Content Analysis of coverage of Israel-Palestine Conflict in Oman Daily Observer and The Times of Oman

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Abstract
This research paper will discuss and examine the coverage of the ongoing Palestine-Israel conflict. In the Palestine-Israel conflict, almost 80% of the news refers to Palestinian’s attacks as retaliation to the attacks done by Israel. The way a headline is placed on the newspaper is the decisive factor that pulls the reader towards or away from the article. The Oman Daily Observer and the Times of Oman newspapers published from the Sultanate of Oman used bold headings and placed the coverage of the conflict on the first page of their respective newspapers. Over the years, this perception of media hostility has perforated the recipients and given rise to a number of media tracking groups that keep an eye on the type of information published. The Plaestine-Israel conflict began over the occupancy of the land, whereas the mainstream Western media has always shown the Palestine-Israel conflict as an issue of security and terrorism, with Israel always shown as being the one under oppression while the reality is otherwise as per the perception of the people living in the Gulf region. Therefore, for the majority of the world, the problem comes out as a conflict of borders and land. Media monitoring groups highlight a trend that has become very common in media; one side is given all the blame and the justification for this is that a particular side attacks as retaliation. Headlines are the very first title and form of text that the readers see and set their eyes on. By placing the news on their front page, the two major English dailies, showed that it realized the importance people of this region attach to this conflict. The two newspapers mostly publish reports received from AFP (Agence France-Presse).

KEY WORDS: CONFLICT, COVERAGE, HEADLINES, NEWS REPORTS, MEDIA.

Introduction

Outline of the Study
This research paper will discuss and examine the coverage of the ongoing Palestine-Israel conflict. The first section of the paper will give an insight into the conflict and include the significance and the purpose of the study. The section after this will review the literature available and the orientation of the print media. Articles and news printed in the past will be highlighted and the potential future research will be discussed. The study will concentrate on the two major newspapers in the Sultanate of Oman; The Times of Oman (private) and Oman Daily Observer (Government) (Zollmann, 2014).

Background of the Research
The ongoing conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians is a contemporary phenomenon. It dates back to the 19th century; before this, the land was known internationally as Palestine. However, after the 1948 war, the land was divided into three sectors known as the state of Israel, Gaza strip and the West Bank. The two groups belong to different religions and cultural differences; but this was not the reason for the conflicts (Dunsky, 2013). The conflicts began over the occupancy of the land by Israel. Each state wishes to gain control over the land which eventually leads to a situation where there exists no possibility of a reconciliation. The Israelis believe that the land is part of their religious history and is destined to be theirs; similarly, the Palestinians claim the land since they have been its original inhabitants for hundreds of years. Over the years, after many attempts to end the conflicts, the issue remains unresolved even today (Dunsky, 2013).
Problem Statement

The subject of war and conflicts between two nations is always controversial; however, amongst this controversy, there are always various expectations from the neighboring states, especially those located in the Middle East region as their own future is also linked to finding a peaceful resolution of this conflict. The amount of attention given to these topics is always highlighted by the readers and while some may favor the subtle coverage, others need more of this (Gelvin, 2014). There is a marked difference between the styles of the two newspapers; one is privately owned, and the other operates under the authority of the government. This research paper will highlight how slanted or biased some of the news published is as well as the amount of space in terms of column centimeters devoted to the conflict by the two major English newspapers in the Sultanate of Oman. On several occasions, these two newspapers gave disproportionate coverage which was revealed on the basis of the Quantitative. The issue at hand is whether the Omani newspapers have allotted decent column space to the articles covering the Palestine-Israel conflict during the period June-August, 2014 (Gelvin, 2014).

Aims and Objectives

The main objective of the research paper is to examine the coverage of Palestine-Israel conflict in the print media in terms of column space as well as the nature of published content. The primary focus is towards the English print media in the Sultanate of Oman.

Research Question

Since the topic is very controversial and is discussed by most critics, the question that we need to ask ourselves is that “Did the two leading newspapers in the Sultanate of Oman give sufficient news coverage in their issues printed between June 2014 and August 2014”

Literature Review

The media coverage at large on the topic of the Palestine-Israel conflict has always been under the controversial spotlight. The two sides have the perception that the media is always biased and provides one-sided information (Lavi et al, 2014). In other words, the genre of investigative journalism made space for itself and allowed journalists to investigate the ongoing issues and keep track of the fine line between manipulation and false reporting. Bias in print media on its own has complex variations that are subjected to alteration. Numerous factors affect the way the news is published and the message is sent across; Diction, Retaliation, Emotive language and omitting information. These processes can either be used against or in favor of either sides. Diction is the choice of words that the journalist used and is printed in the newspaper (Lavi et al, 2014).

Over the globe, the publishers of newspapers need to be aware of the difference the choice of words can make. Media monitoring groups highlight a trend that has become very common in media; one side is given all the blame and the justification for this is that the particular side attacks as a retaliation. In the Palestine-Israel conflict, almost 80% of the news refers to Palestinian attacks as retaliation to the attacks done by the Israeli forces. The print media around the world more so in Western countries emphasizes more on the deaths of the Israelis by using descriptive terms; on the other hand, the deaths of the Palestinians is not given the same kind of coverage. Often, the news is omitted when it is not in favor of the biased side. Due to these problems in print media, readers doubt the authenticity of the news and require a genuine verification of the source (Zollmann, 2014). The mainstream Western media has always shown the Palestine-Israel conflict as an issue of security and terrorism, with Israel always shown as being the one under oppression. Therefore, for the majority of the world, the problem comes out as a conflict of borders and land. Journalists argue that the clear picture of who is being colonized and who the real colonizer is not addressed properly given the inherent bias. To some extent, the media has blurred our vision of the real picture, and used other tools such as religion to hide the bitter truth. Often, the international media has simply become quiet in such
situations, which denotes the ignorance of the international media towards controversial topic (Marton, 2014).

In order for the people to be made aware of the conflicts between the two groups, the watchdog groups, the news needs to be elaborated further and placed amongst the headlines. Headlines are the very first title and form of text that the readers see and set their eyes on. The headings provide the true essence of any certain news or story (Reifen et.al, 2014). Although headlines are meant to capture the attention of the reader, the content within the heading level should be accurate and must address the ongoing issue of conflict. The sizes of the headings in different newspapers tell us how much importance is given to a certain topic. This difference in the heading size signals the height of importance compared to other stories in the paper (Reifen et.al, 2014). The allotment of column space creates a strong impact on the reader and may direct the reader towards or away. The column space is influenced by the input the journalist gives which depends on several factors. Firstly, most of the correspondents tend to live in the controlled parts within Israel, and because of this, they are deprived of exposure towards the Palestinian society (Reifen et.al, 2014). These correspondents fail to consult with the Palestinian sources, which affects the reactions published in the newspapers. More than two-thirds of the journalists reporting the conflict come from the West; meaning, they have a higher chance of blending in with the mentality of the Israelis. When asked, most journalists, as many as 91%, refer to Israel as a “good” side; while 41% of the journalists seemed to have sufficient knowledge about Palestine. Therefore, the ratio of journalists having insight into the Israeli school of thought is higher. The fact that journalists do not report from the scene and rely on the reports from the governments on either side shows that the style of reporting in the international media needs to be fixed (Reifen et.al, 2014).

Figure 1: Oman Daily Observer

English Daily Newspapers in the Sultanate of Oman

*Times of Oman* is an English newspaper published daily in the Sultanate of Oman. It is one of the oldest newspapers in Oman and is considered part of the leading publications. The publication is owned by a private publishing house, which is responsible for many other weekly tabloids and monthly magazines. During 2004, the publishing house became one of the first news publishers in the GCC to develop an online edition of the newspapers (Lloyd, 2012).

The other commonly read English newspaper in Oman, is the *Oman Daily Observer*. It is the oldest and most widely distributed English newspaper in Oman. Owned by the government, the newspaper focuses on national, international, regional, local, sports and business. The paper has been under a few controversies such as the dismissal of the Irish chief editor in 2004. The reason found out later was that this was due to Omanization (Lloyd, 2012).

Research Methodology

The research paper conducts content analysis to examine the coverage of the Palestine-Israel conflict in Print media. Content Analysis allows the researcher to analyze the content of two major English Daily newspapers in the Sultanate of Oman. In this context, the primary data is collected by conducting surveys and observations, while the secondary data is
collected from authentic online editions and libraries. The data gathered in the study is collected through a multi-method strategy; particularly by analyzing the content in focus (Rashid, 2014).

Coverage in Oman Daily Observer over the Period of Conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Week 1 News reports</th>
<th>Week 2 News reports</th>
<th>Week 3 News reports</th>
<th>Week 4 reports</th>
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<td>August</td>
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Table 1

![Oman Daily Observer Coverage Graph](image)

Graph 1

Coverage in Times of Oman over the Period of Conflict

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<th>Week 1</th>
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![Times of Oman Coverage Graph](image)

Graph 2
Relevant information and data is obtained from local online publications and resources. The issues of the two newspapers between June and August 2014, needs to be thoroughly examined so that the analysis of their coverage can be done. The topic of the Palestine Israel conflict is very controversial and sensitive; it has become an established fact that often the news is manipulated or not printed in the newspapers. The researcher looks deep into the school of thought used in the Omani print media and the space allotted to such an important topic (Rashid, 2014).

Data Analysis

The privately owned Times of Oman prints six times a week, which means that from June to August they have had an average of 72 prints. On the other hand, the government operated Oman Daily Observer prints on all seven days of the week which means that in this period, it has a total of 92 prints (Bolton, 2014).

The analysis will first discuss the allocation of space and the amount of coverage given by the Times of Oman. The conflict session between Israel and Palestine initiated on the 8th of July 2014. After several airstrikes and attacks on the Hamas controlled Gaza Strip, the initial attack left more than 2000 people dead. Among adults, children made up the highest percentage of the casualties (Bolton, 2014).

Figure 2: Times of Oman

The reports of the casualties received initially by the newspapers was incomplete and had errors. When the series of conflict began, the news published was given space on the front page since it was under the international spotlight. The rate at which the column space fluctuated was very high.

When the attacks were prominent and the number of casualties was high, Times of Oman took immediate steps in publishing the reports received from AFP (Agence France-Presse). The newspaper published after the very first attack brought the news on the front page.

Gradually, as the topic lost importance, the column space was pushed towards the lower side of the front page (Long, 2011).

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<th>Column Space</th>
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Table 2

A Palestinian relative of Mohammed al Dumin, 25, mourns during his funeral in Kowsh City yesterday. — AFP
As the days went by, the column space was dependent on how highlighted the attack or incident in the conflict was. During the peak of the conflict, which is towards the end of July, the news mostly received space on the front pages (Long, 2011). Although, the column space allotted is arguable, the coverage of the Palestine-Israel conflict sufficed for the general reader. Throughout the conflict, Times of Oman was thoroughly printing the coverage of the ongoing situation. The newspaper concentrated on not printing forged or false information as it would convey the wrong picture to its readers. However, the most authentic sources can also turn out to be occasionally a lie or forged. *Times of Oman* follows the principal of placing this topic on the front page and creates headlines that would create an impact. The headline is the first piece of text that the reader comes across (Long, 2011). The way the headline is placed on the newspaper is the decisive factor that pulls the reader towards or away from the article.

The *Times of Oman* used bold headings and placed the coverage of the conflict on the first page. By doing so, it has sown that it was controlled by way of prescribed editorial policies. Although it is owned and operated by a private publishing house, the newspaper still carried out and showed professional journalism. The articles were to a large extent unbiased and reported actual facts of what was happening in the conflict. Information and inclusion of precise data allowed Times of Oman to capture the readers’ attention. Time and the number of casualties was the primary concern of most readers; especially readers and analysts that use this information to further carry out a comparative study (Long, 2011).

### Space Allotted For the News

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<tr>
<th>Newspapers</th>
<th>Front Page</th>
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<td>Week 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oman Observer</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Times of Oman</td>
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*Table 3*
An important thought that arises in the minds of the readers is how much space the conflict should receive. Ideally, the most happening and important news in the globe gets the spot on the front page; the size however, may vary according to the requirement of the subject. Yet, even the most important news does not get dedicated front page coverage; in such situations, the remaining portion of the news is generally continued on the next inserts of the newspaper. Similarly, Times of Oman did not use a fixed column space for the Palestine-Israel conflict; therefore it is difficult to measure the accurate allotment in centimeters. The reader does not pay attention to the measurement of the allotted space; rather, seeks what is written in that particular space allotted to the topic. Whether it is the talks about the truce, or whether it is about the impending attacks from either side, readers concentrate on every bit of information that they can receive from the paper. Since Times of Oman is one of the most distributed newspapers, according to a 2013 consensus, the number of circulation is 38,000 copies. The newspaper is preferred more over other competing newspapers of Oman (Caballero, 2010).

Figure 3: Oman Daily Observer

The allocation of column space for the coverage of Palestine-Israel conflict in the government owned English newspaper has a similar strategy. Oman Daily Observer is the oldest newspaper of Oman, but has a lower circulation. Nevertheless, the style of publishing is to an extent similar to the Times of Oman. Over the three month period of the Palestine-Israel conflict, Oman Daily Observer continuously printed and published the news on the front pages. As discussed above, the layout of the headlines makes a marked impact on the reader and their attention. By placing the news on the front page, it showed the importance people of this region attach to this conflict. Since the newspaper represented the entire nation, the news printed had to be accurate and the information could not be falsified. From the very beginning to the very end, the newspaper continued to print the news on the first page; regardless of the column space. Just like the discussion in the Times of Oman, Oman Daily Observer does not use a fixed column space for the Palestine-Israel conflict (Caballero, 2010).
Readers do not pay attention to the measurement of the allotted space; rather, they seek what is written in that particular space allotted to the topic. Whether it is the talks about the truce, or whether it is about the impending attacks from either side, readers concentrate on every bit of information that they can receive from the paper (Caballero, 2010). The simple interpretation that the readers obtain from this is that, the Oman Daily Observer allowed more content to be published in reference to the ongoing conflict of Palestine and Israel. Just like the information published in the Times of Oman, this newspaper also prints authentic information and uses the aesthetics of headings. The size of the column spaces went through a lot of changes between and during the conflicts; yet, the news held a position on the front page (Caballero, 2010). However, the column space was pushed around several times, but managed to find a place on the front page. Even if the chance of appearing on the front pages was less, the publishers would place a small headline on the front page and place the continuation column in the inner spreads. Another interesting point examined by the researcher is that, the headings of the news were mostly neutral or at times biased in favor of Palestine. Judging from an analytical perspective, this is most probably due to the connection of religion and natural compassion towards Arab identity and culture (Caballero, 2010).

Globally, the conflict was not seen as one-sided, but as a conflict that was initiated by the rockets from Gaza and Israel responded as retaliation. This is where the controversy lies and is said to be the cause of the misinformed news articles (Dunsky, 2013). Oman Daily Observer is a newspaper operated by the government; therefore, it carries more responsibility of printing accurate and genuine information. The local media plays a pivotal role in providing the news from the international media and at the same time be unbiased. Bias in print media on its own has complex variations that are subjected to alteration. As discussed in Literature Review, the same rules apply even to the Omani newspaper; Diction, Retaliation, Emotive language and omission of information (Dunsky, 2013). The newspaper can use this against or in favor of either sides. Diction is the choice of words that the journalist used and is printed in the newspaper. Oman Daily Observer needs to be aware of the difference the choice of words can make. Media monitoring groups highlight trends that have become
very common in media; one side is given all the blame and the justification for this is that a particular side attacks as a retaliation. Being one of the oldest newspapers in the country, Oman Daily Observer has to set certain boundaries of professionalism that may prove to be the guidelines for the other private newspaper publishers (Dunsky, 2013).

Conclusions

The conflict of Palestine and Israel has been under the spotlight for several months and has seen many fluctuations in the conditions. This makes it very difficult for the publishers to keep track and at the same time fulfill the specifications discussed above. Any newspaper, whether it is owned by the government or a private owner, has to cater the ethical and professional journalistic approach of reporting. The research paper has shed light on the various hurdles that may arise when publishing such sensitive subjects. In the light of the data collected from the two newspapers, the finding suggests that many people do not pay attention to the size of the column space, but do give importance to the subject matter. If the coverage was to be published in one of the inner spreads, the readers would not be able to find out about the ongoing issue. In order to make the readers aware of international news, it has to be placed on the front page and given the right amount of spotlight. Regardless of column space, the publishers should be able to convey a message within a given space on the page. The Times of Oman and Oman Daily Observer have different styles of reporting, but do have a lot of similarity. The only difference is that the privately owned publisher does not have a promising allocation of space on the front page, while the government owned counterpart gives a full hand of information about the ongoing conflicts. The research methods used for the study require human judgmental skills as there is no better way of absorbing human emotions than by understanding what is currently happening in the world around us. Both the newspapers have devoted ample column space in their newspapers and succeeded in capturing the attention of the readers. This brings us to the research question and the answer to this is a very confident Yes.

Bibliography