The Role of Media in United Arab Emirates Public Policy Making

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Abstract

This Paper connects theories of political communication, public relations and international relations to conceptualize a new model of Public Policy, where boundaries between distinct types of actors are drawn. It proposes an ecological model and a competition model of Public Policy. Based on these conceptual models, it empirically supports the academic rationalization of governmental interference in foreign media effects among its domestic citizens: Using a quota sample of 560 survey respondent from United Arab Emirates, the empirical part of the paper illustrated: 1. Governmental control on foreign media accessibility has significant effects on perceived media credibility and thus dependency on it; 2. Availability of domestic media resource negatively impacts dependency on foreign media; and 3. Foreign media and domestic media, as currently conceptualized, have distinct effects on the psychological activeness of UAE citizen to speak out against social issues.

Keywords: Public Policy, Media, United Arab Emirates, Post hoc analysis.

Introduction

The advancement of communication technologies has enabled governments to interact with people in other countries. For either international collaboration or international competition, governments became interested in communicating with foreign people because they want to build better national image, facilitate international trade, increase the clarity of their foreign policy; sometimes, governments communicate with foreign activist groups to destabilize an administration, or reduce rival countries' bargaining power in negotiation. With examples of international broadcasting plans and Public Policy campaigns preceding this dissertation, it examines and compares different channels of activating foreign publics through international media (Keown, 2018). It focuses on the importance of people's perception of the credibility of the communication channel and information source. Moreover, it studies how governmental media influence its people preemptively to reduce the effect of foreign Public Policy. This means that governments are looking forward to the establishment of an academic rationalization of the defensive domestic extension of Public Policy (Guaaybess, 2013).

In public relations theory, people who have a direct or indirect association with the organization is called "publics", and there are four types of them: non-publics, latent publics, aware publics and active publics. Organizations around the world try to harmonize their surrounding environment by understanding, communicating and influencing the public sometimes this includes activating latent publics to generate debate, or deactivating publics for crisis management (Hamdy, & Gomaa, 2012).

Governments are essentially organizations, and as they want to do the same thing with its people and foreign publics, scholars and practitioners call this particular type of public relations practice "Public Policy". Similarly, an important function of the practice of Public Policy is turning foreign publics from latent publics into active publics. Research shows that the Arab Spring movement is an example of outside management of public awareness about "Democracy", the Color Revolution among former Soviet states can also be attributed to active engagement of foreign Public Policy activities (Badran, Turk, & Walters, 2003).

This paper studies how such successful case could be replicated by starting with the right step: researching and understanding the target publics. In general, this paper answered these questions:

"What is the most effective information channel to activate foreign publics?"
"How important is the credibility of these channels in activating foreign publics?"

Selective Accessibility Control and Media Credibility

This section adds more discussion to the rationale of this relationship in a competitive environment for media credibility, and especially in the context of UAE media landscape as a subject of Public Policy. The empirical evidence provided by these studies found that accessibility to a source often works in the same direction with credibility of the source as independent variables (Keown, 2018; Howard, Agarwal, & Hussain, 2011; AlAnazi, & Chatfield, 2012). This finding provides indirect support to the hypothesis that accessibility to domestic media could positively influence perceived credibility of domestic media (and the same for foreign media). Given such data, this study is also interested in exploring whether accessibility to foreign media could influence credibility of foreign media. Therefore, this link has the following set of hypotheses:

H1a: For foreign media, perceived media accessibility positively leads to perceived media credibility

H1b: For domestic media, perceived media accessibility positively leads to perceived media credibility

Previously studies seem to be not interested in how their unique variances affect each other, if their covariance is controlled for (variances caused by a spurious social cognition variable like *trust in all media*, *trust in all government*). Because domestic media is more ubiquitous than foreign media in UAE, it is possible that if a person has access to foreign media, he/she is already unsatisfied with the credibility of domestic media, or is seeking alternative points of view; otherwise he/she would not be motivated to find access to foreign media content (Al-Anazi, & Chatfield, 2012). On the other hand, if we assume that UAE domestic media do not deliberately defame or attack foreign media, then it will be hard to argue that if a UAE citizen has high trust in domestic media, he/she will have low trust in foreign media. Thus, the following hypotheses proposed:

H2: Perception of foreign media credibility will negatively influence perception of domestic media credibility

Media Credibility and Media Dependency

Researchers have studied the relationship between media use and media credibility. Golan and Kiousis (2010) explored the different effects of domestic and foreign media credibility on citizens' assessment of democracy in the Arabic world. They argued that there is a strong relationship between media credibility and people's cognitive (Salwen & Matera, 1992; Ayish, 2005) and affective (Wanta, Golan, & Lee, 2004) evaluation of foreign nations. In their study, their conceptualization and measurement of the media credibility variable was very similar, or even identical, to a conceptualization of media reliance or media

dependency (Hamdy, & Gomaa, 2012). This shows that conceptually media credibility and media dependency are highly related.

Conceptually, UAE citizens' reliance on foreign and domestic media could be conceptualized in media system dependency terms (Guaaybess, 2013): similar to credibility, it is expected that foreign media dependency would be positively related to domestic media dependency, because they are different but overlapping components of an overarching "media system dependency" (Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, 1985). Because they are still conceptually different, foreign media dependency would be explained more by foreign media credibility, and domestic media would be explained more by domestic media credibility. Here, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3a: Perception of foreign media credibility will negatively influence dependency on foreign media for understanding and orientation

H3b: Perception of domestic media credibility will negatively influence dependency on domestic media for understanding and orientation.

Psychological Antecedent of Communicative Behavior

Some may wonder why the current empirical examination only chose the three antecedents in the STOPS model (namely *problem recognition, constraint recognition, involvement recognition*), while there are many other possible psychometric variables to look at in political communication literature. For example, political efficacy (Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Pinkleton, Austin, & Fortman, 1998), political trust (Camaj, 2014; Al-Jenaibi, 2014), and third-person-effect (Davison, 1983; R. Wei & V, 2015) are associated with citizens' political behavior or behavioral intentions, of voting, protesting, and communicating.

The literatures on foreign media's influence on domestic publics' cognition, attitude and behavior about certain issue of problem have given this study abundant support. For example, (Snyder, Roser, & Chaffee, 1991) found that access and reliance on foreign media are significant promoters behind people's intention to emigrate, (Golan & Kiousis, 2010) found that credibility of international media promotes suppresses democratic values among the observed Arabic population.

The positive relationship between foreign media use and increase of materialist thoughts was also examined (Zhu & He, 2002). Many other studies have showed similar results supporting the point that a person's relationship with foreign media significantly increased his/her awareness about the issue, and in certain cases, lead to behaviors to change the status quo.

H4a: Foreign media dependency positively influences problem recognition
H4b: Domestic media dependency positively influences problem recognition
H5a: Foreign media dependency positively influences involvement recognition
H5b: Domestic media dependency positively influences involvement recognition
H6a: Foreign media dependency negatively influences constraint recognition.
H6b: Domestic media dependency negatively influences constraint recognition.

Methodology

If there is theoretical support to supplement the original model with extra links, these links will be added to the model and the model will be reevaluated in the post hoc analysis. For the initial test, the possible loop between the two types of dependencies is not allowed to maintain the simplicity of the model. After all, theoretical discussion about competition between different types of system dependencies goes beyond the scope of this paper. In sum, the model shown in the following figure 1 will be tested.

Note: AF = Accessibility of Foreign Media; AD = Accessibility of Domestic Media
CF = Credibility of Foreign Media; CD = Credibility of Domestic Media
DF = Dependency on Foreign Media for Understanding and Orientation
DD = Dependency on Domestic Media for Understanding and Orientation
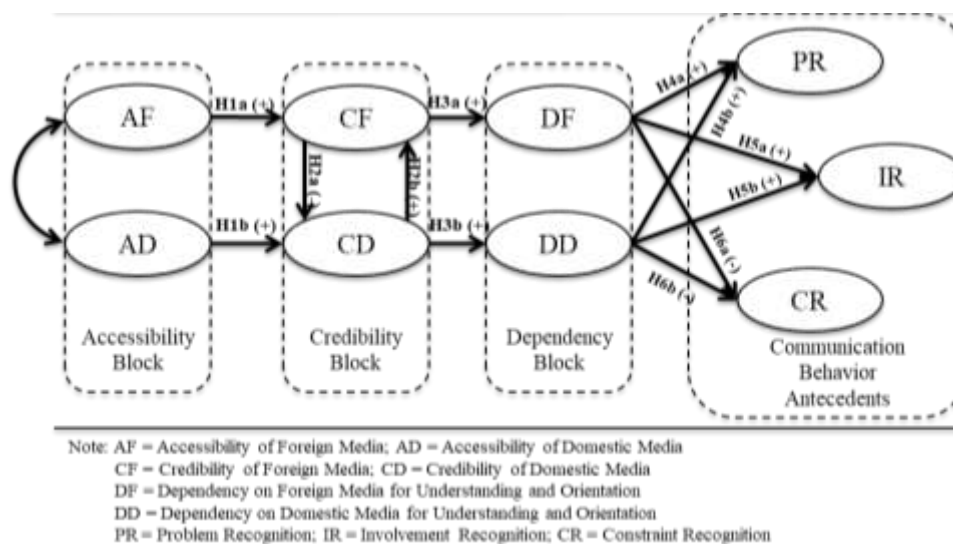PR = Problem Recognition; IR = Involvement Recognition; CR = Constraint Recognition

Figure 1: Theoretical Model

First of all, as can be seen in figure 1, the models were theoretically conceptualized as an influence chain between blocks of variables: that is, theoretically, a variable in the same block tends to be spurred by a common latent variable. For example, numerous studies found that dependencies on different types of media are positively correlated. This shows the possibility that either foreign media dependency or domestic media dependency is a part of people's general dependency on all media.

This means that although the model expects them to be different constructs, their error terms (the variance that cannot be explained by distinguishing foreign from domestic) are very likely to be spurred by a common latent variable of general media dependency, which is not observed by the indicators in our questionnaire. As for the variables in the communicative behavior antecedent block previous study on the STOPS model have predominantly treated these as exogenous variables, and thus they are theoretically hypothesized as covarying. Considering that they usually covary and constitutes to a common latent factor called situational motivation in previous models, in the current study their error terms will be proposed as covarying.

The questionnaire includes survey questions to represent the operationalized variables. This questionnaire was created in English, and was translated into Arabic language. The translation process was done by the author, who worked as a professionally trained translator and interpreter. After translation, the translated questionnaire was examined by two native Arabic teachers who currently reside in UAE to check for any grammatical error or inappropriate use of words and phrases.

Sample Size

The research company collected a total of 560 responses among users of facebook.com in UAE group, the survey was provided to Facebook UAE users on a first-come-first-get basis for a cash reward no greater than 5 Dirham (about 1.4 US dollars). The sampling frame is 165,000 registered users of facebook.com at UAE group.

Demographics

Gender-wise, 52.4% of the sample is female, slightly more than male respondents. It has a mean age of 30.3 with a standard deviation of 7.2 (range being 19 to 63). Regarding highest education levels, 2.1% hold middle school diploma, 9.1% hold high school diploma, 30.9% hold a 2-year college degree, 50.9% hold a

bachelor degree and 7.0% hold a master degree or above. The date of responding the questionnaire of each participant (M = 101.1, SD = 53.3). Table 1 shows the details of the above-mentioned demographic variables. To be comparable with the national population census, some of the categories were recorded in our data.

Table 1: Comparison of Demographics

	N	%	N	%	p value
Gender					
Male	272	48%	68,685	51%	
Female	300	52%	65,287	49%	
Age					
15-19	12	2%	76,215	8%	
20-24	106	19%	99,704	10%	0.06
25-29	176	31%	128,614	13%	0.00
30-34	155	27%	104,886	10%	0.00
35-39	70	12%	92,998	9%	
40-44	22	4%	114,560	11%	
45-49	24	4%	124,891	12%	
50-54	3	1%	104,364	10%	0.05
55-59	2	0%	80,581	8%	
Education					
Illiterate	0	0%	5,466	4%	N/A***
Primary School	0	0%	35,876	29%	N/A
Middle School	12	2%	51,966	42%	0.00
High School	229	40%	18,799	15%	0.00
Bachelor and above	331	58%	11,964	10%	0.00
Residence					
City	448	78%	66,558	50%	0.00
Rural	124	22%	67,415	50%	0.00

First the loadings of each indicator on its latent variable were examined to make sure there were no extremely low loadings, and then according to theory, some errors were correlated with their counterparts among indicators of another latent variable. For example, error terms of media affinity and believability, and foreign and domestic media accessibility were correlated. Some other indicators were dropped from a factor because it shared much variance with a series of other variables. After this process, the CFA model has a CFI = .935, RMSEA = .048, PCLOSE = .797 and SRMR = .047. All indicators showing that the model has a good fit, the proposed model fits the estimated model in terms of major correlations inherent in the dataset.

Validity and Reliability Tests

Using the above-mentioned CFA model, the correlation matrix of all the latent variables in the model was produced, with Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Maximum Shared Variance (MSV) and Average Shared Variance (ASV) calculated. Two discriminant validity issues emerged for problem recognition's discriminant validity against involvement recognition. Actually, as Kim (2010) and Kim and Grunig (2011) explained when they developed the cognition measurement, the discriminant validity among the three recognition variables may vary depending on the actual topic of the "problem". Given that the problem presented to the respondents was environment pollution, it is reasonable to assume that most citizens, as long as they need to breathe, would feel involved with the problem if they

think it is a problem. This means that problem recognition and involvement recognition are likely to cover in the current context.

Table 2: Check for Reliability, Discriminant Validity and Convergent Validity

Factor	Code	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR	A*	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Credibility of Foreign Media	A		0.801	0.527	0.908	**0.895**								
Dependency on Foreign Media	B		0.614	0.527	0.866	0.726	**0.783**							
Dependency on Domestic Media	C		0.581	0.349	0.883	0.360	0.560	**0.762**						
Accessibility of Foreign Media	D		0.734	0.152	0.894	0.135	-0.059	0.201	**0.857**					
Accessibility of Domestic Media	E		0.646	0.283	0.848	0.532	0.529	0.232	0.155	**0.803**				
Problem Recognition	F		0.570	0.457	0.856	0.050	-0.072	0.168	0.390	0.042	**0.755**			
Constraint Recognition	G		0.567	0.256	0.845	-0.373	-0.506	-0.464	-0.062	-0.393	-0.051	**0.753**		
Credibility of Domestic Media	H		0.757	0.349	0.918	0.386	0.308	0.591	0.316	0.285	0.195	-0.445	**0.870**	
Involvement Recognition	I		0.642	0.457	0.844	0.093	0.113	0.303	0.291	0.046	0.676	-0.218	0.279	**0.801**

Note: Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Maximum Shared Variance (MSV), and Max Reliability (MaxR)

*The bolded number on the diagonal line is the root of AVE for each factor, then it is compared with any of the inter-factor correlation beneath it.

Thus, given this theoretical support, error terms of items 3 in involvement recognition and item 5 in problem recognition were covaried. With this improvement, model fit was improved (CFI = .943, RMSEA = .048, PCLOSE = .827, SRMR = .045). Then, the correlation matrix of all the latent variables and relevant parameters were requested and calculated again. Table 2 shows the final correlation matrix and relevant CR, AVE, MSV and ASV readings. The results demonstrate that the latent variables pass the tests of reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity.

Hypothesis testing

The modification indices showed that there are direct relationships between perception of domestic media accessibility and problem recognition, as well as involvement recognition. This is theoretically sound: if a person thinks there is easy access to domestic news about environment pollution and such news is abundant, it is more likely for him/her to feel the problem and feel involved. It also suggests a direct link between perceived domestic media credibility and constraint recognition: while theoretically this link is spurred possibly through common trust in domestic media as government agencies, and thus government trust, it was added into the specified model. Moreover, perception of access to foreign news about environment pollution is linked with constraint recognition.

The model was estimated (Figure 2), which achieved great model fit (χ^2 = 36.2, df = 15, p = .002; CFI = .990, RMSEA = .050, PCLOSE = .475, SRMR = .040). The parameter estimates and the squared multiple correlations for endogenous variables are shown in the following Table 2. At last, a post hoc power analysis

was performed to see how much confidence this study has in the explained variances of endogenous variables it found out. For all the observed R squared of the 4 endogenous variables, the results suggest that all observed R squared readings have post hoc statistical power above .99.
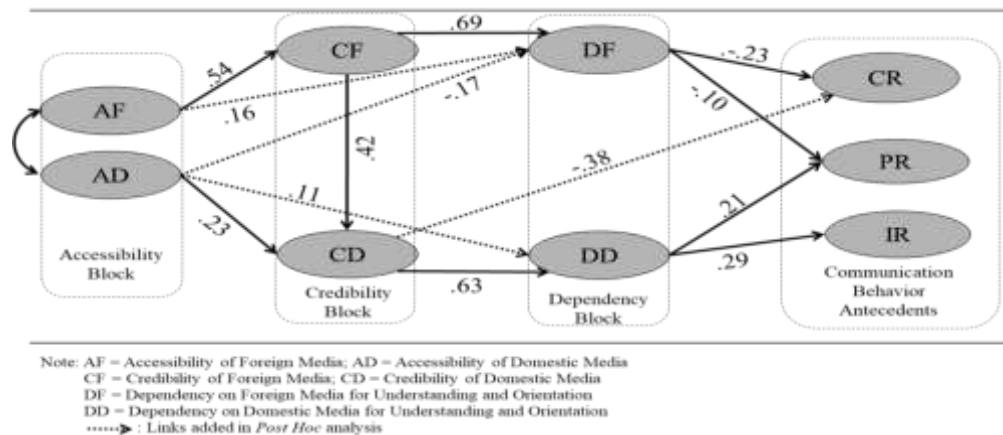

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••••••▶ : Links added in *Post Hoc* analysis

Figure 2: Specification of Model

Table 3: Hypotheses Testing in Model

	Hypothesized			**Unstandardized**	**Standardized**		
Path End	**Hypothesized**	**Path Start**	**Relationship**	**Coefficient**	**Coefficient**	***p***	**Rejected**
H1a	Foreign Media Accessibility	Foreign Media Credibility	+	0.35	0.54	< .001	Supported
H1b	Domestic Media Accessibility	Domestic Media Credibility	+	0.12	0.23	< .001	Supported
H2a	Foreign Media Credibility	Domestic Media Credibility	-	0.37	0.42	< .001	Rejected
H2b	Domestic Media Credibility	Foreign Media Credibility	+			N.S.	Rejected
H3a	Foreign Media Credibility	Foreign Media Dependency	+	0.9	0.69	< .001	Supported
H3b	Domestic Media Credibility	Domestic Media Dependency	+	0.8	0.63	< .001	Supported
H4a	Foreign Media Dependency	Problem Recognition	+	-0.09	-0.1	.007	Rejected
H4b	Domestic Media Dependency	Problem Recognition	+	0.23	0.21	< .001	Supported
H5a	Foreign Media Dependency	Involvement Recognition	+			N.S.	Rejected
H5b	Domestic Media Dependency	Involvement Recognition	+	0.34	0.29	< .001	Supported
H6a	Foreign Media Dependency	Constraint Recognition	-	-0.27	-0.23	< .001	Supported
H6b	Domestic Media Dependency	Constraint Recognition	-			N.S.	Rejected

Note: N.S. = Not Significant

Discussion & Conclusion

Important Findings

This paper has several findings that can be highlighted:

- Firstly, it hypothesizes and supports the existence of a passive reliance process before the formation of media credibility perception;
- Secondly, it illustrates a way of distinguishing foreign media credibility from domestic media credibility, and their respective relations with individuals' dependency on each kind of media;
- Thirdly, it illustrates the different mechanisms by which dependency on either foreign or domestic media lead to communicative activeness about a social issue.
- Last but not the least; the paper comes up with a new structural- functionalist theory of Public Policy as governmental projects.

The first finding about the passive reliance on media illustrates the importance of government policy about media access. Controlling which media citizens can access have been the de facto practice of many governments: such control, from a Western perspective, can be detrimental to media democratization, but can also be necessary for sovereignty from the perspective of more centralized, authoritarian cultures.

Accessibility to foreign media has a significant, and powerful, positive effect on the perceived credibility of foreign media in UAE. Such link also exists for domestic media, yet it is not as strong as the one for foreign media. However, the positive effect of credibility perception on media dependency was similarly strong for both foreign and domestic media: this illustrates that controlling for media accessibility can effectively lead to an indirect control on the level of individual level media dependency. It is especially important to note that the results suggest that increased perception domestic media access would lead to a reduced individual level dependence on foreign media. This is an interesting, but not surprising, finding which may have something to do with how UAE domestic media cut short citizens' reliance on foreign media (Kirat, 2007).

Moreover, it was found that foreign media and domestic media create different effects in terms of the psychological activation. Comparing with domestic media, foreign media do not relate to people's involvement recognition, and reduces the extent to which respondents think environment pollution as a problem. At the same time, foreign media dependency has a direct constraint-relieving effect on respondents' activeness, while domestic media does not have.

Theoretical and Geographical Extension

So far, this paper developed a theoretical model of Public Policy with a focus on the structural relationships between different types of actors and their relative functions. It then empirically examined a part of the structural relationships in the theoretical model: by proposing and examining a structural equation model of public's activation, this paper empirically supported: the potential of policy makers to modify foreign mediating actors' relationship with domestic publics by adjusting media accessibility that domestic publics' relationship with different types of media can increase publics' situational motivation to speak out about a social problem.

The empirical tests give preliminary support to the new conceptualization of Public Policy illustrated. However, not all the structural links shown in figure 2 were empirically tested. For example, how government collaborates with non-state mediating actors is yet to be fully explored and examined with empirical models and real-world data: for example, Jiang and Bowen (2011) explored the link between power and ethical decision making in the relationships between governments, NGOs and activist groups Also, how performing mediators interact and collaborates with channeling mediators (such as Facebook, WhatsApp) in the context of Public Policy is also an important part of the theoretical model. It would be

meaningful to examine how do channeling mediators modifies public perception of governmental interaction with performing mediators.

Moreover, international organizations such as IOC, WTO, UN and IMF are categorized as performing mediators. However, these international organizations can be different in terms of their relationship with individual governments. Indeed, they are international venues where state actions and policies are presented to the global audience, but organizations such as the United Nations are also a collection of government and may have the same time certain restrictive power on state behavior. If powerful international organizations publish negative information about a government's policy, how would such government, as well as other governments, respond in its power to modify the effect of such message on global audience? In short, many other links in the past studies are worth future exploration.

The second possible extension of the current study may be geographical. This is to say that the model could be empirically examined in other areas of the world. While not necessarily every country or region has governments that regulate foreign media content, several places are absolutely of future research interest. Research has also showed that people in Iraq, Qatar, Egypt are aware of the differences between foreign and domestic media. The next step would be finding out if these different perceptions lead to different media use, exposure, cognition and political or even terrorist behavior. Could government control on foreign media accessibility or perception be effective in stabilizing the region ideologically? And what does control mean for numerous new-born democracies in terms of social construction? Research on media control can definitely help us to better answer these questions.

Limitations

The paper is limited in several ways: first, the empirical examinations did not cover all the conceptual relationships proposed in past literature, leaving some of them at the theoretical stage without real-world evidence. Secondly, the theoretical scope is limited to the author's experience in Public Policy, knowledge in international relations and perhaps an emphasis on the psychometric aspect of the empirical testing. Formal theory building in the field of political science can significantly solidify the theoretical foundation. Thirdly, the data collected for empirical examination does not come from a national random sampling process in UAE, and thus should not be interpreted as nationally representative; people who reside in less developed or culturally diverse areas of UAE are less represented in the sample. However, the sample does have considerable face validity since it comes from perhaps the main target group of Public Policy: well-educated, mid-aged people who use Internet. At a higher level, even the new model for Public Policy should be used with caution. The purpose of this study is to draw boundaries between actors of Public Policy, yet, there are two important theoretical limitations of a structural-functionalist conceptualization.

The first is that many of the actors in the model are multiple-goal-oriented rather than being motivated by a single goal of Public Policy. The practice of Public Policy is actually co-orienting the goals of different actors (including the different levels of government) for transnational relationship building, situational persuasion and feedback-based strategy making. This means that every actor included in model does not exist simply because of Public Policy. Thus, their behaviors could be subjects to a more powerful cause.

Secondly, the penetration of government agencies into the neutral ground of social media undermines the purity of the widely respected, attended and studied user-generated content. The boundaries between users and governments are definitely diminishing, or perhaps they have never existed since the beginning of social media. Drawing boundaries in social media is hard, but for governments such work is also necessary, because it would be naïve to assume the absolute benignity of cyber sphere.

The empirical examinations of this paper were performed with the UAE context, this adds to another level of limitation beyond the overlapping nature of accessibility, exposure and control. The UAE context involves dramatic differences between foreign and domestic media's availability and accessibility:

however, a comparison between foreign media and domestic media's accessibility could have better results if the difference in their accessibility levels was less dramatic. In the UAE context, access to domestic media can hardly be partial among the population targeted by this study. In other words, access to domestic media is usually saturated, and such access can be imperative in places where modern communication technology is present.

Thus, what is of most value in this paper should be the effect of foreign media access on citizen's activeness. Retrospectively, the competition phenomenon may have been adequately modeled by the empirical models: it could be better named as a "survival" model of foreign media credibility in a saturated environment of domestic media accessibility. When thinking at this level, even the UAE context starts to lose its uniqueness: perhaps it is reasonable for us to assume that foreign media operate with a "survival" model in any given national context.

Conclusions

As a final note, this paper was written with the sincerest hope that citizens around the world can become literate about the fact that "the medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1964), and can possess the ability to think critically about the medium or the messages that may guide their perceptions and behaviors. As of 2018, we are all living in an era of unprecedented globalization, cultural integration, and global ideological re- alignment. But, it is also an era of high uncertainty because of the regionalist and protectionist policy-making in various governments around the world.

With new considerations on how information was and is being created, packaged and distributed around the world, it is the responsibility of policy makers, media workers and publics around the world to prevent cultural and political extremism, which can inspire distrust, disrespect and misunderstanding between global communities.

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