly to convene "a genuine peace process" during 2021 in the wake of the latest recognition of Israel by some Arab countries (Sawafta, 2020). The Palestinians dismayed the Emirati and Bahraini excuses as Israel just postponed the annexation process of all settlement blocs to guarantee the success of normalization deals and will continue applying its sovereignty on the West bank (Trew, 2019). Netanyahu's government announced that the Israeli-Gulf deals would not hinder the ongoing annexation plans (Harb, 2020).

The normalization agreements would deepen the worsening crisis for the Palestinians as all former negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians went into limbo with no progress. Even the two-state solution does not seem to be an option that can be compromised now (Pollock, 2020). However, the Palestinians seem that they do not put faith in their aging Palestinian Authority, which kept the status quo since the Oslo Accords. The Palestinians ignited two intifadas against Israel in the late 1980s, and the early 2000s respectively resulted in dramatic effects (Siniver, 2018), so would they orchestrate a new one?

What Polls Say?

Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies conducted a poll with 28,288 respondents between 2019 and 2020 from 13 Arab countries concluded that 89 percent of individuals considered Israel as the "greatest threat to Arabs" (p.51). While a full of 88 percent did not recognize Israel due to its " expansionist" policies and "racist" acts against Palestinians, and only 6 percent accepted setting diplomatic relations with Israel. Meanwhile, 79 percent of respondents prioritized the Palestinian cause and said it is the main concern for all Arabs (Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2020b, p.55).

The Arab League Stance

Perhaps there is disintegration in the Arab League, which represents an alliance of 22 Arab countries as the League was criticized for not condemning the new Arab-Israeli normalization deals. Later on, six Arab countries quit the rotating presidency of the League (Jansen, 2020). However, it is obvious that the League cannot continue struggling with the Palestinian cause with the apparent current dysfunction (Rachidi, 2019). The objection would not have made any difference, as six Arab countries of the League, including (Egypt, Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan) have already decided their route to normalize their ties with Israel.

What Else?

It seems that Saudi Arabia is no longer as intransigent as before, as in December 2020, the Kingdom officially agreed to allow Israeli airliners to pass over its territories to UAE (Specia, 2020). Moreover, Saudi Arabia kept silent on the Bahrain-Israel normalization deal, which shows that Saudi blessed this move since

Bahrain is a close ally to Saudi Arabia and a key backer (Rashad, 2020). The Saudi royals used to publicly defend the Palestinian cause, but the new leadership of the younger generation is on the way to softening the hard-line with Israel. Egypt – the key player in the Middle East, praised the normalization agreements (Krasna, 2020), although Egypt had been suspended from the Arab League for ten years in 1979 after signing the peace treaty with Israel. The indicators are heading towards a dramatic change that will be witnessed in the coming period at the level of Arab-Israeli diplomatic relations.

Past Treaties

The Abraham Accords was not the only peace plan that brought peace to the Middle East region. However, there were other peace initiatives and negotiations that had come into play.

The U.N. Resolution

Following the conclusion of the Third Arab-Israeli War in 1967, or the so-called the six-day war, which included capturing the Egyptian Sinai peninsula, the U.N. Security Council Resolution no.242 called for a ceasefire. It urged Israel to withdraw from all occupied territories of the conflict, calling all occupied countries (Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria) to recognize one another's sovereignty and the right to live in peace (Bowen, 2017). Although the U.N. inference paved the route for future peace attempts, the resolution was famous for the imprecision as the Israeli side misperceived the resolution and withdrew from some territories, not all as stipulated. Therefore, Israeli malpractice hindered the peace plans for decades.

Camp David I

After the historical visit paid by the late president of Egypt Anwar Sadat in 1977 to Jerusalem, the former U.S. President Jimmy Carter brokered a peace deal and convened with Sadat and Israel's late Prime Minister Menachem Begin at Camp David near Washington in 1978 (Barron, Kurtzer-Ellenbogen & Yaffe, 2019). They then reached an agreement on Israel's withdrawal from Egyptian territory and securing a transitional government spearheaded by Palestinians. In 1979, Egypt concluded a peace agreement with Israel to be the first Arab country to accept normalizing and establish peace with Israel after six years of the 1973 Israel Egypt war. The two sides agreed on the gradual Israeli withdrawal from Sinai by 1981.

The Madrid and Oslo Agreements

In 1991, the U.S. and Soviet Union had sponsored a conference in Madrid to follow up the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and encourage other Arab countries to set peace with Israel. Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and representatives from Palestine, including late Yasser Arafat and figures in the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), attended. However, no agreements were reached (Barari, 2009). However, in 1994, Jordan signed a peace deal with Israel to become the second Arab country to conclude a deal with Israel (Riedel, 2020).

In 1993, secret and direct talks between Israel and PLO had been held under the auspices of the Norwegian government called for establishing an interim independent government for Palestinians, erecting council to manage a transitional period of five years, withdrawal of Israeli troops, and the resumption of talks on a permanent settlement (Haberman, 1993).

Camp David II

In 2000, former U.S. President Bill Clinton had invited both late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak. at Camp David for resuming talks. Nevertheless, it ended with failure, and a new Palestinian uprising or intifada was ensued later (Satloff, 2000).

The Arab Peace Initiative

In 2002, a ten-sentence Saudi peace plan to solve the long Arab-Israeli conflict was supported by the Arab League at an Arab convention held in Beirut and was also endorsed in 2007 and 2017. The Arab Peace Initiative demanded that Israeli withdrawal from the Palestinian territories and return to the June 1967 lines, as well as the establishment of an autonomous Palestinian entity in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. In exchange, Arab countries would on normalization agreements with Israel and recognize it. (Podeh, 2014). However, no progress had been made.

The Roadmap for Peace

Another peace plan was outlined in 2003 by members of the so-called the Middle East Quartet, including United Nations, the United States, the European Union, and Russia to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The map was preceded by a significant statement by the former U.S. President George W. Bush delivered on 24 June 2002, calling for establishing an independent Palestinian state. A settlement plan of three phases was proposed, but the peace process was blocked in the early phase, and the peace initiative was not implemented (Otterman, 2005).

The Geneva Accord

The Geneva Initiative or the Geneva Accord was an informal initiative announced in late 2003 by former Israeli and Palestinian officials based on previous official negotiations. Although the initiative received international support, the Accords did not represent an obligation to the respective governments of both countries to implement (Shikaki, 2004).

Annapolis Conference

In 2007, George W. Bush, former President of the United States orchestrated a conference in Annapolis to restart the roadmap for peace with plans to reach a peace deal by the end of 2008 in the presence of Ehud Olmert, former Israeli Prime Minister, and Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority. However, no agreement was reached because of Israel's ground offensive in Gaza in December 2008, which effectively halted all efforts (Migdalovitz, 2007).

Direct Talks

After the resumes of talks between Israelis and Palestinians in May 2009, Barack Obama, former President of the United States called for direct talks to revive the peace treaty. In September 2010, a summit was held in Washington attended by Obama, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, and Egypt's late President Hosni Mubarak, and Jordan's King Abdullah (Pollock, 2010). However, no achievement was realized, and a deadlock was present. Another peace talk was held under the auspices of Washington in 2013 but ended at the same destination.

The Trump Peace Plan

In June 2019, then-U.S. President Donald Trump so-called “Peace to Prosperity” plan which aims at investing \$50 billion to boost the living conditions of Palestinians and the economy of neighboring Arab countries (Spetalnick, 2019). However, the Palestinians refused and Arab League (AL) Secretary-General Ahmed Abul-Gheit stated in May 2019 that the Arab states only accept the Saudi peace initiative of 2002 (Sawafta, 2020).

2- Visuals

Visuals and Political Coverage

Visuals have long been a principal component of depicting political events as politicians are aware of the significant role of the visual in constructing meanings (Schill, 2012). Therefore, this study delves deeper into understanding the function of visuals in depicting significant political events. To that end, this thesis wants to understand how photographs could considerably influence the perception of news events by analyzing the visual imperatives depicting the Abraham Accords.

Photographs can play a critical role in creating a rhetorical effect and boosting persuasive argumentative points to the audience (Gallagher & Zagacki, 2005). Since photographs could require visual syntax in order to transmit relations between things, so by juxtaposing the photographs, this aim could be achieved in order to establish causal connection, contrasts, and generalizations (Messaris, 1996). For instance, a photograph for an official in front of a flag or in an emotional mood could anchor meaning and suggest a causal connection between them (Barry, 1997). Here the

photographs, act as inferred justifications as the audience utilize them to fill an important part of the reasoning or the perception of the political event.

Despite the fact that some photographs could not embed explicit interpretations the photographs themselves could evoke logical conclusions by the audience. For instance, images of the removal of the statue of Saddam Hussein while Iraqis were cheering could lead the viewer to understand that the Iraqi are pro the American invasion. Therefore, the audiences consume the visuals to understand the meaning of unclear parts in news narratives (Doremus, 1992).

Powerful photographs could be one of the most favorable methods to secure the audiences' attention since they act as an effective communication tool (Klijn, 2003). Meanwhile, the photographs could frame issues in the news and then influence the perception of the audience of news events (Messaris & Abraham, 2001). Hence, previous research showed that frames could affect the audiences' response and process to the message. The research also illustrated that photographs could have a leading influence on the audience (Domke, Perlmutter, & Spratt, 2002; Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002) as the photographs could evoke old installed attitudes in the audience's minds, prompting them to activate certain viewpoints to assess and evaluate the news events. The photographs could also figuratively take the viewer to a particular time in the past that could lead to accept arguments and emotional appeal or to challenge them and make controversial arguments (Lombard & Ditton, 1997; Meyrowitz, 1985).

Therefore, research on visual communication about deep-rooted political conflicts or resolutions is a complex topic as the news photographs set specific frames that could influence the perception of political events (Fahmy et al. 2006). Hence, the motive of this study is to understand what photographs can represent as the

photographs contribute to structuring the general public's awareness and national memory (Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti 2013; Griffin 2010).

The Role of Photographs in News

Photojournalism plays a different role when compared to other areas of photography. Photojournalism has the potential to support readers with factual visual information (Tomanić Trivundža & Vezovnik, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to distinguish between the practices of photojournalism and other different visual communication methods. Many considerations should be taken care of, such as the content of the image, the context, and the accompanying text because they contribute to the delivery of the message. Hence, we shall be aware of all different stages of the production process that incorporates the limitations of the photograph and the multiple procedures involved in the process of storytelling. Meanwhile, the aspirations of the readers should be considered, like how the photograph is supposed to be objective, subjective (Becker, 1995, p. 5).

Like other disciplines that are constrained by a set of values and ideological rules as in politics, all photojournalists should stick to the directive on providing clear, significant, and relevant news photographs (Galtung & Ruge, 1965).

The competitive nature of news organizations requires knowing the recipient's interests. That is why the visual coverage of any news event will mirror the editorial policy of news organizations and their analysis of these events, and this shall match with the fundamental values of the audience. However, it is expected from news organizations to deliver all story angles, but reserving the values of the audience was crucial (Fahmy, 2005a).

Knightley (2003) demonstrates that the camera does not deceive in a direct way, but it can do so brilliantly by omitting certain sides. Previous searches on war symbolism clarified that both selectivity and photography framing were present in the news. Griffin (2004) found that the war coverage in the American press was in line with priming and supporting particular narratives instead of reinforcing or leading to distinctive and free visual coverage.

Although Griffin (2004) was interested in figuring out the news frames that depicted wars, he did not find significant proof to gauge photographic framing. Therefore, he pointed out that the language used by journalists in news articles and opinion pieces is not as fiercely constricted as photographs. Furthermore, he noted that photographs represent a symbolic representation of news articles and are chosen according to their expected influence.

The textual content or photo-caption and the photograph itself could deliver compelling messages, namely about far-long events that include conflicting parties. Neglecting or ignoring some sides or elements in the photograph for any reason could be harmful. Therefore, biased photography representation of events shall be seriously considered. This happens when one party conflicts or if the political ties are not at best between countries, so here we need to ask how the conflict was depicted and explained, was there a neutral coverage of this conflict or this event or what? Which groups or sides received emotional empathy? And who were negatively or positively featured? (Parry, 2010).

Effects of Photographs

Although photojournalism may seem natural, the authenticity of news reports obscures the basic fact that news photographs are unnatural but a fabricated reality (Messaris & Abraham, 2001). In this way, news photographs become representatives of ideology (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011), “used as a tool to shape public consciousness and historical imagination (p. 57). In addition, the meaning given by the photographs is too provocative or controversial that the publication cannot express it in words (Messaris and Abraham, 2001).

Sidey and Fox (1956) had illustrated that photographs are attractive to the readers; therefore, the editors and news manufacturers have big responsibility and challenge to keep the reader's attention through their powerful tool – the camera (p. 11). This fact still drives the editorial choices for news agencies and media outlets. Now, news stories are accompanied and decorated with more powerful visuals than before on a large scale. That may be due to the remarkable development the media industry witnessed, represented in the technological advances in capturing the photos or the editing techniques that made it more accessible and speedier to produce an iconic photograph. Hence, the desired effects that the photographs leave are the motive power behind using visuals in news stories. Therefore, Gibson (2003) identified two purposes for image employment: first, the photographs are better than words in telling stories; second, the photographs could bring more attention to the text by inducing the audience.

Images obtain more degree of consideration in books during the process of editing narratives (Gibson, 2003). Meanwhile, professional gallery editors and producers carefully select photographs, but the opposite occurs with the writers (Garcia & Stark, 1991). Due to the fact, the images could contribute on a large scale

to the narrative, so it is essential to balance the information presented to be compatible with the accompanying image. However, this balance cannot usually be realized due to the frequent workload and the stressed atmosphere in the newsrooms.

Zillmann, Gibson, and Sargent (1999) found out in their research that some issues could be misperceived due to the inappropriate selection of photographs. As they concluded that both short and long-term interpretations are built through the visuals that accompany the news stories, the reader counts heavily on the photographic content when they construct their impressions. It was detected that the perception of relevant issues could be distorted due to the wrong employment of the photograph. Gibson and Zillmann (2000) conducted an experiment reaching that the reader's evaluation of risks increases when the photographs include elements featuring danger. Therefore, it was observed that the photographs that depict the prevalence of a disease among particular ethnic groups overestimate the perception of risks about these groups though there is no reference or specification of danger in the text. Therefore, the inclusion of images in the news stories adds value and provides a further narrative that can impact the reader's interpretations of news events and then will reflect positively on the accompanying text to be adequately understood. Wanta (1988) also indicated that the large photographs featured on the front pages improve the reader's perception of the significance of news events.

Zillmann and Bryant (1985) proposed that the photographs are attention-grabbers to the accompanying textual content; however, they consider this a selective prediction and cannot be considered solid research evidence. However, Wolf and Grotta (1985) defended this prediction and conducted a significant study that shows the relation between image employment and the accompanying text as the image increases the reader's desire to read the text. To prove their assumption, the two

scholars conducted an experiment on a group of students and did kind of manipulative editing for the front page of a newspaper. The front page contained a focal article about a dancer, who won a ballet award offered by an outstanding dance academy, and her photo was placed on a four-column space, and the top was the headline. However, the results were disappointing, and the students did not show interest in reading the text despite the qualities that the photograph has.

Garcia and Stark (1991) took a very different perspective to define the relationship between the photograph and the text. They explained how the readers move through the multiple layers of the pages and prove that they experimented. The results showed that the large photographs grab the attention of the reader more than smaller ones, noting that the image size affects the attraction to the image. However, they reached that the photographs do not foster the reader's motivation to read the accompanying text. Therefore, this prediction that states the pictures boost the appetite for reading is not supported yet and remains in the status of the hypothesis.

Wanta and Roark (1993) studied if the photographs influence the acquisition of information, and they found that the photographs improve recalling the news report, especially if they are emotionally driven photos. David (1998) reported that news reports that include visual elements are easier to remember than those not illustrated with visuals. Scholars such as Reese (1984) and Gunter (1980) found that it was easier to recall information embedded in TV news reports containing relevant images. However, this research did not confirm if the imagery boosted the prior desire to acquire information, especially during this fierce competition of attention-grabbing.

Regardless of ethical concerns, negative imagery appears to have news value because it is appealing to newsreaders (Donsbach, 1991; Haskins & Miller, 1984).

The demand for observing the surroundings for spotting dangers explained the motivation behind the people's attraction to the news that tackles risk and threats (Shoemaker, 1996; Zillmann, 1998). This comes from the notion that the narratives or news stories provide the audiences with the needed information about their environment, and it operates on that base to complete the people's little need to monitor the environment by themselves. Therefore, the images that depict perils are assumed to be directly consumed by the audiences since they offer surveillance functions. Despite these photographs of danger might be challenging to look at, they demand attention and captivate the audience not due to their artistic or powerful component but due to their nature, which contains human tragedy (Newhagen & Reeves, 1992). As a result, despite the fact that these types of photographs have lost their value over millennia, they were labeled as attention traps (LeDoux, 1993; Zillman, 1998).

However, the image could represent a chain of events through a single shot. That is why the photograph is half of the narrative. Meanwhile, iconic photographs that depict human suffering function as convincing negative images with negative emotions (Brosius, 1993) or annoying photographs (Mundorf, Drew, Zillmann, & Weaver 1990). These characteristics help investigators understand the motivations behind the elicitation of emotional responses as well as disturbances. Here, Zillmann (1998) defined newly typed visuals and called them agonistic imagery that represents a threat to human welfare because the curiosity of the audience increases to monitor their environment. According to LeDoux (1993) and Zillman (1994), such imagery could evoke empathy or induce emotions of fear and anger. However, these responses are not defined yet as probable.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Framework

Visuals are a significant component and an integral part of the coverage of daily news. Visuals could influence and create shift in public sentiment regarding deep-rooted topics. However, this effect might not appear obvious enough. The research suggests images could evoke emotions and attitudes through framing particular scenes for delivering hidden political messages. (Damasio, 1996), in return, the developed emotional reactions that were created through photography could sway decisions made by politicians and the public. Hence, in this study, the researcher will examine visuals through the lens of the visual framing theory.

Examining the visual frames of international news stories covering the normalization treaty will be used to explore how the images reflected and represented political messages on specific issues, namely the signature of the Abraham Accords.

News Framing

News frames are defined by Entman (1993) as explanatory packages, which include the core organizational thought the media professionals and newsmakers consume to convey the most prevalent features and angles of an exceedingly sophisticated news story to the readers. Therefore, when these features are appropriately settled in the minds of the readers, the frames actively work to impact the way people interpret issues. Frames affect the way the readers consume, recall, and process the information they receive (Newhagen & Reeves, 1992). The same applied when the readers build and construct their attitudes (Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997), and their views, and even their behavioral intents (Schuck & de Vreese, 2006).

This study addresses the framing effects produced by visuals that are embedded in news stories. The visuals transmitted by news could realize a notable distinctive function in affairs that dominate the interest of the international community by portraying far-reaching issues, reviving and recalling historical events, and simplifying complex stories, and bringing them to life. However, the new contemporary formats adopted new features of presenting the images alongside a text or a photo caption to maximize the understanding and the scope of the news context in which the images were chosen to represent. Both the image and the accompanying text could break in unlooked and unqualified effects that need more consideration (Fahmy, Bock, &Wanta, 2014).

According to Geise and Baden (2014), the sole characteristics of the image and the text could determine the framing effect. Meanwhile, the images could hook the readers since they are attention-grabbers (Garcia & Stark, 1991), and they could replace and remanufacture reality (Messaris & Abraham, 2001). Visuals could play a vital role in overwhelming the reader when the images touch and provoke emotional aspects compared to the text. Here, the images could have a more substantial and cogent influence (Iyer & Oldmeadow, 2006). Despite the text might not be striking as the image, it provides a comprehensible guide to explain and deduce the main characters and actors involved in the event, like who did what, when, where, and why (Entman,1993). That's why exposing both the effects of images and accompanying texts/photo captions would be of much value for the media workers. They would help in profoundly understanding the visuals through the framing theory.

The Significance of Visual Frames

Previous studies confirmed the significant impact of the visuals branding them as a tool for news frames that can be used to depict, visualize, and put specific aspects in the foreground by focusing attention on these aspects of a particular issue (Grabe & Bucy, 2009). There are plenty of instances that come from news tackle and contain wars and conflicts, such as the news reported about the collapse of Srebrenica (Graham et al., 2013). According to (Robinson, 2002, p. 78), a case of "empathy framing" has been surfaced and became salient after the news coverage of the "Bosniaks massacre," which showed and indexed the images of thousands. As a result, the images compelled the international community to take a stand and take action to prevent human rights violations and abuses, which are the root causes of conflict.

Meanwhile, a robust counter-frame was emphasized through images of belligerents to show the risks of intervention. This case has also been well-known in coverage of other conflicts that hit the Middle East, such as in Iraq, Libya, and Syria (Entman, 2003). Based on this, Robinson (2002) proposed a new model that, by emphasizing empathy-driven frames, could influence decisions made by vacillating governments.

Domke and colleagues (2002) state a conjectural relationship between vivid images and bolstering policies; however, the empirical information of visuals slacks behind the text in a progressively multimodal media reality (Coleman, 2010). This intuition could be explained through the multi-stage winnowing procedure that decides the functionality of the images and how they can present frames (Schwalbe, 2006, p. 269). This happens daily in newsrooms when journalists and newsmakers pick up exciting events that are valid for publishing newsworthy content. Then, these

images are framed based on the journalist's choice and selection of what to choose, why, which angle to present, crop the photo, or keep it without editing. Then, it comes the editor's role who decides which photo caption or text to add alongside the photo. As a result of these semiotic stylistic choices, a kind of connotative influence occurs. They affect the perception of the audiences and readers when they decode and consume the visual content (Kress & Leeuwen, 2020). Not just but they influence how these new frames that were adopted by the editor and journalist choices will recall other internal frames of references in the reader's memory. Barry (1997) explains how images can be processed and accessed faster than text, demonstrating the superior influence of images in the realm of learning and memory. Because of the high quality of the images, they are easier to recall (Paivio, 1991). Overall, the literature suggests that news visuals are more memorable and could be recalled greater than the text (Newhagen & Reeves, 1992).

Photographs and visual elements are more appealing than textual content (Garcia & Stark, 1991). According to eye-tracking studies, photographs are the most visible and frequently used entry points to draw attention to news pages. Wanta (1988) explained that annexing image to news pieces can enlarge prominence on the issue, leading it to the agenda of the public and, in turn, will install these issues in the mindsets of the audience (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Meanwhile, there are essential questions about the visual framing effect and shall be raised whenever addressing the visual framing. The questions are the images just eye-grabbing, or do they have other purposeful contributions to help audiences interpret message meanings by shedding light on specific parts and to what extent they influence the audiences' perception?

The Impact of Visual Framing

Visuals are widely acknowledged to be influential, and previous studies agreed that visual effects are still in their infancy due to the fact that visual research is a relatively new in mass communication research. The majority of visual communication effects research has concentrated on the effects of cognition, attitude, and behavior (Fahmy & Alkazemi, 2017).

Social psychological studies made early progress in pointing out the powerful effects of visuals in attitude changing. Chaiken and Eagly (1976) had proven in a study that audiovisuals were more successful at amending views when the content was not complex. However, the written text was significant when the content was not easy to understand. Therefore, Chaiken (1980) introduced a heuristic system model to create a persuasive two-way hypothesis. Despite this dual-route model, there was a slight examination of media effects research (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). That is why, unlike text, Sparks et al. (1998) asserted that visual elements could support heuristic rather than systematic processing.

Gibson and Zillmann (2000) and other scholars clarified that if manipulation like photo editing to the image is conducted while accompanying text remains with no changes, the image can affect the perception of the event itself and remember the photograph's content later. This can be seen when Arpan et al. (2006) utilized the photographs of demonstrations revealing the photographs involved conflict resulted in a more dismissive judgment about the demonstrations and protesters. However, this was only when the issue matched with the interest of the participants. Meanwhile, other images of the military that depict conventional stereotypes of loss could diminish support for the war, according to studies focused on international affairs, which asserted the superiority of visual effects (Scharrer & Blackburn, 2015).

Meanwhile, it has been seen that the text that accompanies that image could also play a part (Pfau et al., 2006). An example of that is the Iraqi invasion when comparison conducted between photographs of the Iraq war with a photo-caption or textual content stands alone. It was revealed that the images created an influence leading to limited support to the U.S existence in Iraq as the images generated high emotional negative reactions. However, Domke et al. (2002) did not agree with the concept that powerful images could influence public opinion. They justified that the image could influence opinions, but this only depends on the prior knowledge that the audience possesses to process the information and make judgments.

Based on these insights, Geise and Baden (2014) produced a theoretical framework for exploring the framing effect of both visuals and textual content. According to the two scholars, the visuals possess a magnifying effect, and this effect could be recognized quickly and is profoundly salient. Meanwhile, they concluded that the visuals have an analogical quality that makes them easy to decode. However, if the visuals were not understandable, many interpretations could be produced depending on the receiver's stored and prior knowledge and the composition of the image itself. Despite the text being not prevalent as the image, it contributed to constructing meaning due to its normal syntax (Geise & Baden, 2014). However, there is a condition where both the framing and text fail in fulfilling their purpose, and it happens when the receiver of the message does not have sufficient knowledge to decode the textual content (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

The quality of learning and memory functionality perform better when the messages are conveyed using visual and textual formats (Paivio, 1991). Meanwhile, when the messages achieve congruence, then the effect could increase. According to previous studies, congruence positively enhances the learning of the media message.

However, in the case of incongruence, here the vividness of the image acts effectively as an attention-grabber and could disregard the information of the textual content and may also dominate it (Gibson & Zillmann, 2000). Therefore, the powerfulness of the image was appeared to draw the receivers' attention and amplify the salience of the message in addition to calling back any related textual content (Zillmann, Knobloch, & Yu, 2001).

How Are News Photographs Framed?

There are two essential concepts of framing. The first is the composition of individual photographs and how they were framed. The second is applying framing analysis to these visuals. Burgin (1982) explains that the cameras set frames to place and deliver a particular point of view. Burgin clarifies that the frames help to arrange the objects embedded in the photographs taken at critical moments. Therefore, framing does exist during the process of composing the image. As the photographer, while taking the photo is having a specific question to ask, "Is this photo important" but it happens within the framing before proceeding to the following stages of editing and then publishing. Burgin points out that the audiences instantly perceive and consume the photograph without realizing the fundamental nature of the photograph itself and how it represents a condensed depiction of reality. He further explains that the audiences only consider the type of camera angle, the image size, and other photographic features when they make judgments. And the analogy reasoning reflected on their reaction and response to the photograph. Here, the audiences see the reality through the lens of the photographer who constitutes the world of the audience through his/her photographic choices like the moment or the time he/she captures the photographs and how this will contribute to a different composition of the photograph and then bring different message served through the photographer's point of view.

Some writers do hail the photographs, and they claim the photographs can say it all. However, Perlmutter (1998) wrote that this allegorical example could appeal to journalists, but it is not logical. Perlmutter explains that the photographs might seem natural, but the reality of the context might be masked due to the repetition of narratives convincingly representing them (p. 17). Photojournalist Susan Meiselas (1987) points out how she had limited authority to put frames on the visuals in terms of choosing the angle and selection. However, she has no control over how the photograph will be reused or reframed in a larger context by the news organization.

When we consider framing in a broader context, we will understand the framing analysis that piqued Goya Tuchman's interest, who made a comparison between news frames and window frames. Tuchman (1978) clarified the attributes such as space, composition, and placement could hinder what the audience could see, and only uncovered parts could be attainable.

Both Entman and Gitlin have the most cited definitions of news framing. Entman (1993) explains framing as the way of choosing some sides of reality and showing them as prominent to support specific issues, ethical appraisal, or suggestions for social treatment. While Gitlin (1980) emphasizes the roles and activities of journalists in his explanatory definition as he sees journalists purposefully set the media frames due to multiple components, including the way of interpretation, the photographic choices, and the exclusion of some elements, as all of them, frequently contribute in constituting and emphasizing a verbal or visual discourse. Gitlin sees news frames as an essential component of daily coverage that is processed through patterns of cognition, exclusion, selection, and interpretation. Based on that, the news producers change the real sophisticated news events and re-present them in a

more relaxed manner to make them more accessible and clear so that the audiences could consume and digest the news events comfortably.

Meanwhile, these frames contribute to providing a particular meaning that could be rooted for a while due to the routines and employability of the news frames that help to understand significant events in a brief manner. However, framing could not be viewed as a dominant power without any resistance, as persistent values are not harmonious all the time but could swing and be rejected. Gamson and colleagues (1989) questioned the prominent frames that compete to frame particular news events, and he considers all news sources and newsmakers are sponsoring news frames.

Wolfsfeld (1997) looks at framing from a different perspective through the lens of his political model. As in his model, the political ideology plays a role, and the news media provides a fertile environment for the political actors who compete to dominate the political scene. His model depicts media as "a public interpreter" of significant events, and he views media as a "symbolic arena" for the competing political factions in their ideological battle (p. 54, original emphasis). Wolfsfeld, in his model, described the interaction of political players and media actors of common interest in terms of identifying "the structural dimensions." Also, he referred to the "cultural dimensions." He figured out how the norms, values, and routines could influence how the media frames are constructed and how political actors fight to dominate the meaning (p.5).

Previous studies concluded that the visual portrayal cannot be easily interpreted in a linguistic and unambiguous manner, as experiments showed that both individuals and groups could be positively or critically judged due to the inclusion of a powerful picture or a human gesture as they could create an influence and shape

particular attitudes (Arpan et al., 2006). These academic searches pointed out that there is a lack of scholarship looking at the visuals by analyzing media messages' core. Therefore, the role of visuals is not examined yet (Domke et al., 2002: 133). That's why many scholars have recently increased their attention to study and analyze the core elements in the media messages. For instance, (Fahmy 2004; Perlmutter & Wagner, 2004) developed a reliable method for analyzing visual frames, while others focused on the "suggestive" nature of these frames (Entman, 2004: 56).

Previous studies showed that the content transmitted through media outlets has a vital contribution informing and affecting how the audience perceives media messages. However, Reese (2007) noted that despite the multiple theoretical frameworks give vitality to scientific research and helps in making the framing process understandable. Still, there is no fixed model for identifying the theoretical framework for framing as it has many issues with the operational process (Scheufele, 1999). Reese (2007) points out that; framing has never been viewed as a paradigm with standard features but as a research program. Therefore, scholars did not reach a unified conceptualization for framing. Therefore, Reese (2001) tried to create a definition that underlined the dynamic process of framing and defined it as "Frames are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to structure the social world" (p. 11) meaningfully. Also, Scheufele (2000) agreed with Reese (2007) and clarified that the frames do not operate solely but function through a multileveled structure that incorporates other sub-processes. And to provide a more simplified and accurate explanation, he offered an analytical model that includes three approaches: agenda-setting, priming, and framing (Scheufele, 1999).

D'Angelo (2002) clarifies that cognition, constructivism and critical perspectives contributed to directing the framing studies. Scholars explained that the media frames are essential in structuring ideas and stories that, in turn, affect the meaning of events (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987). Meanwhile, they pointed out that networking, analyses provided by media, and personal interpretations contribute to forming public opinion, showing the media effects according to the constructive model (Neuman et al., 1992).

Entman (1993) proposed four levels for utilizing framing. The first is defining a problem, the second is spotting the cause, and the third is suggesting a moral evaluation and then offering a remedy. Entman (1991) analyzed visuals within a political context. He compared the visual news coverage of the Iranian plane shot down by the US to that of the Korean plane shot down by the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Entman discovered that the US media prioritized humanizing the explosion of the Korean plane to blame the Soviet Union. In contrast, the US media focused less on human casualties in its coverage of the Iranian jet to disclaim responsibility.

Messaris and Abraham (2001) make it clear that "visual qualities" give them the preference to frame ideological media messages due to their "iconicity, their indexicality, and their syntactic implicitness" (p. 220). Therefore, they are very effective in articulating messages. These three unique characteristics make the photographs less intrusive than the textual format. The audiences might resist specific critical messages if they were transmitted in a written format but might absorb the same meaning through visuals words' (Messaris & Abraham, 2001).

Entman (1993) points out that the exclusion or inclusion of an image and content could affect how the audience interprets news events as the visuals are not

objective contradicting the common belief. As if the photojournalists did not manipulate the photographs, they still need to be framed to show only the unfolding parts of reality, not all of it. Therefore, (Messaris & Abraham, 2001) clarify that photojournalists normally and routinely set the frames of their visuals. At the same time, Entman (1993) states that photojournalists might move around their objective editorial guidelines and place dominant frames and pass them to their audiences. Based on that, previous studies showed that photojournalists do not follow the guidelines in times of conflicts and war to promote the point of view of their home countries, especially during heightened political tensions (Fahmy, 2005a). Therefore, these various political and cultural backgrounds of journalists could affect the quality of news content. And here, we could reach a corollary that the different cultural and political perspectives could lead to the production of visuals stories with various angles and perspectives.

Framing Devices

Previous visual communication studies concluded that media contributes to shaping the world surrounding us to minimize its complexity (Fahmy & Alkazemi, 2017). They further focused on human interest visuals that elicit emotions, such as photographs of disasters or of international significance. These studies analyzed different framing techniques and visuals devices based on framing theory to illustrate how the visual content is presented to the audience. For instance, Scheufele (1999) proposed a way of analysis to analyze framing. Scheufele located the framing devices in the first level, where the focus is on the most salient events. The frequency of the issue or event itself is then introduced as the most critical device. According to Entman (1993), the repetition of specific attributes through visual messages strengthens some ideas. The frames help send fixed interpretations of events to make

these events more salient and more settled in the audiences' memory. When the particular event receives condensed media coverage, which shows the importance of this event (Fahmy et al., 2007). This explanation matches with what Garcia (1987) found, as the largest photographs on news pages usually draw the attention of the readers than the second one and so on. Meanwhile, Wanta (1988) reached the same result as the larger photographs could make stories more salient to the audiences. Therefore, the more visual is repeated, the more it becomes salient, which confirms the employability of the visual frame in constituting consistent interpretation of news events.

Framing analysis (Point of View)

According to Bowe, Gosen and Fahmy S. (2019), photos can be conveyed through the implicit understanding of visual grammar. Therefore, photos' spatial organization and structural characteristics have particular connotations, deepening our comprehension of visuals (Monaco, 2000). Camera angle, depth of field, and focus, for example, are all significant elements of visual framing (Moriarty & Popovich, 1991). Research on Para-Proxemics found that the manipulation of these structural characteristics affects the way the audience perceives the subject (Coleman, 2010) and affect "the perception they create is not neutral" (p. 248). The image's conceptual structure builds a relationship between the photograph and the viewer. The internal elements of the photo can be constructed using this composition logic to create a vantage point on the outside of the photo (Rose, 2016).

Hence, several scholars analyzed photographs looking at point of view. They found that both the type of shot and camera angle contribute in a non-obtrusive manner to support the conceptual, ideological, and emotional meanings. This includes

technical and pictorial conventions and styles (Berger, 2005). For instance, the low angle could imply empowerment, while the long shot could signify the context.

Leeuwen and Jewitt (2004) explained in their book "Handbook of Visual Analysis" that the camera angle has a significant role in mapping out possible interpretations. For instance, a kind of symbolic relation could be established between the photograph, the photographer, and the viewer if the photograph was captured from different eye level levels, high or low, leading to a feeling of involvement. For example, the symbolic meaning of empowerment could be created if we looked down on something; in contrast, if we looked up, we could perceive a kind of superiority or power over us. In comparison, the eye-level shot indicates equality.

The camera angle could place the audience above the subject or close to reality; however, the audience may not be fully aware of the visual framing aspects. Therefore, elaborating visual framing is required. Mandell and Shaw (1973) conducted an experiment on students to view their judgment on political figures by showing low-angle photographs. However, they illustrated that most of the respondents did not notice the use of the camera angle, and only 13 out of 78 noticed the use of the camera angle.

Rieger & Tagg (1989) and Bissell (2000) illustrated that although the camera can serve as a neutral representation of the real world, the photographs eventually represent a reconstruction of the world. Hence, the photographs do not represent the whole reality, but a slice of it, and the audience's perception of the reality could be influenced by the media choices, including physical characteristics such as choosing one angle or view over another, selecting specific images instead of many or cropping and editing the photographs.

The Importance of Visual Framing in Visual Communication

Although visuals can emphasize the importance of specific issues, previous studies showed that visuals have an agenda-setting and agenda-building function. However, the visual analysis still needs further improvement (Fahmy, S. & Alkazemi, M., 2017, p.3). There literature is not clear on a specific method for analyzing visual data, texts, and/or messages presented in multiple formats to generate a clear explanation of visual content and effects. As a result, there is uncertainty about the variables used in research and whether they can be generalized to advance the theoretical framework and method in the field of visual communication (see Fahmy, Bock & Wanta, 2014).

Walter Lippman, well-known for his popular phrase "the pictures in our heads," was one of the outstanding scholars who urged the importance of the photograph in the early twentieth century. However, there were no significant research inputs after his call until the late 1990s when Doris Graber (1990) called the scientific community to expand their scientific investigations on analyzing television visuals (Graber, 1990). Graber clarified that the absence of relevant theoretical frameworks might have affected the number of research studies on visual information presented in news stories. However, with the emergence of framing theory, there is now a hunk of concrete and appropriate theory that scholars can utilize in their future research on visuals. Messaris and Abraham (2001) coined the importance of visuals as they note that the visuals are characterized with unique qualities that qualify them to be very compelling apparatus for framing (p.22). Erving Goffman, who is credited for introducing the framing theory, realized the same significance that the visuals retain (Goffman, 1979). When visual communication scholars began researching visual frames, the majority of them used qualitative methodology, relying on semiotics and

structuralist analysis. However, these measures were not performing well for the analysis needed for quantitative methodologies. Now, framing theory serves as the intellectual guide for many studies, and the most remarkable aspect is that framing is appropriate for both quantitative and critical-cultural research. The theory allows the researchers to apply triangulation which grants them confidence in their comprehensive analyses. Indeed, other theoretical frameworks could be utilized for visual studies; however, framing has been the preferable theory for researchers. This is because framing theory can guide the researchers to understand how to analyze the visual content to understand and assume its impact on the audience. Therefore, visual framing has a precious theory for visual communication scholars in recent years.

The significance of framing theory was underestimated by few researchers, however, as they considered it is not worthy. On the other side, many scholars, such as Graber (1990), made pioneering and essential contributions to this discipline. However, there is a lack of scientific researches on the role of visuals, and this might be due to the old-dated belief that the words have the quality of being more important than visuals, or it might be due to the difficulty that the researchers face during the encoding process.

Previous commandants highlighted the importance of the visuals and branded them as more powerful than the text (Baran & Davis, 2014). They explained how the information transmitted in a visual format through TVs and newspapers could actively leave various impressions than the one transmitted in the textual format (Domke et al., 1997). However, when scholars embraced work on studying the TV that conjures up visuals, they focused on the verbal content solely. However, there has been a shift,

and now scholars include images or visual elements while using their framing devices.

Scholars justified the exclusion of pictures in their academic studies as they considered pictures as a distinct mode of communication than words. Messaris and Abraham (2001) clarified that the similarity and analogy of the pictures demonstrate the relationship between the pictures and their meaning. They further explained that the social tradition is the key to understanding the meaning of the text as the images build an "analogical" communication approach, unlike the text. Meanwhile, they deal with visuals as "direct indicators," unlike the text, since the images are "indexical" (Messaris and Abraham, 2001, p. 217). This means that the images cannot build causations such as in the text. Therefore they can not constitute an "explicit" claim due to the lack of "clear propositional syntax" (Messaris & Abraham, p. 217).

However, the qualities that visuals images possess give the visual framing superiority and make it more valuable than verbal framing. For instance, we cannot ignore the impacts of the iconic visuals of the invasion of Iraq or the early footage that circulated about Covid-19 from China. Newsrooms daily pass thousands of images that depict stereotypes that would have never been transmitted or communicated in textual format. That confirms the significance of visuals and how they can surpass the boundaries of the words in showing and telling more than the words can do. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge the role of visual framing in affecting the way people perceive the news.

Meanwhile, we have to admit that the audiences consume both visual and verbal media messages concurrently, so research attempts that tackle one channel will not lead to a comprehensive understanding of the nature of the media events.

Moreover, previous studies that were conducted focusing on only the verbal content cannot certainly assure that the effects of the media messages were due to verbal content only. This confirms the fact that the audiences perceive both verbal and visual information simultaneously. Therefore, these studies that involve only a single approach may neglect essential aspects like the way the audiences consume news information as it is applicable that both verbal and visual content work in parallel. We need to bear in mind the complexity and difficulty in the case of adopting both approaches - verbal and visual; however, some researchers realized a practical compromise and produced integrative work. Until reaching this level, research based on visual information needs to receive the same standing that verbal studies do.

What Else Can Visuals Do?

There is plenty of evidence that affirms the robust influence the visuals have on audiences. Graber (1990), who conducted one of the early studies on visual communication, showed that the TV news packages that contain visual elements enhance the function of the audience's memory as they can recall the news story better. Meanwhile, the size of the photograph also has a powerful influence as close-ups and uncommon photos increase the audience's understanding of the verbal information. Visuals do not receive the credit alone, but if both verbal and visual information were processed simultaneously, they can together increase the level of learning and affect the audience's perception of news events. But if the visual information was not identical or compatible with the verbal ones, the audience headed for consuming information transmitted through the visual rather than words. For instance, Grimes and Dreschel (1996) showed there is an interrelationship between visual content and text while viewing information transmitted through visuals.

Grimes (1990) and Pezdek (1977) concluded that the audience could remember words as pictures because both the visual and verbal information is blended in the viewers' minds over time. The studies found that when both formats - verbal and visual, fuse-could mislead the audience about the reality of issues and then cause misperception. As people tend to perceive the point of view of the news story through the picture over the text in case both verbal and visual information is not consistent. The impact of image superiority was coined by Gibson and Zillmann (2000) to describe this phenomenon. Scholars note that the vividness of the picture makes the visual elements attentive in the audiences' memory. That's why images have a more robust influence on perception than the text. Gibson and Zillmann (2000) found that if the audiences cannot recall the information embedded in the textual content, they can still link to the information through the pictures accompanied in the news story as they see that the pictures contributed by large in the narrative (p. 365).

Studying emotions evoked by visuals was taken into consideration by researchers. It has been prominent that media messages that elicit negative implications go viral and have a powerful impact than positive ones. The same applies to the negative visuals (Newhagen & Reeves, 1989). For instance, the images that contained negative elements about demonstrations promoted the audiences to receive negative impressions about the cause of the issue itself (Arpan et al., 2006). Moreover, Zillmann, Knobloch and Yu (2001) found that the audience better recalls negative photos that depict human suffering and victimization. This implies that the negativism that dominates the photographs contributes to the agenda-setting process affecting the audiences' impressions about candidates while the positive ones cannot (Wu & Coleman, 2009). This effect is due to two reasons, firstly, to the substantial elements contained in the image, and secondly to the audiences' ignorance of this

power. That's why it is essential to aware photojournalists and editors to take care of the choices they make and consider the possible results that images might leave on the audience.

An experimental study had found that the respondents had reacted negatively to photographs of social demonstrations as when the researchers manipulated the variables, they concluded that the respondents received negative impressions about the cause of the protests (Arpan et al., 2006). This supports the fact that the image can alone affect the audience's perception, as in this controlled experiment, the verbal content was the same in all narratives (Kamhawi & Grabe, 2008). It is noteworthy when the photographs show more conflict the audiences react more negatively and happened in the aforementioned experiment (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). That shows that the photographs which contain powerful elements for adding editorial and journalistic values perform as frames and could lead to significant consequences. As long as the information that the audiences are receiving away from their personal experience - such as international stories, so here the frames become their primary source of information and affect their perception about the issues (Groshek, 2008). Previous studies showed that people get knowledge about foreign figures and international affairs mainly through the visuals conveyed by media (Perlmutter, 1998). An example of that are visuals depicting wars, as most of the visual communication studies analyzed the visual framing of wars (Aday, 2004; Dimitrova & Stromback, 2005). However, there was a shift witnessed in analyzing the visuals frames of wars to human interest instead, such as a study conducted on examining the visual frames of the Iraqi war on TV (Schwalbe et al., 2008). Aday and colleagues (2005) discovered that certain frames, such as hero, victory, and control, dominated the visuals, taking the place of other frames. This demonstrates how the

aforementioned micro frames mirrored and matched the main narrative presented in the text about the war.

Previous research conducted in the fields of developmental neuroscience and psychology showed that the emotions transmitted through the visuals have a crucial function in affecting the heuristic process and are vital for people to make their own choices (e.g., Damasio, 1996). As a result, emotions could have an essential role in framing effects. Meanwhile, emotions could affect the individuals' political choices and then could influence their way of behaving (Marcus et al., 2007). This shows the significant role of images in provoking emotions when put in comparison to the text (Iyer & Oldmeadow, 2006).

Fahmy, Cho, Wanta, and Song (2006), when analyzed the 9/11 events, anticipated the respondents' concern with terrorism when displayed visuals contain emotions of sorrow and shock. Therefore, the visuals full of emotions could contribute to expanding the salience of an issue. However, it is not yet clear how the visuals drive the emotions and then affect behaviors and opinions regarding specific issues.

Iyer et al. (2014) studied how emotions contribute to enhancing the framing effects of visuals. The scholars examined the images of the London bombings in 2005. They first showed the respondents texts without containing any biased information describing the attack and then showed them photographs of the attack and the casualties. The results revealed that the images provoked emotions of anger, fear, and sympathy, which expected their upcoming behavior of supporting some kinds of policies. Therefore, attitudes and intentional behaviors could be explained and predicted through emotions embedded in the visuals (Frijda, 1988).

Other topics were prevalent in the visual communion studies, such as gender and race stereotypes. However, the visual framing of stereotypes was not evident as it was in verbal framing (Messaris & Abraham, 2001) because the audiences cannot spot "implicit" meanings when consuming the visuals and the effect occurs for granted. This allows the visual frames to transfer "inappropriate meanings to the audience as if they were transmitted in words" (Messaris & Abraham, 2001). Hence, "racial stereotypes" could be conveyed through visuals without "a direct reference to race" (Messaris & Abraham, 2001, p. 221).

That would be true in political communication, particularly when it comes to gender stereotypes. Studies showed that female political figures receive the attention of the media by covering their personal lives, such as their marital status and personal life, more than males (Devitt, 1999). Thus, framing theory provides a beneficial perspective for testing such stereotypes by selecting, emphasizing, and excluding portions of presented information to explore hidden assumptions in the content (Gitlin, 1980; Tankard, 2001). By focusing on the function of the media in shaping reality, framing helps researchers to transcend traditional prejudices (Takeshita, 1997; Tankard, 2001). Framing researchers, on the other hand, have traditionally given little thought to visual effects in news content. Because text is easier to encode than images, text-based research may be more common (Graber, 1990). The text-centric approach, on the other hand, overlooks the subtle and complicated methods in which news structures guide viewers to perform data processing (Coleman, 2010) and the methods by which learning forms are photographed to activate cognition, emotion, and memory (Graber, 1990). The literature indicates that both the verbal and visual information shall be congruent since the audience recalls visuals messages than the ones transmitted in words.

Based on previous studies, visuals that are being used by newsmakers on news websites could give a peculiar salience to a particular issue presented in a framed context. This happens through the selection of visuals that combine the news story or could be chosen by omission. Based on a framing analysis this study will examine all of the visuals related to the signature of the Abraham Accords treaty with the Arab countries in Google News from August 2020 to January 2021.

Semiotics

As with framing, semiotics is suitable for visual communication (Fahmy, Wanta & Bock, 2014). The semiotics is constructed by Peirce and Saussure to examine signs transmitted through terms, pictures, sounds, and motions for ultimate aim represented in understanding the intended messages and evaluating how the reality is represented through these signs (Chandler, 2007).

The signs here are a product of diverse realities, counting on the audiences' manner of interpretation and the context in which the signs would be presented and interpreted. For instance, the same visual content could include various signs and then lead to different interpretations. Therefore, the signs could contribute to "distorting the reality" or to be "accurate", or they could carry "a particular point of view" (Volosinov, 1986, p. 10)

The semiotic analysis could be relatively complex since the media messages could be abundant with multiple signs and multidimensional meanings. Therefore, Barthes (1988, p.158) exposed that the decipherment of signs always represents "a struggle with certain innocence," explaining that people might normally comprehend the language without realizing it is an outcome of "an extremely complicated system".

Therefore, Barthes approached semiotics from an integral angle, analyzing the integration of symbols from a broad socio-cultural perspective (McFall, 2004).

Both denotative and connotative dimensions are significant in the semiotic analysis since it contributes to helping the audience understand the signs and the embedded meanings. Denotation represents the explicit meanings of the signs, while connotation is the implicit meanings (Berger, 2005). Therefore, identifying and understating what is presented (denotation) and how it is presented (connotation) is essential for the interpretation process (Hall, 2012, p. 134).

However, it is critical to recognize and assess all "complexities and nuances" of the visual signs since it could be challenging as the value of the signs could be affected by the surroundings (Barthes, 1977, p. 48) such as ideological, social, and political conditions (Thompson, 1984).

As a methodological tool, the visual semiotic analysis helps identify and interpret both the denotations and connotations of the images. Meanwhile, it establishes symbolism to investigate the cultural context of the images and any visual extensions related to the same context (van Leeuwen, 2014) since boundaries do not restrict the visual meaning (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006) and the accompanying text could lead to "a definite meaning on the photograph" (p. 18). As a result, studying the visual lexis, syntax, and structure is required for the text-image combination. That is why semiotics emphasizes both the structures and meanings of visuals.

Based on the above, the current study will employ semiotics meta-functions to interpret the denotations and connotations of the portrayal of the Abraham Accords in terms of exploring the representational, interactive, and compositional meanings of the photographs (Jewitt & Oyama, 2014).

Chapter Four

Research Questions

Based on the above literature review and the theoretical framework of framing, six exploratory questions are posed by the researcher to examine how the Abraham Accords were visually covered by international news websites, in addition to examining the role of photographs.

As the visual framing approach argues, the media outlets obtrusively or unobtrusively frame some aspects in the news coverage by choosing and emphasizing or de-emphasizing specific topics through the visuals. Therefore, an attentive investigation of visuals and the extent to which they are used can pose much about the visuals framing selections adopted and were prioritized by international news websites in their portrayal of the Abraham Accords.

In the current study, the visual coverage of the Abraham Accords stands in for a selection of various photographs depicting multiple stages of the visual coverage of the normalization agreements according to the timeframe set in the study starting from August 2020 through January 2021.

RQ1: *How do international news websites on Google News visually represent the Abraham Accords in terms of a) dominant topic, b) number of actor/s, c) main role, d) main activity, and e) geographic location?*

RQ2: *What are the dominant emotions shown in the photographs depicting the Abraham Accords?*

RQ3: *In terms of point of view, what are the type of shots and camera angles used in these visuals?*

According to Scheufele (1999), it is recommended that visual frames should be examined through multiple levels of analysis. Hence, in this study, two different levels were identified: framing devices and frames. Based on that classification, the above three questions will represent the first level that deals with the framing devices.

One of the most significant framing devices that lie in the first level is the overall prominence and salience of the news events under consideration. The literature emphasized frequency as a critically important framing device, with which a topic is frequently featured in news.

For instance, perpetual meanings and rendered ideas could be prevalent, vivid, and memorable in the minds of the audiences by repeating and emphasizing a particular visual message regarding some specific events (Entman, 1993). Meanwhile, if certain events have been prominently featured in news outlets, this would imply the significance of that event (Entman, 1991; Fahmy, 2007). Therefore, the literature indicates that when news outlets employ visual frames, a state of congruent understanding is generated among the audiences in the way of interpreting the featured event.

RQ4: *What is the overall tone transmitted by photographs depicting the Abraham Accords (Positive or Negative or Neutral)?*

RQ5: *How are these visuals framed in terms of their implicit representation toward the normalization process (Pro-Normalization, Anti-Normalization, or Neutral)?*

The frames are located at the second level of analysis. The first visual frame investigates the overall tone, whether positive or negative frames are present. The

visual tone has a significant contribution to the overall news frames of political and social events (Schuck & de Vreese, 2006b). The visual tone of the news photograph, either positive or negative or neutral, could be utilized to either legitimize or delegitimize political expression or consent.

Visuals with a negative tone could indicate that the Abraham Accords are not welcomed. In contrast, a positive tone can overemphasize the role of the Accords and show how they are widely welcomed as the desired route for setting peace and thus may even legitimize any upcoming or subsequent procedures.

The second visual frame is the pro-normalization versus the anti-normalization frames. This frame deals with the visuals that could be conventionally categorized as either evoke support or position to the Abraham Accords. Previous studies showed that omitting or excluding certain news from coverage is a critically significant component in the framing process (Entman, 1991; Gamson, 1985).

For example, despite widespread public opposition to the Gulf War, the US media largely ignored anti-Gulf War protests, instead focusing on war efforts (Mowlana et al., 1992).

Hence, based on accumulated literature, **RQ4** will give a more nuanced interpretation of the visual tone of news coverage of the Abraham Accords, whereas **RQ5** will examine pro, anti or neutral frames.

RQ6: *What are the themes in the visuals of the Abraham Accords visually represented by international news websites on Google News?*

Visual elements such as photographs lend themselves to semiotic analysis since they have a visual impact represented in implanting specific thoughts and giving certain details (Teo, 2004). Such visuals can transmit both explicit and implicit

meanings. However, many of these visuals are commonly culture-bound, especially if they communicate implied messages that cultural outsiders could not readily interpret (Darling-Wolf, 2015). However, both the external text, such as the photo captions which accompany photographs, can act as anchorages when presented together. They could help communicate delimit meanings and make them easily understandable for those out of the culture.

Since the visual coverage of the Abraham Accords might entail visuals with implied meanings that require more explanation, hence, the semiotic analysis will be employed to identify the most common themes. Through **RQ6**, these themes will be analyzed by identifying any symbolic, interactive, or compositional meanings.

Chapter Five

Methodology

This research is consisted of two parts. The first part is a content analysis of the visuals depicting the Abraham Accords. The second part consists of a semiotic analysis classifying five representative themes.

Content Analysis

The primary goal of the study – part one, is to look into and investigate the visual framing of the international news coverage of the historical Abraham Accords concluded between Israel and four Arab countries, including the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco, under the auspices of the United States. To achieve this goal, this paper will use a content analysis based on photographic images. The researcher performed content analysis on 413 photographs from 95 international news websites from the first announcement of the Abraham Accords in August 2020 through January 2021 to include all possible photographs since the normalization process had been implemented in different stages during the six months under examination.

Since many scholars recommended the quantitative methodology in the visual analysis (Wanta & Chang, 2001; Fahmy 2004), content analysis has been applied to examine the photographs. Krippendorff (2004) explains that content analysis is commonly applied in the field of visual communication to examine the manifestation of any communicated material through classifying, tabulating, and assessing the central symbols to ascertain its meaning and probable effect.

Hence, this methodology has been selected to investigate the research questions and produce objective and systematic content descriptions of all visuals depicting the Abraham Accords, which marked a regional paradigm shift.

The Data Set

The dataset for this study was gathered through Google News platform searches. Google News was chosen to guarantee a diverse range of cultural and editorial perspectives, as well as geographic locations. Google News culls news narratives from different global news sources without human intervention, based on its algorithm (Joinson, et al., 2009) Hence, it allows viewing how multiple news organizations cover the same news item without regard to political or social or ideological viewpoint. This makes Google News a critical platform for aggregating news on significant daily issues.

The news websites included in the sample, such as the *BBC*, *Al-Jazeera*, *Reuters*, and *The Times of Israel*, are historically respected and have large domestic and international circulations, and large scopes of coverage. The researcher began with a broad search term, the "Abraham Accords," then narrowed down the search with restrictions. These searches were used to explore the kinds of related images that could be identified. Meanwhile, other search strategies were developed using text terms related to the Abraham Accords combined with other terms that helped in the searching process. Moreover, other specific search phrases and terms were used to gauge more thoroughly the primary patterns, including *Normalization*, *Peace Treaty*, *UAE-Israel Normalization*, *Bahrain – Israel Normalization*, *Sudan – Israel Normalization*, *Morocco –Israel Normalization*, *Normalization Ceremony*, *Peace*

Deal, Historic Peace Deal, Gulf-Peace Deal, Israel-Gulf Peace Deal / Normalization, Diplomatic ties/agreement/ relations/ Rapprochement.

The data set allowed the researcher to investigate the visual news content of relevant events related to the coverage of the Abraham Accords and normalization deals produced during the six months under examination. It is worth noting that the searches were primarily sourced via Google News, but some news items were not accessible from the researcher's geographic location of Egypt. Therefore, the researcher used a virtual private network (VPN) to facilitate access to these news items, such as stories from *Al-Jazeera, Middle East Eye, and Daily Sabah*, that would otherwise be unreachable.

A timeframe for collecting items was set for August 2020 through January 2021 in order to capture all waves of the Abraham Accords. Most of the news items mainly included one visual element, and others included more than three or four, making up the total 413 photographs included in the current study. In all, 257 news items from English-language international news websites in the United States, Israel, and the Gulf region, including the countries that inked the Accords, as well as Egypt, the UK, and many others, were recognized from the searches. Based on these news items, 413 photographs were coded.

Coding

The units of analysis in this study were the individual news photographs. Every image depicted in the Abraham Accords was coded. Based on previous studies, the images were coded based on context, the nature of the news narrative, and previous visual communication literature (i.e., Griffin & Lee, 1995; Fahmy, 2004b).

The textual content or photo captions that were paired with the images were an essential component in the process.

The coding was based on several previous studies on visual framing analysis, as well as an inductive approach in the selection of frames based on the context and rationales rather than generic frames (Schwalbe, 2006), in addition to discussions with experts in the analysis of visual news frames.

All of the 413 photographs were content analyzed for this study. The coding schema that details the main variables and frames used in the study is presented below in a condensed form.

All photographs were subjected to content analysis based on the following variables:

A. Identifying Information:

1. Basic information:

A. *Location:* Geographic location of the photographs was measured such that photographs that were taken within the U.S. were coded as one since most of the news coverage of the signature day of the Abraham Accords was in Washington, and the researcher included and coded all possible locations.

B. *Media Outlet:* Since the number of online websites that could serve as news sources is seemingly countless and could vary considerably in terms of the number of stories, type of content, and audience size, the researcher included the news sources variable and identified all news media outlets coded.

C. *Original Source:* The main source variable measures the origin of the photograph, which designates, at the primary level, if the embedded news photographs are a product of original reporting done by the media outlet itself or drawn from other news sources like news or photo agencies.

D. Publication Period: Seven mutually exclusive categories, including six periods starting from August 2020 to January 2021, were created in addition to the "out of time frame" category to guarantee the exclusiveness and inclusion of all stories produced during the time period under study. The data was collected based on the story describer.

E. Format of Visual: The visual format was coded to identify the type of photograph or thumbnail in the case of video.

B. Denotations:

1. Denotative analysis of the context:

A. Topic: A detailed set of categories was developed in order to identify the topics featured in each photograph. Each photograph was coded based on the following sixteen categories: **1)** signature day, **2)** officials, **3)** flag-related images, **4)** historical sites, **5)** places (city, beach, etc.), **6)** protests, **7)** celebration, **8)** meetings, **9)** airplanes/airports, **10)** building (cabinet, White House, parliamentary house, etc.), **11)** visits, **12)** speeches, **13)** IV (interview), **14)** ordinary people, **15)** peace phrase, and **16)** other. The categories were developed after observing the most frequently featured topics in the news photographs in order to guarantee inclusiveness.

B. Dominant Topic: Each photograph was coded in terms of identifying the dominant topic from the categories listed above. To be coded as a dominant topic, the topic needed to be featured heavily and primarily through the visual.

2. Denotative analysis of the characters:

A. Actor/s Present in the Photograph: Each photograph was coded to identify the number of actors present in the visual. Four ordinal categories were created: **1)** an individual (One Person), **2)** Small Groups of (2–3 individuals), **3)** Medium Groups of

4–15 individuals), **and 4) Large Groups** of (16 or more). Since some photographs exclusively included non-human elements such as flags, places, or airports, an "Other" category was created to include unclear /unidentified photographs to make sure that all categories are mutually exclusive and inclusive.

B. Role Main Actor: This variable identified different role/s that actor/s shown in a photograph could perform. Each photograph was coded based on the following categories: **1) Negotiators** such as officials, politicians, legislators, diplomats, **2) Belligerents** such as military or police personnel, **3) Demonstrators** such as people protesting against or denouncing the Accords, **4) Civilians** such as ordinary people acting peacefully. An "Other" category was created to include unclear /unidentified photographs to make sure that all categories are mutually exclusive and inclusive.

C. Action Represented: Each photograph was coded in terms of identifying the type of activity depicted in the visual coverage of the Abraham Accords. After identifying the most frequent activities, mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories were designed to include the following: **1) Signing the treaty:** political leaders/officials sitting on a long table while signing the treaty, **2) Hand-waving/ Saluting:** expressive and cordial hand-waving, **3) Holding up the treaty:** political leaders/officials while raising up the new legally binding agreement after signature, **4) Smiling:** triumphant slight smiles, **5) Social touch:** handshaking, or any kind of greetings exchange, **6) Gathering/ Standing:** people assembling peacefully, **7) Demonstrating:** people while demonstrating or denouncing the treaty, **8) Talking head:** officials while delivering speeches, or while talking to the press, **9) Posing:** profile pictures, **10) Flag-waving:** photographs of flags waving or flag colors lit up on important buildings, and **11) Other** such as other activities including walking for example.

C. Connotations:

A. *Symbolic Reality:* Here, the researcher examined the overall tone of the visual through applying the connotative analysis of the symbolic reality transferred by the photograph, with positive scored as 1, negative scored as 2, and neutral scored as 3, or unclear scored as 4. A positive photograph was the one that would enhance or confirm the images of the Abraham Accords or any connected events such as celebrations, official visits/ meetings and could also be implied through emotions. The negative photograph is the one that would tarnish the image of the Abraham Accords such as images of protests or objections or angry or frustrated emotions. A neutral photograph was neither tarnished nor improved the image of the Abraham Accords. Meanwhile, unclear photographs were identified as inapplicable.

B. *Implicit Representation:* This variable was measured through coding each photograph for the depiction of pro-normalization and anti-normalization. Otherwise, the photograph was coded as neutral since it neither supported nor criticized or unclear since it did not include any cedar signs or elements. The pro-normalization frame was coded as imagery that includes celebrations, official visits, air flights, people with emotions of hope, optimism, confidence, happiness, delight, pleasure, or waving flags of Israel and any other Arab country. The anti-normalization frame was coded as imagery of protests, people chanting or with emotions of anger, frustration, desperation, sadness, pathetic, demoralization, mourning, pain, and fear. Meanwhile, unclear photographs were identified as inapplicable.

C. *Type of (Dominant) Emotion:* This variable measures the type of dominant emotion shown within each photograph. Each photograph is coded based on the following categories 1) hope, optimism, confidence, happiness, pleasure, 2) anger 3)

desperation, sadness, demoralization, mourning, 4) pain, fear, 5) Other, 6) Not Applicable (N/A).

D. Point of View:

1. Type of Shot: This variable measures the photographs in terms of the type of shot size. Three sizes of shots are designated between (close-up, medium, and long) in addition "Not Applicable" categories to guarantee inclusiveness.

2. Camera Angle: This variable measures the photographs in terms of the camera angle. It constitutes three primary categories (low angle, eye level, and high angle) in addition "Not Applicable" category to guarantee inclusiveness.

Semiotic Analysis

The second part aims to understand and explain which individual photographs indicate the cultural role of the visual presentation of the Abraham Accords. For that purpose, a set of elements were chosen to help in analyzing the patterns in both the types of the images and the basic topics that were represented in the photographs.

The analysis was aided by the principles of semiotics by employing a qualitative investigation of the visual content and accompanying news texts – in specific, the photo captions. The semiotics contributed here to address the challenges of the encoding process and the various challenges of decoding photographs. Because the Arab-Israeli conflict has been long, the audience might likely build a visual vocabulary so that specific visuals are now understood globally and by the Arab audience as a cultural response to the Abraham Accords.

To achieve a fine-grained interpretation of the images, a semiotic analysis of five basic steps as applied by Berkowitz (2017) was used in the analysis including the following: “1. determine the type of signs, 2. Determine the significance, 3. Identify

relations between multiple signs, 4. Exploring connections, 5. exploring their articulation of ideology” (p.745). **Table I** includes the five representative themes designated for the semiotic analysis.

Table I Representative Themes of Visual Items Affiliated to the Abraham Accords

Theme	Details	Number of Photographs
1-Political Figures	Officials in visits, conferences, meetings, or delivering speeches.	167
2-Historical Signature Day	The Historical Signature Day that was orchestrated at the White House on Sep 15, 2020, in the presence of high-profile officials.	93
3-Symbolic Meanings	Photographs carry symbolic meanings such as photographs of flags, or about culturally & historically rooted places with a religious character, or about Airplanes taking off or landing or with peace logos.	68
4-Protests	People protesting against the new Arab-Israeli normalization.	46
5-Public Support	Ordinary People or tourists traveling from or to Israel or one of the Arab countries to emphasize the activation of the Abraham Accords.	26
Total		400

Each of the five themes was inspected and analyzed and several readings of the accompanying texts and photographs were conducted to guide interpretation and understanding.

Chapter Six

Results

Content Analysis

To coherently investigate the framing devices and visual frames employed by international news websites in the portrayal of the Abraham Accords, the first part of the study content analyzed 413 photographs for news narratives found on the Google News platform from August 2020 to January 2021. The aim of this analysis was to include all the possible photographs depicting the different stages of the normalization processes.

RQ1: How are the Abraham Accords visually represented by international news websites on Google News in terms of a) dominant topic/s, b) number of actor/s, c) main role, d) main activity, and e) geographic location of the photograph?

A- Dominant Topic

Table 1. Frequency and percentages of most dominant topics in photographs depicting the Abraham Accords (N=413)

Topic	Frequency	Percent
Officials	155	37.5
Signature Day	93	22.5
Protests	46	11.1
Flag-related images	45	10.9
Ordinary People	26	6.3
Place (city, beach ...)	9	2.2
Airplanes	8	1.9
Peace Phrase	7	1.7
Visit (During or in visit)	6	1.5
Historical Sites	5	1.2
Celebrations	3	0.7
Meetings	3	0.7
Delivering Speech	3	0.7
Other	4	1.0
Total	413	100

One of the main criteria under study is identifying the most dominant topic that has been chosen and received the attention of international news websites in their visual coverage of the Abraham Accords. The 14 main categories are shown in **Table 1**. Out of the 14 major categories, five categories – photographs depicting officials (37.5 %), photographs depicting the Historical Signature Day (22.5 %), protests (11.1 %), flag-related images (10.9 %), and ordinary people (6.3 %) – constituted the majority (88.3 %) of all photographs examined.

As shown in **Table 1**, one of the most frequently used topics focuses on depicting the officials in the visual coverage of the Abraham Accords, making it the highest featured topic in all periods as it represents the highest percentage: 37.5%. The focus on officials emphasizes the significance and formal nature of the Abraham Accords to show that the overall commitment to the Abraham Accords is firm.

The second topic which grabbed the attention of the news outlets was the Historical Signature Day. This day was a remarkable event that was held in Washington on September 15 with the presence of high profile figures such as then-U.S. President Donald Trump - as the United States was the leading broker in this deal, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Emirati Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani. The Historical Signature Day has received significant attention, especially since it was the first high publicity Arab-Israeli agreement in dozens of years. It witnessed the signature of both the UAE and Bahrain, the first two Gulf countries to normalize relations with Israel. Hence, the analysis reveals that both visuals depicting officials and the Signature Day are the most frequent topics employed in the visual news coverage of the Abraham Accords, forming (60 %) of all photographs analyzed. **Figure 1** shows a photograph of then-U.S. President Trump on way to make

a speech accompanied by Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, as well as Bahrain's and the United Arab Emirates' Foreign Ministers on the Historical Signature Day at the White House on September 15.

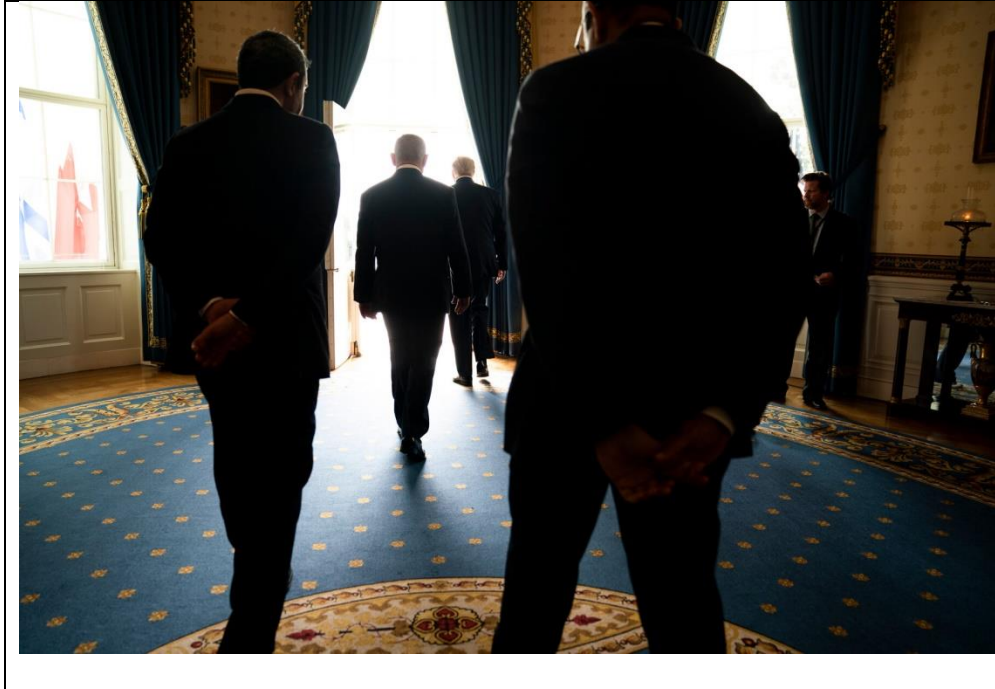


Figure 1. Photograph of the four high-profile officials at the White House. copyright 2020 The New York Times.

The third frequent topic was the visuals that depict protests against the normalization which constitute (11.1 %), indicating that the focus on this topic was notably less compared to the other two topics mentioned earlier. Meanwhile, photographs depicting flags were present in the visual coverage at an almost equal rate of (10.9 %). The flag-related images depicted the national colors of the countries involved in the normalization process, including the United States, Israel, the Arab countries which inked the Abraham Accords, and even other Arab countries such as Palestine and Saudi Arabia. The media was likely motivated to include the flags of these non-participating Arab countries, such as Palestine, on account of their historical and contemporary relevance to the deal.

The fifth least frequent topic was the depiction of ordinary people, whether during their visits to or from one of the signatory Arab countries, or in typical gatherings. This topic accounted for (6.3 %) of the photographs, contrary to the researcher’s expectation that it would dominate the coverage to reflect and match the normalization in terms of the peaceful coexistence anchored in the Accords. However, the focus was on the official level and portraying the Historical Signature Day as a remarkable event.

The rest of the topics feature places such as cities or beaches (2.2 %), airplanes or airports (1.9 %), the peace logo (1.7 %) that was presented in Arabic, English, and Hebrew, photographs of visits (1.5 %), historical sites (1.2 %) such as Dome of the Rock, and other listed topics composing only (11.6 %) of the overall photographs.

The analysis indicates that the above remaining nine low-frequency categories were marginalized in the visual news coverage in favor of the first five high and medium frequency categories, inconsistent with the categories’ actual significance.

B- Number of Actors

Table 2. Frequency and percentages of actor/s present in photographs depicting the Abraham Accords (N=413)

Actor	Frequency	Percent
A medium group of 4–15	162	39.2
A small group of 2–3	85	20.6
Individual	77	18.6
A Large group of 16 or more	27	6.5
Other (flag, place...)	62	15.0
Total	413	100

Another criterion under examination is to assess the number of human actor/s presented in the photographs of the Accords. The researcher divided all the photographs showing people into four groups: those which showed just one person,

and those which showed small, medium, and large groups of people. Summed together, the photographs showing small, medium, and large groups of people exceed in number the photographs showing individuals. **Table 2** shows that the medium group of 4-15 people was the most frequent (39.2 %), while the small groups of 2-3 were the second most frequent (20.6 %). Meanwhile, the photographs depicting only individuals scored (18.6 %), and the photographs of large groups of 16 or more were not as frequent (6.5 %). During the coding process, a separate category was devoted to photographs depicting other visual elements, such as flags, places, or airplanes, and this category represented (15.0 %) of the overall photographs.

C- Main Role

Table 3. Frequency and percentages of the different roles of the main actor/s in photographs depicting the Abraham Accords (N=413)

Role	Frequency	Percent
Negotiator (Officials, politicians, house representatives, diplomats)	243	58.8
Demonstrator	42	10.2
Civilian	40	9.7
Belligerent (Military/ police)	9	2.2
Other	79	19.1
Total	413	100.0

The role of the main actors in the visuals is another factor which was examined to better understand which actors dominated the photographs and the role of each. Four categories were classified in addition to the “Other” category to ensure the inclusion of all actors depicted in the photographs.

Table 3 shows that the presence of negotiators, such as officials, politicians, lawmakers/legislators, or diplomats, is a key element which asserts the normalization’s official and serious nature. The negotiator category has the highest percentage (58.8 %), likely on account of the negotiators’ critical role in bringing the

Accords to fruition. The photographs in this category depict the officials in standard classic suits or traditional typical Arab attire with long and full-sleeve robes.

The second most frequent category was the demonstrators who assembled to complain about the treaty (10.2 %). This category is relatively low and matches with the third most frequent category which depicts civilians with almost the same percentage (9.7 %). The reference to the civilians here refers to any ordinary individual or group of people doing anything other than demonstrating.

The least frequent category includes photographs depicting belligerents, such as military or police personnel. The depiction of these security personnel, however, were not meant to refer to any sort of conflict, but only to represent each country's representatives – most notably Sudan's – in their military attire. This included, among other things, soldiers at airports standing at attention upon the arrival of foreign officials and officers or soldiers dispersing people during demonstrations or gatherings. Finally, the "Other" category accounted for around (19.1 %) of the photographs.

This analysis found that the negotiator category was the most prevalent one, representing more than half of the photos (58.8 %), which affirms the significance of its role.

D- Main Activity

Table 4. Frequency and percentages of the type of activity found in photographs depicting the Abraham Accords (N=413)

Type of Activity	Frequency	Percent
Flag (Waving, or lights up on building...)	70	16.9
Posing	68	16.5
Talking head	58	14.0
Smiling (Triumphant slight smiles)	57	13.8
Demonstrating / condemning	45	10.9
Raising the treaty (Raising the new legally binding agreement)	30	7.3

after signature)		
Gathering / Standing (peaceful)	27	6.5
Hand-waving / Saluting (Expressive and cordial hand-waving)	17	4.1
Social touch (handshaking, or any kind of greetings exchange)	15	3.6
Signing the treaty (Leaders sitting at a long table while signing the treaty)	9	2.2
Other (such as walking, or sitting..)	17	4.1
Total	413	100.0

To further delve into how the Abraham Accords and the normalization process were portrayed during the six months in which the various normalization agreements were signed, it was essential to look at the main actors' main activities to examine the most dominantly captured activity.

Since various activities are evident in the photographs, the researcher created 11 categories to include the activities he anticipated would appear most frequently. It was remarkable that the photographs depicting waving flags or flags projected on buildings were the most frequent category (16.9 %) as shown in **Table 4**. That reflects the role of flags in the visual coverage of the Abraham Accords, as they took a significant portion in the visual presentation as the flag was prominent as a dominant element and also as a supplementary component in other photographs. **Figures 2 and 3** show the flags of Israel and the first and only two Arab Gulf countries – the UAE and Bahrain – to agree to the Abraham Accords.



Figure 2. The national flags of Israel and the United Arab Emirates line a road in the coastal city of Netanya. Photograph by Jack Guez on August 16, 2020, copyright 2020 AFP.



Figure 3. The national flags of the United Arab Emirates, Israel, and Bahrain flutter along a road in Netanya, Israel September 14, 2020. Photograph by Nir Elias, copyright 2020 Reuters.

The second type of action that relatively expresses the same percentage as the previously mentioned category was photographs of individuals posing without any action (16.5 %). That was clear in most of the profile pictures of the officials which accompanied the news narratives.

Officials were also frequently photographed while speaking – while giving statements, delivering speeches, participating in interviews, or in dialogue with each other (14.0 %). The fourth most frequent activity was for officials with triumphant smiles (13.8 %).

A fifth frequent activity was people demonstrating and condemning the normalization agreement, and these photographs represented (10.9 %) of the overall

photographs analyzed in the study. The sixth most frequent activity was officials on the Historical Signature Day holding up the new legally binding document after signature (7.3 %). The photographs of people or officials in peaceful gatherings with no action other than standing are also present (6.5 %). That is clear in photographs that depict officials in group gatherings but with no specific action or activity spotted, or ordinary people gathering at the airport or even other people captured in groups with no dominant activity seen.

Other photographs depicted officials while saluting or cordially or expressively waving their hands, mainly on the Historical Signature Day (4.1 %). Moreover, the social element was also present in the photographs of officials shaking hands or exchanging other greetings; these kinds of photographs represented (3.6 %) of the overall sample (see **Figure 4**).

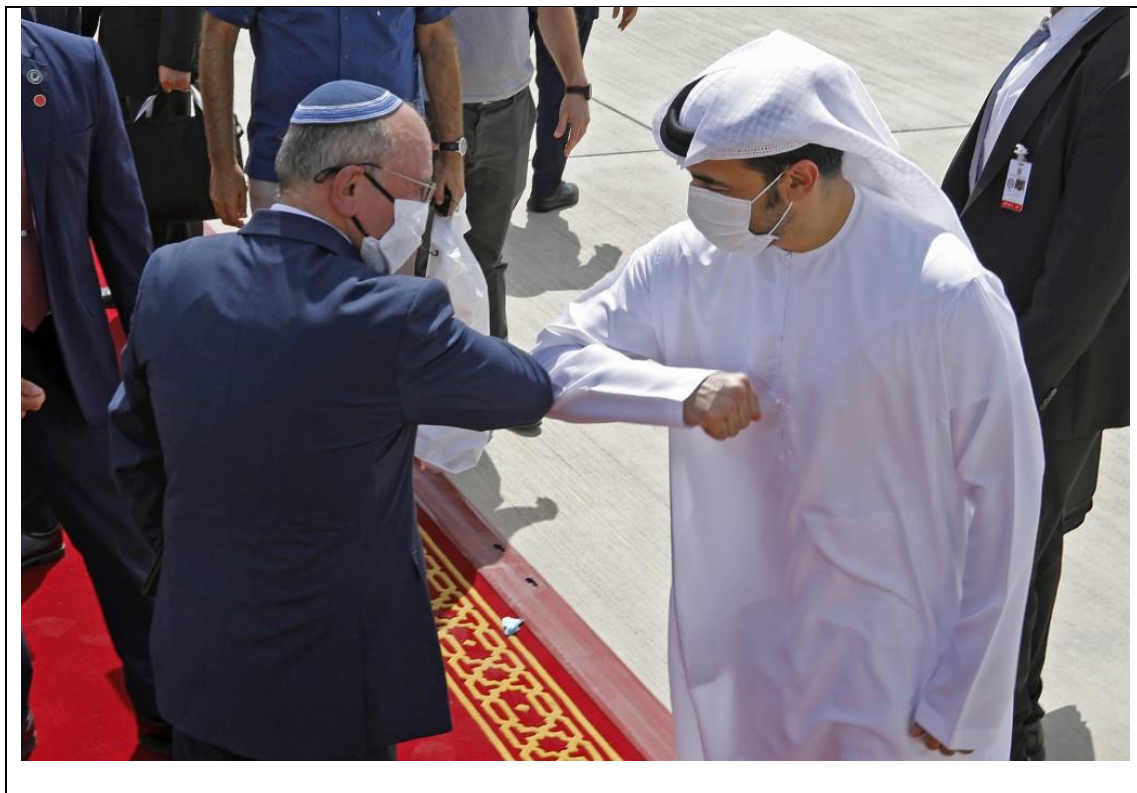


Figure 4. As he leaves Abu Dhabi, Israeli National Security Adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat bumps into an Emirati official on September 1, 2020. Photograph by Nir Elias, copyright 2020 AP.

The last and least frequently represented activity was of officials or leaders sitting at the long table while singing the treaty (2.2 %). This activity was only represented on the first Historical Signature Day at the White House, with the two Arab Foreign Ministers, the Israeli Prime Minister, and the U.S. President. The other activities were placed in "Other" category and included officials photographed while walking as well as unclear photographs with no activity, representing (4.1 %) of the overall photographs analyzed.

E- Geographic Location of the Photograph

Table 5. Frequency and percentages of the geographic location of photographs depicting the Abraham Accords (N=413)

Country	Frequency	Percent
USA	137	33.2
Israel	66	16.0
UAE	53	12.8
Palestine	52	12.6
Not mentioned / not identified	50	12.1
Morocco	17	4.1
Bahrain	13	3.1
Sudan	11	2.7
Saudi Arabia	4	1.0
Jordan	1	0.2
Other Arab Country	5	1.2
Other non-Arab Country	4	1.0
Total	413	100.0

The geographic location of the photographs is a significant component since the carried out analysis includes various international news websites with different editorial views from different locations.

Table 5 shows that the photographs are linked to 11 different locations. A total of 363 photographs are coded for an identified location whereas the information about the geographic location of 50 photographs in the data set is missing. It is apparent that photographs linked or captured in locations related to the United States

are dominant and with high frequency compared to other locations reaching (33.2 %), while the least frequent location is in Jordan, with only one photograph.

It is obvious that no photo was detected in Egypt, despite the fact that it is the first Arab country to normalize ties with Israel in the late 1970s. Meanwhile, the total number of photographs affiliated with geographic locations within the Arab region reached 156 representing (37.7 %) of the overall photographs examined. However, when combining photographs of locations related to the United States and Israel, their overall number is higher than the total number of photographs located in Arab countries, reaching almost half of the overall photographs (49 %). The high volume of the U.S. located photographs reflects the U.S.'s crucial role in initiating the Abraham Accords and boosting the normalization process. At the same time, for Israel, since it is the common thread in all of these normalization processes, its significant representation in the photographs is unsurprising.

RQ2: What are the dominant emotions shown in photographs depicting the Abraham Accords?

Table 6. Frequency and percentages of the type of dominant emotion in photographs depicting the Abraham Accords (N=413)

Emotion	Frequency	Percent
Hope, Optimism, Confidence, Happiness, Delight, Pleasure	260	63.0
Anger, Frustration	55	13.3
Desperation, Sadness, Demoralization, Mourning	2	0.5
Other	4	1.0
Not Applicable (N/A)	92	22.3
Total	413	100.0

Analyzing the overarching emotions transmitted through the visuals is also crucial. Hence, categories are formed out of different paths of emotions including hope, optimism, confidence, happiness, pleasure, anger, desperation, frustration,

demoralization, sadness, and mourning, in addition to other and inapplicable categories. These paths have been condensed to form the five categories listed in **Table 6**.

Most of the photographs emphasized hope, optimism, confidence, and pleasure by including proportionally more visual elements which convey a positive tone. These apparent emotions displayed in the photographs are commonly dominant in the Abraham Accords' visual coverage, with high frequency representing (63 %) of the overall photographs. This emotional state of the photographs can influence to a great extent the significant presentation of the Abraham Accords. This is because the high-frequency volume assures the significance of the event itself through the visual messages which mirror the dominant optimistic tone. For instance, there are photographs which focused on the Historical Signature Day, the officials' reactions, and their main activities. **Figure 5** shows Trump, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, and the Foreign Ministers of the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain smiling after signing the Abraham Accords.



Figure 5. The United Arab Emirates, Israel and Bahrain signed historic accords normalizing ties. Photograph by Saul Loeb, copyright 2020 AFP.

However, there is a lack of emotions transmitted in almost one-fourth (22.3 %) of the photographs, which is puzzling. One possible explanation is that many photographs' dominant visual elements are inanimate objects such as flags. These photographs naturally contain less emotion because they either do not picture human beings at all, or show them only peripherally. Furthermore, the photographs which contain main actors, while in the pose position with no apparent emotions or wearing face masks, are categorized as non-applicable.

The data also shows that some news narratives run visuals which focused less on depictions of anger or frustration and more on hope and optimism. The photographs which display emotions of anger or frustration captured a low share of the overall photographs (13.3 %). These emotions which express displeasure can be mainly seen in the photographs which depict demonstrations or people's standings against the normalization agreements. Meanwhile, the photographs which show emotions of desperation, sadness, demoralization, and mourning are very few; in fact, they are seen in only two photographs. The first such photograph depicts a Palestinian woman holding her child and walking alongside the wall which separates Israel and the West Bank (see **Figure 6**). Meanwhile, the photographs which express mixed feelings or other emotions are placed in the "Not-Applicable" category and represent only 1 % of the overall photographs analyzed.



Figure 6. Image of a Palestinian woman holding her baby and walking by the Israeli West Bank wall. Copyright 2020 BBC.

RQ3: In terms of point of view, what are the type of shots and camera angles used in these visuals?

To assess the point of view, the researcher investigated the camera angle and the type of the shot to assess how the main actors are represented in the photographs. The researcher examined the photographs in terms of the type of the shot (close-up, medium, and long) in addition to "Not Applicable" categories to guarantee inclusion of all photographs.

A- Type of the Shot

Table 7. Frequency and percentages of the type of shots in photographs depicting the Abraham Accords (N=413)

Type of the Shot	Frequency	Percent
Medium (half body)	249	60.3
Long shot (full body)	145	35.1
Close-up (face and shoulders)	17	4.1
Not applicable (i.e. illustration or graphics, nature)	2	0.5
Total	413	100.0

Table 7 makes clear that there is a lack of close-ups in the sample (just 4.1%), relative to medium and long shots. It is notable that most (60.3%) of the visuals are

captured and presented in medium sizes. Meanwhile, photographs in long sizes have a medium frequency percentage reaching (35 %). Just two photographs were categorized as “Not Applicable,” because they were graphics.

The relatively high frequency of medium and long shots is explained by the practice in news media of accompanying stories with images that contain a wide variety of visual elements, covering as many relevant actors and subjects as possible.

B- Camera Angle

Table 8. Frequency and percentages of the type of the camera angle in photographs depicting the Abraham Accords (N=413)

Camera Angle	Frequency	Percent
Eye-level	282	68.3
Low angle	97	23.5
High angle	32	7.7
Not Applicable	2	0.5
Total	413	100.0

Table 8 shows that most (68.3%) of the photographs are captured at the eye level. Meanwhile, the photographs in low angles have a relatively low medium frequency reaching 2.3 out of ten (see **Figure7**), and high angle photographs have a minor frequency reaching 0.7 out of ten. At the same time, only two photographs are categorized as "Not Applicable".

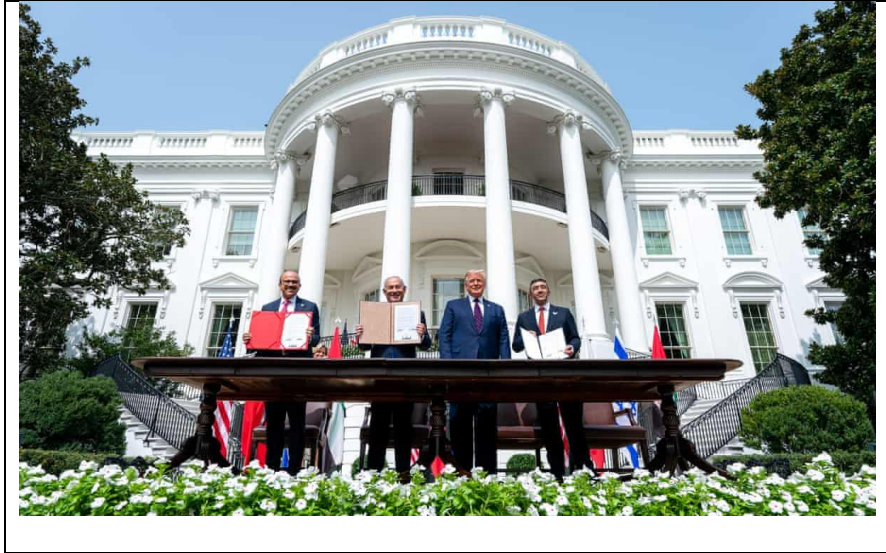


Figure 7. A photograph is showing the officials smiling from a low angle. Copyright 2020 Anadolu Agency/Getty Images.

From the current study's analysis, it is understood that most of the photographs are at the eye-level since it is the preferable human vantage point, and it allows viewers to see things as they would were they there in person.

RQ4: What is the overall tone transmitted by photographs depicting the Abraham Accords (Positive, Negative, or Neutral)?

To investigate the tone of visual coverage of the Abraham Accords, the researcher assessed the overall tone or symbolic reality based on the four categories: positive, negative, neutral, and unclear.

Table 9. Frequency and percentages of the symbolic reality transmitted by photographs depicting the Abraham Accords (N=413)

Symbolic Reality	Frequency	Percent
Positive	282	68.3
Negative	58	14.0
Neutral	54	13.1
Unclear	19	4.6
Total	413	100.0

The study found that almost seven in ten (68.3%) of the photographs were positive in their depictions of the Abraham Accords, as shown in **Table 9**. The high

frequency indicates that the news outlets ran fewer negative photos than positive ones. For instance, photographs portraying the officials smiling or having any social touch give a positive impression (see **Figure 8**). The Historical Signature Day of the Abraham Accords displayed many photographs that can be considered iconic in which the positive tone is transmitted and confirmed through the visuals.



Figure 8. The four leaders waving hands after the signature of the Abraham Accords. Copyright 2020 AFP.

There are two plausible explanations for this. First, the various news websites found on the Google News platform have international standards and different editorial views, so they are not compelled to portray the Abraham Accords in a certain way. Hence, the choice is left to the editors and journalists who cover the most prevalent events in the news arena, and those editors and journalists, under pressure to publish ahead of their competitors, may not adequately consider the meaning transmitted by the photographs they attach to their stories. This issue is to an extent related to the unavoidable reality that journalists and editors will not always be sufficiently aware of the complexities of the issues they cover, and might, as a consequence, omit certain perspectives.

Hence, it is possible that the newsmakers' skewed visual coverage was in part a result of insufficient awareness of the history surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab relations, and therefore failing to go beyond the conventional narratives, ignoring negative perspectives.

Second, the photo editors might not have any personal cultural connection with the Palestinian cause, or to any of the countries directly involved in the normalization agreements, which could make them more sympathetic in their portrayals of the Abraham Accords since the Accords generally appear at first glance to favor peace and cooperation.

According to the findings, approximately 14 percent of the photographs examined depicted the Abraham Accords in a negative light. It was also expected that the news coverage would not be devoid of any negative photographs as Arab-Israeli relations have been tense for years, in large part due to disagreement on the Palestinian issue. Hence, the announcement and signature of the Abraham Accords represented a dramatic shift for a very complex political situation. For instance, there were photographs of people, mostly Arabs and Palestinians, demonstrating against the normalization agreements since this move contradicted their firmly held beliefs (see **Figure 9**).



Figure 9. A Yemeni fighter steps on US and Israeli flags during a rally in Sanaa to protest the US-brokered deal to normalize Emirati-Israeli relations on August 22. Copyright 2020 AFP.

About one in ten of the photographs (13%) depicting the Abraham Accords, on the other hand, were classified as neutral. That could be seen in the photographs which did not convey specific emotions or any subjective angles. The remaining photographs (4.6%) were unclear, such as photographs that depicted locations or displayed unclear elements.

RQ5: How are these visuals framed in terms of their implicit representation of the normalization process (Pro-Normalization, Anti-Normalization, or Neutral)?

To explore how the visual frames focused on how the normalization agreements are covered in terms of garnering support for or opposition to the Abraham Accords, it was essential to examine the implicit representation. In order to do this, the author created four categories: pro-normalization, anti-normalization, neutral and unclear.

Table 10. Frequency and percentages of implicit representation transmitted by photographs depicting the Abraham Accords (N=413)

Implicit Representation	Frequency	Percent
Pro-normalization	275	66.6
Anti-normalization	60	14.5
Neutral	53	12.8
Unclear	25	6.1
Total	413	100.0

The examined visual elements suggest that most of the overall photographs emphasized the pro-normalization frame of coverage. The results show that the news websites published proportionally fewer images about anti-normalization in favor of the pro-normalization frames. The news websites published substantially more photographs of support for the normalization treaty (66.6 %) of the overall sample, as shown in **Table 10**. For instance, the photographs depict officials during the signature day while signing the treaty, smiling, holding up the treaty, or waving their hands. They even also show ordinary people from the signatory countries traveling and gathering at airports or en route to various Bahraini, Emirati, and Israeli cities. (see **Figure 10**). All of these features affirm and align with the normalization process.



Figure 10. Ruli Dikman, an Israeli ultra-Orthodox singer, entertains Israeli tourists at the Conrad Hotel in Dubai during a Hanukkah celebration on Dec. 16. Copyright 2020 NPR.

Conversely, fewer photographs presented the normalization in a negative light. This was clear in the data, as just (14.5 %) of the total photographs depicted the agreement unfavorably. For instance, some photographs depicted ordinary Bahrainis, Sudanese, and Palestinians protesting against normalization agreements (see **Figure 11**).



Figure 11. Protesters waved the Palestinian flag in front of Israeli soldiers during a protest, near Salfit, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, protesting the agreement to normalize relations between the United Arab Emirates and Israel, Aug. 14, 2020. Copyright 2020 Reuters.

The study coded 12.8 percent of the photographs as neutral, because they did not appear to contain either supportive or adverse elements. Meanwhile, the remaining 6.1 percent of the photographs were categorized as unclear, as they depict places with no descriptive details or are otherwise ambiguous.

It can thus be observed that the main thrust of these results is that the news websites preferred pro-normalization frames over neutral and anti-normalization frames. They used frequency and portrayal devices to portray the Abraham Accords in a positive light, glamourizing this normalization treaty without fully depicting the related nuances and complexities.

Semiotic Analysis

RQ6: What are the themes in the visuals of the Abraham Accords visually represented by international news websites on Google News?

The semiotic analysis investigated all the photographs collected in the dataset (N=413) to reach an inclusive overview of the role of photographs in the visual coverage of the Abraham Accords. After removing 13 photographs that were unrelated to any theme, the total number of analyzed photographs reached 400. The following five themes emerged:

1- Political Figures

The first theme included photographs depicting officials during visits, meetings, or conferences. There was a lot of focus by the international media on covering the role of officials, and this was evident in the large number of photographs (167 out of 400). There was a focus on various officials, whether Arabs or Israelis, as central factors in the normalization process, or even the American officials who played a clear and prominent role as effective mediators. The photographs of the officials were essentially indicative, but they needed the accompanying text to give more information about the place, time, and the type of activity. This is due to the different stages that the normalization process went through, starting from negotiations with Arab countries and ending with the approval and declaration of normalization.

Hence, the text accompanying the photograph was necessary, especially since there were a different number of officials who appeared in the photographs. Therefore, it was important for the reader to get to know them and their role to complete the understanding of the different aspects of the normalization process.



Figure 12. In a meeting in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates, US President Donald Trump's son-in-law and Senior Adviser Jared Kushner negotiated the agreements with UAE officials on August 31, 2020. Copyright 2020 Reuters.

The photographs of the officials were not only limited to those officials from the US, Israel, or signatory Arab countries who were involved in the negotiation of the Abraham Accords, but also included certain officials from the Palestinian Authority, who, though not directly involved, were clearly impacted by the Accords/negotiations, as well as officials from certain other unaffiliated countries. The photos of officials from the various countries were taken in multiple locations, and this reflected the role the officials played on a large scale. **Figure 12** shows U.S. Senior Adviser Jared Kushner in a meeting with Emirati officials in Abu Dhabi two weeks before the conclusion of the Abraham Accords agreement.

2-Historical Signature Day

This specific theme included photographs featuring the Historical Signature Day on September 15, 2020 at the White House. The Signature Day theme included 93 photographs out of 413, showing how this event has received significant attention and focus from all the different international news websites. The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain were the first Arab countries to agree on normalizing relations with Israel since Egypt and Jordan in 1979 and 1994, respectively. Figure 13 depicts then-U.S. President Donald Trump as a significant political mediator, showing up on his right side next to him Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel, and Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani and from his left Emirati Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan holding up the documents after signature.



Figure 13. UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Bahrain Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and former President Donald Trump at the White House while holding up the documents of the Abraham Accords after signature on September 15. Copyright 2020 AP.

The prominent pattern in these photos was the footage of the four countries' high-profile representatives signing the agreement. Some pictures also appeared from different angles of the four political leaders, raising the document after signature or hand-waving in reference to victory, and smiles were prominent on all of their faces.

In general, both the photographs and their encoded texts were denotative representations of the Signature Day's main events. It was evident that the photographs were represented relatively straightforwardly, and based on that, the texts required little cultural interpretation to clarify the photographs' meaning.

However, some texts went beyond providing basic facts about the normalization treaty to widen the scope to explore what was behind it. That was clear in the news items presented in the Signature Day's aftermath, such as opinion pieces and feature stories. For instance, an article from *The Washington Post* asked "What do ordinary Arabs think about normalizing relations with Israel?" (El Kurd, 2020).

There were common elements in the photographs that depicted the Signature Day, including expressive and cordial hand waving, the leaders sitting at a long table signing the treaty or raising the treaty after signature, or giving triumphant slight smiles.

Because the images were denotative, the text played no significant role in culturally explaining the embedded meaning. A typical descriptive commentary just added the political leaders' names and the location where the agreement was struck.

In all, the images of the Historical Signature Day were more or less straightforward and required little explanation for the feature events but more explanation to explore the origins of the Accords to engage the audience. Therefore, the photographs' denotative nature was sufficient in portraying the Signature Day's feature events, and that required the text to provide only the basic who, what, when, where, and why.

3- Symbolic Meanings

The third theme, totaling 68 photographs, included many photographs with various symbolic meanings, such as photographs depicting flags, historical sites, or peace phrases, or even airports embedding distinctive messages.

A- Flag-related images

It was evident that the body of flag-related photographs was dominated by the national flags of the U.S., Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain. One example is the photograph below (Figure 14) of a wall illuminated at night with colored lights depicting the four countries' flags in Jerusalem. The flags of Morocco and Sudan were also present but were not dominant. This sub-theme included 45 photographs out of 400.



Figure 14. The flags of the U.S., the United Arab Emirates, Israel, and Bahrain are screened on the Walls of Jerusalem Old City on Sept. 15, 2020. Copyright 2020 JNS.

It was notable that the Palestinian flag was among the photographs present in the visual coverage as well. A cumulative audience understanding was needed to decode the relation of the Palestinian flag images to the new treaty. Therefore, the

current literature explained the historical Arab-Israeli conflict and its relation to the Palestinian cause.

It might be less intuitive to recognize some countries' flags, especially if viewed by a non-Arab audience less familiar with the cultural context. For instance, the two Arab countries' (UAE and Palestine) flags look similar and consist of the same colors. However, an explanation was needed to clarify some countries' relations before and after the treaty. Some photographs required a high degree of textual anchoring to help in the decoding process, especially if their target audience has little knowledge about the historical nature of the conflict between Israel and Palestine. That can be seen in **Figure 14**, which depicts the flags of the four countries on the walls of the contested Old City of Jerusalem. This image in **Figure 13** requires two kinds of decoding to glean the underlying meaning: one to explain the old and new relations between the countries and what this image means in this context and second to clarify the location of the wall as within the former British Mandate of Palestine, and currently under contested Israeli authority.

A review of flag-related images revealed four distinct types:

- The first type highlighted the treaty by displaying the flags of signatory countries.
- The second type of image involved the Israeli flag along with one of the new Arab countries' flags that signed the treaty.
- The third type of image included only the Israeli flag and the Palestinian flag together.
- The fourth type was presenting a flag of only one country.

To decode these four types of photographs, they need contextual and cultural backgrounds, for example the historical relations between countries, the locations

where the flags were shown, and the ongoing historical Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, some of these images were notably left without captions creating ambiguity and many difficulties in decoding without the necessary textual explanations.

B- Open Skies - Normalization of Aviation

The manifestations of normalization were not limited to highlighting the signing ceremony or relevant officials, but included images of aircraft that were newly able to fly between Israel and the signatory Gulf countries. The presence of such photographs was essential for expanding the scope of understanding about the new nature of relations. This sub-theme included 8 photographs out of 400.



Figure 15. An Emirati plane carrying the UAE delegation paid an official visit to Israel for the first time and landed at Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport, on Oct. 20, 2020. Copyright 2020 AFP.

The aircraft photos clearly indicate to viewers the effectiveness and concrete implications of the agreement. In addition to the annotation attached to them, the photos confirmed that meaning, and there was no need for further explanation. Hence, the decoding process was not complex despite the controversy and the sensitivity surrounding the normalization agreement.

The image shown in **Figure 15** was commonly disseminated in the news. The photo depicts two planes in Ben Gurion Airport near Tel Aviv to highlight the UAE and Israel agreement of visa-free travel between the two countries.

C- Peace Logo



Figure 16. Figure 16. An Israeli plane is painted with a peace phrase in Arabic, English, and Hebrew ahead of its first direct flight from Tel Aviv to Abu Dhabi, on August 30, 2020. Copyright 2020 Times of Israel.

The visual coverage of the Abraham Accords emphasized the Accords' promotion of peace by displaying photographs of the word "peace" written in Arabic, Hebrew, and English. Such photographs relatively conveyed a clear and direct message about the ramification of the Abraham Accords for the pursuit of peace Middle Eastern peace. **Figure 16** shows someone writing (the word) "peace" in Arabic, English, and Hebrew on the nose of a plane heading to the UAE from Tel Aviv. This sub-theme included 7 photographs out of 400.

D- Historical Sites with Religious Character

Establishing a link between the normalization agreement and the Palestinian cause was among the messages highlighted by some news websites through the types of pictures chosen in the news coverage. News outlets used

some photographs of places with well-established historical and religious connotations in the minds of Arab audiences, such as the Dome of the Rock, an essential Islamic religious symbol currently under Israeli authority. However, only five such photographs out of 400 featured historical sites.



Figure 17. In the Old City of Jerusalem, an Israeli policewoman stands at the entrance to the Al-Aqsa compound, which leads to the Dome of the Rock, on Oct. 18, 2020. Copyright 2020 AFP.

In **Figure 17**, the Dome of the Rock is related to the Palestinian cause, and in the foreground, an armed Israeli soldier is depicted in the shadow. The components of the picture have clear connotations for some audiences. For the Arab and Muslim viewer, this photo symbolizes Israeli occupation; whereas, for Israelis or supporters of Israel, it may symbolize something very different. In other words, the value of these historical places and the actors pictured in them helps the audience understand the various dimensions of the normalization treaty and its symbolic meaning.

4- Protests – Echo Fades



Figure 18. Palestinians protest Israeli normalization deals in the occupied West Bank at the Second Intifada memorial, on Sept. 28, 2020. Copyright 2020 Foreign Policy.

Photographs featuring the counter-side activities to the normalization process were also present in the visual coverage. However, a limited number of photographs showed demonstrations in the streets to denounce Arab-Israeli normalization. The overall photographs depicting protests reached 46. There are two possible explanations for the limited coverage of the demonstrations. First, either the media institutions did not want to cover the demonstrations to entrench a specific message, or second, the protests were not numerous or significant enough to merit coverage.

The photographs of the demonstrations were clearly indicative and did not need explanation, but they were closely related to the Palestinian cause, which has a complex and unresolved historical and political dimension. **Figure 18** shows dozens of Palestinian demonstrators who took to the streets to denounce the Arab-Israeli normalization.

It was expected that the visual coverage would include photographs about reactions against normalization. To Arab audiences, the meaning of photographs

depicting protests against the Accords is very clear – namely that the protestors believe that the Accords will hurt the Palestinian cause. However, non-Arab audiences and cultural outsiders may need to be informed of the historical context of the Palestinian issue and its link to the new Arab-Israeli relations in order to more fully understand the meaning of photographs depicting demonstrations against the agreement. In the aforementioned case, the text will be necessary because it will clarify the historical and complex dimension of Arab countries' relationships with Israel and the implications of the new normalization agreements.

5- Public Support

It was evident that there were photographs showing the public support for the normalization agreement. It was noticeably shown in the photographs that depicted Israeli people on touristic trips in the United Arab Emirates (or Bahrain). In total, 26 photographs depicting ordinary Israelis or Emiratis visiting back and forth were identified in the analysis.



Figure1 9. Israelis flash their passports at the Dubai airport. Photography by KARIM SAHIB. Copyright 2020 AFP.



Figure 20. An Emirati man walks past an Israeli tourist at the Burj Khalifa, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, December, 2020. Copyright 2020 npr.

Figure 19 shows Israeli citizens preparing to travel to the UAE for tourism, and **Figure 20** shows an Emirati citizen walking past an Israeli tourist at the Burj Khalifa. These photographs give a strong indication of acceptance of the normalization brought about by the Abraham Accords.

The remaining 13 photographs out of 413 could not be grouped in the above five themes and were therefore excluded from this semiotic analysis. These photographs included visuals of tourist locations and screenshots following the Abraham Accords signature (see **Figure 21**).

The Abraham Accords Declaration:

We, the undersigned, recognize the importance of maintaining and strengthening peace in the Middle East and around the world based on mutual understanding and coexistence, as well as respect for human dignity and freedom, including religious freedom.

We encourage efforts to promote interfaith and intercultural dialogue to advance a culture of peace among the three Abrahamic religions and all humanity.

We believe that the best way to address challenges is through cooperation and dialogue and that developing friendly relations among States advances the interests of lasting peace in the Middle East and around the world.

We seek tolerance and respect for every person in order to make this world a place where all can enjoy a life of dignity and hope, no matter their race, faith or ethnicity.

We support science, art, medicine, and commerce to inspire humankind, maximize human potential and bring nations closer together.

We seek to end radicalization and conflict to provide all children a better future.

We pursue a vision of peace, security, and prosperity in the Middle East and around the world.

In this spirit, we warmly welcome and are encouraged by the progress already made in establishing diplomatic relations between Israel and its neighbors in the region under the principles of the Abraham Accords. We are encouraged by the ongoing efforts to consolidate and expand such friendly relations based on shared interests and a shared commitment to a better future.

Signed:



Figure 21. The Abraham Accords after signature. Copyright 2020 the White House.

Chapter Seven

Discussion

This study aims to examine the visual portrayal of the Abraham Accords by offering both quantitative and qualitative contributions to a topic that has received international attention. The study aims to examine how various international news websites on Google News that reflects various points of view and editorial values portrayed the normalization processes to their audiences in terms of displaying photographs and whether these photographs painted the Accords in a positive or negative light. Furthermore, it investigates the types of frames and themes utilized by these outlets, helping to show the tone of the visual news coverage.

Hence, the first part of the study content analyzed visual narratives of 413 photographs by developing operational definitions for positive, negative, anti-normalization, and pro-normalization visual frames, and investigating the use of framing devices such as emphasis – especially frequency. The second part employed a semiotic analysis to explore the denotations and connotations by identifying particular themes. In response to the research questions, the findings based on both content analysis and semiotic analysis reveal the following conclusions.

First, the content analysis findings revealed that international news websites found on Google News virtually covered the events based on their interpretation of the news events through the employability of certain framing devices and visual frames reflected in the visual coverage. Although these international news websites come from different cultural backgrounds, have different editorial policies and perspectives, they unequivocally visually emphasized a positive narrative. This was evident in the high proportion of photographs that referenced and focused on specific

actors, topics, activities, locations, and framing devices such as frequency to generate identical interpretations of the normalization agreement. For instance, the high frequency of photographs depicting Israeli, American, and Arab officials and the Historical Signature Day dominated together the visual coverage constituting 60 percent of overall photographs analyzed compared to 11 percent of photographs which portrayed counter-activities such as demonstrations or other topics.

Meanwhile, there was a considerable emphasis on showing the officials with perceptually salient activities such as officials smiling, saluting, or giving greetings, holding up the document of the Abraham Accords after signature as a sign of triumph or even while signing the Accords. These activities exclusively enhance the perception and motivation towards the Arab-Israeli normalization and contribute significantly to the recognition of the Abraham Accords in a positive manner.

Moreover, almost half of the photographs (49%) were linked to geographic locations within the United States and Israel. The emphasis on both the United States and Israel ostensibly reflects the desire of the two countries to turn the page on old failed initiatives and apparently show commitment to inspire peace with the Arab countries.

The results unequivocally showed there were a high proportion of the photographs referenced and focused on certain actors, topics, activities, locations and particular framing devices such as frequency to generate identical interpretations about the Abraham Accords. For instance, the high frequency of photographs depicting Israeli, American, and Arab officials and the Historical Signature Day dominated together the visual coverage constituting 60 percent of overall photographs analyzed compared to 11 percent of photographs which portrayed counter-activities

such as demonstrations or other topics. Remarkably, the results showed few of the visuals analyzed depicted the Abraham Accords negatively, even though a majority of the Arab public opposed the process (El Kurd, 2020).

The results also showed that the visual coverage emphasized positive emotions of hope, confidence, and happiness through displaying proportionally more optimistic visual messages and fewer visuals depicting counter-activities to resist any negative feelings. The abundance of photographs of officials smiling after the signature of the Abraham Accords is a clear example of this trend. It seems that the news websites depicted the majority of pro-related events and focused less on the depiction of counter activities in order not to evoke empathic emotions. The results indicate that the visual coverage aimed at creating a shift in public attention and sympathy which would deviate from anti perspectives that would negatively affect the image of the Abraham Accords. Hence, more portrayal of benevolent-related events swept up the coverage to mobilize the public towards only one presentation of favorable positive emotions to glamorize the Arab-Israeli normalization.

Because the camera angle and the type of shot could have an impact on the point of view, since Zettl (2011) argued, the viewer can view the object or event from various positions, which would, in turn, constitute audience expectations of power. Therefore, the study examined how the photographs could invite meaning creation. The results showed that most of the photographs (60 %) portrayed the Abraham Accords or related topics from an equal angle with medium shot sizes. The results argue that selecting these types of shots and angles is understandable since they are preferable to the news websites. The medium sizes could include all possible elements, while the eye-level could reflect perspectives on their nature. However, the existence of the other visual cues of camera angles and shot sizes is valuable; for

example, the close-up shots built a kind of intimate personal relationship with the object or actor embedded in the photograph. At the same time, the low-angle gave an impression of force or superiority to the officials depicted in the photographs.

Further, the study found that international news websites used specific visual frames within visual coverage, such as positive versus negative frames and pro-normalization versus anti-normalization frames. Interestingly, the results showed that international news websites ran the largest proportion of the photographs of the Abraham Accords in a favorable positive frame to make it the top newsworthy event across the media arena. Photographic coverage of any negative or counter news was uncommon. By and large, they avoided photographs that depicted an opposing perspective. Hence, this favorable positive frame has given the impression that this latest round of Arab-Israeli normalization is welcomed by the Arab public. Looking at the context of the Abraham Accords and the historically shunned Arab-Israeli relations, the positive visuals may be interpreted as a profound shift in the strategy after a long deep freeze.

The pro-normalization frame was also dominant in the visual coverage to establish and re-adopt the public discourse to cope and accept a new type of diplomatic and political relations previously deemed complex or unresolvable. However, it is now promoted publicly and entrenched in media (Griffin, 2004). It should be noted that 66 percent of the examined photographs promoted normalization, while 14 percent opposed it. The predominance of specific frames, primarily positive and pro-normalization frames, reflect how the majority of the news websites were not influenced by any oppositional attitudes of Arab public opinion towards normalizing relations with Israel despite the fact that Israel remains the "greatest threat" to Arabs (Arab center for Research and Policy Studies, 2020b, p.51). It is noteworthy to

mention that, during the time of writing, the Israeli-Palestinian tension erupted into open conflict after years of relative calm (Kingsley, 2021). As a result, the study speculates on whether or not the news coverage would have been the same.

Since the Abraham Accords carry far-reaching implications in political and diplomatic ties on a high profile level between Israel and the Arab world that would break old, complicated, and tense history, it might have been expected to find some depiction of contrasting or opposite visual frames. Perhaps, there are four other possible and logical explanations for this overwhelming support that could be seen in the visual coverage for the depiction of the Abraham Accords in a more positive manner by international news websites.

Firstly, it is unclear whether the disproportionately positive coverage of the Accords is intentional or unintentional, or whether this is driven more by journalists or by senders (see Gamson, 1989, discussing the possible drivers of skewed coverage). Secondly, despite the differences in the cultural and political backgrounds of the newsmakers, which could conceivably impact the various news-making stages, and then framing of the stories they produce, the coverage of the Accords was ultimately relatively homogeneous and consistent. Third, this could be due to the influences that news media outlets could have on each other despite the different editorial guidelines or policies that seek to promote objective coverage which presents each of the significant points of view on a given issue. This explanation is consistent with the "intermedia agenda-setting" theory, which describes the media interaction in terms of how media content can influence another media content, eventually resulting in the transfer of issue or attribute salience (Guo, L., & Vargo, C. J., 2017). This occurs when journalists check their journalistic work by looking at the work of their colleagues, particularly which of the more well-known, prestigious news outlets

(McCombs et al., 2014). However, this has an impact on the quality of international news flow and may have resulted in the largely consistent coverage observed here. Fourth, the findings seem to suggest that the journalists did not exert enough conscious effort in their coverage and then tailored visual narratives less objectively, failing to cover all sides of the story equally.

The study findings suggest several aspects related to the magnitude of specific dominant frames and their symbolism that led to less diverse depictions and interpretations of news and events related to the Abraham Accords. It has been evident that the visual coverage did not include contrasting visual frames, which drove audiences' interpretations and perceptions of the Arab-Israeli normalization away from any historical or contemporary complexities. Therefore, it seems that the news websites already emphasized specific frames in advance in their visual coverage based on prevalent and dominant specific photographs provided by primary visual services and sources such as Getty Images, AP, AFP, and Reuters. The actual counter activities such as demonstrations and protests did not grab the attention of the news websites or their photographers, which could explain the unevenness in their depiction of the Abraham Accords.

Regardless of the extent to which the journalists were aware of the different framing devices and visual frames, there were indeed other options available besides centralizing the visual coverage on certain elements which would lead to more narrow and homogenous perceptions of the Abraham Accords. Therefore, the study found a significant need for extending research that includes audience frames to understand if the already stored information in the minds of the audiences could influence the way they process and interpret visual information (see Entman, 1993). This is based upon the notion that the photojournalists perceive their visual art with solid value (Fahmy

& Wanta, 2007) and could have a noticeable influence on the audiences' perceptions and evaluations of their surroundings (Domke et al., 2002). Meanwhile, the lack of visuals depicting contrasting views or counter activities concealed some aspects at the expense of showing specific dimensions favorable for the dominant positive frames to pro-normalization frames. However, unfortunately, it deprived the audience of having inclusive visual coverage about the event. Therefore, it is essential to examine the factors that potentially have relation to this end since many interconnected factors could affect the frames ranging from social, political, cultural, structural, and organizational to individual factors. Moreover, it is significant to reveal the components that affect the production process by examining the above factors versus the independent journalistic factors to understand and predict (a) the way, (b) the amount, and (c) the tone the visual coverage would be tailored and presented to the audience.

Second, the semiotic analysis after classifying five themes suggests that some photographs were built on the notion that when visuals are accompanied by interpretive texts, the texts would help in anchoring their meanings and this probably would have helped audience members to interpret how the new Arab-Israeli normalization was presented through the lens of the international media.

The study argued that some visuals could be easily decoded without further explanation from the accompanying text. That might reflect the audience's familiarity with the nature and historical context of the Arab-Israeli conflict and how dramatic changes might follow the new decisive step towards establishing a foundation of peace and stability in the Middle East. Therefore, the messages could be understood by the audience members who are aware of the cultural context with little textual anchoring.

When it comes to the first theme, the study discovered that there was a strong emphasis on highlighting the role of officials. This was evident in photographs of American, Israeli, and Arab officials who paid visits or participated in meetings. It cannot be denied that the focus of the news coverage on them highlighted their role and demonstrated the importance of relations between the countries that signed the Accords at the political and diplomatic levels. The second theme demonstrated how international media outlets touted the historical significance of the Abraham Accords. Because the normalization talks were gradual and the public was aware of the incremental progress toward their conclusion, the images of the Historical Signature Day included in this theme were denotative and did not require elaboration.

However, some photographs that contained flags, such as in the third theme which carried symbolic meanings, might be challenging to recognize without the assistance of the accompanying text if viewed by non-Arab audiences or cultural outsiders. The text here is needed to provide further facts about the underlying message behind choosing the flags in the news items and the geographic location. For instance, the image of Jerusalem's illuminated wall with the national flags of the United States, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain, as both contextual and cultural knowledge were needed for the decoding process. Meanwhile, some details needed more elaboration when only culturally related. For instance, images of the Dome Of Rock and the Wall of the old Jerusalem might require explanation for those who have little knowledge about the historical nature of these sites and their profound meanings to the Arabs. The normalization of aviation was also emphasized in the third theme, which reflects the outcomes of the Abraham Accords. The interpretation of the photographs was simple in this case due to the explicit annotations refuting any assumptions about the ineffectiveness of the new Accords. Photographs of planes

landing or taking off from Israeli or Emirati airports, for example, were easily interpreted.

The third theme symbolized a very significant meaning in the memory of the Arab audiences and might lead to the emergence of old memorial thoughts related to the age-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict; hence the text would expand the scope of understanding about the new shift for cultural outsiders. It is clear that the news narratives contained visual elements that highlight the importance of the event, far from any controversial dimension. As in the fourth theme, there was a scarcity of photographs that expressed demonstrations or counter-activities. This reflects the positive light in which the normalization was shown. Meanwhile, the fifth theme contained photographs featuring ordinary people such as Israeli tourists, which reflect the public support for the new Arab-Israeli relations. This was evident in photographs of Israeli tourists at the United Arab Emirates' Burj Khalifa.

The semiotic analysis found that the photographs tend to make a guiding political gesture but they could go further by communicating how audiences might perceive the Accords. There are two possible ways to view the intended audience of the media coverage of the Abraham Accords. In one view, the photographs depicting the old Arab-Israeli dispute and contemporary relations between Arabs and Israelis are meant to be seen by the whole world. In the other, the photographs could send their messages to specific audiences with more concerns or interest in understanding the political and diplomatic changes in the wake of the Abraham Accords.

The study found that the media audiences might need the good eye or the good visual catch to construct a meaningful interpretation and understand the deliberate meanings embedded in the visual messages. Thus, should the audience succeed in

decoding the intended messages, any photographs published after the announcement of the Abraham Accords will play an essential role in fulfilling the audience's need to understand all dimensions of the Abraham Accords and then to communicate either their support or objection to any subsequent agreements stemming from the Accords. Despite the fact that audiences might not view all of the different photographs about the Abraham Accords or any related events, seeing a few of them would be a powerful reminder of the normalization agreement and could implicate how audiences might think about and interpret visuals and media messages.

Finally, this research was mainly focused on visuals. However, it examined the employability of accompanying text in the framing process because of the significant role that photo-captions can play in altering the meaning people derive from the same photograph found on different platforms. Therefore, it is essential to expand both quantitative and qualitative research on the function of both photographs and photo-captions in the framing process.

Conclusion

This study has shown the significant role of photography in the digital storytelling process. It has shown some of the distinctive characteristics of the use of photographs, in the news media. Here, a mixture of elements such as the content of the image itself, the context, and the accompanying text contribute to the delivery of the message. When done right, the inclusion of photographs can substantially bolster objective news reporting. Therefore, it is critical that photojournalists produce obvious, significant, and relevant photographs to enhance the clarity and quality of news coverage.

This is consistent with Griffin's (2012) explanation, in which he demonstrated how news photographs are used as news illustrations, and how news photographs are selected and framed to contribute to priming and supporting specific narratives (Griffin, 2004). Therefore, the first part of the study investigated the visual coverage of the Abraham Accords by analyzing the framing devices and visual frames employed by international news websites. It found that despite the editorial differences, the results have unequivocally shown that the majority of the websites emphasized common frames, focusing disproportionately on a small group of actors and topics. For instance, there has been a high frequency of photographs depicting the Historical Signature Day topic, officials, and positive or pro-normalization frames, but a low frequency of photographs depicting counter-activities or frames. That left the audience without an adequate chance to consider all sides of the normalization agreement, instead directing them to one dominant interpretation glamourizing the Abraham Accords. Therefore, there was an unduly limited scope of photographic coverage and spontaneous photographs depicting all ongoing events related to the

Abraham Accords. The second part of the study, which applied a semiotic analysis, examined five themes showing the role of photographs in communicating messages to the audience to construct a meaningful interpretation of the new Arab-Israeli normalization.

Limitations and Future Studies

The study encountered limitations associated with the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic that has mutated and spread into three waves so far. Therefore, it drew the attention of the international media outlets prioritizing news related to Covid-19. Hence, Covid-19 news became the daily news meal with great demand dominating the mainstream media coverage and affecting the circulation of other news. This has relatively influenced the presence of the research topic and limited the chances of having more news stories to include in the sample.

Recommendations

The researcher found a need to expand the visual research on the visual coverage of the Abraham Accords, as this research paper is considered the first to address this significant research topic. First, the researcher argues for executing more content analysis on larger sample sizes and go beyond the current timeframe understudy to look for more significance. Second, the researcher argues for conducting comparative visual research to see the differences between the English-speaking media, Arabic-speaking and Hebrew-speaking media in portraying the Abraham Accords to enrich future research.

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Appendix

Normalization through the Visual [Abraham Accords]

Code Sheet

A. Identifying Information

1. Basic information

1.1 Image/video:

1.2 Location: A (Table 1)

1. United States
2. Israel
3. UAE
4. Bahrain
5. Morocco
6. Sudan
7. Palestine
8. Saudi Arabia
9. Jordan
10. Egypt
11. Other Arab countries
12. Other countries
13. Not mentioned / not identified

1.3 Media outlet (TYPE NAME):

1.4 Original source (TYPE NAME):

1.5 Date of publishing

- 1- 1-31 August, 2020
2. 1-30 September, 2020
3. 1-31 October, 2020
4. 1-30 November, 2020
5. 1-31 December, 2020
6. 1-31 January, 2021
7. Out of time frame

1.6 Format of visual:

1. Photo
2. Video

B) Denotations

2. Analytical Denotation of the Photograph

2.1. Topic:

1. Signing the treaty
2. Officials
3. Flag-related images
4. Historical Sights
5. Place (city, beach ...)
6. Protests
7. Celebrations

8. Meetings
9. Airplanes
10. Building (Cabinet, White House, Parliamentary House...)
11. Visit (During or in visit)
12. Delivering Speech
13. IV (Interview)
14. Other Ordinary People
15. Peace Phrase
16. Other

2.2. Most dominant topic of the above (Choose One):

1. Signing the treaty
2. Officials, political elites
3. Flag-related images
4. Historical Sights
5. Place (city, beach ...)
6. Protests
7. Celebrations
8. Meetings
9. Airplanes
10. Building (Cabinet, White House, Parliamentary House...)
11. Visit (During or in visit)
12. Delivering Speech
13. IV (Interview)
14. Other Ordinary People
15. Peace Phrase
16. Other

C. Connotations

3. Analytical Denotation of the Characters

3.1. Actor/s shown:

1. An Individual (One Person)
2. Small (Groups of Two–Three individuals)
3. Medium (Groups of Four–Fifteen individuals)
4. Large (Groups of Sixteen or more)
5. Other (flags, places...)

3.2. Role main actor/s:

1. Negotiator (Officials, politicians, house representatives, diplomats)
2. Belligerent (Military/ police)
3. Demonstrator (against treaty)
4. Civilians (ordinary people)
5. Flag
6. Other

3.3 Action represented or Type of activity:

1. Signing the treaty (Leaders sitting on a long table while signing the treaty)

2. Hand-waving / Saluting (Expressive and cordial hand-waving)
3. Raising up the treaty (Raising up the new legally binding agreement after signature)
4. Smiling (Triumphant slight smiles)
5. Social touch (handshaking, or any kind of greetings exchange)
6. Gathering / Standing (peaceful)
7. Demonstrating / condemning
8. Talking head
9. Posing
10. Flag (Waving, or lighting up on building)
11. Other (such as walking,)

D) Connotative analysis of the image

4. Connotative analysis of the image

4.1. Symbolic Reality conveyed by the photograph:

1. Positive
2. Negative
3. Neutral
4. Unclear

4.2. Implicit representation of the normalization treaty [Abraham Accords]:

1. Pro-normalization
2. Anti-normalization
3. Neutral
4. Unclear

4.3 Type of (Dominant) Emotion shown ((Focus on main/foreground action!)):

1. Hope, Optimism, Confidence, redemption, Happiness, Delight, Pleasure
2. Anger, Frustration
3. Desperation, Sadness, Demoralization, Mourning
4. Pain, Fear
5. Other
6. Does not apply

5. Point of View

5.1. Shot Size:

1. Close-up (face and shoulders)
2. Medium (half body)
3. Long shot (full body)
4. Not Applicable (i.e. illustration or graphics)

5.2 Camera angle:

- 1) Low-angle photography
- 2) Eye-level photography
- 3) High-angle photography
4. Not Applicable