The Sultanate of Silence: A critical analysis of the Omani newspapers' coverage of the 2011 protests

A thesis submitted to Cardiff University in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Moza Abdullah Said Al-Rawahi
Cardiff School of Journalism, Media, and Cultural Studies

October 2019

*

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated in loving memory of my parents, **Abdullah Al-Rawahi and Maryam Al-Aghbari**. This work is in recognition of their dedication and devotion to the advancement of my education. I still remember the day when my mother sold her precious gold necklaces for the sake of my education**.** This one is for my parents. May their soul rest in peace.

Acknowledgement

Abstract

While many studies about the Arab Spring have been conducted, Oman has been largely omitted from scholarly debates. This dissertation aims to address this research gap by examining the role of two Omani newspapers (Oman Daily and Al-Watan) during the 2011 protests. It will analyse two aspects of Omani journalism: news content and news production practices. A content analysis of over 800 news stories over 74 days from both newspapers was conducted to examine how they represented the protests. A close examination of the newspapers agendas shows that news about the protests and public demands were ignored during January and February 2011. After the state made various concessions, media attention then focussed on the government's response to public demands. However, when protests became more violent, the newspapers intensified their coverage about the demonstrations. Both newspapers engaged in more critical coverage, undermining the protests by focusing on patriotism, violence and internal divisions. This thesis also explores if and how the newspapers' coverage differs from that of citizens' debates in Sablat Oman forum, one of the most popular forums in the country in 2011. A sample of 1783 posts was collected from the forum within the same period of time. Semi structured interviews with 15 journalists from both newspapers show that journalists encountered several constraints in their reporting from inside and outside their organizations. Political pressure, however, was of paramount influence, which made journalists cautious to adopt an empowering representation of the protests. Overall, the study reinforces the 'protest paradigm' thesis long established in academic literature about the media representation of demonstrations, and argues that the politicized nature of the Omani media contributed to weaken protest coverage. Both newspapers acted as a sphere of 'confirmed' intellectuals (Spielhaus 2012, p. 8) that continued to serve the government instead of reflecting the Omanis' concerns.

List of contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The wave of protests that swept the Arab countries crashed on Oman's political shore in 2011. The growing discontent with the socio-political and economic conditions in the country led Oman's young generation to follow the pro-democracy protests across the Arab region. Several factors contributed to the eruption of youth anger against the government, leading to the 2011 protests, including corruption, inequality in the redistribution of resources, the privileges granted to foreign workers, the lack of employment opportunities, wage stagnation, the lack of legislative powers given to the Consultative Council, etc. According to Valeri (2015), "The Omani Spring is the most serious alarm bell rung by a population that is both increasingly unable to meet the requirements of daily life and aware of the prospect of a challenging future without the paternal figure of Qaboos" (p. 4). By the end of February 2011, however, the protests had escalated and become more violent due to the dissatisfaction with the government. Therefore, in order to appease the protesters, the regime responded with a combination of reforms. Therefore, due to the government's response to public demands, the 2011 protests in Oman are also known as the 2011 reforms.

The unprecedented upheavals in the Arab countries in 2011 captured the attention of academics worldwide. In particular, academic attention was paid to the relation between the mass media, social media networks, and protest movements. The majority of these studies were concerned with evaluating the influence of social media on collective action (e.g., Khamis and Vaughn. 2011; Wolfsfeld et al. 2013) and with how media coverage marginalized social protests (e.g., Gitlin 1980; McLeod and Hertog 1999; Luther and Miller 2005; McLeod 2007). Nevertheless, unlike the other Arab countries, where social media served as an effective catalyst and accelerator for cyberactivism encouraging civic engagement, the influence of social media sites (including Twitter, Facebook, and blogs) in Oman was relatively modest, as they were not the main vehicle for bringing about social and political changes, none of which could have happened unless there had been "people willing to be physically present in the streets, ready to put their own life at risk, in order to fulfil their demands and achieve their goals" (Khoury 2011, p. 85). These protests had a profound impact on the country, as they spurred Sultan Qaboos to effect some significant economic, social, and political changes.

Ultimately, this thesis will examine the newspapers' coverage of the protests. News media, according to Ashley and Olson (1998), play a vital role in the acknowledgment or omission of protests through the extent of coverage (deciding whether to cover the protest or not), how to frame the underlying issues surrounding protests and protesters, and finally, the use of sources. In this way, "The news media can shape a protest message for

an audience" (ibid. p. 263). With this in mind, this thesis aims to provide a critical analysis of Omani newspapers' coverage of the 2011 protests. More specifically, it attempts to examine newspapers' representation of the street protests and of public opinion, as manifested in the prominence given to particular issues, the dominating discourses, and the selection of sources used. However, it should be acknowledged that for the first time since the 1970s and the end of the Dhofar war[1], the Arab spring empowered Omanis and challenged the idea of a spiral of silence, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six. The 2011 protests in Oman "illustrated the depth of the frustration and social malaise in the country" (Valeri 2015, p. 3). Many citizens actively engaged in the expression of alternative ideas and controversial issues (including political, economic, and social concerns) on the streets as well as on social media sites. Thus, this thesis will also focus on the Sablat Oman forum, one of the most popular forums in the country with a high number of daily visits in 2011, to obtain a meaningful insight into the public debates in society at that time, and therefore, critically assess whether the newspapers addressed people's needs and interests and informed them about the protests. However, it must be acknowledged that Al-Sablah (Sablat Oman) was clearly not representative of Omani public opinion, as it reflected only the opinions of those who used it. Additionally, in order to provide a more comprehensive insight into the newspapers' representation of the Omani public sphere, this thesis will identify the conditions that influenced the news production process both inside and outside the journalistic domain during the protests.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Over the past four decades, the Sultanate of Oman has adopted an independent and pragmatic attitude when dealing with local, regional and international conflicts. Since 1970, Oman's foreign policy promotes peace and co-operation and asserts imperative geostrategic realities rather than temporary political and ideological attitudes. For instance, Oman has consistently supported the Palestinian cause - its national independence and sovereignty, and has continued to affirm its complete support for the legitimate rights and fair demands of the Palestinian people. Also, Oman has made great strides in the multilateral talk's phase of the peace process and has steadfastly opposed violence*.* Of late, in 2019, Oman played a mediating role amid Iran and UK over their tanker crisis tensions. These principles of Oman's foreign relations are expressed in

---

[1] Dhofar Province, the southern province of Oman, was the theatre in 1962 of an uprising of tribes against the authority of Sultan Said. Gradually, this movement morphed into the Marxist-Leninist Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf. In July 1970, when the uprising was about to spread to northern Oman, the British orchestrated Sultan Said's overthrow by his son Qaboos. This decision enjoyed the support of the other Gulf rulers and the Shah of Iran, all of whom were concerned by potential revolutionary contagion. The new sovereign, backed by Britain, Jordan, and Iran, proclaimed the end of the war in 1975.

Joseph Kechichian's Oman and the World: The Emergence of an Independent Foreign Policy. Kechichian articulated that Oman has portrayed great efforts in foreign policy relations.

> Working from foreign policy principles of non-intervention in other countries affairs with respect for international law and adherence to a non-aligned policy, Qaboos has promoted a compromise and peaceful resolution, encouraging even warring countries to find commonalities and acceptable trade-offs. (Kechichian 1995, n.p)

Although Oman's ruler has exercised a major influence over foreign policy, Oman's geopolitical outlook has helped in strengthening its neutral stance in the international arena when it comes to political issues (Al-abri and Goldsmith 2015). Oman's natural stance has been fully committed to the regional and international peace process (for more detail, see Chapter 4). This has been for a range of reasons. Therefore, Oman is seen by neighbouring countries as 'the silent state'. Furthermore, the Omani government is aware of the important role of the media, and thus it has used the media as a tool to promote its longstanding policy (Al-Mashekhi 1996; Al-Murjan 1997; Al-Rawas 1997; Al-Hasani 2003). My aim in this dissertation is to examine the Omani media politics of dissent, notably, how silent Oman really is, by examining the Omani newspaper's coverage of the country's internal affairs and conflicts, for instance - the 2011 Omani reforms.

When the unprecedented protests erupted across the MENA region, I was in Sydney, Australia, completing my Master's degree. I was shocked that the waves of the Arab revolution had reached Oman's shores. At that time, my only sources of information on the protests were my family, friends, and the Sablat Oman forum. The sources were far superior to the mainstream Omani news, which gave the matters very little coverage. I browsed newspaper websites almost every day, but I did not see any news about the reforms. Yet news about the Muscat Festival dominated the newspapers coverage. Strikingly, while the events in Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen had commanded international attention, the Omani media remained deafeningly silent on the protests and reforms happening in Oman. The socio-political and cultural control that the Omani state has promoted contributed to that state of silence. What impressed me more, however, was the level of freedom of expression that was suddenly permitted in the country. For the first time ever, Omani citizens were able to speak their minds and to challenge the government without any fear. Sablat Oman forum played a crucial role in reflecting Omanis' concerns and problems. Despite the media silence, it did not shield Oman from the repercussions of the protests sweeping the Middle East. Those massive uprisings forced the Omani media to acknowledge and report on those events. Nevertheless, it was quite curious that they overlooked the protests that happened in their very own country.

4

Why was the Omani media so reluctant to cover these reforms? How did the media represent the various protests? Did journalists encounter any roadblocks in their reporting of the 2011 uprisings? This dissertation is an attempt to answer those questions.

Although the Omani Spring increased the social benefits and led to some economic and political reforms, the crackdown on press freedom was intensified due to the continuous failures in reporting, meaning information was both biased and filtered (Reporters without Borders 2013). The Reporters without Borders organization, in its annual report in the Press Freedom Index in 2013, indicated that in 2012, Oman's ranking for press freedom sank 24 places from 117 in 2011 to 141, which is the greatest fall among the Middle East and North African countries (ibid.). During the year of the protests, the media were directed to maintain repressive control over press freedom. For instance, Article 26 of the Publications and Publishing Law (PPL) was amended by a Royal Decree. The new article states:

> It is prohibited to publish anything that might compromise the State's safety or its internal or external security, as well as anything related to military or security bodies, their systems and internal regulations, or any confidential documents, information, news or official communications, whether through visual, audio or written media or through the internet or by means of information technology, unless authorized by the competent authorities. (Muscatdaily 2011, n.p.)

It seems that the 2011 protests became the main reason for tightening the restrictions on freedom of expression. Unsurprisingly, the Omani reforms did not receive significant media attention; as Worrall (2012) pointed out:

> It should not come as a surprise that the Arab Spring in Oman has been largely ignored, overshadowed by events in Cairo's Tahrir Square, NATO intervention in Libya and the beginnings of Syria's slow slide into civil war — not to mention events nearer at hand in Bahrain. (p. 1)

 Worrall's comment led me to focus on the newspapers' coverage of the 2011 Omani protests. It seems clear that the unprecedented events and public dissatisfaction with the Omani government led to confusion among the media regarding whether to support the state and condemn the street protests, an attitude most of the media chose to adopt, or to challenge the government and take the side of the protesters and support them in their demand for their legitimate rights. Additionally, to obtain a clear understanding of the messages of news organizations, it is necessary to examine communicators, news organizations, and the context (e.g., social, political and cultural milieu) within which the press was functioning (Siebert et al. 1956; Hallin and Mancini 2004; Harrison 2006). A few media studies in Oman have investigated the influences on media workers (e.g., Al-Hasani 2003; Al-Mashikhi 2015; Al-Kindi 2016); however, all these studies aimed at

exploring journalists' perceptions about such forces at a time of normal coverage, and some of them were only survey based. Thus, the second problem that needs to be investigated is the influence on media workers within the Omani context at a time of crisis; e.g., the protests.

1.3 Objectives of this study

The principal objectives of this study are as follows:

1. Drawing upon the notion of agenda setting and the 'protest paradigm', this thesis aims to add a new scope about the ongoing debate regarding the representation of protest in the mainstream print media and the Sablat Oman forum.

2. To provide a holistic analytical understanding of sourcing patterns in Oman Daily and Al-Watan newspapers, examining the role of news sources in contributing to support for the 2011 reforms within news coverage of the protests.

3. To provide a critical examination about the news decision-making process, particularly the relationship between protest coverage and journalists' accounts of their practices.

4. To provide a theoretical and academic background for researchers seeking to understand the relationship between the Omani media system and the socio-political system in which it is embedded.

5. To identify the role played by the Omani newspapers during the public protests of 2011.

6. To address the limitations of the selected Omani newspapers' coverage during the protests.

7. To examine whether the Omani case study provides a new perspective on media systems or on press freedom**.**

1.4 The main questions of the study

The study's central research aim is to examine the performance of the Omani mainstream print media by answering the research questions, with the main one being "What role did Oman Daily and Al-Watan newspapers play in the 2011 protests?" The following research questions (RQs) which stemmed from the main question highlight the three aspects this research seeks to investigate, which are concerned with the newspapers' representation of the protests, sourcing practises, and the factors that influence journalistic coverage. These questions are as follows:

RQ 1: How did the news professionals in Oman Daily and Al-Watan newspapers and Omani citizens in the Sablat Oman forum interpret the 2011 protests?

RQ 2: How did the newspapers represent public opinion as sources in their coverage of the 2011 protests?

RQ 3: What were the factors that influenced journalistic coverage of the 2011 protests?

Each query generates a list of sub-questions; this will be discussed further in Chapter Five. In this way, this study aims to provide a critical examination of how the Omani press functioned during the protests by evaluating how effectively the selected Omani newspapers performed in their roles as watchdogs and agenda setters.

1.5 Significance of the study

The significance of the study stems from the fact that while several studies have addressed and debated issues regarding the Arab Spring, Oman seems to have been largely omitted from these scholarly discussions. The only three studies that have discussed the media coverage of the 2011 popular protests in Oman (e.g., Al-Amri 2011; Al-Kindi 2016; Al-Rawi 2016) have lacked robust statistical and theoretical analyses. For example, these studies have failed to provide information about the frequency of media coverage, the prominence of issues, dominant discourses, and sourcing practices. Additionally, whilst the majority of studies concerning public opinions/ debates of the key issues during the Arab Spring have focused on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube (Khamis and Vaughn 2011; Lotan et al. 2011; Wolfsfeld et al. 2013), to the best of my knowledge, there are no textual and critical studies on online forums. Therefore, this thesis is one of the few studies in Oman to examine citizens' opinions on social media sites and the Sablat Oman forum in particular. Moreover, although much work has been carried out on sourcing practices especially in the western media (e.g., Sigal 1973; Kunelius and Renvall 2010; Hermida et al. 2014; Van Leuven et al. 2015), there is little research on the range of

sources within the Middle East media. Indeed, there is a noticeable lack of research on the use of sources across events and across countries in the Arab media. Thus, this thesis aims to provide a valid contribution regarding media-specific patterns in sourcing practices during the 2011 Omani reforms, notably how the Omanis' voices were constructed in the 2011 news coverage. In the same vein, although many scholars have explored the tension between news media and protests during the Arab Spring, there has yet to be an analytical and empirical study that not only focuses on textual analysis of the news content but also looks at the conditions under which the journalists negotiated their practices. To the best of my knowledge, no work on these conditions has previously been undertaken to examine the media coverage of protests in the Arab region. Lastly, while a substantial body of research focuses on the journalistic professional roles and how these roles have changed over time and across different cultures (Hanitzsch et al. 2011; Norris and Odugbemi 2010; Weaver and Willnat 2012), there has been little empirical examination of how these professional roles materialize in journalistic output (Vos 2002). Thus, this thesis attempts to examine the roles of the Omani press as watchdog and agenda setter within the context of the 2011 protests, considering the relationship between news content and the various forces that govern journalists' practices.

Therefore, this study aims to address these gaps by providing a foundation for future research to examine the source material in addressing the limitations of newspapers' coverage during the Arab Spring in one of the most conservative media environments in the region. The study also aims to open up new and important topics for discussion and debates about the Omani public sphere and the role of the media at times of conflict and crisis. For these reasons, this thesis makes an important contribution to the limited literature in this field.

1.6 Scope of the thesis

The period of the first three months of the 2011 reforms, that is, from January 17 to March 31, 2011, was chosen as the time frame for this study. In order to examine the newspapers' performance during the Omani Spring, a sample of 800 news items derived from two newspapers, namely, Oman Daily and Al-Watan , were examined thoroughly. To elucidate, 354 news items from Oman Daily and 446 news items from Al-Watan were collected as the sample for the quantitative and qualitative analysis. In order to better understand and compare the newspapers' agendas with the online public agenda during the uprising, a sample of 1,783 posts was collected from the Sablat Oman forum within the same period. Also, to provide a critical analysis about journalists' accounts of their practices, semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen media professionals;

including editors-in-chief, editors, journalists, and writers who were involved in the coverage of the 2011 reforms.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

There are nine chapters in this thesis. The literature review comprises three chapters aimed at explicating the theories underpinning the framework of the study. Chapter Two examines media roles, the sociology of news production, and the public sphere. The discussion begins with a look into the media's roles as watchdog, agenda setter, and gatekeeper. Then, it illustrates the debates and discussions of the sociology of news production, notably, the forces that shape media content and the messages that constitute the symbolic environment inside and outside the media organisations. Next, it provides a critical reflection of the role of the press in shaping the public sphere. Chapter Three examines how the internet has revolutionized the public sphere and redefined journalism, notably, how audience frustration with the mass media's distortion or misrepresentation of the protests, or their refusal to acknowledge the protests in their coverage, empowers citizen journalists in many societies. To explore these issues, this chapter is going to focus on the unprecedented upheaval in the Arab world in 2011. The final literature review chapter, Chapter Four, offers a historical and critical account of Oman and its communication experience in the 21st century, placing the current constitution in its historical and political context. Then, the chapter provides the contextual background to the popular protests that erupted in Oman in 2011. The final part of the chapter will briefly address the tension between journalism, online activism, and freedom of expression in the country before and during the protests. Together, these chapters explain the dynamic and complex relation between the press and the social and political structures within which it operates. Chapter Five presents the methodology of the study. It outlines the processes by which content analysis, framing analysis, and interview methods were constructed, developed, and analysed to answer the research questions. For further clarification, I attach my coding sheets and interview questions in the appendices.

The second part of this thesis discusses the research findings, which are divided into three chapters. Subsequently, Chapters Six and Seven focus on the content and news framing analysis to examine the newspapers' (Oman Daily and Al-Watan) coverage of the 2011 protests; particularly the way in which the 2011 protests and different public opinions were represented by the newspapers. Chapter Six primarily focuses on the selection bias (the prominence given to particular issues) and the description bias (the dominant discourses found in these stories and how the newspapers represented the protests in their coverage). Along with these analyses, this chapter scrutinizes citizens' comments in

the online space, represented by the Sablat Oman forum, to examine the prominence given to particular issues and the dominant discourses found in this online domain. This comparative analysis is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding about the newspapers' agendas and the online public agenda, and their representation of the street protests. Chapter Seven examines sourcing practices in Oman Daily and Al-Watan newspapers. The first part of this chapter aims to examine the dominant sources that were cited or quoted within coverage by Oman Daily and Al-Watan of the 2011 protests and the role of these sources (notably citizens and street protesters) in supporting the 2011 reforms. The second part, however, aims to assess whether the use of anonymous and unnamed sources led to news content that supported the protests and challenged the political discourse or not. Chapter Eight presents the outcomes of the interviews. Based on semi-structured interviews with editors-in-chief, editors, sub-editors, journalists, correspondents, and columnists who were all involved in covering the 2011 protests, this chapter examines the factors that influenced the newspapers' coverage of the 2011 protests based on the journalists' accounts of their practices. The findings identified three main factors of influence, namely, political, professional, and individual. Thus, the question of how journalists interpret and negotiate these forces in their work is central to the discussion in this chapter. Eventually, Chapter Eight recaps the main findings of the three methods of the thesis. It also underlines the significance and the academic contribution to the studies of media coverage of protests by highlighting whether the Omani case study reinforces or challenges the findings of Western literature. Finally, it offers some suggestions for further research.

Chapter Two

Media roles, the sociology of news production and the public sphere

2.1 Introduction

Over the last few decades, a large body of research has analysed the news media's roles and the different functions that journalism should accomplish in society (Weaver et al. 2007; Norris and Odugbemi 2010; Hanitzsch et al. 2011; Willnat 2012). This chapter argues that the press plays a crucial role in the public sphere. For example, journalists not only disseminate information; they also serve to discover the truth (Milton 1904), provide different views to help people make intelligent political choices (Emerson 1962,1963), and encourage citizens to participate in the discussion of public issues (Habermas 1989). To explore how the media strengthen the democratic public sphere, this chapter emphasizes the institutional or collective roles of the news media, first as a watchdog by witnessing events that have not previously been disclosed and have been hidden from public attention; second, as agenda setters, determining which issues or information are more important than others in public opinion; and third, as gatekeepers, controlling which types of information are to be included or excluded in a news discourse. Each role is vital to the quality of democratic deliberation in the public sphere.

Discussions and debates on media roles require an investigation into the rationales and forces that govern journalists' practices and influence the decisions of the gatekeeper (Bass 1969). Thus, the second part of this chapter provides a theoretical background that discusses the various forces that influence the news production culture (Campbell 2004; Hanitzsch 2007) by exploring the professional routines manifested in news selection, news values, and framing and sourcing practises, or as Broersma (2007) stated, "The process of gathering, selecting and presenting news is mostly based on unnoticed and undisputed conventions and professional routines" (p. 1). Similarly, the sociology of journalism argues that news content is shaped by the social, political, cultural, and economic milieu within which the press has operated (Gans 1979; Gitlin 1980; Schudson 1989; Shoemaker and Reese 2013) as opposed to being merely determined by journalistic features or a single force outside the news media. The last part of this chapter aims to give a critical reflection of Jurgen Habermas' (1989) concept of the 'public sphere' and its significance in understanding and evaluating the role of media within society.

2.2 Early media effects theories

The early communication and media studies focused on the influence of the media on personal and group attitudes. The origins of media studies are rooted in the work of scholars like Adorno, Marcuse, and Horkheimer in the 1930s (Held 1980). However, since then, distinct approaches have evolved to understand media influences and the extent

and limits of media power. US communication scholars tried to develop a mass communication model to study audiences' behaviours toward media messages, while European academics have dealt with communication as "a process through which a shared culture is created, modified and transformed" (Carey 1977,1983, p. 412; see also McQuail 1989). Some theorists have emphasised the media's power whereas others have focused on the media's influence due to social mediation. One of the earliest formulations of media effects was the 'hypodermic' or stimulus response or the one-step assumption about mass media (McQuail and Windahl 1981). This model shows that media messages are injected into the minds of the masses and so stimulate the reactions or responses desired by the message source. Although some scholars believed in this theory (Fox et al. 2001), Lazarsfeld's study, published as The People's Choice in 1944, demonstrated the complexities of media influence on people's attitudes and behaviours (Balnaves et al. 2008). Lazarsfeld's study introduced the two-step flow model of communication (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944), which suggests that people are more influenced by opinion leaders than by the media message (Katz 1955). This model examined the impact of political campaigns on people's voting intentions. It suggested that the media had only a weak influence, while at the same time, it highlighted the role of social networks and reference groups in mediating and influencing media messages (Kitzinger 2004).

Unlike these two theories, the uses and gratifications theory states that media consumers are no longer passive. Researchers in this theory explore how people actively use the media to satisfy specific needs or desires, while emphasising the ways in which media consumers make a conscious selection among various items of media content. The theory deals with "what do people do with media" rather than "what do the media do to people" (ibid. p. 17). The early studies of this model were done in the 1940s and were concerned with the entertainment content of the mass media. Herzog studied women's radio consumption in the United States to examine how the same radio serial was interpreted differently. She found that women listened to the programme to satisfy certain needs and obtain a specific gratification, such as giving them the 'chance to cry', escape from isolation, help them understand the world and provide 'recipes for adjustment' (Herzog 1941, p. 69). Although this approach focuses mainly on the individuals, Lasswell (1948) argued that the media also have some social functions. Both the two-step model and uses and gratification theory address peoples' choices and social interactions as important elements relating to media messages. However, one of the most influential models in theorizing media influence emerged in the 1970s and depicted how people interpret and decode texts. Hall (1980) found that text carries a 'preferred meaning', but it might be interpreted and decoded differently. He proposed three positions from which decoding might be constructed according to socio-economic variables: the dominant (accepting the preferred meaning), the negotiated, and the oppositional (ibid.). Hall's distinction between

encoding and decoding suggests that there are many other factors that could construct meaning, not only the text. Morley (1980) argued that paying attention to the process of decoding also opens the question of audience diversity (like gender, age, class, ethnicity, and other major socio-cultural distinctions). The emphasis on audience decoding led to an expansion of research into the theories of active audience and reception, which focused on how different people interpret the same media differently.

Spiral of silence is another theory which was proposed by Noelle-Neumann in 1974. It refers to the individual's tendency to remain silent when the media propagate a particular opinion (Neumann 1993). According to this theory, the minority or public discourse remains silent through a fear of isolation and negative consequences, especially when they hold an opinion that differs from the status quo (Neumann 1993). Noelle-Neumann argued that:

> Individuals who ... notice that their own personal opinion is spreading and is taken over by others, will voice this opinion self-confidently in public. On the other hand, individuals who notice that their own opinions are losing ground, will be inclined to adopt a more reserved attitude.
> (ibid. p. 376)

However, due to technological innovations, the media environment became more interactive, and the way individuals use the media changed; this will be discussed in more detail in the next chapters. This thesis, therefore, aims to examine the effects of newspapers' coverage of society, particularly whether the newspapers merely reflected or moulded society during the public protests of 2011, whether they cultivated common beliefs about the protests, and whether they had control over their audiences. The next sections will provide more details about the roles and responsibilities of the media in society.

2.3 The disparate roles of journalism

In terms of professionalism, journalistic roles can be defined as a set of expectations, including values, norms, and standards, that explain how journalism and the media should operate to fulfil specific obligations in society and render their work meaningful (Hanitzsch 2007, p. 369). Over the past 50 years, journalism scholars (e.g., Siebert et al. 1956; Hallin and Mancini 2004; Weaver et al. 2007; Norris and Odugbemi 2010; Hanitzsch et al. 2011; Weaver and Willnat 2012) have analysed professional roles, that is, the different responsibilities that journalism should undertake in society and how these roles have changed over time and across different cultures; this will be discussed in more detail in the coming sections. In their study evaluating media performance, Norris and Odugbemi (2010) suggested that journalists perceive themselves as serving multiple roles; for

example, "in the priority they give to providing background analysis and interpretation of events, to facilitating public debate and expression, and to delivering timely factual coverage of events" (p. 14). However, there are ongoing debates about whether journalists should act as neutral observers of events striving for objectivity, fairness, and detachment or whether they should adopt certain commitments to promote social change to reflect the interest of a particular group. Due to the complex and dynamic nature of the media environment, not all journalistic roles make an effective contribution to shaping the public debate, for instance, journalists in some countries may serve as lapdogs "acting as loyal spokespersons for state authorities, rarely questioning official information, and providing extensive coverage of ruling elites, dignitaries, and leaders" (ibid. p. 14). Therefore, news organizations may serve as propaganda for autocracies instead of reflecting the voices and concerns of the public. The growing range of threats to media freedom around the globe poses a rigorous challenge to democratic values. Thus, Norris and Odugbemi believed that in order to ensure a sustainable human development and deliberative democracy, "The news media should be understood to involve, at a minimum, their individual and collective roles as watchdogs, agenda setters, and gatekeepers. Through fulfilling each of these roles, as an institution the news media maximize opportunities for critical reflection and rational deliberation in the public sphere, for inclusive participation in communication processes, and, ultimately, for informed choice and human development in society" (2010, p. 15). Following on from Norris and Odugbemi's arguments, this chapter identifies three crucial roles of the press:

(1) as *a watchdog* by checking on political and other holders of power, not just by being free from any interferences but through its capacity to investigate and acquire information (Curran 2002, p. 220), which therefore may increase the transparency of governance by highlighting cases of corruption and malfeasance
(2) as an *agenda setter*, the news media have a responsibility to highlight social problems that lead the public to perceive those issues as more important than other issues
(3) as a *gatekeeper,* the news media have a responsibility to facilitate the debate on issues of public concern (Emerson 1962, 1963) and therefore encourage citizens to participate in the discussion of public issues (Habermas 1989).

Many other roles can be suggested - for example, journalists not only disseminate information; their functions also include discovering truth (Milton 1904), educating the public, and facilitating understanding. Additionally, McQuail (2006) argued that journalists' roles can be categorized into three main sets: acting as observer, providing an opportunity for diverse voices, and playing a participant role in society. James D. Wolfenson, former President of the World Bank, commented,

> A free press is not a luxury. A free press is at the absolute core of equitable development, because if you cannot enfranchise poor people, if they do not have a right to expression, if there is no searchlight on corruption and inequitable practices, you cannot build the public consensus needed to bring about change. (Washington Post 1999, n.p.)

Therefore, this thesis examines the role of Omani newspapers during the 2011 protests by evaluating how effectively they functioned in their roles as watchdog and agenda setter, considering the relationship between news content and the various forces that govern journalists' practices.

2.3.1 Watchdog

As a *watchdog,* the press should bring government misconduct to the attention of the public and check on both public and private domains in society to protect the public interest. As cited in the Leveson report (2012), "A free press can communicate important facts that the public have a legitimate interest in knowing (and which others might want to conceal). …one aspect of the public interest in a free press is that it provides an essential set of checks and balances on power (and, more importantly, the abuse of power). …there is a public interest in learning of dangers and risks, even where others may wish to conceal them" (p. 64). The function of the press as a watchdog dates back to more than 200 years, and it still operates in modern times to have a positive influence on civilians' lives throughout the world. Coronel (2010) argued that since the late 17th century, the press as the fourth estate to check on the government and power holders was based on the premise that states had to be prohibited from exceeding their limits: "Globalization, the fall of authoritarian and socialist regimes, and the deregulation of the media worldwide have fuelled a renewed interest in — as well as a surge in efforts by various groups to support — 'watchdogging' by the media" (p. 111).

Countries in which the media function as a watchdog witness higher levels of political participation and less corruption (Müller 2014). Comparing the media performance in 47 countries, Müller revealed that the capability of the media to disseminate political information and thus act as a public watchdog is found to be much stronger in the United States, Japan, and Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries. However, there is a wide debate about whether the watchdog role of the press should take primacy, especially in countries where the media are profit driven or state controlled. Additionally, even if the press is acting as a watchdog rather than a lapdog, is there any significant difference, notably in countries that resist change? On the other hand, some media critics have argued that the watchdog role of reporting may erode trust and support for the government. For example, studies on U.S. television reporting have found the TV news representation of the U.S. government as inefficient may lead to rising dissatisfaction with

the government, which therefore can threaten democratic consolidation and cause chaos (Ogan 1982). Norris (2010) believed that the notion of reporters as watchdogs is challenged in many countries that consider that "too much exposé journalism undermines faith and trust in government institutions, promoting instability and undermining fragile states" (p. 17).

On a routine basis, journalists acting in their role as watchdogs for can be classified as being impartial disseminators of information about issues related to public affairs that have not previously been disclosed and have been hidden from public attention. Another role is acting as investigators of the behaviour of decision makers to help citizens assess the efficacy of their performance (Hallin and Mancini 2004). Investigative reporting tends to address failures in government, like power abuse, incompetent management, corruption, and malfeasance. The defining characteristic of watchdog journalism is not the political perspective of certain news or stories, but instead the journalists' capacity to ask questions of the officials and power holders to assess government performance and increase transparency, according to Norris and Odugbemi (2010). Yet, this study aims to evaluate the Omani newspapers' performance as a watchdog during the protests; such as by acknowledging the various protests and identifying the societal problems that were highlighted by protesters.

2.3.2 Agenda setter

One major challenge of evaluating media performance in news coverage was determining which issues or information were more important than others in public opinion. According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), the agenda-setting process is based on the ability of the media agenda to influence the issue of salience in the public agenda. One of the most prominent definitions of agenda setting was provided by Coleman, McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver (2009). They argued that agenda setting is "the process of the mass media presenting certain issues frequently and prominently with the result that large segments of the public come to perceive those issues as more important than others ... the more coverage an issue receives, the more important it is to people" (p. 147). Similarly, McCombs et al. (2011) argued that "the idea of agenda setting can be used to understand the role of news in shaping the prominence of a multitude of topics in the news" (p. 84). In other words, the amount of news coverage a certain issue receives will largely determine how much importance the audience considers that issue to have. In their study during the 1968 U.S. presidential election in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, McCombs and Shaw compared issues covered in the news media with main issues on the undecided voters' agenda. They found that the news media coverage of certain issues boosted the salience of those issues in the minds of the public: "Through their day-by-day selection and display

of the news, the mass media shape our perspectives of the world and focus our attention, influencing our views about what are the important topics of the day" (McCombs 1978, p. 90). Since then, several studies (e.g., Takeshita and Mikami 1995; Wanta et al. 2004; Iyengar and Kinder 2010) have found convincing support for the idea that the media play a central role in influencing public attention to perceive particular issues as important. Despite the agenda-setting creation of public concern of salient issues by the news media, the impact of related constraints on agenda setting involve, first, the media not necessary reflecting reality or maybe filtering it, and second, the media concentrating on a few issues to mislead public attention by making the public perceive those issues as more important than other issues (McCombs et al. 2011).

Over the past 25 years, more than 200 studies have examined the impact of mass media messages on the public agenda (Dearing and Rogers 1996). Meanwhile, less attention has been paid to the forces that shape that agenda. At various points, many mass communication scholars have pointed to the integration and convergence of agenda setting with other mass communication subfields, including gatekeeping, which is often referred to as inter-media agenda setting (McCombs and Ghanem 2001). For more than three decades, many complex and longitudinal research studies have been conducted to understand the factors that shape the media agenda, and they point to the role played by the inter-media agenda setting as one key source of the media agenda. The inter-media agenda setting studies the relationship among different media outlets and examines how they influence one another (McCombs 2005). The early studies of inter-media agenda setting examined the relationships among traditional media (Gilbert et al. 1980; Reese & Danielian 1989; Wanta and Foote 1994; McCombs 2005). McCombs (2005) argued that news can be made by the "continuous interaction of news organizations with numerous sources and their agendas" (pp. 548, 549). Gilbert et al. (1980), for example, found the New York Times served as a guide for other news organizations' agendas across the United States in addressing the main issues of the day. A further study was conducted by Reese and Danielian (1989) to examine the coverage of cocaine use in the United States from 1985 to 1986. They selected five newspapers, two magazines, and three television networks, and they found that in most cases, the media coverage was similar. However, McCombs et al. (2011) argued that the audience's approach to a particular media outlet does not necessarily reflect the agenda-setting outcomes in salience-specific issues in the news coverage, as "the widespread evidence of agenda setting influence is the relative uniformity of topics in media content. The issues that the news media tend to cover are similar across a wide variety of print, broadcast, and online contexts" (p. 80). Thus, within a theoretical framework of agenda setting, this thesis will scrutinize the newspapers' agendas during the 2011 protests in championing certain issues. In addition to the inter-media agenda setting, there are other major factors that influence the journalists'

decisions in shaping the media agenda. These influences will be explored within the discussion of media gatekeepers in the next section of this chapter.

2.3.3 Gatekeeping

The gatekeeping model focused on the capacity of media gatekeepers to control which types of information are to be included in or excluded from a news discourse (White 1950; Tuchman 1978; Shoemaker and Reese 1996). Shoemaker (1991, p. 1) went beyond the news selection and described gatekeeping as a process of information control, which deals with the way in which the information is encoded, displayed, withheld from, and delivered to the receivers. The final forms of the published news stories in the newspapers are the results of the gatekeeping process (Schudson 1989). Many scholars have studied how news organizations gather, select, vet, filter, and share information with audiences (Channel 2010). The selection can be categorized into micro and macro levels. Micro level editorial decisions include the choice of certain stories, images, and headlines while the macro level is used to represent the different sources and voices in news coverage (Norris 2010). As *gatekeepers,* it is argued, journalists can facilitate the debate on issues of public concern by bringing voices of diverse interests, opinions, and political parties.

The term 'gatekeeping' was first coined by Lewin to describe the food choice process. He realized that housewives functioned as gatekeepers for controlling which foods reach the family table. Then, Lewin shifted to study the news selection process after recognising that his gatekeeping model went far beyond food selection. He wrote that the theory of gates "holds not only for food channels but also for the traveling of a news item through certain communication channels in a group" (Lewin 1947, p. 145). White (1950) is another key researcher, who established the term 'Mr Gates'. In his study, White focused on the individual who makes the gatekeeping decisions by answering how the newspaper's wire editor selects certain stories to be published. An important early expansion upon the first Mr Gates study came from Gieber (1956). He expanded White's early study into 16 wire editors. Unlike White, Gieber found that the gatekeepers are affected by organizational influences, such as meeting deadlines and the work routines, which were ignored by White. The most significant improvement to early gatekeeping theories of mass communication was the introduction of multiple gatekeepers who control several functions, not just the news process. McNelly (1959) focused not only on editors; he also focused on reporters who serve as the first of multiple gatekeepers between a certain news event and the final publication. McNelly noted that different types of forces are exercised on different types of gatekeepers. However, both White's and McNelly's theories were criticized by Bass (1969). He noted that White's study on newspaper editors was inappropriate because the editor "is not the key decision maker" (p. 71). In addition,

Bass argued that researchers should pay more attention to the "news gatherers" (reporters and line editors) than the "news processors" (editors and translators) because stories will never reach the final process without the reporters. Thus, Bass criticized McNelly because he did not distinguish between the different roles of newsmen, and because McNelly's model included readers "as just another communicator" (p. 72). Another criticism of White's study came from Brown (1979), who highlighted a weakness in the methodology. White's methodology assumed that the wire editor was the one who creates the boundary, without focusing on the external pressures on gatekeepers. Brown found that White failed to consider a key point raised by Lewin's gatekeeping theory. In his study, Lewin clearly stated that a gatekeeper has power that is "interdependent with other channel regions and ranges of impartial rules" (p. 595). Dimmick (1974) was among the key researchers who pointed out the major role of gatekeeping in news organizations. In his "uncertainty" theory, Dimmick mentioned that the main function of the gatekeeper is to reduce ambiguity about what news is and to reduce any conflict among decision-makers.

Other factors influence the decisions of the gatekeeper regarding which types of information should be rejected or approved, such as personal judgment, the culture of government-press relations, the internet, and financial issues. The latest research upon gatekeeping theory continues to improve previous models and to consider the role of technology along with the reporter and the news organization. Bennett (2004), for example, argued that news production in most media organizations has shifted from hard to soft news for economic reasons. In his analysis, Bennett noted four news gates, namely, the news organization, its economics, the reporter, and the newsgathering technology. In many media organizations, gatekeeping is inevitable, but it might stifle public debate by controlling the public's knowledge of the actual event and excluding certain voices or interests in favour of the governing parties and the powerful office holders. Although the gatekeeping models have been refined and criticized since White's (1950) study, media gatekeeping has shown that decision making inside the newsroom is influenced by news values, organizational routines, input structure, and common sense. Shoemaker and Reese (1996, p. 65) argued that "professional roles and ethics have a direct effect on mass media content, whereas the effect of personal attitudes, values, and beliefs on mass media content is indirect". However, gatekeeping models have become increasingly complicated, as the internet has opened the door for anyone wanting to publish any stories on any topics without the traditional gatekeeping of the traditional mass media. This will be discussed further in the next chapter. In this thesis, 'gatekeeper' refers to individual journalists, the organization, and the society (socio-political context) that decided to run certain pieces of information and not others in the Omani press during the 2011 protests. The following sections will consider in greater detail the various forces that govern journalists' practices and influence the decisions of the gatekeeper.

2.4 Influences on journalism and media content

Investigative studies about media sociology or the influences on news content began to develop after World War II. According to Shoemaker and Reese (1991), early and modern studies in this area started with White's (1950) view that journalists act as gatekeepers of media content, selecting from every day events those that will become newsworthy. Since then, several studies have focused on the ways in which journalists, media workers, ownerships, organizational structures, and societies as a whole tend to affect media content. Among the prominent studies that combine different theories of influences on mass media content are those by Gans (1979) and Gitlin (1980). They organized content research into five theoretical perspectives and categories. First, media content works as a mirror in reflecting and conveying the social reality to the audience. However, this model was highly criticized because (1) reality is too complex to be described accurately and objectively by any particular source, and (2) it assumes mass media have little or no effect on social change. Second, content is influenced by the personal, political, and professional attitudes of journalists and media workers as a body. The psychological factors and the amount of training the communicators receive might contribute to producing social reality. Third, content is influenced by media routines that include identifying what is to be considered as newsworthy, selecting sources, and organizing information according to its importance in the news stories. Fourth, content is influenced by some external factors, such as social, political, economic, and cultural forces. Fifth, content is influenced by the ideology and interest of the authorities, the government, and those in power within a particular society.

The hierarchal model, as discussed by Shoemaker and Reese (1991), is another useful theoretical framework for studying influences on media content, similar in conception to the levels of analysis explained in Gans (1979) and Gitlin (1980), except for the mirror approach. It includes five levels of influence, arranged from the micro to the macro levels. A micro-level study examines how the journalists' socialization, journalistic routines, and media practices might affect news selection and gathering, while a macro-level study examines how ownership, ideological forces from powerful groups and individuals, and cultural and political determination affect news production as a whole. However, while influences resulting from media practices may have some minor effects on an entire society, influences resulting from outside the media organization may be somewhat broader. Shoemaker and Reese (2013) argued that although these levels function hierarchically, some of these forces that influence media content have more serious ramifications for social change than others. To evaluate the roles of Omani newspapers as watchdogs and agenda setters in producing and disseminating the news during the Omani reforms, this study examines how these two roles reflect the political agenda,

institutional practices, and standard routines characteristic of the Omani media system. To explicitly understand such influences, let us first look at how the organizational routines affect news selection and the final news product.

2.4.1 Influences of media routines

Walter Lippman (1922) recognised that news is influenced by routines when he commented: "Without standardization, without stereotypes, without routine judgement, without a fairly ruthless disregard of subtlety, the editor would soon die of excitement" (p. 123). In order to better understand mass media workers, it is useful to examine those individuals within a large media system or organizational routine that constitutes their immediate environment. Karl Mannheim, a German sociologist, said: "Strictly speaking it is incorrect to say that the single individual thinks. Rather it is more correct to insist that the individual participates in thinking further what others have thought before" (Mannheim 1936,1964, p. 29). Although most attention has been given to the routines of lower-level media workers, like reporters, editors, and writers, higher-level media workers are also bound by the routines of media practice but with greater flexibility. Mastering media routines in processing news helps reporters and journalists as a whole in forming the cohesive and integral rules that constitute professionalism (Tuchman 1977).

The routines of media practice are related to organizational perspectives on the mass media; hence, many news organizations have fostered and encouraged the "routinization" of news to cope with and manage the organizational and environmental constraints (Bantz et al. 1980). This means that the routinization of news work facilitates the control of the work and handles specific kinds of emergencies and the amount of work to be done. However, what are the routines that help the organization itself in processing information? For example, a reporter might operate under constraints, such as a lack of reliable sources, deadlines, and inaccessible geographic locations (Fico 1984). Thus, the role of media organizations is to give their workers clearly specialized and defined strategies and expectations. Some might argue that constraints influence content. Yet, routines help explain how that content is shaped in response to those limits. However, sociologists have paid scant attention to how organizations routinize the processing of unexpected events, like legal cases, disasters and crimes, and how journalists give accounts and explanations of these exceptional and newsworthy events. As Hughes (1940) noted, "quickening urgency" is the "essence of news" (p. 58). Media organizations cannot cope with the unpredictable and unlimited number of occurrences on a daily basis without a system. These occurrences must be recognized as newsworthy events and be clearly classified as hard or soft news. The term 'gatekeeper' suggests the notion of physical limits, which means decisions must be made within the organizations to narrow down the number of

stories from among many messages and fit them into the limited space available. Additionally, bureaucratic routines help ensure a steady supply of information. For instance, as they cannot have a presence everywhere, news organizations establish beats for reporters or bureaus at locations that are more likely to generate news events. Time may also be considered a physical constraint; in some cases, deadlines force journalists to stop seeking and gathering information, so to avoid this, news workers must adjust their schedule accordingly. Tuchman (1977) noted that along with geographic and institutional gaps, deadlines perhaps lead to temporal gaps in the news net. For example, occurrences happening outside the journalists' news day have less opportunity of being covered. Hirsch (1977) argued that although the mass media may have different routines, they share many organizational similarities when it comes to organizational constraints, such as time and space limitations, and delivering the most acceptable products or news to the consumers in an efficient manner.

Høyer (2005) identified five routines that constitute the news paradigm: the event, news values, interviewing, the inverted pyramid, and objectivity. Discussion about why certain events are covered and others are ignored illustrates the fact that journalists' work is bound by routines. Predictable and newsworthy events get more opportunities to be covered: "The process of gathering, selecting and presenting news is mostly based on unnoticed and undisputed conventions and professional routines" (Broersma 2007, p. 1). Sociologists such as Tuchman (1977) have even suggested that routines make news by allowing daily incidents or events to be recognized and reconstituted. However, despite routines being important to facilitate the production of symbolic content, they affect the social reality portrayed by the media. As Altheide (1976) said, "The organizational, practical, and other mundane features of news work promote a way of looking at events which fundamentally distorts them" (p. 24). News values help explain why some occurrences are identified as events, and interviews give journalists a more autonomous position in society. Meanwhile, the inverted pyramid structure gives reporters more power and flexibility to emphasise certain pieces of information over others by placing the most important information at the beginning of the story. Drawing on Høyer's (2005) argument, the next sections, therefore, will examine the routines that constitute the news paradigm, namely, news values, news framing, and news sources.

2.4.1.1 News values

To better understand what constitutes newsworthiness and how the news organizations customize news augmentation to predict what an audience will find appealing, it is necessary to look at news judgement based on news values. Harrison (2006) claimed that news is guided through an understanding of news values. He described news as that

which "is judged to be newsworthy by journalists, who exercise their news sense within the constraints of the news organisations within which they operate" (p. 13). The long-standing professionalism of news values has led media workers to associate the construct of news with that of newsworthiness and to direct gatekeepers in their news selection. Therefore, the concept of news values can help in understanding why some occurrences are identified as "events" and how those 'events' are selected to become 'news'. News values also help in exploring why certain 'events' will be emphasised while others will be excluded. Randall (2000, p. 23) defined news as something "fresh, unpublished, unusual and generally interesting". Whilst such sets of news values may be "predictive of a pattern" of which events will make the news and which will not, they cannot provide a complete explanation of all the irregularities of news composition (McQuail 2000, p. 343). Furthermore, as Hartley pointed out, identifying the news values within a story may tell us more about how that story has been covered than about why it was selected for coverage in the first place (Hartley 1982). The study of news values is considered one of the most important areas in journalism studies, as it provides transparent judgements for practising journalism; as Hall (1973) argued:

> News values are one of the most opaque structures of meaning in modern society […] Journalists speak of 'the news' as if events select themselves. Further, they speak as if which is the 'most significant' news story, and which 'news angles' are most salient are divinely inspired. Yet of the millions of events which occur daily in the world, only a tiny proportion ever become visible as 'potential news stories': and of this proportion, only a small fraction are actually produced as the day's news in the news media. We appear to be dealing, then, with a 'deep structure' whose function as a selective device is un-transparent even to those who professionally most know how to operate it. (p. 181)

Over the years, many media practitioners have become adept at predicting news values, and they guide what people will find interesting and will want to know about. Lee et al. (2005) suggested that there are six 'news factors' affecting the selection and rejection process, namely, 1) prominence and importance, 2) human interest, 3) conflict and controversy, 4) the unusual, 5) timeliness, and 6) proximity. In their book *The Manufacture of News*, Cohen and Young (1981) added that events are more likely to be news if they meet any of the following criteria: accuracy, unambiguity, continuity, composition, and consonance, and being bizarre or out-of-the-ordinary. Although news values have become predictable over the years, differences in news values are more apparent when comparing the work of journalists in developed and in developing countries. Abdu Al-Jawad (2005) argued that defining news values in contemporary societies has become even more complicated due to the inherent ideological meaning of media systems and the variations in the social, political, and cultural values around the world. According to Abu Zeid (1992), news values are a set of values, ideologies, and mentalities. Each news organization acts

on behalf of these ideological values, and these values therefore prevent them from monitoring or publishing events or news items that do not reflect their own values. In third world countries, including the Middle East, the media emphasise those values that discuss the issues of national solidarity, social responsibility, education, sustainable development, and proximity (Al-Kindi 1995; Al-Hasani 1999; Robie 2013; Al-Mishaiki 2015). For instance, in Arab countries, the media highlight positive news, like the establishment of projects and factories, vaccination campaigns against epidemics, literacy campaigns, and the activities of the leaders of these countries while withholding news of violence, crime, corruption, and scandals. O'Neill and Harcup (2009) also claimed that along with the professional codes of conduct and ownership, funding and the domination of foreign media are some other factors that influence the news values and the representation of media content. For example, the Al-Jazeera Arabic news channel, which is headquartered in Qatar, tends to completely distance itself from covering local, social, and political news about Qatar due to the impact of financial support by the Qatar government. Within these circumstances, as Stewart et al. (2001) argued, "The media do not present reality - they represent it by offering a selection of reality" (p. 35). Therefore, this thesis is going to examine how Omani news organizations acted on behalf of a set of ideological values that prevented them from covering some stories during the 2011 Omani reforms. Discussion of news production processes and routines raise important concerns about the media's representation of reality. To explain further, news framing will be the focus of the next section.

2.4.1.2 News framing

The potential of the framing concept lies in the focus on media content and the media representation of public opinion, notably how issues are constructed, discourse structured, and meanings developed. As the notion of framing has gained momentum, it has attracted scholarly attention. Gitlin (1980) emphasised the power of media routines in the process of selection, inclusion, or exclusion of information. He defined frames as "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion by which symbol- handlers routinely organize discourse" (p. 7). Modigliani (1989) described frames as "interpretive packages" that provide a way to understand an event or issue. The essence of this package is "a central organizing idea, or frame, for making sense of relevant events, suggesting what is at issue" (Gamson and Modigliani 1989, p. 3). Similarly, Tankard et al. (1991) defined media frames as "the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration" (p. 3). One of the most commonly cited definitions of media framing was outlined by Robert Entman (1993, p. 52), who focused on issues such as selection and salience: "To frame is to select some

aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and / or treatment recommendation for the item described". Thus, frames are definite characteristics of news texts that journalists use to construct a news discourse.

Frames can be considered as a powerful tool for making certain aspects of a phenomenon salient or marginalized. However, which components in a news story constitute a frame? Many scholars identify 'framing devices' or specific textual and visual elements for measuring news frames. According to Shah et al. (2002), the selected information, language, and quotations are the main components in a news story that constitute a frame. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) suggested that media workers routinely rely on five 'framing devices' when reporting an issue or event: 1) metaphors, (2) exemplars, (3) catchphrases, (4) depictions, and (5) visual images. Additionally, Entman (1993, p. 52) suggested that frames in the news can be examined by "the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments". More broadly, James and Tankard (2001) listed eleven framing mechanisms for identifying news frames, which are headlines, subheads, photographs, photo captions, leads, selection of sources, selection of quotes, pull quotes, logos, charts and graphs, and concluding statements or paragraphs of articles. Pan and Kosirki (1993) identified several framing devices that construct and convey the preferred meaning of the newsmaker, namely, syntactical, thematic, and rhetorical structures. Syntactical structure refers to a sequential organization of structural elements (e.g., headline, lead, background, and conclusion), as well as strategies such as quoting official sources and marginalizing certain points of view. Thematic structure consists of the main body and summary. It refers to the central organization of ideas that connect various subthemes to support the core theme/ issue of a news story. It is also apparent in elements such as background information or quotations. Rhetorical structure reflects the choices made by journalists to increase the salience of a news story, like the choice of sources and visual images. Many researchers (e.g., McCombs 2004; Cushion 2007) have investigated how media organizations have influenced the presentation of news topics through the concentration, domination, and selection of news sources (more about source patterns will be discussed later in this chapter). Critical to an understanding of the trajectory of this thesis is exploring how news routines attempt to create a paradigm for the treatment of political protests, and subsequently either legitimise or delegitimise protesters' goals within news coverage.

2.4.1.2.1 Protest paradigm

The concept of framing and the characteristics of protest coverage in mainstream news have produced a pattern of coverage known as the 'protest paradigm' (Chan and Lee 1984; McLeod and Hertog 1999). A large body of research indicates that this pattern of coverage creates structural biases that support the ideological view and disparage the radical social groups that challenge it (Gitlin 1980; Shoemaker 1984; McLeod and Hertog 1999; Spyridou 2015). Given that protests signify an impetus for progressive social change, it is thus useful to understand what characteristics are found in the coverage of protest movements and how journalistic processes might prevent their influence. More precisely, "Do the media always, invariably and necessarily impose 'definitions of the situation' on protests and dissent which de-legitimize the protesters' aims and coincide with dominant interests?" (Cottle 2008, p. 856). Frequently, when covering protests, the media tend to resort to the 'protest paradigm' to produce protest stories (e.g., Gitlin 1980; McLeod 2007). As an analytical framework, the protest paradigm proposes three main ideas: First, the media tend to emphasise vandalism, violence, and deviant behaviours (Gitlin 1980; McLeod and Hertog 1999; McLeod 2007). Gitlin (1980) argued that when covering protests, the media "increasingly trivialized, marginalized and disparaged the protesters and their aims, and emphasized the violence of demonstrations" (p. 27). Second, the media tend to obscure the protest's demands, claims, and concerns to underestimate its importance (Weaver and Scacco 2013). Third, the media tend to normalise and downsize the essence of protest activities while legitimising elite discourses and supporting hegemonic and dominant ideas (Oliver and Maney 2000; Spyridou 2015). In her analysis to examine the news treatment of the student movement during the protests of the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention, Brasted (2005) found that the Chicago Tribune and the New York Times developed a more negative narrative and framed the protestors as irresponsible and "invaders who were disrupting the social order" (p. 22). Both newspapers offered support for the status quo and relied on official sources to construct protest stories, thereby "telling the story from those sources' perspectives" (ibid., p. 6). The dependence on elite voices, according to Brasted, provides "an illusion of balanced and unbiased coverage when an inherent status quo bias actually exists" (ibid. p. 384). Additionally, Wiggins (2013) examined the U.S. news media coverage of the events of September 11, 2001, and he found that Fox News Channel created a model based on biased coverage by adapting "an overt tone of patriotism to the exclusion of contrary viewpoints" (p. 8) in order to support the U.S. government against terror. These practices, among others, attempt to avoid serious critical analysis and support political views. Similarly, in their study examining the press coverage of pro- and anti-war demonstrations before and during the 2003 U.S.-led Iraq war, Luther and Miller (2005) found that conflict was a more prevalent descriptor of the anti-war groups. The study also

demonstrated that news coverage was in favour of elite positions and ignored and downplayed the voices that contradicted the dominant political views.

More recently, in their analysis of the media coverage of Egypt's July 3, 2013, mass protests and military coup, Elmasry et al. (2016) suggested that the privately owned Egyptian news media supported the Egyptian military, while the state-owned media provided passionate support for the brotherhood government. During the period of political tension that preceded the coup, Elmasry et al. found that CBC Network and Al-Nahar Network (Egypt's privately owned television networks) employed a variety of framing devices to explicitly demonize, delegitimate, and criminalize the Muslim Brotherhood and their supporters. They were portrayed as small groups of violent terrorists, disloyal to Egypt. On the contrary, both media adopted a pro-military and anti-Brotherhood tone. They represented the anti-Morsi and anti-Muslim Brotherhood protests as massive and peaceful. Additionally, they relied on sources representing a singular political perspective and avoided any sympathetic voice to either the Morsi administration and the Brotherhood.

Scholarly contributions on the protest paradigm focused on two main approaches, namely, 'selection bias' and 'content bias'. The first approach, under the label 'selection bias', examines the factors that lead to greater media coverage of protests. Empirical research has found that the aggressiveness of police and protestors, the presence of a counter-demonstration, and the size of the protest trigger and increase media coverage (see Oliver and Maney 2000; Jennings and Saunders 2014). Researchers from Loughborough University determined that the initial weeks of the Arab Spring were largely ignored and not deemed noteworthy enough to warrant any appearance on broadcast BBC news programmes (Loughborough University 2012). However, when the protests escalated, the BBC journalists became aware of the significance of the uprisings and so were frequently involved in the reporting (ibid.). Examining the linkage between the nature of a protest and media coverage shows that journalists ignore protests unless the protesters employ radical tactics (Demers and Viswanath 1999; Armstrong 2006). The selection bias is clearly explained by McLeod and Detenber (1999), who argued that when protests escalate, the media tend to focus on "the protestors' appearances rather than their issues, to emphasize violence rather than social criticism, to focus on conflict with the police rather than their chosen targets, and to downplay their effectiveness" (p. 3). Many works in the literature show that when protest groups use such extremist tactics, the media tend to produce negative coverage, which marginalizes those groups (Gitlin 1980; Shoemaker 1984; Boykoff 2006) and focuses on their clashes with police rather than on their legitimate rights and issues (McLeod 1999). In line with the framing of the research, this thesis is going to pay attention to the specific topics chosen by the Omani newspapers,

and to examine the headlines and the quoted sources during the 2011 protests. This analysis can allow for the identification of specific frames to see how issues and groups/ individuals are promoted or disadvantaged in the media coverage (Shugart 2011).

Under the label 'content bias', the second approach looks at the broad system of news production and the factors that influenced the news coverage (Reese 2001; Hanitzsch et al. 2011). Protest news coverage is influenced by a variety of factors ranging from the bias of individual journalists, to organization routines, and to the political and cultural context in which media operate (Gans 1979; Shoemaker and Reese 1996) to serve particular groups and mainstream views (McCurdy 2012). As Rupar (2010) put it:

> Events and facts do not have 'intrinsic importance' but become important because they are selected by journalists who adhere to a culturally and ideologically determined set of selection criteria. After this first selection, social reality is transformed once again to fit into media formats that give it shape. (p. 16)

To elucidate, the economic and political interests of the news organisations lead journalists to rely on certain routines to guide their reporting and thus adapt an appropriate tone and attitude towards a certain story (Gitlin 1980, p. 4). In his analysis of Vietnam War protests, Gitlin found that the representation of political opposition within news media followed a rather static paradigm which tended to reinforce official voices and favour a certain form of reality over others. By doing so, the media seek to "process political opposition, to control its image and to diffuse it at the same time, to absorb what can be absorbed into the dominant structure of definitions and images and to push the rest to the margins of social life" (Gitlin 1980, p. 5). The media coverage showed the movement in an unfavourable light by delegitimating protesters, trivializing their goals, and ignoring opposition voices (ibid.). What is more, when examining the coverage of protests, McCluskey et al. (2009) found that in low-pluralism societies, the media generated more negative coverage compared to in pluralistic societies. Some media researchers have found that when journalists view the protestors' tactics as more extreme and posing serious threats to the status quo, they employ more negative and marginalisation narratives about the protesters and their actions (Shoemaker 1984; McLeod and Hertog 1999; Boyle et al. 2012; Lee 2014). Additionally, Lee (2014) and Spyridou (2015) explained how professional constraints affect the coverage of protests. They argued that the political orientation of the news organisation affects the representation of protests. For example, in his study of analysing newspaper coverage of protests in Hong Kong, Lee found that the protest paradigm is more likely to emerge in politically conservative newspapers, particularly when the protest addressed political topics. Also, in his study examining the representations of protests by the Cypriot mainstream media, Spyridou found that the right-wing (Simerini) and centrist-conservative

(Phileleftheros) newspapers adhered more closely to the protest paradigm by "employing stereotyped representations based on instances of (potential) deviant behaviour and weird incidents" (p. 75). Understanding of how the media frame a particular issue/ event cannot be attained without examining the context in which journalists operate, thus providing the key to evaluate their roles. Therefore, this research will look into the "factors that influence the structural qualities of news frames" (De Vreese 2005, p. 52, see also Gan 1979; Shoemaker and Reese 1996). Following the examination of news values and framing in influencing the final news product, the next section focuses on the interchange between journalists and news sources.

2.4.1.3 Source-journalist interaction

2.4.1.3.1 The domination of elite sources

The sociology of news has long focused on the interaction between journalists and sources. Early work focused on the organizational routines in which journalists acted as gatekeepers by controlling which types of news sources were to be included in or excluded from a news discourse (White 1950; Sigal 1973, 1986; Shoemaker and Reese 1996) or the roles of these sources in constructing the media narratives. An essential piece of scholarship relevant to understanding sources and sourcing patterns is Sigal's (1973) study. Based on content analyses of the New York Times and the Washington Post across a 20-year period, Sigal found overwhelming support for the dependence on official sources and routine channels. The competition to get the news first and so obtain discourses on an exclusive basis leads journalists to seek out commentary from elite and accredited sources that are available and suitable. In a similar vein, Gans (1979) and Gandy (1982) suggested that a reliance on routines compels journalists to seek out these sources repeatedly. According to Gandy (1982), journalists "favour bureaucratic sources who can provide a regular, credible and ultimately usable flow of information, insight and imagery with which to construct the news" (p. 13). What this then means is that instead of public interest 'watchdogs', journalists act as 'lapdogs', or 'guard dogs' (Donohue, Tichenor and Olien 1995) of the interests of the elite. Yet, the inclusion and domination of official sources in news texts does not just "reaffirm the unequal distribution of knowledge within a society by promoting some sources as authoritative while ignoring other voices" (Carlson and Franklin 2011, p. 6) but also shapes media narratives in a way that is in line with the political agenda (Hall et al. 1978).

Another influential study concerning source practices is that by Tuchman (1978), who pointed to the importance of including comment or opinion from sources in news stories, arguing that "quotations of other people's opinions are presented to create a web of mutually self-validating facts" (p. 95), which inevitably helps journalists to interpret context

and professionally validate their news. In his ethnographic study of newsroom culture and practices, Tuchman found that journalists relied on statements from political figures to promote a desired policy outcome while they continually excluded commentary from representatives of social movements. Similarly, Fishman (1988) pointed to what he labelled "bureaucratic affinity" (p. 143), meaning that journalists are more likely to include bureaucratic groups as sources into news discourse while reducing the voice of non-elite sources. In contrast, several studies criticised media routines, including a reliance on those with institutional power, and encouraged the inclusion of diverse voices (McQuail 2006) that contribute to expressing different viewpoints about certain topics.

2.4.1.3.2 The changing environment: prominence of citizen sources

A number of recent studies have indicated that news sourcing routines have been changing in favour of citizen sources. The most significant change is that ordinary citizens are deemed to be higher up the hierarchy of credibility than before, and they are increasingly used as sources in media coverage (De Swert et al. 2008; Kunelius and Renvall 2010, Hendriks Vettehen et al. 2011; De Keyser and Raeymaeckers 2012; Kleemans, Schaap and Hermans 2017). A content analysis of five Flemish newspapers from 2001 to 2011 shows an increasing awareness among journalists in calling for the bottom-up participation of citizens in the news. Similarly, De Keyser and Raeymaeckers (2012) found that ordinary citizens are appearing more prominently in the news than previously. Evidence for this trend has been confirmed in recent literature examining sourcing patterns within media coverage of the 2011 Arab Spring. Hermida et al. (2014) presented a case study on the use of sources by National Public Radio's Andy Carvin on Twitter during the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. Their findings determined that non-elite sources were more prominent in Carvin's coverage than the elite sources who dominated the sourcing practices of other journalists. Similarly, Van Leuven et al. (2015) examined the diversity of sources within Belgian television and newspaper coverage of the 2011 Arab uprisings. They found that journalists valued "ordinary citizens and non-mainstream groups" in their coverage of the Syrian uprising rather than elite sources. In contrast, journalists still valued traditional sourcing practices and "mainly turn to official political sources to introduce the news" (p. 585-586) when covering the street protests in Egypt and Tunisia.

Indeed, having ordinary citizens present in the news defines the media's capability regarding deliberation, participation, and diversification (Gillmor 2006; Reich 2015). Therefore, a substantial amount of research focuses on the extent to which citizen sources in the news contribute to political discussion and present issues that influence people's lives directly, such as protest, unemployment, income inequality, and so on. Most

importantly, when there are contradictory views about such issues, the question that remains is "Whose account prevails?" (Franklin and Carlson 2011, p. 13). As Kleemans, Schaap and Hermans (2017) argued, "It is not only important to be present but also to be present as substantive contributors of expertise, knowledge, or agency" (p. 469). For example, research indicates that although citizens do appear in the news, their participation is mainly shaped by official views (Oliver and Maney 2000) in defining "the way things really are" (Becker 1967, p. 241) while Turk (1986) argued that the "sources of raw material of information upon which journalists rely may ultimately have as much to do with the media's agendas as the selection process of journalists themselves" (p. 15). Bennett's 'indexing' hypothesis implies that non-official voices (e.g., ordinary people) are included within news stories and editorials when those voices express opinions that are congruent with the political agenda and official policy circles (Bennett 1990). He argued that "the range of social voices in the news is likely to vary widely from one issue area to another" (ibid. p 107). The inclusion and exclusion of the range of voices in news stories occurs not because of censorship but because of professional routines, which tend to include individuals whose voices "fit into the range of debate between decisive institutional power blocs" (ibid. p. 125). Also, in their analysis of 1,425 news stories in Dutch television broadcast between 1990 and 2014, Kleemans, Schaap and Hermans (2017) found that citizen sources became more prominent at the cost of elite sources. However, their study reveals that citizens have scant opportunity to express political opinions and thus influence the news agenda, which indicates that journalists "do not give citizens a voice as genuine active participants in the public debate, but that citizens are mostly used as mere illustrations" (ibid. p. 477). This was also evident in the media coverage of protests. In examining 208 articles within the UK newspaper coverage of young anti-Iraq war protestors, Cushion (2007) found that it was only after the war intensified that young protestors suddenly became more newsworthy within the newspapers' coverage. However, a close examination of the representation of young people's opinions within the newspaper coverage, including news headlines, quotations, and detailed examples, reveals that the newspapers functioned in "sustaining the voices of the political establishment, while issues (young) protestors raised were, in the main, undermined and delegitimized" (2007, p. 433). By doing so, journalists "appear to address the audience with a single voice" (Van Gorp 2006, p. 68) instead of addressing people's grievances and complaints. In contrast, Fitzgerald (2016) revealed that the rise of citizens as a dominant news source within British and US newspapers regarding the 2011 Egyptian Revolution contributed to the favourable and overwhelmingly positive portrayal of the anti-Mubarak opposition protesters. The favourable media representation of the anti-government actors and their dominance as a news source were also featured within the BBC's coverage of the 2011 Arab uprisings, as researchers from Loughborough University suggested that the

reporting legitimized the protests and "constructed a narrative in which 'the people' were pitted against 'brutal dictators'" (Loughborough University 2012, p. 33). Yet, it is necessary to examine the social, cultural, and political values embedded within journalism cultures in order to provide a clear understanding about the influence of journalists' roles and sourcing patterns.

2.4.1.3.3 Unnamed and anonymous sources

Incorporating identifiable sources into news texts asserts the authority and professionalism of the journalist and provides credibility for newsgathering practices (Franklin and Carlson 2010). Indeed, Freedman and Fico (2005) argued that "credentials, such as titles, degrees, awards, and affiliations can add credibility to sources" (p. 258). To be clear, and for the purpose of this thesis, an unnamed source is any unattributable quotation which appears without a name and background information or with only a vague identifier (e.g., a senior Finance Ministry official). The body of research examining the use of anonymous sources looked at two main categories: 1) the credibility of news stories that include unnamed sources (Franklin and Carlson 2010; Vultee 2010), and 2) the frequency of using unnamed sources in reporting (Brown et al. 1987). Brown et al. (1987) examined the use of unnamed personal and organizational sources within 846 front-page news stories in six newspapers in the United States. In their analysis, stories were categorized according to number of references and attributed information, origin of story, conflict/ non-conflict, and main theme. Each source was coded separately according to affiliation, sex, and identification (veiled or unveiled). They found that more than half the sources cited in wire and national stories were anonymous, especially in conflict stories. In addition, several studies regarding the use of anonymous sources in the media coverage suggest that expert and official sources are more likely to be veiled by journalists, as opposed to other news sources (Tuchman 1978; Lawrence 2000).

Despite many researchers criticizing news organizations for granting anonymity to a source so easily (Culbertson and Somerick 1976; Boeyink 1990; Son 2002; Strupp 2005), anonymous sources can play an important role in disclosing information that could not have been exposed by any other means. Blankenburg (1992) argued that anonymity can "enhance diversity and competition of viewpoints in a mass communication system that tends to value authority and 'responsibility'" (p. 11). This description suggests that if news stories contain anonymous sources, they would also include information that would disclose some type of wrongdoing and challenge political discourses (Pincus 2005). While there has long been a rich scholarly debate over the use and representation of elite and non-elite sources, there is a lack of research about how the use of unnamed sources in news reporting led to news content that reinforces or challenges political discourse.

Hatcher's study of news coverage of the build-up of the Iraq War within 22 different newspapers from 11 countries found that the use of unidentified sources was more prevalent in countries that supported the war (e.g., United States, Canada and Great Britain) while the fewest unnamed sources were found in countries opposed to the war (e.g., France and Spain) (Hatcher 2010). Hatcher determined that news items that used more unidentified sources were stories that "serve the perceived whistleblower function in political discourse" (ibid. p. 1) and support the idea of an invasion.

One of the largest studies of the news media's representation of public opinion, which included 4,398 references to citizens'/ public opinion, in the United States and the UK in different broadcast news programmes was conducted by Lewis, Inthorn, and Wahl-Jorgensen (2005). Following their analysis of "every reference to citizenship or public opinion, whether implicit or direct" (ibid. p. 12), Lewis et al. found that citizens have limited opportunities to influence the media agenda. They suggested that "citizens are seen as deliberative, but only in the context of an agenda set by politicians. Public opinion is thereby seen as flowing from the top down rather than from the bottom up" (p. 45). When covering politics and public affairs, journalists contributed to the production of politically passive and disengaged citizens. Lewis et al. (2005) commented that at a time of crisis, "News media do not necessarily break with patterns they follow at 'normal' times" (p. 113), suggesting that the use of citizen voices tends to reinforce the dominant message of the political elite. This thesis, therefore, will examine the use of citizens and anonymous sources within the news reporting of 2011 Omani protests from the perspective of Bennett's concept of media indexing (1990). The next section shifts its focus to provide more details about the influences on news content outside of media organizations.

2.4.2 Influences on content from outside of media organizations

Media critics have looked beyond the internal influences of the media to question media representation and to understand the context in which media content is produced and constructed. In doing this, they have studied the implications of the political, economic, and cultural influences on media representation. For example, Bourdieu argued that communication is not merely about exchanging ideas or opinions; it is mainly about the exercise of symbolic power. Thus, this thesis stresses, as Rupar (2010) noted, "the importance of analysing texts in their social context rather than in purely linguistic terms" (p. 18). The relationship between the media and meaning making is referred to by Carah and Louw (2015) as a 'conspiracy theory' in which power elites control or manipulate media content to serve their own interests. It depicts how ideas are produced and circulated by powerful groups or individuals:

> Representations are social productions: their meaning depends on who creates and circulates them, the cultural schema within which that circulation takes place, and who receives them. Representation takes place within the context of power relations. Some people have more power to shape not only particular meanings, but also the contexts within which meanings are produced, distributed and received. (ibid. p. 7)

Ideology, according to Croteau and Hoynes (2013), is understood as "a system of meaning that helps define and explain the world and that makes value judgments about that world" (pp. 159, 160). In discussing the linkage between media product and ideology, they argued that "mass media texts can be understood in ideological terms, as forms of communication that privilege certain sets of ideas and neglect or undermine others" (p. 161). The analysis of ideology dates back to 20th century European Marxism. For early Marxists, the discussion of ideology was associated with the concept of 'false consciousness' where the ruling elite enforce their ideas to serve their interests (McCarney 2005). It is argued that influences on content from powerful ideologies within a particular society might explain the ways a specific event or issue is represented in the media.

The relationship between the media and society is mostly characterized by its political and social-cultural dimensions, which Schudson (1989) identified as 'the cultural approach'. He pointed out how certain values, traditions, and a way of life within a given culture influence the news production. Many studies depended on this approach to analyse journalistic works (see Zhu et al. 1997). A centre of ideological influences can be referred to as "culture wars", as Hunter (1992) called them in contemporary American society. Hunter emphasised how discussion about issues of morality, like sex, abortion, race, etc. are being rejected or fought in the mass media. The media, it is argued, operate to promote cultural conservatives and cultural progressives rather than carrying competing messages.

Furthermore, ideology is associated with economic influence. Many mass media researchers have directed their attention to the empirical analysis of media ownership and control and to how media market forces operate (see Golding and Murdock 1977; Ferguson 1990). For example, political-economic theory focuses primarily on the influence of the economic structure on the dynamic of media industries and the ideological content of the media. Many scholars have claimed that media owners have ultimate power over media content to include or exclude what they want; according to Altschul (1984), "The contents of the media always reflect the interests of those who finance them" (McQuail 1994, p. 162). This influence of media ownership can be achieved by setting broad lines of strategy, which are likely to intervene in the journalists' daily practice. The theory addresses how the economic dimension affects journalists' work and media routines and how advertisers and political groups regulate media content. Some researchers believe that highly concentrated

ownership might lead to an increase in sensationalized reporting, and consequently, it lacks important informational content, which therefore prevents diversity in news coverage (Rupar 2010). However, Djankov et al. (2001) pointed to the fact that privately owned media have a stronger independent voice than that of the government-owned media, especially in political discussions; the media's dependence on the government for subsidy and more general policy support is considered a powerful filter that will affect news choices.

Discussion about the political economic approach in the capitalist Western countries usually address the influence of economy and political elites, as discussed by Herman and Chomsky (1994). They argued that the media act as a propaganda tool for political elites or those who hold power:

> A propaganda model focuses on this inequality of wealth and power and its multilevel effects on mass-media interests and choices. It traces the routes by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public. (ibid. p. 2)

Herman and Chomsky identified five main 'ingredients' or a set of 'news filters' in the propaganda model, which are:

> (1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms; (2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; (3) the reliance of the media on information provided by the government, business, and 'experts' funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; (4) 'flak' as a means of disciplining the media; and (5) 'anticommunism' as a national religion and control mechanism. These elements interact with and reinforce one another. The raw material of news must pass through successive filters, leaving only the cleansed residue fit to print. They fix the premises of discourse and interpretation, and the definition of what is newsworthy in the first place, and they explain the basis and operations of what amount to propaganda campaigns. (ibid. p .2)

Along with the economic influence, the political economy approach identifies the politician elites' influence on the news organization. The influence of politics on the media is extremely complex (Downing et al. 2004) due to the expansion of media conglomerates, privatizations, and the shrinking of the public sector (Merrill and Nerone 2002). The government and the state can influence media work by imposing more constraints and restricting opportunities for obtaining information from officials (Epstein 1975). Journalists depend on politicians as key sources for political news stories, while at the same time, politicians need the mass media to spread their ideas and policies. McChesney (1989) described the relationship between politicians and news workers as follows:

> the media rely heavily upon news provided to them by corporate and government sources, which have themselves developed enormous

bureaucracies to provide this material to the media. They have developed great expertise at 'managing' the media. In effect, these bureaucracies subsidise the media and the media must be careful not to antagonise such an important supplier. Furthermore, these corporate and government sources are instantly credible by accepted journalistic practices. Anti-elite sources, on the other hand, are regarded with utmost suspicion and have tremendous difficulty passing successfully through this filter. (p. 36)

The relevance of political economy theory, as mentioned in McQuail (1994), has been increased by several prominent trends in technology and media business due to convergence, the global growth of media concentration, and the decline in the public sector of mass media under the banner of deregulation and privatization, especially in Western Europe. However, this thesis is going to exclude the economic influence on media content for two main reasons: 1) unlike capitalist societies, where media content is mostly influenced by the economy and indirectly by politics, as mentioned in Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model (1994), the media in Oman and most Arab countries have more political orientations than economic ones; and 2) the influence of advertising in developing countries, including Oman, is less than that in developed capitalist countries (Abu-Osba 1999). Therefore, in order to examine the roles of professional journalists when reporting the 2011 Omani protests, it is important to look at the relationship between the media and the socio- and political system in which they are embedded. According to Siebert et al. (1956), as stated in their book *Four Theories of the Press*, "The press takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates" (pp. 1-2). This analysis is useful, as it helps explain the forces that shape media content as well as the messages that constitute the symbolic environment inside and outside media organisations. However, due to the increase in influences on media content, the role of the press in shaping the public sphere has become an issue. Hence, the last part of this chapter aims to give a brief overview about how the press might hinder or stimulate particular messages to serve a specific hegemonic or ideological group.

2.5 A critical reflection of the public sphere

For Habermas, the idea of the public sphere is a space where citizens would come together to engage in critical public debates and discuss alternative viewpoints about their common affairs (Habermas 1989). The public sphere would thus require a medium that could be accessed by all citizens in order to facilitate communication and exchange information. Habermas thereby emphasized that the public sphere should be free and independent from constraints such as economic and political power: "Laws of the market [...] [are] suspended as were laws of the state" (Habermas 1991, p. 36). Europe in the 18th century witnessed an expansion of the public sphere due to the development of new spaces for social and intellectual interaction, like newspapers, reading clubs, and

coffeehouses in metropolitan society (Norris 2010). Dahlgren and Sparks (1993) argued that "in its ambitious guise, however, as it was developed by Habermas, the public sphere should be understood as an analytic category, a conceptual device which, pointing to a specific social phenomenon can also aid us in analysing and researching the phenomenon" (p. 2). Noelle-Neumann recognized the power of public opinion, mainly after her study about the spiral of silence theory, in which the increasing fear of isolation and punishment from elite or hegemonic individuals leads people to conceal their views. She defined public opinion as "attitudes one can express without running the danger of isolating oneself" (Neumann 1993, p. 178), and she pointed to the fact that there are individuals who will never be silenced: "The chance to change or mold public opinion is reserved to those who are not afraid of being isolated. By saying and doing the unpopular, by shocking, they ... can carry their ideas to supremacy" (ibid. p. 379).

Although Habermas's concept of the public sphere has been widely influential, it has been criticized by many social and political theorists (Garnham 1990; Dahlgren 1991; Fraser 1993). First, Habermas (1997) himself admitted that some of his arguments needed revision; for example, his "diagnosis of a unilinear development from a politically active public to one withdrawn into a bad privacy, from a 'culture-debating to a culture-consuming public' is too simplistic" (p. 438). Secondly, Fraser (2007) argued that although Habermas pointed to the exclusionary nature of the bourgeois public sphere in terms of class, he neglected the issue of gender and excluded women and other marginalized groups from the public sphere (see also Fraser 1992). Thirdly, Habermas remained silent on alternative and oppositional public spheres; Dahlgren argued that "under both the periods of liberal and advanced capitalism there have existed other fora which have shaped people's political consciousness, served as networks for exchange of information, rumour and gossip, and also provided settings for cultural expression" (p. 6). Fourthly, Habermas's Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1989) lacked references to the "complexities and contradictions of meaning production" as well as "to the concrete social settings and cultural resources at work" (Dahlgren 1991, p. 6). Finally, Garnham (1990) argued that Habermas conceived the public sphere on an individualistic basis, based on "an assumption, which seems to me wholly unrealistic, that all participants possess complete information and engage in all debates," (ibid. p. 44). Consequently, this means that there is no space left for expert knowledge and decision makers in dealing with the political and societal problems, and "thus it becomes difficult to handle the problem of the role of those who in fact manage the conduct of the information-gathering and debate which is the Public Sphere's raison d'étre, namely, in particular, journalists and politicians themselves. It is a further result of this weakness that the theory has no place for what I regard as an essential and central organizing institution within the Public Sphere, the political party" (ibid., p. 45). Butsch (2007) argued that some kind of state

regulation is necessary to ensure a healthy public sphere to avoid the domination of one individual's or group's interest over others. However, despite all the criticisms underlying Habermas's account of the transformation of the public sphere, many of his ideas remain significant, mainly the need for common spaces to facilitate public debates about their concerns and issues of common interest.

2.5.1 Distrust of representation: Public sphere and the media

The role of the media in shaping and democratizing the public sphere has become a point of debate for many researchers due to the increasing forces influencing media content (see Curran 1991; Carpignano et al. 1993; Neumann 1993; Habermas 2006). The concept of the public sphere, in fact, can be used in many areas, like the social movements, theatre, cinema, news media, and citizen journalism. Yet, Habermas was pessimistic about the role of the public sphere in the 19th and early 20th centuries due to the growth of technological-organizational co-ordination in the media and the domination of both the private sector and political parties over public affairs (Dahlgren 1991). Habermas contended that public opinion is no longer the outcome of rational-critical debate but the result of economic concentration and the media. In the discussion about politics, mass media, and public sphere, Carpignano et al. (1990) argued that:

> There is a common ground, a mutual acceptance of basic premises, shared by participating politicians, conservative ideologues, and leftist cultural critics. Its unquestionable truism is that the mass media today are the public sphere and that this is the reason for the degradation of public life if not its disappearance. (p. 33)

Curran (1991) discussed the role of media in informing and facilitating the public debates, stating that "the media are thus the principal institutions of the public sphere or, in the rhetoric of nineteenth-century liberalism, 'the fourth estate of the realm'" (p. 29).

However, unlike the role of print media in the late 18th century in enabling the public sphere, it is argued that the mass media today threaten both the public sphere and democracy. As cited in Ubayasiri (2006), California University researcher Mark Poster argued that the mass media have weakened the role of public sphere for political debates:

> Contemporary social relations seem to be devoid of a basic level of interactive practice which, in the past, was the matrix of democratizing politics: loci such as the agora, the New England town hall, the village Church, the coffee house, the tavern, the public square, a convenient barn, a union hall, a park, a factory lunchroom, and even a street corner. Many of these places remain but no longer serve as organizing centres for political discussion and action. It appears that the media, especially television but also other forms of electronic communication isolate citizens from one another and substitute themselves for older spaces of politics. (p. 7)

The traditional liberal political theory, which is rooted in the 18th century, defines three functions for media in a democracy, which are acting as a watchdog, an agency of information and debate, and the public's voice to the state (Curran in Curran & Gurevitch 2000, pp. 121, 127, 129). However, as media representation displaces the active participation of citizens in the public sphere, the role of the media in civil society becomes an issue. Noelle-Neumann believed that the media are the central force that accelerates the spiral of silence, especially in democratic decision making. She argued: "I have never found a spiral of silence that goes against the tenor of the media, for then willingness to speak out depends in part upon sensing that there is support and legitimation from the media" (Neumann 1993, p. 375).

In his keynote address to the media researchers at the ICA conference in 2006, Habermas questioned the potentiality of the public sphere in creating an epistemic dimension to political decision-making. His main concern was about the domination of non-deliberative communication over political communication in the public sphere, and he argued that "there is a lack of an egalitarian face-to-face interaction and reciprocity between speakers and addressees in a shared practice of collective decision-making" (Rasmussen 2007, p. 1). In addition, he pointed to the role of the power of the self-regulated system of the mass media in selecting and shaping information, and he discussed the political power role in influencing the news agendas in the mainstream media, claiming that today, the state and private corporations have become the major threats for promoting a healthy public sphere. Capitalism and media monopoly have turned the political public sphere into a commodity by serving the interests of private organisations over those of the people. Alternatively, the state-owned and operated media tend to represent the public sphere in a way that benefits the state's strategies and policies rather than the people. The question that arises from these conditions is how the mass media can represent and reflect the public sphere when they are also powerfully pulled to serve commercial interests and the state.

2.6 Summary

The aim of this chapter was to discuss the roles of the mass media that most closely match the idea of democratic governance and contribute to creating a deliberative public sphere. It is argued that the mass media should operate, at a minimum, as watchdogs, agenda setters, and gatekeepers, according to Norris and Odugbemi (2010). Indeed, the media should function in a way to maximize opportunities for highlighting social and political problems, for providing balanced and inclusive coverage among a pluralistic range of opinions, and for shaping the importance of topics in the public sphere. In general, this thesis aims to examine the journalists' roles as watchdogs and agenda

setters to evaluate their performance during the 2011 protests, mainly regarding the process of hindering or stimulating dialogue and debates among Omani citizens to address social problems. What has been determined through this chapter's discussion of news routines is how news values, framing, and news sources influence the final news product. Within the context of political protests, for example, the media tend to legitimise elite discourses (Oliver and Maney 2000; Spyridou 2015) and resort to the 'protest paradigm' to produce protest stories (e.g., Gitlin 1980; McLeod 2007).

This chapter also suggested the need to look at the relationship between the media and the socio-cultural and political system in which they are embedded. The media are accused of weakening the public sphere, as they are functioning to serve the state's or power holders' interests rather than to produce meanings that represent how things really are. However, as media representation displaces the active participation of citizens in the public sphere, the role of the media in civil society becomes an issue. In recent times, the area of social media, like Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and YouTube, has become a contested terrain, a new platform for class struggle and pro-democracy movements. As was witnessed in the outbreak of revolution in the Arab world, user-generated content (UCG) has created a new form of public sphere to facilitate debates on common concerns and confront the sources of power. The next chapter will discuss the role of the internet in revitalizing the public sphere.

Chapter Three

Citizen journalism in the digital era

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to examine the effects of the internet and new media activists on the public sphere and on the phenomenon of "redefining what counts as 'mainstream' in a post-mass media age" (Lievrouw 2011, p. 15). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the role of the media in shaping the public sphere and civil society has become an issue, as it functions to serve commercial interests and the state, which has led to increasing disregard of the citizens' voice. The rise of the internet and its related communication tools, ranging from websites and chat-rooms to Facebook and Twitter, facilitates the almost universal availability of unfiltered and unrestricted factual and political information (Cammaerts et al. 2013). This chapter will discuss how audience frustration with the mass media's lack of response, alleged bias, and distortion or misrepresentation in their coverage empowers the role of citizen journalism in many civil societies. This chapter emphasizes how audience participation helps in raising awareness of and addressing social problems and thus surpasses the mainstream media's role as 1) a watchdog, witnessing events that have been missed by journalists; 2) an agenda setter, calling attention to social problems; and 3) a gatekeeper, dealing with the way in which citizen journalism has challenged the idea that journalists (or anyone else) can or should limit what passes through it. Each role is vital to the quality of democratic deliberation in the public sphere.

To exemplify or substantiate these expectations, this chapter will focus on the Arab Spring to illustrate how the urgent need for social change empowered the role of citizen journalism. In the wake of 2011, the world experienced a series of tumultuous events in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries. The state-run media's involvement in the events raised pivotal questions about their role in ignoring and marginalizing the frustrations of Arab populations (Spielhaus 2012), especially at the beginning of the events. This chapter, however, will give an overview of news and information coverage during the Arab uprisings while emphasising the role of citizen journalism as an alternative to traditional media. In this context, debates around the contested role of social media in social and political uprisings will be addressed.

3.2 The internet

For centuries, the print industry was a key means for societies to distribute knowledge and to communicate on a widespread scale. Many scholars and media researchers believe that the advent of Gutenberg's printing press affected the intellectual life of Europe and fostered many developments in Western civilisation. It played a vital role in weakening the power of

the medieval church, bringing about the European renaissance, and triggering the scientific revolution: "The printing of books encouraged the development of scholarly research and the desire to attain knowledge. Moreover, printing facilitated cooperation among scholars and helped produce standardised definitive texts. Printing also stimulated the development of an ever-expanding lay reading public, a development that had an enormous impact on European society" (Spielvogel 2011, p. 358). Similarly, the invention of the rotary press in 1846 by Richard Hoe facilitated the printing of materials on a massive scale at a greater speed and volume (Chapman 2005). However, a new phenomenon evolved in the late 20th century, which has surpassed the rotary press, namely, the widespread use of computers and the enhanced capacity of the internet.

The initial computer development, which was used for military purposes during World War II, led to the creation of the internet as a means of communication and information sharing. Indeed, it is believed that "the invention of the telegraph, telephone, radio, and computer set the stage for unprecedented integration of capabilities" (Leiner et al. 2012, p. 1), that is, the internet. It has become a widespread information infrastructure, as it has revolutionized the field of computing and communication. In 1975, there were only 2,000 internet users, and it was mostly limited to engineers and scientists (Burke 2009). Then, in 1989, English scientist Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web (WWW). He said that he speculated on whether it would be possible to "programme my computer to create a space in which anything could be linked to anything" (Burke 2009, p. 265).

The number of internet users had increased dramatically by the end of 2015; approximately 3.2 billion people were using the Internet and the number of cell phone users exceeded 176 million worldwide (Sanou 2015), with around 52.7% of global internet users accessing the internet via their mobile phone. Internet penetration began to spread across the Arab region in 1990, but only under strict government control. The region was characterised as being at the low end of the digital divide, as it faced many challenges, including "a lack of human and economic information and technology (IT) resources, illiteracy and computer illiteracy, a lack of funds for IT research and development, and a lack of solid telecommunication infrastructure" (Abdulla 2013, p. 35). However, this trend is changing rapidly, and many Arab countries are striving to increase their internet penetration rate. Nonetheless, this chapter is not intended to give a complete history of the internet; instead, it provides the necessary background information to help explain how the internet triggered the development of the public sphere.

3.2.1 The internet and the public sphere

It has been argued that the internet has revitalized the public sphere (Papacharissi 2010). Thus, in order to address the relationship between social media and public opinion, it is important to look at "how the internet has facilitated a phenomenon the philosopher Habermas has defined as "the 'public sphere' - a forum where public opinion is shaped" (Ubayasiri 2006, p. 2). The effects of the internet on the public sphere can be assessed through two main criteria: access to information and reciprocity of communication (Sassi 2000; Papacharissi 2002, 2010). Firstly, it is argued that enabling greater access to information helps in developing informed viewpoints, which would enhance and maximize political participation and civic engagement (Bimber 2001; Kaid 2002). Compared with the mass media, which function as centralized filters of public communication because of the influence of public encounters, the internet seems to offer a differentiated public sphere that embraces a wide range of topics, styles, and participants. It has been argued that the topics in the more recent representational dimension of the public sphere are of a more particular, private and local nature than those in the mass media, despite the global reach of the internet (Becker & Wehner 2001, p. 74). However, it is also the case that global or international issues are constantly discussed in the online public sphere. Also, the span of online language and writing style, like informality and rhetorical styles, surpasses the mass media in facilitating public deliberation. Moreover, the number of online participants is relatively heterogeneous, as it involves a wider category of citizens compared with the mass media (active, passive, educated, uneducated, children, youth etc). Thus, the cyber age has created a more niche-oriented public sphere because of its ethnic and cultural multiplicity and the diverse media-scape (Rasmussen 2007). Because of these three differentiations in the topics debated, styles applied, and members involved, the internet has enabled the diversity of communication as well as the formation of public opinions on a much broader scale. However, some sceptics are more aware about the online access to information to the extent that some have argued that rational and deliberative discussion can be enjoyed only by those who have access to the internet (Pavlik 1994; Sassi 2005).

Secondly, online media enable reciprocity in communication where all parties are involved equally in a conversation and in the exchange of information. Several studies have demonstrated the ability of the internet to create engagement and contribute to critical discussion about important issues (Coleman and Gøtze 2001; Dahlberg 2001). However, in order for online conversations to offer a degree of reciprocity, "They must involve two directional communication, cover topics of common interest, and be motivated by a mutually shared commitment to rational and focused discourse" (Papacharissi 2010, p, 122). These factors help in connecting online participants instead of reproducing fragmented spheres of discussion. Addressing the issue of the fragmentation of the public

sphere, Dahlberg argued that the increasing number of decentralized online dialogues weakens the critical debates: "A cursory examination of the thousands of diverse conversations taking place every day online and open to anyone with Internet access seems to indicate the expansion on a global scale of the loose webs of rational-critical discourse that constitute what is known as the public sphere" (2001, p. 1). In addition, Kraut et al. (1998) added that the characteristics of the online public sphere as abundant, local, and segmented make it hard to examine "how their normative communication may integrate into larger sentiments of public opinion", as cited in Rasmussen (2007, p. 10). Additionally, Habermas (2006) himself downplayed the importance of the internet. In his keynote speech at the International Communication Association (ICA), he pointed out that "the online debates of web users tend instead to lead to the fragmentation of large mass audiences into a huge number of isolated issue publics. The rise of millions of fragmented chat-rooms across the world endangers only political communication within established public spheres, when news groups crystallize around the focal points of print media, e.g., national newspapers and magazines, which are the pillars of national public spheres" (Habermas 2006, p. 9). However, Bruns (2007) criticized Habermas' argument about the insufficiency of online communities. Instead, he argued that there are many discourses about delimited issues all over the web that are independent from the mainstream media. He also commented on the issue of the fragmentation of the public sphere: "To speak of [online audiences] as fragmented and isolated ignores or rejects the reality that especially online, individual publics are multiply connected both implicitly through shared membership and explicitly through a network of hyperlinks connecting postings right across the boundaries of individual fora" (Szabó 2007, pp. 37-38). He underlined the ability of the internet to link different blogs and discussion groups and forums via the use of hyperlinks and other control mechanisms, which function to create a sense of the overloaded information, "an egalitarian decentralization of access does not necessarily fragment debates" (ibid. p. 38). From a modernist perspective, a single public sphere with authority or institutional influence is more desirable (see Garnham 1992; Bohman 2004), while the post-modern tradition rejects this idea, supporting instead the existence and the significance of multiple public spheres and fragmented public opinion, where the old control mechanisms, hierarchies and exclusions of the public sphere are broken up: "What's really important for a group is what that group thinks is really important to it" (McKee 2005, p. 151).

Although the internet creates an intellectual forum and facilitates engagement in rational debate, many studies have shown that the political conversation that takes place online is not valid unless it is characterised by mutual trust and reciprocity (e.g., Uslaner 2004; Kobayashi et al. 2006). Other elements that might weaken the success of online conversations are the fact that online discussion does not necessarily guarantee greater

political impact (Stanley and Weare 2004) and that it connects already existing spheres of contact where online participants tend to connect with people who already know each other offline (Uslaner 2004). Thus, the cyber age has raised considerable arguments about the role of the internet in shaping public deliberation and creating critical public debates, especially in advancing political communication (see Dahlberg 2001, 2004; Papacharissi 2002; Dahlgren 2005, 2009). Also, it has raised questions about fragmented public opinion (Dahlberg 2001), and how individuals with different attitudes engage in debate with each other (McKee 2005). Because of these conditions, many of the scholars who have examined the role of the internet as a public sphere have come to the conclusion that online technologies create a public space, but do not enable the public sphere: "The internet does not constitute a public or virtual sphere; if anything, it presents less of a democracy than several of the public sphere's past incarnations" (Papacharissi 2010, p. 127; see also, Dahlgren 2005). Papacharissi (2010) proposed that along with the commercialization of the online space, access to information and reciprocity are among the factors that prevent the transition from public space to public sphere.

3.3 Social media, interactivity and participation

Social media networks (SMNs) are computer-mediated tools. The emergence of social network sites enabled users to create highly interactive platforms via the internet and mobile technologies. This process began in the 1990s with the launch of sites such as Six Degrees, MoveOn and others (Edosomwan et al. 2011). Then, the beginning of the 2000s saw the introduction of, many social network services (SNSs), such as MySpace and LinkedIn. In 2004, Facebook was introduced, followed by YouTube in 2005 (ibid.). Today, there are more than 30 different SNSs worldwide, though Facebook has remained dominant for several years (GlobalWebIndex 2014). Social media sites provide platforms for so-called user-generated content (UGC), where individuals can actively engage in publishing their own texts, photos, and videos (O'Reilly 2005). Boyd and Ellison (2013) defined a social network site as a "networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user generated content provided by their connections on the site" (p. 158). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) focused on UGC, and they defined social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Sørensen et al. 2014, p. 3).

Unlike traditional methods of mass communication, mass self-communication has expanded individuals' capacity to express their ideas in a wider public context. The communication conventions of online networks, like discussion forums, blogs, YouTube, and hashtags, allow individuals to circulate their views to a network of people who share similar interests. The online users were described as the "spontaneous movement of people using online tools to connect, take charge of their own experience, and get what they need- information, support, ideas, products, bargaining power for each other" (as quoted in Burke 2009, pp. 280-281). This form of interactive horizontal networks makes the flow of information difficult to control despite widespread surveillance. To a large extent, this communication system is characterised by its capacity to bypass traditional gatekeeping. Castells (2000) claimed that with the rise of mass self-communication, "Traditional forms of access control are not applicable. Anyone can upload a video to the Internet, write a blog, start a chat forum, or create a gigantic e-mail list. Access in this case is the rule; blocking Internet access is the exception" (p. 204).

The web not only provides greater opportunities to create identities and circulate information, but it is also integrated into our everyday life. In the last 5-10 years, the use of social networking sites has expanded to include all aspects of life (ibid.): "Media are social practices, something humans do" (Couldry 2012, p. 33). The online users are actively involved in constructing the social world, building communities, maintaining trust, legitimizing ideas, and challenging the status quo, as will be discussed later in this chapter (Boyd and Ellison 2013). The intrinsic practices that form interactive and social media have been summarized by Couldry (2012). He mentioned that via these social network sites, social media users are able to 1) search and access various sources of information via search engines, which are known as a hub of online networks, 2) show everyday life, as users can record or upload images and content in real time on a range of topics, such as protest, crisis, or even personal events, and 3) help in building and presenting a social identity, as individuals and institutions put information about themselves online to sustain a public presence (ibid. p. 50). Thus, social media are incorporated into a series of social practices that might be used to create identities and organize people's lives. For the purpose of this thesis, the term 'social media networks' refers to the "online tools and utilities that allow communication of information online and participation and collaboration" (Newson et al. 2008, p. 49). The following section will briefly define the three most prominent platforms and the practices that were most commonly used in the Arab Spring: Facebook, Twitter, and blogging.

Facebook: the site is considered one of the biggest social networks worldwide, as in 2015, it had more than 1.59 billion active users per month (Statista 2015), 75% of whom were outside the United States (Statistic Brain Research Institute 2015). Facebook provides a

venue for communication, entertainment, marketing, research, and sharing of information with other users. After the first three months of 2011, a substantial shift in the usage of social media was witnessed in the Arab world. Indeed, according to Mourtada and Salem (2011), Facebook become one of the most preferred networking tools in the MENA region in 2011: "The total number of Facebook users in the Arab world stands at 27,711,503 (as of April 5, 2011), up from 21,377,282 (January 5, 2011), having almost doubled since the same time last year (14,791,972 in April 2010)" (p. 9). Additionally, the result demonstrates that Egypt constitutes about a quarter of total Facebook users in the region, while the "GCC countries dominate the top five Arab Facebook users as percentage of population, with Lebanon being the only exception" (ibid. p. 9). The number of Facebook users in the region has increased dramatically, especially in the countries that experienced the protests, as the site was used to organize demonstrations, disseminate information, and raise awareness (DeLong-Bas 2011).

Twitter: Launched in 2006, this is a microblogging service (Carlson 2011). Unlike most social networks, Twitter posts follow a strict limit of 280 characters per message and the process of being a follower or being followed does not require reciprocation. It is much more than connecting with friends; it serves as a "real-time information network that connects you to the latest information about what you find interesting", as cited in Storck (2011, p. 12). Based on an active time during a major incident, over 85% of topics are news headlines (Kwak et al. 2010). Thus, Twitter functions to spread news, most notably in the new era of citizen journalism. Today, Twitter is ranked as one of the leading social networks worldwide in terms of the number of active users. The number of monthly active Twitter users worldwide increased dramatically from the first quarter of 2010 to the fourth quarter of 2015 (Statista 2016), when it was found that Twitter had around 305 million monthly active users (ibid.). According to the Arab Social Media Report (2011), the total number of active Twitter users within 22 Arab countries (plus Iran, Israel and Turkey) in the first quarter of 2011 was 1,150,292. UAE, Qatar, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait were among the top Arab countries in terms of the number of Twitter users.

Weblogs: These are mostly referred to as blogs, a term which was first coined in 1997 (Blood 2002) by the intelligence programmer Jorn Barger, when he described his personal website, as a "weblog" (Hughes 2011). Blogs are diary-style sites which contain text, images, links, and other objects that are arranged in a chronological order. The word 'blogger' is used to describe an internet user who posts on his or her website information based on a personal opinion or experience. According to Wyld (2007), blogging is "an easy-to-use content management tool. When you 'blog' you are instantly adding new content to your site via a web interface. No technical or programming skills are necessary" (p. 94). Being a blogger requires only typing skills and internet access, which has led to

the global expansion of personal blogs. Apart from "self-blogs", there are other types of blogs, like "theme-oriented blogs", which focus on a wide variety of topics, like technology, movies, medicine, politics, fashion, art etc (Szabó 2007). However, blogs did not receive much attention until they became a source of news (Quinn and Lamble 2008). Time magazine named the United States blog power line 'Blog of the Year' in 2004 after its writer posted information that challenged a 60-minute news story about George W. Bush's military service (Hinderaker 2004). Similarly, since 2005, the Arab blogosphere had been gaining political significance (Lynch 2007), which led to "countless instances of Arab governments censoring, arresting, and even torturing anti-regime bloggers" (Dewey et al. 2012, p. 4). For example, the number of active blogs in the Arab countries increased significantly from 40,000 in 2010 to 600,000 during the uprisings in 2011 (Storck 2011). In addition to blogs, another common form of UGC in Web 2.0 is citizen journalism where ordinary people play an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing, and disseminating news (Gillmore 2006). This will be the focus of the next section.

3.4 Contemporary citizen journalism

Unlike the mainstream media, citizen journalism is practised by ordinary people who have no professional training or educational experience in the field. The concept of citizen journalism has proliferated and has become more apparent due to the expansion of the new media technology, which has facilitated accessibility to information for the general public. Thus, the internet has redefined the frontiers of journalism by offering opportunities to upload content and share information, which therefore enables anyone to become a citizen journalist (Goode 2009). Hughes (2011) pointed out that "because of this re-emergence, the number of voices in the media is once again growing and beginning to look a lot like the early American press" (p. 18). The term 'citizen journalism' was associated with the beginning of blogs in the late 1990s (Quinn and Lamble 2008). Then, in 2004, citizen journalism became an outstanding feature of the mainstream media in the aftermath of the South Asian tsunami. Ordinary citizens actively contributed to feeding the news rooms with stories and video footage. In an interview by the Independent newspaper, John Whitney, duty news editor at BBC News 24 that morning, stated: "Never before have I worked on a story where the news was coming more from the public than the agencies. When you take 10 calls from all over the country at five o'clock on Boxing Day morning, you know it's a big story {…} From the British point of view we had a new agency: the public" (Burrell 2005, n.p.). Indeed, since the tsunami, citizen journalism has been widely associated with crisis reporting. Citizen journalism is also referred to as open source journalism, participatory journalism, hyperlocal journalism, distributed journalism, user generated content, and user-centred news production (Thorsen and Allan 2009; Kaufhold et al. 2010). In addition, it is known as grassroots journalism, which has been

described by Gillmor as "when people can express themselves, they will. When they can do so with powerful yet inexpensive tools, they take to the new-media realm quickly. When they can reach a potentially global audience, they literally can change the world" (Gillmor 2006, p. 15). The debate about the role of citizen journalism and social media in facilitating such events and bringing about social change has received worldwide attention since the 2011 Arab uprisings, the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the 2009 green revolution in Iran, and the 2008 attacks in Mumbai. The next section, therefore, will illustrate how the urgent need for social change has empowered the role of citizen journalism.

3.5 Citizen journalism and social change

As a concept, social change is "the transformation of culture and social institutions over time", as defined by Macionis (2006, p. 451). The term 'social change' is used to describe transformations in culture, policies, social institutions, socio-economic structures, power, and behaviours. As cited in Jaim et al. (2007), Jones argued, "Social change is a term used to describe variations in, or modifications of, any aspect of social processes, social patterns, social interaction or social organisation" (p. 4). It is commonly combined with addressing a variety of social problems, like corruption, discrimination, economic inequalities, gender inequity, and so on. Certainly, each country will experience different problems depending on its economic and political circumstances. For example, in the less economically developed countries, access to education, immunisation, and sanitation are among the most significant problems compared with problems in the West. Despite the North–South divide, collective action could take place to identify social problems. Indeed, social change, according to Thorsen and Allan (2014), "should not be confused with its cognate 'political change' which refers to transformations in political regimes, structures, actions, and dynamics" (p. 187). The recent political unrest that sparked the protests in the Arab world caused major political changes in the region, which led to the fall of robust and powerful regimes, mainly in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia (Joseph 2012). Since then, the Arab spring, protest movements, and the role of citizen journalism as a disseminator of information and an organizer of political action have been the major focus of recent discussions.

The urgent need for social change has empowered the role of citizen journalism in many societies. It is argued that citizen journalism has been a manifestation of social change. This probably indicates that citizen journalism is driven by a sense of social responsibility. Social media, according to Mikolaj Jan Piskorski, offer a solution to "unmet social needs or social failures", as cited in Lallana (2015, p. 23). Social failure happens when a society fails to address social, political, cultural, and economic matters, which therefore forces change in the society. One can reasonably argue that digital citizen journalism enables

citizens to be heard and get more actively involved in public issues and political activities. It helps ordinary citizens to make demands in the public sphere by giving them opportunities to discuss societal problems. However, it should be noted that social change is not only about individuals voicing opinions; considerable attention must be paid to how these voices are translated into decisions and changes. As Carah and Louw (2015) claimed, even if ordinary people are free to express and circulate their ideas, it does not mean that they are able to effect change in the real world because most citizens' activities on social media networks come under political pressure. Thorsen and Allan (2014) argued that in order to evaluate citizen journalism's contribution to making changes, it is important to look at what is the actual problem, how it is addressed by the online activists, and how the conversation is linked to decision-making. These questions focus on the media institution and communication actions for providing propitious conditions for facilitating dialogue and addressing social problems. Therefore, a better understanding of how citizen journalism effects social change is crucial to "examine its connections (or lack of) to information and communication organizations" (Thorsen and Allan 2014, p. 188). This chapter, therefore, will draw attention to the Arab Spring by examining the relation between citizen journalism and mainstream media in facilitating public debates, addressing the protests, and exploring social problems. To elucidate, the next sections will present the discussions and debates regarding citizen journalism's role as watchdog, agenda setter, and gatekeeper.

3.6 The role of citizen journalism
3.6.1 Citizen journalism as a watchdog

It is argued that audience participation in journalism has led to events being witnessed that would have been missed or misrepresented by professional journalists and thus bring public attention to social problems, critique the quality of professional journalism, and expand the news coverage. Within these circumstances, new media activists might be, as Lievrouw (2011) put it, "redefining what counts as 'mainstream' in a post-mass media age" (p. 15). Firstly, both media scholars and activists have criticized journalists for ignoring or downplaying the social problems that affect marginalized communities (Thakurta & Chaturvedi 2012). Such events that carry a newsworthy element are more likely to receive media attention than other social issues. Yet, Tilley and Cokley (2008) argued that citizens are engaging in producing content they believe to be newsworthy and that extends beyond the bandwidth of mainstream media organizations. A significant number of social media platforms contain serious discussions and important information about solving social problems (Dai and Reese 2007).Therefore, it is argued that citizen activists may provide a greater access to a wide variety of social and political problems that the mainstream media ignore or distort, or that they cannot access, such as war, government

wrong doing, corruption, racism, gender discrimination, unemployment, injustice, poor quality of life including unequal distribution of health and education services, etc. For example, Weibo, China's equivalent of Twitter, is becoming a force to be reckoned with in exposing corruption and abuses of power (Gong et al. 2015).

Secondly, citizen journalists and political bloggers operate to criticise the quality of professional journalism and the lack of transparency. This means they are driving professional journalism to demonstrate a new level of transparency by checking traditional media and questioning their accuracy and standards. For example, sometimes, the nationalist citizen journalists have adapted the principles of media analysis to criticise the performance of professional journalists, particularly when it comes to sensationalism, negative conflict-based stories, unbalanced news coverage, and how the nation is portrayed due to the unfair coverage, as in the case of the protests in Tibet. While it cannot be stated for certain that the Western media ignored "the long-historical and standing political conflict between the Chinese central government and Tibet over the subject of autonomy", they clearly misrepresented specific incidents in Tibet. In response to CNN's coverage, a 23-year-old girl called Jin Rao established the website Anti-CNN.com and invited all citizen journalists to "collect, classify, and exhibit the evidence of misbehaviors of Western media, and to voice our own opinion" (Anti-CNN 2008). According to Jin Rao, CNN and the BBC only reported selectively and grossly misrepresented the incident (ibid.). The website received an enthusiastic response; according to Stephen and Jia (2009), the website got over 500,000 visits per day, 60% of which were Chinese. They all worked in the process of collecting and analysing information, focusing mainly on the long history between Tibetans and the Chinese central government. Eventually, CNN made a formal response to the charges of the cropping of cover pictures and mismatching captions.

Thirdly, many have welcomed citizen journalism and blogging because of their democratic and autonomous nature, which would result in positive developments for the quality and diversity of news. The 7/7 bombing campaign in London in 2005 highlighted the importance of the public's involvement. The only video footage available about the explosion was captured by an ordinary citizen, and it became a priority for news organizations around the world: "When editors at BBC Television news became aware of the grainy yet spellbinding video, the decision was immediately made to put those images on the air as quickly as possible. The riveting video was broadcast around the world, driving home the horror of terrorism for many of us" (Henderson 2006, p. 36). Additionally, "The BBC was alerting viewers and listeners about special Internet links where witnesses could upload any pictures or video they had captured. Response was overwhelming, and the venerable British news institution quickly found there coverage ahead of competitors,

all because their viewers had become reporters" (ibid.). Also, citizen journalists were praised for providing up-to-date information regarding the Mumbai attacks in November 2008; the UK's Daily Telegraph stated that because of the Mumbai attacks, the "social web came of age" (Beaumont 2008).

Fourthly, citizen journalists are more open to discuss issues that are not covered by or disclosed in the mainstream press because of their independence. Unlike the mass media, which prioritize public topics to serve the national interest, the internet considers a wider array of issues, which "make a political focus difficult to trace" (Rasmussen 2007, p. 9). The multiplicities of the forms of communication (discussion forums, blogs, etc), and intertextual and hyper textual connections (hyperlinks, network sites, RSS feeds) between forums make the online sphere difficult to control.

However, this chapter does not conclude that the internet has reduced the importance of mainstream media and nor should we underestimate their roles in contemporary society. Indeed, the media play a vital role in producing and distributing information on important social, political, and economic developments. The type of information they send out, however, is heavily controlled by media corporations and ideological authorities (Hintz 2003). Even though audience participation in journalism opens the door to a new form of journalism, which is personal, opinion-based, and most importantly, independent, there is widespread debate regarding whether citizen journalists should be considered real journalists and what impact they may have on the quality of traditional journalism (Boyd and Ellison 2013). For example, Carah and Louw (2015) argued that citizen journalism influences how we feel as much as what we think, as social media can rapidly amplify and circulate feelings of outrage and anger. Also, many opponents of citizen journalism have expressed fears about the negative ramifications that it may pose for the quality of professional journalism. Lotan at el. (2011) argued, "Journalists tend to be deeply skeptical about how valuable or relevant user involvement is to their work, worrying that low quality content may displace their professionally produced work and result in degraded overall news environments" (p. 4). Similarly, Newman (2009) claimed that "the Web 2.0 revolution has peddled the promise of bringing more truth to more people but every week a new revelation calls into question the accuracy reliability and trust of the information we get from the internet" (p. 6). The Iranian elections in 2009 provided a significant example of how high quality journalism sustains its role, especially when it comes to accuracy, accountability, and fact-checking. Newman (2009) argued that although political bloggers and citizen journalism played an active role in gathering information, their participation created some significant dilemmas for quality journalism. In order to influence the election result, they tended to generate a huge amount of noise and false information in these networks. The lack of balance was a challenging issue for mainstream organizations. Newman (2009)

pointed out that the BBC Persian service encountered a marked difficulty in identifying what was right and what was wrong. Similarly, CNN felt uncomfortable about that coverage. As a result, from among more than 6,000 Iran-related submissions, CNN used only 200 of them (ibid.). Thus, the circulated messages tend to generate meaning only if they are constructive and accurate (Pentina and Tarafdar 2014)

Some opponents of citizen journalism have also suggested that the quality of what is being produced by citizen journalism does not comply with journalistic standards, such as lacking the required objectivity and professional news values. Hendricks (2010) quoted A. C. Croft, who stated that "many of the 'citizen journalists' manning various 'new' media can hardly claim the same experience, objectivity and credibility as a traditional print or electronic journalist. So, their output often tends to lack objectivity and 'third party credibility'" (p. 15). Also, it should be mentioned that story detachment, neutrality in presenting conflicts within the story, an emphasis on description, solid editorial processes, and the use of a rigorous structure are some of the outstanding features that cannot be practised except by quality journalism. Certainly, as Thorsen and Allan (2014) said, "Bloggers who inform about their experiences and conduct original reporting make important contributions, but they are unlikely to have resources for producing regular, in-depth coverage or investigating the responsibilities and actions of governments and corporations" (p. 191). Undoubtedly, the rise of social media has contributed to, and is continuing to transform the practice of journalism. Citizen journalists and political bloggers may not provide many of the things we expect from professional journalists, but instead they provide a different form of journalism other than professional journalism; it allows more people to contribute their voice and opinions, and it is explicitly subjective.

3.6.2 Citizen journalism as agenda setter

The rise of social media networks has introduced the Reversed Agenda-Setting effect (Kim and Lee 2007). Unlike the theory of agenda setting, in which the media have a great influence in deciding what is important or salient, UGC may redefine the function of journalism by determining which issues are more important than others. Goode (2009) praised the online activists' contribution in the editorial decisions of news organizations and their ability to break the press's monopoly on agenda-setting. Goode (2009) also referred to the news audience's capacity to enable a kind of "metajournalism", where they can shape the media agenda by sharing, commenting on, and rating the news. A single message or a collection of shared opinions from citizens through the SMNs might become an important trend, meaning that the mainstream media will place the message on the media agenda. Some studies have shown that particular news stories or even comments on Twitter or a forum may gain a level of popularity that leads the mainstream media to

report on the issue (Volders 2013). Similarly, a particular subject might stimulate a high level of public interest on SMNs. The public then, instead of the traditional media, will determine the discourse; this would create a reversed agenda setting effect: "If such a subject is high enough on the public's agenda, the subject could become an online trend. It could then follow the same steps that the examples in Kim and Lee's study (2007) followed, and show reversed agenda-setting effects" (Volders 2013, p. 19). The citizen-based crisis reporting that I discussed above has a strong agenda-setting function.

Volders (2013) argued that topics that deal with issues of public concern, disasters, and social problems will be more likely to demonstrate strong reversed agenda-setting effects, which means that if a particular subject becomes an online trend and features high enough on the public's agenda, this would probably encourage the traditional media to cover the issue. Although most studies that have examined the Reversed Agenda-Setting effect have focused on Twitter data, Volders argued that similar findings might be revealed if the aforementioned studies were to focus on Facebook data. He addressed the capacity of the liking and sharing tools in shaping and spreading online discourse, therefore making them popular, much like the most popular messages on Twitter. These findings would probably encourage the traditional media to keep an eye on the trending issues on social media networks to get an insight into what is on people's minds.

However, this is not to make the generalization that audience participation on the internet affects the traditional media agenda setting. Due to the mass amplification to create and circulate meaning, great attention must be paid to how the social network sites manage audience participation and incorporate it into a consistent production of texts and meanings. This probably raises important considerations; for example, according to Carah and Louw (2015), audience participation does not always mean the production of a new meaning. It might involve recirculating the media message without adding new connotations to it. Additionally, Habermas (2006) examined the role of the public sphere in the normative theory of deliberative democracy. He highlighted the power of the newspapers in shaping public opinion in the public sphere. In this context, Habermas argued that the online debates of web users could only feed on the mainstream media, but they cannot decide which issues are more salient and cannot alter the news that is created by journalists. Recent studies on political debate and deliberations on Twitter that were done in Sweden, Australia, and the United States (Bruns 2010; Shamma et al. 2010) concluded that Twitter conversations were influenced by the traditional media coverage of political discourses, indicating agenda-setting effects. Similarly, other studies have found that news organizations may still influence audience discussions on the Internet (Roberts et al. 2002; Johnson 2011). Park (2002) supported this hypothesis and argued that among the vast amount of news produced by the online users, only a small fraction attracts the traditional media. He referred to

journalists' power and their role in determining what is and what is not news. In their studies, Bruns (2010) and Shamma et al. (2010) stated that Twitter discourse regarding politics evolved due to traditional media coverage. UGC tends to retweet and mention messages from traditional media sources. Volders (2013) also predicted that subjects that discuss economic or weather reports will demonstrate strong agenda-setting effects because of audience dependency on traditional media to obtain the latest information.

Although some studies have provided empirical evidence to support intermedia agenda-setting (see McCombs and Shaw 1976; Hirsch 1977; Reese and Danielian 1989; Roberts and McCombs 1994), few studies have examined intermedia agenda-setting between the Internet and other traditional media. More recently, Luo (2014) found bidirectional agenda-setting influences between the online public agenda, in both the *Qiangguo* forum and the *Tianya* forum, and the traditional media agenda in the Chinese context. A similar hypothesis had previously been supported by Roberts and colleagues (2002) showing that Internet bulletin board discussions of the three issues of immigration, health care, and taxes were correlated with news media coverage. On the other hand, Kushin (2010) found there was almost no bi-directional inter-media agenda setting between Twitter and the online New York Times; meaning that there was no evidence regarding whether social media affect the agenda of the media or vice versa. Also, in his study to test agenda-setting effects in Twitter and the newspapers of Saudi Arabia, Almistadi (2014) found each medium of news had a different agenda, indicating that Saudis did not depend only on newspapers for attaining the level of salience for particular issues. This finding had previously been approved by Al-Harithi (1983) and Al-Haqeel (1993); they concluded that the Saudi press was not an agenda setter for Saudis.

3.6.3 Citizen journalism as a gatekeeper

In the wake of the internet, the traditional media gatekeeping processes are changing. Singer (2006) stressed that "the Internet defies the whole notion of a 'gate' and challenges the idea that journalists (or anyone else) can or should limit what passes through it" (p. 265). Similarly, Bruns (2010) suggested that the online communication environment creates open communities where anyone can contribute to the collective knowledge. Some scholars deem the internet to have weakened traditional gatekeeping. indeed, the rise of the internet tools would suggest that the power for gatekeeping has passed to the audience rather than just to a few individuals, as it was before (Boczkowski 2004). Discussion forums and blogs have enabled ordinary citizens to create their own news that challenges the mainstream media stories. Huesca and Dervin (2003) stated that the audience are no longer consumers but are perceived as collaborators. Similarly, Shoemaker and Vos (2009) commented that UGC has become a new gatekeeper. Social

media also serve as new platforms in the news presentation by empowering regular and marginalized individuals to voice their opinions and giving them a chance to participate in making changes. Social media networks enable passive citizens to become more active and influential and empower sources other than mainstream news media to become alternative news providers. Similarly, Rasmussen (2007) determined that the internet helps citizens to voice and exchange their opinions on online forums.

On the other hand, it is debatable whether the internet has undermined the power of traditional media gatekeepers. Although citizen journalism has reduced the number of gates, it operates in an environment (the internet) where new gates are erected by state authorities and search engines. Hintz (2015) argued that "social media are at the centre of a trend towards restrictions to online communication by both state and private sectors. The deterritorialized spheres of the internet have partly been reterritorialized by states; the practice of filtering and blocking content is expanding, information and ideas are being commodified and digital surveillance has become pervasive" (p. 122). Thus, social media and online communication are increasingly kept under close observation and control by the state to enforce speech regulation, maintain national security, and preserve cultural or religious morals (Alqudsi-ghabra et al. 2011). In many countries, like China, Iran, and the MENA region, the state maintains its control over online expression through the adaption of new restrictive laws and censoring the internet content (Almaghlooth 2013). These restrictions have led to a series of detentions and prosecutions, which are often identified under anti-terrorism and anti-cybercrime laws. As Greenwald noted, social media are becoming subject to "police measures of control, repression and punishment" (2015, n.p.). In most circumstances, this form of control is complemented by state disruption of digital infrastructures and blocking of social network sites. In most Arab countries, governments censor and blocked web sites that are considered politically, culturally, or sexually sensitive, like web sites that contain pornography and gay and lesbian material; that promote secularism, atheism, or terrorism; or that are critical of Islam.

Furthermore, despite the fact that Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter are heralded as 'effective catalysts' (khamis and Vaughn 2011, p. 1) in advancing free expression, transparency, and social change, as in the case of the Arab revolution, social network sites serve as a means for governments to collect information about the sites' users and monitor their behaviour (Hintz 2015). In Tunisia, Syria, and Iran, governments approached the social media to collect user data, including location, activities, political orientations, friends, and networks (ibid.). In addition, social media platforms have become subject to government intervention. Bui (2010) stated that in the age of the internet, the search engine, the private sector and other providers of online services are considered as contemporary gatekeepers. The term 'online gatekeeper' was first mentioned by Hargittai

(2003) and Introna and Nissenbaum (2000) when they discussed the implications of search engines and portals on gatekeeping. Hargittai (2003) pointed out that the main concern "is no longer what is produced, but what consumers hear and know about" and that "gatekeeping activity still occurs online, but now takes place at the level of information exposure" (p. 17). Therefore, social networking platforms and internet companies have created their own rules and practices for establishing what they consider acceptable content, and as a result, protesters and political activists have experienced restrictive content polices (Hintz 2015). Facebook, for example, deactivated activists' pages and instigated a crackdown on the presence of political groups during the protests. Also, the internet companies have implemented strategic monitoring of users' behaviour. Facebook users, for instance, can report content that is deemed inappropriate by clicking on the Facebook Report Abuse button. Thus, as Hintz noted, the incorporation of social media into controlled policies provides a serious challenge, as platforms used for debates and free expression are transformed into restrictive spheres (2015).

However, it should be acknowledged that this thesis does not attempt to explore the role of citizen journalism as watchdog, agenda setter, and gatekeeper. Instead, it aims to analyse newspapers' coverage and examines if and how this coverage differs from citizens' debates on the online forum. Indeed, social media may not offer a representation of the entire public, but it provides a valuable insight into citizen expressions about the protests and reforms in online spaces.

3.7 The role of social media upon the social unrest of the Arab Spring

Undoubtedly, social media served as an effective catalyst and accelerator for change during the Arab uprisings. However, before examining social media's relations with online/offline activists and social change in the region, this section begins with the reasons behind the uprisings. Social unrest began in Tunisia at the end of 2010. Within weeks, social unrest had spread to countries across the MENA region, most noticeably in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Morocco, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, and Yemen. Although social media may have played a significant role in facilitating the protests, it should be noted that the widespread social unrest was rooted in a broader set of social, economic, and political factors. People were united in their desire to achieve a decent life, where they could enjoy respect and the fundamental principles of human rights and security. It is argued that the global economic crisis that began in 2008, which therefore resulted in high inflation and rising unemployment in the MENA region, might help to explain the reasons for the social unrest (Dewey et al. 2012). Following the global financial meltdown, several MENA countries experienced a rapid decline in gross domestic product (GDP) growth, which led to an increase in food prices, a decline in tourism, a fall in the price of oil, and a higher

cost of living. Additionally, it is argued that although the Arab region experienced the expansion of education, the educational systems in the region failed to provide students with the skills that were relevant to the countries' needs (see Campante and Chor 2012; Dewey et al. 2012; Barro and Lee 2013). The rapid population growth resulted in expanding the unemployment rate, especially among educated young people. It is estimated that around 60% of the MENA population is under the age of 30 and the governments have done little to address youth unemployment; which ranges between 15-30 percent across the region (see Campante and Chor 2012; Dewey et al. 2012). Furthermore, the Arab countries that witnessed the protests were governed by authoritarian governments that lacked transparency and did not hold fair elections. Also, many restrictions were imposed on the establishment of political parties. Furthermore, police brutality and detention without due process were common across the Arab countries. Equally important, cronyism and corruption were major factors fuelling the protests in Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen (Levey 2011).

The role of new media, mainly in Egypt and Tunisia, as suggested by Khamis and Vaughn (2011) and Wolfsfeld et al. (2013), can be presented as comprising three intertwined ways: enabling cyberactivism, which paved the road for change and street activism; encouraging civic engagement, which helped in leading the mobilizing of activists and organizing of protests; and promoting citizen journalism, which provided an arena for ordinary citizens to voice their opinions, challenge media censorship, and thus compete with mainstream media coverage. The death of Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian street vendor, who set himself on fire on 17 December 2010 in protest at the confiscation of his wares, is considered a catalyst for the Tunisian Revolution and Arab Spring. He had been humiliated and beaten by security officials. Tunisian activists played a significant role in mobilizing Tunisian educated youth via Facebook and YouTube. Videos of Bouazizi's suicide and police clashes with protesters quickly appeared online and triggered the country's anger. The Tunisian regime's attempt to block social media sites was unsuccessful. Thus, the government decided to adopt a more repressive method by arresting prominent bloggers and online activists. As social media played an important role in mobilizing protesters in Tunisia, civil society groups, including human right groups, opposition groups, and education unions, played key roles in organizing their members to demand reforms and to protest against the regime (Honwana 2011).

Egypt is among the largest internet-using population in the region, and like Tunisia, has an active online sphere. Much like Tunisia, the murder of a young blogger, who was beaten to death by police for revealing their corruption, generated a wave of anger among Egypt's online activists. A famous online campaign ''We Are All Khaled Said'' was created by 30-year-old Google executive Wael Ghonim in June, 2010 through a Facebook page to

memorialize the blogger (Youmans and York 2012). The group page continued to cover government abuse and corruption and police torture. By 2011, the "We Are All Khaled Said" page had attracted more than 400,000 members and so became a central platform for debate and mobilization during the Egyptian uprising (Dewey et al. 2012).

However, it is argued that despite the significant opportunities offered by social media in the Arab uprisings, these mediated platforms, as Khamis (2013) contended "were simply a reflection of the overall sentiment of unity and solidarity that prevailed in these Arab societies in their struggle to oust dictators from office and to overthrow corrupt regimes" (p. 58). In some countries, the demonstrations resulted in the overthrow of the autocratic government. For example, protests in Tunisia led to the fall of President Zine Al-Abidine's 23-year regime, whereas demonstrations in Egypt led to the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak, and the Yemeni President Ali Abdullah stepped down after 33 years in power. All these changes could not have happened if "there were no people willing to be physically present in the streets, ready to put their own life at risk, in order to fulfil their demands and achieve their goals" (Khoury 2011, p. 85). In other countries, protests were repressed by the government and softened by promises of democratic reforms, like the case of Oman, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. In some countries, like Bahrain, Yemen, and Syria, the social media failed to bring about the expected results or desired outcomes due to conflicts of interest, the absence of trust among protesters, and government control over the internet (Dewey et al. 2012). For the purpose of this thesis, the next section will provide an overview of the news and information coverage during the Arab uprisings while emphasising the role of citizen journalism as an alternative form of media.

3.7.1 Traditional media vs. citizen journalism: Comparing news and information coverage during the Arab uprising

The public grievances over economic and political failures in the Arab region fostered the emergence of citizen journalism compared to the ongoing criticism of "media representation of citizen articulation of participation in social change, or rather the lack of it, as a condition within the broader political and hegemonic power structure for sustaining and enhancing democracy" (Spyridou 2015, p. 73). In an unprecedented way, the 2011 aftermath in the Arab region challenged the media ecology and allowed mainstream citizens to generate content to report vital events and turn these news items into media coverage. The significance of citizen journalism during the Arab uprisings derived from the fact that it "defies boundaries, challenges governmental media censorship, and provides an alternative voice to traditional media outlets, which echo official, governmental policies and views" (Douai and Moussa 2016, p. 45). The news of Bouaziz's death received worldwide attention and sympathy because of the Tunisian online activists who came to realize that they shared a common sense of grievance in what McAdam called a

"cognitive liberation" (McAdam 1982). YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook played an important role as information providers when "protesters took to the street with a rock in one hand, a cell phone in the other" (Ryan 2011, n.p.). Twitter hash-tags evolved from #Bouazizi to #sidibouzid to #tunisia to feed Tunisians with the latest news about the unrest (ibid.). Al Jazeera's team broadcast information about Bouaziz's death after picking up the footage via Facebook, whereas the state-owned media did not cover his death (Howard and Hussain 2013). Before this incident, one of the most direct accusations of the Tunisian government's corruption had come from a blogger (Jurkiewicz 2010). Through the uncontrolled communication networks, Tunisian citizens challenged the media's watchdog role after Bouazizi's death by exposing social and political issues in the country. News about the protests were spread on social media networks by ordinary people like Shamseddine Abidi, a 29-year old interior designer, who posted videos and updates on Facebook, while Al-Jazeera carried the news abroad by using Abidi's content to report the protests (Howard and Hussain 2013). In 2011, the popular Tunisian blog Nawaat.org received the 2011 Netizen Prize and the 11th annual Index on Censorship Media Award (Dewey et al. 2012). However, it was only after Ben Ali's departure that the Tunisian media outlets adopted Twitter as an information source to provide eyewitness stories about the protests (Lotan et al. 2011).

In Egypt, news of Ben Ali's departure to Saudi Arabia was extensively covered by Egyptians through social media networks, while the state-run media were reluctant to cover the earlier protests and Ben Ali's flight (ibid.). Whilst Egypt was ablaze with revolution, the state-run media ignored the protesters' presence on the social media and on the streets and continued to act as a sphere of 'confirmed' intellectuals, who according to Zvi Bar'el, "successfully re-constitute a hegemonic discourse that dictates the consensus, according to the ruling power's parameters" (Spielhaus 2012, p. 8). The media in the Middle Eastern countries were established by the governments to support their policies (Al-Jammal 1991; Hamada 1993; Tarabay 1994). During the 2010 protests, the mainstream media in all forms failed to change the course of the revolution and prevent the victory of the street protestors. They were slow to broadcast and cover the news at a time when events were accelerating minute-by-minute. Instead, the media continued to exercise hegemonic control over content and maintain their grip as public opinion shapers. For instance, some researchers (e.g., McLeod and Hertog 1999; Brasted 2005; AlMaskati 2012) found that Al Ahram newspaper gave more space to pro-government representatives to discredit the protesters and their actions. Youssef (2012) also argued that the national newspapers, such as Al-Ahram and Al-Masry Al-Youm, disregarded and neglected the social movements. Al-Ahram covered the event of 26 January, the "day of rage", with the headline "Thousands Participate in Peaceful Demonstrations in Cairo, Governorates". Simultaneously, the state-run television channel denied there were any

sort of protests and offered only partial coverage to serve certain groups, agendas, and ideologies; journalists who reported on the events were detained or killed. To combat the discredit and misrepresentations of protests found in traditional media, activists shifted to social media networks to produce their own media. UCG was labelled as a new democratic force for changing the Arab regime and keeping pace with the events; illustrating how the internet has become an alternative medium for activism (Kenix 2009).

Despite the communication struggle between the government and the activists, the protesters were both resilient and creative in circumventing the internet and mobile phone blockade. After the Egyptian government's failure in blocking certain sites, like Twitter and Facebook, on January 28, 2011, the Egyptian government shut off the internet and mobile phone services for about a week (Khamis and Vaughn 2011). The blackout of the internet forced the protesters to find more innovative ways to share information and mobilize protesters, such as setting up FTP (file transfer protocol) to upload updates about the protests to international news organizations (Ishani 2011). Another technique they found was using landlines to link to internet services in neighbouring countries (Sigal 2011; Seibt 2011). Also, an activists group called *We Rebuild* resorted to using Morse code, fax machines, and ham radio to provide minute-by-minute unedited stories about events on the ground and get messages out of the country (Seibt 2011). Despite the high cost of international calls, users found this method was effective, especially for urgent communication and for reaching satellite modems. The Egyptian blog Manalaa was used extensively for sharing advice about how to get internet access to mobile phones and laptops through the international dial-up internet providers. Noor was the only ISP (internet service provider) which was working due to the Egyptian stock exchange and Western companies, and many subscribers to Noor removed their passwords from their wi-fi routers to allow others to connect to the internet (Khamis and Vaughn 2011). Moreover, upon the closure of Al Jazeera's office in Cairo, Egyptians would watch Aljazeera through Hotbird and Arabsat transmissions. Furthermore, due to the international support, protesters were able to post and hear Twitter messages without needing access to the internet (BBC News 2011). It is therefore evident that the Egyptian government's ineffective communication strategy not only failed to halt the activists but instead helped in fuelling their activism further.

Although the Egyptian and Tunisian governments censored the traditional media, many independent groups and citizen journalists enjoyed a vibrant presence online. Idle and Nunns (2011) argued that people "no longer had to read stifled accounts in state-run newspapers when they could go on the Internet and hear from … protesters directly through social networks" (p. 26). During the internet blackout, activists telephoned their friends living overseas to upload tweets to the international media and the world, while

professional journalists were unable to disseminate their stories: "Street protesters were using land lines to call supporters, who translated and published their accounts on Twitter for an international audience hungry for news of the unfolding events" (Ishani 2011, n.p.). Citizen journalists were recognized as being the most credible source of news during these significant events. Upon Mubarak's fall from power, the Egyptian state media immediately turned against Mubarak and changed their coverage, leaning toward acknowledging the demands of the pro-democracy demonstrators (Fadel and Londoo 2011). Similar to the case of Tunisia, the Egyptian media turned to Twitter to get updates and real time information (Lotan et al. 2011). In this case, Twitter served as guide for the mainstream media outlets of what to report and where to send their crews (ibid.). Additionally, citizens became favourable sources within the media coverage of the 2011 Arab Spring (Hermida et al. 2014). More recently, El Gody (2016) has noted that several media outlets, such as Al Wafd, Al Dostor, Al Masry Al Youm and Al Youm7, developed a new type of journalism: 'network journalism'. They started using ICTs and expanded their presence on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube in order to develop their media content, encourage citizen engagement, and break the government's news coverage monopoly.

In Syria, the state-owned media continued to control the flow of information, thus acting as propaganda machines rather than covering the protests. The disillusionment with the state-run media in Syria created a need for citizen videos (Amos 2011), which led the public to upload videos showing government repression and police brutality in quelling protests (ibid.): "New social media – YouTube, Twitter, Facebook – along with online bloggers and mobile telephony, all played an important role in communicating, coordinating and channelling this rising tide of opposition and variously managed to bypass state controlled national media as they propelled images and ideas of resistance and mass defiance across the Middle East and North Africa" (Cottle 2011, p. 648). When the information flow was restricted by state control, audience participation in the online sphere during the Arab uprisings played a significant role by gathering information in real time and taking on the role of the state-owned media in the coverage of this tragic event. Out of 95% of journalists working in Middle East, only 35% of them used social media tools as a source of information (ibid. p. 11). Consequently, most of the events of the uprisings were covered by citizen journalism than the mainstream media. According to Storck (2011), the 2011 Arab Social Media Report illustrates how most of the Arab street protesters depended on social media tools to obtain information about the unrest and shows that about 88% of Egyptians and 94% of Tunisians got their news from social media tools: "Both countries also relied the least on state-sponsored media for their information (at 40% and 36% of people in Tunisia and Egypt respectively)" (pp. 5-6). Equally noteworthy, Facebook users in the Arab region exceeded the number of newspaper subscribers (Ghannam 2011).

The significance of citizen journalism lay in the fact that social media allow citizen journalists who are dissatisfied with the traditional media coverage to generate their own stories so that "these patterns of political expression and learning are key to developing democratic discourses" (Howard 2011, p. 182). This pattern of reporting not only facilitates the spread of information among the local audience, but it has the capacity to reach an international audience through the transitional satellite channels, like Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera, to increase the awareness about the violation of human rights, the corruption, and the abuse practised by the autocratic governments and the excessive use of force against protesters. The importance of the widespread coverage by citizen journalism encouraged the hesitant citizens to protest and "the marriage between satellite television channels and social networking sites has made it easier to let individuals know that their views are shared by enough people to make protesting worthwhile and safe" (Freeland 2011). Citizen journalism also enabled collaboration between activists from different Arab countries, as in the case of Egyptian and Tunisian protesters, to share their experiences and exchange useful knowledge, especially when it came to confronting security forces (Khamis 2013).

3.8 Summary

As a platform for the public sphere, the role of the mainstream media in shaping public opinion has been accused of marginalizing individuals and has also been criticized for serving bottom-line finances and political power. The emergence of new public spheres, however, has fostered the deliberative model of communication, which enables individuals to discuss issues, form arguments, demand changes, and suggest solutions (Rasmussen 2007). This chapter suggests that the new employment of communication technologies has empowered the role of online activists to create their own media and therefore challenge the role of professional journalism as watchdog, agenda setter, and gatekeeper. Social media networks enable audience participation in journalism to expand news coverage, witness events that have been missed by professional journalists, bring public attention to social problems, and challenge the old outstanding gatekeeper.

As the uprisings erupted in the Arab region throughout the first half of 2011, audience generated content was attributed a crucial role in gathering real-time information and highlighting social and political problems. State-owned media, however, continued to be the arena of "confirmed" intellectuals and national newspapers and national TV ignored or denied what was happening in the streets. Therefore, this thesis not only analyses the Omani newspapers' coverage but explores if and how this coverage differs from the coverage provided by citizens' debates. In order to provide a clear idea about the ongoing citizens' debates in the Omani streets about the reforms, this study will examine citizens'

expressions in the online forums. However, it should be noted that examining what Omani citizens said in the online sphere is not the aim of the research, but rather is about 'testing' that core research. It mainly aims to examine the newspapers' coverage, notably exploring whether the newspapers addressed people's needs and interests and informed them about the protests.

Chapter Four

Oman and Omani media

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to present a historical and critical account of Oman's communication experience in the 21st century, placing the current constitution in its historical and political context. This chapter has three main parts. Firstly, it will provide an overview of Oman by giving background information about the country. Secondly, it will focus on the media in Oman and how they operate, with the emphasis on print newspapers. To provide a clear account of the relation between the government and the media, this section will situate the Omani media within the media system of GCC countries. The Omani protests are the focus of the third section, which will shed light on the reasons that led to the unrest and how the Omani government responded to the events of 2011. Also, it will draw attention to how both Omani citizens and Omani media documented and disseminated news on the Omani protests during that time. The purpose of this discussion is to improve understanding of the relationship between the society, the citizens, and the media of Oman, and how this relationship has changed over time. Focusing on the case of the Sultanate of Oman during the Arab Spring, which erupted in 2011, might provide a new perspective on media systems.

4.2. Oman's geopolitics, economy and society
4.2.1 Geography

Oman, previously known as Muscat and Oman, is located in the extreme South-eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. Its origins date back approximately 5,000 years. The other names by which Oman has been known related to a specific civilization in Oman's history (De Bel-Air 2015). In Sumerian and Akkadian sources from the 3rd millennium BC, Oman was referred to as Majan, or Mezoun, which means 'abundance of water'. The country covers a land area of nearly 300,000 square kilometres (World Bank 2016). It is surrounded by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to the northwest, Saudi Arabia to the west, and the Republic of Yemen to the southwest, and shares marine borders with Iran. Additionally, Oman has a long coastline of 2,092 kilometres (World by Map 2015): "Its shore extends from Hormoz in the north to Yemen republic in the south, so it is open to three seas: Arab Gulf, Oman Gulf and Arab sea" (Ministry of Information 2015). Until the mid-20th century, Oman colonisation extended "from the east coast of Africa to the shores of the Indian subcontinent" (Al-Shaqsi 2013, p. 5). This strategic and geographical position of Oman at the main entrance to the Arabian Gulf, which is a transit point for the world's crude oil (Morris 1991, p. 5), plays significant economical and historical roles in connecting these countries.

The country is administratively divided into eight governorates and 61 districts or wilayats. These governorates are as follows: Muscat, which comprises six wilayats, including Muscat (the capital city); Al Batinah, which includes twelve wilayats and occupies the coastal areas in the country; Ad Dakhiliyah, which comprises eight wilayats and is located in the interior of Oman where the gas and oil pipelines operate; Al Wusta, which has four wilayats and covers a big part of the oil reserves; Dhofar, which has ten wilayats and is situated in the south of the Sultanate and shares a border with the Republic of Yemen from the south west; Musandam, which has four wilayats and overlooks the Straits of Hormuz; Ash Sharqiyah, which comprises 11 wilayats and overlooks the Arabian Sea from the east (Al-Yousef 1997, p. 44); Adh Dhahirah, which comprises three wilayats and shares the same border with the UAE in the north ;and Al Buraimi, which comprises three wilayats. Each governorate is represented by a governor, and each wilayat is headed by a wali. These authorities represent the government and are responsible for the administrative function of their areas.

In recent years, however, Oman and its citizens have been singled out by Oman's neighbours in the Gulf region as having a quietist and detached approach to regional affairs (Al-Abri and Goldsmith 2015, n.p.). However, this is not the case; Oman has played a subtle role as a positive neutral activist and peacemaker in most of the regional and international complicated issues, like the case of the war in Yemen, Iran's nuclear program, and negotiations with the West. Al-Abri and Goldsmith (2015) commented on Omani quietism by saying: "This is a misconception and reveals a misunderstanding of Oman's longstanding policy" (p. 2). They added,

> The perspective, particularly by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, that Oman is 'silent' and passive regarding both internal and external politics, is not the case. Oman is in fact speaking up with its positive interventions in regional politics, and at the internal level the public and politicians alike are beginning to find their voices regarding critical issues of political participation. (n.p.)

It has become increasingly apparent that Oman's geographic location between UAE, Yemen, Iran, and Saudi Arabia encourages its neutral political stance. More recently, in 2015, Saudi Arabia led a military intervention (Amaliyyat 'Āṣifat al-Ḥazm) in Yemen against the forces loyal to former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh and the Houthi militia. All the Gulf countries joined Saudi Arabia as allies except Oman, which decided to keep its forces out of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. Qatar was a coalition member but was then expelled due to Qatar's tensions with the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Oman sought to promote diplomatic solutions to the Yemeni crisis and, indeed, at a time when the air strikes are still ongoing in Yemen, continues to play a significant humanitarian role in evacuating and treating Yemenis.

4.2.2 People

The nationals of Oman are commonly known as Omanis. They have inhabited the country for some 2,000 years. Most Omanis can trace their origins back to the Arab tribes who migrated from the Uman region of Yemen while some link the Omanis to Uman bin Ibrahim Al-Khalil, a descendant of the Prophet Ibrahim (Al-Yousef 1997). The Azad tribal group, which represented the ruling family at that time, were descended from Yemen. Omanis are some the earliest peoples among the Arabs to embrace Islam. The adherence to Islam dates back to 630 A.D. (GlobalSecurity 2012) when Prophet Mohammed sent his envoy Amr bin Al-As to invite Jaifar and Abed, the sons of Al Julanda bin Mustakbar, who were the rulers of Oman at that time, to accept the Islamic faith. The Omanis then spread Islam to many countries, particularly East and Central Africa countries.

The first official census of the Omani population was conducted in 1993, and Oman recorded population of 2,446,645 (Ministry of Information 1995, p. 146). However, the latest census shows that the current Oman population is double than that of 1993. The General Directorate of Civil Status reveals that the population of Oman had reached 3,623,001 by the middle of 2012, and the population of Omani citizens stands at 2,092,560, whereas the expatriates population numbers 1,530,441 (The Gulf Research Centre 2018). The majority of foreign workers are from the Asian subcontinent, including Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis, who constituted more than 87 per cent of the workforce in 2013. By 2016, the percentage of the population in Oman between 15 and 64 years old was double that of people aged below 15, which is estimated to be around 65.7%, while the percentage of the population over 65 is 3.1% (Countrymeters 2016). This indicates that the pressure on the productive population, that is, those aged between 15 and 65 years old, is comparatively high (ibid.).

4.2.3 The administrative system and legal structure

Prior to 1970, the country was behind in the provision of basic human services, like healthcare, education, and communication infrastructure. Additionally, "a full scale local war was being fought in Dhofar, against a communist insurgency, with a small, inadequately equipped army" (Morris 1991, pp. 55-63; Ministry of Information 1999, p.10). However, when His Majesty started to rule Oman in 1970, he promised Omani citizens to proceed with the process of creating a modern government. On the day of his accession, July 23, 1970, he issued a call to all Omanis to restore and build a modern Oman:

> I promise you to proceed forthwith in the process of creating a modern
> government. My first act will be the immediate abolition of all the

unnecessary restrictions on your lives and activities. My people, I will proceed as quickly as possible to transform your life into a prosperous one with a bright future. Every one of you must play his part towards this goal. Our country in the past was famous and strong. If we work in unity and cooperation, we will regenerate that glorious past and we will take a respectable place in the world. I call upon you to continue living as usual. I will be arriving in Muscat in the coming days and then I will let you know of my future plans. My people, I and my new government will work to achieve our general objective. My people, my brothers, yesterday it was complete darkness and with the help of God, tomorrow will be a new dawn on Muscat, Oman and its people. (Funsch 2015, p. 60)

Under the Sultan Qaboos bin Said, who has reigned since 1970, Oman has undergone a new phase of transformation (Clements 1980). In November 1996, the Basic Law of the state had been promulgated as Royal Decree 101/96. It constitutes 81 articles, and it governs the roles of all authorities in Oman. Article 42 of the Basic Law defines the functions of his Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said as the Head of State, the highest authority and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. The administrative system under Sultan Qaboos consists of the Diwan of the Royal Court, the Ministry of the Palace Office, the Cabinet of Ministers, the Secretariat of the Cabinet, the Supreme Judicial Council, the Financial Affairs and Energy Resources Council, the National Security Council, the Defence Council, and the Council of Oman (Ministry of Legal Affairs-Sultanate of Oman 2013). All these bodies play key roles in the government of Oman.

The need to establish a parliamentary or legislative arm of government led to the formation of the Council of Oman, which consists of the State Council (Majlis A'Dawla) and the Consultative Council (Majlis A'Shura). The State Council is responsible for the generation of ideas and proposals that aim to advance the development of the state and its government. The State Council and its members are appointed by Royal Decree. The selection of the State Council members is based on several criteria. For example, members must be Omani nationals and most be 40 years old or more. They must have a good reputation, certain qualifications or level of education, and experience. Additionally, they cannot be elected to the Consultative Council. Consequently, membership constitutes high-ranking Omanis, for example, former ministers, ambassadors, dignitaries, businessmen, academics, and senior judges (Ministry of Legal Affairs 2013). In contrast, the Consultative Council members are elected by Omani citizens to represent wilayats, while the two vice-presidents are elected by the Council members themselves. They are responsible for reviewing the five-year plans, as prepared by various ministers; setting proposals that benefit economic and social laws in Oman; and voicing opinions on various issues that need to be discussed by the State Council (ibid.). Until 2010, both councils remained advisory and had no direct legislative powers. However, in 2011, the sultan issued a Royal Decree granting legislative and regulatory powers to the Council of Oman.

4.2.4 Economic

Part of the historical significance of Oman has been its relations with India, China, Britain, the United States, and East Africa, especially Mombasa and Zanzibar. Such relations play a crucial role in Oman's flourishing economy due to its unique strategic location as a major maritime and trading centre (see Al Yousef 1997; Port Services Corporation 2010). Yet, before oil production, Oman was a low-income country which depended on agriculture and fisheries as the main sources of income. Until oil was first discovered in the Gulf region in the 1930s, many Omanis travelled to the neighbouring Gulf countries seeking jobs. In 1965, the majority (61 per cent) of the Omani Gross Domestic Product (GDP) relied on farming and fisheries whereas industry contributed 23 per cent (World Bank 1987, p. 207). However, since oil production began in Oman in 1967, it has become a major instrument in financing the state-building enterprise, and Oman has been transformed from a country lacking in basic services to a modern state. According to the UN Human Development Report (HDR) of 2015, Oman ranked among the top ten countries worldwide for making a steady progress in the past 40 years in the fields of income, health, and education (United Nations Development Programme 2015).

Nevertheless, the over dependence on the oil sector, the alleviation of the national economy's dependency on foreign labourers, and the 'Omanisation' of the workforce are the main challenges facing the Oman economy. Like other countries in the GCC region, the Sultanate depends extensively on oil revenues as the major source of income (Al-Hamadi et al. 2007). However, it should be noted that Oman is less hydrocarbon-rich compared with the other GCC states (Gulf Labour Markets and Migration 2015). Therefore, the over dependence on the oil sector has forced the Omani government to focus on diversifying the country's economy. At the beginning of 1997, the Omani government introduced the new five-year plan, a strategy which the Sultanate has adopted since 1976, to diversify its income source and encourage the private sector to contribute to the development of the Omani economy (Ministry of Information 1999, 2015). In 2011, oil and gas constituted around 38.8 per cent of Oman's GDP (Gulf Labour Markets and Migration 2015). However, the Oman government, in its eighth five-year plan between 2011 and 2015, "increased spending on key infrastructure projects, which is enhancing Oman's status as a logistics hub in the region" (Gulf Labour Markets and Migration 2015, p. 4). These projects include the development of the tourism infrastructure, mainly cruise terminals and hotels; Oman's industrial sector, particularly the petrochemical segment, in Sohar and Salalah; major improvements to the international airports in Muscat and Salalah; and development of the three major ports at Salalah, Duqm, and Sohar (Windorexoman 2015).

The second concern is the over dependency on foreign labourers. Due to the implementation of heavy industrial projects in the country, skill shortages have become the main challenge especially for operating high-level and professional businesses (Al-Hamadi et al. 2007). Oman resorted to importing foreign manpower from different countries, and by 1997, there were about 493,847 foreign employees working for the private sector, while there were 34,004 Omani nationals in the same sector (Ministry of National Economy 1998). According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information in 2013, the number of expatriates in the Sultanate was approximately 1,736,288, constituting 44.2 per cent of the total population of Oman. The number of Omanis working in the private sector was nearly 177,641 compared to 1,498,777 expatriates. Thus, it is estimated that about 87 percent of the foreign workers were in the Omani workforce, and around eighty-two percent of them were employed in the private sector, while 12 percent occupied managerial positions. Although most of the expats in the private sector are concentrated in the construction sector and housework, their growth is indisputably considered a burden on the national economy due to the increase in financial transfer abroad. The over dependency on foreign labourers leads to an increasing trend for unemployment in Oman.

Despite the increasing number of graduate students in Oman, most find it difficult to obtain work due to "the lack of vocational/ higher education and/or the lack of practical work experience compared to expatriate labourers working in similar positions" (Gulf Labour Markets and Migration 2015, p. 5). This indicates that even if young Omanis have obtained an excellent education, their qualifications still do not meet the requirements of the private sector. Until December 2010, more than 72% of Omanis in the private sector received less than 200 Omani rials (£408). The inflation rate was about 5.6%, while the rate of increase in salaries during the period 2000-2008 was not more than 5.3% for all employees in the private sector. Meanwhile, the number of unemployed Omanis continued to increase, and 38% of job seekers were young (Al Hashimi 2011). The current trend of 2015 HDR reveals that the youth unemployment ratio was the highest among the Arab States from 2008 to 2014. To resolve this issue, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos has emphasized the urgent need for collective efforts to encourage more Omanis into the private sector and thus boost Omanisation, which is the process of "replacing expatriates with trained Omani personnel" (Hasan and Blackwell 2015, n.p.). Oman Vision 2020 has outlined the indigenisation of the workforce to alleviate the over dependency on foreign labourers through "expanding the proportion of Omanis in the labour force from 17 per cent of the total population in 1995 to 50 per cent in 2020" (ibid.). Also, the Vision aims for the private sector to be staffed 70 per cent by Omanis by 2020. However, despite such efforts and the improvement in some localised economic sectors like taxi driving, the unemployment rate in Oman is still high, especially regarding low-grade jobs.

Consequently, inequality in the redistribution of resources, the privileges granted to foreign workers, the lack of employment opportunities, and stagnating salaries contributed to inflaming youth anger against the government and led to the 2011 protests.

4.3 Oman media

The era of real mass communication in Oman began with the establishment of radio broadcasting. One week after the Sultan Qaboos came to power in 1970, a small broadcasting station with only a one-kilowatt transmitter was established in Muscat (Al-Hasani 2003). Four years later, in November 1974, Oman Television (OTV) was established, and it became the main television channel of the Sultanate and the official government broadcaster. Since 1970, the government of the Sultanate of Oman has used the media to achieve the strategic objectives of promoting national unity and development while enhancing the values of loyalty to His Majesty the Sultan and the country to foster a sense of belonging (Al-Mashekhi 1996; Al-Murjan 1997; Al-Rawas 1997; Al-Hasani 2003). The national media were also established to maintain the humanitarian values by highlighting the problems of racism, sectarianism, and any other negative attitudes "while emphasising the safety, stability and sophistication of Omani society" (Ministry of Information 2015, p. 140). These principles have been inspired by the His Majesty's vision at the beginning of the Omani renaissance, when he referred to the media's role as being "a mirror that reflects what is going on in the country, and this mirror must be clear and untainted, honest with itself and with its audience" (ibid. p. 139). This thesis, however, will evaluate the Omani newspapers' performance and whether they functioned as a mirror that reflected what was going on in the country during the 2011 Omani protests. The next sections provide the historical background about the Omani media, with the emphasis on print newspapers, and discusses how the Omani government controls the media content.

4.3.1 Oman News Agency

The Oman News Agency (ONA) represents the government's voice. It was established by a Royal Decree on May 29, 1986 to become a main source of information about domestic activities as well as national and international activities. The agency was part of the Oman Establishment for Press, News, Publication and Advertising (OEPNPA), which was founded by Royal Decree in 1997. The agency is considered the official channel for news about the Sultanate and the rest of the world for all the Omani media outlets in the country, as it reproduces what seems appropriate to fit the Omani context (Oman News Agency 2015). The main objectives of the ONA have been defined by Article No. 1 in the Royal Decree No. 39/86, 1986 as follows: "1) demonstrating the trends of public opinion and the views of officials accurately and honestly and without jeopardizing the safety or

security of the state or compromising individuals dignity or their rights. This is in addition to 2) collecting, classifying and analysing information on issues and topics of concern to the homeland and citizens in accordance with the requirements of the public interest" (ibid. n.p.). In 2006, the government agency came directly under the Ministry of Information by Royal Decree. If any media ignored ONA stories, it "would be questioned, by the council board and the Ministry of Information" (Al-Hasani 2006, p. 21). In 2014, according to the Ministry of Information (2015), "The Oman News Agency published 42,571 news items and 34,079 images, spanning a full range of activities and events" (p. 143). ONA is operated by Omani staff who have received training courses in running news media (Mikkawi 1989). It has a number of local, regional and international correspondents.

4.3.2 Omani press: Omani daily newspapers

The history of Omani print media dates back to the beginning of the 20th century in Zanzibar due to Oman's colonial empire in East Africa. Omanis' settlement in Africa for more than a century, from 1832 to 1964 (Al-kindi 2008), contributed to the foundation of Omani newspapers in Zanzibar, which mostly covered news about Oman. These included Al-Najah, which was established by Abu Muslim Al-Bahlan in 1911, The Gazette in 1929, Al-FlaQ in 1929, Al-Eslah in 1932, Al-Nahdha in 1949, Al-Murshid in 1954, and Al-Ummh in 1958 (see Saleh 1990; Al-Kindi 2001; Al-Shaqsi 2013). However, after Tanzania gained independence in 1964, a number of Omani settlers returned to Oman. Thus, all these newspapers closed, and a new phase of Omani media began to accompany the renaissance of modern Oman. On the occasion of the 20th National Day in 1990, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos stated: "At a time when the importance of the role of information is being increasingly left by society and peoples, it is necessary to support our Information Services in order that they may perform their mission" (Ministry of Information 2014). Because only a few studies have dealt with Omani media (see Al-Mashikhi 1994; Al-Kindi 1995; Al-Hasani 1996, 2003; Al-Mashekhi 1996; Al-Muijan 1997; Al-Rawas 1997; Al-Shaqsi 2013), this thesis will focus on the daily newspapers that have been established in Oman since 1971.

The first newspaper in Oman was the privately owned Al-Watan, which was established in 1971 by Al-Taei's family. Upon its first establishment, Al-Watan newspaper faced many challenges, for example, the level of literacy in the country, which limited Al-Watan's capacity to find Omanis willing to read domestic news, and poor communication infrastructures (e.g., cars, roads, telecommunication services) restricted the journalists in writing and obtaining news from around the country until 1974. For these reasons, Al-Watan was very limited in content and distribution (Abdulmohsen 2003). Due to printing problems, it was published on a weekly basis in Beirut, Egypt, and Kuwait (Al Watan

2016). From 1977 to 1984, the country entered a new phase by building a new communication infrastructure, establishing civil laws, and improving the country's income and economy. Thus, Al-Watan tended to be in line with these improvements by developing new technology and departments. Al-Watan become a daily newspaper in 1984, but it was still printed outside Oman. In 1988, Al-Watan founded its own publishing establishment in Oman, and it published its first issue from Oman (ibid.). More technical facilities were developed, and more staff were employed. From 1989 to 1996, the newspaper was distributed to all states in the Sultanate, and the circulation figure increased to 37,010 copies per day. However, due to the rise of printing costs and raw materials in the global market, the newspaper increased its cover price from 100 biza (almost £0.25) to 200 biza (£0.50). Thus, circulation decreased to 20,000 copies, but the circulation began to increase again in 1996. In 1997, Al-Watan took an important step and started its internet version. Today, the newspaper is published in 60 pages, which are divided into six main sections of local news, politics, economy, sport, arts, and opinions. Currently, Al-Watan has around 290 employees, 47% of whom are Omanis. In 2011, Al-Watan became the most popular and famous newspaper in the Sultanate of Oman in terms of readership among all ages, and its circulation reached 47,000 copies a day (Al-Shaqsi 2013). Both Al-Watan and the Oman Tribune are published by the same publishing house, Oman Establishment for Press, Printing, Publishing and Distribution LLC. The Oman Tribune was launched in 2004. It is well known for its editorial and op-ed pages; thus, it is considered to be the only newspaper in the country offering an opinion to its readers on international and local issues.

In 1972, the government founded its own Arabic newspaper, Oman Daily. It was first published on the occasion of the National Omani Day under the supervision of the Ministry of Information. Initially, the newspaper was published once a week, and then in 1975, it was published twice a week on Saturdays and Tuesdays. It started to appear on a daily basis only in 1982. Oman Daily publishes a number of supplements, which focus on the economy, culture, health, sport, art, and family. In 2009, Oman Daily was considered the first newspaper to launch its interactive newspaper website in Oman. Omanis constitute about 95% of its employees (Al-Shaqsi 2013). By 2011, Oman Daily had become the second highest-circulation newspaper in Oman, which sold around 41,721,000 copies per day (ibid.). Both Oman Daily and the Oman Observer are considered government owned newspapers and they follow the same editorial policy. The Oman Observer is an English newspaper, which was first published by Muscat Press and Publishing House in 1981. By 1997, both Oman Daily and the Oman Observer became part of a large organization, namely, Oman Establishment for Press, News, Publication and Advertising (OEPNPA). The Oman Observer focuses on covering business, sports, and current affairs news from

around the world, and meanwhile, highlights the country's economic development, and its natural and cultural wealth.

Al-Shabiba is another privately owned newspaper, which focuses on youth and sports news coverage. It began as a sports magazine, and then closed temporarily in 1991. After two years, Al-Shabiba reappeared but in a newspaper format, and its issues coincided with the allocation of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos in 1993 as the Year of Youth. In 2009, the newspaper underwent major changes not only in its design but also in its content by focusing more on investigative reporting. In 2011, the newspaper became the third largest newspaper in terms of circulation with 37,000 copies per a day. Both Al-Shabiba and the Times of Oman are issued from the same publishing house, Muscat Press and Publishing House (Worldfolio Ltd 2014). The Times of Oman is Oman's first English daily newspaper, and it was the first newspaper in Oman to have an online e-paper edition. It was established in 1975, and in 1991, it became a daily newspaper covering local news and providing news services for foreign communities present in the Sultanate.

Azzamn Daily is the fourth Arabic daily in Oman. Published by Azzamn Press and Publishing House, it was first issued in 2007. It is the only daily in Oman which uses the tabloid format. Although it covers a variety of regional and international news, it mainly targets or highlights events and issues that happen in Oman. In 2011, the newspaper was accused of publishing defamatory information against the Minister of Justice, which led to the one-month closure of the paper, both Azzamn Daily's editor-in-chief Ibrahim Al-Mammari and reporter Yousef al-Haj being sentenced to five months in jail, and a full-page apology being published in the paper (Muscat Daily 2011a). In that year, the newspaper's circulation was 25,000 copies. In 2017, Azzamn Daily was permanently closed after targeting the judiciary. According to Oman's Al-Atheer newspaper, Azzamn Daily was targeted because of "publishing false news, undermining the prestige of the state, and disturbing public order" (The New Arab 2016).

Al Roya Daily is the fifth Arabic daily newspaper. Launched in 2009 by Hatim Altaee, it is the first and leading business newspaper in Oman. It is published by Al Roya Press and Publishing House, and it obtained the second largest readership in its first two years (Al Roya Daily 2014). Although the newspaper is more business-oriented, it covers a variety of topics ranging from politics, health, beauty, and Omani youth activities. Muscat Daily was also launched in 2009. It is an English-language newspaper that is published by Apex Press and Publishing. It is mentioned by top international media like The Economist, Christian Science Monitor, and Radio Netherlands when someone wants to get news about events happening in Oman (Muscat Daily 2014).

By 1992, there were 24 newspapers and magazines, and by 1994, this had increased to 28 publications, with several daily newspapers (Ministry of Information 2004). However, in 2006, the trend changed. There were 4 dailies and more than 10 free weekly tabloids (Al-Shaqsi 2013). By 2010, the number of Omani publications had increased to include 9 daily newspapers (5 in Arabic, namely, Al Roya Daily, Azzamn Daily, Al-Watan, Oman Daily, and Al-Shabiba, and the remainder in English, namely, Times of Oman, Oman Observer, Muscat Daily, and Oman Tribune), 22 private commercial magazines, 17 governmental magazines, and 10 free weekly tabloids (ibid. p. 7). By 2014, there were 9 daily newspapers in Arabic and English and more than 80 publications including 80 newspapers, magazines, and periodicals (Ministry of Information 2015). This thesis, however, will examine news production in two leading Omani newspapers, Oman Daily and Al-Watan, during the 2011 Omani reforms.

However, all publications are kept under strict state control. The coverage of events in the Sultanate focuses closely on the themes of national loyalty, industrial developments and achievements, and the meetings of ministers and government bigwigs, while coverage of international events tends to be better due to the lack of censorship. Also, government officials and ministry sources dominate the media coverage (Al-Hasani 2003). All the newspapers in the country, both government- and privately owned media, depend on government subsidies. Although advertising, subscriptions, and circulation have become the main financial supports for private-sector media, they still depend on government support through easy term loans.

Thus, there are four main challenges facing the press in the country. First, the substantial dependence on the government subsidies puts pressure on Omani newspapers to be more supportive of the state's policies and thus to function as the mouthpiece of the government (Al-Jammal 1991; Hamada 1993; Tarabay 1994; Al-ariami 2002; Al-Shaqsi 2013). The Omani newspapers are struggling to be free, yet even if they are financially independent, they are not allowed to cover politically sensitive issues, as will be addressed later in this chapter. As Thomas (2011) put it, "Like most other countries in the region, Oman is not particularly noted for its freedom of speech, a fact reflected in its rather turgid media, which still serves more as a PR and propaganda vehicle than a forum for genuine debate and analysis" (p. 34). In studying the domestic news production within four print news organizations in Oman, Al-Hasani (2003) found that all the newspapers depended largely on government officials and ministry sources to tell the stories from their perspectives. Secondly, journalists working in newspapers are suffering from the lack of an adequate salary, weak financial incentives, and a lack of training opportunities (Al-Hasani 2003; Al-Mashikhi 2015). In his study, *The effecting factors in the mass media in the Sultanate of Oman: A field study on Omani Journalists*, Al-Mashikhi (2015)

investigated 167 journalists in more than eight media organizations in Oman, both print and broadcast media, regarding the influences on their work. He found that the low salary that journalists earn and the lack of promotion emerged as key obstacles to entering the profession. Similarly, Al-Subhi (2012) pointed to the increased level of dissatisfaction among Omani journalists in the Sultanate due to the low wages and the lack of promotion and appreciation. Thirdly, there is a lack of qualified journalists (Al-Mashekhi 1996) who are aware of their roles. Fourthly, self-censorship is widely practised among Omani journalists, which weakens the quality of the news. After analysing the press in the country, it is essential to discuss Oman's media laws, which govern the media system and media practices.

4.4 The Publications and Publishing Law (PPL) in Oman

The Publications and Publishing Law (PPL), which was issued in 1984, sets the basis and the necessary regulations for practising journalism in Oman (Ministry of Information 2015). The sultanate's first law pertaining to publications and publishing was promulgated in 1975, and it was replaced in 1984 by the current law. The law has nine chapters. Chapter one defines the phrases and terms used in the law. Chapter two includes articles about printing in general. Chapter three deals with provisions related to printing houses, publications, and the distribution and circulation of domestic publications and of any publications from abroad. Article 16 of Chapter three states that "no one is allowed to take up the profession of importing, selling, distribution or publishing of publications or setting up of a publishing or distribution house or a bookshop before having obtained the relevant license to do so from the competent authority at the Ministry of Information. The application for this license shall comprise all necessary data stated in the executive regulation of this law" (ibid.).

Chapter Four, however, addresses specific items that cannot be published for social, economic, security, health and religious considerations. For example, it is prohibited to publish anything that explicitly or implicitly may offend the ruler or members of the Royal Family. Anyone who violates this article will be sentenced to three years in prison or a fine of two thousand Omani rials or will receive both penalties. Also, it is prohibited to publish anything that might affect the state's safety or its internal or external security. As clearly stated in Article 26 of Chapter four, the law prohibits anyone from "publishing anything that might affect the safety or security of the state whether internally and externally [...] without the permission of the competent authorities" (Gulf Centre for Human Rights 2011, n.p.). The punishment for violating this article is two years in prison or a fine of two thousand Omani rials or both penalties. The law also bans the publication of any items that affect the national currency or anything that could cause confusion about the economic situation

of Oman. No item can be published that might affect the privacy of individuals or family life unless the publishing of such news items comes within the context of execution of a court verdict for serving the public interest. It can be noticed that many articles have indicated what the journalist should do or should publish, but there is no single article about the rights of journalists or for allowing any independent organisation to protect journalists working in Oman from any penalties. Because of all these prohibitions, the law has been criticized by many international organizations for preventing journalists from practising their profession freely. For instance, Freedom House Organization (2013) described Oman's PPL as 'one of the most restrictive statutes of its kind in the Arab world, [which] serves to create a highly censored and subdued media environment' (n.p.). Fear of negative repercussions from the government leads journalists and news organizations to restrict their own objectivity and autonomy (Al-Mashikhi 1994). Instead, they function in a way that carries positive propaganda for the government and its policies (Al-Kindi 1995; Al-Ariami 2002; Al-Hasani 2003; Al-Shaqsi 2013; Robie 2013; Al-Kindi 2016).

Furthermore, the PPL (1984) granted the Ministry of Information the right to ban any publications that breach any of these boundaries; as emphasised by Al-Kindi (1995): "The Ministry of Information can coerce an editor to emphasize one story and ignore another" (p. 31). The law insists that the editors-in-chief are responsible for their newspapers, and they are not permitted to cover or publish any items that the Ministry of Information does not allow to be published. This explains how the Ministry of Information has power over all news organisations in the Sultanate. The next section will situate the Omani media within the media system of GCC countries in order to better understand the relationship between the government and the media.

4.5 Identifying restraints on freedom of the press in the laws of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries

Compared with the other countries of the Arab world, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, namely, Kuwait, Sultanate of Oman, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Kingdom of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia (KSA), exercise tight restrictions over the media (Abu-Zaid 1986; Al-Jammal 1991; Al-Shamari 1993; Abu-Osba 1997; Abdulmajeed 2001; Duffy 2014). According to Duffy (2014), all the GCC countries have long held relationships with the UK due to the invasion by Britain as a colonial power in the region in the late 17th century, which therefore helps explain "why the legal environment is currently so restrictive for media outlets" (p. 4). Duffy argued that the unelected rulers or the monarch in the GCC countries may have adapted the restrictive media system to maintain their power. Despite the legal provisions that guarantee press freedom and freedom of speech in all the GCC countries except Saudi Arabia, restrictive rules are implemented to limit these freedoms. For instance, Oman guarantees press freedom in the Basic Law, issued

in 1996. Indeed, Article 31 of Oman's Constitution states: "Freedom of the press, printing and publication is guaranteed in accordance with the conditions and circumstances defined by the Law"; then the article goes on to say that no media source can "print or publish material that leads to public discord, violates the security of the State or abuses a person's dignity and his rights" (Constitute Project Organization 2018, p. 8). In addition, Article 48 of Qatar's Constitution states: "Freedom of the press, printing and publication shall be guaranteed in accordance with the Law" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2010). Similarly, Article 37 of Kuwait's Constitution of 1962, which was reinstated in 1992, states: "Freedom of the press and of publication is guaranteed, subject to the conditions and stipulations prescribed by Law" (Constitute Project Organization 2013, n.p.). Duffy criticized the unclear exceptions and conditions that urged for more press restrictions in the constitutions of most of the GCC countries. Then he suggested that the autocratic rulers and the lack of legal protection for freedom of information in the region, like independent judiciaries, are the main reasons for the lack of press freedom. Most of the laws in the GCC countries are based on the Sharia legal systems in which court rulings are based on Islam and the Holy Quran. However, when it comes to press codes, Bohlander (2011) disputed this, saying that most of the Islamic countries tend to exercise their legal grip beyond Sharia, which means the GCC countries "rely on codes that may be based to differing degrees on previous colonial principles and indigenous attitudes" (p. 396).

Al-Shamari (1993, pp. 92-93) claimed that most of the Arab countries share the same prohibitions in their media laws, such as forbidding any criticism of the president, the Royal Family, the armed forces, and any government party as well as prohibiting any critical analysis regarding economics. In his analysis of publications and publishing laws in 16 Arabic countries, including the GCC countries, AbuZaid (1986) found that Arabic media systems are characterised by their authoritarian stance, which reflects the socio-political and economic situations in these countries (pp. 9-10). To clarify, newspapers can only be published under government licence. Neither privately nor publicly owned media outlets are banned in the region under the law, but the government retains its monopoly over the media content. The media systems are viewed more as tools of the government, which tend to support the state more than acting as a watchdog due to the state's excessive pressure and control over the media content. In Oman, for example, the media are not allowed to cover issues that contradict government policy; thus, Al-Shaqsi (2000) argued that "watchdog or investigative journalism still faces formidable resistance especially concerning internal matters" (p. 29). The GCC states value social cohesion and stability in their societies more than any potential benefits of a free press. As an illustration of this, Article 39 of the Saudi Arabia constitution states:

Mass media, publication facilities and other means of expression shall function in a manner that is courteous and fair and shall abide by State laws. They shall play their part in educating the masses and boosting national unity. All that may give rise to mischief and discord or may compromise the security of the State and its public image, or may offend against man's dignity and rights shall be banned. Relevant regulations shall explain how this is to be done. (Constitute Project Organization 2015, n.p.)

In most of the GCC countries, both the penal code and the press law detail a wide array of restrictions for the news outlets and journalists, which efficiently hamper the freedom of the press, like imposing fines and imprisonment for any speech that criticizes the rulers, violates or threatens the national interest, harms Islam, and damages public morals.

4.5.1 Legitimate areas of press restriction of the six Arabian Peninsula countries

The legitimate areas of press restriction in the GCC countries, according to both the penal codes and media laws, can be classified into three main categories: protection of reputation-defamation laws, national security and public order, and public health and public morals. Firstly, laws regarding defamation, whether spoken (slander) or written (libel), serve an important role in any society to defend the truth and deter the making of false statements that can harm the reputation of the claimant. Like other laws, defamation can be executed through the civil courts or the criminal justice system. The majority of countries treat defamation, in most cases, as a civil charge, not a criminal offence for which charges result in detention and a jail sentence. On the other hand, in the GCC countries, slander and libel are perceived as criminal rather than civil offences, which means accusations lead to arrest and even jail. In addition, unlike in other countries, in the Gulf region, public figures receive more defamation protection than do private individuals. Therefore, public officials' ability to prosecute journalists for defamation tends to quash press freedom. Moreover, the concept of truth as a defence for libel is not considered an ultimate protection against a complaint of defamation in the GCC countries. Reporting on corruption, for example, could potentially lead to jail because a journalist's report harms a public official's reputation. The dearth of laws that might protect journalists from defamation accusations, including the lack of clarification regarding truth as a defence and the further protection for public figures, is a significant obstacle to press freedom in the region. This analysis indicates that the defamation laws of the GCC countries do not align with three practices of "civil rather than criminal cases, a higher burden of proof for libelling a public figure and truth as a defence for libel", according to Duffy (2014, p. 11).

The second legitimate area of press restriction in the GCC countries is national security and public order. Again, in contrast to some international approaches, the media laws

concerning the protection of national security and public order are all relatively broad. For instance, Article 9 of the Saudi press law mandates that printed materials are not allowed to be a breach of public security or public policy or to serve any group interest that might affect the national interest (World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) 2000). In addition, the article bans the publication of any materials that might provoke "fanatical instincts or discord among citizens" (ibid.). Similarly, Article 72 of the Emirate press law prohibits the publication of any materials that violate public discipline, involve insult to teenagers, or provoke any subversive ideas (International Labour Organization 1986), while Article 73 bans the publication of any materials that foster criminal activity or prompt acts of discord within society (ibid.). Article 9 of the Saudi press law contains a myriad of prohibitions for the press including banning the publication of any materials that lead to a "breach of public security, public policy or serving foreign interest that conflicts with national interest"; instead, the press "shall observe objective and constructive criticism that aims at public interest and which is based on facts and evidence" (WIPO 2000). Even in Kuwait, which is known to be a country of freedom and democracy among the GCC countries, the government implements strict procedures against any action that could be thought to undermine national unity.

The third legitimate area of press restriction in the GCC countries is dealing with public health and public morals. Restrictions on freedom to maintain public morals are common internationally, but the GCC countries feature more restrictions than other parts of the world. For example, the media in the GCC countries are prohibited from covering the issue of homosexuality due to the sensitive nature of the topic. In fact, the GCC constitutions cover several provisions for restricting freedom of expression and press freedom that fall beyond international norms. In his article, Duffy listed some of the prohibitions, which include 1) criticism against rulers and public officials, 2) exercising journalism without a license, 3) harming the relationships between the GCC state and another other friendly state, and 4) damaging the national economy. The significant variations between the European and some Arab and Islamic countries regarding journalistic ethical codes exist due to the differences in cultural perspectives; like tradition, mores, and religion. Hafez (2002) noted that most of journalism codes in the Arab countries stem from an assumption that "every person's right to honor and good reputation is a central value in Arab and Islamic communication ethics in both secular and religious traditions" (p. 230). Despite having similar, highly conservative political and media systems, the GCC countries experienced significant political reforms in 2011, giving citizens more opportunities to challenge state politics and restrictions on freedom. During the Arab uprising, for example, Oman and Saudi Arabia implemented some new rigorous laws to control the press and digital platforms. The UAE, Kuwait and Bahrain maintained a firm grip on the national media. Paris-based media watchdog Reporters without Borders

described Bahrain during the anti-government protests in 2011 as becoming "a past master in the art of manipulating coverage of the street protests and the ensuing crackdown" (Reporters without Borders 2014, n.p.). However, Qatar was the only GCC nation that allowed more press freedom.

The similar demographic, social, historical, cultural, and political ties in the GCC countries provide more understanding of the current media landscape in Oman. However, studying penal codes, media laws, and regulatory bodies is not a substitute for detailed observation of the flagrant infringement of media freedom and freedom of expression. Thus, this thesis examines the newspapers' coverage in Oman during the uprisings in 2011 by evaluating the factors that constitute the symbolic environment of the media system in the country. However, based on the information presented in this chapter, can one classify the media system in Oman under normative media theories of the press? The next section reviews some of the key studies regarding the Omani media system.

4.6 Omani media in normative media theories

According to some authors, Omani journalism can be classified in accordance with the Western normative theories[2] of journalism, namely the authoritarian, loyalist, developmental, and responsible models. In his analysis of two daily Omani newspapers - Oman Daily and Al-Watan - during the Gulf War, Al-Kindi (1995) found that the coverage lacked balance, detachment, and professionalism. He concluded that the substantial dependence on government subsidies, both in government and private publications, and the PPL prevented journalists from reporting or writing critically, especially when regarding government policies. This sort of pressure and intimidation leads to a pervasive self-censorship among journalists in the country. However, according to Al-Hasani (2003, p. 77), "Wartime may be seen as an exception", and it is hard to judge why the press functions in certain restrictive ways due to direct government control. Similarly, Al-Mashekhi (1996) and Al-ani (2003) classified the Omani media under the authoritarian theory. Al-Mashekhi argued that "the majority of the Arab world media, including Oman and other Gulf states, lie within the authoritarian theory. Some newspapers in these countries are privately owned. Nevertheless, they follow the censorship regulations, which are laid down by the government" (1996, p. 43).

Al-Mashikhi (1994) classified the media system in Oman under social responsibility theory. However, Al-Mashikhi's classification seems to be invalid for several reasons.

---

[2] In their book called *Four Theories of the Press*, Siebert et al. (1956) looked at the relationship between the press and government and they identified four models or theoretical types of media which are the Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social responsibility, and Soviet communist theories.

Based on social responsibility theory, according to McQuail (1994, 2000), the press is allowed to criticize the government and it helps eradicate social problems. It is also characterized as not being a part of the government and being independent from pressure groups (ibid.). However, Al-Mashikhi (1994) himself argued that the Omani press operates under heavy government censorship, and the private media in Oman are struggling to be independent. In addition, he argued that because of these reasons, the Omani press rarely address social problems and "the critical items against the government are not found in Omani print media" (ibid. p. 69). Therefore, because of these considerations, it could be concluded that the Omani press do not have the characteristics of a press operating under social responsibility theory, as explained by McQuail (1994, 2000).

Another researcher, Al-Rwas (1997), suggested that the Omani media should be classified under two theories: social responsibility and development theory. He argued:

> Oman is a traditional Arab and Islamic society, which believes in the preservation of its national values, culture and heritage. The social responsibility theory points to these objectives. Also, Oman is a Third World country striving to modernise and develop its infrastructure at all levels-social, economic and political. This suggests that the development media theory is applicable to the Omani context as well. (p. 53)

In contrast, Al-Hasani (2003) claimed that based on this description, many developing and developed countries could be classified under both the social responsibility and development theories, which seems unrealistic. Each country is distinguished by a set of characteristics, including language, culture, religion, and traditions, but it is not possible from this to generalize that their media are working under social responsibility media theory. Similarly, development theory does not seem to fit the Omani press. Development theory, according to McQuail (1994, p. 131), functions to assist "the pursuit of cultural and informational autonomy' and to give 'support for democracy'", but government control stands against democracy in the Omani media (Al-Kindi 1995, 2016; Al-Shaqsi 2000).

While the normative theories of journalism are limited to Western countries, Rugh (2004) went beyond the Western world and provided more comprehensive typologies of media systems in the GCC countries. Rugh looked at media freedom, media orientation, media culture, the funding of the media, and media ownership. By combining these dimensions, he categorized the media system in Oman as the 'patriot or loyalist model', which has a clear loyalty to the country and the sultan. He argued that the dependence on government subsidies led the Omani media to be "consistently loyal and supportive of the regime in power" (p. 59).

Although media scholars have made a very important academic contribution to the systematic comparative study of the relationship between journalism and the political system of Oman, it is important to note that, as Humphreys (2011) argued, the media systems are too complex to fit into one particular or identified mode. Thus, I argue in this thesis that instead of producing neat typologies, it is better to look at the relationship between media systems and the socio-cultural and political system in which they are embedded because in practice, there is a range of barriers that restrict the role of individual journalists and the collective news media as an institution. In order to categorize which media models best fit the Omani media during the 2011 protests, it is important to have an understanding of the 2011 Omani protests, their causes and implications.

4.7 Pro-democracy protests in Oman prior to 2011

This section aims to contextualize the 2011 Omani protests with reference to previous protests in the country. Worrall (2012) argued that "while these early protests were significant, they were in no way unprecedented in Oman" (p. 99). One of the most obvious protests in the country was in 1962 in the province of Dhofar against the authority of Qaboos's father. The 15-year rebellion was repressed by Sultan Qaboos in 1976 with foreign support. However, when Sultan Qaboos took power, Oman witnessed only a limited number of demonstrations. Some of them were considered peaceful demonstrations such as organized marches aimed at showing sympathy with the Palestine issue or celebrating Oman National day. However, at the beginning of March 2005, an unexpected wave of protest hit Omani society due to a number of political arrests. Hundreds of Omanis demonstrated at Said bin Taimur Mosque in Al Khuwair and disrupted late evening traffic near the College of Islamic Studies and Sharia to protest against the jailing of 31 Islamists [3]convicted of plotting to overthrow the government and attempting to install an Islamic government (BBC News 2005). All 31 accused were educated, and among them were civil servants, Islamic scholars, and university academics. Many were from influential tribes who wanted to overthrow the regime by force of arms due to the absence of an intellectual civil society and the lack of equality in the distribution of wealth and power.

Their intention was to confront the monarchical system in Oman and to replace it with an imamate[4]. The accused were also found guilty of conducting military training and

---

[3] A group of Omanis, including preachers, religious scholars, university professors and government figures, belonged to a secret Islamic movement and attempted to overthrow the regime by force of arms (albawaba 2005).

[4] Oman was ruled by Ibadite imams who exercised spiritual and often temporal authority over the region. The Imamate is a thousand-year-old system of government pioneered by the Ibadi religious leaders of Oman, and is based upon the Islamic sharia. It governed parts or the whole of Oman and other lands for interrupted periods of time for over a thousand years.

obtaining illegal weapons. They were suspected of having been plotting a series of attacks on the Muscat festival, a trade and cultural event spanning part of January and February. Some of the defendants who were arrested in January 2005 expressed "regret" and asked Sultan Qaboos to pardon them. The trials of the defendants were conducted privately and secretly, and only a few Omani journalists were allowed inside the courtroom. Of thirty-one of the accused, six men accused of being leaders of the group were sentenced to 20 years in jail while the remaining twenty-five accused were acquitted of subversion charges but received a one-year jail sentence for holding weapons without a licence (BBC News 2005). More than 200 supporters of the group protested in Muscat to demand their acquittal. The Omani police decided to control the gathering by arresting several people and allegedly hit them with batons to break up the gathering and disperse the crowd. On June 2005, Sultan Qaboos issued an order to release the thirty-one detainees. This was not the first time that some Omanis had challenged and confronted the government regime. In 1994, the Omani authorities had arrested two hundred alleged Islamists who were subsequently convicted of belonging to a secret and violent group. They were given sentences ranging from the death penalty to jail terms, but the country's ruler pardoned them (ibid.). However, it is apparent that although the Basic Law of the Sultanate of Oman guarantees freedom of opinion and assembly within the limits of the law, as mentioned in Articles 29, 32 and 33 (Ministry of Legal Affairs 2013), Oman is still a conservative country as regards freedom of expression, compared with other countries. Article 33 of the Basic Law of the state prohibits forming associations whose activities are secret or hostile to social order or national security (ibid.).

4.7.1 The 2011 popular protests in the country

The climate of frustration that ignited the fire in the Arab countries in 2011 caught the Omani government regime by surprise. After the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak from power in Egypt and just a few days after Tunisian President Zine ben Ali had fled to Saudi Arabia, Oman experienced its most widespread popular protests since the end of the Dhofar war (Valeri 2015, p. 3). However before addressing the Omani reforms, it would be useful to provide a brief comparative statement comparing the 2011 demonstrations with other GCC countries. Unlike Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen, where the protests evolved into massive uprising and had demanded the complete elimination of the existing political systems, the Arab monarchies of Oman, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Jordan protests were less radical. Compared to the other GCC countries, Oman and Bahrain experienced the strongest level of demonstrations. The two countries are the least affluent countries and people were discontented with income inequality and higher cost of living (Al-Kindi 2016). The masses in Kuwait, however, raised some demands regarding their political and social life,

including the dismissal of the prime minister and calling for stateless people's rights (bidun) (The guardian 2011). The only two countries in the GCC region that did not experience significant protests were Qatar and the United Arab Emirates due to the living standards in both countries. In Qatar, the main demand was to reduce the country's support for Western foreign policy, while in the UAE, there were calls for bolstering and empowering the role of the Federal National Council (FNC) (ibid).

But these should not be understood as the only reasons for protests in the GCC region. Rampant economic and political corruption, unemployment, lack of freedom of expression were among the factors that contributed to the flare-up of youth anger against the government. However in some countries, like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman and Jordan protests turned into confrontation with the military and security forces. For instance, Saudi Arabia, tended to deter protests by rigid official warnings and pre-emptive security measures. Additionally, the government also directed religious leaders and scholars to prohibit demonstrations (The guardian 2011).

In Oman, Hundreds of protesters, mainly in the northern industrial town of Sohar, about 120 miles north-west of the capital Muscat, took to the streets to demand an improved quality of life, justice in the distribution of wealth, and an end to corruption. Although the Omani protests did not develop with the same intensity as other uprisings in the Arab countries, it seems that the new Omani generation was mobilised at a historical moment to protect the state from its institutions' mistakes and wrong doings. On January 17, 2011, around 200 protesters gathered in the Muscat, where some had camped out overnight in tents, to protest against corruption, economic instability, and the lack of legislative powers given to the Consultative Council (Al-Shaibany 2011a). Early in February 2011, a number of teachers protested against higher pension contributions, lack of promotions, the introduction of performance-related pay, and demanded that a large allowance be paid for the electricity, water and housing costs. The protest, which was organized through text messaging and led to the closure of many schools across the country, led to a series of so-called Green Marches, where the emphasis was on peaceful gatherings. The first Green March ended without any significant response from the government and thus a number of Omani young people called for a second Green March to be organized. To affirm its peaceful character, they used the same name and exercised their right to assembly without any fear. On February 18, 2011, the second Green March took place in the middle of Muscat. It should be noted that the Green Marchers were comprised of people representing the varied groups in society. Their ranks included everyone from all walks of life, even ministry employees, demanding political and constitutional reforms. One of the most vocal groups were teachers and university students, who worked to drive the agenda at the protests by making educational and economic reforms the focal point.

Also, due to the lack of experience in government as well as rampant corruption in the existing governmental agencies, some intellectual groups filed a petition calling for the powers of the Shura Council to be expanded and the removal of specific ministers. There were also protests by media personnel demanding to be able to their jobs authentically. They wanted loosened restrictions on the press, amendments to the Publications and Publishing Law (PPL), and the end of the persecution of journalists. Other protests that erupted in the country involved employees at both governmental institutions and private companies. These protests included everyone from oil company engineers to school bus drivers. All were demanding welfare allowances, higher wages, and improved working conditions. Additionally, unemployed young people took part in the protests calling for job creation. Marginalised people, including those with special needs, also protested demanding an improvement in living standards.

Unlike the case of other Arab countries, young Omanis failed to trigger any mass protests; fewer than 400 demonstrators were involved, demanding for accountability of the corrupt, establishing the constitution of the country, and improving the living conditions. On February 22, 2011, a petition was delivered to the Diwan of the Royal Court and subsequently was handed to the Sultan Qaboos. The petition carried requests for some social and economic reforms, such as protecting public money, monitoring and ending price rises, giving financial support to low income families and individuals, making education compulsory, establishing more higher education institutes and scholarships, giving better pay to higher education students who are studying inside and outside Oman, guaranteeing teachers the right to form unions, widening the powers of the Shura (Consultative) Council, sacking incompetent ministers and bringing them to justice, guaranteeing freedom of expression, permitting the establishment of Islamic banks, and many others (Worrall 2012).

At the end of February, the protests escalated and became more violent due to the dissatisfaction with the government. On February 25, 2011, a large number of young activists organized a demonstration in Salalah, issuing an appeal to Qaboos entitled the 'call to good'. On February 26, 2011, a group of young job seekers in Sohar demonstrated in front of the Labour Force Office in the city to review the employment status that was promised by the office. The police clashed with the demonstrators. On the same evening and due to the government's late response, more than 100 young Omanis issued a statement to the sultan (ibid.). The following day, the strikes quickly escalated and became out of control, especially in Sohar. The protesters targeted the governor's office and a police station, setting fire to them and to a number of cars. They also targeted and set fire to the LuLu hypermarket. The burning of the LuLu came as no surprise due to the Omanis' frustration over the Indians' and Pakistanis' domination over the Omani economy and the

rising cost of food and other essentials. Protesters in Sohar also gathered at the Globe Roundabout, which protesters had named "Reform Square", based on the example of Tahrir Square. The violence resulted in a more robust response from the security forces, who began to fire rubber bullets and tear gas at demonstrators and fire live rounds into the air to disperse the protesters (Al-Abri 2011). This escalation in the levels of violence led to the death of at least one person in Sohar (Muscat Daily 2011b). In the evening of the same day, and following calls across social media networks, a number of demonstrations erupted across the Sultanate demanding an immediate end to violence against the protestors in Sohar. The first strike was in the capital Muscat in front of the Shura council, in a square named by the protestors as "People's Square". 'This was closely followed by a second protest, which erupted in "Freedom Square" in Sur in east Oman. The demonstrations around the country appeared to be growing in size; around 10,000 were protesting in Salalah and 5,000 in Sur (Al Hashimi 2011). All of these protests continued to make the demand to tackle corruption, remove some ministers, and improve general economic and social welfare.

Unlike the case of Bahrain, Syria, Libya, and Yemen, where the government tried to silence their protesters with bullets and tanks, the Omani authorities immediately responded with unprecedented concessions. During the first round of the protests, the Omani government did not take the protestors seriously, or even begin to address any of their demands. This, in turn, led to larger-scale protests. However, after the protests on 27 February took a dangerous turn and left one protester dead (Abdullah Al Ghamlasi), the government agreed to unprecedented concessions in order to prevent the protests from escalating. The Sultan's responses to quell the growing discontent included 50,000 new jobs, unemployment benefits, higher pensions, and increased allowances for members of the military and select university students. An urgent meeting was held by Oman's elected Consultative Council to examine the protesters' demands. By the end of February, the sultan had replaced several ministers and had promised to create 50,000 public-sector jobs for Omanis in an attempt to defuse tensions in the country. The sultan also increased the salaries of private sector workers by 43 per cent ($520) a month (Valeri 2015). Other reforms were implemented, such as giving care and financial support to low-income families, raising the minimum wage of employees in the government and private sectors, providing consumer protection, and ending the rise in prices. Additionally, he replaced six Cabinet members, including Maqbool Bin Ali Bin Sultan (the Post of Commerce Minister), General Ali bin Majid al-Maamari (Minister in the Sultan's Office), Lieutenant General Malek Bin Sulaiman Al Ma'amari (Inspector General of the Police and Customs) and Yahya Al-Salimi (Minister of Education) (Al-Shaibany 2011b).

At the beginning of March, the Omani Spring entered a new and quieter phase. Most of the Omani wilayats witnessed a strange kind of calm. In Sohar and Sur, protesters expressed their happiness by organizing marches of loyalty to the sultan. The marches around the country appeared to be growing in size; around 5,000 protesters were in Sur and 10,000 in Salalah (Oman Information Centre 2011). Although the protesters in Sohar, Salalah, and Sur welcomed the Royal Decrees of His Majesty the Sultan, they demanded more reforms. The removal of some ministers, the promise of higher wages, and an end to corruption were the main demands. By March 7, the sultan had removed the Minister for National Economy, Ahmed Bin Abdul Nabi Macki, who was singled out by the protesters for perceived corruption (Al-Shaibany 2011b). A number of protests erupted in March demanding welfare allowances and higher wages; these protests included students at the University of Nizwa, Omani workers in the luxury hotels in Muscat, and Omani workers in Oman Air, Oman International Bank, and the refineries in Muscat and Sohar (see Muscat Daily 2011b; Al Roya Daily 2014). At the end of March, and despite concessions made by the sultan, the protests continued, and the government's patience with the protests was running low. Although the demonstrations did not seem to be increasing in size, more violent action was taken to put an end to the sit-ins; which led to the arrest of around 100 suspects in Sohar. There was a sudden burst of violence in the city on the Friday afternoon, with protestors demanding the release of those who had been arrested and for an end to corruption; the protests left one dead and at least six injured (Muscat Daily 2011b). The army's presence had been reduced by April 9, 2011. By the end of May, and as Ramadan was approaching, a number of activists called an official stop to the protests. By the end of Ramadan, only a few minor protests remained. It is notable that various groups in Oman engaged in the protests which all contributed to bringing about potential social and political changes in Oman. It is notable that unlike the protests that erupted in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain, the protesters in Oman did not threatened the dignity of the state, and their aim was never to topple the regime (Al-Dossary 2011).

4.8 Online activism in Oman

The history of electronic media in Oman can be traced back to the launch of the internet in the Sultanate in 1997. Initially, internet usage was limited to the elite individuals due to a number of factors, such as literacy, high prices, the difficulty of dealing with technology, and the limited infrastructure. In 2006, there were approximately 29 internet subscribers per 1,000 inhabitants (OpenNet Initiative 2009). This low number of subscribers was a result of the scarcity of personal computers; there were estimated to be 32 per 1,000 people in 2006 (ibid.). Before the 2011 protests, one of the most popular websites that Omanis used to discuss and debate upon various issues in the country was Sablat Al-

Arab (om.s-oman.net), which was founded by Said Al-Rashdi in 1999. Upon its establishment, most of the posts and participations were from just a few people, mainly educated contributors, like writers and publishers. The dialogues did not take any political stance and nor were they intended to play any role in the media. However, due to the increase in the number of the internet users, the forum became a platform for what is known as citizen journalists and in 2007, approximately 300,000 visitors logged in to Sablat Al-Arab per day (Al-Husaini 2007). Omanis played a significant role in conveying information about certain events or sending messages to the masses and covering issues that had been missed or ignored by the mainstream media. The U.S. Ambassador to Oman in 2004, Richard L. Baltimore III, described Sablat Al-Arab as:

> the liveliest and most comprehensive Arabic-language forum for political and social discourse in the country, touching on issues and personalities rarely addressed in the conventional media. While not totally free, nor wholly reflective of Omani public opinion, Al-Sablah nevertheless offers a worthwhile window into the hot topics and unvarnished views of the day. (Wikileaks 2004, p. 1)

One of the most prominent causes of friction between the traditional media and online users, mainly users of Sablat Al-Arab, occurred in 2005, when a group of individuals were sentenced to between 1 and 20 years in prison for organizing a banned secret organization and plotting to overthrow the government (Kuwait News Agency 2005). The Omani media continued to fulfil the national development goals and denied the existence of any arrests. However, some members of the detainees' families approached the Sablat Al-Arab forum and provided details of the arrests, including pictures. Al-Bahlani (2013) argued that the online users succeeded in provoking the Omani public sphere and so heightened public awareness regarding the reasons behind the arrests. By doing so, the online public put the pressure on the media, which later disclosed the existence of the arrests and their causes (ibid.). However, in 2006, the Omani authorities detained Al-Sablah's administrator (Al-Rashdi) after an article about corruption in the country was posted in the forum, which led to the permanent closure of the forum (Arabic Network for Human Rights Information 2007).

In 2006, another forum was founded to complement the former forum, namely, Sablat Oman (avb.s-oman.net/). During the 2011 protests, Sablat Oman played a very important role in "documenting the protests and conveying messages to the public" (Al-Rawi 2016, p. 179) as it functioned as one of the alternative media channels due to the lack of media coverage. Al-Sablah provided an arena for Omani activists to exercise their right to express political opinions, voicing their concerns and documenting the various protests taking place (Al Hashimi 2011; Al-Shaqsi 2013). Al Hashimi (2011) argued that "protestors did not have many opportunities to voice their demands, except through social networking

pages on Facebook, Twitter and some chat forums" (p. 6). At the time the unrest began, the traditional media ignored the events to the extent that at the peak of the crisis, animated cartoons were shown on national television, but no news about the protests. Azzamn Daily was the only newspaper in the country that covered the Green rallies (Al-Shaqsi 2013). Al-Sablah, however, covered the protests in detail and in a professional manner (Al Bahlani 2013). The 2011 Arab spring had revealed the entrenched and widespread corruption across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions. Wikileaks played a prominent role in facilitating the revolutions and detailing the corruption of Arab regimes; notably political corruption in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. Information within Wikileaks cables, for example, had provided historical evidence of some issues, such as abuse of public funds and the accumulation of high amount of public money for private gain (Johnson and Martini 2012). Thus, the information contained within Wikileaks had a major influence in legitimising the protest movement while delegitimizing the repressive governments (Mabon 2013). Conversely, no information has been disclosed in Wikileaks about cronyism and corruption in Oman. The Sablah's users, however, posted a number of articles and complaints, and they succeed in exposing evidence of corruption and covering issues that the Omani media had failed to address due to the censorship and restrictions the media were subject to. They felt empowered to engage in political discussions and taboo topics, such as increasing people's salaries, changing some ministers, improving the health and education sectors, providing more job opportunities mainly in the armed forces, and improving the infrastructure. As Al Hashimi (2011) pointed out, the protests "encouraged the masses to overcome their fearful mentality, and at the demonstrations and in special councils, citizens began to speak their opinions frankly, exposing stories of corruption and theft by public figures without hesitation" (p. 7). Unlike Al-Sablah, the role of Facebook was relatively limited. It is argued that there were only a few Facebook pages that were related to the 2011 Omani reforms. Among the popular pages were 'March 2 Uprising for Dignity and Freedom', which had 2,300 likes, and 'The Humanitarian initiative to demand the release of protest detainees in the Sultanate of Oman', which had 811 likes (Al-Rawi 2016). However, the increased presence of the online activists, especially by the end of February, led the media to cautiously cover the 2011 reforms, as "nearly all of the major dailies in Oman have reported on the unrest, the state-run TV station has broadcast special programs on the demonstrations, and at least one radio station in the capital broadcast a call-in show where people shared their opinions about what Omanis need" (Spinner 2011, n.p.). Al-Mahrami (2011) argued that the motives behind such changes were to 1) accommodate the Omanis to obtain news from the state's official sources and not from the internet, 2) avoid the failure of the Egyptian media in covering the protests, and 3) prevent the situation from getting worse, as occurred in the cases of Libya, Syria, and Yemen.

Though it is apparent that the protests in Oman in early 2011 resulted in a number of political and social reforms, they became the main reason for the increasingly tight restrictions on freedom of expression. Besides blocking sites that contain illegal drugs, gambling, and pornographic materials, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) imposes very strict censorship on any online conversations. Social media users are not allowed to post content that is against the government or attempt to provoke opposition movements. According to Omantel[5] terms and conditions, the legal and regulatory frameworks of the internet mandates that users must

> not carry out any unlawful activities which contradict the social, cultural, political, religious or economical values of the Sultanate of Oman or could cause harm to any third party …. Any abuse and misuse of the Internet Services through e-mail or news or by any other means shall result in the termination of the subscription and may result in the proceedings of Criminal or Civil lawsuits against the Customer. (OpenNet Initiative 2009, p. 3)

Thus, if anyone violates any laws provided by the TRA, they shall be punished with imprisonment or a fine or with both of these penalties. Some of Al-Sablah content that criticized the Omani authorities or that were deemed politically controversial were blocked. Additionally, the government carried out arbitrary detentions for a number of outspoken bloggers and online activists who engaged in political discussions in order to intimidate them (Freedom House 2015). Thus, freedom of speech in Oman was under attack, as increasing numbers of activists and bloggers were being jailed for slander and dissent. On September 9, 2011, a new official announcement substituted Article 26 regarding print media law, that prohibited

> publishing anything that might affect the safety or security of the state whether internally and externally and everything related to military and official documentation through the print media, broadcast media or even the internet without the permission of the competent authorities. (Gulf Centre for Human Rights 2011, n.p.)

The Omani government thus tightened its grip on both Omani citizens and the local media. This became clear because of the new declaration, when a group of activists posted material on the internet commenting on recent developments in Oman, including criticism of actions taken by the authorities; six of the activists were sentenced to between a year to 18 months in prison and fined $2600 and had bail set at $3,900 for insulting the ruler, undermining the status of the state, and using the internet to publish defamatory materials (Zainab 2012). In the latest attempt by Oman's ruling party to quiet dissent, a

---

[5] Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel), previously known as the General Telecommunications Organization, is the official ISP, supplying the country with both telephone services and international networks.

court sentenced five people to 12 to 18 months in jail for using social media to slander the Sultan Qaboos. The five condemned, four men and one woman, had their names and photos published publicly by the official Omani state news agency.

These repressive threats resulted in a rise of self-censorship among writers and publishers, both off- and online to avoid harassment (Al-Rawi 2016). However, the topic of freedom of speech in Oman stimulated an international debate regarding whether what the Omani authorities did in 2011 was right or wrong. Amnesty International has criticised the Omani government, urging them to overturn the convictions. However, this thesis does not aim to investigate the convictions made against individuals solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression but instead evaluates the coverage of two local Omani newspapers and the Sablat Oman forum of the 2011 protest events, while emphasizing the factors that influenced press freedom.

4.9 Conclusion

The history of Omani newspapers is nascent. Although some Omani newspapers were established in East Africa at the beginning of the 20th century in Zanzibar, no print media existed in Oman until 1971. Oman currently has eight daily printed newspapers. Four of them are Arabic, namely, Al Roya Daily, Al-Watan, Oman Daily, and Al-Shabiba, and the remaining are English, namely, Times of Oman, Oman Observer, Muscat Daily, and Oman Tribune. All the dailies operate under the supervision of the government, which has used the media to achieve the strategic objectives of promoting national unity and development. Understanding Oman's geopolitics, economy, and society might help in explaining more about the current situation of Oman media and thus identifying restraints on the freedom of the press. The 2011 protests that erupted in Oman empowered the Omani activists to protest for their rights and demand some socio-political changes. In order to understand the relationship between the Omani media, the government, and its citizens, this thesis explicitly compares what journalists in Oman Daily and Al-Watan covered with what the public said during the events of 2011 in Oman. It should be noted that although the user base of the Sablat Oman forum is not representative of the whole Omani population, it offers quantitative representations of controversial opinions and views about the 2011 reforms due to the absence of any rolling data of public opinion. Also, the thesis focuses on the role of the government in influencing journalists' narratives.

Chapter Five

Methodology

5.1 Introduction

This thesis uses a mixed-methods approach, which involves collecting, analysing, and integrating quantitative and qualitative research. Several studies (see, for example, Campbell and Fiskel 1959; Caracelli 1997; Jakob 2001; Creswell 2003; Maxwell and Loomis 2003; Hussein 2009; Yeasmin and Rahman 2012) have emphasised combining social science research techniques to get a clear understanding of a new media organization. Jakob (2001 as cited in Yeasmin and Rahman 2012. p 154) suggested that "by combining multiple observers, theories, methods, and empirical materials, researchers can hope to overcome the weakness or intrinsic biases and the problems that come from single-method, single-observer, single-theory studies". Thus, in order to examine the performance of Omani newspapers during the first three months of the 2011 events (from 17 January to 31 March), triangulation is used to combine both the qualitative and the quantitative approaches to increase the credibility of evaluation and research findings. As Jakob (2001) added: "Often the purpose of triangulation in specific contexts is to obtain confirmation of findings through convergence of different perspectives. The point at which the perspectives converge is seen to represent reality" (ibid.).

Three research methods were used in this study. Firstly, content analysis was conducted to examine the newspapers' agendas and the public agenda. In particular, it was used to determine the frequency of certain characteristics of the news stories (themes and sources) and the frequency of public debates/opinions on the Sablat Oman forum over the course of my sampling period. Secondly, in order to examine the discursive representation of street protests and public opinion within the newspapers and the Sablat Oman forum, I conducted framing analysis to complement the results from the analysis of the newspapers' content. Additionally, along with investigating the content of the Omani news organizations, this study addresses the factors that influenced the news workers. Murdock and Golding (1977), Barrat (1992), and McQuail (1994) suggested that in order to understand what influences media content, researchers need to examine the role of communicators in news organizations. This means that merely describing the manifest content of the news organization is not enough to understand what influences the routines of media practice. Thus, to better understand what influences the media content in both newspapers, this thesis employed a third method, which is semi-structured interviews with the editors-in-chief, editors, journalists, correspondents, and Omani writers who were involved in the coverage of the 2011 reforms. This analysis might provide a comprehensive examination of how that content is shaped in response to such limits (these limits and constraints are discussed in detail in Chapter Two). This chapter, therefore, attempts to present the research questions and the research methodology.

However, before clarifying how and why a certain methodology is proposed, I will first lay out the research questions.

5.2 Research questions

The overarching research question of this thesis aims to examine the performance of two Omani mainstream print media: "*What role did Oman Daily and Al-Watan newspapers play in the 2011 protests?*" Consequently, this main research question is divided into three operationalised research questions, and thus each query combines a list of sub-questions. Narrowing the focus to a specific research question facilitates a comprehensive examination of the topic and therefore helps to adequately address the problem. These research questions are listed as follows:

RQ 1: How did the news professionals in Oman Daily and Al-Watan newspapers and Omani citizens in the Sablat Oman forum interpret the 2011 protests?

To explicitly address whether the newspapers conveyed the full extent of the protests, Chapter Six is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the newspapers' coverage while the second part deals with the public debates on the online forum. The first part aims to provide empirical evidence of how the newspapers' covered the 2011 Omani protests. Its main concerns are the selection bias (what issues were emphasized in the newspapers' agendas as reflected in the extensiveness and prominence given to the coverage) and the description bias (how the newspapers represented the protests in their coverage). Drawing upon the notion of agenda setting and the 'protest paradigm', the first section aims to answer the following question:

1. What were the dominant discourses and which issues were marginalised or silenced in the news coverage?

2. How were the 2011 protests represented in Oman Daily and Al-Watan news coverage?

The second part deals with public opinion about the 2011 protests in Oman. Of course, it is not possible to have a full understanding newspapers' representation of the 2011 protests without scrutinizing the Omani public sphere, as it raises vital questions regarding what types of public opinion were included and what aspects of public discourse were excluded in their coverage. Accordingly, this thesis examines what debates existed in the Sablat Oman forum. However, it should be noted that the forum does not represent public opinion, but it might provide useful information about what the Omanis thought about the 2011 reforms. Hence, in order to provide a clearer idea about the newspapers' agendas

and representation and compare it with that found in the bulletin discussion forum, the following sub-questions were formulated to measure public opinion in Al- Sablah forum:

3. What were the dominant discourses and which issues were marginalised or silenced in the Sablat Oman forum?

4. How were the 2011 protests represented in the Sablat Oman forum?

This second research question explores the sourcing practises of the 2011 Omani newspapers' coverage:

RQ 2: How did the newspapers represent public opinion as sources in their coverage of the 2011 protests?

Similar to the previous question, this query is divided into two parts. The first part aims to provide a holistic analytical understanding of whether Omani citizens became sources and whether they appeared to support the protests within the newspapers' coverage. The second part, however, attempts to assess whether the use of unnamed sources in reporting the protests supported the 2011 protests. These sub-questions were proposed as follows:

1. Who were the dominant sources that were cited or quoted within Oman Daily's and Al-Watan's coverage of the 2011 protests?

2. Were ordinary people and street protesters determined to support the protests within the newspapers' (Oman Daily and Al-Watan) coverage of the 2011 reforms?

3. Did the use of anonymous sources in reporting the protests lead to news content that supported the 2011 protests?

The third research question is as follows:

RQ 3: What were the factors that influenced journalistic coverage of the 2011 protests?

This question aims to provide information regarding the relationship between protest coverage and journalists' accounts of their practices, notably, how journalists negotiated the various influences in their works and whether journalists' personal characteristics influenced what they write. Thus, to examine the influence of journalists over newspapers' content, the following questions are asked:

1. How did outside influences (e.g., government and Ministry of Information) affect journalists' news coverage of the 2011 Omani reforms?

2. How did organization routines influence journalists' narratives?

3. How did journalists' backgrounds (e.g., education, skills and training) affect media content?

4. Did the Sablat Oman forum affect the press coverage of protests?

5.3 Research methods

To answer all these research questions, three research methods were employed: content analysis, news framing analysis, and semi-structured interviews. For the purpose of this study, Neuendorf's (2002) definition of content analysis is used, which refers to it as "the primary message-centred methodology" (p. 8). This research methods helps in providing detailed information about the general characteristics of the manifest content of the newspapers' message including frequency and prominence of issues and source attribution. As Hansen (1998) pointed out, content analysis can provide "some indication of relative prominences and absences of key characteristics in media text" (p. 95). However, the concern here is the extent to which the quantification of content analysis can be used to comprehensively interpret meaning in a text. Thus, investigating the newspapers and the public agendas in championing certain issues along with examining the frequency of quoted sources within the newspapers' coverage provides little insight about the newspapers' representation of the 2011 protests and the extent to which citizens were given a serious part in the public debate, including societal and political problems. Accordingly, in order to examine how the dominant themes revealed by my content analysis were constructed within the public discourse in the Sablat Oman forum and news coverage of the 2011 Omani protests, framing analysis was used to complement the content analysis. Together, these two methods can provide more detailed information in understanding the meanings of texts.

Examining how news organizations manufactured their news at a time of protest requires an exploration of the journalists' accounts of their performance. Ethnography might be a good research method for gaining detailed observation of people or media workers and the work they produce, which therefore could help in understanding why messages are the way they are (McLeod and Hertog 1999, p. 308). However, this research method is less appropriate to my research questions and cannot be used (Randall and Rouncefield 2013) because this study was conducted almost 8 years after the protests. Thus, this thesis used semi-structured interviews not just to evaluate the professional roles evidenced in the journalistic output but also to look at the various factors affecting the performative components of media workers. This approach offers significant insights into the opinions of key individuals who were involved in covering the 2011 protests in both

newspapers, including Omani editors, journalists, correspondents, and writers. The following subsections will introduce the methodologies deployed within this thesis.

5.3.1 Content analysis

Content analysis was chosen in this thesis to facilitate the analysis of a large amount of data. Berger (2015) argued that the "numerical methods are an extremely useful tool for summarizing a large quantity of data and establishing relationships among different factors with a known degree of certainty" (p. 7). However, Berelson (1952) gave the most commonly quoted definition: "A research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (p. 18). Therefore, this method was selected to quantify and describe the main characteristics of the message content (Berelson 1952; Neunendorf 2002) and, importantly, to ensure objectivity by decreasing the subjectivity of the researcher in selecting and analysing data (Sandelowski 1995). Objectivity can be achieved by categorising media texts into less content based on clear rules of coding, which therefore enables a systematic identification of the specific characteristics of certain messages. Prasad (2008) argued that following the same set of criteria will "enable different researchers to obtain the same results from the same documents or messages" (p. 3). These advantages are summarized by Hansen (1998), who suggested that "if we wish to describe and analyse media content in a more comprehensive way, a way less prone to subjective selectiveness and idiosyncrasies, then we must employ a systematic method. Content analysis is one such method for the systematic analysis of communications content. It is by no means the only method for studying media content" (p. 91). Thus, this research method was adopted to systematically examine the newspapers' coverage during the 2011 reforms. The objective is to identify the frequency and prominence of newspapers content and compare them with the frequency and prominence of posting in the Sablat Oman forum. Also, it aims to examine the dominant news sources of the 2011 newspaper coverage.

Although Berelson's conception of content analysis is useful, the notion of "manifest content" raises a significant argument regarding to what extent the quantification of content analysis provides interpretations of the meanings in text (see Shoemaker and Reese 1996; Newbold et al. 2002). Shoemaker and Reese (1996) claimed that "reducing large amounts of text to quantitative data [...] does not provide a complete picture of meaning and contextual codes, since texts may contain many other forms of emphasis besides sheer repetition" (p. 32). Therefore, this problem led many researchers to integrate qualitative and quantitative message analysis in order to analyse latent and manifest content to "capture the context within which a media text becomes meaningful" (Newbold et al. 2002, p. 84). Yet, this thesis employs a combination of quantitative and

qualitative analysis as a way of understanding the meanings of texts, such as the dominant narratives within the news stories/posts that are examined. Before discussing the qualitative methodologies used to pursue this research, the following section will provide more information about the research sample and coding paradigm.

5.3.1.1 The unit of analysis and data sampling

For the purpose of this study, I selected two Omani dailies (Oman Daily and Al-Watan). These two newspapers were selected for two reasons: 1) the circulation and readership figures of both newspapers were the highest in 2011 compared with other newspapers (for more detail, see Chapter 4), and 2) they have their distinct features of ownership, as Oman Daily is government owned while Al-Watan is privately owned. It was hoped that this might provide some information regarding how the government and private newspapers functioned during the 2011 reforms and then reveal whether there were any similarities and differences when covering the protests, particularly how they represented public opinion in their coverage. It should be noted that this study does not aim to compare the coverage of all the daily newspapers. However, although this thesis might not provide a comprehensive representation of the Omani media's coverage at a time of protest, it provides a robust study of the coverage by leading newspapers in Oman.

Additionally, in order to provide a clear idea about the ongoing public debates about the 2011 reforms among Omani citizens, this study uses the Sablat Oman forum as a source of public opinion. This forum was chosen for two reasons: 1) it was the centre of discussion for most Omanis during the reforms, and therefore it might provide a valid contribution about the Omani public sphere, and 2) it might provide a comparative analysis about the newspapers' agendas and the online public agenda. However, it should be noted that Sablat Oman forum reflected the views of those who used it, which means that the online forum was not a representation of the public sphere/ opinion, (for more details, see Chapter Six). The absence of places and opportunities for Omanis to discuss the politic situation and its related issues forced them to approach the Sablah forum. From 2006 to 2011, the number of topics discussed in Sablat Oman was 950,000 and the number of active members reached 170,600; with more than 21 million participations; according to Sablat Oman forum statistics (2011). The forum comprised 19 sections dedicated to general or specific subjects; each section was called "sablah", for example, political and economic sablah, religion sablah, general sablah, weather and climate sablah, tourism and hobbies sablah, art and media sablah, scientific sablah, students abroad sablah, legal sablah, health sablah, technology sablah, culture sablah, sport sablah, market sablah, and social and educational sablah etc. This study, however, focuses on the political and economic sablah, one of the most popular discussion sections

within the forum, which covered variety of political and economic issues, as the majority of the protest posts were found in this section. Like many other subforums, the political economic Sablah, embraces a diverse society. This means anyone from intellectuals to writers, businessmen, journalists, and any one in between are welcome. Al-Sabla's users must register with the forum in order to create content or post messages. One of the main advantages of this online forum, according to Sablat Oman forum (2011), is that users can express their opinions anonymously, and therefore are protected from any type of retaliation. Unregistered users of Al-Sablah can only view the contents of the forum and read existing messages. This forum's only purpose is to provide Omanis a safe place to discuss their concerns on a wide swath of issues. Those issues can range from unemployment, improving work conditions, corruption, abuse of public money, guaranteeing freedom of expression, and many more.

Moosa Alfraei was the General Manager of the political economy forum Sablah and the Sablat Oman forum as a whole until 2013. He promoted active members and participants to moderators. Moderators are granted access to the posts and threads of all members for the purpose of monitoring forum activity. Standard privileges of moderators include: encouraging forum participation, responding to specific complaints, answering users' concerns about the forum, and deleting any posts and threads when needed (ibid.). Any topic that might promote sedition, incite violence, spread unsubstantiated gossip, and violate public discipline and morals is prohibited in the Sablah. Thus, Al-Sablah's administrators and moderators have the right to warn and ban members who attempt to subvert or violate Al-Sablah policies (ibid.). If moderators are not effective, it directly impacts the quality of a forum and its users. The board serves as a tremendous online community for many Omanis. Sablat Oman forum statistics (2011) show that around 2 million participations were witnessed in the political and economic sablah and around 72,677 topics were discussed. One important thing to mention here is that since the Sablat Oman forum is a public space, there are no ethical considerations that should be taken into account to protect subjects or minimize invasions of privacy. The period for this study, from January 17 to March 31, 2011, was chosen because it arguably yielded the greatest number of protests and witnessed substantial shifts in newspapers' coverage over the 74 days. It therefore provided a significant and meaningful insight into how the newspapers and the Sablat Oman forum dealt with the 2011 protest events in their coverage.

In order to examine the role of the selected newspapers (Oman Daily and Al-Watan) and the Sablat Oman forum over the course of the sampling period, this study pursues an event-oriented approach. This helps understand how both newspapers contextualized the events and the Omani sphere during the 2011 protests. The units of analysis were every

single news item (e.g., general news, column-article, commentary/ criticism or other) in both newspapers concerning the 2011 protests and any related issues. All articles about the 2011 Omani protests within this timeframe were coded. A total of 800 news items were collected within 74 days: 354 from Oman Daily and 446 from Al-Watan. Unlike the newspapers, with the Sablat Oman forum, the terminology is different, and the unit of analysis was each posted message about the 2011 protest and its related issues in the political and economic sablah. However, posts about regional and international affairs, gossip, entertainment, and any other issues that did not address the research concerns were discarded. Around 1,783 posts concerning the 2011 reforms were collected and coded.

The news articles and posts were obtained by accessing the newspapers and the Al-Sablah archives. The samples of Al-Watan were collected from its electronic version online while no online sources about the 2011 coverage were found in the Oman Daily website. Thus, I visited the news organization in Al-Qurum and asked for permission to access the organization's archive. Unlike at Al-Watan, where it took me a month to collect the samples, it took me almost two months to manually collect Oman Daily samples. The study samples were collected from all sections of the newspapers. In contrast, I obtained Al-Sablah samples by accessing the Sablat Oman forum's online archive, and I spent almost two months collecting the Al-Sablah samples. Overall, it took nearly six months to collect the samples and to design and then modify a coding scheme.

5.3.1.2 The coding scheme

After a pilot study had been conducted using a random selection of articles, three coding sheets were designed. The first and third coding sheets concerned the newspapers' coverage (their news agendas and sourcing use) while the second one dealt with the Sablat Oman forum (public opinion). The first coding schedule of content analysis aimed to scrutinize the newspapers' agendas in championing certain issues. It was designed to identify the type of newspaper (Oman Daily or Al-Watan), the date of coverage (day and month), the main types of content that were published in the Omani daily newspapers (e.g., general news, column-article, commentary/ criticism or other), the number of references and attributed information, and the main themes that were covered and discussed in the newspapers. In order to examine the newspapers' agendas, only significant articles were considered. This thesis is mainly concerned with news items that addressed the street protests, public demands, government's responses to public demands, and some other related issues; therefore, the coverage of regional and international issues, sport, and entertainment was excluded from the analysis. To understand which topics received more attention than others, the issues were categorized

into fifteen broad themes: (1) street protests, (2) political reforms, (3) economic demands, (4) social demands, (5) public petition to the Sultan, (6) the government's/ the Sultan's responses to public demands, (7) human rights, (8) human morality, (9) media and media freedom, (10) social media, (11) police, public prosecution, courts and legal, (12) crime, (13) youth, (14) others, and (15) cannot be determined. Some of the broad categories comprised subcategories; for example, the political reforms theme comprised six subcategories, including widening the powers of the Shura (consultative) council, ousting the government by sacking incompetent ministers and bringing them to justice, dealing with corruption/ ensuring protection of public money, strengthening the judiciary's independence, guaranteeing freedom of expression, and others. The economic demands theme also comprised eight subcategories: consumer protection and an end to rising prices, employment, improving work conditions, raising the minimum salaries of employees in the government and private sectors, monthly assistance for job-seekers, care and financial support for low-income families, the establishment of Islamic banks and Islamic investment and insurance companies, and others. The social demands theme, however, was divided into four categories: regulating teaching and guaranteeing teachers the right to form syndicates, establishing more higher-education institutes, scholarships and higher pay and others. These subcategories might reveal more information that would help in measuring the frequencies and prominence of coverage of the key issues during the protests. For example, if a particular issue was covered frequently in a newspaper, it would suggest the importance of that topic, and thus it would be categorized as being at the top of the agenda. In addition to newspapers' agendas, information about date of coverage, types of content, and number of sources aims to provide general characteristics about coverage of the protests. All the news stories from the two newspapers for all 74 days underwent content analysis and were manually coded. However, if a particular news story contained any quoted source or attributed information, the story was coded and analysed further to examine the source pattern, as will be addressed in the third coding sheet.

Along with examining the newspapers' agendas, this thesis extends agenda setting theory to social media networks, mainly bulletin board discussions. Some scholars have demonstrated the ability of online forums to inform the discussion of public opinion in political coverage (e.g., Roberts et al. 2002; Lee et al. 2005; Luo 2014). They have demonstrated that frequency and heavy posting imply importance and salience in the online forum environment. Thus, the second coding sheet was designed to examine and quantify the prominence and frequency of coverage of the key issues during the protests in the online public domain. The objective of the second coding sheet designed for the Sablat Oman forum was to identify the date of posting (day and month), the number of visitors per post, the number of comments per post, and the main themes that were

posted and discussed in the Sablah. To understand which topic received more attention than others, the central theme of each post as manifested in the title was coded and content analysis applied as follows: (1) street protests, (2) political reforms, (3) economic demands, (4) social demands, (5) public petition to the Sultan, (6) the government's/ the Sultan's responses to public demands, (7) human rights, (8) human morality, (9) media and media freedom, (10) social media, (11) police, public prosecution, courts and legal, (12) crime, (13) youth, (14) others, and (15) cannot be determined. The number of posts about a particular issue raises its level of salience. The gauge of an issue's salience provides a significant indication about the importance of real-world issues and events. Additionally, Al-Sablah participants can create threads to comment on another poster's messages (see Roberts et al. 2002, p. 456). Thus, the number of comments and visits within a post indicates the salience of a story. Participants' comments were not included in the analysis.

The third coding sheet aims to examine source use in Oman Daily and Al-Watan. Thus, it targeted only news stories that contained quotations or attributed information. It was designed to answer RQ2, notably, to investigate the sourcing practises of the coverage in 2011 of Oman Daily and Al-Watan. In order to analyse source practises, I followed Lewis, Inthorn, and Wahl-Jorgensen's approach (2005), which involves examining every implicit and direct reference to officials and public opinions. In practice, this posed a serious challenge. Some references were easy to identify whereas other were difficult to locate without reading every single news item, as they included more subtle inferences, for example, 'citizens think that…', 'there is a common feeling of...' or 'officials denounced …'. Yet, examining news sources requires vigilance. Thus, within the 800 news items I examined, I found only 377 news items contained sources, that is, 152 news items in Oman Daily and 225 news items in Al-Watan. In total, 768 distinct sources were found in both dailies (there is further discussion about the number of sources in Chapter Seven). Accordingly, to examine source practices, the coding schedule was split into two parts. The first part contains variables related to the general characteristics of the referenced news story; similar to those listed in the first coding schedule (e.g., type of newspaper, day/month of coverage, main theme of the story, number of references, and attributed information). Additional variables were added concerning the origin of the story. Stories were categorized as wire stories (Oman News Agency ONA, or other wire service), staff-written stories (organization staff and correspondents), and non-staff-written stories (experts or ordinary people). In some cases, mainly in Oman Daily, I found some news stories were not identified by origin. Thus, I coded them as media organization stories based on Culbertson's definition of staff-written stories: "All stories not clearly identified as coming from a wire service, syndicate or other non-staff source" (1975, p. 10). Also, to

know more about how the central theme was discussed, each story was categorized according to the degree of conflict (conflict-centred story or non-conflict-centred story) *(this classification will be discussed further in Chapter Seven).* This analysis is useful, as it helps in identifying how the inclusion of certain voices/ sources encouraged the use of certain ideas to interpret the specific news event. During data collection, I found some news stories contained more than one source. In addition, because the study aims to identify the characteristics of every single reference found in every news story, each source was coded separately. Thus, the second part contains variables related to the general characteristics of every single source including affiliation (the head of state, government official, protester, ordinary citizen, members of the police and army, business people, journalists, religious bodies, international quotations, and others) and identification (veiled or unveiled). These analyses aim to examine the dominant sources that were cited or quoted and the use of anonymous sources in both newspapers during the 2011 protests.

Before interpreting the findings, it is essential to test the coding schedule in the early stages of the research process: "If the coding is not reliable, the analysis cannot be trusted" (Singletary 1993, p. 294). Although I extensively reviewed and modified my coding categories and their attendant definitions during the early stages of my study, this research did not include a secondary coder, which could have enhanced the validity and consistency of the findings presented herein and identified any weaknesses in my coding scheme. The amount of time needed for training, e.g., explaining the coding categories, clarifying the definition of each code, and using qualitative data analysis software, was a major challenge that prevented me from including a second coder in the conduct of my research. Nonetheless, in order to compensate for this, I carried out my own internal checks, and therefore, I am confident that I applied my coding scheme definitions as accurately and as comprehensively and with as much relevance to the research project as possible. Finally, once all the news stories and posts had been analysed, they were input into a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences program (SPSS). The purpose of this step is to facilitate the analysis of big data, especially when it comes to comparing the media coverage in the two newspapers with the public postings in the Sablah (see appendix for full details of the coding categories examined within this research).

5.3.2 News framing analysis

Examining the frequency of particular issues and sources during the coverage of the 2011 protests reveals little about how journalists operate to "promote a particular interpretation" (Entman 2004, p. 5). Thus, in order to interpret meaning in the texts, I applied framing analysis as a quantitative and qualitative approach to study the newspapers' content. As

previously discussed in Chapter Two, several scholars have conceptually defined media frames (for example, Gamson and Modigliani 1987, 1989; Entman 1993; McCombs and Shaw 1993; Reese 2001; Kim and McCombs 2007; Reese 2007). Media framing functions to present an event in a particular way by selecting certain interpretations and excluding some others from the central arguments. In this respect, a frame can be considered as an indispensable and powerful tool for making certain aspects of a phenomenon salient or marginalized. Scholars, such as Pan and Kosirki (1993), Tankard (2001), and Shah et al. (2002), identified the selection of headlines and quotations as framing devices which might contribute to influencing media discourse (for more about news frames, see Chapter Two). Thus, this thesis focuses on the newspapers' dominant discourses as embodied in their news headlines, quotations, and detailed examples to answer RQ1 and RQ2, notably demonstrating how the dominant themes and citizen's opinions exposed by my content analysis were constructed within the newspapers' coverage of the 2011 protests. In this way, framing analysis can "reconstitute a sense of the whole" (Pauly 1991, p. 10). This approach was chosen for two reasons: 1) by providing a detailed account of how protests and public opinion were presented in news stories, this analysis serves as a springboard for investigating the factors that influence the way journalists frame certain issues and 2) by doing so, it helps in drawing inferences about the conditions of news organizations at the time of their production, which therefore helps in understanding some aspects related to news production in Oman.

5.3.2.1 Frame design

In designing the framing analysis, this thesis followed Van Gorp's (2006) approach: 'Each frame that a journalist applies in a text can be represented as a "frame package", a cluster of logical organized devices that function as an identity kit for a frame' (p. 64). Media text can be considered as a set of interpretive packages that give meaning to an event or issue. When analysing media coverage during protests, many researchers have used variables related to the protest paradigm template (e.g., Brasted 2005; Boyle 2012; Spyridou 2015). Thus, to explicitly examine how the Omani newspapers set the frame for encouraging or narrowing public debates about the 2011 reforms, I combined some of the variables used in the literature of protest coverage to identify the framing devices. This analysis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding about the type of information and issues that the newspapers employed to weaken the legitimacy of the protests. The framing devices, therefore, contained variables regarding the portrayal of the protests and the sourcing practices.

After the initial pilot study had been conducted, three overall themes were apparent. to examine how the Omani newspapers/online users represented the 2011 reforms. These

included an overt emphasis on one of the following themes in news headlines/ post titles: (1) loyalty, defined as insisting on loyalty to the country and the sultan; (2) acts of vandalism, defined as emphasizing the negative implications of the protests, for example, deviant behaviour, weird incidents, and conflict with the police; and (3) acts of protest, where journalists/ online users acknowledge one or more of these criteria: the various protests that erupted in different places in Oman, the reasons behind the protests, and the violence against the protesters. For instance, if the headline of one particular news story emphasised the way the police dealt with the protester; like shooting live bullets, the story would be framed as a protest action.

In order to convey an extensive picture of the newspapers' representations of the protests, the news coverage of the 2011 protests is also analysed regarding the public opinions expressed by sources. This analysis aims to examine whether citizens were determined to be supporting the protests/ protesters and whether the use of anonymous sources in protests reporting led to news content that supported the 2011 protests. Deacon et al. (1999, p. 133) encouraged the use of the same set of investigative criteria to ensure analytical consistency and reduce researcher subjectivity over the results. Thus, to measure the dominant narrative found on source use, I followed similar framing devices to ensure analytical reliability. Therefore, source framing is classified according to the dominant discourse found in every single attributed piece of information/quotation in a news story as follows: (1) loyalty, (2) acts of vandalism, and (3) acts of protest. Because I found many sources that expressed claims by the public and the government's responses, notably by the end of February 2011, I included two more frames: (4) the sultan's response to public demands, and (5) expressing public demands. One of the key challenges I faced when designing the coding frame was that some references to the protesters, the citizens, and the government were often implicit and hard to identify. Thus, a close reading was required to categorize each attributed piece of information into an identified frame.

5.3.3 Interviews

To provide more comprehensive analysis of news production, the researcher needs to go beyond the description of the manifest content of the news organization (Halloran 1981; Barrat 1992; McQuail 1994). Thus, RQ3 aims to explore the factors that influenced the journalistic coverage of the 2011 protests, particularly how newspaper workers negotiated the various influences in their work. Therefore, interviews were used as a third research method in this study. This approach is useful, as it allows for the accumulation of a large amount of detailed qualitative data regarding the relationship between the coverage of the protest and the journalists' accounts of their practices. Instead of following a rigorous set

of questions, this study aims to explore further follow-up queries based on what the interviewees said. Thus, the semi-structured approach was the best interview technique for answering RQ3 due to 1) the flexibility of time and question order and 2) the informal and conversational atmosphere, which gives interviewees "the chance to fully express their opinion on a subject" (Denscombe 2003, p. 167).

The interviewees included in this study were the key journalists who were actively involved in the coverage of the 2011 reforms. For the purpose of this study and as clearly stated in Article 3 in the Publications and Publishing Law in Oman, the term 'journalist' refers to:

> anyone who has taken up journalism as a profession or source of living and whose work includes writing for print media and other types of media or providing the press with news, reports, features, analyses and other forms of press coverage like pictures, illustrations (etc.) and is listed under the designation of reporters, editors, correspondents and freelancers, irrespective of one's nationality or the nationality of the institution(s) for which he/she works. (1984, n.p.)

The sample of interviewees consisted of fifteen journalists. Oman Daily newspaper was represented by seven journalists in the sample (two chief editors, one editor, three journalists, one correspondent) and Al-Watan daily was represented by six journalists (two editors, one sub-editor, two journalists, one correspondent). The study also includes two columnists who were not part of mainstream news organizations, one who was working for Oman Daily newspaper and one who was working for Al-Watan newspaper. The majority of interviews took place on October 2017 in Oman, and the venue for each interview was selected by the interviewee (e.g., café, public library or their workplace). However, at that time, I was unable to meet some journalists because of their journalistic duties or issue with travel. Thus, I contacted them again while I was in the UK, mainly during the first two months of 2018, and the interviews were conducted through phone calls. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour, with an average length of 49 minutes (see Appendix 5 for general notes of interviews).

In order to scrutinize the various factors that influenced the journalists' narratives of protests, I developed a list of questions. However, the main topics raised in the interviews remained the same for all interviewees. The interview questions were about the political influence on journalists' work and news decision-making process (e.g., governmental subsidies, the Ministry of Information, and journalism regulations). In addition, drawing on the findings from the content analysis and the framing, the interviews posed questions concerning the newspapers' routines and the professional values and conventions (e.g., the newspapers' reluctance in covering the early phase of the protests, the process of

information gathering and selection, the dominance of issues, and sourcing practices). Other questions were concerning the relation between journalists' personal characteristics (education, skills, and training) and their coverage. These questions allowed journalists to reflect on their coverage of the protests.

All interviews were recorded using a Sony digital voice recorder and were then transcribed, and anonymized. Before starting each interview, I explained my research purpose and methods. Also, I explicitly told the interviewee that all interviews would be recorded and that they could withdraw from the interview at any point without any prejudice, penalty, or loss of benefit. The interview was stopped once data saturation had been attained. Although the interviews went smoothly without any objections being raised, I did not obtain written or electronic consent for the research. Instead, I obtained only oral or recorded consent. Because of the sensitive nature of the 2011 reforms, this led me to mask the identities of all my interviewees. All names, genders, work departments, and other identifying features were disguised or removed from interview transcripts. Freedom of expression is still a matter of debate in Oman. Most interviewees revealed that they feared retribution. The increased restrictions that were placed upon journalists and writers and lack of laws that protect journalists were among the reasons they wanted their identities protected. What I noticed was once I promised them anonymity, they felt more secure revealing their real opinions and viewpoints on political issues in Oman.

The following step was transcription. When I transcribed the first audio, I spent almost three hours replaying the same part of the recording. I felt disappointed, and immediately I started thinking of another transcribing technique. The first thing that came mind was to use my smartphone as a transcribing solution by enabling the dictation feature. I put my phone on airplane mode to avoid interruption (e.g., calls or messages), and I sat in a quiet place. I listened to the recorder via earphones and then spoke out loud the recording I was listening to. At the same time, the phone transcribed the exact words I spoke into iPhone note.

In order to ensure accuracy, I was watching as I was speaking and the tool transcribing. Using this technique, I transcribed all fifteen interviews in less than half a day. In order to present and analyse the interview outcomes, I identified three major domains that the interviewees raised as factors that influenced their work: political, organizational, and individual. I allocated each answer to the suitable section, and I selected only the answers that best described and supported my research findings. The selected quotations from the interviews throughout the analysis were translated from Arabic by me.

The main limitation of doing interviews is that although these interviews offer valuable insights into the opinions of these interviewees, they do not represent the practices of all journalists. By that token, I cannot guarantee the accuracy of the interviewees' responses, especially since it has been almost eight years since the protests happened. However, comparing the content analysis and framing the findings with the interviewees' answers reduces the possibility of ambiguity. In this regard, it should be noted that in order to deal with the time between the interviews and the 2011 events, I took the following precautions. Firstly, before asking any questions, I began by describing my findings from the analysis of the newspapers' content (see Appendix 5 for general notes of interviews). For example, before questioning journalists about the newspapers' reluctance in covering the early stages of the protests, I showed them examples regarding the total coverage during the month of January 2011 and then compared it with that from February and March 2011. In that same vein, when I asked them about the principles and routines that guided their coverage, I showed them examples of how Al-Watan and Oman Daily changed the tone and level of coverage based on their change of attitude toward the protests. In fact, I found this technique helpful as it enabled journalists to address better the different kinds of influences on their reporting. Secondly, I carefully selected which journalists I planned to interview. I only interviewed journalists who wrote many stories about the protests. During the interview process, I showed them some of the news articles they wrote during that time. For those I interviewed on the phone, I verbally reminded them of the news stories they wrote on a particular day or month during the reforms. This technique was especially useful when I raised questions regarding the news organization's routines (e.g., news values, news paradigm, the selection of sources and frames).

The second limitation is that although assurances were provided that the interviews were for research purposes only, some journalists refused to participate in the interviews while others did not add any significant information to my research outcomes. As I had anticipated that this might happen, I had prepared a list of 25 names of the key journalists and writers I wished to interview; in case I encountered difficulties in reaching any of them or if anyone decided to withdraw from the research. Also, more than one participant was hesitant about being interviewed, and they asked me to leave my research questions with them, and they would return them to me with the appropriate answers. To deal with this case, I told them that the participation in the study was completely voluntary, and they could withdraw from the interview at any point if they felt insecure or not confident enough to share their experiences. Thirdly, slightly more than half of the interviewees asked me not to reveal their identity and just a few wanted their information to be recorded. In order to ensure confidentiality, I had anonymised all the interviewees.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the three research methods I used to examine news production during the 2011 reforms in two leading Omani newspapers (Oman Daily and Al-Watan). These methods were content analysis, framing analysis, and interviews. Content analysis was used to deal with the newspapers' agendas, the public agenda, and the sourcing practices. For the purpose of this thesis, the Sablat Oman forum was examined to evaluate what the public said and what the newspapers covered. Although this research method helped in quantifying the frequencies of coverage /posts about the key issues during the protest and in examining source selection, it could not provide a complete picture of how protests and public opinion were represented in the newspapers. Thus, I employed framing analysis to complement the results from the analysis of media content and to focus on the essence of the issues rather than only on the prominence of a particular topic. The third method, interviews, aimed to capture journalists' interpretations of their works and the various factors influencing their news outcomes. This mixed-methods design, both quantitative and qualitative, has allowed me to form a comprehensive and valuable understanding of the role of the selected Omani newspapers during coverage of the 2011 protests.

Chapter Six

**The newspapers' and the Sablat Oman forum's
interpretations of the 2011 Omani reforms**

6.1 Introduction

The wave of social protest movements that spread across the world has attracted substantial scholarly attention about the complex relationship between mainstream news media and protest. The pivotal role played by the media when covering protest news has been widely discussed. The news media have the means to construct meaning, thus directing people's attention and affecting protest activities (Gamson and Modigliani 1989). Indeed, research on social reality construction through the media certainly is not new (see, for example, Stewart et al. 2001; Rupar 2010). However, this chapter aims to add a new scope about the ongoing debate about media representation of the protest; particularly in the Middle East where most media in these countries were established by the governments to support their policies (Al-Jammal 1991; Hamada 1993; Tarabay 1994). To explicitly address what the media covered with what the public said, this chapter is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the newspapers' coverage while the second part deals with the public debates in Sablat Oman forum.

The first part aims to provide empirical evidence of how the newspapers covered the 2011 Omani protests. It focuses on the selection bias and the description bias. One major consequence of evaluating media performance was the determination of which issues were more important than others in public opinion (McCombs 1978; Iyengar and Kinder 2010). However, it is argued that at times of crisis and protest, the media "do not present reality - they represent it by offering a selection of reality" (Stewart et al. 2001; p. 35). Based on Stewart et al.'s argument and within a theoretical framework of agenda setting, examining media representation raises vital questions regarding what types of public opinion are included and what aspects of public discourse are excluded. In addition, to establish salience, early influential studies on the treatment of social protests by mainstream news media (e.g., Gitlin 1980; McLeod and Detenber 1999) focused on news framing, which is regarded as a power mechanism influencing the understanding of messages (Entman 1993), notably how issues are constructed, discourse structured, and meanings developed. Framing and the characteristics of protest coverage in mainstream news have produced a pattern of coverage known as the "protest paradigm" (Chan and Lee 1984; McLeod and Hertog 1999; McCurdy 2012). This pattern of coverage refers to the tendency of the news media to marginalize the scope of the protest, emphasize deviance (Gitlin 1980; McLeod 2007), undermine the protesters' demands, and neglect the underlying causes (Weaver and Scacco 2013). Accordingly, for the purpose of this study, I conducted content analysis of 800 news stories over 74 days from two Omani dailies (Oman Daily and Al-Watan) that were believed to be the most popular newspapers at that time based on readership and circulation. Drawing upon the notion of agenda

setting and the 'protest paradigm', this chapter proposes the following questions to examine the newspapers' interpretations of the 2011 protests

RQ1: What were the dominating discourses and which issues were marginalised or silenced in the news coverage?

RQ2: How were the 2011 protests represented in Oman Daily and Al-Watan news coverage?

The second part of this chapter deals with what the public thinks about the 2011 protests in Oman. In earlier studies, opinion polling was measured through a public opinion survey. However, due to the proliferation of the internet, social networking might provide alternative methods for gauging public opinion. Several studies have demonstrated the ability of the internet to contribute to the critical discussion about important issues and to form public opinion (Coleman and Gøtze 2001; Dahlberg 2001). This chapter, however, does not aim to weaken the use of public opinion polls, as they are still the most systematic and accurate way of measuring public opinion. Yet, while there are new ways of conveying public opinion, such as forums, they are clearly not representative because they reflect only the opinions of those who used them. In such a fragmented and participatory online environment, citizens become able to construct their own agenda to determine what issues are important to be included for discussion. In Oman, particularly during the 2011 reforms, the absence of places and opportunities for Omanis to discuss politics and related issues forced them to approach the Sablat Oman forum. Accordingly, this study examined the Al-Sablah forum to see the kind of debates that were discussed by Omanis during the protests. Hence, I conducted content analysis of 1,783 posts in the Sablat Oman forum, which might represent a valid contribution about the Omani public sphere, particularly during the first three months of the 2011 reforms, that is, from the middle of January and through February and March. To understand what the newspapers covered and what the public said, this chapter aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ3: What were the dominant discourses and which issues were marginalised or silenced in the Sablat Oman forum?

RQ4: How were the 2011 protests represented in the Sablat Oman forum?

6.2 Producing protest news: The coverage of the 2011 reforms in the Omani newspapers

The wave of frustration that resulted in the eruption of protests in the Arab countries in 2011 caught the Omani government by surprise. Unlike in other Arab countries, the Omani reforms did not appear to represent a threat to the regime. Omani citizens were calling for political, social, and economic changes, while at the same time, emphasizing

their loyalty to the sultan. However, by the end of February, the protests had escalated and become more violent due to the dissatisfaction with the government. There is controversy about how, in this period of unprecedented change, the Omani print media dealt with the 2011 reforms and their implications (Worral 2012). Accordingly, this section will focus on the selection bias (the issues that were emphasized in the newspapers' agendas as reflected in the extensiveness and prominence given to the coverage) and the description bias (how the newspapers framed/ represented the protests in their coverage).

6.2.1 The amount of coverage

The quantity of media coverage of particular events points to the perceived journalistic significance and importance of those events or issues, suggesting an agenda-setting effect. Before discussing the newspapers' agendas, it is first necessary to give a general picture about the scope and nature of the coverage, as doing so might help us understand how much attention the newspapers devoted to the 2011 reforms. Figure 1 below gives a comparative overview of the proportion of Oman Daily's and Al-Watan's coverage of the 2011 reforms, particularly from the middle of January and through February and March.

Figure 1: The amount of newspapers' coverage about the 2011 Omani reforms during the three-month sample period
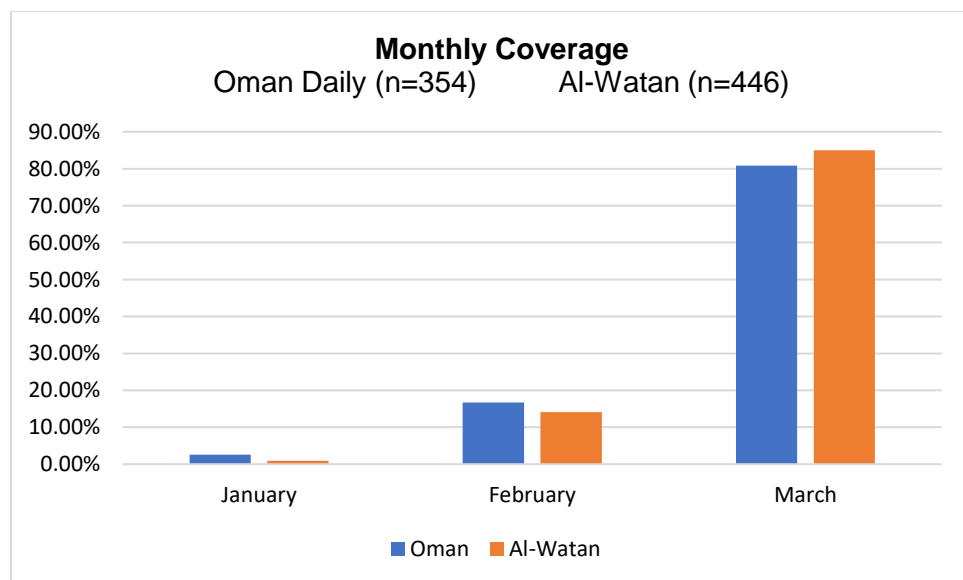
As can been seen from Figure 1, the private newspaper, Al-Watan, covered more news items about the reforms than the government-owned newspaper, Oman Daily (Al-Watan accounted for 55.75% of the total coverage). Figure 1 shows that the two newspapers were reluctant to cover the early phase of the protests; mainly from January 17 to 31

2011. The average number of news stories during the month of January was estimated to be around 1.63% of the total coverage in both newspapers. What is striking is the extent to which print media ignored the main events in Oman but gave more attention to the coverage of Muscat Festival and the events occurring in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya. More detail about why the Omani newspapers were so reluctant to cover the early events of 2011 will be explored in the next few chapters.

However, the study findings show that the coverage had slightly increased by February 2011: almost 16.67% of news items were published by Oman Daily, and 14.13% of news items were published by Al-Watan. By March, a significant shift had been witnessed in both newspapers: 80.79% of news stories were covered by Oman Daily and 84.98% of news stories were covered by Al-Watan. Why had both newspapers maximized their coverage by March 2011? And what type of issues were emphasised in their agendas? These questions will be addressed in the coming sections.

6.2.2 Types of content

Measuring the amount of coverage leads us to explore the kinds of content that were emphasised in both dailies. This section mainly addresses content regarding the 2011 reforms, which could be classified as follows: general news, column-articles, commentary and criticism articles, and lastly, others, like interviews, features, leading editorials, and investigative articles. Figure 2 indicates the types of content that were published in Oman Daily and Al-Watan. It is clear that over the 74 days, news stories about the reforms were frequently published in both newspapers, constituting 54.3% of the total coverage. Regarding the comments and analyses, column-articles were the second most frequent type of item (35.6%). The sudden shift in the Omani newspapers to accommodate the events in Oman, notably in March 2011, was accompanied by the increase in coverage of column-articles, which were mostly written by non-journalists. Al-Watan paid more attention to the reforms in its column-articles than did Oman Daily, with around 193 articles (43.27%).

Figure 2: Percentage of each type of content about the 2011 reforms in both dailies over the sample period
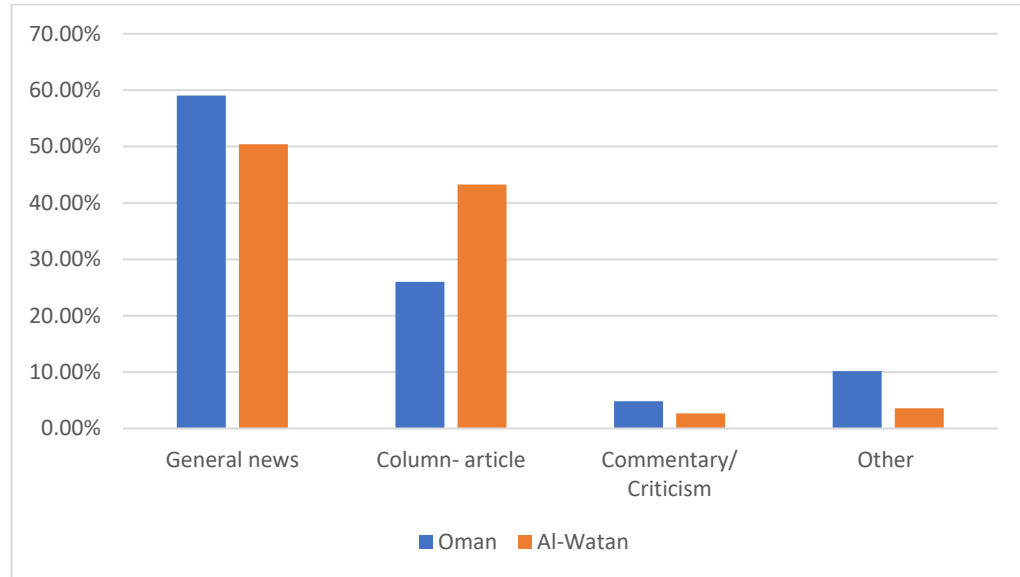
Other forms of news items were the third most frequent, with around 52 items (6.5%). Even though both newspapers had changed their coverage by the end of February 2011, beginning to acknowledge the public demands and street protests, they were still reticent in covering and publishing commentary and criticism articles, as such items constituted only 3.6% of the total coverage as shown in Figure 2. This could be because of the internal and external forces that influenced the newspapers' content and thus prevented journalists from covering some issues; as will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

6.2.3 Newspapers' agendas

In order to understand how the Omani press represented the reforms, we first need to scrutinize the newspapers' agendas in championing certain issues. In agenda setting, the gauge of issue salience provides a significant indication about the importance of real-world issues and events. As mentioned previously, according to McCombs and Shaw (1972) and McCombs (2004), one major consequence in evaluating media performance in news coverage is the determination of which issues or information are more important than others in public opinion. To achieve this, this chapter is mainly concerned with the issues that were addressed, as follows: (1) street protests, (2) political reforms, (3) economic demands, (4) social demands, (5) public petition to the Sultan, (6) the government's/ the Sultan's responses to public demands, (7) human rights, (8) the media and media freedom and (9) police, public prosecution, courts and legal issues. Topics about human morality, social media, crime, youth, and other stories related to the reforms that cannot be determined are excluded from this study due to their small or non-existent coverage. Thus, Tables 1 and 2 show what issues were emphasized in Oman Daily's and

Al-Watan's agendas during the 2011 Omani reforms as reflected in the extensiveness of and prominence given to the coverage. This analysis might help in understanding and examining the factors that shaped the newspapers' agendas, as will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

Table 1 shows Oman's agenda, represented by the percentage and frequency respectively. This reveals more information that would contribute to measuring the frequencies of coverage of the 'key issues' regarding the 2011 reforms. For example, if a particular issue was covered frequently in the newspaper, it would suggest the importance of that topic and thus would be categorized as being at the top of Oman's agenda.

Table 1: Oman's agenda in the sampled period, represented by percentage and frequency

Topics	January	February	March	Total
Government's/ the sultan's responses to public demands	100	74.58	34.97	43.22
Street protests	0.00	13.56	46.85	40.11
Economic demands	0.00	3.39	5.59	5.08
Social demands	0.00	3.39	4.55	4.24
Police/ public prosecution/ courts/ legal issues	0.00	0.00	3.50	2.82
Public petition to the sultan	0.00	1.69	1.75	1.69
Political reforms	0.00	0.00	2.10	1.69
Media and media freedom	0.00	3.39	0.70	1.13
Human rights	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	100% (n=9)	100% (n=59)	100% (n=286)	100% (n=354)

As illustrated in Table 1, over the 74 days, the issue of the government's and the Sultan's responses to the public demands was at the top of Oman's agenda. During January and February 2011, much attention was devoted to the government's responses (100%, 75.58%). However, it should be noted that Oman's coverage of the 2011 reforms during January and February was comparatively low; as shown earlier in Figure 1. Although street protests were receiving a significant amount of attention by March (46.85%), again, the government's response was still at the top of Oman's agenda (34.97%). It is obvious that the public demands were given less attention; in particular, the issue of political reforms, which was relatively ignored by the newspaper during the first two months of the reforms. News about police/ public prosecution/ courts/ legal, public petition to the Sultan, media and media freedom, and human rights were given less priority.

Table 2, however, illustrates the agenda of the privately owned newspaper, Al-Watan, represented by percentage and frequency respectively. This might help in measuring the extent of Al-Watan's coverage of the 'key issues' during the 2011 protests. Similar to Oman's daily agenda, as shown in Table 2, the issue of the government's and the Sultan's responses to public demands was at the top of Al-Watan's agenda during January and February 2011 (75%, 38.10%).

Table 2: Al-Watan's agenda in the sampled period, represented by percentage and frequency

Topics	January	February	March	Total
Street protests	0.00	19.94	47.76	43.27
Government's/ the sultan's responses to public demands	75.00	38.10	27.97	29.82
Economic demands	0.00	17.46	10.03	10.99
Political reforms	0.00	7.94	7.39	7.40
Social demands	0.00	1.59	2.64	2.47
Police/ public prosecution/ courts/ legal	0.00	1.59	1.85	1.79
Media and media freedom	0.00	7.94	0.79	1.79
Human rights	25.00	1.59	1.06	1.35
Public petition to the sultan	0.00	4.76	0.53	1.12
Total	100% (n=4)	100% (n=63)	100% (n=379)	100% (n=446)

In February 2011, as demonstrated in Table 2, street protests were the second most frequently covered topic by Al-Watan (19.94%), with the majority of the coverage coming after February 28. The increase in the coverage of street protests in February was accompanied with acknowledgement of the public demands, in particular economic demands (17.46%) followed by political reforms (7.94%). In March, news coverage about the street protests increased continuously (47.76%) and received the most attention followed by the governments' and the Sultan's responses to the public demands (27.97%). In general, and over the 74 days, although the issue of street protests was at the top of Al-Watan's agenda (43.27%), it constituted almost the same proportion as Oman's coverage of the same issue (40.11%). Also, it could be noted that, as shown in Tables 1 and 2, Al-Watan paid more attention to the public demands, with its coverage almost double that of Oman Daily. However, similar to Oman Daily, news about police/ public prosecution/ courts/ legal issues, public petition to the Sultan, media and media freedom, and human rights were given less priority by Al-Watan. In order to provide a closer examination of the newspapers' agendas, let us look at how the mainstream print media, Oman Daily and Al-Watan, covered and or decided not to cover the key events of 2011, from January 17 to March 31, 2011.

During the month of January 2011, around 200 Omanis protested at the Shura Council in the capital Muscat against corruption, the lack of legislative powers given to the Consultative Council, and economic instability. As can be noted from Table 1 and Table 2, neither of the two dailies mentioned news about the first Green March, which took place on January 17, 2011. Following the government's response, that is, to provide a monthly grant of RO 150 (equivalent to GBP 310) to 25,000 Omani job seekers, both newspapers paid more attention to the government's and the Sultan's responses to the public demands. Oman Daily published a news item on January 22 with the headline "Omanis appreciate the achievements and offer loyalty and gratitude to His Majesty the Sultan" (Oman Daily, January 22, 2011, p. 1), but unfortunately neglected to give the reasons that had driven the Omani government to make this sudden decision.

At the beginning of February 2011, a number of teachers protested, demanding that a syndicate of teachers be established to defend their rights, ensure fair wages, and improve working conditions. Even though the teachers' protests led to the closure of many schools across the country, the newspapers remained silent and ignored the demonstrations. However, when the government investigated the teachers' demands, the newspapers started covering the government's response. On February 13, 2011, Oman Daily published a news story titled "Ministry of Education discusses educational practices and the development of school performance" (Oman Daily, February 13, 2011, p. 2), while on February 23, Al-Watan published a news story titled "Muna Al-Gardani meets with teachers and administrators of Muscat Educational Schools" (Al-Watan, January 23, 2011, p. 1). On February 18, the second Green March, which was organized online, took place in the middle of Muscat. Unlike in the case of other Arab countries, young Omanis failed to trigger the mass protests; fewer than 400 demonstrators were involved. On February 19, Oman Daily took the initiative and published a news story on its front page about the protest titled "A peaceful march affirms loyalty to His Majesty Sultan and calls for reforms" (Oman Daily, February 19, 2011, p. 1). However, was it only a march of loyalty as Oman Daily depicted? More interpretation about the newspapers' representation of the protests will be discussed in the next section. Following the second Green March, a petition was delivered to the Diwan of the Royal Court on February 22, 2011, which then was handed to the Sultan Qaboos. The petition carried a list of the protesters' demands, including some social, political, and economic demands; there were chants about corruption and high food prices, the need to improve working conditions and pay fair wages, the demand to establish a syndicate of teachers to defend their rights, etc. News about the petition was discussed in both dailies. On February 24, Al-Watan published a news story titled: "The petition is in safe hands" (Al-Watan, 24 February 2011, p. 9); and on the same day, both dailies published similar news stories titled "Green march petition to the High Commissioner" (Oman, 24 February 2011, p. 1). The findings here show that both

newspapers were reluctant to address and acknowledge public demands in their coverage until the petition had received government attention.

Due to the government's late response to the protesters' grievances and demands, the protests become more serious, and larger protests erupted in Sohar, Dhofar, Muscat, Sur, and other smaller towns around the country. However, it is important to note here that there was no reference to all these protests in either Oman Daily or Al-Watan. It was only after the sultan's response that the newspapers acknowledged the various protests and public demands in their coverage. For instance, Al-Watan published a news story on February 27, 2011 titled "Protest at Sohar roundabout demanding economic and social reforms" (Al-Watan, February 27, 2011, p. 3). News about the government's and the sultan's response to the public demands received a significant amount of attention by both newspapers. Oman Daily, for example, published two news stories on February 27, 2011 titled: "His Majesty the Sultan issues a number of declarations" (Oman Daily, February 27, 2011, p. 1) and "The supreme graciousness reflects His Majesty's keenness to create a decent living for his people" (Oman Daily, February 27, 2011, p. 10) while Al-Watan published news stories titled "His Majesty the Sultan is reshuffling the ministerial formation and appointing officials of the state" (Al-Watan, February 27, 2011, p. 1) and "Welcoming the establishment of an 'independent authority for consumer protection' and confirming the speed study for establishing cooperative institutions" (Al-Watan, February 27, 2011, p. 7). However, despite some changes being made in the country, the protests escalated and became more violent, especially in Sohar, due to the dissatisfaction with the government's decision not to meet the public's key demands, which were about employment issues and combating corruption. After the death of one protester, 17-year old Al Ghamlasi, in Sohar, the Sultan Qaboos promised to create 50,000 public sector jobs for Omanis. Nonetheless, the death received only marginal attention from Oman Daily while Al-Watan ignored it. However, following the death, the street protests in Sohar roundabout moved to the top of both newspapers' agendas; more details about how the newspapers reported these events are given in the next section.

On February 28, 2011, news about the sultan's response to the protesters' demands was provided in both dailies. Oman Daily, for instance, published a news story with the headline "His Majesty the Sultan orders the employment of 50,000 citizens" (Oman Daily, February 28, 2011, p. 1). News about the urgent meeting which was held by Oman's elected Shura Council to examine the protesters' demands was published in both dailies. Al-Watan, for example, on February 28, 2011, published a news story titled "Al-Shura discusses what is happening across the Sultanate; demands for more reforms" (Al-Watan, February 28, 2011, p. 1) and Oman Daily published a news story titled "His Majesty the Sultan has commissioned the government to improve the lives of citizens immediately"

(Oman Daily, February 28, 2011, p. 1). Generally speaking, although 'street protests' became an important issue in the country; mainly by the end of February, they still received only a small amount of journalists' attention. Rather than the protests, coverage about the government's and the Sultan's responses to the public demands remained the most frequent issue in both newspapers. This was, perhaps, due to the number of reforms and changes that were witnessed in the country. However, it can be noted, as shown in Tables 1 and 2, that Al-Watan devoted more coverage to the public demands in February 2011 (27%) compared to Oman Daily (6%).

By March, a significant shift had been witnessed in both dailies. They had begun to decrease their coverage about the government's response, instead dedicating more coverage to the street protests. For example, at the beginning of March 2011, Al-Watan entered a new phase and published around 39 news items about the reforms, notably, on March 2, 2011. Both newspapers tended to acknowledge the various sit-ins that happened across the country, for example, protests in Sur, Sohar, Salalah, the University of Nizwa, Ministry of Information, and Oman Air. The reasons behind such changes, as Al-Mahrami (2011) argued, were to encourage Omanis to get news from the state's official sources rather than from social media networks and so avoid the problems with the media that had been encountered in some Arab countries in covering the protests. One of the most notable reforms by the sultan was the dismissal of the Minister of National Economy on March 7, 2011, whom protestors had identified specifically for perceived corruption. On the next day, news about the Minister's demission was covered in both newspapers; for example, Oman Daily published "A blessed step and a bright future" (Oman Daily, March 8, 2011, p. 9); while Al-Watan published "The protesters chant to His Majesty the Sultan and celebrate the ministerial changes" (Al-Watan, March 8, 2011, p. 1). The most significant finding here is that although Oman Daily and Al-Watan provided more space for column-articles that expressed 'opposed' ideas, these types of articles were shallow and lacked in-depth arguments. For example, on March 10, 2011, Al-Watan published an opinion article about fighting corruption titled "Law of Accountability of Ministers" (Al-Watan, March 10, 2011, p. 12). Similarly, on March 12, 2011, Oman Daily addressed the same issue and published a column article titled "Ways to combat corruption" (Oman Daily, March 12, 2011, p. 8). Yet, both articles failed to address the abuse of power by government officials, which would have resulted in them bringing allegations of corruption to the attention of the public and fighting against impunity. Both articles discussed in general the misuse of public funds, but they provided only examples of administrative corruption in Western countries. However, after announcing the Cabinet change in March 2011, these types of coverage diminished in frequency until they stopped completely (more details behind journalists' narratives will be addressed in Chapter Eight). By the end of March 2011, and despite concessions having been made by the sultan, the protests,

particularly in Sohar, continued, and the government's patience with the protests was wearing thin. News about the protests in Sohar was covered in both dailies. On March 29, Oman Daily published "Protesters obstruct work in government institutions" (Oman Daily, March 29, 2011, p. 3) while Al-Watan published "Dissatisfaction in Sohar with the protesters' closure of some of the service institutions" (Al-Watan, March 29, 2011, p. 5). Although these protests had a profound impact on the country, as they spurred Sultan Qaboos to make some significant economic, social. and political reforms, the findings show that the newspapers' coverage of these sit-ins did not convey the full extent of the protests and the issues they were concerned with.

6.3 Muzzling the watchdog: Newspapers' representation of the 2011 Omani public sphere

Many studies on the treatment of social protests by mainstream news media (e.g., Gitlin 1980; McLeod and Detenber 1999) have focused on news framing, which examines the characteristics of news texts that journalists use to construct news discourse. The potential of the framing concept lies in the focus on how issues are constructed, discourse structured, and meanings developed. Framing and the characteristics of protest coverage in mainstream news have produced a pattern of coverage known as the 'protest paradigm', which has become a dominant framework in the large body of literature on protest coverage (Chan and Lee 1984; McLeod and Hertog 1999; McCurdy 2012). Empirical research on media coverage of protest movements has found that the media tend to resort to the 'protest paradigm' when attempting to produce protest stories, as discussed in Chapter Two. Therefore, in order to provide a closer examination of the media politics of dissent, this section focuses on 'description bias', notably, the newspapers' dominant discourses embodied in news headlines to weaken or support protest legitimacy. RQ 2 asks: 'How were the 2011 protests represented in Oman Daily and Al-Watan news coverage?' This analysis might help explain some aspects related to the production of news, for example, how Oman Daily and Al-Watan represented the Omani public sphere during the first three months of the 2011 events.

All news stories concerning the issues of 'street protests' in the two dailies during the period of analysis were examined. A total of 335 stories were included in this analysis, 142 from Oman Daily and 193 from Al-Watan. I combined some variables used in the literature of protest coverage to identify the framing devices. The framing devices, therefore, contained variables regarding the portrayal of the protests as follows: (1) loyalty frame, defined as insisting on loyalty to the country and the sultan; (2) vandalism action frame, defined as emphasizing the negative implications of the protests, for example, deviant behaviour, unusual incidents and conflict with the police; and (3) protest action frame, where journalists acknowledge one or more of these criteria: the various protests that erupted in different

places in Oman, the reasons behind the protests, and the violence against the protesters. Figure 3 shows the percentages of news stories in each frame, which therefore gives an idea about how the selected mainstream print media represented the issue of 'street protests' in their coverage over the 74 days.

Figure 3: How did the Omani newspapers represent street protest events in their coverage in the sampled period?
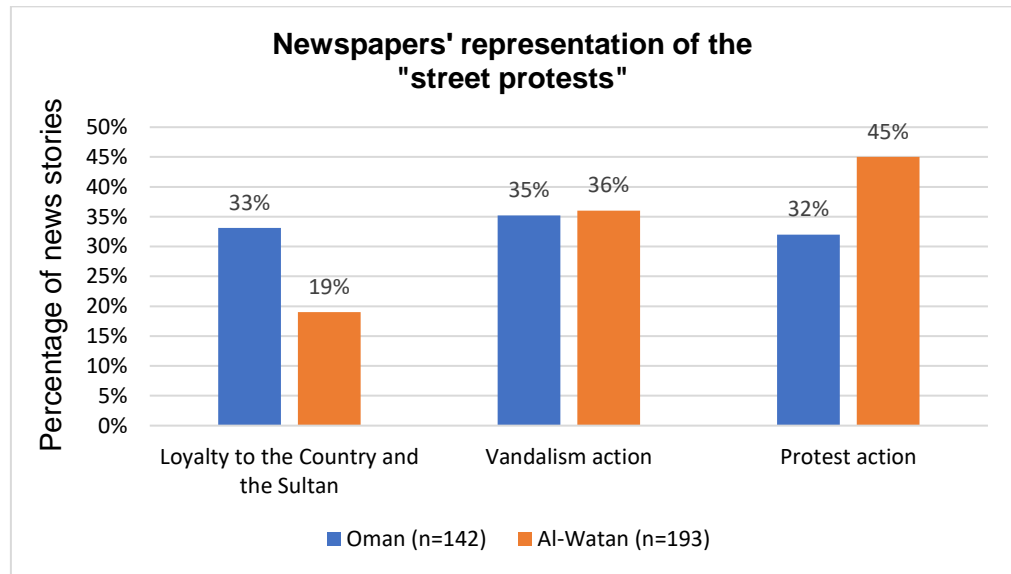
* N represents only stories of street protests during the sample period.
  Other news stories about the reforms are not included in the framing analysis

It is clear, as shown in Figure 3, that when covering the issue of 'street protests', Al-Watan devoted more attention to addressing the protest actions that happened in various places. It should be noted that 36% of news stories regarding the issue of 'street protests' were represented as act of vandalism, while 19% were represented as loyalty marches. Oman Daily, however, gave an almost equal amount of coverage to vandalism and loyalty representations when covering street protests (35%, 33% respectively). Only 32% of news items acknowledged 'street protests' as acts of protest. Generally speaking, although by the end of February and March, the newspapers entered a new phase by acknowledging the street protests and the public demands, in their coverage, they divided the protests into marches of loyalty to the country and the sultan, and acts of vandalism. In order to provide a better understanding about such representations, let us examine how the newspapers represented the key protest events during that time in their headlines.

The most striking feature that characterized both newspapers' coverage of the 2011 reforms was the contradiction. On the one hand, the newspapers emphasized individuals' rights to demand peaceful reforms and to make legitimate demands while on the other hand, they delegitimized the protests and exaggerated any acts of sabotage. Although Oman Daily took the initiatives in covering the street protests, its coverage of the second

Green March was both bias and misleading. The march was organized to protest against corruption and to request some economic and political reforms; however, the newspaper depicted the protest as a march of loyalty to the sultan and the country. Of particular interest is how on February 19, Oman Daily published on its front page a news item titled "A peaceful march affirms loyalty to His Majesty the Sultan and calls for reforms" (Oman Daily, February 19, 20011, p. 1). When the strikes escalated and spiralled out of control in Sohar on February 27, 2011, the newspapers deliberately focused on the idea of sabotage and portrayed the protests as acts of vandalism, with burning and looting, rather than discussing the underlying reasons for the protest. For example, on the next day, February 28, Oman Daily published a news story that emphasised the presence of weird people and defined protestors as angry citizens engaging in deviant activities and behaviours: "Burning cars, oil tanker, police station, and the death of a person in Sohar" (Oman Daily, February 28, 20011, p. 2). Al-Watan instead continued to highlight the slogans of loyalty and non-vandalism in its coverage. For instance, on February 28, Al-Watan ran stories with the headlines "The country: the responsibility of all! The vandalism must stop", "No to sabotage", "Call to dismantle the sit-in" and "Omani Journalists Association calls on the society to preserve the achievements of the blessed renaissance" (Al-Watan, February 28, 2011). The newspapers' coverage of that day was suspicious. Why did they remain silent in addressing the main reasons for the outbreak of the demonstrations? Why did they not discuss the way the police dealt with the protesters, such as shooting live or rubber bullets and throwing tear gas? And why did they not discuss the issue of not releasing detainees, which further aggravated matters?

By March 2011, Al-Watan devoted intense coverage to opinion articles that were written by non-journalists, but it tended to publish articles condemning the sit-ins and exaggerating their negative effects, while emphasizing the violence. The research findings here concur well with Spyridou's argument (2015), as both newspapers tended to "adhere more closely to the protest paradigm by employing stereotyped representations based on instances of (potential) deviant behaviour and weird incidents" (p. 75). On the other hand, this chapter finds that both dailies disregarded the role of the peaceful protestors in avoiding such incidents and did not report the positive elements of the Sohar sit-ins which led to significant changes in the country. The results here are also consistent with the findings of McLeod and Hertog (1999), who argued that news organizations would tend to emphasize deviant behaviours and vandalism, even if the majority of the protests had been peaceful. Similarly, at a time when the street protests occurred in Adh Dhahirah and Ash Sharqiyah governorates, the newspapers ignored them until vandalism took place, whereupon both newspapers highlighted the acts of vandalism and the negative actions by angry young men, like throwing rocks at riot police, blocking traffic, looting, burning shops, and targeting the governor's office and a police station. On March 15, 2011, Al-

Watan, for example, published a news story on its front page titled "Prosecution investigates the events of Ibri and Dank" (Al-Watan, March 15, 2011, p. 1), focusing on the damage to public property, arson, and vandalism while Oman Daily published a news story on March 16 titled "The citizens of Adh Dhahirah condemn the acts of vandalism, arson, and blocking roads with trucks" (Oman Daily, March 16, 20011, p. 4). Meanwhile, Oman Daily continued to devote intensive coverage to the loyalty rallies. In its coverage, the journalists divided the Omanis into loyalists and vandals.

More controversially, when the newspapers expanded their coverage of the street protests, why did they neglect to consider any substantive issues of the protests? For instance, on March 21, 2011, in the largest report of its kind in the Sultanate, some 7,000 Omani citizens filed a complaint and requested an immediate investigation into the finances of all ministers, advisors, and officials in the country due to the growing accusations by citizens of theft and the use of public money for personal interests. Although the incident was widely discussed in the Sablah, Oman Daily and Al-Watan did not cover the event; instead, they published only a statement from Sheikh Ahmed Al-Khalili, the Grand Mufti of the Sultanate. Oman Daily published the headline "Al-Khalili: Fighting corruption should be in ways that do not lead to the disruption of interests and assault on property" (Oman Daily, March 22, 20011, p. 3) while Al-Watan published the headline "Ifta: reform comes in the application of shura and fighting corruption is obligatory with no harm to production" (Al-Watan, March 22, 20011, p. 5). What can be noted here is that both newspapers made no mention of combating corruption and instead tended to report the public demands by including Al-Khalili's statement while insisting on halting acts of vandalism in their coverage. It is obvious that the Omani newspapers tended to represent the Omani public sphere in a way that served government policies rather than giving an accurate representation of how things really were. This finding supports previous studies mentioned in the literature; this pattern of coverage created structural biases that underlined hegemonic and dominant ideas and legitimized elite discourses (Gitlin 1980; Shoemaker 1984; McLeod and Hertog 1999; Spyridou 2015).

The findings here suggest that both newspapers incorporated elements of the protest paradigm into the framing of their stories about the 2011 protests. At the beginning of the reforms, the newspapers ignored the protests. Then, when the protests became serious and intensive, the newspapers increased their coverage, but they tended to delegitimatize the protests by highlighting the vandalism that occurred. This pattern of coverage created internal divisions due to the emphasis on loyalty marches and the depiction of protesters as vandals and a threat to the social order.

6.4 The Sultanate of silence? Interaction and dependence on the new public sphere

Many scholars are pessimistic about the role of the media, as it has threatened and weakened the public sphere and displaces the active participation of citizens (see Carpignano et al. 1990; Curran 1991; Neumann 1993; Habermas 2006). With the advent of new technologies, however, several studies have demonstrated the ability of the internet to contribute to the critical discussion about important issues (Coleman and Gøtze 2001; Dahlberg 2001). Discussion about the role of Omanis in political participation provokes the perception, particularly by Oman's neighbours in the Gulf, that they are silent. However, as discussed earlier in Chapter 4, "This is a misconception and reveals a misunderstanding of Oman's longstanding policy" (Al-Abri and Goldsmith 2015, p. 2). Nonetheless, Oman is not a silent country, and its neutral political stance has allowed it to play the role of peacemaker in most of the complex regional and international issues. Beyond the mainstream news outlets, social media networks in Oman, as discussed earlier in Chapter 4, provide an alternative information channel and enable Omanis to voice their opinions, thus contributing to revealing some interesting discussions among the general public. During the 2011 reforms, the Sablat Oman forum acted as a key barometer of controversial issues, including political, economic, and social concerns. Even though the estimated number of Omanis in the Sultanate in 2011 stood at around 2 million (National Centre for Statistics and Information 2011), the number of active members in the Sablat Oman forum was only 170,600 (Sablat Oman forum 2011), which is a comparatively small proportion of the Omani population. However, it is worth noting that during the 1st quarter of 2011, the number of mobile subscribers and fixed internet subscribers decreased according to the Telecom Market Indicators Report (2011). High prices and technical problems affect the extension of internet services in the rural and mountain areas in Oman, which contributed to the low level of public engagement in the Sablah. And yet, while Sablat Oman posts might not have represented the Omani public sphere, they provided a valid indication of Omani public opinion during the 2011 reforms. The absence of places and opportunities for Omanis to discuss politics and related issues forced them to approach the Sablah which therefore led to the increase in the number of participations/ posts, which exceeded 21 million in 2011, according to Sablat Oman statistics (2011). Thus, the following sections will discuss the main issues that were addressed in this online public sphere during the reforms.

6.4.1 The number of visitors and comments per post

Before looking at how the Sablat Oman forum functioned during the reforms, it is essential to provide some data regarding the number of visits/comments the Sablah received during the first three months of the reforms, which is the study's timeframe. As mentioned earlier,

a number of frustrated civilians, who saw the limited amount of freedom of expression as an obstacle, decided to approach the Sablat Oman forum with the aim of making some real reforms and discussing their concerns. Figures 4 and 5 categorize the number of posts according to the number of visits and comments in the Sablah in January, February, and March 2011.

Figure 4: Categorizing the number of posts according to the number of visitors in Al-Sablah in the sampled period
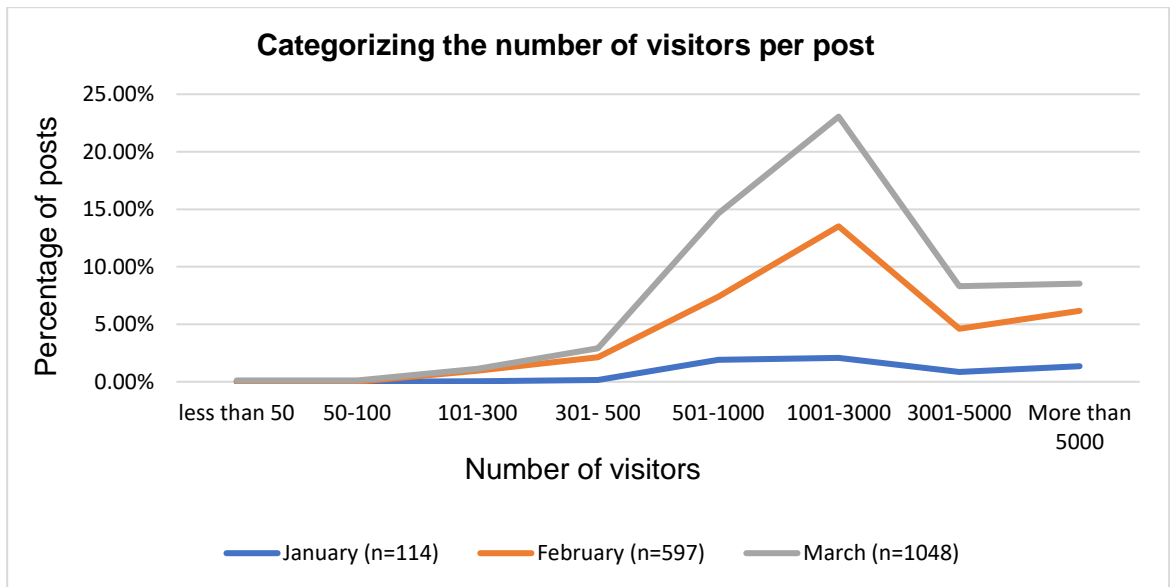
The number of visitors was grouped into eight categories ranging from fewer than 50 to more than 5,000 while the number of comments was grouped into eight categories ranging from 0 to more than 300. Figures 4 and 5 clearly demonstrate that Omanis participated passively in Al-Sablah during January 2011. Despite the dramatic growth witnessed in the online users' engagement by March 2011, less than 10% of posts received more than 5,000 visits and less than 1% of posts received more than 300 comments. Generally speaking, among the 1,783 posts I collected over the sample period, only 38.64% of issues received between 1,001-3,000 visits per post and around 70.27% of topics received fewer than 50 comments per post. Both trends constituted the highest records in Al-Sablah usage at that time. The results show that posts regarding street protests and economic and political demands received the highest number of visits and comments. For example, on February 28, 2011, one post about the protest in Sohar gained 24,516 visitors and 248 comments. One might argue that Omanis were reluctant to actively participate and add their opinions. For example, over the 74 days of the sample period, only 16.04% of topics received more than 5,000 visitors and 2.19% of topics gained more than 300 comments.

Figure 5: Categorizing the number of posts according to the number of comments in Al-Sablah in the sampled period

CATEGORIZING THE NUMBER OF COMMENTS PER POST
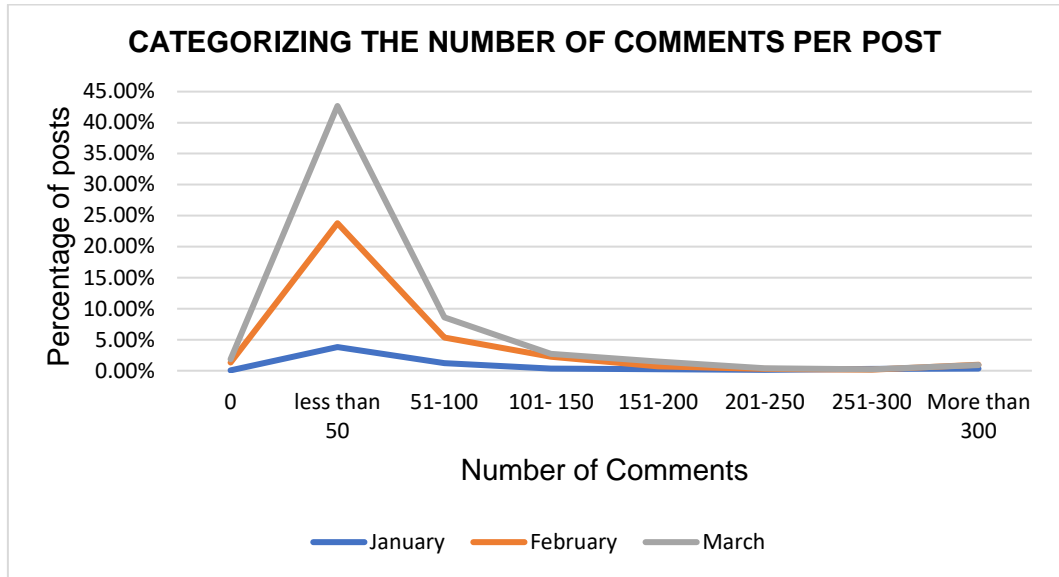
However, the low numbers could be explained by the slight decline in the internet penetration rates in the Sultanate in 2011, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Importantly, when addressing the level of online public engagement in social media, particularly at the time of the reforms, it should be noted that the majority of Omanis were grateful to Sultan Qaboos for the revival the country had been experiencing since he took power, especially the older Omani generation who were born and lived through the phase of change. In contrast, it was the new generation of young people who fuelled the protests. This might give another insight about the low level of online participation, as most of the older Omani generation are illiterate, and they do not use social media sites, particularly online forums. Therefore, both the low level of participation and the exclusion of old people indicate that the online forum was not representative of the public sphere/ opinion. However, in the absence of rolling data, although it is clearly not representative, Al-Sablah might provide a useful and meaningful insight into the ongoing public debates about the 2011 events.

6.4.2 The online public agenda

Unlike the theory of agenda setting, in which the media have a great influence on what is important or salient, instead of the traditional media, it is the online users who determine the discourse and thus break the press's monopoly on agenda setting. This pattern of online participation would create a reversed agenda setting effect (Kim & Lee 2007; Goode 2009). Indeed, some researchers have argued that topics that deal with public concerns and social problems will be more likely to demonstrate strong reversed agenda-setting effects (Volders 2013). Although most studies that examined the reversed agenda-

setting effect have focused on Twitter data, this chapter will focus on the Sablat Oman forum. Much like the most popular messages on Twitter, the forum became a place where Omanis constructed their own discourse and determined what issues were sufficiently important to be included for discussion during the 2011 reforms. Table 3 gives an indication of the level of issue salience in the Sablat Oman forum as represented by the percentage and the frequency. The frequency of each issue in the Sablat Oman forum might provide an insight into what were people's main concerns. In order to quantify the prominence and frequencies of postings about the key issues during the protests, the same issues were coded, and the content analysed for both the newspapers and for the Sablat Oman forum. This analysis will help examine whether the Sablah affected the newspapers' agendas or not during the 2011 protests. As can be seen in Table 3, the total number of posts regarding the nine main issues in the Sablat Oman forum was 114 in January, 621 in February, and 1,048 in March.

Table 3: Sablat Oman's agenda in the sampled period, represented by percentage and frequency

Topics	January	February	March	Total
Street protests	31.58	57.81	54.48	54.18
Economic demands	47.37	13.04	16.79	17.44
Political reforms	11.40	15.46	12.69	13.57
Government's/ the sultan's responses to public demands	4.39	7.89	7.06	7.18
Social demands	0.00	4.99	3.63	3.87
Police/ public prosecution /courts/legal issues	1.75	0.16	2.48	1.63
Public petition to the sultan	3.51	0.00	2.10	1.46
Human rights	0.00	0.32	0.38	0.34
Media and media freedom	0.00	0.32	0.38	0.34
Total	100% (n=114)	100% (n=621)	100% (n=1048)	100% (n=1783)

In January, economic demands were at the top of the public agenda (47.37%), followed by street protests (31.58%). By 2011, it was estimated that around 70% of Omanis, mainly in the private sector, were earning less than 200 rials a month (Worrall 2012). This explains why Omanis were agitated about low wages, unemployment, and higher food prices and why they were demanding a social-support fund for young people, larger government subsidies, higher wages, and more employment opportunities. The public dissatisfaction about these issues and the increase in the newspapers' ignorance of the public's concerns led the public to approach the Sablat Oman forum to raise their concerns. Another frequently posted topic was the new retirement law. Omanis had been

hoping for an improvement, but the new retirement law was quite the contrary, as Omanis were surprised by the reduction in their salary. Additionally, news about the first Green March and teachers' demonstrations were frequently discussed by Al-Sablah users, but the newspapers were silent on all these issues.

Despite the increase in the amount of public involvement in the Sablah, as Figure 6 clearly shows, there was hesitancy and fluctuation in the level of participation, especially in February 2011. Nonetheless, despite such disinclination, street protests were at the top of the public agenda (57.81%). Teacher protests across the country were discussed in the Sablah at the beginning of February, and the street protests were discussed frequently and received the most attention by citizens, as protests over unemployment and corruption spread from Oman's capital to the provincial cities of Salalah and Sur.

Figure 6: The amount of posting in February 2011
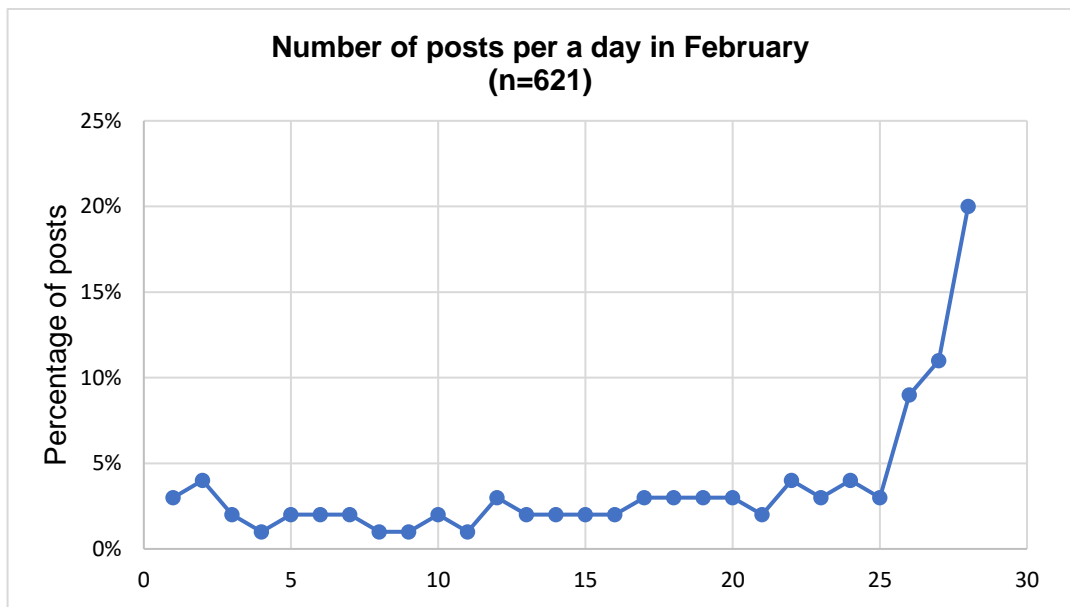
Figure 6 shows that a peak in posting frequency was witnessed on February 27, 2011, indicating that despite certain changes, Omanis were clearly disappointed with the government. The number of posts increased as the protests escalated and became more violent by the end of February. The death of one protester in Sohar at the hands of the police stimulated and encouraged a high number of posts in Al- Sablah. Thus, Omanis played a decisive role in providing timely, reliable citizen reporting from the scene and notably disseminating information about police intervention, protester death, and the detention of some protesters. Citizens provided evidence of how the Al Jazeera and Al-Arabiya news organizations covered the death at a time when the Omani mainstream media marginalized the incident. Interestingly, despite the increase in the number of posts

criticizing the Omani government, no one called for a regime change.

Figure 7: The amount of posting in March 2011

Number of posts per a day in March (n=1048)
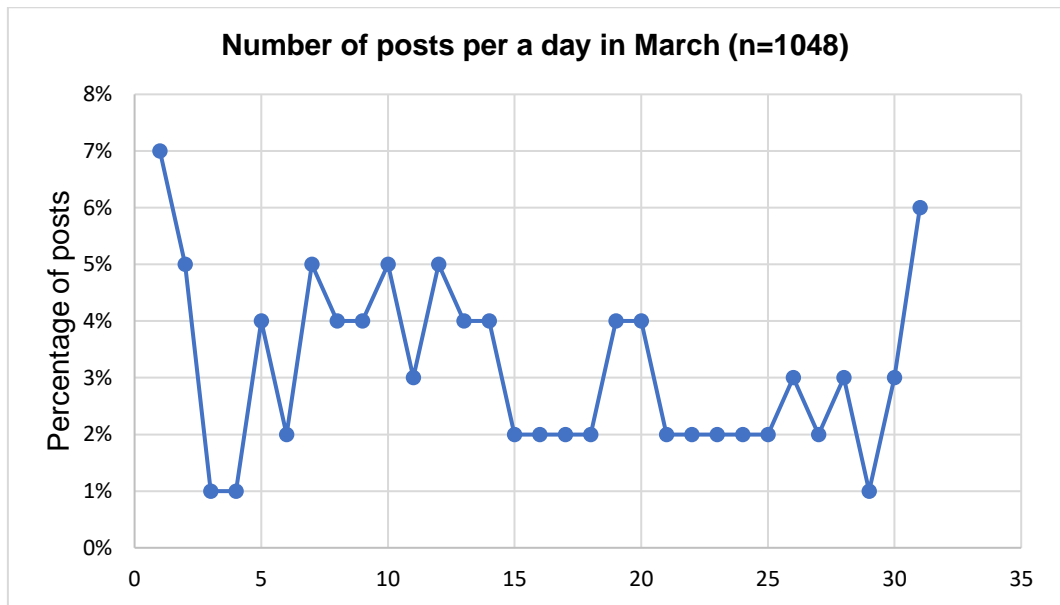
Figure 7 shows that a peak of posting was also witnessed at the beginning of March 2011. Although the Omani Spring had entered a new and quieter phase, there were more posts than in February 2011. Again, street protests were the main topic in March (54.48%), as a number of protests were held, with demands for raising wages and allowances of workers. Posts in the Sablah provided updates about the various protests that took place in the University of Nizwa, the Ministry of Information, several hotels, Oman Air, Oman International Bank, and the refineries in Muscat and Sohar. By the end of March, and despite concessions made by the sultan, the protests continued. To put an end to the sit-ins, the government tool more violent action. Consequently, as illustrated in Figure 7, by March 31, the number of posts had increased dramatically regarding the different protests that had occurred across the country, the arrest of protesters in Sohar, and police brutality. Economic demands (16.79%) and political reforms (12.69%) were also at the top of the online public agenda by March, as they contributed to the causes of the protests. However, the public demands ranged from the rational to the unrealistic. Some of the public grievances were extremely urgent, such as debt forgiveness. However, it is evident that Omanis were posting in an attempt to bring the public's attention to social problems that were being ignored by professional journalists. Thus, the citizens all contributed to the process of collecting and analysing information, focusing mainly on the public demands and on bringing about social, political, and economic reforms. They provided detailed information about some issues and events which the mainstream media failed to address, such as the lack of employment for graduates, the role of expatriate workers in rising unemployment, low salaries in both the private and government sectors, and the media's

failure in covering the various demonstrations. A significant number of posts in the Sablah included evidence and documents exposing financial and administrative corruption, like stealing public money and exploiting the public service to achieve personal goals, mainly in the Ministry of Information, Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Manpower, and Ministry of National Economy.

Again, in order to compare the newspapers' coverage with public debates in Al-Sablah during the 2011 reforms, let us examine how Omanis represented the issue of 'street protests' in the Sablat Oman forum by examining the dominant discourses embodied in posts' titles. To do so, all posts concerning the issue of 'street protests' during the period of analysis were examined. A total of 966 posts were included in this analysis. In order to examine the public discourse, I followed the same variables as were used in the newspapers to identify the framing devices. These are (1) loyalty frame, (2) acts of vandalism frame, and (3) acts of protest frame. Figure 8 shows the percentages of posts in each frame, which therefore, gives an idea about how the Al-Sablah users represented the issue of '*street protests*' in their posts over the 74 days. As can be seen, when covering the issue of 'street protests', the majority of posts (80%) were classified into the acts of protest frame, thus acknowledging the various protests, violence against protesters, and protesters' demands. For example, "the Omani army controls the roundabout" (Al-Sablah, March 1, 2011), "three days of hard life lived in Sohar" (Al-Sablah, March 1, 2011), "army chief threatens protesters in Sohar with live bullets" (Al-Sablah, March 2, 2011), "photos and video of youth rally in the Freedom Square (yesterday)" (Al-Sablah, March 7, 2011), "voice recording of the Minister of the Interior threatening the demonstrators" (Al-Sablah, March 8, 2011), "protest in the Seeb Court" (Al-Sablah, March 19, 2011), "the night of the capture of the protesters in Sohar" (Al-Sablah, March 30, 2011) and many others. Also, some online users posted news stories and column articles which were also covered by the traditional media. The news stories covered a wide range of topics: "school bus owners in Samail and Bidbid go on strike" (Al-Sablah, 2 March, 2011), "a protest against Oman Air and officials promises protesters urgent solutions to their demands" (Al-Sablah, March 9, 2011), "employees' sit-in in the Oman Flour Mills stops production, and the company warns of a shortage in the markets" (Al-Sablah, March 15, 2011), and so on. Also, Al-Sablah's users posted news from other news organizations outside Oman, like Al-Jazeera, "a demonstration in Oman calls for an improvement to the situation" (Al-Sablah, January 18, 2011); AlQabas AlKuwaitiah, "protesters demand the removal of the Minister of Information" (Al-Sablah, March 12, 2011); and Al-Arabiya, "losses of a billion dollars by the Omani economy due to protests" (Al-Sablah, March 17, 2011).

Figure 8: How did Al-Sablah's users represent street protest events in the sampled period?

Sablat Oman users' representation of the "street protests"
(n= 966 posts)
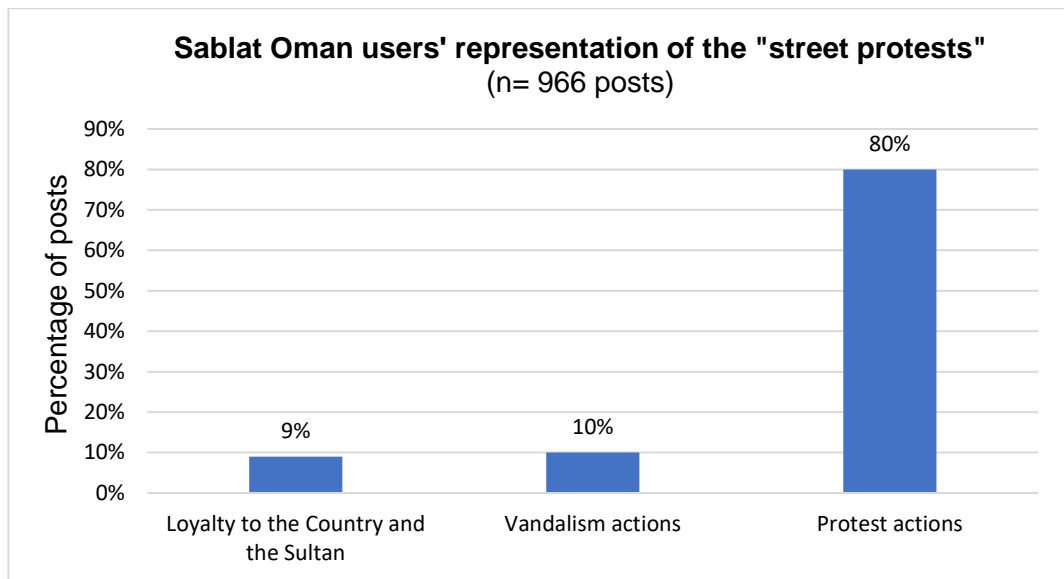
∗   N represents only posts about street protests during the sample period. Other posts about the reforms are not included in the framing analysis

Figure 8 also shows that a small and nearly equal proportion of posts represented the protests as loyalty marches and acts of vandalism. As the protests and violence increased in Sohar on February 27, 2011, which then led to deadly clashes and the burning of a LuLu supermarket, a few posts in the Sablah called for a stop to the protests and vandalism in Sohar and instead for loyalty marches to the country and the sultan to be organized. On March 1, 2011, some online users denounced the vandalism in Sohar and the surrounded areas. They wrote posts titled, for example, "forming several committees to confront vandalism", "beware of those in demonstrations and sit-ins", and "groups of saboteurs attempted to burn LuLu in Al-Khaboura". Similarly, by the end of March 2011, due to the number of government reforms, a few posts called for a halt to the protests and demanded an end to the violence. The findings here suggest that unlike the newspapers' coverage, which tended to incorporate elements of the protest paradigm into the framing of their stories about the 2011 protests, Al-Sablah users focused more on how things really were and on the protests that erupted in various places in the country.

6.5 A comparison of the agendas in the Sablat Oman forum and the selected newspapers during the 2011 reforms

Ultimately, the findings in this chapter seem to indicate that the events in Oman were more serious than the impression given in the mainstream print media (Oman Daily and Al-Watan). It seems that the new Omani generation had been mobilised at a historical moment to protect the state from its institutions' mistakes and wrong doings. The open access and decentralized nature of the Sablat Oman forum encouraged Omani citizens to

challenge the newspapers' coverage by reporting from the ground and adding threads to comments on particular posts. This chapter proposes that the topics that were covered in the two newspapers were distinct and had little in common with those in the Sablat Oman forum. Figure 9 aims to show which subjects received more attention in the total coverage of the two Omani news organizations during the 2011 reform and compare them with the Sablat Oman forum. This analysis will help later in exploring why particular topics received more attention than others and how Omani news organizations acted on behalf of a set of ideological values that prevented them from covering stories about the street protests, the government's wrongdoings, corruption, etc. during the Omani Spring. As is shown clearly in Figure 9, issues that were ranking at the top of the newspapers' agendas were not the same as the top issues that were discussed in the public agenda.

Figure 9: Which issues were paid more attention in the total coverage of the Omani newspapers (Oman Daily and Al-Watan) and the Sablat Oman forum during the 2011 reforms?
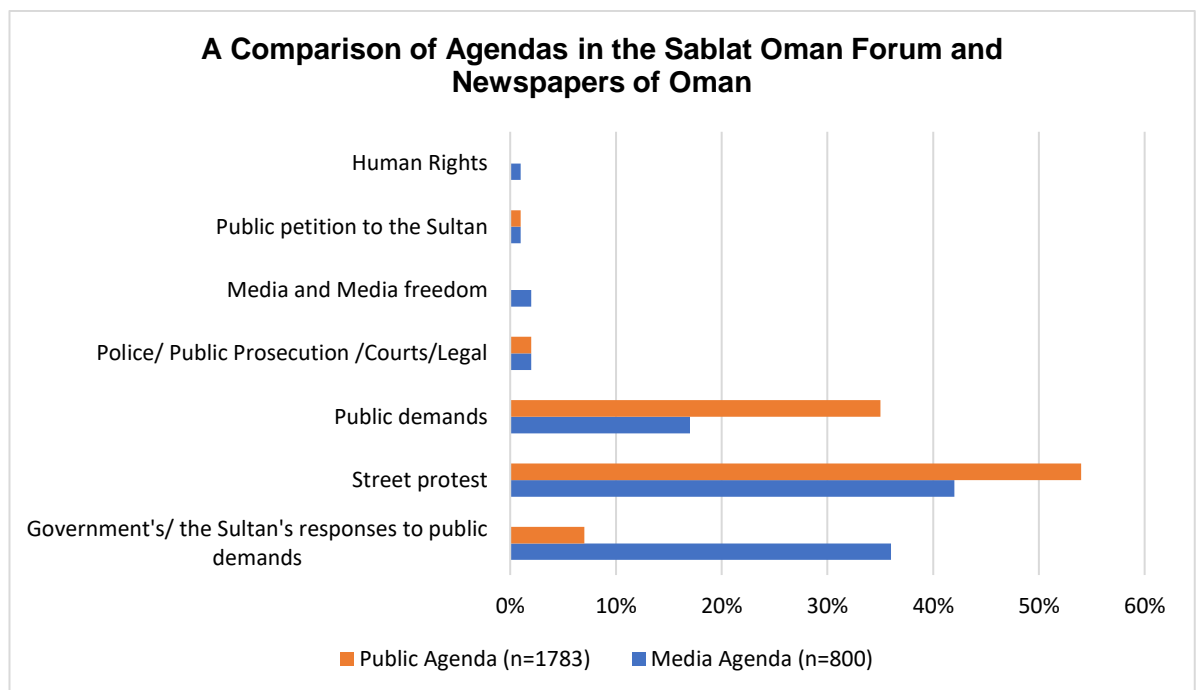
Despite some similarities in both agendas, it can be seen that topics that received significant attention in the public agenda were not presented as having the same level of importance in Omani newspapers. For example, Figure 9 shows that both agendas gave more attention to the street protests, but that each newspaper dealt with the events according to its editorial policy. Nonetheless, the newspapers acted as passive mediators and to some extent, failed to address the essence of the 2011 reforms. Instead, the newspapers misdirected the public's attention away from the key events and continued to exercise their hegemonic control over the public discourse by depending on the protest paradigm as a frame template in covering the public protests (McLeod and Hertog 1999;

McLeod 2007). As discussed earlier, framing analysis shows that instead of reflecting the Omanis' concerns, the newspapers tended to put an emphasis on loyalty marches and acts of vandalism when covering the street protests. Additionally, the newspapers devoted much coverage to the government's responses to the public's demands (35.75%). However, the topic of the government's responses was not as popular in the Sablah. Figure 9 also demonstrates that the newspapers were hesitant to focus on the protesters' demands or to state the reasons that had inspired the Omanis to stage protests across the country (16.50%). However, it is obvious, as illustrated in Figure 9, that the public's demands were the second most important issue in the Sablah (34.89%). As discussed earlier in Table 3, topics about economic demands and political reforms generated a high public interest on the Sablah community. Similar to Rasmussen's (2007) argument, these variations draw our attention to the fact that unlike the newspapers, which prioritized public topics to serve a national interest, Al-Sablah users were working on raising the awareness of government wrongdoing by posting heavily on topics that involved discussion of the public demands. The general impression from the newspapers' and Al-Sablah's agendas is that topics about human rights, media freedom, public petitions, and public prosecution were rarely addressed across this period. The results in this chapter demonstrate that the variation between the newspapers' agendas and the Sablat Oman forum's agenda during the 2011 reforms indicated that there were almost no agenda-setting effects. Because of the newspapers' ignoring of and distortion about the 2011 protests, Omanis did not depend on newspapers to attain the level of salience for the protests and related issues. There have been similar findings in the literature (see Al-Harithi 1983; Al-Haqeel 1993; Kushin 2010; Almistadi 2014), which showed that traditional newspapers were not influential in setting and determining the agenda for social media users. Furthermore, the distinction between the agendas refutes the research of Roberts et al. (2002) and Luo (2014), who stated that internet bulletin board discussions were correlated with news media coverage.

This chapter, however, does not conclude that the Sablat Oman forum has weakened the importance of Omani print media. Oman Daily and Al-Watan played important roles in informing citizens about the government's and the sultan's responses to the public demands and some of the acts of vandalism perpetrated by the protesters. For example, some online users posted news stories and column-articles about topics which were covered by the traditional media. The news covered a range of topics: "The Cabinet is considering improving the pensions of private sector employees" (Al-Sablah, March 20, 2011), "Increase of the Social Development pensions" (Al-Sablah, March 24, 2011), "Change of officials in ministries" (Al-Sablah, March 26, 2011), "Reforms in the Ministry of Education" (Al-Sablah, March 29, 2011), and so on. Although users' comments on Sablah posts are not included in this study, I noticed many online users wrote comments raising

queries such as "What is the source", "Where did it come from?" and "Was this published/ broadcast in the media?". This indicates that the news media in Oman played an important role in giving public visibility to the reforms.

6.6 Discussion

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the interpretations of the 2011 Omani protests in two daily newspapers (Oman Daily and Al-Watan) and one forum (Sablat Oman). A close examination of the newspapers' agendas shows clear and systemic biases in the news coverage. News about the protests and about the public demands that contributed to the causes of protests were rarely acknowledged in both newspapers during the first phase of the protests in January 2011. The results here correlate with the study by Loughborough University (2012) in which it was determined that the events of the Arab Spring were largely ignored and did not receive any attention on broadcast BBC news programmes until the protests had spread across several countries (Loughborough University 2012). Similarly, the results coincided with those of Youssef (2012) regarding the media's treatment of the 2010 Egyptian protests, which shows that Al-Ahram and Al-Masry Al-Youm newspapers disregarded and neglected the social movements. It was only on February 19, 2011, that Oman Daily took the initiative and published a news story on its front page about the second Green March. However, the newspaper failed to address the reasons that had led the Omanis to protest; instead, the news story was framed in such a way as to suggest that the protesters' core goal was to show loyalty and support for the Sultan of Oman. In February, the coverage by Oman Daily and Al-Watan was more favourable toward the government. After the concessions had been made by the country's ruler, much attention was devoted to the government's responses to the public's demands. The news stories varied, with topics such as the cabinet reshuffle, Oman's elected Shura Council holding urgent meetings to look at the public demands, the establishing of an independent authority for consumer protection, the provision of new welfare schemes for the unemployed and so on. By presenting this issue (the government's responses) frequently and prominently, the newspapers tended to mislead the public about the essence of the protests and therefore were able to influence the public's views about what were the important topics that brought about the reforms. As suggested by McCombs et al. (2011), the evidence here points to the fact that the Omani press tended to filter reality and mislead the public about the key events through agenda setting and by concentration on just a few issues.

However, because of the newspapers' decision to ignore the surrounding events, Omanis turned to Sablat Oman forum to construct their own discourse, obtain updates about the protests, and discuss their demands and concerns. Examining what Omanis said in the

online forum reveals that each news medium had a distinct agenda. The issues that were discussed in the Sablah were not consistent with the newspapers' agendas. For example, a number of posts discussed protest events that had occurred in various institutions, ministries, companies, schools, and hospitals. Additionally, the online users in Al-Sablah highlighted the protests in various Omani wilayats. The results here confirm Lotan et al.'s (2011) findings that news about the protests and Ben Ali's departure to Saudi Arabia was extensively covered by Egyptians in Twitter, while the state-run media were reluctant to cover the protests earlier in the month. "Economic demands" was the second most prominent issue in the online forum, followed by "political reforms". Netizens played a significant role in disseminating information on a sensitive issue that their conventional counterparts downplayed. The issues of unemployment and the increasing number of expat workers in some major workplaces and industrial areas were heavily discussed in the forum. Additionally, Omanis were posting to raise awareness about corruption and government wrongdoing that had been witnessed in some ministries. This variation calls into question the influence of mainstream print media in Oman and recalls the findings of other studies done in the GCC countries, particularly in Saudi Arabia, which showed that the press was not an agenda setter for citizens and that they did not depend on traditional newspapers for determining issues' salience (Al-Harithi 1983; Al-Haqeel 1993; Almistadi 2014). The difference between the online forum's and newspapers' agendas might be attributed to the fact that Al-Sablah is a free environment, as opposed to the newspapers, which are controlled by the government (Al-kindi 2016) (The influence on journalists' narratives will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Eight.) The evidence in this chapter coincides with that in the previous literature (Dai and Reese 2007; Hermida et al. 2014) that has suggested that the open access and decentralized nature of the Sablat Oman forum encouraged Omani citizens to create their own agendas and challenge the newspapers' coverage.

A close examination of the framing of street protest stories shows that a protest paradigm was used to construct the majority of the stories in both newspapers. These findings contribute to the relevant scholarly work stemming from the protest paradigm. Many studies which focused on the treatment of protest events by traditional news media (e.g., Gitlin 1980; Chan and Lee 1984; Shoemaker 1984; Hertog and McLeod 1999; Armstrong 2006) pointed to the media's tendency to follow a set routine and pattern of characteristics that marginalize protests and emphasise vandalism, violence, and deviant behaviours. By the end of February 2011 and due to the public's dissatisfaction with the government, the street protests had spread to many Omani wilayats and become more violent. Surprisingly, both newspapers changed their coverage to lean toward reporting the street protests, which went to the top of their agendas. Although both newspapers emphasized individuals' rights to ask for peaceful reforms and to make legitimate demands, neither

newspaper expressed any direct support for the protests. When the 2011 protests become more serious in terms of demands and tactics, especially in Northern Oman, the findings in this chapter confirm that the newspapers started to engage in more critical coverage. The description bias was clearly manifested in the newspapers' coverage, which tended to trivialize the protests by emphasizing the violence and focusing on protesters' clashes with the police rather than their legitimate rights and issues. The news coverage of the protests tended to highlight the negative characteristics rather than the positive ones to downplay their effectiveness. Journalists in Al-Watan, for example, employed more negative narratives about the 2011 reforms by portraying the protests as vandalism, arson, and looting, claiming that such sit-ins discredit the country and undermine its national security. A similar finding was confirmed by Brasted (2005). She found that the dominant narrative structure for the stories in the Chicago Tribune during the protests of the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention was that of battle or conflict between protestors and police, and the newspaper framed the protestors as "invaders who were disrupting the social order" (p. 22).

Additionally, by utilizing the protest paradigm in their coverage, Oman Daily and Al-Watan showed a greater bias in support of the government. The analysis also showed that Oman's coverage of the second Green March, which took place on February 18, 2011, was biased and framed in favour of the government's policies. A similar finding was observed by Youssef (2012), who argued that Al-Ahram's coverage of the events of January 26 was characterized by biased reporting to serve certain agendas and ideologies. What is more, no reference was found in either newspaper to the way the police dealt with the protesters, such as shooting live or rubber bullets, throwing tear gas, and detaining peaceful activists. This bias also became evident when the newspapers emphasised the loyalty demonstrations. March 2011 saw the Omani Spring enter a quieter phase, and those in favour of the government began to stage demonstrations of loyalty. The newspapers tended to focus on internal divisions by dividing Omanis into loyalists and vandals at a time when the country needed to find viable solutions. Oman, for example, took the opportunity to promote its national aims by emphasizing loyalty to the sultan and depicting the protestors as being deviant or non-representative. These results also support Carragee's (1991) finding about the New York Times' coverage of the West German Green Party. He found that the media tended to distort public opinion and downgrade the essence of protests by focusing on internal divisions. The main conclusion that can be drawn is that even when a potential shift occurred in the Omani newspapers, journalists failed to act as investigators and to bring government misconduct (e.g., abuse of power, incompetent management, corruption, and malfeasance) to public attention. Instead of acting as "the fourth estate of the realm" (Curran 1991, p. 29), they purposely continued to serve as the mouthpiece of the government (Al-ariami 2002; Al-Shaqsi

2013), thus benefitting the government's policies rather than the people. These findings are in line with Al-Mashikhi (1994), who argued that the Omani press rarely addresses social problems and "the critical items against the government are not found in Omani print media" (p. 69). Rather, the government had used the newspapers to achieve its strategic objectives of promoting national unity while enhancing the values of loyalty to His Majesty the Sultan and to the country to foster a sense of belonging (see Al-Mashekhi 1996; Al-Murjan 1997; Al-Rawas 1997; Al-Hasani 2003). This confirms previous findings in the literature suggesting that the media in Arab countries, including Oman, highlight the values that address the issues of national solidarity, sustainable development, and leaders' activities of these countries while silencing news of protests, crime, scandals, and corruption (Al-Kindi 1995; Robie 2013). By examining the press roles as agenda setter and watchdog during the protests, this chapter suggests that Oman Daily and Al-Watan news organizations "do not present reality - they represent it by offering a selection of reality" (Stewart et al. 2001, p. 35), which hinders the journalist's role as a key facilitator in promoting a deliberative public sphere. Examining newspapers' representation of public opinion also raises important queries about media sourcing practices, notably, whether Omanis (citizens and street protesters) became sources and how diverse were the viewpoints that were presented by the two selected Omani newspapers during the 2011 events. These questions will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Seven

Sourcing patterns within Oman Daily's and Al-Watan's coverage of the 2011 Omani reforms: The rise of citizen sources

7.1 Introduction

Early work on the sociology of news focused on the capacity of media gatekeepers to control which types of information should be included in or excluded from a news discourse (White 1950; Shoemaker and Reese 1996). If we consider journalists as key facilitators for creating a deliberative public sphere (Habermas 1991), the concern centres on who speaks through the news and who is excluded (Sigal 1973). Media scholars in the 1970s and early 1980s employed more sophisticated methodologies, such as ethnography and content analysis, to examine the interactions between journalists and sources (see Sigal 1973; Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979; Fishman 1988). The evidence gathered over the last decade has made a valid contribution regarding the nature and extent of the diversity of news sources and news channels, suggesting that diversity in news sources should not be expected. Studies on journalistic practices have underlined key challenges in news routines, such as over reliance on political figures and business leaders as official sources. However, a significant number of recent studies have highlighted the change in the news sourcing routines suggesting that ordinary citizens are increasingly used as sources in mainstream news coverage (De Swert et al. 2008; Hendriks Vettehen et al. 2011; De Keyser and Raeymaeckers 2012). Indeed, the inclusion of ordinary citizens' voices in the news demonstrates the media's capability in enabling deliberation, participation, and diversification (Gillmor 2006; Reich 2015). Therefore, in my analysis, I followed an event-centred approach when considering the 2011 Omani reforms to examine sourcing patterns in Oman Daily and Al-Watan. To assess whether Omanis had become more prominent as sources, this chapter formulates the following research question:

RQ1. Who were the dominant sources that were cited or quoted within Oman Daily's and Al-Watan's coverage of the 2011 protests?

The previous chapter proposed that the dominant narratives embodied in news headlines within the newspapers' coverage of the 2011 protests focused on patriotism, violence, and internal divisions. This chapter, however, will explore how the newspapers represented public opinion and the 2011 protests in their coverage through the selection of sources. Previous studies, such as Brasted (2005) and Luther and Miller (2005), have demonstrated the ability of news sources to influence media representation and thereby shape media narratives. When covering protests, Brasted (2005) suggested, journalists tend to rely on official sources and official definitions to construct protest stories and thereby tell "the story from those sources' perspectives" (p. 6) to support the status quo. Luther and Miller (2005) also found that the news media tend to ignore and downplay the voices that contradict or go against the government and the most dominant political views. Yet, examining the frequency of sources within the newspapers' coverage says little about

the extent to which the quantification of content analysis provides interpretations of the meanings in text (see Shoemaker and Reese 1996; Newbold et al. 2002). My main contribution, thus, is to provide a holistic analytical understanding of how official and citizen sources were framed in the 2011 news coverage. This chapter, therefore, aims to address the role of news sources in contributing to support the 2011 reforms within news coverage of the protests. It also aims to explore the extent to which Oman Daily and Al-Watan acted as a "preeminent institution of the public" (Habermas 1989, p. 181) in serving as a platform on which citizens were given a serious part in the public debate, including societal and political problems. To investigate this, the following research questions are formulated:

RQ2. Were ordinary people and street protesters determined to support the protests within the newspapers' (Oman Daily and Al-Watan) coverage of the 2011 reforms?

Undoubtedly, incorporating identifiable sources into news texts not only highlights the legitimacy of the quoted sources and asserts the authority and professionalism of the individual journalist and news outlet, but also provides pragmatic information about and gives credibility to a news item (Franklin and Carlson 2010). As Tuchman (1978) contended, "Quotations of other people's opinions are presented to create a web of mutually self-validating facts" (p. 85). Thus, including comments or opinions from sources in news texts allows journalists to validate their work. When covering protests, it is argued that news stories often convey clues to public opinion through the use of unnamed sources (Hatcher 2010) to reinforce the tone of the media's message and encourage the use of certain ideas to interpret the news event (p. 2). Accordingly, the second part of this chapter aims to assess how the newspapers represented public opinion through the use of anonymous sources within their coverage. Thus, following Lewis, Inthorn, and Wahl-Jorgensen's approach to the analysis of public opinion in news media (2005, p. 12), this chapter aims to analyse every implicit and direct reference to government officials, ordinary citizens, and street protesters. In order to assess whether the use of unnamed sources shaped the debate over the 2011 protest, this chapter formulates the following research question:

RQ3. Did the use of anonymous sources in reporting of the protests lead to news content that supported the 2011 protests?

These analyses might help explain some aspects related to the news production in Omani newspapers, for example, whether the routinization of Omani newspapers, mainly during the time of the protests, encouraged young people to convey their perspectives and encode their agendas as elites and as other sources.

7.2 Producing protest news: Examining sourcing practices of the 2011 reforms within Oman Daily and Al-Watan

Before the sourcing practises were analysed, all the referenced stories were grouped according to month of coverage (January, February, March), type of newspaper (Oman Daily or Al-Watan), number of references and attributed information, origin of story (whether the story was written by wire service, organization staff, or others, such as ordinary people, specialists, etc), and main theme (topics about street protests, government responses, and other related topics that were mentioned in the previous chapter). Then, in order to understand source-journalist relations during the 2011 Omani reforms, each source was coded separately according to affiliation (government official, protester, ordinary citizen, business people, etc.) and identification (veiled or unveiled). The analysis covered straight news and opinion columns. The classification began with the categories used by Brown et al. in their study examining the diversity of sources in 846 front-page news stories in 6 newspapers in the United States (Brown et al. 1987), and I developed these categories to incorporate more diverse sample related to protests. Although their study is quite old and concerns the US media in a pluralistic democracy, many recent studies have suggested that diversity in news sources should not be expected, and they have pointed to the growing awareness among media outlets across countries of the need to include non-elite sources in the news (see Kunelius and Renvall 2010; AlMaskati 2012; Hermida et al. 2014). Thus, this chapter focuses on how the mainstream print media operate in a non-democratic society, for example, Oman at a time of protest. This might provide a further insight into the production of protest news, notably to what extent the Omani press included a pluralistic range of sources in their presentation of events during the 2011 reforms and whether Omanis became sources or not. For the purpose of this chapter, diversity means representativeness - a diverse representation of protest groups and individuals, ordinary citizens, government and political figures, and some related individuals and groups who played an active role during that time.

Figure 10 shows the percentage of news sources in January, February, and March 2011 in both Oman Daily and Al-Watan. Within the 800 news stories I examined in both dailies, I found 768 distinct sources within 377 news items. In Oman Daily, among the 360 news stories I collected, I found only 152 news items with sources (42.22%), while out of 446 news stories in Al-Watan newspaper, I found only 225 news items with sources (50.44%). Figure 10 shows that during the early stage of the protests, that is, January 2011, both newspapers were reluctant to include references or inferences to public opinion or government officials. Oman Daily, for example, used sources only 4.44% of the time while Al-Watan used sources less than 1% of the time, and their reluctance continued until February 2011.

Figure 10: Categorizing the percentage of sources in January, February and March 2011

The percentage of sources per month
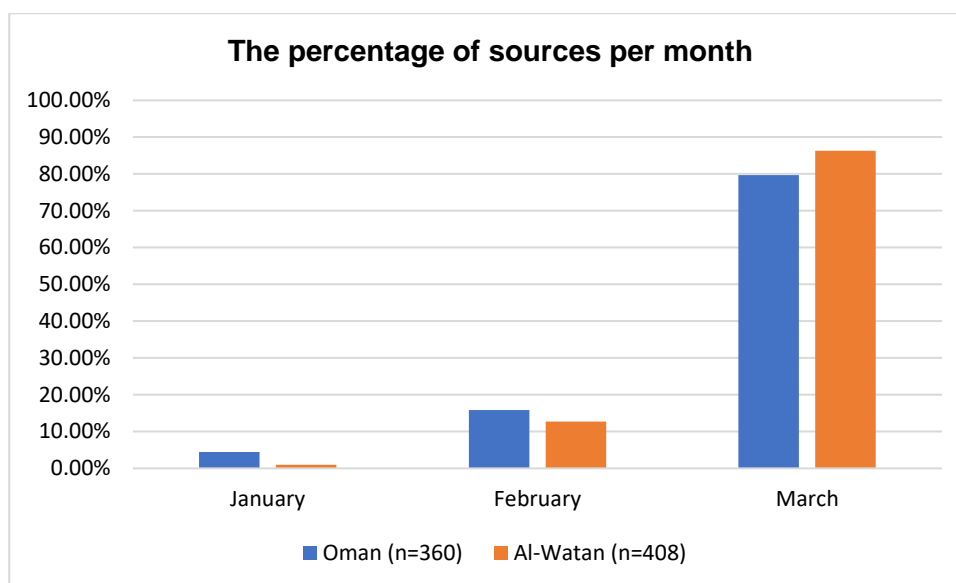
∗   N represents the number of sources that were found in all news
   about the 2011 protests

The small number of references could, perhaps, be due to the marginal coverage of the street protest events in January and February, as mentioned earlier in Chapter Six. By March, however, as the newspapers' coverage of the 2011 events increased, the proportion of sources suddenly increased to approximately 83.13% of news items in both newspapers; Oman Daily and Al-Watan, as suggested in Figure 10, incorporated more references into their coverage (79.72% and 86.27% respectively). Generally, it should be noted that nearly half of the news stories (53%) in both newspapers did not include any references or sources. Thus, for the purpose of this chapter, I performed content analysis on 377 news items (47%), which used a combined total of 768 sources. Before assessing whether citizens and street protesters became prominent sources in the Omani news coverage of 2011, it is useful to examine the linkage between source, story origin, and topic. This might reveal detailed information about the general characteristics of sourcing practices, such as who selected particular sources and which themes were used most.

7.2.1 Categorizing sources per story origin

Indeed, the use of sources within news coverage asserts the authority and professionalism of the individual journalist and news outlet. Table 4 illustrates the percentage of sources by story origin in January, February, and March 2011. This analysis is important, as it gives an indication of news production in Oman Daily and Al-Watan, particularly in identifying which story origins were more likely to use sources in their protest coverage. In order to examine sourcing practices, stories were categorized as

wire stories (Oman News Agency ONA, or other wire service), staff-written stories (organization staff and correspondents), and non-staff-written stories (experts or ordinary people). If any news story was not identified, I coded it as a staff-written story, as previously clarified in the methodology chapter. The maximum number of sources per single news item was found in March 2011 in both newspapers, with 14 sources in Oman Daily on day 30, and 10 sources in Al-Watan on day 31. Despite the low percentage, however, it is evident, as suggested in Table 4, that in January, compared to Al-Watan, Oman Daily incorporated more referenced news stories, which were all written by the organization's staff. By February 2011, more sources were also found in staff-written stories, mainly in Oman Daily (80.70%). Additionally, the percentage of sources in wire stories increased, especially in Al-Watan (30.61%). By March 2011, as Table 4 shows, the number of sources had significantly increased in staff-written stories in both newspapers.

Table 4: The percentage of sources by story origin in January, February, and March 2011 in both newspapers

Story origin	Oman Daily				Al-Watan			
	January	**February**	**March**	**Total**	**January**	**February**	**March**	**Total**
Wire stories	0.00%	19.30%	12.54%	13.06%	25.00%	30.61%	14.20%	16.30%
Staff written stories	100.00%	80.70%	87.46%	86.94%	75.00%	69.39%	77.84%	76.79%
Non-staff-written stories	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	7.95%	6.91%
Total	100% (n=16)	100% (n=57)	100% (n=287)	100% (n=360)	100% (n=4)	100% (n=52)	100% (n=352)	100% (n=408)

* N represents the number of sources that were found in all news about the 2011 protests

The most remarkable result to emerge from the data is that unlike Al-Watan, no sources were used in Oman Daily over the 74 days in the non-staff-written stories, that is, stories written by ordinary people and specialists. All sources in Oman Daily were found in the wire stories and staff-written stories. However, it is worth mentioning that, as the results suggest, the average number of sources in non-staff-written stories in Al-Watan was very low (6.91%). By contrast, the average number of sources in staff-written stories in both newspapers was high across the time of the study. Journalists in both news organizations tended to use more sources in their coverage compared to other story origins. Since organization staff included more sources, what kind of individuals' or groups' views were

included in the news reporting? The next section gives more details about this.

7.2.2 Source affiliation: Who was included in or excluded from the news discourse?

Prior research shows that journalists favour elite sources and lessen the presence of alternative and non-elite sources in accordance with their availability, credibility, and structural position (Sigal 1973; Gans 1979; Gandy 1982). However, a substantial number of recent studies have suggested that news sourcing routines have been changing in favour of citizen sources (De Swert et al. 2008; Hendriks Vettehen et al. 2011; De Keyser and Raeymaeckers 2012). This section, thus, focuses on the selections journalists made from potential individuals or groups whose information and viewpoints were included in the news-making process. In order to assess how often official sources were used in the news stories and whether the routinization of Omani newspapers during the period of study encouraged young Omanis to be active citizens in the public sphere, this section aims to answer research question 1: Who were the dominant sources that were cited or quoted within Oman Daily's and Al-Watan's coverage of the 2011 protests?

Tables 5 and 6 show the percentage of sources affiliated with particular groups or institutions within Oman Daily's and Al-Watan's coverage of the 2011 protests. To begin, it is necessary to define the different types of sources that were presented in the news. Based on the findings of content analysis, sources were grouped into ten affiliations according to their significance to the reforms. During the coding process, these affiliations were categorised as follows: the head of state, government officials (any names under these titles are considered official sources: his /her excellency, his/her highness, minister and deputy minister), members of the police and army, ordinary citizens (citizens who were not protesting), street protesters, business people (employee from the private or government sectors commenting on the effects of the protests on the country's income and economy, etc.), journalists (anyone who had taken up journalism as a profession, as clearly defined in Chapter 5), religious bodies, and international quotations. Any other sources not included in the category were referred to as 'others'. It is notable that, as illustrated in Table 5, during the initial days of the protests, more attention was given to official government sources (62.50%) while citizens were rarely cited (37.50%). By February 2011, government sources (42.11%) continued to dominate Oman Daily's coverage, followed by ordinary citizens (38.60%).

Table 5: The percentage of source affiliation in Oman Daily

Source Affiliation	Percentage of sources per month			
	January	February	March	Total
The head of state	0.00%	3.51%	0.35%	0.83%
Government officials	62.50%	42.11%	16.03%	22.22%
Ordinary citizens	37.50%	38.60%	52.26%	49.44%
Members of the police and army	0.00%	0.00%	0.35%	0.28%
Street protesters	0.00%	10.53%	7.67%	7.78%
Business people	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Journalists	0.00%	0.00%	3.48%	2.78%
Religious bodies	0.00%	1.75%	1.05%	1.11%
International quote	0.00%	1.75%	2.09%	1.94%
Others	0.00%	1.75%	16.72%	13.61%
Total	100% (n=16)	100% (n=57)	100% (n=287)	100% (n=360)

∗   N represents the number of sources that were found in all news about the 2011 protests in Oman Daily

However, by March 2011, ordinary citizens became the subject of journalistic attention. What is striking is that the newspapers favoured ordinary sources (52.26%) above elite sources (16.03%). Over the 74 days, I found 49.44% of references to citizens or public opinion, which is nearly double the number of references to government officials (22.22%). The results here correlate fairly well with the studies from Loughborough University (2012), Hermida et al. (2014) and Fitzgerald (2016), who demonstrated that citizens became important sources within the media coverage during the 2011 Arab Spring. However, it is evident that protesters were rarely cited in Oman's coverage; only 7.78% of sources were affiliated with street protesters. References to the head of state, international bodies, religious bodies, members of the police and army, and journalists were very infrequent. No source was found for business people.

In contrast, as shown in Table 6, there was a clear trend of favouring government officials (33.58%) for news production in the privately owned media, Al-Watan, over the 74 days. Indeed, the increase in the number of government sources within Al-Watan's coverage of the 2011 protests confirms other influential studies, which had found that journalists covering the protests have consistently relied on elite sources and reduced the presence of non-elite sources (Sigal 1973; Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979; Brasted 2005).

Table 6: The percentage of source affiliation in Al-Watan newspaper

Source Affiliation	Percentage sources per month			
	January	February	March	Total
The head of state	0.00%	5.77%	3.98%	4.17%
Government officials	100.00%	51.92%	30.11%	33.58%
Ordinary citizens	0.00%	21.15%	29.26%	27.94%
Members of the police and army	0.00%	0.00%	0.57%	0.49%
Street protesters	0.00%	13.46%	18.47%	17.65%
Business people	0.00%	0.00%	6.53%	5.64%
Journalists	0.00%	1.92%	1.14%	1.23%
Religious bodies	0.00%	0.00%	1.99%	1.72%
International quote	0.00%	5.77%	0.57%	1.23%
Others	0.00%	0.00%	7.39%	6.37%
Total	100% (n=4)	100% (n=52)	100% (n=352)	100% (n=408)

∗ N represents the number of sources that were found in all news about the 2011 protests in Al-Watan daily

Similar to Oman Daily, references to ordinary citizens had increased significantly by March 2011 (29.26%). Indeed, they were given almost equal importance with government sources (30.11%). However, unlike Oman Daily, it is clear that by March, Al-Watan notably inclined more to using street protesters as sources in its coverage (17.65%). References to others and business people were comparatively low. The evidence here suggests that citizens as sources are valued more highly than are business people. Similar to Oman Daily, references to the head of state, international individuals, religious bodies, members of the police and army, and journalists were deemed the least important.

Generally speaking, despite some changes in the newspapers' coverage, Al-Watan was clearly biased towards government representatives over the 74 days. The rise of citizen voices within the newspapers' coverage concurred with Cushion's study (2007), which found that there were particular moments when young people's opinions became more newsworthy, and they were encouraged to be active within the U.K. newspaper coverage of young anti-Iraq war protestors. The evidence in this chapter suggests that it was only by March and after the Sultan's responses to the citizens' demands that ordinary citizens were deemed as more influential and were sought more often by both dailies. Furthermore, comparing who was the most prominent source within Oman Daily and Al-Watan shows that ordinary people were given considerably more weight compared to street protesters. The next section will look at how journalistic sourcing routines, particularly the choice of news sources, "promote a particular interpretation" (Entman 2004, p. 5) of the events and issues of 2011.

7.3 Framing the debate: Questioning the role of officials' and Omanis' opinions within the newspapers' coverage of the 2011 reforms

Undoubtedly, how sources are characterized in news reports influences the way we understand the central issues. Therefore, understanding how news sources were constructed in the 2011 news coverage requires an assessment of the allocation of sources per topic; as Bennett argued, "The range of social voices in the news is likely to vary widely from one issue area to another" (1990, p. 107). Before examining how sources were framed within the newspapers' coverage of the protests, this part classified the eleven news topics into conflict and non-conflict stories. For the purpose of this chapter, conflict stories refer to any disputes, controversy, and disparities in views between individuals and society. It is commonly accompanied by strike actions and by addressing a variety of social problems, like corruption, economic inequalities, and so on. Thus, topics about street protests, political reforms, economic demands, social demands, and public prosecutions were categorized as conflict-centred stories, while stories that involved no conflict included those about public petitions to the sultan, the government's / the sultan's responses to the public demands, human rights, and the media. One might question this division, particularly when considering human rights stories as non-conflict stories. However, this decision was made because, after a close reading of every single news story, no disagreement or conflict of views was found in the human rights news reporting. Table 7 shows the percentage of sources by degree of conflict. It is apparent from the table that more sources were found in conflict stories (64.72% in Oman Daily, 50.49% in Al-Watan) compared to in non-conflict stories (35.28% in Oman Daily, 49.51% in Al-Watan). In conflict-centred stories, more attributed information was found in street protest stories in both dailies (50.00% in Oman Daily, 33.58% in Al-Watan) while fewer sources were found in stories about public demands.

Table 7: Sources allocation per topic in conflict and non-conflict stories in both newspapers

Degree of Conflict	Percent of Sources by Degree of Conflict			
	Topics	Oman Daily	Al-Watan	Total
Conflict-Centred Stories	Street protests	50.00%	33.58%	41.28%
	Political reforms	3.61%	0.74%	2.08%
	Economic demands	6.11%	11.76%	9.11%
	Social demands	4.72%	2.70%	3.65%
	Police/ public prosecution /courts/legal	0.28%	1.72%	1.04%
Non-Conflict-Centred Stories	Public petition to the sultan	1.11%	0.74%	0.91%
	Government's/ the sultan's responses to public demands	31.67%	46.32%	39.45%
	Human rights	0.28%	1.96%	1.17%
	Media and media freedom	2.22%	0.49%	1.30%
	Total	100% (N=360)	100% (N=408)	100% (N=768)

∗ N represents the number of sources that were found in news about the 2011 reforms during the three-month sample period

Regarding non-conflict stories, as predicted, stories about the government's responses to the public demands were frequently attributed in both newspapers, but most notably in Al-Watan (46.32%). Other non-conflict stories were rarely referenced. Overall, stories in Oman Daily about street protests were referenced more often than government's response stories whereas Al-Watan allocated more sources in government's response stories compared to street protests stories. Yet, if the highest proportion of sources was found in street protests stories, one might ask, whose voices and viewpoints were included in these stories?

Table 8 give an indication about the type of individuals whose information was mostly frequently attributed in 'street protests stories' in both newspapers. This analysis is useful, as it helps in understanding the extent to which the inclusion of certain voices within the news coverage of the 2011 Omani reforms may have played a role in influencing newspapers' representation of the protests. As McCombs (2004) argued, journalists tend to influence the presentation of issues or news topics through the concentration, domination, and selection of sources. Table 8 shows that when covering street protests events, Oman Daily gave more space to ordinary citizens as sources (55.31%), while any other sources were referenced less often. However, it is obvious that the average references to government officials (13.97%) were close to the information attributed to street protesters (12.29%).

Table 8: Sources' domination in 'street protest stories' in Oman Daily and Al-Watan during the three-month sample period

Source Affiliation	Oman Daily	Al-Watan
The head of state	0.00%	1.46%
Government officials	13.97%	23.36%
members of the police and army	0.56%	0.00%
Ordinary citizens	55.31%	13.87%
Street protesters	12.29%	40.88%
Business people	0.00%	3.65%
Journalists	2.23%	2.19%
Religious bodies	1.12%	2.92%
International quote	2.79%	1.46%
Others	11.73%	10.22%
Total	100% (N=180)	100% (N=137)

While the dominance of government officials as a news source is significant to Al-Watan's coverage of the 2011 protests, Table 8 demonstrates that journalists tended to reference more street protesters (40.88%) when reporting street protest stories; unlike in Oman Daily, ordinary citizens were rarely cited or quoted (13.87%). However, examining the frequency of government and Omanis (citizens and protesters) sources within the newspapers' coverage did not convey the extent to which these sources are given a serious role in the public debate, including the discussion of societal and political problems. If the newspapers leaned toward addressing the various protests that swept through the country, why were street protesters cited or quoted less often in Oman Daily's coverage? And why did Al-Watan favour protesters' voices in its coverage more than official and citizen sources? In order to provide a clearer picture about the newspapers' sourcing practises in *street protest stories*, I decided to compare what citizens said with what street protesters and government officials said.

7.3.1 The role of official sources

In the coverage of protest events, the sources cited in the media coverage do not just denote events and issues, they also give meaning to events (Luther and Miller 2005; AlMaskati 2012). Accordingly, this section of the chapter will reveal how the inclusion of government and official sources within the news coverage may show either support for or denunciation of the 2011 Omani protests. Therefore, in order to examine the dominant discourse found in each source, the source framing is classified as act of protest, loyalty, vandalism, sultan's response to the public demands, and expressing public demands. This makes it possible to look at texts from a representational point of view by examining which events or issues were given more priority or salience in the newspapers' discourse as manifested in their source practices.

Table 9 provides an analysis of the kinds of frames that were attributed to official sources in both dailies. Government voices, as predicted, were mostly articulated in the Sultan's responses to public demands (36.00%) and loyalty frames (24.00%). Many news articles included attributes to ministers and officials commenting on the changes and reforms made by the Sultan. For example, after the Royal Orders to enhance and improve the citizens' income level, the newspapers published a news article that included a statement from his Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said, the Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, stating that "the wise vision of His Majesty was reflected in his constant concern for his people and a keen interest in granting expanded powers to state institutions and providing the citizens with the best possible means of living in a secure and stable society in which justice prevails for everyone" (Oman Daily, March 13, 2011 p. 1). Also, the newspaper included information attributed to members of the Council of State affirming that *"His Majesty is sincerely working to ensure a decent life for his citizens, and that the Royal decrees and orders are a clear indication of His Majesty's wisdom"* (Oman Daily March 2, 2011, p. 2).

Table 9: How official sources were framed in the coverage of 'street protest stories' in Oman Daily and Al-Watan during the sampled period

	Oman (n=25)	Al-Watan (n=32)
Protest action	8.00%	9.38%
Loyalty to the country and the sultan	24.00%	12.50%
Vandalism	16.00%	46.88%
Sultan's response to public demands	36.00%	28.13%
Expressing public demands	16.00%	3.13%

On the contrary, Table 9 suggests that the majority of voices of government officials in Al-Watan were framed to emphasise the need to stop vandalism and protests (46.88%), and the sultan's response to the public demands (28.13%). Al-Watan relied on government actors who were perceived as authoritative sources, such as ministers and members of the Shura Council, to lessen the significance of protests and ignore protesters' voices, which were regarded as deviant. Unlike Oman Daily, many of Al-Watan's news stories about vandalism were reported from the perspectives of the official sources. This can be seen in Al-Watan's inclusion of the official statements of the State Council, the Council of Ministers, and the Shura Council denouncing vandals and vandalism. For example, Al-Watan published news articles that contained a full statement from the Minister Council stressing that,

> the unexpected phenomenon that was witnessed in Omani society
> represented by series of sit-ins in the public and the private institutions
> in the country, especially those protests that occurred along the roads

leading to those sites, negatively affected the private and public interests of citizens and affected the commercial development of the country. Despite the officials' and specialists' efforts to understand protesters' demands, at times, these efforts were not met as they should have been; instead, protesters committed acts which are contrary to all laws and are not consistent with the culture and authentic values of this country. (Al-Watan, March 6, 2011 p. 3)

Likewise, Al-Watan published an article titled '(Al-Shura) calls on the competent authorities to stand firm and strong in the face of every act of vandalism', which included a source on behalf of the Shura Council stating that "the Council strongly condemned any irresponsible acts of sabotage outside the legal framework. It also reiterated its call upon all competent authorities in the State to stand resolutely and forcefully against every act of sabotage, regardless of its source, justification and level, issued by these subversive groups" (Al-Watan, March 17, 2011 p. 2). The findings here confirm the previous literature of protest coverage in which it was found that journalists rely on official voices, which are perceived as authoritative sources, to denounce protests and therefore shape media narratives from those sources' perspectives (Gitlin 1980; Tuchman 1978; Brasted 2005).

7.3.2 Were citizens and street protesters determined to support the protests?

While the dominance of Omani citizens as news sources is significant in the newspapers' coverage of the 2011 protests, the questions remain as to why the newspapers favoured these voices, how does journalists' inclusion of these voices shape the long-term meanings, and whether Omanis had the opportunity to voice their demands and grievances within the newspapers' coverage of the 2011 reforms, particularly in *street protest stories*. Table 10 provides an analysis of the kinds of frames that are attributed to citizens and street protesters in Oman Daily and Al-Watan. Framing analysis in the government-owned newspaper, as can been seen in Table 10, has indicated that when covering the 2011 reforms, the loyalty frame (63.64%) was employed most often in the ordinary citizens' discourse. For instance, after the state had made various concessions, the newspapers included some references to women expressing their great gratitude to His Majesty the Sultan: "The supreme orders issued yesterday are evidence of His Majesty's understanding of Omani citizens' needs, as they come to fulfil the promise he made during his meeting with members of the Shura Council to improve the living conditions of the Omani citizen" (Oman Daily, March 14, 2011, p. 5). Another source says: "I do not know how to express my gratitude to His Majesty, may Allah preserve him and grant him peace, as he did not forget social insurance families. This grant, certainly, will help improve our standard of living" (Oman Daily, March 16, 2011, p. 5).

Furthermore, the findings suggest that some of the ordinary voices that articulated expressions of allegiance to the sultan and the country were also accompanied with the vandalism frame. For instance, in an article with the headline "Citizens expressed their full loyalty to His Majesty the Sultan" published on March 3, 2011, rejecting vandalism came into focus: "A group of citizens in Sohar emphasized that they are fully prepared to catch any saboteur or those who try to undermine the Sultan Qaboos and they confirmed loyalty to him" (Oman Daily, March 3, 2011, p. 5). Likewise, when the protest took place in Wilayat Al-Qabil, Oman Daily published a news article on March 16 titled "The protesters are few and do not represent all the citizens in the wilayat". The article included some references to citizens who affirmed loyalty to the sultan and undermined the protesters:

> they [sheikh] pointed out that the protesters were a minority of 25 people and did not represent the people of the wilayah. Citizens pointed out that the news of their sit-in is incorrect, and they enjoy the achievements of the Renaissance and renew loyalty to the Commander of Oman. (Oman Daily, March 16, 2011, p. 3)

Additionally, on March 30, Oman Daily published a news story that included references to citizens: "The people of Sohar condemn acts of vandalism and demand a halt to the sit-in" (Oman Daily, March 30, 2011, p. 10). Additionally, when various protests erupted in some universities and colleges across the country, Oman Daily included some references to female students who denounced vandalism. For example, there was a reference to a comment by a university student:

> …the sit-in which disrupts the system of these institutions [educational institutions] and impedes official working hours is a sit-in aimed at subversion‹ not for the advancement of these institutions as it gives wrong image of those who belong to it" and another source said, "I am with the peaceful and reasonable sit-ins but against sit-ins that are based on vandalism and damaging public property, (Oman Daily, March 19, 2011, p. 8)

Thus, the analysis implied that Oman's coverage of the street protests adheres to the loyalty and stop vandalism frames when using ordinary citizens' voices. However, when reporting street protest events, Oman Daily tended to ignore the issues and voices underlying those events. For instance, when peaceful demonstrations took place, detailed coverage of the loyalty marches and the hanging of banners was provided. Meanwhile, the newspaper gave only marginal attention to the protestors' voices, especially when the protests became more serious. Instead, journalists tended to include more references to ordinary people condemning the protesters' actions and their demands. However, after February 27, mainly after the Sultan's responses to the public demands, protesters' voices were commonly framed in such a way as to express their demands and grievances (50%). Protesters' voices included nursing staff at Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah demanding

the restructuring of the administrative body and the end to administrative corruption as well as establishing an association for midwifery and nursing. Other voices included school bus drivers protesting against the low wages and the protesters in front of the Al-Shura Council in Muscat demanding social, political, and economic reforms. However, despite such changes in the newspaper coverage of street protest stories, it is obvious, as suggested by Luther and Miller (2005), that Oman Daily tended to downplay or ignore the voices that contradicted or disputed the government's views. For example, in some cases, I found protesters' demands and voices were associated with the loyalty frame. For instance, when covering the protest that took place in Wilayat Hayma in front of Occidental Petroleum Corporation protesting against unemployment on March 5, Oman Daily included protesters' demands along with their voices insisting on loyalty to the Sultan. Similarly, the coverage of the Dhofar protests included references to protesters expressing their demands of and their devotion to the Sultan.

Table 10: How Omanis' opinions were framed in the coverage of 'street protest stories' in Oman Daily and Al-Watan during the sampled period?

	Oman Daily		Al-Watan	
	Ordinary people (n=99)	Protester (n=22)	Ordinary people (n=19)	Protester (n=56)
Protest action	3.03%	4.55%	5.26%	7.14%
Loyalty to the country and the sultan	63.64%	22.73%	10.53%	10.71%
Vandalism	22.22%	9.09%	26.32%	48.21%
Sultan's response to public demands	2.02%	13.64%	52.63%	17.86%
Expressing public demands	9.09%	50.00%	5.26%	16.07%

On the other hand, the framing analysis, as illustrated in Table 10, indicates that one of the most common journalistic practices in Al-Watan is the failure to include and use statements from those in opposition to the government's stand. Conversely, the newspaper heavily relied on the voices of some street protesters whose statements lessened the significance of these protests by emphasising the peaceful demonstration and criticizing acts of vandalism, and whose comments escaped serious critical analysis, as can been seen in Table 10. In most cases, when the protests became serious and significant in nature, protesters' perspectives were either ignored or reflected incorrectly. Framing analysis suggests that at the early stage of the protests, most news articles failed to discuss the protesters' ideologies and grievances. By the end of February, when the

protests had become out of control mainly in Sohar and some wilayats, Al-Watan tended to focus on "the protestors' appearances rather than their issues, to emphasize violence rather than social criticism, to focus on conflict with the police rather than their chosen targets, and to downplay their effectiveness" (Brasted 2005, p. 384). Even after the Sultan's response to the public demands, Al-Watan continued to frame the protesters' demands with loyalty to the sultan and the call to stop vandalism discourses when including protesters' voices. For example, on March 1, 2011, Al-Watan published a news article commenting on the recent reforms made by the sultan: "A group of citizens continued protesting their demands for administrative and economic reforms. They chanted slogans of love and loyalty to His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, promoting slogans not to resort to sabotage and chaos" (Al-Watan, March 1, 2011, p. 1). However, protesters' voices, mainly those in the peaceful protests, were framed in such a way as to lessen the significance of the street protests and to focus on acts of vandalism, insisting that "those who carried out riots and vandalism affecting some government and private property in Sohar do not belong to us. They are a group of some "masked" youths who have performed acts that are unacceptable to Omani values" (ibid.). Similarly, on March 2, during the coverage of the peaceful demonstration in Sohar, Al-Watan used the participants' voices to marginalise the protesters: "We are not in opposition to their demands, but we are against the actions of a few individuals who destroy and misuse property" (Al-Watan, March 2, 2011, p. 4). Through the references to some protesters' opinions, Al-Watan aimed, as suggested by Brasted (2005), "to convey the deviance of the protestors by depicting them as an isolated minority" (p. 386). Also, on March 4, Al-Watan included references to the protestors at the Sohar Industrial Port roundabout saying that "their sit-in is peaceful and will continue to be so to assure everyone that they are against harming others and against disrupting public interests and that their public interest is above all considerations" (Al-Watan, March 4, 2011, p. 5). Even when Al-Watan voiced protesters' demands, it tended to stress the loyalty to the Sultan. For example, when the civil service retirees protested against the low pension fee, Al-Watan covered the event on March 13 by including information attributed to the demonstrators saying that

> they represent all retirees, presenting their demands to the sultan while affirming their loyalty to His Majesty. Pointing out that the old pension system did not do them justice in a manner that achieves a decent life for them and their families, especially given that the salaries on which the pensions were based are low. (Al-Watan, March 13, 2011, p. 5)

The results here suggest that although Al-Watan gave more space to protesters as sources, it continued to exercise its hegemonic discourse over the media content by discrediting the essence of the protests while ignoring protesters' core demands. The evidence here gives credence to Cushion's assertion that when covering a protest, the

media should aim at "sustaining the voices of the political establishment, while issues (young) protestors raised were, in the main, undermined and delegitimized" (2007, p. 433).

Ordinary citizens, however, as shown in Table 10, made up a small minority of news sources in Al-Watan's coverage of 'street protest stories' and their discourses were mostly framed to comment on the Sultan's economic, social, and political reforms and denounce acts of vandalism. However, when the protests were uneventful and peaceful, the use of ordinary citizen voices as sources became minimal. Thus, citizens' voices in Al-Watan's coverage were framed to focus on the inconveniences the protestors had created for Omanis and the country as a whole, such as the burning of buildings and property, deteriorating economic conditions, rising food prices, and traffic congestion due to the closure of the Sohar roundabout. In an article titled "Forearms protect achievements" which was published on March 2, Al-Watan included a statement from the acting mayor of the municipality saying that

> he received a call at 3:30 am from the Royal Oman Police in Yanqul
> stating that two vehicles were burning at the headquarters of the
> transport division of the municipality then he commented, "This act and
> this absurdity is outlandish to the Omani society, which is totally
> rejected. The people, sheikhs, the elderly and all sectors of society in
> the state reject this disruption, and the people of the state do not accept
> such disgraceful acts. (Al-Watan, March 2, 2011, p. 1)

Also, on March 4, 2011, Al-Watan published an article that included information attributed to Sohar citizens expressing their anger at the protesters and thus calling to repudiate such acts that affected the country's stability, tranquillity, security, and safety and damaged the interests of the citizens:

> the continuation of the protesters' closure of the roundabout is not
> justified, as it is considered a path for everyone, and no one has the
> right to dispose of it. Because of their act, they harm not just the citizens
> of Sohar who move continuously through this dynamic circle, but also all
> passers-by, as it serves as an important passageway to several places
> in Sohar and other neighbouring regions. (Al-Watan, March 4, 2011, p.
> 3)

The newspaper attempted to turn public opinion against the protesters by including some influential voices in its coverage. This was patently obvious in the following example; as the newspaper used the Omani Journalists Association as a source to call on the society to preserve the achievements of the country and stop vandalism: "The Sultanate has lived over the past years in security and stability […]. In order to preserve the achievements made over the past years, the Omani Journalists Association stresses the importance and necessity of cooperation from all sectors of society to preserve the achievements of the

blessed Renaissance" (Al-Watan, March 2, 2011, p. 2). In addition, sources from the Association of Lawyers in the Sultanate affirmed that "the Basic Law of the State has guaranteed the freedom of peaceful expression of opinion and called for rational approach to dialogue in order to establish superiority for the homeland and the citizen who constitutes the basic building blocks of development" (Al-Watan, March 3, 2011, p. 4).

Overall, the framing analysis of sources in 'street protest stories' suggests that although the proportion of elite sources was comparatively less than that of citizens' voices in Oman Daily and street protesters' voices in Al-Watan, both newspapers' attention cycle was mainly shaped by official views (Oliver and Maney 2000) in defining "the way things really are" (Becker 1967, p. 241). The results here confirm the findings of Tuchman's (1978) influential study and of previous research (Gitlin 1980; Bennett 1990; Brasted 2005) in that the journalists covering the protests rarely included any commentary from representatives of the protesters and relegated other voices that were seen as deviant.

7.4 Anonymous sources: Who and what were they saying?

Certainly, the patterned use of named sources may establish the objectivity and credibility of a media organization in the eyes of news consumers (Freedman and Fico 2005). The use of veiled and unnamed sources in news reporting, however, has led many media consumers to question the media's credibility and accuracy (Franklin and Carlson 2010; Vultee 2010). Thus, discussion about the incorporation of unnamed sources into news texts required an examination of how journalists contextualize their sources. One of the major findings was that among 377 of the news stories I examined in this chapter, I found that 30.34% of the sources included unnamed attributions. Identifying veiled sources controlled by source affiliation and topic is essential in this section, as it reveals more information about news production in the Omani newspapers during the events of 2011. Specifically, it helps, perhaps, in examining whether the practice of unnamed sourcing in the newspapers' coverage of the 2011 reforms aimed to stimulate dialogue in the public sphere and therefore "enhance diversity and competition of viewpoints in a mass communication system that tends to value authority and "responsibility" (Blankenburg 1992, p. 11). Thus, to assess identification, sources were coded as veiled (no details were found in the story about the source, that is, either the source's name or any identifying information), or unveiled (the source's name or sufficient information about the source were found in the story). However, due to the nature of the newspapers' coverage of the 2011 reforms, it is worth noting that the newspapers' tendency not to provide the names or any significant information about the sources was not necessarily to protect the identity of the sources.

7.4.1 Source affiliation: Whose voices were unnamed?

Research into the use of anonymous sources in the coverage of major news events looked at (1) the frequency of using these sources, and (2) the credibility of news stories that include unnamed sources. This section, however, will focus on how often unnamed sources were used within the newspapers' reporting of the protests. To begin, this section identifies the kind of individuals whose voices were unnamed: *Who were they?* This might help in understanding some characteristics related to the Omani newspapers and the motives that led journalists to veil some persons more than others, particularly during the 2011 reforms. Accordingly, Table 11 displays the percentage of veiled sources by affiliation in both dailies. The total row here suggests that street protesters and ordinary people were veiled most often.

Table 11: The percentage of veiled sources by affiliation in both dailies during the sampled period

Source Affiliation	Oman		Al-Watan	
	Veiled	**Unveiled**	**Veiled**	**Unveiled**
The head of state	0.00%	1.03%	0.00%	7.00%
Government officials	16.18%	23.63%	15.15%	46.09%
Members of the police and army	1.47%	0.00%	1.21%	0.00%
Ordinary citizens	26.47%	54.79%	29.09%	27.16%
Street protesters	23.53%	4.11%	35.76%	5.35%
Business people	0.00%	0.00%	4.85%	6.17%
Journalists	8.82%	1.37%	1.21%	1.23%
Religious bodies	0.00%	1.37%	0.61%	2.47%
International quote	0.00%	2.40%	0.61%	1.65%
Others	23.53%	11.30%	11.52%	2.88%
Total	100% (n=68)	100% (n=292)	100% (n=165)	100% (n=243)

For example, in many news stories, I found remarks that began or were prefaced with 'one of the protest organizers said that…', 'a group of citizens participating in the sit-in think that…' or 'some protesters expressed regret over …'. I found a small number of cases in Al-Watan where journalists explicitly mentioned the person's desire to remain anonymous: 'A spokesperson for the protester group in the roundabout in Sohar, who preferred not to be named, said that …'.

As mentioned earlier, ordinary citizens were sourced most often in both dailies. It is plausible, then, that more veiled sources were identified in this group, as shown in Table

11; notably in Al-Watan (29.09%). There are a number of instances of referencing citizens' opinions, such as 'people in Sohar appealed to protesters in the roundabout for…', 'a number of shop owners and consumers pointed out that...', 'people in Ibri condemned the sabotage and said…', 'the citizens expressed their sincere thanks and gratitude to the commander' and 'the driver of the fuel tank, who arrived in Buraimi yesterday evening, said that…'. Likewise, some veiled attributions were found in government officials' sources. The most common phrases used to identify an anonymous official source were 'an official source', 'a government source', 'senior officials', and 'members of the Shura Council stated that…'. The percentage of unidentified sources in 'others' were also found in both dailies. An example of 'others' included sources from the Public Authority for Consumer Protection, public prosecutors, and experts. Additionally, Table 11 suggests that the three sources that were mentioned as being from the police were all unnamed. A typical example of police sources usually included phrases such as 'the Royal Oman Police announced that…'. Surprisingly, Table 11 illustrates that Oman Daily included veiled sources who may have been journalists (8.82%), including sources from Oman News Agency (ONA) and some foreign agencies. In Al-Watan, I found some attributed information from unnamed sources, like local correspondents and other journalists from the GCC. Indeed, hiding some information about journalistic sources, who are considered news providers, might affect the media's credibility.

Generally, in stark contrast to the previous literature regarding the use of sources in the coverage of major news events (e.g., Tuchman 1978; Lawrence 2000) in which it was found that journalists are more likely to use unnamed sources with expert and official sources, the findings reveal that the journalists covering the protests in Oman Daily tended to veil sources who were protesters and ordinary people. Furthermore, the results here suggest that more veiled sources were found in the privately owned newspaper, so one might question Al-Watan's policy of not providing enough information about its sources, particularly those who were street protesters and ordinary people.

7.4.2 Unnamed and anonymous sources: Did they shape the debate over the 2011 protests?

While there has long been a debate over the use of unnamed sources, there is a scarcity of research regarding whether the presence of anonymous sources in news reporting might support or delegitimise protests and political discourse. Thus, another important criterion in assessing source identification is examining what kind of information was included in these veiled sources: What were they saying? This assessment is crucial in this chapter, as it helps identify how the newspapers used veiled voices to stimulate debate and discussion in the Omani public sphere or to encourage the use of certain

ideas to interpret the news events during the 2011 reforms. Accordingly, this section aims to explore whether the uses of anonymous sources in certain topics helped journalists expose news events that could support the protests or challenge the arguments being made by government. Table 12 shows the percentage of unveiled and veiled sources in conflict and non-conflict stories in Oman Daily and Al-Watan. The total row illustrates that conflict stories involved more unnamed persons compared with non-conflict stories in both newspapers. However, it is obvious that the highest percentage of veiled sources in the conflict stories was found in 'street protest stories' in both newspapers (63.24% in Oman Daily and 53.94% in Al-Watan). For instance, when the protests had escalated by the end of February, Al-Watan included more veiled references that downplayed the protests and emphasized deviance and violence, such as "people in Sohar expressed their deep concern over the continued tension in the country and asked the demonstrators to break their sit-in" (Al-Watan, March 2, 2011, p. 7), and "a spokesperson from the administrative committee of the protesters in Sohar said that this group (vandals) that instigates chaos does not represent them. He said that these behaviours are rejected by all and are not civilized, which is not accepted by Omani society in its original values" (Al-Watan, March 1, 2011, p. 5).

Similarly, when covering street protests, Oman Daily included more unnamed attribution, calling for a stop to the protests and acts of vandalism while emphasising loyalty to the Sultan. Examples of these attributes were "the people in Ibri denounced the acts of subversion and rejected all these irresponsible actions raising the slogan 'no to sabotage" (Oman Daily, March 14, 2011, p. 8), "the protesters in Sur said that their sit-in is peaceful and they are fighting vandalism and disruption, and that the achievements of the country must be preserved" (Oman Daily, March 4, 2011, p. 5), and "the protesters said: we started our sit-in since last Friday after Friday prayer and it was a march of loyalty and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan and the fight against corruption" (Oman Daily, March 5, 2011, p. 4).

Table 12: The percentage of unveiled and veiled sources by degree of conflict in the sampled period

Degree of Conflict	Topic	Identification of Sources			
		Oman Daily		Al-Watan	
		Unveiled	Veiled	Unveiled	Veiled
Conflict-Centred Stories	Street protests	47.60%	63.24%	19.75%	53.94%
	Political reforms	2.40%	8.82%	0.41%	1.21%
	Economic demands	7.19%	1.47%	10.70%	13.33%
	Social demands	4.79%	4.41%	3.29%	1.82%
	Police/ public prosecution /courts/legal	0.00%	1.47%	1.23%	2.42%
Non-Conflict-Centred Stories	Public petition to the sultan	1.03%	1.47%	0.82%	0.61%
	Government/ the sultan responses to public demands	35.96%	10.29%	60.49%	25.45%
	Human rights	0.34%	0.00%	2.47%	1.21%
	Media and media freedom	0.68%	8.82%	0.82%	0.00%
	Total (n)	100% (n=292)	100% (n=68)	100% (n=243)	100% (n=165)

A complete lack of information about sources in the conflict stories was also noted in stories regarding political reforms in Oman (8.82%) and economic demands in Al-Watan (13.33%). For example, on March 3, Oman Daily included some information attributed to veiled sources demanding changes of ministers and the guarantee of more legislative power being granted to the Shura Council. Al-Watan, however, included veiled attributions for the demands regarding employment, improving the workers' situation, increasing salaries and adjusting allowances according to efficiency standards, such as the case of school bus drivers saying: 'We demand an increase in the daily wages of buses by at least 20 riyals per day, including all official and exceptional holidays' (Al-Watan, March 2, 2011, p. 6), and when the citizens of Hayma continued protesting in front of the Occidental Petroleum Corporation, Al-Watan included some veiled references to citizens demanding their rights for employment, utilization of the company's services by virtue of their presence on their land, and the carrying out of developmental projects. Nonetheless, both newspapers gave scant attention to public grievances in their coverage until the sultan had responded to the public demands.

In contrast, after February 28, the percentage of unidentified sources in the government's and the sultan's responses to the public demands stories become apparent in both newspapers, regarding non-conflict-centred stories. Examples of veiled attributes in this

regard were "one member spoke on behalf of his fellow members of the Council, expressing the dedication of the Shura Council in serving that country and reviewing a number of demands for His Majesty's consideration'" (Al-Watan, February 28, 2011, p. 6), "an official source at the Ministry of Health said that the ministry is studying all the demands recorded by the students of the health institutes affiliated with the ministry in Muscat" (Oman Daily, March 3, 2011, p. 6) and "an official said we have distributed thousands of forms to update the data in order to start the procedures of employing citizens; in addition, the payment of the monthly stipends ordered by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said amounting to (150) riyals a month will continue until the job seeker obtains a job" (Oman Daily, March 7 2011, p. 2). Additionally, it is significant, as suggested in Table 12, that unlike in Al-Watan, more unnamed sources were found in Oman Daily in stories about the media and media freedom (8.82%). This result doubtless explains why more unnamed voices about journalists were found in the newspaper.

Again, the findings here support previous results in this chapter showing that the use of unnamed sources was articulated in such a way as to support government policy; Oman Daily continued to emphasise loyalty, while Al-Watan placed great emphasis on denouncing the protests and acts of vandalism.

7.5 Discussion

What this chapter has revealed is that by the end of February 2011, almost immediately after the sultan had made various concessions, citizens had assumed an added importance as sources in Oman Daily's and Al-Watan's coverage of the 2011 protests, especially in the government-owned newspaper. Previous studies concerning sourcing patterns within the Omani media (e.g., Al-Hasani 2003) found that sources such as government officials and ministers dominated the news production while less attention was given to ordinary people. However, this chapter identified that at the time of the protests, there was a significant change in the newspapers' coverage, which is the inclusion of public voices as important sources. The results here confirm recent studies indicating the rise of citizens as favourable sources within the media coverage of the 2011 Arab Spring (see Loughborough University 2012; Hermida et al. 2014; Van Leuven et al. 2015; Fitzgerald 2016). Despite such changes, the findings reveal that in its coverage, Al-Watan continued to heavily rely on voices that came from the government. The newspaper would still "mainly turn to official political sources to introduce the news" (Van Leuven et al. 2015, pp. 585-586). Another interesting finding pertaining to the subject of news sources showed that relatively less importance was given to street protesters within the reporting on the 2011 Omani protests. Despite Al-Watan including more information about protesters as sources compared to Oman Daily, the finding revealed that attributes

to street protesters were given less priority in both dailies. These results agree with Al Hashimi (2011), who pointed to the weakness of the Omani media's coverage of the protests in which protesters' voices were largely ignored. McQuail (2006) argued that journalists must provide an opportunity for diverse voices and play a participant role in society. However, this chapter assumes that news organizations "reaffirm the unequal distribution of knowledge within a society by promoting some sources as authoritative while ignoring other voices" (Carlson and Franklin 2011, p. 6).

Framing the analysis of patterns of news sources within Oman Daily's and Al-Watan's coverage of the protests suggests that the journalists' inclusion of Omanis' voices did not break with their conventional professional routines. The findings indicate that from the array of available information, the newspapers tended to be selective in choosing individuals whose information and viewpoints were aligned with government policy and avoided counter-hegemonic views. Although street protesters succeeded in bringing about some social, political, and economic reforms to the country, the public voices the newspapers used as sources, including protesters and citizens, did not seem to support the protests. The finding here differs from previous results reported in the literature (e.g., Loughborough University 2012; Fitzgerald 2016), which determined that the rise of citizens as a dominant news source within the media narrative contributed to support the 2011 Revolution in which "the people" were pitted against "brutal dictators" (Loughborough University 2012, p. 33). It is worth noting that only at the end of February 2011, precisely after the Sultan's responses to the public demands, were more street protesters (in Al-Watan) and ordinary citizens (in Oman) cited in the newspapers' coverage of 'street protest stories' than government officials. One justification for this pattern, as suggested by Al Hashimi (2011), lies in the fact that the newspapers started to realize that after years of silence, the people of Oman had become more empowered to speak their opinions frankly and to criticise government officials. Thus, the newspapers tried to influence the Omani public sphere by including public sources in their coverage, notably including those who usually tried to support the government and undermine the reputation of the activists. Thus, instead of reflecting Omanis' voices, both newspapers oriented their coverage toward government policy, and they "appear to address the audience with a single voice" (Van Gorp 2006, p. 68) by excluding from the public agenda those who disputed the government's views or challenged the political consensus. Oman Daily, for example, adapted an overt tone of patriotism by including ordinary citizens as sources to emphasise loyalty to the sultan and the country and to stop vandalism. Al-Watan, however, gave more spaces to street protesters (e.g., those who were engaged in loyalty rallies and peaceful demonstration) in order to discredit the protests' significance and potential and to convey the deviance of the protesters. The coverage of the newspapers during the protest, mainly, Al-Watan, correlate very well with Al Ahram's

potential aim in the coverage of the Egyptian revolution. In his analysis of the coverage of the 2011 Egyptian protests within six newspapers (Al Ahram, Arab News, China Daily, Guardian International, International Herald Tribune and Jerusalem Post), AlMaskati (2012) found that Al Ahram gave more space to pro-government representatives to discredit the protesters and their actions.

Additionally, this chapter reveals that 30.34% of sources in street protest stories included unnamed attributions, especially in Al-Watan. The findings show that citizens' voices were veiled in order to make general claims on behalf of the Omani public sphere and against the street protests. Oman Daily, for instance, attributed information to unidentified citizen sources emphasizing loyalty to the country and the sultan and calling for a stop to the protests and vandalism. Al-Watan included many veiled ordinary citizens' voices that indicated discontent and provided negative narratives about the protesters and their actions. These findings are corroborated by Hatcher (2010), who, as mentioned earlier, in researching journalists' use of veiled sources in news coverage of the build-up to the Iraq War, determined that anonymous and unnamed sources "serve the perceived whistleblower function in political discourse" (p. 1). Pragmatically, journalists must inform and reflect, and not communicate assumptions. What is less clear is that if we consider journalists as key facilitators for creating a deliberative public sphere (Habermas 1991), why should they tend to make assumptions and inferences about public opinion without providing evidence to support such claims. This raises considerable debate about how conscious and responsible journalists actually were of what the Omani people were thinking and whether the journalistic practices and routines might, to some extent, have contributed to constructing passive, disengaged citizens.

By the simplest of criteria outlined in this chapter, the findings assume that although both newspapers used citizens and street protesters as sources in their coverage of the 2011 reforms, it is apparent that the routinization of journalists' work remained the same. Several researchers (Sigal 1973; Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979; Lewis et al. 2005) have affirmed that media organizations need to include sources not just to get access to information but most importantly to interpret context, present different views, and validate news accounts. However, sourcing practices within the newspapers' coverage of 2011 continued to reflect the state's strategic objectives, which were 1) maintaining the state's safety and its internal or external security, and 2) enhancing the values of loyalty to His Majesty the Sultan and the country to foster a sense of belonging, as clearly stated in the PPL. Therefore, it is obvious that the rise of non-elite news sources within Oman Daily and Al-Watan aimed at reducing public support for the protests, thus supporting previous studies from Turk (1986) and Bennett (1990), both of which noted that journalists favour non-official voices when those voices express opinions that are in alignment with the

media's agendas and emanate out of official policy circles. Similarly, the rise of citizens' voices within the newspapers' coverage of the protests echoes findings long established in protest coverage (Gitlin 1980, Brasted 2005; Luther and Miller 2005; Cushion 2007; Hatcher 2010; Kleemans et al. 2017) in which researchers have found that journalists favour sources who tend to construct an issue or event in a way that is congruent with the political agenda rather than challenging it.

However, it is worth mentioning that journalists are bound by routines which might affect the social reality portrayed by the media, as discussed by Gans (1979) and Tuchman (1978). In many media organizations, gatekeeping is inevitable, and it might stifle public debate by controlling the public's knowledge of the actual events and by excluding certain voices or interests in favour of the governing parties and the powerful office holders. The next chapter will triangulate the framing and content analysis findings with interviews to better understand the news production culture, and to explain the journalists' accounts of their practices and the influences on sourcing practices in the Omani news organizations. This will provide an in-depth analysis about the societal and political context in which media messages are produced (Shoemaker and Reese 2013). Chapter Eight, therefore, insists on "the importance of analysing texts in their social context rather than in purely linguistic terms", as pointed out by Rupar (2010, p. 18).

Chapter Eight

Reporting the 2011 Omani reforms: A look into journalists' accounts of their practices

8.1 Introduction

The 2010 protests that erupted across the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) led to new attention being given to scholarly research concerning the relationship between the media and protests. However, the bulk of this research focuses on either the influence of social media on collective action (e.g., Khamis and Vaughn 2011; Wolfsfeld et al. 2013) or the media framing of protest news (e.g., Cushion 2007; Spyridou 2015). Furthermore, despite this increasing body of literature, there is a scarcity of research addressing the factors that influence journalistic coverage of protests. Indeed, a clear examination of how the media represent the public sphere requires an examination of the forces that influence the media content. Investigative studies about media sociology or the influences on news content concentrate on how reality is produced, constructed, and transformed, but most studies tend to give general perceptions of the relationship between media systems and the socio-cultural and political system in which they are embedded (Murdock and Golding 1977; Gans 1979; Gitlin 1980; Fishman 1988; Reese and Danielian 1989; Shoemaker and Reese 1991, 1996, 2013; McQuail 1994, 2000; Rupar 2010). Although some studies explain how the coverage of protests is shaped in ways that serve particular groups and mainstream views (McCurdy 2012), less attention is given to the relationship between protest coverage and journalists' accounts of their practices. Research into this area, however, is mostly survey based, which neglects how journalists negotiate these various influences in their works and whether journalists' personal characteristics and cognitions influence what they write. Indeed, Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2014) argued that "existing research into general influences on news production has been mostly survey based, thereby capturing journalists' overall perceptions of the influence of different factors on their work" (p. 411).

This chapter aims to address this gap through the case study of the 2011 Omani reforms. It attempts to examine journalism culture (Campbell 2004; Hanitzsch 2007) in Oman Daily and Al-Watan media organizations. According to Hanitzsch (2007), journalism culture can be defined as "a particular set of ideas and practices by which journalists, consciously and unconsciously, legitimate their role in society and render their work meaningful for themselves and others" (p. 369). This is perhaps useful, as it helps explain the way in which news organizations manufacture their news by looking at the various factors that influence the decisions of the gatekeeper regarding which types of information are to be rejected or approved (Bass 1969). Indeed, as Broersma (2007) argued, "The process of gathering, selecting and presenting news is mostly based on unnoticed and undisputed conventions and professional routines" (p. 1). Accordingly, based on semi-structured interviews with two editors in chief, three editors, one sub-editor, five journalists, two

correspondents and two columnists, who were all involved in covering the 2011 protests, this chapter will answer the following questions about the newspapers' (Oman Daily and Al-Watan) coverage, also drawing on the findings of content analysis:

RQ1: How did outside influences (e.g., government and Ministry of Information) affect journalists' news coverage of the 2011 Omani reforms?

RQ2: How did organizational routines influence journalists' narratives?

RQ3: How did journalists' backgrounds (e.g., education, skills, and training) affect media content?

RQ4: Did the Sablat Oman forum affect the press coverage of the protests?

However, before beginning the discussion, it is worth mentioning that all answers are anonymized in accordance with the interviewees' requests. Thus, to ensure confidentiality, this chapter maintains privacy at a maximum by not revealing interviewees' genders or work departments.

8.2 An inquiry into the various influences on journalists' narratives of the 2011 reforms

The question of how journalists interpreted and negotiated the factors that shaped their coverage of the 2011 Omani reforms is the main topic of discussion in this chapter. To address this issue, this section explores the cultural approach to journalism which emphasizes on the one hand, "the complexity and contingency of the various forces that drive journalism and on the other, the ways in which journalists function as an interpretive community that continually negotiates its identity and boundaries, particularly in connection to major news stories or critical events" (Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2016, p. 413). Using the data gathered from the interviews, this chapter will present the discussions and debates concerning the key factors involved in journalists' coverage of the protests at different levels, including the influence of 1) the political setting on news operation, 2) organizational routines, and 3) journalists' backgrounds (education, skills, and training) on protest reporting. By doing so, this chapter will explore the influence of the culture of news production on the role of Omani journalism in the 2011 protests.

8.2.1 Political agenda

Upon the establishment of the media in Oman in the beginning of the 20th century, the government took control over all the communication systems, including the media. Thus, the state has absolute power to control the content of the press. In order to offer a critical assessment of the newspapers' reporting of the popular protests that erupted in Oman in

2011, it is important to situate the Omani media within the political structure within which they operate. When the interviewees were questioned about the newspapers' reluctance in covering the early stages of the protests, the most common answer was related to the influence of political agendas. This section, therefore, aims to answer research question 1: How did outside influences affect the journalists' news coverage of the 2011 Omani reforms? The journalists referred to three primary methods the government uses to influence the Omani media: governmental subsidies, the Basic State Law, and the PPL.

8.2.1.1 Governmental subsidies

One major factor belonging to the political influence which was identified by the interviewees as having shaped the protest coverage was the financial support from the state. As is the case of many Arab media across the GCC region, the government tends to control the media through government subsidies. The substantial dependence on government subsidies puts pressure on the Omani media, both government-controlled and private newspapers, to be more supportive of state policies and therefore function as 'loyalist' media, as described by Rugh (2004). All interviewees clearly mentioned that the newspapers in Oman are struggling to be free from state control. Even though some newspapers no longer need state subsidies, that does not make them editorially independent. As summarized by one editor,

> The government supported the private media with subsidies, official subscriptions and long-term loans from 1970 till the beginning of 1990. Recently, the private newspapers in Oman rely completely on commercial advertising, subscriptions and circulation and do not receive any direct subsidies from the government. However, the government supports these newspapers through easy term loans. Fear of losing the government's financial support leads the media to support the state's policies and achieving its goals. Although advertising becomes the main financial support for private-sector media making them financially independent, it did not free the media.

If a certain media outlet does not comply with the government's policies and objectives or violates the norms regarding freedom of expression, the government will not just stop its subsidies, but it also has the right to undertake legal proceedings against the perpetrators of the published material, which might lead to the closure of the newspaper.

8.2.1.2 Journalism regulations: The Basic State Law and the Publications and Publishing Law (PPL)

Fearing that freedom of speech and of expression could destroy its control and political legitimacy, the Omani government also tends to control the newspapers through the Basic Law and the PPL. It is important to note here that the country's political system and all Omani legislation, including the Basic Law and the PPL, have been promulgated through

decrees by the sultan. Although the Basic Law, which was issued in November 1996, guarantees freedom of expression and freedom of the press, the majority of the interviewed journalists criticized the unwritten exceptions and unclear conditions that led to more press controls. One journalist said,

> Despite the existence of some legal provisions that guarantee press freedom and freedom of speech in the 1996 Basic Law as clearly stated in Articles 29, 30, and 31, these articles prohibit the publication of anything that might affect the safety of state, lead to public discord, or abuse an individual's rights or dignity. Also, these articles contain some unclear phrases which further hinder press freedom and make it hard to freely exercise journalism in the country, like 'freedom of opinion and expression is guaranteed within the limits of the Law', 'except in cases specified by the Law', 'in accordance with the procedures stated therein', and 'these rights must be exercised within the limits of the law'. What are these laws? Really, I do not know. I do not know. There are many repressive forces to media development in Oman.

Another constraint that limited the journalistic coverage of the 2011 events was the PPL. The majority of the interviewees mentioned that the PPL imposes many barriers to the Omani press, as it not only limits what journalists report or write critically but also forces journalists to be silent when covering controversial issues, especially when it comes to government policies. The former CEO of Oman Establishment for Press, Publication and Advertising (OEPPA) and the Editor-in-Chief of an Omani newspaper from 2005 to 2012 pointed out that:

> the Omani media policy is derived from the policy of Oman which prohibits defaming and criticizing the sultan and the royal family, promoting violence and disrupting the political stability in the country; including provoking crimes or hatred or sowing discord among people in the country. The Publications and Publishing Law (PPL), which was issued in 1984, sets the grounds and conditions for practising journalism in Oman and provides basic guidelines to journalists in dealing with the news and subject matter. The print media in Oman, both the government and the privately owned media, do not allow the publication of any news that contradicts government policy, and any dissent is not allowed to be covered. The newspapers are controlled, and those who breach the government policy are subject to legal questioning.

Because of these constraints, the Omani newspapers were confused during the early phase of the protests, as most news organizations in the Sultanate had no previous experience in dealing with this type of occurrence. This confusion led most news organizations in Oman to ignore the first and second Green Marches or any controversial issues in their media agendas, including oppositional voices. Additionally, the current Editor-in-Chief of an Omani newspaper pointed to the fact that the Ministry of Information is legally empowered by the PPL to censor any content that is deemed controversial in the printed media, like protests; as he put it:

> Oman is a developing country; the government sets its own rules and instructions to control the media. All public gatherings require official approval in advance, and if the demonstrations went against this law and the legal organization, we were not entitled to cover them. Any dissent and political content that disrupts Oman strategic policy is not tolerated in the Omani media unless we obtain official permission from the Ministry of Information.

It should be emphasized here that the Basic Law of the State issued in November 1996 contains legal provisions that safeguard human rights and guarantee freedom of expression within the limits of the law. However, the unclear interpretation of the permissible limits allows the government authorities, e.g., the Ministry of Information, to impose stringent limits to control the press in the country. It is therefore clear that in order for organisations to comply with government policy, the Ministry of Information provides guidance and official instructions on what to publish or not to publish. However, the Basic Law and the PPL are not the only means to control the Omani newspapers. The Ministry of Information also retains the right to implement some restrictive rules to limit press freedom. As Al-Kindi (1995) stated, "The Ministry of Information can coerce an editor to emphasize one story and ignore another" (p. 31). The prerogatives granted to the Minister of Information by the PPL give him the authority to impose severe censorship over the press, both the government and privately owned newspapers, which negatively affects the media performance in Oman. Due to these repressive restrictions on media freedom, a number of media professionals protested in front of the Ministry of Information offices in March 2011 calling for the abolition of the existing PPL and the dismissal of the Minister of Information Hamad al-Rashedi.

8.2.1.3 Self- censorship

Self-censorship in journalism happens when journalists intentionally manipulate their discourse, and it is common in countries where the government has official media censorship policies. If journalists do not obey the censorship rules, they will be fined, jailed, or dismissed from their job. All the aforementioned factors of restraint and censorship contributed to self-censorship, which led to a lack of further coverage of the protests and the disregard of the public demands, notably before February 26, 2011. As a junior journalist in Oman Daily said,

> After February 28, some journalists felt encouraged to write on bold and sensitive issues that would not have been addressed before 2011, like corruption, unemployment, and high living expenses. However, no one can deny that self-censorship definitely exists. Many journalists, including me, remained conservative and preferred to take a slanted position and not report on the surrounding events. Fear of losing my job, perhaps, was the main reason for my reluctance. We did not receive any clear instructions about what to cover, and at that time, I did not want to put myself through legal questioning or detainment.

The majority of the interviewees repeated the same fears and concerns. They all agreed that the longstanding pro-government voice, the publication laws, and the Ministry of Information contributed to creating a kind of negative self-censorship among journalists in both the government- and privately owned newspapers. A 48-year-old journalist explained that the publication laws had led him to deliberately censor himself, specifically during his coverage of the 2011 protests, despite years of work at the government-owned newspaper.

> In Oman, the government exerts considerable control over the media content, especially during times of protest. The Publications and Publishing Law, which is considered one of the most restrictive laws in the Arab region, censors many issues aimed at creating a cautious media environment. Under the law, libel is a criminal offence, and if journalists were to write about corruption in one particular ministry based on protesters' claims, they would be at least fined or jailed. With all these restraints, how do you expect me to write about the reasons that motivated Omanis to protest?

However, some interviewees, including editors-in-chief, editors, and correspondents, were not satisfied with the media environment in Oman; they argued that self-censorship might hinder journalists' watchdog role. One editor in Al-Watan criticised the overt self-censorship practised by many journalists:

> Although the publication laws censor some issues related to the political domain, some constructive criticism of the government is allowed. Also, the law gives journalists some freedom to tackle social and community problems. However, the growing fear of dismissal, sanctions, jail, and fines makes journalists cautious and afraid to pursue daring stories. Exercising a high level of self-censorship among journalists, notably within the privately owned media organizations, is very common in Oman which results in reducing the quality of their reporting. Yes, the laws impose some barriers to press freedom, but journalists exacerbate the situation further.

Article 26 of Chapter 4 in the PPL prohibits the press from "publishing anything that might affect the safety or security of the state whether internally and externally (...) without the permission of the competent authorities" (Gulf Centre for Human Rights 2011, n.p.). If any contravention of the provision is found, journalists are subject to punishment: either two years' jail or a fine of not more than 2,000 Omani rials or both penalties. This could explain, particularly at the early stage of the protests, the reasons behind the lack of journalists reporting on the issue and the absence of oppositional views, as previously discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. The results showed that despite the fact that Omani newspapers began covering the unprecedented events that occurred in the country earlier than in the other Arab countries, the state does not appear to have been using the Arab Spring as an opportunity to loosen its restrictions on freedom of expression (Duffy 2013, p. 36). Even when Omani newspapers deliberately increased their coverage,

accompanied by the sultan's responses to public demands, journalists did not seem to benefit from the array of changes implemented in the country to strengthen their watchdog role and investigative reporting.

8.2.2 Organization routines

Undoubtedly, there are ongoing debates about whether journalists should act as neutral observers of events, striving for objectivity, fairness, and detachment, or whether they should adopt certain commitments to promote the government's political agenda and reflect the interests of a particular group. However, it is worth noting at this point that unlike the role of journalism, which adheres to accurate and objective reporting, the interviewees clearly demonstrated that journalistic objectivity is an ever-evolving and elusive notion. Nearly all the interviewees argued that the objectivity of their reporting played key roles in constituting the news paradigm. They pointed to the fact that objectivity and social reality as portrayed by the newspapers raise questions about the selectivity of sources and frames, which were often tied to organizational criteria to fit a political agenda. The next section will explore how the selectivity of sources and frames influenced the journalistic objectivity in reporting the 2011 events.

8.2.2.1 Dependence on Oman News Agency as information source

The unpredicted occurrences and the blurred dimensions behind the Omani protests led the Omani newspapers, perhaps, to remain silent and to depend only on the state-owned Oman News Agency (ONA) as the main news provider. The over dependence on ONA as an official source of news explained the reasons behind the newspapers' bias and partial coverage. As noted by one correspondent in Al-Watan newspaper,

> In the early stages of the protests, Omani media were afraid to speak up and displease the government. For this reason, they depended heavily on the state-owned Oman News Agency (ONA) as the official source of news about the reforms. Undoubtedly there was fear and concern on the streets about the Arab situation, notably, at the early time of the sit-ins. And because of the external follow-up of what was published in the local newspapers, ONA, which is considered the official spokesman that represents the government's voice to the public, deliberately acted to express the government's orientations (e.g., maintaining the internal and external safety of the country, emphasizing the loyalty to the sultan, and sustaining the Omani values) while the coverage of controversial and key events was either manipulated or simply disregarded.

It was abundantly clear that during the events of January till the middle of February 2011, the ONA continuously functioned to achieve two main objectives: facilitating access to information and representing official views and public opinion without threatening the

security of the country, *as discussed in Chapter 4.* Given these circumstances, it is evident that whilst there is no political pluralism, the government uses the ONA, which falls under the Ministry of Information, as a mechanism to bolster its own politics and doctrines and propagate its ideology instead of reflecting the public's concerns.

By the end of February, and due to the increased intensity of the protests, the newspapers called upon journalists and specialists to cover the occurrences. The majority of the interviewees in Oman Daily and Al-Watan agreed that they had not received any direct spoken or written instructions from the Ministry of Information or official sources of what not to publish. However, journalists themselves were cautious when covering issues related to the street protests in order to avoid legal or ethical pitfalls. Thus, the journalists' accumulated experience in the newspapers led them to abandon their journalistic watchdog role when reporting the 2011 events. These factors explain why the newspapers were so unlikely to cover such incidents or would even marginalize the coverage of a particular event. One columnist and independent writer at Al-Watan explained this case by emphasizing the following:

> The coverage of the Omani protests in 2011 was not satisfactory at all. It lacked objectivity, balance, and transparency. And because citizens did not trust the government source (ONA), many approached social media as an information source, including information related to various protests, public demands and the sultan's responses. After February 28, many journalists and columnists were invited to cover the dissent to accommodate the Omani scene and avoid rumours. However, after years working inside the news organization, we had become familiar with what kind of stories we were allowed to cover or not to cover. Journalists were unlikely to pursue stories that challenged the limits of the press law.

In Oman, the media are not endowed with press freedom. When covering the protests, journalists tended to be selective, and sometimes they deviated from the balanced coverage of events. The selection bias contributed to obscuring the journalistic watchdog role. A correspondent in Oman Daily stated,

> Although when the newspapers started to accommodate the scene as a response to the increasing public demands and protests, they did not keep pace with the aspirations of the Omanis and instead continued to devote more space to loyalty stories and ignored the motives that led Omanis to protest. We all agreed on the importance of allegiance, but the newspapers must highlight the other side of the demands, especially with regard to employment, chants against corruption and demanding fair wages, as they do not conflict with the demands for loyalty. It is not that journalists do not want to cover the events, but we cannot freely choose what to write. Sometimes, the editors censored stories and preferred to promote the political agenda over maintaining professional integrity. Eventually, the story that is published does not resemble the original writing.

Because the media outlets served as conduits for information about the country's development and policy, journalists tended to function as lapdogs, whether willingly or not, acting as loyal spokespersons for the government (Norris and Odugbemi 2010, p. 14). The lack of a watchdog role and the ethical codes for exercising the profession might explain why the basic elements of journalism were avoided and ignored in most of the government and private media outlets.

8.2.2.2 Journalistic objectivity and news values

The concept of news values explains why some occurrences are identified as 'events' and how those 'events' are selected to become 'news'. These values in this chapter emerge as a second factor that shapes the news paradigm of the journalistic reporting. Due to the politicized media system in the country, the defining characteristics of reporting of the 2011 events became predictable, as they echoed the government's consensus and dissensus regarding the protests and related issues. Regarding newsworthiness considerations, the core value of negativity and conflict became central and more pronounced in journalists' narratives throughout the second phase of the protest coverage, especially in Al-Watan. The increased coverage of the street protest news stories coincided with the destruction of public or private property and the existence of "weird people who did not represent the Omanis"; as the newspapers described protesters. Most often, the protests which that occurred in some wilayats become newsworthy because they could be portrayed as violating and disrupting the Omani values and beliefs. In this case, the news, according to Hallin (2005), becomes a "boundary-maintaining mechanism" (p. 17), and by emphasizing those individuals or actions, journalists play "the role of exposing, condemning, or excluding from the public agenda those who violate or challenge the political consensus. It marks out and defends the limits of acceptable conflict" (ibid.). As summarized by one columnist,

> The Omani media coverage, especially in Oman Daily and Al-Watan, was not feasible. They functioned to express views that were ideological, deprecatory, or value laden while neglected their most prominent professional claim of objectivity. When the protest escalated, the media, particularly the privately owned media, paid more attention to negative news that involved violence, blockage of busy roads, and deviant behaviours. Although Oman Daily coverage was more critical than Al-Watan, no one can deny that a climate of national unanimity was predominant in its coverage. In this way, the media divided Omanis into loyalists and vandals to incite public feeling against the protesters. If the media attempt to ensure cohesion and maintain the security of the state, they should publish such stories that would resolve the dispute without causing sedition.

It is clear that instead of addressing government misconduct and the concerns of the public, both newspapers adopted "an overt tone of patriotism to the exclusion of contrary

viewpoints" (Wiggins 2013, p. 8). For instance, while Oman Daily continued to celebrate its loyalty, Al-Watan placed more emphasis on deviant behaviours and irresponsible individuals as a way to preserve the homeland and its property. This pattern of coverage was also apparent by emphasising public and government voices while keeping away from the protesters' perspectives. Another important consideration for assessing how much prominence a news story is given by a media outlet is the placement of the news story. All the interviewees confirmed that news about the sultan received significant attention and was placed on the front pages. Also, news about vandalism was considered important, especially after February 28. As one editor mentioned,

> The editorial policy, with regard to front page news allocation, is known, and each editor has a point of view which is consistent with the state policy. While many newsworthy events occurred in the country at that time, news stories about the sultan's declaration and the government's responses to the public demands were at the top of media agendas. Meanwhile, news related to riots, vandalism, and the violation of public services received significant attention. We received instructions from editors in chief and editors to place these news stories on the front pages in order to mobilize public opinion against these irresponsible actions which did not reflect Omani values.

The results show that the editors-in-chief and the central editorial teams acted as gatekeepers not just to enforce journalistic routines but also to determine the prominence and placement of a particular news story. In general, the bureaucratic routine inside the news organizations placed great emphasis on the sultan's news on the front pages, followed by sovereign government authorities and dignitaries in the state based on the concept of 'names make news', news about state institutions according to their importance, local news, news on political affairs about the Arab Gulf countries, and then Arab and global issues. With the unprecedented events of 2011, much remained the same. Both news organizations continued to prioritize the government's agenda on their front pages. Oman Daily, for example, emphasised the sultan's responses, loyalty, and peaceful protests, while Al-Watan focused on the sultan's responses and vandalism from the government's perspective (e.g., the need to maintain the state's internal security and preserve its achievement) more than any potential objectivity.

8.2.3 Individual influences

Examining what influences protest coverage also requires an investigation into the people who work inside the news organizations, as seen in journalists' general characteristics. Presumably, this analysis helps identify whether individual factors played a predominant role in influencing the newspapers' performance. Drawing on the individuals' characteristics, this section attempts to demonstrate to what extent journalists' skills, education, and training affect newspapers' content.

8.2.3.1 Lack of professional competence and necessary skills

For a journalist, having basic journalistic skills is central to the profession. However, the lack of qualified and skilled journalists is considered another obstacle to journalism in Oman. Almost all the interviewees agreed that developing adequate skills is considered extremely important, for example, research skills, writing skills (e.g., accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation), critical thinking, working under pressure to tight deadlines, photography, and keyboard and computer skills. Also, they mentioned features related to personal qualities including self-confidence, dependability, patience, credibility, and enthusiasm. However, more than half of the respondents contended that some Omani journalists have become lazy and prefer to either wait for news from press releases or write what they are told instead of searching for stories. As one journalist mentioned:

> During my work, I have come across non-specialized reporters who do not have any degrees in journalism, and I have noticed the lack of professionalism in their news stories and reports. For example, some reporters copy and paste what they receive in the press releases without adding any quotes or extra information that would make their reports special. Others focus only on the patron or chief guest and on how many people attended the event rather than focusing on the main story and useful information about that event.

Even when the protests erupted in many wilayats in the country, as one sub-editor said:

> Only a few journalists felt eager to go to the scene and report on the incidents while the others remained seated in their offices waiting for orders to cover the protests. In many cases, they came up with stories without any quotes or photos.

Undoubtedly, journalists with greater skills have the potential to present a more satisfactory and productive performance. Based on the assumption presented in this chapter, the key journalistic skills and personal qualities were missing, which contributed to weaken journalists' coverage of the 2011 reforms.

8.2.3.2 Inefficiency of journalists' education and lack of training

In contrast to the previous situation in Oman, the percentage of university graduates in journalism has increased due to the spread of university education and the establishment of the journalism and communication departments at Sultan Qaboos University, Colleges of Applied Sciences, and Al-Bayan College. However, ten of the interviewees argued that although these graduates contributed to the improvement of journalism in their media organization, they lacked the necessary skills that would qualify them for the profession; as one editor stated:

> The Omani press suffers from the lack of professionalism and skills. Not everyone who writes anecdotes or poems is a journalist. Even the Omanis who are educated and specialized in the field lack critical thinking. Obtaining a certificate does not guarantee proficiency in journalism due to the lack of any practical element in the journalism studies, which weakens the validity of the qualification regarding media or journalism studies. What is important is reading and acquiring the necessary skills which will improve journalists.

The findings here point to another serious problem facing the Omani newspapers, which is the inefficiency of the media outputs in higher education institutions. In these colleges, the theoretical courses are given far more prominence than the practical courses. The lack of training and applied courses in the field, perhaps, exacerbates the situation. Therefore, there must be cooperation between the educational institutions and the Ministry of Information to train the students, so they are qualified to join the labour market.

Providing training opportunities is not only a matter of supplying graduates, but it also concerns the staff of the media organizations themselves. All interviewees called for the government to allocate an annual budget for intensifying the training courses for media cadres in various institutions. These courses should focus on traditional skills (e.g., interview techniques, investigative reporting, and writing crisis and protest news stories) and digital skills (e.g., photography, editing, and layout). Only one interviewee called for safety training to defend themselves from the risks that come with the work.

> When I went to cover the protest, some protesters tried to stop me taking photos. They yelled at me and tried to take away my camera. Some journalists who were working on Oman TV faced the same thing in the line of duty. I think each media organization must prioritize safety training for its employees.

The interviewee here raised an important point. The risks associated with providing media coverage of disasters and protests cannot be predicted. So, journalists must be adequately trained to deal with emergency situations in order to protect themselves.

However, the editorial line in both newspapers argues that there are some essential skills that cannot be attained through training; as one editor put it:

> Throughout my experience in journalism I found that personal features like curiosity, determination and motivation are things that we cannot teach. We know constant training of new skills is important to keep up with rapid changes in the industry, but there are skills all journalists should be aiming to master, like shorthand, networking, gaining and maintaining contacts, newsgathering, and writing. Journalists should come equipped with a whole host of these skills, and no one can train them better than themselves.

The findings here illustrate a gap between an academic degree and training in the Omani media environment. Therefore, the news organizations should collaborate with their journalists to meet the job requirements. The training and development department in both newspapers is responsible for building and developing a competent workforce, especially for new employees and new graduates.

8.2.3.3 Lack of adequate salary

In addition to the lack of skills and training, the low wages is another problem concerning media practitioners in Oman, which affects their performance and commitment. The majority of respondents, whether from the public sector or the government sector, expressed their dissatisfaction with their salaries, emphasizing that the lack of an adequate salary, the weak financial incentives, and the poor prospects of promotion are the most important obstacles facing the media in the Sultanate, as the following illustrates:

> Unfortunately, I know many journalists who work in the media for years just to make a living. Some of them do not hold any academic degree in journalism, and they learn their profession on their own after years of experience or from other journalists. This means they have a lack of awareness about the real mission of journalism, and they do not care about their work. Even those who have graduated from universities do not feel satisfied due to the low salaries and incentives they get compared with their counterparts in the Gulf countries (e.g., Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates), which makes them less enthusiastic to join the profession.

The finding here suggests that a lack of promotion and the inadequate salary contributes to the high level of dissatisfaction among Omani journalists, which perhaps explains journalists' lack of commitment in seeking sources and reporting the protests. Discussion about journalists 'skills also requires an examination of the role of journalists in utilizing social media sites as a source of information. Most of the interviewees argued that they used social media networks, as Couldry (2012) pointed out, for personal reasons and for everyday life rather than engaging in discussions on political and social issues. Only a few journalists had adopted social media as a rich source of potential stories and for getting access to interviewees. In order to provide a clear picture about the relationship between journalists' usage of social media and their coverage of the protests as part of their professional competence, the next section will investigate the Sablat Oman forum as a case study.

8.2.4 Did the Sablat Oman forum appear to have had an impact on the press coverage of the protests?

Undoubtedly, the rise of social media has and continues to facilitate the transformation of the practice of journalism. Citizen journalists are not substitutes for many of the things we expect from professional journalists, but instead, they may provide a different form of journalism rather than professional journalism. It allows more people to contribute their voices and opinions, and it is explicitly subjective. It must be acknowledged that unlike other demonstrations in the Arab world, in Oman, social media were not the main vehicle for bringing about social and political changes. However, due to the government's suppression of opposing viewpoints, the absence of a free press, and the lack of a public channel of communication, Omani citizens approached the Sablat Oman forum as an alternative source of information to the official channels to engage in discussions of public affairs and voice their concerns, as previously discussed in Chapters Four and Six. This section, therefore, will examine the newspapers' presence on the Sablah, mainly regarding whether journalists had used the Sablat Oman forum to gain access to contacts and arguments about public concerns. Nine of the interviewed journalists argued that due to the unbalanced performance of the mainstream media and their continued lack of acknowledgement particularly of negative conflict-based stories, Al-Sablah's coverage was a rival to the press coverage, as illustrated in the following quotation:

> Since its establishment, Sablat Oman has played a vital role in the local Omani mobility, as it has embraced a large number of intellectuals who have not found enough space in the media to express their opinions. During the reforms, the traditional contemporary media faced fierce competition from the Sablah users. Unlike the mainstream media, which continuously function to support the government, the Sablat Oman forum granted more freedom to meet the public demands and challenge media practices despite the fact that it was under the control of legal authorities. The 2011 events proved that the people were able to offer constructive criticism and to do so in the interests of the country. The online users in the Sablah were actively involved not only to legitimize ideas but also to challenge the government, as they played a major role in drawing the government's attention to some erroneous practices in some institutions.

In an insecure political culture, as Hintz (2003) argued, the type of information the media send out is heavily controlled by media organizations and the ideological authorities, so the majority of Omanis could only passively receive information from the state-owned media, and their discourse remained silent due to their fear of isolation and negative consequences, especially when their opinion opposed that of the government. However, the urgent need for political, economic, and social changes; the absence of official statements; and the newspapers' lack of acknowledgement of the surrounding events, particularly at the beginning of the protests; had empowered the role of the Sablah users

and led them to utilize Al-Sablat as an information channel. This probably indicates that they were driven by a sense of social responsibility. A significant number of Sablat Oman posts contained serious discussion about solving social problems. Citizens were posting frequently in the online public sphere to bring about political and economic changes. They were making suggestions about what should be done to safeguard the Omani government, create job opportunities for Omanis, and empower the Omani economy. In that regard, the findings affirm those of other studies underlining the important role of social media in providing a convenient platform for debate (Tilley and Cokley 2008; Khamis and Vaughn 2011). When the interviewees were asked about what influence Sablah had on their coverage, only three younger journalists admitted that they had approached the Sablah Oman forum as a source of news information, as demonstrated in the following comment:

> I surfed the Sablah almost every day to get updates about the protests from eyewitnesses. I remembered when the protest became intense in Sohar roundabout, we had difficulty in reporting the incidents due to the road blockage. I did not have any contacts in Sohar who might provide detailed and reliable information of what was going on. So, the Sablah, at that time, was the only means of information. I was amazed by the sheer volume of comments and the spontaneous posting. I wrote my column article with the online users' help and without any risk to myself. However, despite the increasing freedom in this cyberspace, only a few journalists were able to benefit from this sphere.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, Omanis had previously been unable to participate in disseminating information and contributing to the critical discussion about important issues, as news production occurred in a one-way direction. Though the widespread public engagement in Al-Sablah provided access to information and reciprocity of communication (Papacharissi 2002, 2010; Sassi 2000), as it offered opportunities for direct interaction between citizens, the majority of journalists expressed negative views about the impacts of Sablat Oman on their work and admitted that they did not rely on Al-Sablah for their news consumption and their professional practices as a whole. They presented considerable arguments about how valuable or relevant user involvement is to the mainstream media. The interviewees criticized the quality of the online discussion in Al-Sablah, saying that it lacked credibility and eroded the public's ability to differentiate between facts, serious arguments, and rumours. With this in mind, the editorial line usually did not consider Sablah as an information source, as exemplified in the following account by an editor:

> Political dialogues in the Sablah lacked specialists dealing with the discussion of serious matters, and many of those who speak on political issues were not qualified. Although citizens played an active role in gathering information about the protests, they lacked the expertise and the skills to use the Internet without conceding credibility. I think our

society generally lacks a sense of proper political dialogue. Frequently, the online users tended to generate a significant amount of noise and false information, for instance, rumours about government responses to the public demands, debt exemption, dismissal of some ministers, protest locations, and army intervention to stop the sit-ins. The traditional Omani media had helped, through official statements transmitted by the competent authorities, to stop the spread of any rumours that could cause confusion among the public on social networking sites.

The finding here is consistent with previous research (e.g., Uslaner 2004; Kobayashi, Ikeda and Miyata 2006; show Pentina and Tarafdar 2014; Carah and Louw 2015) regarding the quality of the public dialogue on social network sites. In this regard, Newman (2009) claimed that "the Web 2.0 revolution has peddled the promise of bringing more truth to more people but every week a new revelation calls into question the accuracy reliability and trust of the information we get from the internet" (p. 6). For these reasons, the Omani newspapers did not depend on the Sablah for their information, as there were concerns about the reliability of stories that turned out to be false rumours. However, it is worth emphasizing that the absence of official media intervention on rejecting or confirming the rumours was the main factor in propagating rumours in the Sablah, especially at the beginning of the 2011 reforms, as most interviewees mentioned. Eight interviewees pointed out that along with rumours, anonymity further weakens the quality of participation. As one columnist said,

> I did not trust what was written in Al-Sablah, and it was not a reference to me. I was looking for the truth in my writings, which I missed in that online forum. It included anonymous sources whose credibility could not be trusted, and sometimes they tended to amplify feelings of outrage between the government and citizens instead of producing thoughtful contributions.

Government control over the online conversation through the 2002 Telecommunications Act and 2011 Cybercrime Law might explain the use of pseudonyms. During the Omani reform, the Sablat Oman forum was highly controlled and came under political pressure, which meant it started functioning like the official mainstream media (Al-Rawi 2016). This indicates that although Al-Sablah had played a significant role in informing and facilitating the public debates, it had not undermined the power of traditional media gatekeepers. Audience participation in the online public sphere had partly been reterritorialized by the state, as previously discussed in Chapter Four. Furthermore, due to the increasing number of detentions among online writers and bloggers, anonymity was used to safely express opposing views and, probably, to lessen the effect of the spiral of silence (Neumann 1993).

8.2.5 Other influences concerning journalists and source relationships: Harassment of journalists

Although sourcing practice is considered one of the most important components of journalistic narratives, the influences behind the lack of sources in news coverage, notably during protests, has been sparsely researched. This section, however, aims to fill this void. In addition to all the above-mentioned domains of influence, the interviewees referred to another force which influenced source-journalist relations, namely, harassment. Some journalists described how the fear of physical attack prevented them from interviewing protesters. The assaults on journalists and the protesters' refusal to be interviewed or photographed led journalists to abandon some of their professional duties, as illustrated in the following quotation:

> The demonstrators refused to talk to the Omani media. When I approached them for interviews, I was subjected to inappropriate speech and I was beaten several times. On contrary, they welcomed the foreign media, and they openly talked with them.

These instances of harassment not only witnessed among print journalists. The Omani TV team was harassed by the protesters in Salalah on March 2, 2011. Similarly, on the following day, another Omani official television crew was attacked in Sohar near the Globe roundabout. The protesters not only refused to be interviewed by the journalists but also confiscated their recorded tapes (Oman 2011). It is clear that the protesters' attack was a direct consequence of their dissatisfaction with and disappointment in the media's performance. In his speech during the sit-in, Saeed al-Hashemi, a writer and anti-corruption activist said, "We aspire to a free media, a critical and transparent media, to keep people from shading, and to use its tools to criticize and expose corruption in the country" (CNN 2011, n.p.). Likewise, Mohammed Al-Harthy, a poet and human rights activist, said, "We are tired of media policies that aim only at misleading the Omani citizen" (ibid. n.p.).

There is also a potentially worrying indication here about the journalists' level of awareness about their role. As a journalist from Al-Watan put it:

> I stopped interviewing protesters, and I tended to provide only a description of what was happening. Sometimes, I included what they said in their speeches or selected what they wrote on their banners as evidence of demonstrators' voices without risking my safety.

This raises another problem facing Omani journalists in their coverage of the events of 2011, that is, the newspapers' failure to obtain information directly from sources. Journalists' dependence on protesters' banners and speeches provides clear evidence that journalists, at certain times, have little direct interaction with citizens. This case gives

a further justification about, perhaps, the use of anonymous sources, notably in the privately owned media, where no indication of the real interviewees appears in the coverage. Indeed, patterns of sourcing matter because they function as a substantial truth-telling check on a journalist's accuracy. However, what is more important here is the kind of information the newspapers included from these veiled sources, as the respondents gave more emphasis to social cohesion. One editor-in-chief said it plainly:

> The people were so rebellious, and it was unreasonable to include all their slogans and speeches that would negatively affect the unity of society.

Thus, the finding offers convincing evidence of veiled sources being used as a way of misleading public opinion (Turk 1986). Journalists tended to be selective in choosing what to include and exclude in order to support government policy and denounce acts of vandalism instead of reflecting public opinion.

8.3 Discussion

This chapter has explored journalists' interpretations and negotiations of the factors that influenced their coverage of the 2011 Omani reforms, notably in Oman Daily and Al-Watan. The analysis in this chapter demonstrates that there was a consensus on the relative influence of the political agenda on journalists' practices during the 2011 protests. The political system in the country tried to influence the news agendas through a set of regulatory laws. Indeed, the PPL and the Basic State Law were perceived as the most powerful boundaries to the journalists' work in both newspapers. Although Articles 29, 30, and 31 of Oman's 1996 Basic Law and the 1984 PPL guarantee freedom of expression and of the press, these rights are subject to limitations and news media outlets are expected to play a key role in supporting the government's position and contributing to national security. Any topic that the Omani government might deem controversial to the state is not allowed. Yet, in order to keep a tight grip on newspapers' content, the government through the PPL has granted the Ministry of Information the right to censor newspapers' content and implement some restrictive rules to punish those who violate the laws. If journalists cross these political red lines, they might be accused of libel, which could result in detention and a jail sentence. Thus, fear of negative repercussions and dependence on the government's financial support has led the privately owned media, like Al-Watan, to function with strong political ties and has restricted its own autonomy and integrity (Al-Mashikhi, 1994, p. 69). As Hafez (2010) put it, "The public' media sector is really a state-media sector and the private media basically have to be loyalist in order to survive" (p. 4). This confirms previous findings in the literature, such as Shoemaker and Reese (1991, 1996, 2013), that influences outside the news organizations, such as

government regulations and the Ministry of Information in this case, pose greater constraints on media content, which forced journalists to exercise negative self-censorship when reporting protests. Therefore, during the early stage of the protests, news organizations depended heavily on the government agency (ONA) when covering the 2011 events. Like the governments of most Arab countries that experienced the tumultuous events of these times, the Omani government, through the ONA, tried to keep news about the reforms to a minimum in order to reduce public support for the protests (Brasted 2005). The ONA attempted to emphasize the government's responses while ignoring the early protests and public demands. Were a news organization to ignore the ONA stories, it "would be questioned, by the council board and the Ministry of Information" (Al-Hasani 2006, p. 21). Thus, the newspapers felt confused at that stage and remained silent, which exacerbated the situation.

Indeed, the results here lead to paradoxical arguments on the role of objectivity in protest coverage. News values emerge from this analysis as another substantial obstacle concerning how Oman Daily and Al-Watan routinized the processing of the unexpected events of 2011 and how news items were selected and constructed. The results suggest that objectivity in the protest coverage was swayed by patriotism and often tied to organizational criteria to fit a political agenda. For example, despite such changes in the newspapers' coverage by the end of February 2011, journalists did not benefit from the level of freedom, which had never been envisaged in the country before the 2011 protests. The political intimidation and pressure contributed to a tendency for negative self-censorship among journalists, which made them cautious and afraid to adopt an empowering representation of the protest and the protestors or to pursue stories related to official corruption and malfeasance. Both newspapers continued to value news stories that were consistently loyal and supportive of the state's official line. Furthermore, journalists relied on the "protest paradigm" as a frame template, which in turn attempted to marginalise the protests (McLeod and Hertog 1999; McLeod 2007) and shape news narration in a direction favourable to and subordinate to the state policy (Davies 2009). The findings here confirm the arguments by McCluskey et al. (2009), Lee (2014), Spyridou (2015) and Elmasry et al. (2016) regarding how the political orientation of the news organisation may contribute to the delegitimization of the protests.

Drawing on communicators' characteristics and backgrounds, this chapter has demonstrated that the lack of training opportunities, lack of adequate salary, weak financial incentives, and poor promotion prospects emerged as additional obstacles facing the Omani media practitioners, which, perhaps, negatively affected journalists' performance. The finding here substantiates previous findings in the literature (e.g., Al-Hasani 2003; Al-Subhi 2012; Al-Mashikhi 2015). In his study, Al-Subhi revealed the high

level of discontent among Omani journalists working in the Public Authority for Radio and Television in the Sultanate due to the lack of promotion and appreciation as well as the low salary they receive. Similarly, in his study of 167 journalists in more than eight media organizations in Oman, including print and broadcasting media, Al-Mashikhi (2015) concluded that there was a general agreement among the Omani journalists that the lack of an adequate salary had a negative impact on the development of the Omani media. Another interesting finding pertaining to the subject of usage of the Sablat Oman forum among journalists during their coverage of the protests indicated that although the forum played a significant role in providing detailed descriptions of the 2011 Omani protests that were not covered by the mainstream media outlets, the results of this chapter have demonstrated that Omani journalists in both newspapers were dismissive of or reluctant to use the forum as a source of information in their coverage. Journalists in both newspapers predominantly relied on traditional methods of reporting to contextualise the protest events. This finding is significantly different from the previous results reported in the literature. Upon Mubarak's fall from power, Lotan et al. (2011) and El Gody (2016) found that several media outlets expanded their presence on Twitter and Facebook to break the government's news coverage monopoly, to offer access to online information, and to provide a space for diverse voices to engage in discussion about matters affecting citizens' daily lives. On the contrary, journalists and their editors working in Oman Daily and Al-Watan were reluctant to utilize Al-Sablah to break out of routine news frames. The interviewees admitted that they were suspicious about the quality of Sablah content, the spread of false information and rumours, and users' anonymity, which cast doubts about the reliability of the online users' stories. All of these concerns raise an argument about the role of journalism not just as a watchdog or agenda setter but also as a truth transmitter. Since the interviewees agreed that the Sablah coverage was a rival to the press coverage, why they did not refer to this online sphere as an information source in their coverage? If journalists were concerned about the quality of online discussions, why they did not verify facts?

This concludes the discussion of my empirical findings, which has covered the newspapers' portrayal of the 2011 protests, the dominant sourcing patterns, and the various influences that shape journalists' narratives. The next chapter will summarize the key arguments that I have suggested across the thesis, arguing that they provide a foundation on which to build a significant contribution to the existing academic literature examining news media coverage of protest, particularly in the Arab world where governments exert direct control over the media system.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion: Summary of the research and its scholarly contribution

9.1 Introduction

The thesis has examined the performance of two leading Omani newspapers during the 2011 Omani protests by exploring their news coverage and news production practices as manifested in journalists' accounts of their practices. It has also examined the Sablat Oman forum to capture a wider understanding of what debates existed in society regarding the 2011 reforms and whether the press addressed people's needs and interests and informed them accurately and sufficiently. The findings in this thesis have built on and hopefully provided strong evidence for advancing academic debates about the media coverage of protests to fit in with the studies of journalism and the 2011 Arab Spring, as elucidated in the previous three empirical chapters. Divided into three parts, this chapter first summarizes the key arguments that I have suggested across the thesis. The second section seeks to unpack how the coverage of Oman Daily and Al-Watan made sense of the protests and to explore how the 'case study' of Oman provides new knowledge for key academic debates. Then, I will explain how the representation of protests and public opinions within the two newspapers' coverage of the 2011 Omani protests reinforces the existing academic literature examining news media coverage of protests. The third section provides suggestions for future research by following avenues of investigation that were not explored in my research.

9.2 Summary of the key arguments and discussions

The overarching research question of this thesis, as indicated in Chapter One, is "What role did Oman Daily and Al-Watan newspapers play in the 2011 protests?" To answer this question, this thesis investigates two dimensions of Omani newspapers, specifically, news content and news production practises, using the studies of the sociology of news production as the theoretical framework. The following subsections summarize the main arguments that emerged from the research findings and the theoretical/conceptual implications.

9.2.1 Delegitimising dissent: The newspapers' representation of the 2011 Omani reforms

It is apparent that the 2011 events across the Arab countries have shaken Oman more than many would have expected. Although, the protests were relatively small in scale, they were sufficiently serious that they spurred the sultan to execute a number of reforms. Several underlying socio-economic issues fuelled the 2011 protests. For example, in February 2011, the average monthly income for around 70% of Omanis working in the private sector was only 200 Omani rials (£408), which was less than the real living wage. Corruption was another reason that led to the 2011 protests in the country. This thesis,

however, does not intend to focus on the essence of the protests and the related issues; instead, its aim is to shed light on the roles played by two daily Omani newspapers (Oman Daily and Al-Watan) at the time of the reforms.

The first RQ, "How did the news professionals in Oman Daily and Al-Watan newspapers and Omani citizens in the Sablat Oman forum interpret the 2011 protests?" focuses on the newspapers' agendas and their representations of the protests. In order to provide a comprehensive picture about the kind of debates that existed in Omani society and whether the press covered them, Chapter Six also examined the Sablat Oman forum. Some scholars have demonstrated the validity of using an online forum to determine which issues are more important than others in public opinion (e.g., Roberts et al. 2002; Lee et al. 2005; Luo 2014). Drawing on the role of the Omani media, it is perceived that since the establishment of the Omani media in the last four decades, the coverage of events in the Sultanate focuses mostly on the issues of national loyalty, industrial developments, and achievements (see Al-Mashekhi 1996; Al-Murjan 1997; Al-Rawas 1997; Al-Hasani 2003). Yet, the findings of this thesis reveal that despite the passage of four decades of the blessed Renaissance age, much remains the same or is even worse when situating the media's role within the unprecedented upheaval of 2011. As stated in Chapter Six, the protests in Oman were either ignored or overshadowed in Oman Daily's and Al-Watan's coverage, especially at the early phase of the protests. Based on the theoretical framework of agenda setting (see McCombs et al. 2011), the findings demonstrate that there was a perceived lack of coverage by these newspapers of the first Green March which took place on January 17, 2011 and of teachers' protests, which happened early in February. There was no reference to these protests in either newspaper. The results presented within this chapter correlate with those of previous literature, suggesting that during the initial weeks of the protests, the Arab Spring was largely ignored and did not receive any media attention (Lotan et al. 2011; Loughborough University 2012; Youssef 2012). By February, notably, after the state made various concessions, journalists completely missed the various protests that erupted across the country and neglected to report the reasons that had driven Omanis to protest. Instead, much attention was devoted to the government's responses to the public demands. This means, as suggested by Donohue et al. (1995), that instead of reporting and addressing Omanis' concerns, the newspapers acted as "lapdogs", or "guard dogs" of the interests of the elite.

During the 2011 protests, Al Jazeera and Agencies (2011) reported that Oman had not witnessed anything similar to this wave of anger against their government in the past 40 years. Thus, for the first time since the 1970s and the end of the Dhofar war, the 2011 protests demonstrated that Omanis were no longer passive. They rejected Noelle-

Neumann's idea of a spiral of silence and became more motivated to legitimise their opposite opinion and construct their own agenda to determine what issues were important to be included for discussion. Al Hashimi (2011) argued that the lack of coverage by the newspapers and the absence of places and opportunities to discuss politics and other related issues empowered the role of Omanis in the Sablat Oman forum to voice their concerns and document the protest events. Al- Sablah had enabled passive, regular, and marginalized individuals to become more active and influential, and empowered sources other than the mainstream news media to voice their opinions on online forums (Rasmussen 2007). Chapter Six reveals that the street protests and the public demands were at the top of the public agenda. At the beginning of the protests, the issues that were ranked at the top of media's agendas were not the same as the main issues that were discussed in the public agenda. The Green Marches and teachers' protests were discussed frequently in the Sablah. Although Al-Sablah's content showed no evidence of demands for the abdication of the Sultan, the public's dissatisfaction with the Omani government was the most prominent feature in their discourses. A number of citizens were posting intensively in the online public sphere in an attempt to effect political and economic changes. This result supports Al-Rawi' s (2016) argument in which he noted that Al-Sablah had played an important role in "documenting the protests and conveying messages to the public" (p. 179) at a time when the information flow was restrained by government control. A peak in posting frequency was witnessed on February 27 to underline the various protests that had erupted in the country while the newspapers remained silent and emphasized only the government's responses. These variations draw our attention to the fact that unlike Oman Daily and Al-Watan, which prioritized the topics that served the government and its policies, the Omani online activists gave updated and detailed coverage about the public demands and societal problems (Rasmussen 2007, p. 9). The findings indicate that Oman Daily and Al-Watan, within their coverage of the 2011 reforms, did not corroborate the Habermasian conceptualisation of the public sphere (Habermas 1989). I would argue that this conclusion can be drawn since the newspapers did not fulfil their purpose of providing a deliberative public sphere by informing and facilitating the public debates. Thus, when the information flow is restrained by state control, it could be argued that it is given more freedom in the online sphere

By the end of February and March, it seems that the Omani newspapers realized the power of the online users, so they decided to cover the protests. Thus, the street protests dominated the newspapers' agendas and took precedence over any substantive issues of the protests including the regime's responses. Yet, the newspapers' representation of the protests and their manifestations provoked considerable concern about the role of the media and raised the question "Do the media always, invariably and necessarily impose 'definitions of the situation' on protests and dissent which de-legitimize the protesters'

aims and coincide with dominant interests?" (Cottle 2008, p. 856). The results presented within the actual chapter support the previous literature mentioned in Chapter Two, which suggested unfavourable and antagonistic coverage of political dissent (e.g., Gitlin 1980; Chan and Lee 1984; Shoemaker 1984; Hertog and McLeod 1999). To reiterate some points made within the conclusion of Chapter Six, the newspapers' coverage of the 2011 protests indicates that with a growing wave of sit-ins in various parts of the Sultanate, including in the government and the private sectors, the newspapers began to engage in more critical coverage in an attempt to control the protesters' actions. Both newspapers repeatedly criticized the sit-ins, indicating that these undesirable activities of the protesters contradicted the Basic Law of the State, which safeguards the state's achievements. Al-Watan, for example, portrayed the protests as acts of vandalism, arson, looting, and public disorder rather than considering underlying reasons for the protests. These results substantiate the previous findings reported in the literature, suggesting that when covering protests, news organizations are more likely to trigger coverage that marginalizes the protesters and their aims, downplays their effectiveness and emphasizes the violence of the demonstrations (see Gitlin 1980; McLeod and Hertog 1999; Brasted 2005; McLeod 2007; Elmasry et al. 2016). Oman Daily also intensified its coverage of the peaceful sit-ins and tended to emphasise loyalty marches, which coincided with radical changes in the country. By doing so, the newspapers' coverage supported the findings of Carragee's (1991) study, which determined that when covering protests, the media tend to distort public opinion and downplay the reasons for the protests by focusing on internal divisions.

Given these results, it can be concluded that Oman Daily and Al-Watan failed to report the course of the Omani reforms. Their coverage of the protests exhibited low levels of accountability, which therefore provoked significant debates about the social function of the newspapers. Ideally, news media have a responsibility to fulfil specific obligations in society, for example, providing their audience with timely factual coverage, providing background analysis and interpretation of events that affect the conditions of their lives, and acting as a check on government malfeasance (Hanitzsch 2007, p. 369). However, the results here support the findings of previous studies (Al-Kindi 1995; Al-Hasani 2003; Robie 2013; Al-Kindi 2016), which pointed to the power of the Omani mass media for conveying positive propaganda about the government and its policies. Journalists in both dailies continued to exercise hegemonic control over content and maintain their grip as public opinion shapers.

9.2.2 Omanis as passive observers within the newspapers' coverage of the 2011 Omani reforms

The second RQ, "*How did the newspapers represent public opinion as sources in their coverage of the 2011 protests?*", explores the news sourcing routines within Oman Daily's and Al-Watan's coverage of the protests. It deals mainly with who speaks through the news media and who is excluded (White 1950; Sigal 1973, 1986; Shoemaker and Reese 1996). To address this question, Chapter Seven is split into two parts. The first part examines the dominant sources that were cited or quoted and considers whether Omanis (ordinary people and street protesters) were determined to be supporting the protests within the newspapers' coverage. The second part assesses whether the use of anonymous sources in the reporting of the protests led to news content that supported the 2011 protests.

Chapter Seven revealed that Omanis' voices were deemed to be higher on the hierarchy of credibility than they had been previously within the newspapers' coverage of the protests. Oman Daily, for example, attributed more information to citizens or public opinion (49.44%) than to government officials (22.22%). Although there was a clear trend of favouring government officials as sources in Al-Watan, Omani citizens also emerged as important sources especially by the end of February. The rise of citizens as favourable sources within the media coverage of protests, mainly during the 2011 Arab Spring, was consistent with findings in the literature (Loughborough University 2012; Hermida et al. 2014; Van Leuven et al. 2015; Fitzgerald 2016). This sourcing pattern reported a potential shift in the Omani newspapers' coverage which had routinely favoured elite sources (Al-Hasani 2003). The findings presented herein refute the conclusions of influential studies (e.g., Sigal 1973; Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979; Fishman 1988; Gandy 1982; Brasted 2005) which have argued that journalists are more likely to include official sources in news discourse as being more credible and powerful in influencing news coverage while reducing the commentary from non-elite sources. What my research also reveals is that protesters were granted a lower level of power to construct the news compared to citizens and elite sources. Several scholars (e.g., Sigal 1973; Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979; McQuail 2006) have argued that journalists should reflect the diversity of their society. Yet, I argue that the absence of protesters' voices from the discussion and actual narration of newspapers' coverage gave a false reflection of the Omani public sphere.

However, framing analysis of news sources' patterns, as discussed previously in Chapter Seven, suggests that when covering 'street protest stories', Oman Daily included more citizen sources whilst Al-Watan gave more space to protesters' sources in their narratives. The findings demonstrate that the inclusion of these voices within the newspapers'

coverage of 2011 reforms provide "an illusion of balanced and unbiased coverage when an inherent status quo bias actually exists" (Brasted 2005, p. 384). I argue that both dailies failed to include and use statements from those in opposition to the government. To reiterate several points made in the conclusion of Chapter Seven, when citizen voices were invited in the newspapers narrative, Oman Daily, for example, continued to favour the Omani government's side and provoke patriotic sentiments and national identification in support of government policy. This mode of patriotism led to a total disregard of protesters' perspectives and values. Although protesters as sources were mostly found in Al-Watan, their perspectives were reflected incorrectly. The newspaper included sources who portrayed radical protest groups in a negative light. Al-Watan attributed information to protesters in the peaceful protests whose voices reduced the significance of protests and emphasised the problems the protestors had created for the country. If we go back to Bennett's 'indexing' hypothesis in Chapter Two, we see that Oman Daily and Al-Watan link their coverage to the official policy circles (Bennett 1990).

Moreover, the findings from my research highlighted another key weakness in the newspapers' routines, which was reporting assumptions and inferences about public opinion without providing evidences to support such claims, for example 'a group of citizens participating in the sit-in think that…', 'some protesters expressed…' 'people in Ibri said…', 'one of the protesters said…', and so on. When the protests escalated, both dailies included unnamed sources in their narratives to make general claims on behalf of the Omani public sphere against protests and street protesters. Oman Daily, for example, included unnamed sources that expressed loyalty and gratitude to the sultan and condemned what they termed vandalism. By contrast, Al-Watan included more unnamed attributions that denounced protests and any acts of sabotage emphasised that these behaviours did not reflect the original and authentic values of Omanis. The use of anonymous sources, therefore, continued to echo the government's perspectives while the newspaper neglected oppositional grievances and the contention that surrounds them. The results presented here differ from those of previous research (e.g., Blankenburg 1992; Pincus 2005), suggesting that anonymous sources can play an important role in disclosing opposite viewpoints and challenging political discourses.

Indeed, the media have a responsibility for informing people of things affecting their life (Curran 1991), encouraging them to participate in discussions of public affairs (Habermas 1989, 1991; Lewis et al. 2005), and thus converting them into a participant public (Gillmor 2006; Reich 2015). However, what emerges here is that both newspapers served as a potential detriment to a healthy public sphere in which public opinion was "flowing from the top down rather than from the bottom up" (Lewis et al. 2005, p. 45) to condemn the

protests. This implies that citizens were not given an opportunity to be genuine active participants in the public debate, but that they were regarded as less deliberative and politically engaged within the newspapers' coverage of the 2011 protests. On the contrary, both newspapers served as lapdogs "acting as loyal spokespersons for state authorities" (Norris and Odugbemi 2010, p. 14) instead of focusing on the prevailing situation in the country and reflecting the voices and concerns of the masses. It was apparent that the newspapers stepped down their balanced and objective reporting and tended to incorporate voices that supported government policy, which encourages the 'one voice' policy and does not believe in a plurality of opinions. What I am able to conclude given these results is that even though these results differ from some published studies (e.g., Loughborough University 2012; Fitzgerald 2016), this research reinforces previous studies that suggested that although citizens are more prominent in the news than ever, their participation is shaped mainly by official views (Tuchman 1978, Turk 1986; Bennett 1990; Oliver and Maney 2000; Brasted 2005; Luther and Miller 2005; Cushion 2007; Hatcher 2010; Kleemans et al. 2017). These contentious and distinct results point to the complexity of the news media coverage of the protests. Indeed, the characteristics of protest coverage are not constant, depending on the type of media and the societal context in which media messages are produced. Chapter Eight, therefore, continued the discussion of how the newspapers' coverage makes sense out of the protests by examining the "factors that influence the structural qualities of news frames" (De Vreese 2005, p. 52) with the emphasis on the societal and political context in the country.

9.2.3 Journalism culture: Exploring the relationship between protest coverage and journalists' accounts of their practices

The third RQ, "What were the factors that influenced journalistic coverage of the 2011 protests?", investigates the news production culture, like the influence of the political and societal milieu on news operations. The question also seeks to examine the impact of newspapers' routines and journalists' backgrounds (education, skills, and training) on the reporting of protests.

9.2.3.1 Political Influence

Since 1970, the Omani government has run all the communication systems, including the press, to maintain its grip on the country's strategic objectives and to sustain its policy embodied by its socio-political, cultural, and economic orientations. Despite 48 years of Omani renaissance, the findings in Chapter Eight suggest that the authoritarian political system in the country has used financial benefits and legal authority as means to influence the press. Drawing from Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model (1994) in

which economy and political elites regulate media content, I determined that Omani news organizations are small businesses, and they depend on government subsidies to survive. So, unlike the capitalist western countries, where money and power exert an overt control over media content, media in Oman are more politically oriented, as the government retains its monopoly over the media content through official government advertising, subscriptions, and indirect subsidies. Because the government plays an important role in financing the media organizations, newspapers' editors-in-chief and editors must be vigilant not to antagonise such an essential supplier. Therefore, it was not surprising that only stories with a strong orientation to government interests received ample newspaper coverage during the protests. Contrary to Shleifer et al. (2001), who argued that privately owned media have a strong independent voice compared to that of the government-owned media, the results presented within this study support previous Omani literature, mentioned in Chapter Four, which suggested that the privately owned media (e.g., Al-Watan) in Oman are struggling to be independent, as they are operating under the restrictions posed by the government's financial support (Al-Mashikhi 1994, 1996; Al-Kindi 1995; Al-Shaqsi 2000; Al-Hasani 2003). The findings here also confirm the conclusions of McQuail's (1994) study in which he argued that "the contents of the media always reflect the interests of those who finance them" (p. 162). The substantial dependence on the government subsidies meant the Omani newspapers served more as a propaganda tool for the political elite.

As previously stated in Chapter Eight, the power of the legal authority and the lack of legal protection for journalists are considered another important factor which is likely to intervene in journalists' daily practice and act to censor the newspapers' content. The Omani press is restricted by law; both the Basic State Law and the PPL are perceived as being a blatant violation of press freedom. Despite the guarantee of press freedom in the Basic Law, which states, "Freedom of the press, printing and publication is guaranteed in accordance with the conditions and circumstances defined by the Law" (Constituteproject 2018, p. 8), the state has enacted some restrictive rules to limit these freedoms (Abu-Zaid 1986; Al-Jammal 1991; Al-Shamari 1993; Abu-Osba 1997; Abdulmajeed 2001; Duffy 2014). For example, the Basic State Law and the PPL prohibit the publication of anything that undermines national unity, leads to a breach of public security, promotes violence, criticises the country's rulers and public officials, or contradicts government policy. If journalists violate any of the prohibitions listed in the laws, they can be punished by arrest, detention, or fines. Therefore, the excessively restrictive nature of these laws forced journalists to be passive and more muted in reporting the first and second Green Marches or in addressing any controversial issues and opposition voices in their newspapers, which therefore contributed to journalists practising a kind of negative self-censorship. To

that end, I argue that the rigid political environment and the Ministry of Information meant the editorial board of the newspapers were slow to react to the events of 2011. This means that both the Omani government and the Ministry of Information act as gatekeepers that stifle public debate, control the public's knowledge of actual events, and silence certain voices. The findings here support the findings in the literature (e.g., McCluskey et al. 2009; Lee 2014; Spyridou 2015; Elmasry et al. 2016) suggesting that the political orientation of the news organisation plays a significant role in shaping the way the media report on political protests, which contributes to the de-legitimation of protests.

9.2.3.2 Newspapers' routines

Discussion about why certain events were covered and others were ignored requires an examination of newspapers' routines. Drawing on Høyer's (2005) argument about media routines, Chapter Eight illustrated that objectivity and news values played key roles in constituting the news paradigm. Pragmatically, the notion of 'objectivity' defines the journalists' capability in reporting reality without bias (Altheide 1976; McQuail 2006) and thus in determining what is important and what is not in public opinion; however, in reality, the view of the newspapers' objectivity that emerged from the interviews is one that is passive and aligned with the government policy. The findings demonstrate that the portrayal of objectivity and social reality by the newspapers raises questions about the selection of sources and frames. Let us first look at the relation between objective reporting and official sources. Since the start of the protests, it was apparent that the government exerted influence over the newspapers by emphasizing only the ONA's stories as an official source of information about the dissent. Thus, the government agency served as a guide for Oman Daily and Al-Watan news organizations' agendas indicating what is often referred to as intermedia agenda setting (McCombs and Ghanem 2001). Both Oman Daily and Al-Watan remained silent and relied heavily upon news provided to them by the government agency to define public discourse. Within this case, news, according to McCombs (2005), became a product of "continuous interaction of news organizations with numerous sources and their agendas" (pp. 548- 549). Because of the reliance on this official source, the newspapers became biased in favour of the government. Thus, instead of highlighting the Omanis' concerns, ONA tried to keep news about the protests to a minimum in order to control the events and maintain trust in and support for government. By doing so, the watchdog role became questionable within the Omani press, as it was considered that "too much exposé journalism undermines faith and trust in government institutions, promoting instability and undermining fragile states" (Norris 2010, p. 17). As in the case of many Arab countries, since the Omani media were established in 1970, they have functioned as a government agent to promote stability of

the state, which explains the lack of any journalistic watchdog role (Al-Shaqsi 2000). Thus, much like McQuail and Windahl's (1981) notion of the 'hypodermic' or one-step assumption about mass media influence, it seems the Omani government used the newspapers as a mechanism to inform the Omani people of what the government thought they should know and thus to stimulate the responses desired by the message source.

The second force that constitutes the news paradigm of the 2011 coverage deals with news values. The concept of news values, according to Harrison (2006), explains why some occurrences are identified as 'events' and how those 'events' are selected to become 'news' while others are excluded. What is worrying, as the research findings suggest, is that although a significant shift was witnessed in both newspapers, each media outlet dealt with the events according to its editorial policy; as pointed out by Lewis et al. (2005), "At a time of crisis, news media do not necessarily break with patterns they follow at 'normal' times" (p. 113). Pointing to newsworthiness criteria, it should be mentioned that the Omani media ecology has been shaped by loyalty to the state during the past 40 years. At the time of the protests, the Omani press relied on the "protest paradigm" as a frame template to produce news. Protest events, in Al-Watan's coverage, became newsworthy specifically because they could be interpreted as violating and undermining the values and beliefs of society (McLeod and Hertog 1999; McLeod 2007). The newspaper tended to emphasise how the undesirable activities of the demonstrators contradicted the nature of Omani society, which was known as balanced and moderate. Similarly, as Oman Daily represented the government voice to the public, it was thus normal for the newspaper's coverage to reflect state policy. I contend that the newspapers' representation of the 2011 events attempted to de-legitimize the protests and create what McCarney (2005) called a 'false consciousness' among Omanis about the protesters, in which they were portrayed as an isolated minority who sought to delay the process of the Omani renaissance. Additionally, as discussed earlier, it was apparent that although the number of citizen sources in the news increased, the newspapers routines were still forming barriers to prevent access by citizens in a more relevant capacity. The finding in this thesis agrees with Hansen et al. (1994), who pointed out that "the forms of information retrieval may be different, but the same organizational power structures, sources, and news frames are still evident" (p. 566). The increase in the coverage of the protests did not demonstrate any significant change in how the news organizations routinized their works prior to the unprecedented events. The sources and frames being presented in the newspapers around particular events were emanating out of official policy circles and undermined the journalists' watchdog role. These findings are consistent with the findings in the literature (see Abu Zeid 1992; Abdu Al-Jawad 2005; Hoynes 2013); stories about the protests became newsworthy because they were

selected by journalists who adhered to an ideologically determined set of selection criteria. Although routines are important to facilitate the production of symbolic content, the political system in the country tended to value social cohesiveness and stability more than any potential benefits of objective reporting and a free press. The relationship between the newspapers and their coverage of the 2011 protests is in line with what Carah and Louw (2015) referred to as 'a conspiracy theory' in which political elites/government influence the newspapers' agendas to serve their own interests. Overall, these findings support Altheide's (1976) and Stewart et al.'s (2001) studies about the social reality portrayed by the media in which they argued that the professional routines promote a way of looking at events which fundamentally distorts them.

9.2.3.3 Individual influences

Also, in order to capture a full understanding about the potential influences on protest coverage, it was necessary to investigate the factors that were intrinsic to the communication workers, including their characteristics, skills, and professional backgrounds. Chapter Eight explored the relationship between journalists' usage of the Sablat Oman forum and protest coverage as a part of their skills and professional competence. Referring to Cottle's (2011) study, in which he found that out of 95% of journalist working in the Middle East, only 35% of them used social media tools as a source of information, the findings in this study support this claim and reveal that journalists were unlikely to approach the Sablah to gain access to contacts and discussions about public concerns. They did not pay attention to participants' comments or opinions in the Sablah, citing issues such as lack of credibility, rumours and anonymity of its online users. However, by comparing the results here with the case of the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, Lotan et al. (2011) indicated the emerging symbiosis and the two-step flow phenomenon between journalists and citizen journalists sharing news on Twitter. After Ben Ali's departure and Mubarak's fall from power, mainstream media outlets had adopted Twitter as an information source to provide eyewitness accounts, engage in dialogue with protesters, and reinforce their arguments. However, regarding the case of Oman, it seems that the Omani newspapers did not benefit from the experiences of the Egyptian and Tunisian press and their symbiotic relationship with information sources. Importantly, if journalists were worried about the quality of the online debate, why they did not "sift through the rubble of cyber noise and verify facts" (Alejandro 2010, p. 31). Furthermore, if journalists did not trust the credibility of anonymous online users, why did they tend to anonymize their sources when reporting the 2011 events and, more logically, how did they expect citizens to trust the credibility of their coverage? The results here lead to a serious argument about the role of Omani journalists. Although

many researchers have expressed fears about the potential negative ramifications of citizen journalism for professional journalism (see Newman 2009; Hendricks 2010; Lotan at el. 2011), many scholars have valued new media activists' participation, particularly when it comes to negative conflict-based stories, unbalanced news coverage, and how the nation is portrayed due to unfair coverage (see Lievrouw 2011; Boyd and Ellison 2013; Thorsen and Allan 2014). Equally noteworthy, with the growth in the number of social media users in the country (Times News Service 2017), Omani journalists should be aware that their roles and responsibilities are changing.

There are three justifications for journalists' resistance to using the Sablah: 1) government control over newspapers' content, 2) self-censorship, and 3) journalists' lack of skill and inability to source reliable information from social media. All these justifications are valid. To elucidate, the Omani government tried various ways to exercise firm control in order to control newspaper content and strengthen the traditional gatekeeping, which contributed to predominant self-censorship among journalists in Oman, as discussed earlier. Moreover, the findings in Chapter Eight give more evidence of the lack of professional competence and necessary skills. For example, the results revealed that the key journalistic skills (e.g., research, writing, critical thinking, and computer skills) and personal qualities (e.g., patience, curiosity**,** determination, and enthusiasm) are missing. The most significant finding in this regard is that despite the increase in the number of higher education graduates in the media, Omani newspapers suffer from a shortage of talented nationals who are skilfully capable of practising the profession. This finding confirms the finding by Al-Mashekhi (1996), who pointed to the lack of qualified journalists in Omani media. Regarding another issue previously raised and addressed in the literature (e.g., Hasani 2003; Al-Subhi 2012; Al-Mashikhi 2015), this thesis reported that job satisfaction among journalists has dropped substantially due to the lack of training, the low salary, and the absence of benefits, which made journalists lose their passion for their profession. The Omani case also confirms the findings of Western literature about the influence of media content (Gans 1979; Gitlin 1980). The psychological factors and the low amount of training the journalists receive contributed to the role of journalists as passive observers of the 2011 events. What the research has also revealed is that due to citizens' dissatisfaction with and disappointment in the newspapers' performance, they refused to be interviewed or photographed by the Omani newspapers. Some journalists were beaten and assaulted by protesters when they approached them for interviews. Therefore, the journalists felt humiliated, and they stopped interviewing protesters, depending instead on what was written on their banners or what they said in their speeches. This indicates that there were substantial problems facing Omani journalists in their 2011 coverage, which are failure in 1) obtaining information directly from sources, 2) acknowledging and identifying sources, and 3) reflecting the Omani public sphere. This

interpretation is consistent with the results of Turk (1986), who argued that the "sources of raw material of information upon which journalists rely may ultimately have as much to do with the media's agendas as the selection process of journalists themselves" (p. 15). By depending on information from protesters' banners and speeches, journalists tended to be selective in choosing what to include and exclude in their sourcing practices in order to support the media's agendas.

In summary, the findings in Chapter Eight present the factors that influenced the journalists' coverage of the 2011 reforms, as manifested in the social and political structures within which the media operate (Siebert et al. 1956). The thesis identifies a range of influences both inside and outside the news organizations. But how strong are such influences? In line with Shoemaker and Reese (1991, 1996, 2013) and Norris (2010), the thesis concludes that the effect of journalists' characteristics and backgrounds and of organizational routines on journalists' coverage of the 2011 protests were perhaps minor compared to the importance of political constraints, which forced journalists to practise self-censorship. The Omani government and the Ministry of Information served as direct gatekeepers on media organizations and thus exerted their influence over newspapers' content, which contributed to hindering the journalists' role as watchdog, as an agency of information and debate, and as the public's voice to the state. The findings in this thesis confirm the arguments by McCluskey et al. (2009), Lee (2014), and Spyridou (2015) regarding how the political orientation of the news organisation may contribute to the delegitimization of the protests. When covering the protests, both newspapers engaged in more negative and critical coverage (Lee 2014). More recently, the results presented herein also support Elmasry et al.'s (2016) research, in which it was noted that the impact of news framing during protests is more prominent in authoritarian countries, where the government exercises direct influence over the media content. It seems that at a time of crisis, like the case of the civil war in Oman, the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973, the Cold War, and the 2011 reforms, the government tightened its grip on the newspapers, making them more politically oriented (Al-Mashekhi 1996, p. 44).

Thus, drawing on the findings in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, I characterize the Omani media system during the coverage of the 2011 reforms as "authoritarian" and "loyalist". During the early stage of the protests, this study supports previous research (e.g., AbuZaid 1986; Al-Kindi 1995; Al-Mashekhi 1996; Al-Hassani 2003) and argues that Omani newspapers are categorized under the authoritarian theory due to the government's pressure on the media. The results in this study support Al-Shaqsi's (2000) arguments in which he suggests that investigative journalism or the watchdog role for journalists in Oman is still not welcomed due to the government's fear of the media promoting instability and undermining the public's trust in the government. By January and mid-February 2011,

media outlets, both privately owned and government controlled, remained silent and tended to wait for the official line (ONA) before covering the events. However, given the slight change in the Omani media by the end of February, the category of Rugh's (2004) media system that best fits this period is the 'patriot or loyalist model'. Since its establishment in the early 1970s, the Omani press has played a vital role in highlighting the achievements and revitalization witnessed by the Sultanate. And after the concessions made by the sultan, the newspapers exhibited clear loyalty and allegiance to the country. I will next discuss how this thesis makes a valuable and timely contribution to the studies of journalism and the 2011 Arab Spring.

9. 3 Scholarly contribution to the field of journalism studies: Reinforcing Western literature

This thesis adopts the protest paradigm theory, which is an overly Western structure- to study the Omani newspaper's coverage of the 2011 reforms. The dissertation is an attempt to "de-Westernise" the protest paradigm research and to re-apply it to a non-Western media system, precisely situating it in one of the most conservative media environments in the MENA region, Oman. Thus, by doing so, the study might offer new insights on the debate about the "de-westernization" of protest paradigm thesis. A rich body of literature examining the media politics of protest has devoted attention to how and why news media have delegitimised protest. Gitlin (1980) demonstrated that protests are trivialized, marginalized, and disparaged if they challenge political ideologies. Other researchers, like McLeod and Detenber (1999), Brasted (2005), and McLeod (2007), have focused on the ways in which protest is denigrated by emphasising the potential for violence and the negative portrayal of protests and protesters. Yet, the picture that emerges from this thesis supports the growing body of literature (Gans 1979; Gitlin 1980; Shoemaker and Reese 1996; McLeod and Detenber 1999; Brasted 2005; McLeod 2007; Rupar 2010; McCurdy 2012; Lee 2014; Spyridou 2015) that suggests that when covering protests, the media tend to resort to the protest paradigm attempting to produce protest stories through a coherent ideological world view.

Similarly, the rise of citizen voices within the newspapers' coverage of protests extends the range of studies long established in protest coverage (Tuchman 1978, Turk 1986; Bennett 1990; Oliver and Maney 2000; Brasted 2005; Luther and Miller 2005; Cushion 2007; Hatcher 2010; Kleemans et al. 2017) in which they found that journalists favour sources who tend to construct an issue or event in a way that is congruent with a political agenda rather than one that challenges it. The findings in this thesis demonstrate how ordinary citizens are given prominence as sources that are used to delegitimize protests and legitimize government policy.

While I have noted that most studies that have explored media politics of protest have been concerned with news production in a Western cultural context (McCluskey et al. 2009; Lee 2014; Spyridou 2015), the results presented within this study address the applicability of Western-oriented media theories and models, like Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) work, Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model (1994), and Carah and Louw's conspiracy theory (2015), to an Omani context. In this sense, this thesis provides a clear case in which the political orientation of the news organisation does affect the representation of protests. The rigid nature of the political system and the politicized nature of the Omani media turned the newspapers into the mouthpiece of the government in that they continued to act as a sphere of 'confirmed' intellectuals (Spielhaus 2012, p. 8) rather than acting as a watchdog. The final section of this thesis will offer some suggestions for future research that will address the limitations of my own project.

9.4 The limitations of this thesis and suggestions for future research

Chapter Five of this thesis explained some of the research limitations with regard to the interviews, particularly participants' hesitation in revealing information. Although the findings are sufficient to provide grounds to build the thesis' core arguments, it is plausible that a number of limitations may have influenced the results obtained. For example, the protest stories under investigation are not a true representative sample of the newspapers' coverage of the 2011 Omani reforms because the research excludes newspapers' coverage of the protest events in April and May. These two months were characterised by a heavy security presence, the death of another protester, an increasing number of protesters demanding a judicial investigation into alleged state abuses, and the detention of a number of protesters in security crackdowns, who were later pardoned by Oman's ruler. Thus, future research should widen the sample selection period to examine journalists' role in covering the events of April and May. The first three months surrounding the 2011 reforms were chosen, however, because they arguably gave rise to the greatest number of protests and witnessed substantial shifts in media coverage, including television, newspapers, and radio. Thus, the period for this study, from January 17 to March 31, 2011, provided a more significant and efficient sample of articles about the reforms compared with other dates considered.

Because of the complete lack of resources about the media coverage of the 2011 reforms in some Arabic Omani newspapers like Al-Shabiba and Azzamn, the thesis targeted only the media coverage in the Oman Daily and Al-Watan news organizations. Azzamn, for example, was the only newspaper in the country that mentioned the details of the Green Marches (Al-Shaqsi 2013). Yet, one year later, in 2012, the newspaper faced serious issues after it published an article alleging corruption in a court case, which resulted in two

journalists being arrested. In 2017, the courts in Oman ordered the permanent shutdown of Azzamn daily. Thus, the non-existence of protest stories in Azzamn possibly limited the acquisition of a full understanding of how different newspapers reacted to the events and the kind of pressures journalists faced. However, further studies of the same event could include English-language Omani newspapers to supplement the understanding of the whole process, which can add new dimensions to the discussions of the journalistic role during the protest coverage. I would recommend a much broader content analysis examining the coverage of the reforms within English-language Omani newspapers, which can add new dimensions to the discussions of the journalistic role during the protest coverage.

Further studies of this event should include Oman Television (OTV) and their failure to cover the entire event. There was no substantive coverage or images of the protests at all. Just like the newspapers, Oman TV ignored the protests and delegitimised the protesters' demands during the early stages of the protests. Despite the presence of some journalists who recorded television interviews with several protesters, none of those recordings were ever broadcast. Additionally, the coverage of the Second Green March was inadequate and not reflective of what actually transpired at the march. Al-Amri (2011) determined that Oman TV was selective in what they broadcast and focused on demonstrators who wanted loyalty to the Sultan while removing any footage of those calling for reform. As the events started to deteriorate, only then did Oman TV begin to devote airtime for Omanis to discuss and debate issues that the protestors were rallying for. However, by March, this shift and the inclusion of citizen voices suddenly stopped. Even though Al-Amri's study provided significant insight regarding the Omani media coverage of the protests, it lacked any systematic and robust data analyses. Also, it lacked substantial evidence that supported both the analysis and the conclusion. Therefore, similarities and differences in the coverage emanating from Oman TV could then be compared with the results presented within this thesis. While the 2011 Omani reforms are ten years old at the time of this writing, the significance and impact of that historical event in Oman will need to be critically analysed further.

The thesis has focused primarily on coverage by the Omani newspapers while regional and external news media are excluded. The 2011 Omani reforms received a modest amount of attention from the international media (e.g., Al Arabiya, Al Jazeera Media Network, AlQabas AlKuwaitiah, Cable News Network (CNN), France 24, International Herald Tribune, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the New York Times) at a time when the Omani media remained silent and biased. Hence, the examination of the regional and international news organisations' reports on the subject is useful due to the lack of substantive studies in this regard. I believe this analysis might offers interesting

perspectives and provide noteworthy findings about how different media from various socio-political systems reported and represented the protests.

Indeed, focusing only on a particular type of event of 'reforms' to examine the use of sources is not enough. Sources' patterns might differ depending on the nature of the events; thus, more research should be carried out to understand how distinct types of events influence the newspapers' sourcing practices in Oman. Additionally, this study was limited to only two news outlets (Oman Daily and Al-Watan), and this prevented there being a deeper understanding about source selection. Therefore, to ensure media accountability, future research should explore a wider range of outlets to examine sourcing practices in the Omani print media across distinct news events.

Also, Oman stands at a historical crossroads where citizens became far more empowered than before. The increasing disappointment and impatience with some failing government services, corruption, high living cost, unemployment, and a lack of freedom forced Omanis to overcome their fear and hesitation (Al Hashmi 2011). They found their way onto social media networks (e.g., the Sablat Oman forum, YouTube, Facebook and blogs) to voice their opinions and demand their legitimate rights and freedom. For instance, the search results for two terms 'Reform Roundabout' and 'Sohar protest' on YouTube in February 2014 show that there was a total of 1,708 likes, 675 dislikes, 2,888 comments, and over 3.4 million views, "suggesting the huge popularity of these clips in the country" (Al-Rawi 2016, p. 178). Unfortunately, this thesis is limited to public participation in the Sablah. Future studies could conduct a more in-depth examination of the role of other types of social media and their interaction with mainstream media.

Lastly, the thesis was conducted almost eight years after the 2011 popular public protests. Thus, it would be interesting to investigate the newspapers' coverage of a more recent protest, like the youth protests over unemployment in 2018. This kind of investigation would be useful, as it could help demonstrate whether the Omani media roles and policies changed after the 2011 protests or not.

9.5 Summary

In conclusion, this thesis reveals that there are deficiencies in the journalistic content and practices, and these prevented newspapers from fulfilling their responsibilities to foster a healthy and deliberative public sphere where citizens can voice their opinions without bias. It was clear that the newspapers did not break their daily routines. The traditional media, both the government-owned and privately owned newspapers, emphasised national agendas that bolstered government policy. This thesis points out that the Omani

newspapers served as a propaganda vehicle and a powerful proponent of the dominant discourses for the government. Despite the sudden shifts that had appeared in the news coverage by the end of February, Oman Daily continued to promote patriotic sentiments while Al-Watan amplified any acts of sabotage in support of government policy. These findings from my research indicate that the newspapers' coverage was characterised by biased and unfavourable representations of the 2011 protests. Similarly, the thesis argues that sourcing practices in the newspapers' coverage of the 2011 Omani reforms also lacked supportive attitudes towards the protests. Over the 74-day period, both dailies, though most notably Al-Watan, were passive mediators that focused on the hegemonic voices. When citizen voices were invited to participate in the media narrative, both newspapers were biased in selecting voices that reiterated their agendas rather than encouraging pluralism and opposite discourses that highlighted oppositional grievances. However, what my research reveals is that the negative representation of the 2011 Omani protests and the dominance of Omanis' voices as news sources in Oman Daily's and Al-Watan's coverage had more to do with the political context of the country, as suggested by previous research (McCluskey et al. 2009; Lee 2014 and Spyridou 2015). The authoritarian political system and government monopoly over the newspapers' content in 2011 indicate that the media environment in Oman was not yet ready to empower journalists' roles, which consequently contributed to the increasing restrictions in press freedom.

Bibliography

Abdu- Aljawad, S., 2005. *Fan Alkhabar Alsahafi {The Art of news}*, (in Arabic). Cairo: Dar AlFajr le Nashr Wa Tawzee.

Abdulla, R., 2013. *Mapping digital media: Egypt*. New York: Open Society Foundations.

Abdulmajeed, L., 2001. *Tshreeaat AlSahafa fi Al-Watan AlArabi*: *AlWaqe wa Aafaq AlMustaqbal (Journalism laws in the Arab World*: *Reality and the Future)*, (in Arabic). Cairo: Alarabi.

Abu-Osba, S., 1997. *Edart Al-Muassat Al-Elamia fi Al-Watan Al-Arabi {News organizations 'Administration in the Arab nation)*, (in Arabic). Amman: Aram.

Abu Zaid, F., 1986. *A lAndhmah A lSahaflaf i Al-Watan A lArabi {Press Systems in the Arab World)*, (in Arabic). Cairo: Aalm AlKutb.

Al-Abri, O., 2011. The Middle East in crisis: Looters take control of Oman's streets. *The Telegraph* 25 April. Available at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk

Al bahlani, A.M., 2013. The impact of electronic media on traditional media. *Alfalaq magazine.*

Albawaba, 2005. 31 Islamists jailed. Available at: https://www.albawaba.com/ar/ [Accessed: 16 January 2019].

Al-Dossary, S., 2011. How did the Sultanate escape the "Arab Spring"?. *Asharq Al-Awsat*.

Alejandro, J., 2010. Journalism in the age of social media. *Reuters Institute Fellowship Paper*, p.5.

Al-Hamadi, A.B., Budhwar, P.S. and Shipton, H., 2007. Management of human resources in Oman. *The international journal of human resource management*, *18*(1), pp.100-113.

Al-Haqeel, A.S., 1993. Agenda-setting function of news media among civil servant employees in Saudi Arabia.

Al-Harithi, S.I.K.A., 1983. *The mass media in Saudi Arabia: Present concept, functions, barriers and selected strategy for effective use in nation-building and social awareness* (Doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University).

Al-Hasani, A., 2003. *Influences on media content: domestic news production processes at four Omani print news organisations* (Doctoral dissertation, Mass Communication).

Al Hashimi, S.S., 2011. The Omani Spring: towards the break of a new dawn. *Arab Reform Brief*, *52*, pp.1-9.

Al-Jammal, R., 1991. AlEtsal wa AlElam fi Al-Watan Al-Arabi (Communication and media in the Arab nation). Beirut: Mrkz Drasat AlWhda Al-Arabia.

Al Jazeera and Agencies, 2011. Oman shuffles cabinet amid protests. *Al Jazeera*. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com [Accessed: 11 January 2016].

Al-Kindi, A., 1995. Coverage of Omani press in the Gulf War: Content analysis of the arabic daily newspapers. *Unpublished MA Dissertation, University of Wales, Cardiff.*

 Al-Kindi, A., 2008. The genesis of Omani press in Zanzibar: A Historical analysis study. In Al-Kindi, A. and Al-Hasani, A., 2008. Studies in Omani Press. *Al-Falah Publishing, Al-Ain, United Arab Emirates,* pp. 19-72.

Al-Kindi, A.K. and Al-Syabi, B.S., 2016. Journalists' attitudes towards journalism regulations in the Arab world: Oman as a case study. *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research*, *9*(2), pp.143-163.

Al-Kindi, A.K., 2016. GCC Media Roles during the 2011 Arab Spring: An Analytical and Critical Overview. *Journal of Arts and Social Sciences [JASS]*, *7*(2), pp.53-68.

Allan, S. and Thorsen, E. eds., 2009. *Citizen journalism: Global perspectives* (Vol. 1). Peter Lang.

Allan, S. and Thorsen, E. 2014. *Citizen journalism: global perspectives. Global Crises and the Media (Vol. 2).* Peter Lang International Academic Publishers.

Al Maghlooth, A.A., 2013. *The relevance of gatekeeping in the process of contemporary news creation and circulation in Saudi Arabia* (Doctoral dissertation, Media & Cultural Studies).

Al-Mashekhi, A.A., 1996. *Television in the Sultanate of Oman 1974-1996: its development, role and functions in the Omani Society* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Exeter).

Al-Mashikhi, M.A., 1994. *The mass media in the Sultanate of Oman 1970-1993* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Exeter).

Al-Mashikhi, M., 2015. The Effecting Factors in The Mass Media in the Sultanate of Oman: A field study on Omani Journalists. *Journal of Arts and Social Sciences [JASS]*, *8*(1), pp.115-138.

AlMaskati, N.A., 2012. Newspaper coverage of the 2011 protests in Egypt. *International Communication Gazette*, *74*(4), pp.342-366.

Almistadi, M.I., 2014. *Trendsetters vs. agenda setting: A comparison of agendas in Twitter and newspapers of Saudi Arabia*. Arkansas State University.

Al-Muijan, H., 1997. Mass Communication and Development in the Sultanate of Oman1970-1993. *Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Exeter, Exeter.*

Alqudsi-ghabra, T.M., Al-Bannai, T. and Al-Bahrani, M., 2011. The Internet in the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (AGCC): Vehicle of Change. *International Journal of Internet Science*, *6*(1).

Al-Rawas, A.M.A.A., 1997. *Television news in the Sultanate of Oman: an analytical and developmental perspective* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Exeter).

Al-Rawi, A., 2016. The 2011 Popular Protests in the Sultanate of Oman. In *Mediated Identities and New Journalism in the Arab World* (pp. 165-183). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Al Roya Daily, 2014. *Al Roya newspaper: who we are.* Available at: https://alroya.om/page/3 [Accessed: 17 March 2016].

Al-Shaibany, S., 2011a. Protesters across Oman demand reform, jobs. *Reuters* 12 May. Available at: https://www.reuters.com

Al-Shaibany, S., 2011b. Sultan of Oman removes 10 ministers and office that runs economy. *The Nationa* 5 April. Available at: https://www.thenational.ae

Al-Shamari, S., 1993. *Al-Sahafa wl Qanoon fi Aalm Al-Arbi wa AlWelayat AlMutaheda (Press and Law in the Arab World and United States)*, (in Arabic). Cairo: AlDar AlDwliya.

Al-Shaqsi, O.S., 2000. *The influence of satellite and terrestrial television viewing on young adults in Oman: uses, gratifications and cultivation* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Wales. Cardiff).

Al-Shaqsi, O.S., 2013. Readership and Readers' Perception of Omani Newspapers. *Global Media Journal*, *12*(22).

Altheide, D., 1976. Creating reality: How television news distorts events. *Beverly Hills: Sage Publications*.

Altschull, J.H., 1984. *Agents of power: The role of the news media in human affairs*. Longman Publishing Group.

Al-Yousef, M.B.M., 1997. *The state and market in Oman's development: conflict or cooperation?* (Doctoral dissertation, University of London).

Amos, D., 2011. Pro-Assad 'Army'Wages Cyberwar in Syria. *National Public Radio*, pp.1995-2000.

Armstrong, C.L., 2006. The influence of reporter gender on source selection in newspaper stories. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *81*(1), pp.139-154.

Bantz, C.R., McCorkle, S. and Baade, R.C., 1980. The news factory. *Communication Research*, *7*(1), pp.45-68.

Barrat, D., 1992. Media Sociology. *Routledge: London and New York*.

Barro, R.J. and Lee, J.W., 2013. A new data set of educational attainment in the world, 1950–2010. *Journal of development economics*, *104*, pp.184-198.

Bass, A.Z., 1969. Refining the "gatekeeper" concept: A UN radio case study. *Journalism Quarterly*, *46*(1), pp.69-72.

BBC News, 2005. *Oman jails 31 for plotting coup.* Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk [Accessed: 4 June 2017].

BBC News, 2011. Egypt protesters use voice tweets. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk [Accessed: 16 November 2017].

Beaumont, C., 2008. Mumbai Attacks: Twitter and Flicker Used to Break New. *The Telegraph* 10 March. Available at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk

Becker, B. and Wehner, J., 2001. Electronic Networks and Civil Society: Reflections on Structural Changes in the Public Sphere. *Culture, technology, communication: Towards an intercultural global village*, p.67.

Becker, H.S., 1967. Whose side are we on. *Soc. Probs.*, *14*, p.239.

Becker, L. B., & McCombs, M. E., 1978. The role of press in determining voter reaction to presidential primaries. *Human Communication Research*, 4(4), 301-307.

Bennett, W.L., 1990. Toward a theory of press-state relations in the United States. *Journal of communication*, *40*(2), pp.103-127.

Bennett, W.L., 2004. Gatekeeping and press-government relations: A multigated model of news construction. *Handbook of political communication research*, pp.283-314.

Berelson, B., 1952. Content analysis in communication research.

Berger, A.A., 2015. *Media and communication research methods: An introduction to qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Sage Publications.

Bimber, B., 2001. Information and political engagement in America: The search for effects of information technology at the individual level. *Political Research Quarterly*, *54*(1), pp.53-67.

Blankenburg, W.B., 1992. The utility of anonymous attribution. *Newspaper Research Journal*, *13*(1-2), pp.10-23.

Blood, R., 2002. *The weblog handbook: Practical advice on creating and maintaining your blog*. Basic Books.

Blum, R., 2005. Bausteine zu einer Theorie der Mediensysteme [Constituents of a Theory of *Media*Systems]. *Medienwissenschaft Schweiz*, *2*(2), pp.5-11.

Boczkowski, P.J., 2004. *Digitizing the news: Innovation in online newspapers*. mit Press. Bohlander, M., 2011. Radbruch redux: the need for revisiting the conversation between common and civil law at root level at the example of international criminal justice. *Leiden Journal of International Law*, *24*(2), pp.393-410.

Bohman, J., 2004. Expanding dialogue: The Internet, the public sphere and prospects for transnational democracy. *The sociological review*, *52*, pp.131-155.

Boyle, M.P., McLeod, D.M. and Armstrong, C.L., 2012. Adherence to the protest paradigm: The influence of protest goals and tactics on news coverage in US and international newspapers. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, *17*(2), pp.127-144.

Brasted, M., 2005. Protest in the media. *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, *17*(4), pp.383-388.

Broersma, M.J. ed., 2007. *Form and style in journalism: European newspapers and the presentation of news, 1880-2005* (Vol. 26). Peeters Pub & Booksellers.

Brown, J.D., Bybee, C.R., Wearden, S.T. and Straughan, D.M., 1987. Invisible power: Newspaper news sources and the limits of diversity. *Journalism Quarterly*, *64*(1), pp.45-54.

Brown, R.M., 1979. The gatekeeper reassessed: A return to Lewin. *Journalism Quarterly*, *56*(3), pp.595-679.

Bruns, A., 2007. Towards Produsage: Futures for user-led content production.

Bruns, A., 2010. Key events in Australian (micro-) blogging during 2010. In *ECREA 2010 Conference, Hamburg, Germany*.

Bui, C., 2010. How online gatekeepers guard our view—News portals' inclusion and ranking of media and events. *Global Media Journal*, *9*(16), p.N_A.

Burrell, I., 2005. On the front line. *The Independent* . Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk. [Accessed: 2 August 2016].

Butsch, R. ed., 2007. *Media and public spheres* (pp. 1-14). New York: Palgrave macmillan.

Campante, F.R. and Chor, D., 2012. Why was the Arab world poised for revolution? Schooling, economic opportunities, and the Arab Spring. *Journal of Economic Perspectives, 26*(2), pp.167-88.

Campbell, D.T. and Fiske, D.W., 1959. Convergent and discriminant validation by the multitrait-multimethod matrix. *Psychological bulletin, 56*(2), p.81.

Carah, N. and Louw, E., 2015. *Media and society: production, content and participation*. Sage.

Carey, J.W., 1977. Mass communication research and cultural studies: An American view. *Mass communication and society, 412*, pp.11-17.

Carpignano, P., Andersen, R., Aronowitz, S. and DiFazio, W., 1990. Chatter in the Age of Electronic Reproduction: Talk Television and the" Public Mind".Social text, (25/26), pp.33-55.

Carragee, K.M., 1991. " News and Ideology" An Analysis of Coverage of the West German Green Party by the New York Times. *Journalism and Communication Monographs, 128*.

Castells, M., 2000. The Rise of the Network Society: Economy. *Society and Culture. Blackwell, Cambridge*.

Chan, J.M. and Lee, C.C., 1984. The journalistic paradigm on civil protests: A case study of Hong Kong. *The news media in national and international conflict*, pp.183-202.

Channel, A., 2010. Gatekeeping and citizen journalism: A qualitative examination of participatory newsgathering.

Chapman, J., 2005. *Comparative media history: An introduction: 1789 to the present*. Polity.

Clements, F.A., 1980. Oman, the Reborn Land. *Oman, the Reborn Land.*

CNN., 2011. Protesters call upon the Sultan of Oman to dismiss media leaders. Available at: https://edition.cnn.com [Accessed: 10 January 2017].

Cohen, S. and Young, J., 1981. The manufacture of news: deviance, social problems and the Media. *London: Constable*.

Coleman, R., McCombs, M., Shaw, D. and Weaver, D., 2009. Agenda setting. In *The handbook of journalism studies* (pp. 167-180). Routledge.

Coleman, S. and Gotze, J., 2001. *Bowling together: Online public engagement in policy deliberation* (pp. 39-50). London: Hansard Society.

Constitute project organization., 2013. Kuwait ' s Constitution of 1962 , Reinstated in 1992.

Constitute project organization., 2015. Saudi Arabia ' s Constitution of 1992 with Amendments through 2005.

Constitute project organization., 2018. Oman' s Constitution of 1996 with Amendments through 2011. , pp.1–28.

Coronel, S., 2010. Corruption and the watchdog role of the news media. *Public sentinel: News media and governance reform*, pp.111-136.

Cottle, S., 2008. Reporting demonstrations: The changing media politics of dissent. *Media, Culture & Society*, *30*(6), pp.853-872.

Cottle, S., 2011. Media and the Arab uprisings of 2011. *Journalism*, *12*(5), pp.647-659.

Couldry, N., 2012. Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice. Polity, p.242.

Countrymeters., 2016. Oman population 2016. Available at: https://countrymeters.info

Croteau, D. and Hoynes, W., 2013. *Media/society: Industries, images, and audiences.* Sage Publications.

Culbertson, H.M. and Somerick, N., 1976. *Cloaked Attribution: What Does it Mean to News Readers?*. American Newspaper Publishers Association.

Culbertson, H.M., 1975. Veiled News Sources–Who and What Are They?. *ANPA News Research Bulletin*, *3*, pp.3-22.

Curran, J., 1991. Rethinking the media as a public sphere. *Communication and citizenship*, pp.27-57.

Curran, J., 2002. *Media and Power.* Routledge.

Cushion, S., 2007. Protesting their apathy? An analysis of British press coverage of young anti-Iraq war protestors. *Journal of youth studies*, *10*(4), pp.419-437.

Dahlberg, L., 2001. Extending the public sphere through cyberspace: The case of Minnesota E-Democracy. *First Monday*, *6*(3).

Dahlgren, P. and Sparks, C., 1993. Communication and citizenship: Journalism and the public sphere. *Routledge.*

Dai, J. and Reese, S.D., 2007. Practicing Public Deliberation: The Role of Celebrity Blogs and Citizen-Based Blogs in China. In *Harmonious Society, Civil Society and the Media Conference, Beijing* (pp. 20-1).

Danielian, L.H. and Reese, S.D., 1989. Intermedia influence and the drug issue: Converging on cocaine. *Communication campaigns about drugs: Government, media, and the public*, pp.29-45.

De Bel-Air, F., 2015. *Demography, migration, and the labour market in Oman.*

De Keyser, J. and Raeymaeckers, K., 2012. The printed rise of the common man: How Web 2.0 has changed the representation of ordinary people in newspapers. *Journalism Studies*, *13*(5-6), pp.825-835.

De Keyser, J., Raeymaeckers, K. and Paulussen, S., 2011. Are Citizens Becoming Sources?. *Journalists, sources and credibility: new perspectives*, pp.139-151.

Deacon, D. et al. 1999. *Researching Communications: A Practical Guide to Methods in Media and Cultural Studies.* London: Arnold Publishers.

Dearing, J.W. and Rogers, E., 1996. *Agenda-setting* (Vol. 6). Sage publications.

DeLong-Bas, D.N.J., 2011. The New Social Media and the Arab Spring. *Oxford Islamic Studies Online.*

Denscombe, M. 2003. *The Good Research Guide: For Small Scale Social Research Projects. 2nd ed.* Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

Dewey, T., Kaden, J., Marks, M., Matsushima, S. and Zhu, B., 2012. The impact of social media on social unrest in the Arab Spring. *International Policy Program*, *5*, p.8.

Dimmick, J., 1974. The gate-keeper: An uncertainty theory. *Journalism and Communication Monographs*, *37*.

Djankov, S., McLiesh, C., Nenova, T. and Shleifer, A., 2001. Who owns the media? (No. w8288). *National Bureau of Economic Research.*

Douai, A. and Moussa, M.B., 2016. *Mediated Identities and New Journalism in the Arab World.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Downing, J.D., McQuail, D., Schlesinger, P. and Wartella, E. eds., 2004. *The SAGE handbook of media studies.* Sage Publications.

Duffy, M.J., 2014. Arab media regulations: Identifying restraints on freedom of the press in the laws of six Arabian peninsula countries. *Berkeley J. Middle E. & Islamic L.*, *6*, p.1.

Edosomwan, S., Prakasan, S.K., Kouame, D., Watson, J. and Seymour, T., 2011. The history of social media and its impact on business. *Journal of Applied Management and entrepreneurship*, *16*(3), pp.79-91.

Neumann, N., 1993. The Spiral of Silence a theory of public opinion. *University of Chicago Press*, Chicago, p. 178.

Ellison, N.B. and Boyd, D.M., 2013. Sociality through social network sites. In *The Oxford handbook of internet studies.*

Emerson, T.I., 1962-1963. Toward a general theory of the First Amendment. *Yale Lj*, *72*, p.877.

Entman, R.M., 1993. Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of communication*, 43(4), pp.51-58.

Epstein, E.J., 1975. *Between fact and fiction: The problem of journalism* (Vol. 396). New York: Vintage Books.

Fadel and Londoo, 2011. State-Run Media Changing Tune. *The Washington Post*. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/ [Accessed: 7 January 2017].

Ferguson, R., 1990. *Out there: Marginalization and contemporary cultures* (Vol. 4). MIT Press.

Fico, F., 1984. How lawmakers use reporters: Differences in specialization and goals. *Journalism Quarterly*, *61*(4), pp.793-821.

Fishman, M., 1988. *Manufacturing the news.* University of Texas Press.

Fitzgerald, P., 2016. Legitimising Dissent: Media Framing of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution within British and American Print Media. *Media Studies/Mediální Studia*, (2).

Franklin, B. and Carlson, M. eds., 2010. *Journalists, sources, and credibility: New perspectives.* Routledge.

Fraser, N., 1991. Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy. pp. 109–42 in Craig Calhoun (ed.) Habermas and the Public Sphere. Cambridge, MA: *MIT Press.*

Fraser, N., 2007. Transnationalizing the Public Sphere, On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion. *a Post-Westphalian World.*

Freedman, E. and Fico, F., 2005. Male and female sources in newspaper coverage of male and female candidates in open races for governor in 2002. *Mass Communication & Society*, *8*(3), pp.257-272.

Freeland, C., 2011. The Middle East and the Groupon effect. AFP.

Funsch, L.P., 2015. *Oman Reborn: Balancing Tradition and Modernization.* Springer.

Gamson, W. A., & Modigliani, A., 1987. The changing culture of affirmative action. In R. G. Braungart & M. M. Braungart (Eds.), Research in political sociology (Vol. 3, pp. 137-177). *Greenwich, CT: jAI Press.*

Gamson, W. A., & Modigliani, A., 1989. Media discourse and public opinion on nuclear power: A constructionist approach. *American Journal of Sociology,* 95, 1–37.

Gandy, O.H., 1982. Beyond agenda setting: Information subsidies and public policy. *Ablex Publishing Corporation.*

Gans, H. J., 1979. Deciding what's news: A study of CBS evening news, NBC nightly news, Newsweek, and Time. *Northwestern University Press.*

Garnham, N., 1990. *Capitalism and communication: Global culture and the economics of information.* Sage Pubns.

Garnham, N., 1992. The media and the public sphere. *The information society reader*, pp.357-365.

Ghanem, S.I. and McCombs, M., 2001. The convergence of agenda setting and framing. In *Framing public life* (pp. 83-98). Routledge.

Ghannam, J., 2011. Social Media in the Arab World: Leading up to the Uprisings of 2011. *Center for international media assistance*, *3*(1), pp.1-44.

Gieber, W., 1956. *News is what newspapermen make it.* na.

Gilberg, S., Eyal, C., McCombs, M. and Nicholas, D., 1980. The state of the union address and the press agenda. *Journalism Quarterly*, *57*(4), pp.584-588.

Gillmor, D., 2006. *We the media: Grassroots journalism by the people, for the people.* " O'Reilly Media, Inc.".

Gitlin, T., 1980. *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making and unmaking of the new left*. Univ of California Press.

GlobalSecurity., 2012. *Oman - History*. Available at: https://www.globalsecurity.org [Accessed: 3 May 2016].

Gong, T., Wang, S. and Ren, J., 2015. Corruption in the eye of the beholder: Survey evidence from Mainland China and Hong Kong. *International Public Management Journal*, *18*(3), pp.458-482.

Goode, L., 2009. Social news, citizen journalism and democracy. *New Media & Society*.

Greenwald, G., 2015. With power of social media growing, police now monitoring and criminalizing online speech. *The Intercept*, *6*.

Habermas, J., 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, translated by Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press (originally published in German in 1962).

Habermas, J., 1991. A Reply," in Axel Honneth and Hans Joas, eds., *Communicative Action: Essays on Jürgen Habermas's The Theory of Communicative Action*, translated by Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, pp. 214-264 (first published in German in 1986; book also published in English in 1991 by Polity Press, Cambridge, UK).

Habermas, J., 1997. *A Berlin republic: writings on Germany*. U of Nebraska Press.

Habermas, J., 2006. Political communication in media society: Does democracy still enjoy an epistemic dimension? The impact of normative theory on empirical research. *Communication theory*, *16*(4), pp.411-426.

Hall, S., 1973. Encoding and decoding in the television discourse.

Hall, S., 1980. Encoding/decoding. Culture, media, language, pp.128-138.

Hall, S., Critcher, C., Je erson, T., Clarke, J. N., & Roberts, B., 1978. *Policing the crisis: Mugging, the state, and law and order.* London: Macmillan.

Hall, S. ed., 1997. *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices* (Vol. 2). Sage.

Hallin, D., 2005. *We keep America on top of the world: Television journalism and the public sphere*. Routledge.

Hallin, D.C., & Mancini, P., 2004. *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Halloran, J.D., 1981. The need for communication research in developing societies. *Media Asia*, *7*(3), pp.137-144.

Hamada, B., 1993. Dor wsael aletsal fi sn'a al-qrarat fi alwatan Al-Arabi (The role of mass communications in making decisions in the Arab nation), (in Arabic). *Beirut: Mrkz AlWhda Al-Arabia.*

Hanitzsch et al., 2011. Mapping Journalism Cultures Across Nations: A Comparative Study of 18 Countries. *Journalism Studies Studies*, *12*(3), pp.273-293.

Hanitzsch, T., 2007. *Deconstructing journalism culture: Toward a universal theory. Communication theory*, 17(4), pp.367-385.

Hansen, A., Cottle, S., Negrine, R. and Newbold, C., 1998. *Content analysis. In Mass communication research methods*(pp. 91-129). Macmillan Education UK.

Hansen, K.A., Ward, J., Conners, J.L. and Neuzil, M., 1994. Local breaking news: Sources, technology, and news routines. Journalism Quarterly, 71(3), pp.561-572.

Hargittai, E., 2003. *The digital divide and what to do about it.* In D.C. Jones (Ed.). New Economy Handbook, San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Harrison, J., 2006. *News*. London: Routledge, pp304.

Hartley, J., 1982. *Understanding News*. London: Methuen.

Hasan, D. & Blackwell, M., 2015. Is Omanisation Working? *Y Magazine* 27 January. Available at: https://www.y-oman.com.
.
Hatcher, J.A., 2010. Unnamed and Anonymous Sources: Did They Shape the Debate Over Invading Iraq?. *Global Media Journal*, 10(17), p.N_A.

Henderson, D., 2006. *Making news: A straight-shooting guide to media relations*. iUniverse.

Hendricks, J., 2010. *The Twenty-first-century Media Industry: Economic and Managerial Implications in the Age of New Media*. Lexington Books.

Herman, E.S. and Chomsky, N., 1994. *Manufacturing consent: The political economy of the mass media*. Random House.

Hermida, A., Lewis, S., and Zamith, R., 2014. Sourcing the Arab Spring: A Case Study of Andy Carvin's Sources on Twitter During the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 19, 479-499.

Herzog, H., 1941. On borrowed experience: An analysis of listening to daytime sketches. *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 9(1), pp.65-95.

Hinderaker, J., 2004. Blog of the Year | Power Line. *Power Line blog* 13 June. Available at: https://www.powerlineblog.com [Accessed: 9 September 2017].

Hintz, A., 2003, May. Media Actors at the Dividing Lines of Information Society: Civil Society media at the World Summit on the Information Society. In *Paper, Euricom colloquium. Venice, May* (Vol. 6).

Hintz, A., 2015. Social media censorship, privatized regulation, and new restrictions to protest and dissent.

Hirsch, P.M., 1977. Occupational, organizational and institutional models in communication research: Towards an integrated framework. In *Strategies for communication research*.

Honwana, A., 2011, December. Youth and the Tunisian revolution. In *Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum policy paper.*

Howard, P.N. and Hussain, M.M., 2013. *Democracy's fourth wave?: digital media and the Arab Spring*. Oxford University Press.

Høyer, S. and Pöttker, H., 2005. *Diffusion of the news paradigm 1850-2000*. Göteborg: Nordicom.

Huesca, R. and Dervin, B., 2003. Hypertext and journalism: Audiences respond to competing news narratives. *Democracy and new media*, pp.281-307.

Hughes, Helen MacGill. 1940. *News and the Human Interest Story*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hughes, W., 2011. Citizen Journalism: Historical Roots and Contemporary Challenges.

Humphreys, P., 2011. A political scientist's contribution to the comparative study of media systems in Europe: A response to Hallin and Mancini. *Trends in Communiations Policy Research*.

Hunter, J.D., 1992. *Culture wars: The struggle to control the family, art, education, law, and politics in America*. Basic Books.

International Labour Organization (NAtLEX), 1986. *United Arab Emirates FEDERAL LAW No. 15 OF 1980 GOVERNING PUBLICATIONS AND PUBLISHING, 1980.* Available: https://www.ilo.org [Accessed: 15 May 2017].

Introna, L.D. and Nissenbaum, H., 2000. Shaping the Web: Why the politics of search engines matters. *The information society*, *16*(3), pp.169-185.

Ishani, M., 2011. The hopeful network. *Foreign Policy*, *7*.

Iyengar, S. and Kinder, D.R., 2010. *News that matters: Television and American opinion*. University of Chicago Press.

Jakob, A., 2001, February. On the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data in typological social research: Reflections on a typology of conceptualizing" uncertainty" in the context of employment biographies. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (Vol. 2, No. 1).

Johnson, K.A., 2011. Citizen journalism, agenda-setting and the 2008 presidential election. *Web Journal of Mass Communication Research*, *28*.

Johnson, E. and Martini, M., 2012. Corruption Trends in the Middle East and North Africa Region, 2007-2011. *U4 Expert Answer, Jan*, (302).

Joseph, S., 2012. Social media, political change, and human rights. *BC Int'l & Comp. L. Rev., 35*, p.145.

Jurkiewicz, S., 2011. Blogging as counterpublic? the Lebanese and the Egyptian blogosphere in comparison. *Social dynamics*, *2*, pp.27-47.

Kaid, L.L., 2002. Political advertising and information seeking: Comparing exposure via traditional and Internet channels. *Journal of Advertising,* 31(1), pp.27-35.

Kaplan, A.M. and Haenlein, M., 2010. Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business horizons,* 53(1), pp.59-68.

Katz, E. and Lazarsfeld, P.F., 1955. Personal Influence, The part played by people in the flow of mass communications. *Transaction Publishers*.

Kaufhold, K., Valenzuela, S. and De Zúñiga, H.G., 2010. Citizen journalism and democracy: How user-generated news use relates to political knowledge and participation. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *87*(3-4), pp.515-529.

Kechichian, J.A., 1995. *Oman and the world: The emergence of an independent foreign policy*. Rand Corporation.

Kenix, L. J., 2009. Blogs as alternative. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 14(4), 790–822.

Khamis, S., 2013. The Role of the Media in Arab Transitions: How "Cyberactivism" is Revolutionising the Political and Communication Landscapes. *The IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook*, pp.55-59.

Khamis, S. and Vaughn, K., 2011. Cyberactivism in the Egyptian revolution: How civic engagement and citizen journalism tilted the balance. *Arab Media and Society,* 14(3), pp.1-25.

Khoury, D., 2011. Social media and the revolutions: how the internet revived the Arab public sphere and digitalized activism. *Perspectives*, *2*(2011), pp.80-85.

Kim, K. and McCombs, M., 2007. News story descriptions and the public's opinions of political candidates. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 84(2), pp.299-314.

Kim, S.T. and Lee, Y.H., 2007. New functions of Internet mediated agenda-setting: Agenda-rippling and reversed agenda-setting. *Korean journal of journalism & communication studies*, *50*(3), pp.175-205.

Kobayashi, T., Ikeda, K.I. and Miyata, K., 2006. Social capital online: Collective use of the Internet and reciprocity as lubricants of democracy. *Information, Community & Society*, 9(5), pp.582-611.

Kunelius, R. and Renvall, M., 2010. Stories of a public: Journalism and the validity of citizens' testimonies. *Journalism*, 11(5), 515-529.

Kushin, M.J., 2010. *Tweeting the issues in the age of social media? Intermediaagenda setting between the "New York Times" and Twitter*. Washington State University.

Kuwait News Agency (KUNA)., 2005. Oman sentences members of secret group between one to 20 years. Available at: https://www.kuna.net.kw/.

Lallana, E.C., 2015. Exploring Social Media's Role in Development. *Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development APCICT,* p.101.

Lasswell, H.D., 1948. The structure and function of communication in society. *The communication of ideas*, *37*(1), pp.136-39.

Lawrence, R.G., 2000. *The politics of force: Media and the construction of police brutality*. Univ of California Press.

Lazarsfeld, P.F., Berelson, B. and Gaudet, H., 1944. *The people's choice: How the voter makes up his mind in a presidential election.* New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce.

Lee, B., Lancendorfer, K.M. and Lee, K.J., 2005. Agenda-setting and the Internet: The intermedia influence of Internet bulletin boards on newspaper coverage of the 2000 general election in South Korea. *Asian Journal of Communication*, *15*(1), pp.57-71.

Lee, F., 2014. Triggering the Protest Paradigm: Examining Factors Affecting News Coverage of Protests. *International Journal of Communication*, Vol. 8, pp. 2318–2339.

Lee, J.H., Han, G., Shoemaker, P.J., & Cohen, A.A., 2005. Here and there around the world: Proximity and scope as news values. *Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication,* San Antonio, August.

Leveson, B.H. and Leveson, L.J.B.H.L., 2012. *An Inquiry into the Culture, Practices and Ethics of the Press: Executive Summary and Recommendations [Leveson Report]* (Vol. 779). The Stationery Office.

Lewin, K., 1947. Frontiers in group dynamics: II. Channels of group life; social planning and action research. *Human relations*, *1*(2), pp.143-153.

Lewis, J., Inthorn, S. and Wahl-Jorgensen, K., 2005. *Citizens or consumers?: What the media tell us about political participation*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

Lievrouw, L., 2011. *Alternative and activist new media*. Polity.

Lippmann, W., 2017. *Public opinion*. Routledge.

Lotan, G., Graeff, E., Ananny, M., Gaffney, D. and Pearce, I., 2011. The Arab Spring| the revolutions were tweeted: Information flows during the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. *International journal of communication*, 5, p.31.

Luo, Y., 2014. Mapping agenda-setting research in China: a meta-analysis study. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, *6*(3), pp.269-285.

Loughborough University Communication Research Centre. 2012. *A BBC Trust report on the impartiality and accuracy of the BBC's coverage of the events known as the "Arab Spring": Content Analysis*. [Online] Loughborough University. [Accessed: 14 November 2018] Available from:
http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/our_work/arabspring_impar tiality/appendix_a.pdf

Luther, C.A. and Miller, M.M., 2005. Framing of the 2003 US-Iraq war demonstrations: An analysis of news and partisan texts. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *82*(1), pp.78-96.

 Lynch, M., 2007. Blogging the new Arab public: Arab blogs' political influence will grow. *World Politics Review*, 10. Available at: https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com.

Mabon, S., 2013. Aiding Revolution? Wikileaks, communication and the 'Arab Spring'in Egypt. *Third World Quarterly*, *34*(10), pp.1843-1857.

Macionis, J.J. and Capparelli, M., 2006. *Society: the Basics SocNotes*. Prentice Hall.

Mannheim, K., 1936/1964. from ideology and utopia. In Henry S. Kariel (ED), Sources in ,' twentieth- century political though,' (pp.26-46), New York: Free Press.

Maxwell, J.A. and Loomis, D.M., 2003. Mixed methods design: An alternative approach. *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*, *1*, pp.241-272.

McAdam, D., 1982. *Political process and the development of black insurgency*, 1930-1970. University of Chicago Press.

McCarney, J., 2005. Ideology and false consciousness. *Marx Myths and Legends*.

McChesney, R.W., 1989. The political economy of the mass media: An interview with Edward S. Herman. *Monthly Review*, *40*(8), pp.35-46.

McCombs, M., 2004. *Setting the agenda: The mass media and public opinion.* Polity.

McCombs, M., 1994. The future agenda for agenda setting research. *Journal of Mass Communication Studies*, (45), pp.171-181.

McCombs, M.E. and Shaw, D.L., 1976. Structuring the "unseen environment". *Journal of Communication*, *26*(2), pp.18-22.

McCombs, M.E. and Shaw, D.L., 1993. The evolution of agenda-setting research: twenty-five years in the marketplace of ideas. *Journal of communication*, 43(2), pp.58-67.

McCombs, M., Holbert, L., Kiousis, S. and Wanta, W., 2011. *The news and public opinion: Media effects on civic life.* Polity.

McKee, A., 2005. *The public sphere: An introduction.* Cambridge University Press.

McLeod, D.M., 2007. News coverage and social protest: How the media's protect paradigm exacerbates social conflict. *J. Disp. Resol.*, p.185.

McLeod, D.M. and Detenber, B.H., 1999. Framing effects of television news coverage of social protest. *Journal of communication*, *49*(3), pp.3-23.

McLeod, D.M. and Hertog, J.K., 1999. Social control, social change and the mass media's role in the regulation of protest groups. *Mass media, social control, and social change: A macrosocial perspective*, pp.305-330.

McNelly, J.T., 1959. Intermediary communicators in the international flow of news. *Journalism Quarterly*, *36*(1), pp.23-26.

McQuail, D., 1987. *Mass communication theory: An introduction*. Sage Publications, Inc.

McQuail, D., 1994. *Mass communication theory: An introduction.*

McQuail, D., 2000. *McQuail's mass communication theory*. Sage publications.

McQuail, D., 2006. Media Roles in Society: Researching Media Democracy and Participation.

McQuail, D. and Windahl, S., 1981. *Communication models for the study of mass communications*. Longman.

Merrill, J.C. and Nerone, J.C., 2002. The four theories of the press four and a half decades later: A retrospective. *Journalism Studies*, *3*, pp.133-136.

Mikkawi, H., 1989. Wsael AlEtsal Algmaheery fi Sultanate Oman (Means and Methods of Communication in the Sultanate of Oman). *Cairo: the Anglo-Egyptian Library*.

Milton, J., 1904. *Milton's Areopagitica: a speech for the liberty of unlicensed printing*. Macmillan.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010. Permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar. Available at: http://english.mofa.gov.qa/details.cfm?id=80 [Accessed: 3 November 2017].

Ministry of Information., 1995. Oman 95. Available at: https://omaninfo.om/english/ [Accessed: 3 October 2017].

Ministry of Information., 1999. Oman 98/99. Available at: https://omaninfo.om/english/ [Accessed: 20 May 2017].

Ministry of Information., 2014. His Majesty Speech. Available at:https://omaninfo.om/english/ [Accessed: 10 April 2017].

Ministry of Information., 2004. Pres in the Sultanate: origins and evolution. Available at: https://omaninfo.om/english/ [Accessed: 2 February 2017].

Ministry of Information., 2015. Oman 2015. Available at: https://omaninfo.om/english/ [Accessed: 14 February 2017].

Ministry of Legal Affairs-Sultanate of Oman, 2013. Basic Statute of the State. Available at: http://www.mola.gov.om/eng/ [Accessed: 22 January 2017].

Ministry of National Economy, 1998. *Statistical Year Book.* Muscat: Ministry of National Economy

Morley, D., 1980. *The nationwide audience: Structure and decoding.* London: B.F.I.

Morris, C., 1991. *Oman: A report.* Morris International Associates.

Mourtada, R. and Salem, F., 2011. Civil movements: The impact of Facebook and Twitter. *Arab Social Media Report, 1*(2), pp.1-30.

Müller, L., 2014. *Comparing mass media in established democracies: patterns of media performance.* Springer.

Murdock, G. and Golding, P., 1977. Capitalism, communication and class relations. *Mass communication and society*, pp.12-43.

Muscat Daily., 2011a. Oman court issues judgment on Azzaman newspaper. Available at: https://muscatdaily.com/ [Accessed: 17 March 2016].

Muscat Daily., 2011b. Oman air staff to continue protest till demands are met. Available at: https://muscatdaily.com/ [Accessed: 20 May 2017].

Muscat Daily., 2014. Oman's largest selling daily newspaper. Available at: https://muscatdaily.com/ [Accessed: 6 January 2017].

National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2011. *Population clock.* Available at: http://www.ncsi.gov.om [Accessed: 26 April 2017].

National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2013. *Population clock.* Available at: http://www.ncsi.gov.om [Accessed: 11 July 2017].

Neuendorf, K. A., 2002. *The content analysis guidebook.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Newman, N., 2009. The rise of social media and its impact on mainstream journalism.

Newson, A., Houghton, D. and Patten, J., 2008. *Blogging and other social media: Exploiting the technology and protecting the enterprise*. Gower Publishing, Ltd..

Noelle-Neumann, E., 1991. The theory of public opinion: The concept of the spiral of silence.

Norris, P. and Odugbemi, S., 2010. Evaluating media performance. *Public Sentinel: News Media and Governance Reform*, pp.3-29.

Nunns, A. and Idle, N., 2011. Tweets From Tahrir: Egypt's Revolution As It Unfolded. *The Words Of The People Who Made It*, pp.267-276.

Oliver, P.E. and Maney, G.M., 2000. Political processes and local newspaper coverage of protest events: From selection bias to triadic interactions. *American Journal of Sociology*, *106*(2), pp.463-505.

Oman Information Center, 2011. Celebrations in Sohar, Sur and Salalah hail decrees. Available at:
http://www.omaninfo.com/ [Accessed: 3 September 2018].

Oman News Agency., 2015. *Oman News Agency*. Available at:
https://www.omannews.gov.om/ona_eng/ [Accessed: 18 October 2018].

OpenNet Initiative, 2009. Internet Filtering in Oman. Available at:
https://opennet.net/studies/oman2007 [Accessed: 3 October 2018].

Papacharissi, Z., 2002. The virtual sphere: The internet as a public sphere. *New media & society*, *4*(1), pp.9-27.

Papacharissi, Z.A. and Papacharissi, Z., 2010. *A private sphere: Democracy in a digital age*. Polity.

Pavlik, J.V., 1994. Citizen access, involvement, and freedom of expression in an electronic environment. *The people's right to know: Media, democracy, and the information highway*, pp.139-62.

Pentina, I. and Tarafdar, M., 2014. From "information" to "knowing": Exploring the role of social media in contemporary news consumption. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *35*, pp.211-223.

Port Services Corporation (S. A. O. G.), 2010. *Oman Maritime History*. Available at:
http://www.pscoman.com/about-us/ [Accessed: 23 October 2018].

Prasad, B.D., 2008. Content analysis. *Research methods for social work, 5*, pp.1-20.

Quinn, S. and Lamble, S., 2012. *Online newsgathering: research and reporting for journalism*. Focal Press.

Randall, D., 2000. *The universal journalist*. Pluto Press.

Randall, D. and Rouncefield, M., 2013. Ethnography. In Soegaard, M. and Dam, R. (eds.). *The Encyclopedia of Human-Computer Interaction*, 2nd Ed. Aarhus, Denmark: The Interaction Design Foundation.

Rasmussen, T., 2007, October. Two faces of the public sphere. The significance of internet communication in public deliberation. In *conference "Changing Politics through Digital Networks", Firenze* (pp. 5-6).

Reese, S.D., 2007. The framing project: A bridging model for media research revisited. *Journal of communication*, 57(1), pp.148-154.

Reese, S.D. and Dai, J., 2009. Citizen journalism in the global news arena: China's new media critics. *Citizen journalism: Global perspectives*, pp.221-231.

Reese, S.D., Gandy Jr, O.H. and Grant, A.E. eds., 2001. *Framing public life: Perspectives on media and our understanding of the social world*. Routledge.

Reich, Z., 2015. Why citizens still rarely serve as news sources: Validating a tripartite model of circumstantial, logistical, and evaluative barriers. *International Journal of Communication*, *9*, p.22.

Reporters without Borders, 2014. *World press freedom index 2014*. Available at: https://rsf.org/en/world-press-freedom-index-2014 [Accessed: 12 April 2017].

Roberts, M. and McCombs, M., 1994. Agenda setting and political advertising: Origins of the news agenda. *Political communication*, *11*(3), pp.249-262.

Roberts, M., Wanta, W. and Dzwo, T.H., 2002. Agenda setting and issue salience online. *Communication Research*, *29*(4), pp.452-465.

Robie, D., 2013. 'Four Worlds' news values revisited: A deliberative journalism paradigm for Pacific media. *Pacific Journalism Review*, *19*(1), p.84.

Rugh, W.A., 2004. *Arab mass media: Newspapers, radio, and television in Arab politics*. Greenwood publishing group.

Rupar, V. ed., 2010. *Journalism and meaning-making: reading the newspaper*. Hampton Press.

Ryan,Y 2011. How Tunisia's revolution began. Al Jazeera. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/2011126121815985483.html [Accessed: 5 January 2016].

Saleh, A., 1990. *Ekhrag A lsh f AlOmanya* {Design in Omani Press), (in Arabic). Cairo: Al-Wazen Press.
Sandelowski, M., 1995. Qualitative analysis: What it is and how to begin. *Research in nursing & health*, *18*(4), pp.371-375.

Sanou, B., 2015. ICT facts and figures. *The world in*, pp.1865-2015.

Sassi, S., 2000. The controversies of the Internet and the revitalization of local political life. *Digital democracy: Issues of theory and practice*, pp.90-104.

Schudson, M., 1989. The sociology of news production. *Media, Culture & Society*, *11*(3), pp.263-282.

Seibt, S. 2011. Egyptians find loophole to government web blackout. France 24.

Shah, D.V., Watts, M.D., Domke, D. and Fan, D.P., 2002. News framing and cueing of issue regimes: Explaining Clinton's public approval in spite of scandal. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *66*(3), pp.339-370.

Shamma, D., Kennedy, L. and Churchill, E., 2010. Tweetgeist: Can the twitter timeline reveal the structure of broadcast events. *CSCW Horizons*, pp.589-593.

Shoemaker, P. J., 1991. *Gatekeeping*. London: Sage.

Shoemaker, P.J. and Reese, S.D., 1991. *Mediating the message in the 21st century: A media sociology perspective*. Routledge.

Shoemaker, P.J. and Reese, S.D., 1996. *Mediating the message in the 21st century: A media sociology perspective*. Routledge.

Shoemaker, P.J. and Reese, S.D., 2013. *Mediating the message in the 21st century: A media sociology perspective*. Routledge.

Shoemaker, P. J. and Vos, T., 2009. *Gatekeeping Theory*. Routledge.

Siebert, F., Peterson, T.B., Peterson, T. and Schramm, W., 1956. *Four Theories of the Press*. Urbana & Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Sigal, I., 2011. Egypt: information getting out despite information blackout. *Global Voices.*

Sigal, L.V., 1973. *Reporters and officials: The organization and politics of newsmaking*. DC Heath.

Singletary, M.W., 1993. *Mass communication research: Contemporary methods and applications*. Longman.

Sørensen et al, 2014. A User Perspective on Social Networking Sites. *Wireless World*, p.19.

Spielhaus, E.G.& R., 2012. Covering the Arab Spring: Middle East in the Media – the Media in the Middle East. *Global Media Journal-German Edition*, *2*(1).

Spielvogel, J.J., 2011. *Western Civilization: Alternate Volume: Since 1300*. Cengage Learning.

Spinner, J., 2011. In Oman, protests spur timid media to cover the news. *MinnPost 20 February. .* Available at: https://www.minnpost.com/.

Spyridou, L.P., 2015. Producing protest news: Representations of contentious collective actions in mainstream print media. *The Cyprus Review*, 27(1), p.71.

Stanley, J.W. and Weare, C., 2004. The effects of internet use on political participation evidence from an agency online discussion forum. *Administration & Society*, 36(5), pp.503-527.

Statista., 2015. Statistics and facts about Facebook. Available at: https://www.statista.com/topics/751/facebook/ [Accessed: 21 January 2016].

Statista., 2016. Statistics and facts about Twitter. Available at: https://www.statista.com/topics/751/facebook/ [Accessed: 21 January 2016].

Statistic Brain Research Institute., 2015. Facebook Statistics. Available at: https://www.statista.com/topics/751/facebook/ [Accessed: 21 January 2016].

Stewart, C., Kowaltzke, A. and Lavelle, M., 2001. *Media and meaning: an introduction*. British Film Institute.

Storck, M., 2011. The role of social media in political mobilisation: a case study of the January 2011 Egyptian uprising. *University of St Andrews, Scotland*, *20*.

Strupp, J., 2005. Losing confidence. *Editor & Publisher*, *138*(7), pp.32-39.

Sunstein, C., 2001. Republic. com Princeton. *NJ: Princeton University Press.*

Szabó, A., 2007. The Impact of the Internet on the Public Sphere and on the Culture Industry. A study of blogs, social news sites and discussion forums.

Tankard, J., Hendrickson, L., Silberman, J., Bliss, K. and Ghanem, S., 1991. Media frames: Approaches to conceptualization and measurement, Paper presented to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. *Communication Theory and Methodology Division, Boston, MA*.

Tankard Jr, J.W., 2001. The empirical approach to the study of media framing. In *Framing public life* (pp. 111-121). Routledge.

Tarabay, M.H., 1994. The social context of news production: Internal and external influences on Arab press in London and Beirut.

Tenenboim-Weinblatt, K., 2014. Producing protest news: An inquiry into journalists' narratives. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, *19*(4), pp.410-429.

Thakurta, P.G. and Chaturvedi, S., 2012. Food and Nutrition Justice: How to Make it More Newsworthy?. *IDS Bulletin*, *43*, pp.58-64.

The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, 2007. Internet and Freedom of Expression in the Sultanate of Oman. Available at: https://anhri.net/en/home.shtml [Accessed: 28 June 2016].

Theguardian ,2011. Saudi Arabian security forces quell 'day of rage' protests. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com [Accessed: 22 January 2019].

The New Arab., 2016. Oman jails three journalists for reporting corruption in courtroom. Available at: https://www.alaraby.co.uk/ [Accessed: 23 September 2017].

The United Nations Development Programme, 2015. Human Development Report 2015. Available at: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2015_human_development_report.pdf [Accessed: 20 January 2017].

The World Bank., 2016. Land area (sq. km) | Data. Available at: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ag.lnd.totl.k2 [Accessed: 7 January 2017].

Thomas, G., 2011. *The Rough Guide to Oman*. Penguin.

Tilley, E. and Cokley, J., 2008. Deconstructing the discourse of citizen journalism: Who says what and why it matters. *Pacific Journalism Review*, *14*(1), p.94.

Times News Service., 2017. Social media user numbers in Oman up by over 600,000 since 2017. *Times of Oman.* Available at: https://timesofoman.com/article/135630 [Accessed: 11 March 2017].

Tohme, H., 2012. Media coverage of the Syrian uprising and the implication for the discipline of IR. In *Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, San Diego, CA, April*(Vol. 2).

Tuchman, G., 1978. Making News: a study in the construction of reality. *New York*.

Turk, J.V., 1986. Public relations' influence on the news. *Newspaper Research Journal,* 7(4), pp.15-27.

Ubayasiri, K., 2006. Internet and the public sphere: A glimpse of YouTube. *Central Queensland University*, *2*.

Uslaner, E.M., 2004. Trust, civic engagement, and the Internet. *Political Communication,*, *21*(2), pp.223-242.

Valeri, M., 2015. Simmering unrest and succession challenges in Oman.

Van Gorp, B., 2006. The constructionist approach to framing: Bringing culture back in. *Journal of communication*, 57(1), pp.60-78.

Van Leuven, S., Heinrich, A. and Deprez, A., 2015. Foreign reporting and sourcing practices in the network sphere: A quantitative content analysis of the Arab Spring in Belgian news media. *New Media & Society*, *17*(4), pp.573-591.

Volders, S., 2013. Agenda-Setting Theory in Political Discourse on Twitter. , p.59.

Vos, T., 2002. Role enactment: The influence of journalists' role conceptions on news content. In *85th AEJMC Conference, Miami, FL, August* (pp. 5-8).

Vultee, F., 2010. Securitization as a media frame: What happens when the media 'speak security'. In *Securitization Theory* (pp. 91-107). Routledge.

Weaver, D.A. and Scacco, J.M., 2013. Revisiting the protest paradigm: The Tea Party as filtered through prime-time cable news. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, *18*(1), pp.61-84.

Weaver, D.H. and Willnat, L. eds., 2012. *The global journalist in the 21st century*. Routledge.

White, D.M., 2018. The" gate keeper": A case study in the selection of news. In *The Media, Journalism and Democracy*(pp. 119-126). Routledge.

Wiggins, B., 2013. Framing the Truth: U.S. Media Coverage during the War on Terror. Webster University Vienna.

Wikileaks., 2004. Oman online: The natives are restless. Embassy Muscat. Available at: https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/04MUSCAT1983_a.html/ [Accessed: 14 January 2016].

Wolfensohn, J., 1999. Voices for The Poor. *The Washington Post. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com* [Accessed: 10 June 2017].

Wolfsfeld, G., Segev, E. and Sheafer, T., 2013. Social media and the Arab Spring: Politics comes first. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, *18*(2), pp.115-137.

World by Map., 2015. Coastline Lengths. Available at: http://world.bymap.org/Coastlines.html [Accessed: 20 July 2016].

World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)., 2000. Saudi Arabia: Law of Printed Materials and Publication (promulgated by Royal Decree No. M/32 dated 03/09/1421H. Available at: https://wipolex.wipo.int/en/legislation/details/8491 [Accessed: 19 February 2017].

Worldfolio Ltd., 2014. *Times of Oman*. Available at: http://www.theworldfolio.com/ [Accessed: 19 February 2016].

Worrall, J., 2012. Oman: the "forgotten" corner of the Arab Spring. *Middle East Policy*, *19*(3), pp.98-115.

Wyld, D.C., 2007. *The blogging revolution: Government in the age of Web 2.0*. IBM Center for the Business of Government.

Youmans, W.L. & York, J.C., 2012. Social Media and the Activist Toolkit: User Agreements, Corporate Interests, and the Information Infrastructure of Modern Social Movements. *Journal of Communication*, 62(2), pp.315–329.

Youssef, A., 2012. A critical analysis on media coverage of the Egyptian revolution: The case of Al-Ahram, Al-Masry Al-Youm, the Telegraph and the Washington Post.

Zainab,S., 2012. Omani government cracks down on free speech. *Oman Observer*. Available at: http://www.omanobserver.om [Accessed: 24 April 2016].

Zhu, J.H., Weaver, D., Lo, V.H., Chen, C. and Wu, W., 1997. Individual, organizational, and societal influences on media role perceptions: A comparative study of journalists in China, Taiwan, and the United States. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *74*(1), pp.84-96.

Appendixes

APPENDIX1: CODING SHEET for Oman Daily and Al-Watan

Type of Newspaper	Oman Daily	Al-Watan
Headline Title		

A: General characteristics about media coverage:

1. What is the day of coverage?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

2. What is the month of coverage?

January	
February	
March	

- The period for this study, from 17 January to 31 March 2011, was chosen because it arguably yielded the greatest amount of protests and witnessed substantial shifts in newspapers' coverage.

3. What is the main type of content that is published in the Omani daily newspaper?

General news	
Column-article	
Commentary/ Criticism	
Other	

- General news: It includes either lead news stories, which are usually found on the front page of the newspaper, or others news stories but not lead ones.

- Column-article: a recurring piece or article in a newspaper written by the newspaper's editors, reporters, or readers expressing their own opinion about a particular event or person. These articles have a specific headline and are published in a specific position.

- Commentary/ criticism: articles that seek to provide a critical or alternative viewpoint on a key issue. These articles have different headlines and positions in the newspapers.

- Other: any other type of item that is not mentioned in the above categories, such as interviews, features, press releases, leading editorials, and investigative articles.

4. How many sources are found in the news story?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	More than 10

- If a particular news story contained any quoted source or attributed information, fill in coding sheet 3 (the story will be coded and analysed further to examine the source pattern).

B: The newspaper agenda: Examining the prominence and frequency of coverage

5. What is the main issue/ theme that is covered in the newspapers as manifested in news headline?

Street protest	
Political reforms	
Economic demands	
Social demands	
Public petition to the sultan	
Government's/ the sultan's responses to the public demands	
Human rights	
Media and media freedom	
Police/ public prosecution /courts/legal	
Others	
Cannot be determined	

- Street protest: Topics that focus on the protests that erupted in the country

- Political reforms: Any topics relating to the improvement of the laws, the government, or public affairs of a country in accordance with the expectations of the public. Some political demands that were raised by citizens in the 2011 reforms were, for example, widening the powers of the Shura (Consultative) Council, ousting the government by sacking incompetent ministers and bringing them to justice, fighting corruption/ ensuring protection of public money, strengthening the judiciary's independence, guaranteeing freedom of expression, and others.

- Economic demands: Any topics that focus on economic demands. Some economic demands that were raised by citizens in the 2011 reforms were, for example, consumer protection and ending rising prices, employment, improving work conditions, raising the minimum salaries of employees in the government and private sectors, providing job-seekers with monthly assistance, giving care and financial support to low-income families, permitting the establishment of Islamic banks and Islamic investment and insurance companies, and others.

- Social demands: Any topics that focus on the public demands regarding social services, including education, heath, and so on. Some social demands that were raised by citizens in the 2011 reforms were, for example, regulating teaching and guarantying teachers the right to form syndicates, establishing more higher-education institutes, scholarships, higher pay, and others.

-

- Public petition to the sultan: Any topics that address the public petition which was handed to the sultan on February 23, 2011, containing their demands.

- Government's/ the sultan's responses to the public demands: Any topics that focus on the regime's response to the public demands.

- Human Rights: Any topics that deals with the basic individuals' rights and freedom.

- Media and Media freedom: Any topics related to media, journalism and media freedom.

- Police/ public prosecution /courts/legal: Any topics that deal with police and army activities, and news of court and legal cases.

- Others: Any other topics not included in the category

- Cannot be determined: Not enough information present

C: Newspapers' representation of the 2011 reforms:

6. If the main topic of a news story was "street protests", how did the newspaper represent the street protest events? (Only answer this question if the main topic of the news story was street protests.)

Loyalty frame	
vandalism action frame	
protest action frame	

- Loyalty frame: journalists described the protests as loyalty to the country and the sultan.

- Vandalism action frame: journalists emphasize the negative implications of the protests, for example, deviant behaviour, weird incidents, and conflict with the police.

- Protest action frame: select this frame if journalists acknowledged one or more of these criteria: the various protests that had erupted in different places in Oman, reasons behind the protests, and violence against protesters.

The Sablat Oman forum	
Post Title	

A: The amount of posting, visitors and comments

Questions 1 to 4 aim to provide some data regarding public interaction and engagement in Al-Sablah.

1. What is the day of posting?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

2. What is the month of posting?

January	
February	
March	

3. What is the number of visitors per post?

Less than 50	
50-100	
100-300	
300-500	
500-1000	
1000-3000	
3000-5000	
More than 5000	

4. What is the number of comments per post?

0	
Less than 50	
50-100	
100-150	
150-200	
200-250	

250-300	
More than 300	

B: Public agenda: Examining the prominence and frequency of posting

5. What is the main issue that is posted and discussed in the Sablah, as manifested in post headline?

Street protest	
Political reforms	
Economic demands	
Social demands	
Public petition to the sultan	
Government's/ the sultan's responses to the public demands	
Human rights	
Media and media freedom	
Police/ public prosecution /courts/legal	
Others	
Cannot be determined	

C: Public representation of the 2011 reforms:

6. If the main topic of the post was "street protests", how did the public represent street protest events? (Only answer this question if the main topic of the post was street protests.)

Loyalty frame	
Vandalism action frame	
Protest action frame	

Type of Newspaper	Oman Daily	Al-Watan
Headline		

Note:
- Fill in this sheet if a news story included sources or references
- Use a separate coding sheet for every single source

A. General characteristics of the referenced news story:

1. What is the day of coverage?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

2. What is the month of coverage?

January	
February	
March	

3. What is the origin of the news item that is published in the Omani daily newspapers?

Wire stories	
Staff written stories	
Non-staff-written stories	

- Wire stories: news stories that were produced by Oman News Agency (ONA), or other wire service.

- Staff written stories: news stories that were written by organization's staff and correspondents

- Non-staff-written stories: news stories that were written by experts, ordinary people, etc.

4. What are the main issues that are covered in the newspapers?

Street protest	
Political reforms	
Economic demands	
Social demands	
Public petition to the sultan	
Government's/ the sultan's responses to the public demands	
Human rights	
Media and media freedom	
Police/ public prosecution /courts/legal	
Others	
Cannot be determined	

5. What is the category of the story; signified by the degree of conflict?

Conflict-centred stories	
Non-conflict-centred stories	

- Conflict-centred stories: refers to news stories that include any disputes, controversy, and disparities in views between individuals and society.

- Non-conflict-centred stories: refers to any news stories that do not include any disagreement or conflict of views.

B. **General characteristics of each single source:**

6. What is the actor who is quoted, referred to or interviewed in the news item?

The head of state	
Government officials	
Police and army figures	
Ordinary citizens	
Street protesters	
Business people	
Journalists	
Religious bodies	
International quote	
Others	

- The head of state: His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, Oman's absolute ruler

- Government officials: any names under these titles are considered official sources: his /her excellency, his/her highness, minister, and deputy minister

- Members of the police and army: anyone who belongs to the police or military services

239

- Ordinary citizen: Omani citizens who were not protesting

- Street protester: Young Omanis who paved the way for the 2011 protests in the country

- Business people: employee from the private or government sectors commenting on the effects of the protests on the country's Gross domestic product (GDP) and economy, etc.

- Journalist: "anyone who has taken up journalism as a profession or source of living and whose work includes writing for print media and other types of media or providing the press with news, reports, features, analyses and other forms of press coverage like pictures, illustrations (etc.) and is listed under the designation of reporters, editors, correspondents and freelancers, irrespective of one's nationality or the nationality of the institution(s) for which he/she works" (PPL 1984, n.p.).

- Religious bodies: religious figures or Islamic organizations

- International quotation: any information attributed to individuals/organizations outside the country

- Others: any other sources not included in the above categories

7. What is the identification of sources?

| Veiled | |
| Unveiled | |

- Veiled: any unattributable quotation which appears without a name or background information or with only a vague identifier (e.g., a senior Finance Ministry official).

- Unveiled: the source's name or sufficient information about the source were found in the story

C: Newspaper representation of public opinion:

8. What is the dominant frame of the central issue of the quoted and attributed information?

Protest action frame	
Loyalty frame	
Vandalism frame	
Sultan's responses to the public demands	
Expressing the public demands	

APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEWS QUESTIONS

Name:	Age:
Affiliation:	Years of experience in journalism:
	Level of education:

A. <u>Questions related to the content analysis findings about the newspapers' coverage:</u>

1. At the time when the unrest began, the newspapers ignored the event. Al-Watan and Oman Daily downplayed the street protests in their agendas mainly in the early stage. The total coverage during the month of January was estimated to be around 1.6% (9 items were covered by Oman Daily and only 4 by Al-Watan). What were the reasons for this lack of coverage?

2. The coverage had been slightly increased by February, with 122 items. By March, a significant shift had been witnessed in both newspapers. The coverage increased to reach approximately 665 items, most of which were covered by Al-Watan. What were the reasons behind this shift?

3. From the data I collected, I noticed that although Al-Watan and Oman Daily changed their coverage regarding their attitude toward addressing the street protests; Oman Daily paid more attention to the government's and the sultan's responses to the public demands, emphasising loyalty to the country and the sultan, while Al-Watan's coverage focused more on acts of vandalism and calls to stop the protests. What principles and routines guided the coverage of the Omani newspapers?

4. After 28 February, the ONA coverage of the protest reduced, and the two newspapers tended to publish more column-articles which were written by ordinary people and Omani writers. Why?

5. Most news items in both newspapers frequently did not include any quotations or interviews. Why?

6. Why did journalists, notably in the privately owned media, tend to grant anonymity to sources in their coverage? Anonymity means making assumptions and inferences about public opinion without providing evidence to support such claims.

B: Questions about newspapers influences

7. How did the outside influences (i.e., government, Ministry of information, and sources) affect journalists' news coverage of the 2011 Omani reforms? Factors to be considered include licenses, subsidies, self-censorship, the Basic State Law and the Publications and Publishing Law (PPL).

8. How did organizational routines influence journalists' narratives?

9. Did social media networks, particularly the Sablat Oman forum, affect the press coverage of protests?

10. Through your experience, how did journalists' backgrounds (e.g., education, skills, and training) affect newspapers' content?

11. Were there any other influences that affected your coverage?

APPENDIX 5: GENERAL NOTES OF INTERVIEWS

Interviews' no.	News Organization	Interviewee's role	Time of the interview			Period	Place
			Date	Day	Time		
1	**Oman Daily**	The current Editor-in-Chief	16-01-2018	Tue.	12:30 pm-1:10 pm	40 minutes	The interview was conducted by phone
2		The former Editor-in-Chief of Oman newspaper from 2005 to 2012	28-01-2018	Sun.	4:05 pm-5:35 pm	90 minutes	The interview was conducted by phone
3		Editor	31-10-2017	Tue.	2:00 pm-2:42 pm	42 minutes	His office
4		Journalist	29-10-2017	Sun.	10:00 am-10: 50 am	50 minutes	Café
5		Journalist	30-10-2017	Mon.	9:30 am-10:00 am	30 minutes	Reporter's News Room
6		Journalist	30-10-2017	Mon.	10:30 am-11:00 am	30 minutes	Domestic Newsroom
7		Correspondent	25-10-2017	Wed.	1:25 pm – 2:20 pm	45 minutes	Public Knowledge Library
8		Columnist	18-10-2017	Wed.	2:00 pm-3:15 pm	75 minutes	Main Library at Sultan Qaboos University
9	**Al-Watan**	Editor	20-10-2017	Fri.	9:40 am-10:35 am	45 minutes	Café
10		Editor	21-10-2017	Sat.	6:15 pm-6: 42 pm	32 minutes	Café
11		Sub-editor	21-10-2017	Sat.	11: 10 am- 12:00 pm	50 minutes	Café
12		Journalist	25-10-2017	Wed.	3:10 pm – 4:05 pm	55 minutes	Public Knowledge Library
13		Journalist	26-10-2017	Thurs.	11:00 am-11:32 am	32 minutes	Public Knowledge Library
14		Correspondent	20-10-2017	Fri.	4:00 pm-5:20 pm	80 minutes	Café
15		Columnist	4-2-2018	Sun.	5:30 p m-6:03 pm	33 minutes	The interview was conducted by phone