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## **The Usage of Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera News Channels of Twitter to Disseminate Breakdown News**

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## **The Usage of Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera News Channels of Twitter to Disseminate Breakdown News**

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### **Abstract**

Social media platforms such as Twitter have become an important tool for the field of journalism. Twitter plays a major role in both the newsroom and the selection of information process. This study aims to investigate the type of content used in Twitter feeds, as well as the type of news on Twitter feeds in breaking news from both Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera news channels. Guided by gatekeeping theory and networking gatekeeping perspective, this study explored the relationship between the type of news and retweeting and the influence of the interaction between editors and audience on the presented type of news to the audience in the Middle East. The study used a quantitative content analysis to analyze 500 tweets collected from both Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera, 250 tweets from each account, from the period of February 1<sup>st</sup> to February 28<sup>th</sup> of 2019. The results indicated that Al-Jazeera posted tweets about political news more than Al-Arabiya and both Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera rely on Twitter to disseminate human interest, entertainment news more than any other type of news. Also, the results indicated that there is a strong correlation between the type of news and the number of retweets. Political news gets the greatest number of retweets and more replies than other type of news.

### **Introduction:**

Social media has become a significant source for journalists. Platforms such as Twitter play a vital role in the process of gathering information, and have become a major part of many newsrooms (Moon & Hadley, 2014). Twitter facilitates the immediate dissemination of news from official or unofficial sources to over a variety of system and devices (Hermida, 2010). Also, this social platform is significant because it functions as a sort of awareness system, which helps journalists to be aware of current events (Hamdy & Gomaa 2012; Lim 2012).

There is a lack of understating toward how the most famous news channels in the Middle East, Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera, are using Twitter as a platform to disseminate breaking news using links, images, content sharing and Hashtags. This study investigated the type of news used in Twitter feeds, as well as the type of content on Twitter feeds from both Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera news channels. By conducting a quantitative content analysis, the study explored

which types of news are most related to retweeting and explored whether or not there is a relationship between the types of news and the audience's replies to the news as a sort of interaction based on gatekeeping theory and network gatekeeping perspective.

### **Literature Review:**

Twitter has grown immensely due to its role in facilitating communication (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2011). Notably, journalism is one of the fields which has integrated Twitter greatly in its activities. In such a way, the media industry has contributed greatly to the growth and widespread use of Twitter. Media stakeholders use it for relaying important information to the public, as well as receiving feedback from their audience. Since its conception, Twitter has revolutionized the way people receive news as well as how emerging information is disseminated to the public.

Essentially, the digitization of the news industries has elicited several changes in the business. For instance, it has increased competitiveness in the information sector, which in turn has forced media houses to adapt and keep up with emerging technology (Chikweche & Fletcher, 2014). Additionally, Twitter and other social media applications, such as Facebook, have improved the level of news transparency, because they have allowed live reporting of news. Moreover, the control media houses have had on news in the past has been reduced with a multiplicity of social websites, as news can be obtained from numerous channels or even shared amongst many people (Malhotra, 2016; Hahn, Ryu, & Park, 2015). Inherently, this social media wave of change is likely to continue, and journalism houses will have to adapt to the new trends in order to remain relevant; this can be achieved via the use of Twitter. Overall, Twitter facilitates the effective sharing of breaking news online using links, images, and content sharing.

### **Twitter as a source for reporting:**

News organizations access Twitter to disseminate and find newsworthy information at the same time (Gleason, 2010). According to (Ahmad 2010), Twitter covers the main source of breaking news and eyewitness accounts. In the same time, this popular microblogging service provides a convenient means of monitoring and organizing Tweets comprising of control lists and search filters that allow you to screen out noise (Ahmad, 2010). Previous studies (Gleason, 2010; Broersam & Graham, 2013; Moon & Hadley, 2014) have conducted content analysis to understand how Twitter has been used in then news coverage. It was revealed that Twitter facilitates a huge dissemination of information and it has become a useful tool for breaking news (Moon & Hadley, 2014). Previous studies (Ahmed, 2010; Broersam & Graham, 2013; Moon & Hadley, 2014) have indicated that Twitter is a useful and sometimes a unique tool, not only because it allows journalists to

gather and verify information, but it also allows journalists to cover unpredictable events and cases that may happen such as disasters, crimes or political scandals.

Media organizations consider Twitter as a crucial tool for covering important and exciting news such as art, sports, and the environment, and it is regarded as a significant source of information for newspapers and media outlets. Twitter is an essential tool to tell stories, ideas, and facts, and it plays a significant role in online news. Massive changes in technology has an impact on journalism across traditional media organizations (Moon & Hadely, 2014). Maier (2010), has found the internet has impacted journalists in the way they check information. Journalists use the internet mainly to be aware of other news or to find new story ideas to write about. The different usage of the internet in the newsroom, based on previous studies, has become a significant tool for the information gathering process (Maier, 2010).

News organizations are currently using social media for news outreach. Regarding the use of Twitter, questions arise on how often news organizations tweet and the kind of news they give to their audience (Weston-Williams, 2016). Apart from using Twitter for reporting, they gather important information from their followers. Indeed, news organizations use the social media platform as an added channel to convey their material.

According to Masip et al. (2015), media houses have varying Twitter feeds and they use different channels. For instance, *The Washington Post* is very active on Twitter as compared to news outlets such as *The Daily Caller* (Masip et al., 2015). In addition, the activity level for various outlets is different. For example, some news outlets can have about 100 Twitter feed while others will have less than 10. This indicates that some news organizations are yet to embrace the use of Twitter.

Weston-Williams (2016) asserts that Twitter activity for all news organizations is almost similar. Generally, most of the postings tend to promote the company's work. In the tweets, members are regularly referred to the organization's website to get more details. As a result, over 90% of the postings give links that will lead the follower to the company's own website (Herrera-Damas & Hermida, 2014). Therefore, posts on Twitter by news organizations are not detailed.

It is also important to note that news organizations rarely use Twitter to report news that originated from other news organizations. Furthermore, they do not use the platform to gather firsthand information from their followers/readers (Soo Jung & Hadley, 2014). Moreover, they hardly retweet posts from other organizations because they want to maintain originality.

Evidently, news agenda on Twitter by news organizations is similar to that of their mainstream platform. Greer & Ferguson (2011) argue that 75% of the top stories on Twitter match the information in the legacy outlets. The implication here is that what news organizations post on Twitter is given

priority in the legacy outlets. Additionally, most of the tweets by various organizations are almost similar but they are conveyed differently.

Most individual reporters do not use Twitter to report information that originated from news organizations that they do not work for. Consequently, their posts are not unique in any way, rather they match the posts of their news organizations (Soo Jung & Hadley, 2014). A few journalists will, however, post news whose origin is outside their entities and in some instances, they report their own content.

Among the main ways that journalists and media organizations use Twitter to cover breaking news is the use of hyperlinks/links that connect users to different news articles on the Internet. Essentially, media houses place a summarized version or a headline of their latest stories on Twitter and link the tweets using RSS to their websites or blogs (Archambault et al., 2013). In principle, writing the same content repeatedly on different social media is strenuous and creates a form of redundancy. In such a way, journalists and media outlets can share information much faster to the public effortlessly by using hyperlinks (Brickner, 2016). Besides, Twitter links are compatible with various social media such as websites, blogs, as well as other social media applications such as Facebook, which makes them easy to use.

Images are efficient tools of communication; one glance at an image can easily communicate a lot of information. Live images from incidents such as riots, accidents, or rallies are easier and faster to understand compared to actual words. Mostly, the images that are used contain a short caption illustrating the activity or event of interest. When on social media, one uses the eyes as the primary sense; in such a manner, posting news on social media, such as Twitter, followed by a picture is ten times more likely to receive engagement compared to using just words (Callison & Hermida, 2015). Most journalists and news outlets utilize the power of images while communicating breaking news (Sudulich, Wall, & Baccini, 2015). Images are a way of grabbing the audience's attention and engaging their interaction towards a specific piece of news.

Fundamentally, Twitter allows only a limited number of characters per post, making it difficult to express complex ideas and messages in writing. Images help to express such complex messages without having to take too much space. Besides, since most people are visual learners, they would rather view an image than read a long, stressful sentence (Archambault et al., 2013). Additionally, images have the potential to get an emotional response from viewers. In essence, strong responses from the audience indicate the relevant information was communicated (Abeza & O'Reilly, 2014).

Sharing is an effective means of fast communication because its fast forwards the spread of information. Exchanging information makes it available to many people within a short period. Breaking news shared with friends and family can be shared further resulting to a means through which data can flow

to the desired audience. Numerous social media applications can be used together effectively to share mainstream media content. Sharing content is important as it ensures that necessary information reaches the desired parties. For example, information about an unpredicted earthquake can be of great importance to the residents of the affected area. Without such statistics, unaware persons can get caught in dangerous situations such as floods or storms. Twitter is primarily used for information sharing rather than social networking; therefore, Twitter is considered as an excellent channel for sharing all forms of content, especially media content (Chaudhry, 2011).

Hashtags, which are phrases that start with the hash symbol, are a great way to navigate through the evolving world of social media, especially for media outlets. Inherently, hashtags are easy to create and use, as well as a unique way to connect to large audiences. Notably, Twitter was the first social media network to use hashtags, which sets it apart from other sites. When clicked, hashtags lead users to a list of other tweets that contain the same phrase. In such a manner, media outlets can use such hashtags to engage a larger audience (Brickner, 2016). Fundamentally, the use of hashtags by journalists and media outlets to convey breaking news is important, as it helps the audience to join and contribute to trending conversations. Twitter, when used appropriately can display a list of trending hashtags and in turn help the audience to get updated on the most recent news. Overall, hashtags help increase the visibility of a potential audience by allowing the public to join high traffic discussions (Billings, Moscovitz, Rae, & Brown-Devlin, 2015). In addition, they allow individuals to know more about trending topics.

By creating an original hashtag, journalists can create an organized repository showcasing information that any person can access with a click of the hashtag. Nevertheless, hashtags must be simple and concise, leaving users enough space to share their thoughts and ideas (Jones, 2014). By definition, a simple hashtag is one that is easy to understand and use. Effectively, hashtags can be used to access the pervasiveness of a certain news item; the more trending the hashtag, the more people have seen the breaking news (Jones, 2014). In principle, the most trending news items have hashtags that gain a high number of views within a short period. Inherently, hashtags are necessary when introducing new pieces of information or news as most people are always eager to receive new information (Chaudhry, 2011). In such a manner, using unique hashtags and retweet helps to encourage people to research and find emerging information and exchanging them with others.

As a Twitter convention, Boyd et al. (2010) identified retweeting as a key mechanism for exchanging information on Twitter. Those researchers have understood retweeting as a means of participating in information diffusion. Kwak et al. (2010), identified that if a user retweeted once, his retweet would be delivered to an average of 1000 users, regardless of how many followers the user has. This clarifies how retweeting functions as a means for diffusion and

participation. Recuero et al. (2011), explained Twitter users utilize the function of retweeting to express their agreement, support, and to initiate conversations as well as exchange information. Previous studies on retweet motivation have suggested the retweet function has a strong effect on not only information exchanges, but also relations among users on Twitter.

### **Gatekeeping theory:**

The concept of gatekeeping refers to “the process by which countless occurrences and ideas reduced to the few messages we are offered in our news media” (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p.75). Basically, gatekeeping relies upon news editors selecting what sort of elements are distributed and what remain unpublished. Simply, the gate is guarded by the gatekeepers, who could make choices about what information can go through social networks. Gatekeeping theory is the most appropriate theory to study the research topic as it allows the study to understand which information reporters the chosen media organizations disseminate.

Gatekeeping has been applied in the field of journalism to look specifically into the selection of information process by news editors. Also, it has been applied to understand what content journalists or editors allow to be published (Barzilai-Nahon, 2009). Gatekeeping theory has been used to explore the factors that influence the selection of information process.

Through time, new technology has changed the basic concepts of gatekeeping because of the intentional and unintentional manipulation of information (Barzilai-Nahon, 2009). Barzilai-Nahon (2008), proposes a new conceptual frame work for gatekeeping theory. Two basic assumptions of the networked gatekeeping theory that were overlooked in traditional gatekeeping theory include: (1) gatekeeping is more than mere selection of information and it extends to manipulation and tempering with the information, and (2) gatekeeping can be describe as the phenomenon between the gatekeeper and the news that has been “gated” (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). Networked gatekeeping has been employed to describe multiple levels of relationships and symmetries between variant news actors who hold diverse levels of power and positions. The new technology, economic and organizational concerns are important variables impacting the selection of information process. The news industries have embraced Twitter as a social platform, which helps journalists to change their routines in gathering information and forced them to rely more on Twitter for gathering news, facts checking, contacting sourcing and gaining story ideas (Arketi Group, 2011; Pavlik, 2000).

Suh B, Hong L, Pirolli P et al. (2010) have considered Twitter as a significant environment for the dissemination of the breaking news directly from the sources. Individuals on Twitter can follow other users and exchange

messages. Also, those previous studies investigated the relationship between Twitter connectivity and message diffusion. Suh et al. (2010), indicated there is a strong connection between the number of followers and the retweet rate. The more followers a Twitter user has, the more its tweets are retweeted. Jürgens et al. (2011) found there is a strong relationship between users with a higher number of followers or a high number of messages exchanged have a strong influence on the information passed on Twitter.

Based on provided information above, retweeting was considered a means of participating, and this feature on Twitter along with the feature of replying, made it possible for the users to exchange information with journalists as well as to have conversations with them. This study is considering the ability to retweet and reply as influencer tools on the field of journalism, especially on the information selection process. The networking gatekeeping concept is compatible with the idea that retweeting and replying influence the editors. In other words, these features on Twitter force gatekeepers and editors to provide only the content that attracts their audience and increases their followers.

The perspectives of the networked gatekeeping will guide the study as a framework to explore the relationship between the type of news and retweeting, and the relationship between the type of news and the replies to those tweets, which are considered as a sort of interaction between users. This interaction could possibly influence the type of news editors provide to their audience on Twitter, as well as influence the style of presenting those tweets. For example, tweets could be presented with images, links, text or a combination in an attempt to consistently attract larger audiences.

Previous studies (Gleason, 2010; Broersam & Graham, 2013; Moon & Hadley, 2014), found that the American, Dutch and British news organizations use Twitter constantly as awareness system to be up-to-date with what is happening, and as a tool to disseminate political news more than any other type of news. Based on the previous studies and what those studies have revealed, the main goal of this study is to investigate how Al- Jazeera and Al-Arabiya are using Twitter as a platform to disseminate news using links, images and content sharing.

### **Research questions:**

RQ1: What type of news (sports, politics, human interests, technology, war, economy and international news) do news editors release on Al Jazeera and Al-Arabiya's Twitter accounts?

RQ2: What type of content (tweets with images, links, text, Hashtags and combined content) do news editors release on Al Jazeera and Al-Arabiya's Twitter accounts?

RQ3: Do particular types of stories posted receive the greatest number of retweets?

RQ4: Is there a relationship between the type of news that is posted by Al Jazeera and Al-Arabiya on their Twitter accounts and the response from the site's followers?

### **Hypotheses:**

H1: News editors on Al Jazeera news channels use Twitter accounts to release political news more than other types of news.

H2: News editors on Al –Arabiya news channels use Twitter accounts to release political news more than other types of news.

These research questions and hypotheses seek to explore the type of news released in the Twitter account of those media outlets as well as explore the use of different content in the posted tweets like using tweets with images, links and videos and Hashtag. Also, these questions aims to explore if the type of news is related to retweeting. Furthermore, the last question in this study is linked to the networked gatekeeping, which refers to the impact of the interaction between editors and the users on the provided content to the audience, so this question seeks to explore the relationship between the type on news and reply. Replying tweets will be consider as a form of interaction among users that would influence the decision about the type of news that editors choose to present to their audience, so they can consistently attract their followers.

### **Methodology:**

This study focused on the tweets of Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya news organizations to explore how these news outlets use Twitter to disseminate specific types of news. Also, this research explored the correlation between particular types of news and the audience response through retweets or replies. The researcher selected a sample of two news organizations based on their popularity. They both have more than 25 million followers and they are active on their Twitter accounts as they tweet more than 45 times per day.

A content analysis was conducted to analyze a total number of 500 tweets, 250 tweets collected from both Twitter accounts. Those tweets were collected from February 1st to February 28th of 2019.

Content analysis is a method for summarizing different types of content by counting various aspects of the content. Additionally, this method enables the researcher to include large amounts of textual information and systematically identify its properties. Content analysis allowed the researcher to explore what is being given to the audience, and measure the occurrence in media content. The content helped the researcher to analyze and understand the different types of content that was presented to the audience through Al Jazeera and Al-Arabiya's Twitter accounts. The content analysis method provides extremely significant benefits including the devoid of interruptions in the



process of gathering the data. This method helped the researcher to explore the interaction between the journalists and the audience on Twitter, and explore the content of news channels such as Al Jazeera and Al-Arabiya.

### **Coding Scheme and time line:**

The researcher measured the difference between the type of news and the type of content, as well as explored the correlation between the type of news and the amount of retweeting of the chosen media outlets' tweets. The researcher divided the type of news into the following categories: political news, sports news, religious news, technology, crime, economy, weather, human-interest, and international news. For the type of the content in the tweets, the researcher divided the type of content that is posted by Al- Arabiya and Al-Jazeera into five categories; tweets with images, links, text, videos, Hashtags and combined content. Regarding the correlation between the type of news and retweeting, the researcher coded the number of retweets for each type of news to explore if the type of news is related to retweeting. To explore the correlation between the type of news and the audience response, researcher coded the number of replies toward the type of news in the news channels' tweets. The researcher coded the tweets based on the categories above in order to collect a sample of 500 tweets from the Twitter accounts of Al- Arabiya and Al-Jazeera, in a time period of four weeks started from February 1st to February 28th of 2019.

### **Results:**

The research focused on the tweets of Al- Arabiya and Al-Jazeera to explore how they use Twitter. The results revealed that the most common type of news released was news that related to human interest, followed by entertainment news and political news with a combined proportion of 72%. News related to war, crime, technology, health, business, and weather had a combined proportion of 28%.

Table (1)  
*Reporting the overview of the Data from Frequencies for the type of news*

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>Al-Arabiya</b>	<b>Al Jazeera</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Human Interest</b>	218	222	440	88.0
<b>Entertainment</b>	134	114	248	49.6
<b>Politics</b>	74	109	183	36.6
<b>War</b>	58	45	103	20.6
<b>Crime</b>	33	47	80	16.0
<b>International</b>	40	7	47	9.4
<b>Business</b>	22	24	46	9.2
<b>Health</b>	12	6	18	3.6
<b>Technology</b>	9	8	17	3.4
<b>Religion</b>	5	7	12	2.4

The first hypothesis suggested that news editors on Al Jazeera news channels use Twitter accounts to release political news more than other types of news. The second hypothesis stated that news editors on Al-Arabiya news channels use Twitter accounts to release political news more than other types of news. Based on the provided numbers in Table 1, these hypotheses were not supported. News related to human interests were cited with total of 440 tweets and news related to entertainment were cited with total of 248 tweets. However, political news which it came in third place with a total of 183 tweets was cited more than any other type of news like news related to war, crime, weather or technology.

The first research question focused on determining the type of news that news editors released on Al Jazeera and Al-Arabiya's Twitter accounts. The frequencies show that a total of 440 tweets were about news related to human interests. There were 248 tweets linked to entertainment. The table shows that Al Jazeera tweeted 109 about political news, where AL Arabiya tweeted 74 tweets about political news to get a total of 183 tweet about politics. Also, the table shows that AL Arabiya posted 40 tweets about international news Al Jazeera posted only 7 tweets. Tweets that related to war had a total of 103, and news about crime got a total of 80 tweets. Business news had a total of 46 tweets. Tweets related to news about health, technology, religion and weather got less than 50 tweets. The

Table (2)  
*Reporting the overview of the Data from Frequencies for the type of content*

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>Al-Arabiya</b>	<b>Al-Jazeera</b>	<b>total</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>
<b>with Tweet Text</b>	236	249	485	97.0
<b>Tweet With Hashtag</b>	240	187	427	85.4
<b>Tweet with an image</b>	231	96	327	65.4
<b>Tweet with link</b>	224	51	275	55.0
<b>Tweet with video</b>	36	112	148	29.6

The second research question asked the most common type of content that released with tweets. This research question explored how often news editors tweet with text, images, links, hashtags and videos. Table 2 shows the frequency of the type of content that was released by the news editors on Al Jazeera and Al-Arabiya's Twitter accounts. Both news channels released 485 tweets with text. Tweets with hashtags came in second place with a total of 427

tweets. As the table shows, AL Arabiya posted 231 tweets with images where Al Jazeera posted only 96 tweets with images .Another significant information is that AL Arabiya posted 224 tweets with links where Al Jazeera posted less with 51 tweets with link. Also, Al Jazeera posted tweets with videos more than AL Arabiya with a total of 112 tweets.

### **Correlation:**

In order to explore the relation between the variables in the third and fourth research questions, the researcher chose to conduct a correlation test to explore the relationship between the type of news and the number of retweets, and the relationship between the type of news and the number of replies to a particular type of news. The third research question asked if do particular types of stories posted receive the greatest number of retweets., The correlation test showed that there was a positive correlation between the political news and the number of retweets,  $(500) = 0.132, p < .003$ . This correlation revealed that the type of news influences the number of retweets, and political news gets the greatest number of retweets by the followers.

The last research question asked if there is a relationship between the type of news that is posted by Al Jazeera and Al-Arabiya on their Twitter accounts and the response from the site's followers. This fourth question focused on investigating the relationship between the type of news posted on Al Jazeera and Al-Arabiya's Twitter accounts and the number of replies from the accounts' followers. The correlation test shows that there was a positive correlation between these variables,  $(500) = 0.151, p < .001$ . This correlation revealed that political news gets more replies than any other type of news

### **Discussion and Conclusion:**

Twitter has become a significant tool for the field of journalism as it helps to gather information and keep the journalists aware of what is happening at the same time. Twitter works as a tool for disseminating breaking news. This study aims to investigate the type of content used in Twitter feeds, as well as the type of news on Twitter feeds in breaking news from both Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera news channels

The conducted analysis generated interesting findings. The results showed that Al- Jazeera and Al-Arabiya relied on Twitter to disseminate human interest and entertainment news more than any other type of news like politics, sport, fashion, health and technology. The results indicated that Al-Jazeera posted tweets about political news more than Al-Arabiya. The results also indicated that Al-Arabiya posted tweets about international news more than Al-Jazeera.

The study revealed that short text is the common content since this feature is what makes Twitter unique compared to other social media platforms. Also, tweets with hashtags and images came up with more than 450 tweets. However, the results show that Al-Arabiya posted tweets with Hashtag, link and images more than Al-Jazeera. The results show that Al-Jazeera posted news with videos more than Al-Arabiya.

The third and fourth research questions aimed to explore the correlation between the type of news and the number of retweets and replies for a particular type of news. This study discovered that there was a significant relationship between the political news and number of retweets. Interestingly, the results indicated that there was a significant correlation between political news and the number of replies to the tweets. Therefore, individuals in the Middle East comment on these political news or events to express their views.

Despite the several interesting findings, the study is not free of the limitations. The sample size was small compared with previous studies' number of collected tweets. The researcher suggests for future studies to expand the sample and choose more news organizations that popular and active on Twitter like CNN and BBC news channels in order to get more significant results regarding who releases specific types of news. In addition, expanding the sample of tweets would play a significant role in exploring what type of news do followers like to retweet or response to.

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