The Arab Spring
The Role of ICTs

Overthrowing the Protest Paradigm?
How *The New York Times*, Global Voices
and Twitter Covered the Egyptian Revolution

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With social-media driven protests erupting across the Arab world, this content analysis of Egyptian protest coverage in *The New York Times*, the Twitter feed of *Times* reporter Nick Kristof, and the citizen media site Global Voices, examines whether the de-legitimizing "protest paradigm" found in mainstream media is replicated in social media and blogs, and what impact their protest coverage has on their credibility. Results showed that *The Times* adhered to the paradigm by emphasizing the spectacle, quoting official sources, and de-valuing protesters as reporters maintained an impartial role. In contrast, Global Voices and Kristof's Twitter feed took different approaches, legitimizing protesters and serving as commentators/analysts, even actors, in the unfolding events. Global Voices also provided more opportunities for reader interactivity.

Introduction

Scholars long have noted the complex relationship between the media and protest groups. Mainstream media often discredit and marginalize protest actions, with journalists relying on a "protest paradigm" that focuses on tactics, spectacles, and dramatic actions, rather than the underlying reasons for the protest (Chan & Lee, 1984; Gitlin, 1980; McLeod & Hertog, 1999). At the same time, protesters must rely on the media to reach the public and policy makers (Rucht, 1991). To combat the negative portrayals of protesters typically found in traditional media, social movements and activists often turn to alternative media outlets or create their own media (Downing, 2001; Rodriguez, 2001; Padovani, 2010). Most recently, protesters, such those as in Tunisia and Egypt, have turned to online social media like Facebook and Twitter to mobilize pro-democracy social movements and start revolution, illustrating how, in today's Digital Era, the Internet has become a key alternative media tool for activism (Kenix, 2009; Raghavan, 2009).

Whether through blogs or social media, the Internet allows protesters to circumvent the gatekeeping of traditional media and take control of the message they want presented publicly (Postmes & Brunsting, 2002). For the protesters in Egypt, the Zapatistas in Mexico, and a host of other online activists, "new communication technologies are fundamental to the existence" of these social movements that are characteristic of what Castells referred to as the "network society" (1997, p. 164). The Internet, in fact, can be seen as a counter public sphere for voicing alternative views, building solidarity, and encouraging empowerment (Downing, 2003; Fraser, 1990; Kellner, 2000) that, ultimately, can lead to a revolution and the end of a 30-year autocratic regime, as evidenced by the February 2011 resignation of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. In light of the recent social media-led Egyptian revolution, it is worth considering whether the negative, de-legitimizing "protest paradigm" found in mainstream media coverage is replicated in social media and blogs. Or have social media and blogs adopted a different narrative structure that offers more in-depth and contextualized information, more alternative voices, and more of a bottom-up, participatory approach that could prompt greater credibility among readers?

Within a theoretical framework of social movement and credibility theories, this study draws on a content analysis of coverage of the Egyptian protests *in The New York Times* (*NYT*) online, *NYT* reporter Nick Kristof's Twitter feed, and the Global Voices blog, to examine the frames used, portrayals of protesters, sources cited, amount of user interaction, and level of author involvement to show whether the medium matters when it comes to the protest paradigm. This study is not about whether these media influenced mobilization, but whether new media are creating a new protest paradigm. While the traditional protest paradigm and other social movement theories were developed with Western democracies in mind, they still contain "powerful theoretical foundations that can cross regional boundaries" (El-Mahdi, 2009, p. 1016).

Theory and Literature Review

The "Protest Paradigm"

Studies have shown that how the media portray protesters influences not only how the public will perceive the protesters and their claims, but also whether the public will support the protesters (Detenber et al., 2007; McLeod, 1995; McLeod & Detenber, 1999). When it comes to coverage of protest events, the traditional news media tend to follow a set routine and pattern of characteristics referred to as the "protest paradigm" (Chan & Lee, 1984). McLeod and Hertog (1999) extended this idea of a news template for protest coverage, specifying elements such as narrative structure, or framing, and a reliance on official sources—elements that lead, ultimately, to the de-legitimization, marginalization, and even demonization of protesters. Further, this routinized paradigm focuses on the spectacle of the protest, highlighting sensational details such as violence, visible drama, and deviant or strange behavior (Gitlin, 1980; Hertog & McLeod, 1995; Kielbowicz & Scherer, 1986). Bayat contends that Western media portray protests in the Arab world either as "irrational" and "aggressive," or as "apathetic" and "dead," meaning "the 'Arab street' is damned if it does and damned if it doesn't" (2003, para. 4).

Narrative structures, or frames, are derived from Goffman's (1974) concept of "schemas," heuristic tools allowing individuals to process and understand new information. Entman (1993) said that media frames construct a message through selection, exclusion, emphasis, and elaboration. Frames identify problems, establish their causes, offer moral judgments, and recommend solutions. Rather than tell readers what to think about, frames tell the audience how to think about something (Reese, 2007). How something is framed has been shown to shape the public's choice of whom to blame for social, political, and economic problems (Iyengar, 1991).

In terms of protest stories, the news media can employ "injustice" frames that assign blame and emphasize moral outrage (Gamson, 1992). Frames can invoke sympathy, as Wolfsfeld (1997) put it when arguing that the more sympathetic coverage given to the "challengers" and their views, the more official and strong their cause becomes. Frames can also be legitimizing or de-legitimizing, fostering the public's support for activists or marginalizing activists' actions (Gitlin, 1980; McLeod & Hertog, 1999). Boyle and Hoeschen (2001) offer a typology, including the concept of "accountability" stories, which demand scrutiny of policy and government action.

Most often, news stories about protests are framed to emphasize deviant behavior, violence, and confrontations between police and protesters, even if the majority of the protesters have been peaceful (McLeod & Hertog, 1999). Such spectacle frames obfuscate the underlying issues that have fueled the protests, serving to discredit the protesters and perhaps even dissuade potential supporters (Gitlin, 1980; Murdock, 1973). Framing is so important because it helps to determine whether a movement will mobilize, and how successful a protest action might be (Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986). A frame's credibility (such as consistency between a movement's ideals and actions) and salience (how essential a movement's ideals are in everyday life) are fundamental to a movement's success (Benford & Snow, 2000). Gamson (1992) articulates the concept of "frame resonance," whereby personal experiences, community beliefs, and media discourse impact how the audience will understand a frame. If a frame resonates in all three of these areas, mobilization is more likely to occur (ibid.).

This study does not consider how framing was used to mobilize the Egyptian revolt, but rather, once the uprising had begun, how different forms of media portrayed the protesters and their actions. Doing so allows for an examination of whether or not the protest paradigm changes based on the medium, and of what that means in terms of credibility for the news outlet and legitimacy for the protesters.

Considering the preceding literature regarding framing, the first questions this research will answer are the following:

RQ1a: What major frames are employed in *The New York Times*, Nick Kristof's Twitter feed, and Global Voices?

RQ1b: How do frames vary between *The New York Times*, Nick Kristof's Twitter feed, and Global Voices?

RQ2a: How are the protesters portrayed in *The New York Times*, Nick Kristof's Twitter feed, and Global Voices?

RQ2b: How do the portrayals of protesters differ between *The New York Times*, Nick
         Kristof's Twitter feed, and Global Voices?

Besides framing, the people whom journalists choose to quote as sources also factors into the protest paradigm (McLeod & Hertog, 1999). Protest stories rely heavily on official government or police sources, rarely quoting protesters themselves (McLeod & Detenber, 1999; McLeod & Hertog, 1992). And when protesters are cited, they appear juxtaposed to the official voices, making their alternative views seem irrational or lacking legitimacy (Hertog & McLeod, 1995). Gans (2003) calls for "multiperspectival" news that takes a "bottom-up" approach to reporting, with journalists relying on information not only from officials, but also from everyday citizens.

Based on the literature about sources, the next questions this study will answer are the following:

RQ3a: How often are citizen/non-official and official/non-citizen sources used in *The
         New York Times*, Nick Kristof's Twitter feed, and Global Voices?
RQ3b: Is *The New York Times* more likely than Nick Kristof's Twitter feed and Global
         Voices to rely on official sources?

Blogs, Twitter, and Credibility

Although a mainstream media outlet like *The New York Times* might have, at one time, been seen as a more credible source than a blog like Global Voices, it is not clear whether that still holds. With its 300 volunteer authors and translators reporting on blogs and citizen media from throughout the world, Global Voices' contributors are from the countries being covered or know the territory well, allowing them to post first-hand accounts of international events (Preston, 2011). Its writers and editors may have more expertise and access to first-hand information than those in the mainstream news media. As such, journalists have come to rely on Global Voices for credible accounts of information, particularly in areas not regularly covered by the traditional news media (Abrash, 2006). As founder Ethan Zuckerman said in *The Times*, "Our goal is to give you the voices of the people in a country like Tunisia, day in and day out . . . We don't parachute in. We are there all the time" (Preston, 2011).

Scholars agree that blogs began gaining attention in the wake of 9/11 in response to the perception that mainstream media coverage was too sympathetic toward Muslims. While a third of the online audience has read someone else's blog (Pew Internet, 2011), scholars disagree on how much faith audiences place in blogs, with differences often resulting from how often the individual relies on blogs, and from the type of blog which is being studied.

Political blogs often receive low credibility ratings from Internet users (Banning & Sweetser, 2007), particularly when compared to mainstream sources that strive to be fair and balanced (Meyer, Marchionni, & Thorson 2010), or when the blog posts are uncivil and challenge the reader's beliefs (Thorson, Vraga, & Ekdale, 2010). However, those who regularly use political blogs judge them as more credible than traditional media and their online counterparts (Johnson & Kaye, 2004, 2009, 2010). Rather

than being put off by the partisan rancor of political blogs, blog users seek out information that support their partisan views (Johnson, Bichard, Zhang, 2009). Users appreciate that bloggers are not bound by traditional journalistic values of objectivity, and that they provide readers their own opinions, experiences, and insights (Johnson & Kaye 2004, 2009; Perlmutter, 2008).

With ordinary citizens tweeting about the dramatic emergency landing of the US Airways flight into the Hudson River or the terrorists attacks in Mumbai, Twitter has emerged as a legitimate means of breaking news, another way for citizens to become active contributors in the journalism process (Hermida, 2010). But while Twitter is increasingly recognized as a way for citizens to break stories, little attention has been paid to the credibility of Twitter as a news source. Analysts examining the debate in the newsroom about whether journalists should be allowed to express their views (particularly political ones) on Twitter center it on the issue of credibility. Proponents argue that allowing journalists to express their views creates more transparency for the news organization, which should boost credibility (Sonnenberg, 2009). But critics claim that, when journalists are expressing their views online, they are violating the traditional canons of objectivity, fairness, and balance, thus cheapening the credibility of the product (Gleason, 2009).

Thus, considering the preceding literature on the credibility of citizen journalists and the debate about what traditional reporters tweeting or blogging their opinions means for journalism, the final question this study poses is this:

> RQ4:   Are the authors of the stories/tweets/posts acting as neutral observers, commentators/analysts, actors, or catalysts for change?

Methods

This study used a constructed week of *New York Times* news articles, "tweets" from Twitter, and Global Voices posts related to the 2011 revolution in Egypt. *The New York Times* was chosen because it is the "paper of record" for the United States, dominates in international news coverage, and adheres to traditional journalism norms and ethics. *Times* reporter Nick Kristof's Twitter feed was chosen because it is a hybrid: a new medium that could allow for alternative forms of news coverage, but still written by a mainstream, legacy newspaper reporter trained in traditional reporting techniques. As a "community of more than 300 bloggers and translators around the world who work together to bring you reports from blogs and citizen media everywhere," Global Voices was selected for analysis because of its emphasis on alternative voices and stories typically excluded from mainstream media. Thus, the media outlets chosen form a sort of journalistic spectrum, allowing for a more nuanced examination of the protest paradigm and credibility, and for a better understanding of whether protest coverage changes according to the medium.

This content analysis employed a constructed week (Riffe et al., 1993) of days randomly chosen between January 23, 2011 (just before the protests erupted in Egypt) through February 14, 2011 (shortly after Mubarak resigned as president). A search of all *NYT* news stories, Nick Kristof tweets, and Global Voices posts for terms such as Egypt, protest(er)s, Cairo, Mubarak, and Tahrir yielded 208 total units of

analysis. Over all, this study includes 66 stories from *The New York Times*, 93 posts from Nick Kristof's Twitter feed, and 49 Global Voices posts.

To analyze RQ1a-b, which questioned which frames were employed in the *NYT*, Twitter, and Global Voices, this study relied on nominal variables that coded for the use of (a) injustice frames, defined as emphasizing moral outrage, the significance of a problem, and injustices being done; (b) sympathy frames, defined as provoking support, compassion, or sympathy for the protesters as underdogs; (c) legitimizing frames, defined as recognition or support of protesters' claims, fostering the public's support for the protesters, or portraying the protesters as having a real, legitimate reason to protest; (d) de-legitimizing frames, defined as marginalizing or discrediting the protesters' claims and actions; (e) accountability frames, defined as suggesting there is a consensus that an issue is wrong and in need of changes or oversight/monitoring; (f) spectacle frames, defined as emphasizing the number of protesters, the violence, emotion, drama, and deviance of protests and protesters; and (e) contextual frames, defined as in-depth history and background.

For analysis of RQ2a-b, which asked how protesters were portrayed, articles, tweets and posts were coded for whether portrayals of protesters were positive (fighting for democracy, freedom, stability, order, etc.), negative (hooligans, deviants, disruptive, corrupt, irrational, etc.), or mixed/neutral. A variable coding for who was blamed for, or seen as responsible for, the social unrest (protesters, the government/police/military, international actors, the media, others, or no one) was also used to answer this research question.

To answer RQ3a-b, which dealt with the types of sources being cited, all the human voices quoted directly or paraphrased were counted. Sources were considered official if they were government or authority figures, experts, or part of the media. Sources were considered to be citizen voices if they were quoted simply for their "man on the street" perspective (i.e., protesters).

For RQ4, which asked how the authors were characterized, coders used the following labels and definitions: (a) observer, offering an uninvolved, neutral account typical of traditional news reporting; (b) commentator/analyst, analyzing the actions of those involved in the conflict and providing perspective and opinion; (c) actor, becoming a party to one side in the conflict; and (d) catalyst for change, influencing those already involved, as well as inciting and encouraging others to get involved.

After several coder trainings and codebook revisions to achieve higher inter-coder reliability, three coders, one of whom is an author of this study, coded the articles, tweets, and posts. Inter-coder reliability was assessed using 15% of the sample. Inter-coder reliability was achieved with 12 variables at "substantial agreement," where Kappa is between .61 and .80, and with 17 variables at "almost perfect agreement," where Kappa is at or above .81 (Viera & Garrett, 2005). For individual variables, Kappa ranged from .61 to 1, with an overall mean of .85, exceeding the acceptable minimum standard (Poindexter & McCombs, 2000).

Results

In answer to RQ1a, which asked which major frames were employed, analysis shows that injustice frames that highlighted injustices and moral outrage were used 37% of the time. Sympathy frames that provoked sympathy or support for the protesters or underdogs were employed 26% of the time. Stories, posts, and tweets were coded as having legitimizing frames that gave credit to the protesters' grievances 42% of the time, and de-legitimizing frames that marginalized them appeared 6% of the time. Accountability frames that suggested there was a consensus an issue was wrong and in need of rectification were used 40% of the time. Almost half, 45%, of all stories, tweets, and posts employed a spectacle frame that focused on the drama and violence of the protests and the number of protesters. Additionally, all three media failed to provide history or in-depth context, with only 11% of articles, tweets, or posts explaining the reasons why protesters had taken to the streets.

When considering RQ1b, how the frames differ between *The New York Times*, Nick Kristof's Twitter feed, and Global Voices, analysis shows Global Voices (71%) was significantly more likely than the *NYT* (36%) or Twitter (19%) to use an injustice frame (see Table 1). Similarly, Global Voices was significantly more likely than the other two media to use sympathy frames (47%), legitimizing frames (76%), and accountability frames (59%). In contrast, the *NYT* (12%) was significantly more likely to employ de-legitimizing frames. Of the three media, the *NYT* (68%) also was significantly more likely to rely on a spectacle frame. Additionally, the *NYT* (27%) was more likely to include history or context about the protests.

Table 1. Chi-square of Frames Used in Egyptian Protest Coverage.

Frame employed	NYT		Nick Kristof's Twitter feed		Global Voices		Total	x^2	df	p
	n	%	n	%	N	%	208			
Injustice	24	36%	18	19%	35	71%	77	37.34	2	<.001
Sympathy	23	35%	7	8%	23	47%	53	34.62	4	<.001
Legitimizing	32	49%	19	20%	37	76%	88	65.29	6	<.001
De-legitimizing	8	12%	3	3%	1	2%	12	65.29	6	<.001
Accountability	36	55%	19	20	29	59%	84	28.07	2	<.001
Spectacle	45	68%	25	27%	24	49%	94	26.96	2	<.001
Contextual	18	27%	1	1%	4	8%	23	27.49	2	<.001

In answer to RQ2a, which asked how the protesters were portrayed, they were coded as worthy victims 32% of the time, and portrayed positively 44% of the time. However, they were blamed for the ongoing social unrest 8% of the time.

Considering RQ2b, how the portrayals of the protesters differed between the *NYT*, Nick Kristof's Twitter feed, and Global Voices, protesters were significantly more likely (X^2 = 114.74, *df* = 6, *p* < .001) to be portrayed positively by Global Voices (84%) than the *NYT* (53%) or Twitter (17%). Protesters also

were significantly more likely (X^2 = 38.91, *df* = 4, *p* < .001) to be coded as worthy victims in Global Voices (57%) than the *NYT* (44%) or Twitter (11%). However, when it came to assigning responsibility for the social unrest, the *NYT* (21%) was significantly more likely (X^2 = 56.14, *df* = 10, *p* < .001) to blame the protesters than Twitter (2%) or Global Voices (2%) (see Table 1).

In answer to RQ3a, how often citizen/non-official and official/non-citizen sources were used, analysis shows that, overall, citizen sources were used in 41% of the *NYT*, Twitter, and Global Voices stories and posts, and official sources were used in 48% of the stories and posts.

When considering RQ3b, which asked whether the *NYT* was more likely than Nick Kristof's Twitter feed and Global Voices to rely on official sources, it turns out the *NYT* (92%) is far more likely (X^2 = 85.27, *df* = 2, *p* < .001) to use official, non-citizen sources than Twitter (18%) or Global Voices (45%). In contrast, Global Voices (90%) is significantly more likely (X^2 = 94.42, *df* = 2, *p* < .001) than the *NYT* (52%) or Twitter (8%) to cite citizen sources. There was a significant difference in the number of citizen sources cited (see Table 2) between *NYT*, Twitter, and Global Voices, as well as a significant difference in the number of official sources between the *NYT* and the other two media.

Table 2. ANOVA of Publication and Sources Cited.

Source	Dependent Variable					
	Publication					
	NYT		Kristof's Twitter feed		Global Voices	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Citizen[a]	1.98	2.45	.08	.27	7.73	5.77
Official[b]	4.56	4.92	.18	.39	.63	.83

[a] = *F* = 97.88, *df* = 2, *p* < .001

[b] = *F* = 51.19, *df* = 2, *p* < .001

For RQ4, which examined how authors for the three sources were characterized, this study found that, overall, half of the coverage involved the normal journalistic stance of reporter as neutral observer. However, in nearly four in 10 instances (38%), the journalists acted as commentators or analysts for events in Egypt. Rarely did any of the sources take a more active role, serving as an actor 10% of the time, and as a catalyst for change only 1.4% of the time. *Times* reporter Kristof used Twitter to serve a different function than his parent newspaper, and both his Twitter feed and the *NYT* used different reporting techniques than Global Voices (see Table 3). The authors for nearly all of the *NYT* stories on the Egypt Facebook revolution (95%) followed the traditional journalistic style of serving as neutral observer. Kristof's Tweets allowed him to provide some perspective on the protests, as 60% involved him acting as a commentator or an analyst. Global Voices authors took on two main roles, as a commentator (42.9%) or a neutral observer (38.8%).

Table 3. Comparison of Role of Author by Publication in Egyptian Protest Coverage.

Role of author	Publication						
	NYT		Nick Kristof's Twitter feed		Global Voices		Total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	208
Observer	63	96%	22	24%	19	39%	104
Commentator/ Analyst	2	3%	56	60%	21	43%	79
Actor	1	1.5%	13	14%	8	16%	22
Catalyst for change	0	0%	2	2%	1	2%	3

$X^2 = 84.13, df = 6, p < .001$

Discussion

Using a content analysis of a constructed week's worth of *New York Times* articles, tweets from *NYT* reporter Nick Kristof's Twitter feed, and Global Voices blog posts related to the 2011 Egyptian revolution, this study demonstrates that, when it comes to the protest paradigm, the medium does matter in terms of the use of frames, portrayals of protesters, sources cited, amount of user interaction, and level of author involvement.

In general, *NYT* coverage of the 2011 Egyptian revolution adhered to the protest paradigm more than Kristof's Twitter feed or Global Voices, which supports previous studies of mainstream media (Gitlin, 1980; Hertog & McLeod, 1995; Kielbowicz & Scherer, 1986). The *NYT* employed a spectacle frame that hyped up violence and drama far more than it used injustice, sympathy, or legitimizing frames, thus indicating that the excitement, fever, and even volatility of the protests were more newsworthy, and thus important, than the underlying causes of the protests or the plight of the protesters. While the *NYT* did use accountability frames that suggested an issue was wrong and in need of change slightly more than half the time, this could perhaps be explained by the U.S. stance on democracy: After invading Iraq to overthrow a dictator, and after supporting the protesters in Tunisia, it might have been perceived as hypocritical if the *NYT* had framed stories implying that Egypt was not in need of democratic leadership. Also, accountability framing was not overwhelming, as it was used just more than half of the time, fitting within a traditional newspaper's aims of balance and fairness. Similarly, protesters were portrayed positively only about half the time, coded as worthy victims less than half the time, and actually assigned blame for the ongoing social rest a fifth of the time, suggesting the *NYT* was sticking to the notion that "objectivity" is most valuable, even when there is a consensus that the protesters were fighting for something worthwhile. Further, *The Times'* inclusion of in-depth background about the underlying causes of the protest in slightly less than a third of articles far outpaces any such context in either Twitter or Global Voices, again fulfilling the traditional journalistic norm to inform and explain.

In contrast, Global Voices' posts on the Egyptian protests clearly broke away from the protest paradigm. As a citizen journalism news source, Global Voices clearly provided an alternative view of the Egyptian protests. Global Voices was significantly less likely than the *NYT* to rely on a spectacle frame; its authors instead framed their posts to emphasize the injustices being committed, to provoke sympathy for the protesters, and to legitimize and validate their causes and actions. Further, protesters were portrayed positively almost all the time, and they were coded as worthy victims more than half the time. Only in one post were the protesters ever blamed, and that was a post written from the Israeli perspective that worried the overthrow of Mubarak would damage the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. Still, despite having local authors who could have provided historical perspective on the protests, less than one-tenth of the Global Voices posts included any kind of in-depth contextual information.

Few content analyses have examined the role of Twitter in international protests. As Twitter "tweets" are limited to 140 characters, assessing framing is more difficult. Still, even Twitter mostly escaped the confines of the protest paradigm. Kristof's Twitter feed was least likely of all three media to employ a spectacle frame, using it less than a third of the time. However, Kristof's tweets also were the least likely of the three to use an injustice frame, a sympathy frame, a legitimizing frame, or an accountability frame. Additionally, the tweets were least likely to portray protesters positively or as worthy victims. Nor did the Twitter posts include any kind of real historical explanations or context. These findings perhaps can be explained by the very nature of Twitter, a microblogging service meant to provide short news updates, leaving little room to do more than state a quick observation or opinion. As such, while the sentiment of many tweets might have been pro-democracy or anti-Mubarak, protesters, and the reasons for their actions, often were not even mentioned.

Besides framing and the way Egyptian protesters were portrayed, the sources cited once again illustrate the tendency of the *NYT* to fall back on the protest paradigm more than Twitter or Global Voices. The *NYT* overwhelmingly relied on official sources, with the number of official sources per story outnumbering citizen sources more than 2 to 1. Results, then, conform to previous studies that demonstrate mainstream media's dependence on official sources (McLeod & Detenber, 1999; McLeod, 1995; McLeod & Hertog, 1992). Global Voices, in contrast, clearly fulfilled its mission to provide an alternative viewpoint, with citizens cited more than 8 to 1 over official sources. As a blog with limitless space and the ability to pull from other citizens' blogs or Twitter feeds without having to conduct interviews, it makes sense that citizen voices would dominate in the Global Voices posts. However, Twitter, again because of its space constraints, used few sources at all, with Kristof providing his own point of view or observations, rather than fulfilling the traditional reporter role of interviewer.

Lending support to scholars' claims that the mainstream media believe their credibility resides in the ability to remain detached and objectively report the news (Best et al., 2005; Finberg & Stone, 2002), this study showed that the *NYT* clearly takes that admonition to heart, as 95% of its coverage came from authors who remained as neutral, detached observers of the events of the Egyptian revolution. In contrast, Global Voices writers took on the dual role of commentators and observers, even going so far as to become actors 16% of the time. Similarly, *Times* reporter Kristof moved away from the mainstream press model, with 60% of his Tweets involving commentary, allowing him to provide perspective on the

protests. During his 2011 South by Southwest panel on bloggers vs. journalists, media critic Jay Rosen (2011) noted that most journalists enter the profession with idealistic views of wanting to change the world—no one enters the field because they want to be detached from the news and adhere to strict standards of objectivity. Despite this, the authors of the *NYT* articles never acted as catalysts for change, and Global Voices authors and Kristof only did so 2% of the time, respectively. Results from this study suggest that one way mainstream media could regain their credibility would be to offer more commentary and perspective on the news, thus providing their audience with more insight.

Conclusions

In light of the ways that social media are being used to spark protest activity, stirring up pro-democratic movements, even revolutions, across the Arab world, this study examines how traditional and non-traditional online media covered the Egyptian protests, and what that means for credibility. This study, which offers insight into how the protests and protesters were portrayed, and what those portrayals mean for credibility, is particularly important and timely, as would-be protesters around the world are potentially influenced by what they read in the media, and future protest activity could hinge on how these protesters are framed, whether in traditional newspapers, Twitter, or blogs.

With that in mind, this study has shown that the *NYT,* in general, falls short in its protest coverage. Rather than adequately explaining why there is a problem that has driven citizens to protest, the *NYT* falls back on routine and formulaic reporting, highlighting the drama, violence, and spectacle of the protests and reducing protesters' grievances to one or two sentences about Mubarak's autocratic 30-year reign. Although many articles made it clear that the protesters were fighting for democracy—theoretically a good thing—in several cases, such as those stories about the economy, protesters were portrayed negatively, blamed for travel delays or rising oil prices. Also, despite having reporters on the ground in Cairo, and despite thousands of citizens demonstrating in Tahrir Square, seemingly readily accessible for interviews, the *NYT* still privileged official sources over citizen sources. As such, it does not appear that mainstream media's protest coverage has changed much since the U.S. sit-in movement of the 1950s and 60s. In its quest to adhere to journalistic principles of objectivity and balance, it seems the *NYT* believes there are two sides to every story. Rather than consider the possibility of one-sided, or even three- or four-sided stories wherein the Egyptian protesters demanding jobs, freedom from poverty, and democracy are in the right and deserving of support, the implication is that the *NYT* must remain neutral, which, in effect,,serves to undermine the protesters' claims and perhaps even justify the Mubarak government.

It falls, then, to new online media outlets like Global Voices—and Twitter, if it can be fit into 140 characters—to show the injustices being committed, and to give the protesters a voice that can be heard outside of Cairo. While Global Voices and Twitter provided the commentary and analysis that *The Times* did not, Global Voices and Twitter still can do more. First, both must be careful that, like the *NYT*, they do not get caught up in the drama and report just about the spectacle of the protests. Additionally, Global Voices, with its writers stationed around the world, quoting from local citizen blogs and Twitter feeds, is in a position to better contextualize and explain the history leading up to the protests than it did. Further, authors from Global Voices and Twitter, free from the burden of impartiality, have the potential to serve

more as actors, even catalysts for change, influencing others to get involved and right a wrong. They did not live up to this potential in Egypt.

With the *NYT* and other mainstream media outlets struggling to compete with blogs and social media, as well as to maintain credibility and readers, perhaps the ongoing protest movements in the Arab world will offer an opportunity for improvement. Providing more photos, videos, and opportunities for interactivity via Facebook or reader comments is a start, as the implication is that inclusion of more interactive elements might improve mainstream media's credibility. However, *The Times'* tendency to follow a protest paradigm pattern of coverage could damage credibility by focusing too much on official perspectives, and not enough on injustices, the plight of protesters, and the reasons driving their actions. This is not to say that how *The Times* portrayed protesters was directly impacting the mobilization of Egyptians, but rather, that as an influential international newspaper, its protest coverage could influence how much legitimacy government leaders assigned to protesters. This also could impact how governments respond to protesters, which, in turn, could affect levels of mobilization.

This study is limited because it only examined one representative U.S. newspaper, one online alternative outlet, and one reporter's Twitter feed, so results cannot be generalized to all mainstream, alternative, and social media sources. Further, this study only examined English-language sources, and it did not consider coverage and framing that led up to the mobilization, so future studies should examine how or whether the protest paradigm emerged in Arabic-language media and what influence, if any, it had on prompting protesters to take to the streets. Nevertheless, this study is important in light of its timeliness and the potential for media coverage to influence other future Arab pro-democracy movements, especially as such uprisings continue to move across the region. Future research should examine whether the findings regarding the protest paradigm for Egyptian coverage hold up in Tunisia and other Arab countries with ongoing protest activity. Other research could also examine how much media coverage of the Tunisian and Egyptian protests influenced protests in other countries. Content analysis could be coupled with interviews with reporters to get a deeper understanding of how and why certain media covered the protests like they did.

While many studies have considered the protest paradigm in mainstream media, scholarly research, until now, has mostly ignored how protests are covered in online media. As such, this study breaks new ground by exploring protest coverage in Global Voices and Twitter. This study is important for showing that, despite competition from blogs and social media, when it came to coverage of the Egyptian protests, the *NYT* still fell back on routine patterns that potentially marginalize and undermine protesters. *NYT* reporter Nick Kristof used Twitter to provide more perspective by taking on a commentator/analyst role, but he was still hampered in his portrayals and explanations by the nature of Twitter and its 140-character limit. In contrast, the online citizen journalism site Global Voices stepped up, breaking mostly free of the protest paradigm to offer not just an alternative space for protesters' voices and perspectives, but also a participatory, interactive approach to news coverage that could prompt greater credibility among readers. As such, as more countries are motivated to protest and revolt, it could mean an opportunity for citizen journalism to shine, and one more nail in the coffin for traditional media.

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