

**The mechanisms of media framing in shaping the public perceptions of corruption issues: how does the news turn from a description into a direction?**

**آليات التأطير الإعلامي في تشكيل تصورات الجمهور تجاه قضايا الفساد:  
كيف يتحول الخبر من وصف إلى توجيه؟**

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**Abstract:**

This study tackles media framing and corruption using a theoretical approach that aims at analyzing the method used by the media outlets in shaping the audience perceptions of corruption issues, mainly regarding the concepts, mechanisms, and results. The study hypothesizes the media framing is an effective tool in manufacturing the meaning related to corruption issues through different phases, starting from the selection of the sources and framing the angles, passing by the language and images used, until identifying the responsibilities or calling for reforms. In addition, the study discusses the effect of this framing in shaping the public opinion and calling for new anti-corruption policies. Moreover, it sheds light on the transformations imposed by the digital media, which redrew the media maps through the new diverse media platforms.

Findings show that the media framing may be a tool for awareness raising and mobilization against corruption. However, it may turn into a tool to reproduce and develop corruption, depending on the choices of the media channel and its political and economic contexts.

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**Keywords:** media; media framing; audience; public perceptions; corruption.

#### ملخص:

تبحث هذه الدراسة في موضوع التآطير الإعلامي وظاهرة الفساد، من خلال مقارنة نظرية تسعى إلى تحليل الكيفية التي تعتمدها وسائل الإعلام في تشكيل تصورات الجمهور تجاه قضايا الفساد، من حيث المفاهيم، الآليات، والنتائج، وتستند على فرضية أساسية مفادها أن التآطير الإعلامي يعد آلية فاعلة في هندسة المعنى المرتبط بقضايا الفساد، عبر مراحل متعددة تبدأ بانتقاء المصادر وزوايا التغطية، وتمر عبر اللغة المستخدمة والصورة المصاحبة لها، وتنتهي بتحديد المسؤوليات أو الدعوة إلى الإصلاح، كما تناقش الدراسة تأثير هذا التآطير في تشكيل الرأي العام، وفي الدفع باتجاه صياغة سياسات عامة لمكافحة الفساد، مع استحضار التحولات التي فرضها الإعلام الرقمي، الذي أعاد رسم خرائط الإعلام من خلال تفاعلية المنصات الجديدة وتعدد قوالب التآطير.

خلُصت الدراسة إلى أن التآطير الإعلامي يمكن أن يكون أداة للتوعية والتعبئة ضد الفساد، لكنه قد يتحول أيضاً إلى وسيلة لإعادة إنتاج الفساد وتطويره، وهذا وفقاً لاختيارات الوسيلة الإعلامية، وسياقاتها السياسية والاقتصادية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الإعلام، التآطير الإعلامي، الجمهور، تصورات الجمهور، الفساد.

#### Introduction

Corruption is one of the most complex structural phenomena in contemporary societies. It is not merely a deviant behavior or a legal violation, but rather a manifestation of deep-seated dysfunction within systems of governance, oversight, and institutional values—political, economic, and social. As much as corruption threatens development, justice, and state cohesion, it simultaneously reflects a profound crisis of trust between citizens and state institutions, revealing the limitations of accountability mechanisms and the fragility of information flows.

Amid the growing prevalence of corruption and the multiplicity of its manifestations, the media emerges as a central actor in shaping

collective perception. The media is no longer a neutral transmitter of events; it has become a key producer of meaning and a builder of public consciousness through what is known as media framing. Issues—including corruption—are presented within specific narrative templates that highlight certain aspects while obscuring others, thereby reordering public priorities and steering interpretations of reality.

The literature indicates that the narration of corruption-related issues extends far beyond the mere presentation of facts; it actively influences the public's understanding of the phenomenon, shapes judgments about responsibility, and informs how the issue should be addressed. Media framing can either mobilize awareness and fuel calls for accountability or, conversely, normalize corruption and reproduce public disengagement within political and social systems.

In this context, (Park, 2012) study—one of the most significant applied works in the field—reveals that (62%) of corruption-related news coverage in Illinois newspapers adopted an episodic frame emphasizing individual scandals and personal wrongdoing, compared to only (38%) employing a structural or thematic frame. Park argues that this imbalance reduces corruption to isolated incidents and weakens public awareness of its systemic roots, shifting attention from institutional reform toward the pursuit of individual culprits.

Despite its value, Park study has methodological limitations: it focuses solely on traditional print journalism, excludes digital media environments, and lacks an audience-effects perspective. It also provides limited qualitative analysis of discourse, imagery, and symbolic representation—elements that have become central to contemporary processes of perception engineering.

With the profound transformations brought about by digital communication, media framing is no longer the exclusive domain of journalistic institutions. The digital sphere now constitutes a highly complex communicative environment in which social media platforms generate competing narratives about corruption—some oriented toward exposure and documentation, and others driven by misinformation and organized propaganda. This shift has reconfigured the dynamics of public discourse, expanded the field of influence, intensified the

circulation of misleading frames, and made it increasingly difficult to regulate the narratives surrounding corruption.

Based on what was said, this study aims at studying the mechanisms of media framing of corruption through analyzing the different levels of building the media frames, as Robert Entman put it, and at revealing the linguistic and visual strategies used in describing the phenomenon, with a focus on the role of framing in shaping the public perceptions and manufacturing the related public policies. Furthermore, the study sheds light on how the news turns from a mere neutral description into an implicit tool of direction that reshapes the public opinion. In so doing, we raise the following problematic, **“how do the mechanisms of media framing help shape the perceptions of the audience towards the corruption issues? And how does the news turn from a description to a direction?”**

#### **Importance of the study:**

The importance of the study lies within the need for fighting corruption, which neither stops at changing the individual behaviors nor is the outcome of the individual and ethical responsibilities. In this context, the corrupt practices take another dimension that affects the external environment, including the cultural factors and communicative frames. Only few studies focused on how corruption is depicted by the media outlets, and very few focused on framing (Palaua & Palomo, 2021, p. 6) . In addition, the study re-questions the functional and symbolic roles of media in treating corruption, which is one of the dangerous political and social phenomena, through an exact theoretical approach that sheds light on how the meaning is reproduced in the media discourse. Moreover, the study tackles the critical dimension by distinguishing between framing as a tool for awareness raising and as a tool for manipulation, and focuses on its relation with the digital context that reshaped the expression spaces and cognition.

#### **Axis one: the conceptual and theoretical frame:**

The discussion of corruption framing by the media outlets requires investigation of central concepts that help determine the theoretical

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frame. In this context, this axis provides the main definitions of corruption, media, and the role of media outlets in fighting corruption from a functional and awareness point.

### **1. The concept of corruption:**

The World Bank defines it as the misuse of the public job for private gains through embezzlement, bribery, nepotism, illegal gains, abuse of the job by appointing in-laws, or theft, etc (Ben Bouza, 2013, p. 70) . Besides, it is breaking the laws, rules, and norms in a way that harms the others or the state as a whole (Hamdi, 2013, p. 104). Furthermore, it is the use of the institutional power to achieve private gains, and is a deviation in using the prerogatives of the normal or moral persons for specific limits and purposes (Achour, 2010, p. 34). In general, corruption takes different aspects, including fraud, lies, theft, embezzlement, bribery, power abuse, tax evasion, mismanagement, nepotism, and money laundering. In addition, it is divided based on the social and functional criteria into political, administrative, financial, and ethical corruptions. Furthermore, we find a minor corruption and a gross one; the latter is conducted by the big officials and elite. Regarding spread, we find local corruption and transnational corruption -globalized corruption-(Ben Bouza, p. 73).**In this study**, corruption refers to any behavior or practice that implies the misuse of the authority or job to achieve personal material or symbolic benefits. Its aspects include bribery, embezzlement, fraud, and nepotism. We chose to work on it since it is a topic covered by the media in their traditional and digital discourses.

The literature presents varied definitions of corruption, from legal views focused on the abuse of public authority to sociological perspectives that see it as a structural dysfunction. This diversity enriches the concept but complicates its precise delimitation.

Institutional definitions, such as the World Bank's, offer clarity but remain limited, especially when examining corruption as it appears in media and political discourse.

Therefore, any definition must specify the analytical angle—whether corruption is treated as a social phenomenon, a media-constructed discourse, or a power mechanism—to ensure conceptual coherence.

## 2. The concept of media:

Media provides people with exact news, information, and facts that help build a vision towards an event or problem. They depict the audience mentality, trends, and inclinations (al Ghaz, 2010, p. 27), and exercise information by spreading news, information, ideas, and attitudes within a wide or narrow range to a specific audience through suitable communication tools to achieve a given goal, take decisions, guide the public opinion, or redress a given attitude (Kassimi, 2017, p. 42). In this context, we can define the media as the tools of transferring information on purpose to raise awareness and convince the audience, and to establish a background about the economic, political, and social issues. **In this study**, media can be defined as the journalistic, audiovisual, and electronic tools exercising communicative activities to collect and analyze information and provide them to the audience using verbal and visual messages that convey news, interpretations, or awareness raising contents to shape the social perception of the public issues.

Academic reviews of traditional definitions of media show that they primarily emphasize its classic functions: informing, educating, and shaping public opinion. However, these definitions tend to present media as a neutral intermediary, overlooking structural factors such as the political positioning of institutions, editorial considerations, and the influence of digital platforms and algorithms. Therefore, relying on classical definitions is no longer sufficient to explain the complex roles media plays today, especially in the field of framing, which relies on selecting, arranging, and reshaping messages within a specific interpretive vision.

Accordingly, there is a need for a broader conceptualization of media—as a system for producing meanings rather than merely transmitting them—where institutions, audiences, digital platforms,

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and competing discourses intersect. This perspective provides the study with greater analytical capacity to uncover the mechanisms through which public perception is constructed, which lies at the core of framing analysis in corruption-related coverage.

### **3. The role of media outlets in revealing corruption issues between awareness raising, control, and accountability:**

The media outlets are key for fighting corruption because they can call for accountability and transparency in the public and private sectors. Besides, they constitute the 04<sup>th</sup> authority and express a popular authority. The democratic governments use these tools to explain their policies, formulate the public opinion, and direct it towards the public interests (al Abd & al Abd, 2007, p. 29). Many studies showed the relation between the freedom of press and corruption, mainly the investigative press. In many states, the media outlets face unethical practices and people, and motivate the criminal investigation. Moreover, the media reports on corruption rank at the top thanks to the ability of journalists to unveil corruption, the freedom of these outlets, and the legal protection of journalists.

Despite their importance in fighting corruption, they may be a source of corruption, mainly when the politicians, businessmen, and corrupt elite manage them and issue biased reports that aim at manipulation. In general, the media outlets are the engine towards the definition of events, as the news stories provide interpretative frames that guide the audience comprehension and vision of the events. The outlets choose the main issues from the available ones to increase interest in them (Park, 2012, p. 7). The success of the media outlets relies on different points, namely:

- The call for controlling corruption.
- Raising awareness about corruption and its causes, results, fighting, and treatment.
- Revealing the cases of corruption to help the government limit it.
- Influencing the public opinion to make it angrier with corruption, mainly in the administrative bodies and private sector.

- Calling for issuing stringent laws.
- Pushing the authorities towards making investigations on corruption.
- Launching wide and continuous information campaigns to explain the consequences of corruption and show the need for administrative, social, and financial reforms.
- Publishing studies on corruption and making polls.
- Widening the dialogues and debates on fighting corruption to gain the support of the audience.
- Fostering the accountability system and integrating reforms.
- Influencing all the society categories and targeting as many as possible to mobilize the public opinion and influence the behaviors (Souli, 2016, pp. 78–79).

**Axis two: the media framing- The concept and mechanisms:**

The media framing theory is one of the main approaches to understand how the media outlets deal with the public issues. In this regard, it does not stop at what is said; rather, it focuses on how it is said. Thus, this axis discusses the theoretical bases, founders, and conceptual and functional mechanisms of framing, and shows how it is used in corruption cases and its effect on the audience.

**1. The concepts and bases of the media framing theory:**

The term “frame” has lately gained popularity in many research fields, such as information and communication, sociology, political sciences, and study of the social movements. It refers to the choice, focus, and use of given elements in the media texts to build a proof on the issues and their causes, evaluations, and solutions (al Tarabichi & al Sayad, 2003, p. 223). In this context, Robert Entman, the founder of the theory, defines the frame as the choice of some aspects of reality and making them more visible in the communicative texts to foster a given definition of the problem, interpret its causes, evaluate it, and recommend solutions (Entman, 1993, p. 53).

Mekkaoui defines the media frame as the deliberate choice of some aspects of the event and making it more visible in the media texts by using a given style in describing the problem, presenting its dimensions, and suggesting solutions. In addition, the frame is the choice, focus, and use of some elements in the text to build up a proof on the problems, causes, and solutions. It is introducing a given topic in a way that turns a blind eye towards all the other views and fields (Adda, 2021, p. 316).

The theory was founded by the sociologist Erving Goffman who developed the concept of the social construct and symbolic interaction by discussing the people's ability to build a reserve of experiences that moves their perceptions and urges them to use their personal experiences in an optimal way. This takes place by choosing suitable media frames that add meaning to the content. The aim of the theory was providing an organized system on the use of predictions to interpret and add meaning to the daily life situations. The theory focuses on the method people use to learn how to interpret their social world in a recurrent typical image. To create a perceptual frame, it is necessary to take two points into account, namely:

- The content and the sociopolitical context of identifying and making the frame.
- The long-term sociopolitical consequences of the frames learned from the media outlets.

In this regard, Robert Entman was the first to integrate the theory in the media studies, as he made a scientific application characterized with theoretical and mythological exactness in his different studies. Entman linked the analysis of frames with the information representation by the audience. Besides, he defined the frame as choosing some aspects of the reality and following a given path to identify the problem, explain its causes, assess its ethicality, and suggest solutions and recommendations (Toumi, 2022, p. 893).

## **2. The mechanisms of media framing in directing the audience perception:**

The experts focused on reorganizing the media messages and texts, and on setting them in media frames that confirm or deny a given

meaning. These messages meet with the primary experiences and dominant facts of the recipients, what affects their vision of the facts and events (Abd al Hamid, 2004, p. 402). The mechanisms of media framing are the selection and salience. In this regard, the news editor selects a given frame for the news and, then, the main features of the news within that frame turn into the most prominent things. Entman adds that salience as one of the framing mechanisms is achieved through focus on given information in given situations. Thus, it implies the existence of specific elements in the news, which are insisted upon to provide a main meaning. This mechanism is achieved through the position, the repetition, and the link between an issue and another (Toumi, p. 896). Furthermore, the media do not only provide us with news on given events; rather, they choose a given perspective to oblige us to look from it in interpreting the events. This puts the events and issues in special contexts and helps the recipients understand them with special methods (Adda, pp. 309–327). The mechanisms of media framing include:

#### **The macro-framing:**

This refers to the big frames adopted by the news agencies in dealing with the public issues. They are frames stemming from specific editorial policies or ideologies. The macro-framing is about reconstructing the general narrative about corruption and how it is presented. For instance, is it a national crisis that threatens the stability of states? Or, is it an isolated individual case that can be handled separately?

#### **The micro-framing:**

It manifests in the daily treatment of the media content. It is about selecting headings, ordering the news and images, and identifying the terms used in describing the events of corruption. It focuses on the details, unlike the macro-framing, builds the first impressions for the recipients, and reshapes their perception of the issues. For instance, in corruption cases, the actions of the victim may be justified or condemned and charged with the legal and ethical outcomes.

### **3. The media frames used in covering corruption cases:**

Media literature shows that corruption is rarely presented as neutral information; it is instead reconstructed within interpretive frames that shape meaning and steer audience perceptions. News is embedded in narrative and discursive structures influenced by the outlet's political stance, making framing not a neutral technique but a central tool for producing meaning.

#### **The conflict frame:**

The conflict frame emerges as one of the most prevalent patterns in corruption coverage (Bassyouni, 2020, p. 2165), where the phenomenon is presented as a battleground between opposing actors: media versus government, citizens versus ruling elites, or opposition versus government. While this approach adds dramatic appeal and boosts audience engagement, it also—critically—transforms the discussion into a personal or identity-based confrontation at the expense of examining the structural roots of corruption. In this way, corruption shifts from a systemic issue to a form of media spectacle, and conflict itself becomes a consumable media product rather than a pathway toward reform.

#### **The victim frame:**

The victim frame highlights the human consequences of corruption by focusing on groups most affected—such as vulnerable populations and low-income citizens. Although this frame is effective in eliciting empathy and generating moral outrage, it risks reducing victims to symbolic images used to support political narratives without addressing the structural causes of corruption. Thus, while emotionally compelling, this frame often lacks policy impact and may transform social suffering into a rhetorical device rather than a driver of substantive reform.

#### **The responsibility frame:**

This frame assigns blame for corruption to specific actors—individuals or institutions—and reinforces a culture of accountability. Yet, it frequently simplifies corruption by depicting it as the result of “bad individuals,” overlooking the institutional and structural

mechanisms that sustain corrupt practices. Consequently, the frame produces a form of knowledge that is easily digestible but insufficient for uncovering the complex networks of power that underpin systemic corruption.

**The reform frame:**

It introduces corruption as a treatable phenomenon and focuses on the possible solutions and policies, such as fostering control, enacting new laws, or promoting justice to direct, not diagnose. For example, a TV program may discuss the government initiatives to promote a given law and host government experts. A comparative study on Washington Post and New York Times coverage of the political reforms found out that both use different frames in covering the political reform issues, mainly the frame of the regime resistance to the political reform (Hassanine, pp. 511–563).

These dynamics are clearly reflected in Algerian media practices, as shown in (Ismail, 2023) study. El Khabar, a private newspaper, relied heavily on the conflict frame (35.43%) followed by the responsibility frame (26.69%), reflecting an oppositional and mobilizing editorial stance aimed at energizing public opinion. In contrast, El Chaab, a state-owned newspaper, adopted a more institutional tone, relying equally on strategic and responsibility frames (28.94%), thereby steering public debate toward official reform channels and lowering the intensity of public mobilization. This divergence not only reflects editorial differences but also demonstrates that frame selection is a political choice, embedded within the newspaper's relationship to centers of power.

This pattern extends globally, as illustrated by (Park, 2012) study in Illinois, where episodic framing dominated 62% of corruption coverage, compared to only 38% for thematic, structural framing. This suggests a widespread media tendency—in democracies and non-democracies alike—to narrate corruption through individualized stories rather than structural analysis. It confirms that media frames reshape

reality more than they reflect it, and that they intersect with institutional interests and political–economic pressures.

Ultimately. The choice of frame cannot be understood outside the broader media system, power dynamics, and audience characteristics. Thus, media frames are not merely interpretive tools; they are mechanisms for engineering public consciousness—either toward genuine reform or toward normalizing and reproducing corruption.

**Axis three: The mechanisms of media framing of corruption issues from description to direction:**

The role of media in dealing with corruption cases is not limited to the coverage of events, as it is a wise selection that contributes to manufacturing the collective perception of the phenomenon. The media framing mechanisms are used by the media agencies to formulate the content of the message according to given views with scientific, functional, or ideological goals. Their importance lies within their ability to influence how the audience interprets corruption and reacts to it. These mechanisms include (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007):

- Devotion: it is about the focus on people instead of the public issues.
- Personalization: it is about showing the personal sides of the concerned officials and people.
- Politicization: it is about linking the issues to given political parties or attitudes.

The following lies show the main mechanisms used by the media outlets in framing corruption issues and directing the news:

**1. Framing through the choice of sources and treatment angles:**

The selection of the media sources, news agencies, and journalists is the main mechanism of framing because the nature of the source, i.e., be it official, independent, governmental, etc, helps build a given angle. For instance, when the media outlets choose the declarations of big governmental officials as main sources in corruption issues, they give

their news big weight unlike when relying on the civil society organizations and independent experts, which may face criticism and evaluation from the audience. A study on the Algerian newspapers revealed that the tools of media framing of corruption issues were strong despite the simple tools used in drawing the readers' attention, and the headings and images (Ben Bouza, p. 87). This is a deliberate and unsuitable direction in media literature and shows a clear framing of corruption issues by the media outlet. Besides, the coverage angle helps identify how the recipient will understand corruption, i.e., whether he will see it as an accidental individual event, an outcome of a whole system, a risk on economy and security, a threat to the human and social values and ethics, etc. The choice of the coverage angle and of what to focus on and what to neglect reconstructs meaning and directs the public opinion.

## **2. Framing through the linguistic and visual effects:**

Language is vital for conveying meaning, as the linguistic choices, vocabulary, terms, and symbols are not neutral. In this regard, they reflect the framing intentions in the news agencies. For instance, the use of the terms "scandal, crime, commitment, theft, and embezzlement" differs than the use of "administrative violations, mismanagement, etc". This produces a different understanding for the recipient, mainly regarding the cognitive side and shapes the ethical and political attitude towards the phenomenon; this is the main goal of framing. As for the visual side, the images, videos, footage angle, colors, movement, and shots generate symbolic connotations that change or distort some facts that may be clear to the audience, and change their attitudes towards the issue or person.

## **3. The media framing between awareness raising and manipulation:**

Framing corruption issues has two distinct goals. The first is educational and aims at spreading transparency and accountability while the second is about manipulation and uses political or commercial agenda. For example, when corruption is introduced as a phenomenon

that requires social and institutional cooperation, the media outlets are seen as a reform tool. On the other hand, if specific issues are given more focus than others, or when some political opponents are focused on, the media outlets change into a manipulation tool used against the public opinion. In this context, the Egyptian press discussed the administrative and political corruption issues, mainly the elections fraud and corruption in housing, oil, agriculture, customs, etc.

The press reported direct accusations against the corrupt minister, the lands violations, and construction violations. Besides, it tackled bribery in the ministries and governmental organizations and discussed lot of issues regarding power abuse and money laundering. These campaigns were against parliament members, ministers, and mayors. Despite having lot of Egyptian studies focusing on how the media outlets framed corruption, they all agree that the outlets played a key role in revealing the corrupt people and in raising the Egyptian public awareness about the dangers of corruption (Mosleh, 2017, pp. 27–28). Moreover, an Algerian study on al Khabar and al Chaab newspapers showed they used different frames in discussing corruption, with focus on the frames of causes, solutions, and results. This reflects their different editorial orientations towards raising the awareness of the Algerians sometimes, and towards manipulating their understanding of corruption and its socioeconomic dimensions in some other times (Mojahed, 2014). This shows the dangers of framing, as it may turn into a tool for generating or weakening the collective will for combating corruption, and does not stop at interpretation.

#### **Axis Four: the outcomes of media framing on the general perceptions and decision making:**

The relation between media framing and corruption issues is mutual and compound, as many communicative, political, and cognitive dimensions overlap. In this regard, the media outlets build the audience perceptions, not only report the facts. Besides, it directs the thinking patterns, making media framing a pivotal actor in shaping the public opinion and influencing the general policies inside the state, or outside it if the target audience is bigger, mainly under the digital

transformations that reshaped the communicative process thanks to the feedback, interaction, and immediacy.

### **1. The media framing and shaping the audience attitudes towards the corruption issues:**

Media framing is one of the main tools used by the media outlets in influencing the public opinion through what is said and how it is said. In this context, framing reshapes the meanings and trends and directs the audience attention towards specific points the recipient may have not noticed. Thus, it contributes to shaping collective attitudes towards corruption, through either the ethical judgments, calls for accountability, adoption of a neutral attitude, or indifference. The media outlets have a double role, as they are a tool for accountability or for corruption increase. For instance, in an analysis of the TV news reports, Iyengar found two categories. The first describes poverty as a social or collective outcome (objective frame) while the second says that poverty is the outcome of the economic corruption (accidental frame). The accidental frame depicts the specific issues, such as the collective suicide, homeless people, or illegal immigrant. On the other hand, the objective frame depicts specific cases, such as politics, by putting them in a historical or societal context. In addition, an objective report on corruption may provide information on the modern trends of corruption rates and the main causes for its increase or decrease (Park, p. 9). Thus, the objective or accidental frames have different effects on the recipients, as many studies point that framing has huge potentials to influence the public opinion and the political behavior (Hemphill & Heston, 2013, p. 18).

### **2. Media framing and its role in directing the public policies**

The media framing influences the audience and decision makers, as many studies show that the media frames regarding the public issues, including corruption, indirectly affect the orientations of the public policies because the media outlets do not only reflect the policies; rather, they participate in their production because they shed light on

specific points and turn a blind eye towards others; this was discussed by the agenda setting theory. In a study on corruption issues covered by the Algerian TV channels, the authors found out that the program under study focuses on given angles, including the active people in corruption through analyzing the details of the issues, explaining the legal procedures, and showing how to report corruption.

Besides, it focused on the administrative corruption seen in the recruitment of friends and in-laws; what is known in Algeria as “bureaucracy” or “nepotism”. In addition, the values of honesty and transparency ranked at the top of values to be adopted to protect the country (Latrache & Bourogaa, 2024, p. 374). This example shows that when the media outlets speak about corruption in a given sector, such as education, economy, or security, and use frames that charge the authority with the full responsibility, they exercise political pressure on the politicians and push them towards the enactment of laws or issuance of reforms to alleviate or end the public rage and gain back the citizens’ trust. In return, the emotional frames that go beyond the core of the issues, such as objections against unemployment or inflation, may just raise emotions and lead to limited outcomes that cannot yield political change.

### **3. The digital transformations and corruption framing in the new media environment:**

The digital revolution brought about radical changes in the public space, as framing shifted from monopolizing the traditional media to new tools, such as the electronic newspapers, blogs, and social media. In addition, the media framing is no more limited to the media agencies; rather, all the technical media participate in it by broadcasting the official and counter discourses. This made corruption framing more diverse, modern, and difficult. Besides, it turned into one of the more contradicting topics. In addition, internet is vital in fighting the political corruption, as what we saw in the Arab revolutions, where the nets helped reveal the secrets of the organizations and the financial and administrative corruption (Gouasmia & Boukehil, 2019, pp. 135–154).

Moreover, the digital environment provides huge potentials for detecting or unveiling corruption; however, it brings about new

challenges, such as misleading, selecting the narratives, and the multiplicity of the angles. In this regard, the study of Chojaa Ben Soltan al Bakmi confirmed that most of the communication actors in the Saudi newspapers and news pages see that the digital media outlets highly focus on corruption news, mainly after launching 2030 vision (al Bakmi, 2021, p. 59). In addition, the social media may push the politicians to rely on the traditional media to directly influence the views and behaviors of the audience through setting their own frames for the issues, as found out by a study on how Congress members use the Hashtags on twitter in framing the issues (Hemphill & Heston, pp. 19 -20). The study examined the extent to which the politicians can make their own framing far from the mass media and confirmed that the politicians really use social media actively to frame the issues and choose discussion topics, including healthcare and economy.

Moreover, studies show that the first step towards the success of the new media outlets in achieving participation is finding a common awareness about the issue. This is what is done by the social media in dealing with the corruption issues, as they increase the freedoms and reduce the censorship thanks to the online interaction, as any citizen can unveil the corruption files and practices he knows about (Mosleh, p 31). The findings of these studies show how the new communicative environment changed the mechanisms of shaping the public opinion and covering corruption. In this context, the media outlets are not the only awareness creator; rather, they face the competition of new narratives, which may be based on facts or fake news, and propaganda campaigns based on specific agenda, making it difficult to understand framing in the digital media.

#### **4. Media Framing of Corruption in the Digital Environment: Applied Models**

Media framing is no longer a one-directional process; rather, it has evolved into a participatory. A notable example of this shift is the study “The Role of Modern Media in Combating Corruption Practices During the Arab Spring” (Habib Muneim Khushan al-Shahd, 2025). It demonstrated how social media platforms moved from being mere

publishing tools to becoming active spaces producing a mobilization frame, where individual experiences of injustice were transformed into a collective awareness seeking change. Digital media helped redefine corruption as a structural phenomenon linked to governance patterns and institutional inequalities, rather than as a series of personal deviations. This model shows that framing in digital environments does more than create meaning; it generates social energy that can translate into protests, demands, and political pressure.

Despite its significance, the study remains limited in addressing the long-term effects of digital media, particularly regarding misinformation, algorithmic shifts, and the sustainability of mobilization frames in politically constrained environments. These gaps point to the need for further research capable of capturing the evolving complexities of the current digital landscape.

Another illustrative case is the study on the “Israel in the Gulf” (Awad, 2024). Twitter account, which demonstrated how the platform was used as a diplomatic tool to repackage the image of Israeli occupation through humanitarian and touristic framing. Findings revealed a dominant humanitarian frame (60.1%), portraying Israel as a state of peace and coexistence, a misleading construction that erases the reality of occupation. The leading persuasive strategy was emotional appeal (74.6%), relying on scenic imagery and cultural heritage content to bypass political facts and target emotions directly. The thematic focus on global and environmental tourism (29%) worked to commodify Palestine as a touristic object stripped of its identity and history—an attempt to normalize the Israeli narrative within Gulf public consciousness.

This strategy constructs an “alternative reality” where the political context is deliberately removed and perception is reshaped through soft propaganda that conceals the colonial and human-rights dimensions. However, the study was limited in its sample and platform scope, and overlooked a fundamental element of the digital environment: the public is not merely a passive recipient but actively reproduces,

contests, and legitimizes frames through comments, replies, and sharing.

(Abu Adas ,2020) offers another valuable contribution by reviewing 76 Arab and international studies on digital treatments of corruption, recommending the enhancement of journalists' digital competencies. Yet the study remains largely descriptive, focusing on classifying digital tools and frames without unpacking the deeper framing processes within an environment characterized by accelerated content circulation and fluid information flows. Framing in digital media is shaped not only by "how corruption is presented," but also by a broader ecosystem of algorithms, artificial intelligence, fake accounts, sponsored content, cyber armies, and interventions by state and non-state actors. This complexity demands more advanced analytical tools capable of capturing how corruption narratives are constructed and disseminated. future studies could employ advanced analytical tools such as:

- NodeXL for analyzing interaction networks on Twitter
- NVivo for textual and visual content analysis
- CrowdTangle for tracking content dissemination on Facebook

These tools represent an integrated methodological package for empirically monitoring framing dynamics in the digital space."

In this context, algorithms play a decisive role in shaping digital framing. They do not prioritize news based on accuracy or relevance, but on virality, emotional impact, and alignment with users' past behavior. As a result, the most visible frames are not the most informative, but the most sensational—creating a tense media environment where corruption becomes a form of ongoing social drama rather than an issue of governance and institutional reform. Algorithms also contribute to "personalized framing," where each user encounters a tailored narrative based on their digital profile, producing fragmented understandings of corruption and weakening collective awareness.

Digital propaganda complements this landscape through affective framing, employing emotionally charged images, videos, and short narratives to reshape the meaning of corruption in ways that serve

specific agendas. International research shows that emotionally driven short-form content outperforms analytical content in reach and circulation, making the digital sphere fertile ground for the dominance of emotional frames over structural ones that expose the roots of corruption.

This underscores the need for advanced methodologies able to distinguish between organic framing arising from genuine public interaction, and manufactured framing driven by political and technological power structures operating beneath the surface of digital communication.

### **Conclusion:**

This study concludes that media framing of corruption represents a pivotal mechanism in shaping collective perception and engineering social awareness across both traditional and digital platforms. The frame through which corruption is presented constitutes the very core of meaning, reconstructed and directed through linguistic, visual, and narrative choices that emphasize certain angles while concealing others.

Through a critical reading of Entman's framing model, the study showed how framing transforms corruption from a simple event into a meaningful construct. Many media outlets—despite appearing objective—tend to simplify corruption by focusing on isolated incidents rather than examining the deeper structural contexts that generate and sustain it, as demonstrated in Park's findings. Ismail's study further revealed, within the Algerian context, a divided framing landscape shaped more by editorial and ownership pressures than by public interest.

A cumulative review of previous research indicates that much of it remains descriptive, prioritizing classification over critical deconstruction of media messages or engagement with audience responses. Key dimensions—such as power relations, production contexts, and the real impact on collective consciousness—are frequently overlooked. This study attempted to address these gaps by adopting an analytical-critical perspective aimed at exposing the mechanisms of symbolic control embedded in media discourse.

In the digital environment, the results show that interactive platforms have not necessarily democratized meaning production. Instead, they introduced new actors—such as digital diplomacy accounts and instruments of soft power—that employ persuasive, aesthetic narratives to reshape sensitive issues. The case of the “Israel in the Gulf” account illustrates how framing can serve as a subtle tool of symbolic warfare, transforming media into an active participant in political conflict.

In light of these conclusions, addressing corruption in the media requires a balanced approach that combines factual reporting with structural analysis, grounded in values of justice and transparency.

this study recommends the following:

1. Improving media coverage of corruption by guiding journalists to employ structural frames rather than episodic ones, and by strengthening their analytical skills.
2. Strengthening the media’s oversight role through encouraging investigative reporting and establishing specialized units dedicated to monitoring corruption cases.
3. Enhancing the public’s critical awareness via media literacy education and digital platforms that teach users how to deconstruct and interpret media frames.
4. Regulating the digital environment by introducing safeguards to limit algorithmic manipulation and by supporting fact-checking initiatives.
5. Promoting research on framing and audience reception to measure the impact of media frames and to test alternative approaches that reinforce accountability and transparency

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