UNSTOPPABLE TRENDS

The Impact, Role, and Ideology of Yemeni News Websites

WALID AL-SAQAF

Supervisor: Stig-Arne Nohrstedt

20 May 2008
A Word of Gratitude

I would like to acknowledge my two university mentors, Stig-arne Nohrstedt and Roland Stanbridge. Aside from being the ones who helped me carry out this thesis academically, they are the ones who assisted me throughout my ordeal, which was a consequence of the Yemeni government's ban of my website Yemen Portal. I can still recall their gentle words of encouragement and support. To them I am ever grateful particularly as I believe that they will continue their support for me in working for, what I believe, is a noble cause.

And through them, I would also like to express my gratitude to Örebro University for standing up for me and for sending an official memo to the President of Yemen asking him to lift the unjust ban. They have demonstrated how a university and its student could come together in defense of the freedom of expression and research. The courageous stance of the university should be respected and admired for it has also shown that academia and activism can sometimes go hand in hand to achieve a higher purpose.

Then I also want to acknowledge my colleagues in class, Calixte, Adriana, Ning, Victor, Bussaba, Jacky, Besnik, and Alex. All have shown support in many ways during my troubles and have helped lift my spirit to face the odds that I confronted.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my loving wife Afaf and my two wonderful daughters Rania and Sarah, whose endless love keeps me going on and on.
To

**ABDULAZIZ,**

and

**AZIZA**

*Rest in peace...*
# Table of Contents

**DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS** ............................................................................................................... VII
**LIST OF TABLES** ........................................................................................................................................ IX
**LIST OF FIGURES** ........................................................................................................................................ X
**ABSTRACT** ................................................................................................................................................ XI

## 1 INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................................................. 1

1.1 **BACKGROUND** ...................................................................................................................................... 3
    1.1.1 Yemen and media: a historical glimpse .......................................................................................... 3
    1.1.2 Internet in Yemen .......................................................................................................................... 6
    1.1.3 Yemeni websites: a historical preview ........................................................................................... 7
    1.1.4 Yemen Portal .................................................................................................................................... 9
    1.1.5 The Yemeni News Cyber Space ....................................................................................................... 11
    1.1.6 Personal background ..................................................................................................................... 12

1.2 **PURPOSE** .............................................................................................................................................. 13
    1.2.1 Research questions ....................................................................................................................... 13
    1.2.2 Personal motive ............................................................................................................................... 13

1.3 **LIMITATIONS** ...................................................................................................................................... 14
    1.3.1 Technical limitations ..................................................................................................................... 14
    1.3.2 Theoretical approach limitations .................................................................................................. 16
    1.3.3 Interview-related limitations ......................................................................................................... 16
    1.3.4 Ban of Yemen Portal ..................................................................................................................... 17

1.4 **THESIS OUTLINE** ................................................................................................................................. 17

## 2 PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ................................................................. 19

2.1 **PREVIOUS RESEARCH** ........................................................................................................................ 19
    2.1.1 Research on Internet in Yemen .................................................................................................... 19
    2.1.2 Research on Internet in the Arab world ....................................................................................... 21
    2.1.3 Research on online news .............................................................................................................. 26

2.2 **THEORETICAL APPROACHES** ........................................................................................................... 29
    2.2.1 New media theory ......................................................................................................................... 30
    2.2.2 The World Wide Web ................................................................................................................... 31
    2.2.3 Immediacy ..................................................................................................................................... 33
    2.2.4 Hypermediacy ............................................................................................................................... 36
    2.2.5 Remediation .................................................................................................................................. 37
    2.2.6 Summary ....................................................................................................................................... 40

## 3 METHODS AND MATERIAL ..................................................................................................................... 41

3.1 **QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS** .................................................................................................................. 41
    3.1.1 Cases analyzed .............................................................................................................................. 42
    3.1.2 Sampling approach ....................................................................................................................... 43
    3.1.3 SPSS variables ............................................................................................................................. 45

3.2 **CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS** ..................................................................................................... 46
    3.2.1 Sample of articles ......................................................................................................................... 46
    3.2.2 CDA phases .................................................................................................................................. 49

3.3 **INTERVIEWS** ....................................................................................................................................... 50
    3.3.1 Interview type ............................................................................................................................... 50
APPENDICES ................................................................................................................................. 135

BIBLIOGRAPHY ........................................................................................................................... 129

CONCLUSION................................................................................................................................ 123

RESULTS AND FINDINGS............................................................................................................... 61

4.4.4 Summary and discussion of the findings .............................................................................. 74

2.1 Event and sources analyzed .................................................................................................... 77

2.2 Action and reaction ................................................................................................................ 80

2.3 A small station gathering vs. a massive rally ......................................................................... 81

2.4 Who started the fire? Who is the victim? ............................................................................ 83

2.5 Government, opposition websites missing the context ............................................................ 87

2.6 Summary and discussion of the findings ............................................................................... 89

3.3.5 Event and sources analyzed ............................................................................................... 51

3.3.3 Interview themes ................................................................................................................ 52

3.3.2 Sample of interviewees ....................................................................................................... 52

3.3.1 Interview schedule ............................................................................................................. 55

3.3.5 Questions for each of the themes ....................................................................................... 57

3.4 Questions for each of the themes .......................................................................................... 58

4 RESULTS AND FINDINGS........................................................................................................... 61

4.1 Quantitative analysis ............................................................................................................. 61

4.1.1 Mechanism of data gathering ............................................................................................ 61

4.1.2 Yemen’s news websites explored ...................................................................................... 63

4.1.3 Government sources: doing more, getting less ................................................................. 65

4.1.4 Readership and comments ............................................................................................... 67

4.1.5 Some websites do better than others ............................................................................... 69

4.1.6 Summary and discussion of the findings ........................................................................... 74

4.2 CDA: Ideological tendencies of Yemeni news website ........................................................... 76

4.2.1 Event and sources analyzed ............................................................................................... 77

4.2.2 Action and reaction ............................................................................................................. 80

4.2.3 A small station gathering vs. a massive rally ..................................................................... 81

4.2.4 Who started the fire? Who is the victim? ......................................................................... 83

4.2.5 Government, opposition websites missing the context .................................................... 87

4.2.6 Summary and discussion of the findings ........................................................................... 89

4.3 Interviews: producers have their say .................................................................................... 91

4.3.1 Cross-validating and justifying the quantitative analysis findings .................................... 92

4.3.2 Role, ideology, and impact ............................................................................................... 102

4.3.3 Summary of findings ....................................................................................................... 118

4.4 Discussion of study’s findings .............................................................................................. 119

4.4.1 Triangulation achieved ..................................................................................................... 119

4.4.2 Cyberspace found to be breathing space ......................................................................... 120

4.4.3 Independent websites: successes and challenges ............................................................... 121

4.4.4 An impact despite the odds ............................................................................................. 122

5 CONCLUSION............................................................................................................................. 123

5.1 First glimpse of Yemen’s news cyber sphere ........................................................................ 123

5.2 Independent websites bring diversity .................................................................................. 124

5.3 Online news genre nonexistent .......................................................................................... 125

5.4 Impact and reactions of today may decide tomorrow’s course ............................................ 127

6 BIBLIOGRAPHY .......................................................................................................................... 129

7 APPENDICES .............................................................................................................................. 135

7.1 Appendix (A): master statistics table for the YNCS ............................................................ 135

7.2 Appendix (B): Participants in the focus group interviews .................................................... 137

7.3 Appendix (C): General guidelines for the focus group interviews ...................................... 138

7.3.1 Technical overview (Day 1 - Jan 13) ............................................................................... 138

7.3.2 Human and financial resources (Day 2 - Jan 14) .............................................................. 141

7.3.3 Yemeni news websites and political impact (Day 3 – Jan 15) ........................................ 143

7.4 Appendix (D): Translated articles used in the CDA ............................................................. 146

7.4.1 Government Website I .................................................................................................. 146

7.4.2 Government website II .................................................................................................. 148

7.4.3 Opposition website I ....................................................................................................... 150

7.4.4 Opposition website II ..................................................................................................... 153

7.4.5 Independent website I ................................................................................................... 155

7.4.6 Independent website II ................................................................................................... 158

7.5 Appendix (E): Personal chronology .................................................................................... 162

7.5.1 Yemen Portal establishes itself in Yemen ................................................................. 162

7.5.2 Yemen Portal: a platform for all with no exceptions ....................................................... 163
7.5.3 Website blocked, blacklisted ............................................................................................... 164
7.5.4 Solidarity meeting ............................................................................................................... 165
7.5.5 Resistance... the only way ............................................................................................... 166
7.5.6 Bringing the content of banned websites to one place ...................................................... 168
7.5.7 A violence turning point ................................................................................................... 170
7.5.8 A wave of threats ............................................................................................................. 171
7.5.9 Government lost battle, but war continues ...................................................................... 172
7.5.10 Looking ahead ................................................................................................................ 174
Definitions and abbreviations

**Article visits**
Number of visits (clicks) from a specific visitor to a website's news article that appears on Yemen Portal's pages during the sampled period of this study.

**ADSL**
Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL) is a form of broadband Internet connectivity, a data communications technology that permits higher speed for Internet access compared to ISDN or dialup.

**CDA**
Critical Discourse Analysis is an interdisciplinary method of studying language or discourse.

**E-business**
Electronic business refers to any business activity that relies on the Internet and automated digital information systems.

**Government news websites**
Yemeni news websites that were –at the time of this study- run by the government (e.g., sabanews.net) or the ruling party (e.g., almotamar.net). Also referred to as government websites.

**GPC**
The General People's Congress, which is the Yemeni ruling party and majority holder in the Yemeni parliament.

**Independent news websites**
Yemeni news websites that were –at the time of this study- privately-owned and considered editorially independent (e.g., newsyemen.net). Also referred to as independent websites.

**Interaction level**
The level of readers' interaction with a specific website is measured in terms of the number of comments stored in Yemen Portal for that specific website.

**Internet café**
A place where Internet access is provided for a fee per minute or hour.

**ISDN**
Integrated Services Digital Network is a telephone network
system that allows digital transmission of voice and data over ordinary telephone lines but that achieves a higher speed of up to 128kb/s for Internet access compared to dial-up.

**ISP**

Internet Service Provider. In the context of this study, it refers to Yemen Net, which is the country's dominant ISP and is controlled by the Yemeni Ministry of Communication.

**Opposition news websites**

Yemeni news websites that were— at the time of this study— run by a political entity that has an active public anti-government stance. They include websites belonging to the opposition parties (e.g., alshora.net) and websites run by dissident entities in exile (e.g., adenpress.com). Also referred to as opposition websites.

**Political affiliation**

A political affiliation of a news website is one of three: opposition, government, or independent.

**Politically sensitive story**

A story that touches upon issues, whose coverage needs extra care and attention because it could be penalized based on the country's press law. Examples of such stories are the ones related to the head of the regime, Yemen's 1990 unity and national security.

**Yemen Portal**

A search engine that automatically searches, fetches, and stores thousands of news articles from the YNCS. It is the main research tool used for this study (http://yemenportal.net).

**Yemeni news websites**

Arabic-language websites with news content that is predominantly focused on Yemen. For this research, the YNCS is taken as a sample representing Yemeni news websites.

**YNCS**

The Yemeni News Cyber Space is constitutes the government, opposition and independent news websites that had content stored in the search engine *Yemen Portal*. See Appendix (A) for the full list.
List of Tables

Table 3.1: SPSS variables assigned for the main data set ...................... 45
Table 3.2: Story sources, dates and titles of stories used for the CDA .......... 48
Table 3.3: Sampled websites considered for the interviews......................... 54
Table 3.4: Days, themes, and key points raised during the group interviews..... 56
Table 4.1: Summary table for all sources based on political affiliation .......... 63
Table 4.2: Distribution of articles with pictures ........................................ 65
Table 4.3: Distribution of comments........................................................ 68
List of Graphs

Figure 1: How YemenPortal.net operates as a search/web crawling engine........ 9
Figure 2: Immediacy as reflected in the New York Times' "Times Reader"........... 35
Figure 3: Sources based on political affiliation ............................................. 63
Figure 4: Dead and active websites ............................................................. 64
Figure 5: Number of articles and article visits ............................................. 66
Figure 6: Production frequency and average article visits for websites ............ 67
Figure 7: Websites that allow comments ..................................................... 67
Figure 8: Number of Comments ................................................................. 68
Figure 9: Comprehensive look at different factors for government news sites ... 69
Figure 10: Scatter graph demonstrating the range in production ................... 70
Figure 11: Comprehensive look at different factors for opposition news sites.... 71
Figure 12: Comprehensive look at different factors for top independent sites.... 73
Figure 13: Relative factors comparing the top 10 websites in article visits ........ 73
Figure 14: A snapshot taken from yemenportal.net of an article by Al-Watan

bews website entitled "A Yemeni news website contributes in finding a little
girl three hours after reporting about her disappearance.".......................... 112
Abstract

This research aims at finding the structure, traffic, role, ideology and impact of Yemeni news websites. In terms of structure and traffic, the study examines websites based on their affiliation, update frequency, production volume, associated pictures and estimated article visits and comments\textsuperscript{1} levels.

To achieve this, content analysis was carried out for a sample of about fifty thousand news articles published on seventy websites during 1 May 2007- 31 January 2008. News websites in Yemen were split in this study to three groups based on their political affiliation. The first group included websites owned by the ruling party or the state. The second included those that were run by opposition political parties or dissident entity outside Yemen. The third group of websites was those that were known to not officially represent a political entity and that publicly claimed to be independent.

Experts representing some of those websites were interviewed to provide their views and comments on the content analysis findings as well as on the role, ideology and impact of Yemeni news websites. Their input was collected through focus group interviews held during January 13-15, 2008 in Yemen's capital Sana'a. Those experts were basically news website managers and professionals, whose feedback was crucial for the findings and conclusion of this study.

In terms of the characteristics of the Yemeni news websites, the study revealed that government news websites\textsuperscript{2} had a much higher volume of content and frequency of updates, yet they also had the lowest article visits. On the other hand and despite their lower production volume, opposition and independent websites had much higher rates of article visits. Independent websites however totally dominated the other two groups in the

---

\textsuperscript{1} Several news websites allow readers to add a comment on articles, allowing a two-way interaction between the news website and the reader. This has become increasingly common for Yemeni websites.

\textsuperscript{2} The term 'government news websites' should be understood in their context defined exclusively for this study in the Definition section. The term is not confined to the literal definition of government websites as those run by a government institution. The same note also applies to opposition and independent websites.
volume of reader comments on published articles. Interviewees confirmed those findings and rationalized them based on their own experiences and knowledge.

Although high computer illiteracy rates constitute a major hurdle for news websites, interviewees noted that because websites are the only unregulated media in Yemen, they were able to publish more critical reports compared to the print media, which in turn attracted attention from readers as well as from the regime that often resorted to blocking some websites.

Interviewees remarked that ideological differences could be established by observing the coverage of politically sensitive events. This view confirmed the findings of the critical discourse analysis, which dealt with stories covering a politically sensitive event in six different sources, two from each of the three groups.

Among the findings of the study was the belief of the interviewed news website experts in the impact that news websites are having on the Yemeni society and on the country's politics as a whole. One interviewee went as far as suggesting that news websites have already started setting the news agenda for the print media.
1 Introduction

Since the introduction of the World Wide Web (WWW) in 1989 by Sir Tim Berners-Lee in Geneva, the public has been able to access customized news content quicker and more efficiently (Castells, 2001). The technical potential of the WWW greatly surpassed that of print media in a number of ways, creating a potential threat to newspapers as we know them today (Neuberger et al, 1998).

Although newspapers in the developed world have started adopting the WWW for their content in the early 1990s, (Trumbo, 2002) Yemen's first website with Arabic-language news content intended for the web only emerged in 2002, (Al-Tagheer, 2006) which came six years after the Internet itself was first introduced to in the country in 1996. (Yemen.net, 2008)

More than a decade later, the cyber news industry started thriving. Today, online readers are able to read hundreds of daily news stories in Arabic from seventy Yemeni news websites, which form the Yemeni News Cyber Sphere (YNCS) as shall be referred to hereafter.

When independent news website News Yemen emerged on May 3, 2005, its founder Nabil Al-Sufi said he was not taken seriously and was told his website could not be viable, let alone be competitive with traditional media. Given that at the time, Yemen had an Internet penetration of about 1%, (Internet World Stats, 2008) one would have assumed that Al-Sufi's project may have been doomed to fail.

However, not only was Al-Sufi's website able to survive until date, but over the years, it was able to train a professional team, develop resources, and gain a reputation that made it a major local news source for many newspapers. In March 2008, Al-Sufi was even able to launch the Abwab magazine and is expected to depend on his website for a significant chunk of the material that would appear in the magazine. (News Yemen, 2008)

It is important to note that the YNCS does not include all Yemeni news websites. But it is safe to consider it a representation of the most active and widely accessed Yemeni news websites. Hence, the results obtained by analyzing YNCS should be sufficiently accurate to be applied on all Yemeni news websites.
Although he was among the most successful, Al-Sufi was certainly not the only entrepreneur who succeeded in this field. There has been noticeable growth in the number of Yemen-related news websites in recent years. During the period from May 2007 to February 2008 alone, two new news websites emerged every month on average\textsuperscript{4}.

The lack of regulations of news websites in Yemen made it possible for news websites to report on issues that were perceived as taboo in the print media. Several red lines were crossed by many websites in recent years, thus far without any legal repercussions. After reporting about corruption and scandals involving government officials, some of the stories published on news websites caused uproar and led to investigating those reports by the government and others. The impact of news websites was noticed by the regime, which occasionally resorted to blocking some of them, including *Yemen Portal*, which was used as a research tool for this very study\textsuperscript{5}.

Given the rapid growth of news websites, it is fair to ask how this sphere evolved, what it is composed of, what discourse it has taken, and what impact it may have. These questions become even more interesting given that Yemen has one of the lowest computer literacy rates in the Arab world, (Internet World Stats, 2008) yet as this study has found, it is also home to a diverse and rich online news sector.

\textsuperscript{4} The results were obtained through yemenportal.net's tracking of new news websites. More about yemenportal.net and how it operates can be found in the background section of this chapter.

\textsuperscript{5} Appendix (E) includes a personal chronology of the researcher related to yemenportal.net.
1.1 Background

In order to have a full understanding of Yemeni news websites, they need to be put in their appropriate context. This background section will briefly cover the aspects of Yemen's history in the general media context before it zooms in to the field of news websites. It will provide a brief background about the Internet and how the first news websites were initiated.

The section will also briefly touch upon Yemen Portal, Yemen's first news search engine, which is a research tool developed as part of the master program leading this thesis study.

Finally, this background section will provide a brief personal background about the researcher, who is also the developer of Yemen Portal.

1.1.1 Yemen and media: a historical glimpse

The Republic of Yemen was formed on May 22, 1990 when former socialist Democratic Republic of Yemen –also known as South Yemen- and the former capitalist Yemen Arab Republic –also known as North Yemen- were united to form the Republic of Yemen. A new constitution, flag and reality were formed on that day.

Among the dramatic changes was the adoption of the multi-party democratic system after decades of a one-party system rule in each country. Freedom was granted to all citizens to establish their print media although broadcast media remained under strict government control. Following unification, a significant growth of publishing activity was witnessed, as the number of licensed publications doubled quickly (Whitaker, 2001).

Although newspapers thrived for many years, they could not be truly competitive with broadcast media because of the high illiteracy rate and due to the fact that Yemen remains a primarily rural country with 66% percent of the population living in remote
areas to where only a few newspapers are able to reach readers regularly. (Press Reference, 2008)

The newly founded press freedom had resulted in polarized press coverage as political rhetoric reflected in the print media was inflammatory during the period from 1990-1994, when anti-government rhetoric in opposition newspapers reached its climax. Tensions mounted in late 1993 and early 1994 when frictions started to emerge between the President Ali Abdullah Saleh and his vice President Ali Salim Al-Beidh, who was formerly the head of south Yemen. The hostility spilled over to the press, which was used as a propaganda tool by both regimes to alienate public opinion against each other. The situation got out of control in May 1994 when Al-Beidh declared a one-sided withdraw from the unification treaty and demanded international recognition of the former south as a separate country as it used to be prior to 1990. (MSN Encarta, 2008)

President Saleh retaliated by declaring Al-Beidh a traitor and a separatist. A short time later, a 3-month civil war broke out between the yet to be unified army factions. The war ended on June 7, 1994 with the victory of the northern army, resulting in the fleeing of most southern leaders and the maintaining of the country's unity by force. The victory was sometimes referred to as "re-unity by force." (Whitaker, 1994)

Following the war, many southern newspapers had to shut down mainly due to drought of finances from the former regime but also due to excessive risks to writers who dared criticize the north or the country's unity. Since then, the southern opposition suffered successive blows as the regime began manipulating the state’s annual subsidies to political parties to reward and punish opposition parties as it pleased. (Fattah, 2008)

The 1994 war also affected the opposition and independent media. The level of freedom of the press has since been in steady decline as it suffered from successive setbacks mainly caused by trials, kidnappings, mysterious fatal accidents of renowned editors and a host of other measures. Overall, the government continued to pursue a concerted campaign to restrict press freedom (Freedom House, 2007)
Fifteen years after the war, voices from the south of Yemen started to re-emerge calling for the separation of south Yemen from the north. The calls were often not reported in the print media due to the restrictive press law that prohibits the publishing of any material that may harm national unity or incite hatred. Critical writing about unity is among three things that may get a Yemeni in trouble. The other two are the person of the president and the armed forces. (Al-Saqaf, 2006)

However, it was found through this study that voices critical of unity have been increasingly detectable on news websites, which have not been legally pursued thus far due to the lack of a law that regulates them.

Mobile phone short text messages and videos of demonstrators in the south of Yemen were circulated online and through cell phones around the country with the help of widely accessible new technology. For example, the demonstrations held in March 2008 were recorded using cell phone cameras and sent to youtube.com, which is a popular video search engine where regular users could upload their videos directly. Those videos were then viewed, downloaded, and shared by email and on online discussion groups and even through cell phones using multi media short messaging. They were also fetched by Yemen Portal, which in turn, increased their exposure.

New media have slowly started to make inroads with the public through news websites. In recent months, the government banned several news websites that published information about riots and demonstrations in the south. (Gharbia, 2008)

Despite being widely covered by several news websites, anti-unity demonstrations in the south of the country were rarely reported by the national broadcast media, which are monopolized by the state or even by the regional and international media, whose correspondents require licenses from the ministry of information to operate in the country. (Al-Saqaf, 2006)

---

6 Among those websites was Yemen Portal, which remains blocked to the date of submitting this thesis. See Appendix (E) for more on the ban.
1.1.2 Internet in Yemen

The Internet was first introduced to the public in Yemen in 1996 by Teleyemen, a joint British-Yemeni telecommunication company, which was also operating a mobile telephony service. (Yemen.net, 2008) Offered as part of Teleyemen's services, the Internet started with very few subscribers due to poor infrastructure, low literacy rates, and lack of personal computer affordability. Furthermore, the fees for subscription were relatively expensive for the average Yemeni household, whose annual per capita income is about USD 2,400. (CIA Factbook, 2008)

Teleyemen's Internet monopoly ended in 2002 when the Ministry of Communication established Yemen Net, which became the country's largest Internet Service Provider (ISP). Since then, the rate of Internet subscribers has been steadily rising. The number of Internet users rose to over 220,000 in 2005, compared to 15,000 in 2000. (Internet World Stats, 2008)

Although there are currently ADSL, ISDN and dial-up Internet subscriptions available, only dial-up is available outside the outskirts of the main cities. But in many remote areas even dial-up is not available due to the lack of landline phone connectivity. The study found that subscription prices range from YER 6,000 (USD 30) to YER 24,000 (USD 120) monthly depending on the the number of hours of accessibility and the speed, which was maxed at 512 kb/s based on a 2004 study by Information Technology expert Helmi Noman. Furthermore, 61% of Internet users accessed the Internet at an Internet café, 24% had access at work, while only 13% had access at home and a mere 2% accessed the Internet from school. (Noman, 2004)

Nonetheless, there is a steady increase in the number of Internet cafés allowing affordable Internet accessibility, which could be as cheap as YR 2 ($0.01) per minute. A report released in 2006 by the Ministry of Telecommunication and Information Technology showed an increase in the number of Internet cafés from 753 in 2005 to 836 in 2006. (September Net, 2007)
Given the poor infrastructure and limited investment in this field, the Internet penetration remained much lower than the average of the Middle East region, whose Internet penetration ratio is 17.4%, which in itself is still lower than the world average of 20%. (Internet World Stats, 2008) Furthermore, decision-makers on the governmental level are not well exposed to the information-based environment. (Noman, 2004)

Among the obstacles facing the use of the Internet is the frequent power outages throughout the country. Electricity blackouts have been so severe that they have not only affected Internet users, but have also negatively impacted regular students who often have to use candles at night to cope with their studies. (Al-Ajel, 2006) There are even some rural regions in Yemen where electricity is yet to be delivered.

Those and other factors contributed to ranking Yemen at the bottom of the list in terms of Internet penetration compared to other Arab countries. By the end of 2006, the number of subscribers to the Internet was around 1%, while 2.4% of the population used the Internet regularly. By 2010 however, the Arab Advisors Group\(^7\) projects the penetration to climb to 1.36% and the percentage of users accessing the Internet regularly to grow to 6.81%. (AME Info, 2006)

### 1.1.3 Yemeni websites: a historical preview

The first designs of Yemeni websites in the late 1990s were often quite simple and primitive. Among the first Yemeni websites built was Yemen Times Online, which was established in 1997 as the official website of Yemen Times weekly newspaper. That period was characterized by slow Internet connectivity, limited expertise and expensive hosting packages.

In the early years following the turn of the decade however, things started to improve particularly as Arabic –as a language- started to be standardized. This was a major milestone given that the language used in Yemeni websites until 2002 was mainly

\(^7\) An Amman-based group specialized in research, analysis and forecasts of Arab communications, media and technology markets (http://www.arabadvisors.com)
English because Arabic was not easy to integrate into the WWW. Although several small websites started to emerge in the late 1990s, only a few had regular news updates.

In May 1999, the country's official news agency Saba launched its own news website Saba News to publish its news articles on the web. It started with English and Arabic but the content published was merely a replica of what it provided as part of its regular wire service offered to local and international media for a fee. (Saba News, 2008)

The breakthrough came in October 2002 when Al-Sahwa Net became the first Arabic news website to be updated with exclusive news content around the clock. The website represented the opposition Islamic Congregation of Islah Party, which had a weekly newspaper with the name Al-Sahwa but which had different contents and a different target group. (Al-Sahwa Net, 2007)

Soon after, the ruling party the General People's Congress (GPC) launched Al-Motamar Net, which –like Al-Sahwa Net- had exclusive online news content. The website represented the official viewpoint of the GPC and was used throughout the campaign of the 2003 parliamentary elections, which it later won, allowing it to dominate the parliament with 79% share of its seats.

In January 2004, Al-Tagheer Net became the first independent Yemeni news website with exclusive online news content. A year later, NewsYemen Net was established to gradually climb to be one of the most popular Yemeni news websites.

Since 2004, many other opposition, government and independent websites emerged. The most widely accessed Yemeni news websites according to both Alexa and Yemen Portal were found to be Mareb Press and Naba News, both which claim to be independent.

---

8 Alexa is a website owned by Amazon.com that provides information on web traffic to other websites
1.1.4 Yemen Portal

Yemen Portal, whose Universal Resource Locater (URL) is http://yemenportal.net is a crawling and searching engine for news and other content related to Yemen. It was initially built for the Media Project course of the 2006-2008 Global Journalism Master of Arts Program at Örebro University in Örebro, Sweden. It was programmed as an automated collector of news and other content related to Yemen from news websites, blogs, forums, online magazines, video search engines, and other online sources.

Since its launch in the end of May 2007, the portal grew and expanded to become one of the most prominent websites in Yemen. Given its ability to gather and tally news content from thousands of websites, it was approved as a research tool for this very study as it was found useful in applying quantitative analysis on content derived from the tens of news websites, from which it fetched data.

![Diagram of YemenPortal.net operations](image)

**Figure 1: How YemenPortal.net operates as a search/web crawling engine**

Given the automated nature of the engine, it was able to gather about half a million items including more than a hundred thousand news and opinion articles from more than one
thousand sources in less than a year. The news websites indexed and crawled regularly by the engine were referred to as the YNCS in this study in recognition to the fact that they are the most prominent sources of news related to Yemen. The process is illustrated in figure 1 and starts by regularly checking a list of news websites for fresh news content or updates to existing records. It then fetches the content and stores it electronically to its database. It also tracks visits to each article by adding up the number of clicks on the headline of an article appearing on its pages to the article's record in the database as illustrated. This is done seamlessly around the clock in a fully automated fashion without interference.

The use of Yemen Portal for the purpose of this thesis is to produce a sample of articles that broadly represent Yemeni news websites at large and hence serve as a basis for a statistical analysis that would give an idea about the quantity of news articles published by the different websites and to reflect the level of article visits and interaction for each of those articles and their sources.

Apart from its use as a research tool, Yemen Portal it was helpful in presenting the latest important and breaking news on Yemen from many news websites without subjecting the sources to filtering or censorship of any kind. The automated nature of the engine guaranteed that there would be no tampering or human interference in the crawling and indexing process, giving it a level of credibility from the perspective of online visitors.

On January 19 however, the Yemeni government blocked the website without prior notice, preventing Internet users in Yemen from accessing its content. Although no reasons were given for the ban, certain sources close to the regime said the government objected to the neutrality of the engine, which allowed the publishing of critical news coverage targeting the regime and other issues often viewed as 'taboo' in journalistic circles. It had been assumed that the engine may be unblocked if it filters out and censors certain content and blocks some sources from being represented. However, if done, such a measure would have weakened this research's credibility because the engine would
have been effectively transformed to a manipulation tool in the hand of the government. Thus far, the search engine remains neutral and also remains banned in Yemen\(^9\).

### 1.1.5 The Yemeni News Cyber Space

As described earlier, *Yemen Portal* was used as a research tool to analyze the different news websites focusing on Yemen. In referring to the news websites that had dominant news on Yemen, the term *Yemeni News Cyber Sphere* (YNCS) was introduced in this study. This sphere is basically the news websites that are indexed and crawled regularly by *Yemen Portal*. All websites within the YNCS are visited approximately once every 30 minutes by the portal's robot. The newest contents are then fetched and new comments in existing news stories are added to the database regularly.

The YNCS consists of seventy sources categorized based on their political affiliation as *independent, opposition, or government* and are treated equally in terms of number of articles fetched per round and times accessed per day. In other words, every site is checked every 30 minutes or 48 hours a day (512,640 times a year).

The content produced by the YNCS and which was stored in *Yemen Portal* during the period from May 2007 to February 2008 was around fifty thousand news stories and was accessed more than 140,000 times; had more than 35,000 comments; and published more than 20,000 pictures.

The high number of articles in this sample made studying and analyzing it rewarding as it could be generalized to include all news websites as will be described in the *Methods and Material* chapter. The study will hence give the first blueprints of a growing new media sector that has not been academically explored in this depth before.

---

\(^9\) A personal chronology on the ban can be found in Appendix (E).
1.1.6 Personal background

I became a full-time journalist in 1998 upon graduating from the Middle East Technical University in Ankara, Turkey. I pursued my career in journalism mainly through working for the *Yemen Times* weekly newspaper, which was founded by my father Professor Abdulaziz Al-Saqaf in 1990. I became the Editor-in-Chief of *Yemen Times* in 1999 after the unfortunate death of my father in a traffic accident in Yemen\textsuperscript{10}. I resigned from that post in 2005 although I continued to work for Yemen Times as a journalist and editor. I then worked for the Wall Street Journal for six months from March to September 2005 before starting my Master of Arts program at Örebro University in 2006.

However, given that my academic background was in computer engineering, I found myself leaning towards 'new', and away from 'old', media\textsuperscript{11}. It also allowed me to closely follow the developments of news websites in my country. I was personally involved in the design of *Yemen Times Online*, which was among the first news websites in Yemen.

My background and experience in software development and knowledge of Yemen's media situation in general and online media in particular served me well when I decided to develop *Yemen Portal* as a media project during my master degree program in Örebro. During my work on *Yemen Portal* in 2007, I was fortunate to have been able to foster relations and communicate regularly with dozens news website operators and owners. Along with my experience in the print media, online journalism has slowly become a preferred area of study.

Given my involvement in the news website area in Yemen, I became familiar with the ways news websites developed and how they were managed. This experience was essential for a better understanding of Yemen's online news media and was hence quite useful in carrying out this study.

\textsuperscript{10} More about the founder and the accident can be found at: http://yementimes.com/99/iss23

\textsuperscript{11} More about the definition of new and old media can be found in the *new media theory* section of the *Previous Research and Theoretical Framework* chapter of this study.
1.2 **Purpose**

The study aims at studying the content, structure, ideology, role, and impact of Yemeni news websites. It uses content analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) plus interviews of experts in the field to find the answers the below research questions.

1.2.1 **Research questions**

There are two research questions this study attempts to answer:

1) What are the structure, content, and traffic of the YNCS?

2) What are the role, ideology and impact of the YNCS from the standpoint of YNCS experts and in the context of the websites' political affiliation?

1.2.2 **Personal motive**

I was motivated to start this study mainly because it served as a natural extension of my initiative in creating Yemen Portal, which is the only news search engine dedicated to news on Yemen. I became interested in the Yemen Portal project because I wanted to establish an interface or 'portal' that would present the headlines and summaries of the most important and up-to-date events related to Yemen. Such a portal would save the time used to open and browse each and of the individual Yemeni news websites. Furthermore, it would allow me to search and find relevant stories in many Yemeni news websites without having to use a sophisticated query on other search engines such as Google.

Once Yemen Portal was established and had rich content that included tens of thousands of articles and comments, it became a useful tool to analyze what each of the websites published and allowed me to have a broad idea of which sources had more article visits.
and comments. Hence, it became a tool to basically build the map of Yemen's news websites in an efficient and reliable manner.

Finally, I wanted to know if despite the high computer illiteracy rates in Yemen, news websites had an impact on the society and politics of Yemen. And if there is an impact, I very much wanted to know how producers of news contents for those websites feel about the prospects for the future, especially in the context of media as a whole. Answering those questions would set me on the road to explore online media in Yemen in greater depth in future and provide me with hints on how digital media is affecting lives in poor and developing societies.

I have also come to realize that this research is the first of its kind in Yemen, and hence this added to my eagerness to pursue it as an introductory piece of work that could encourage academic research by in this field in the future.

1.3 Limitations

The limitations of this study are basically technical, theoretical and practical. Those limitations are general and deal with the study as a whole. A few specific limitations for methods and material used for the study are mentioned in the Generalizability, validity and reliability section of the Methods and Material chapter.

1.3.1 Technical limitations

The use of Yemen Portal as a research tool to gather statistics on the content from tens of news websites is confined to the hardware limits of the account on which it is installed. The hosting service for the Yemen Portal provides database space that allows the storage of 400 MB per database. Given that all fetched stories are in Arabic, this requires up to
three times more space than Latin stories because of the fact that stories are stored using the UTF-8\textsuperscript{12} encoding method, which uses three bytes to represent every Arabic letter.

This storage limitation prevents the engine from saving all news articles retrieved from all sources. Hence, a maximum of 15 articles are retrieved from each source per 30 minutes. Although the retrieval of 15 stories at a time for each source may limit the overall number of stored stories, this limitation affects all sources equally and does not result in discrepancies or advantages to some sources over the others.

Another technical limitation is the number of comments retrieved for each story. Only comments on the first 15 stories of each source will be updated. This effectively means that comments for a website that is updated frequently may not be updated as often as comments that appear on a less frequently updated source.

*Yemen Portal's* server has its own processing limitations as well. Occasionally, the search engine gets excessive traffic, which could cause delay in processing some crawling procedures. Those delays rarely result in disrupting the whole system. But they were found to result in the over use of the server's resources, which slows down the whole website. The only way to overcome this limitation is by upgrading the server to a more expensive package.

Like any search and crawl engine, *Yemen Portal* has its own limitations as well. Those limitations include fact that the engine stores all news articles regardless of their content, which may result in duplicate articles stored under different titles as the engine is ultimately just a robot. It calculates the number of article visits based on a mechanical procedure that could be processed by an actual reader or even an automated process. Furthermore, successive visits from the same source are only counted once\textsuperscript{13}, the program

---

\textsuperscript{12} UTF-8 refers to the 8-bit UCS/Unicode Transformation Format, which is a variable-length character encoding system for Unicode used to standardize encoding of pages to incorporate any set of complex languages in the same space. Arabic and Japanese for example are two languages often encoded in UTF-8.

\textsuperscript{13} It is important to not allow the counting of the same person's attempt to open a story twice. It is often the case that readers click on the same link twice especially if the Internet connection is slow. The search engine ensures that only the first click on the link is counted to avoid duplicate counts.
INTRODUCTION

has a built-in script that ensures that only actual visitors –and not robot engines- are accessing the stories\textsuperscript{14}.

\subsection*{1.3.2 Theoretical approach limitations}

The lack of research done in this topic in the developing world, and particularly in the Arab world, poses a limitation to this study.

Given that this is the first study of its kind on Yemen's news websites, it was left with little theoretical basis to start with. Although the theoretical approach used in this study is largely based on the New Media Theory of \textit{immediacy}, \textit{hypermediacy} and \textit{remediation} by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999), this literature is purely based on Western perspectives.

A limited, albeit growing, number of new media theories have been introduced in recent years. But the fast pace of this field made it difficult to find well-founded theories that could be found useful and relevant to the scope of this study. Therefore, the study itself contributes by adding to the theories cited and introduces its own examples based on the most recent developments in the new media sector, particularly in relation to news websites.

\subsection*{1.3.3 Interview-related limitations}

The interviews used as a method in this study were carried out through focus group discussions where questions were presented in roundtable meetings with about six interviewees at a time. However, in each of the interviews, some of the persons supposed to be present were absent due to personal circumstances, which constituted a practical limitation.

\textsuperscript{14} This prevents counting accesses to the stories from automated scripts such as search engines applying robots, or web crawlers.
During the group interviews, a sense of confrontation and rivalry was sometimes felt. Although it did not result in missing the point of discussion, those rivalries did cause some delays to certain segments of the interviews. This may have been a practical limitation that is often associated with open group discussions.

1.3.4 Ban of Yemen Portal

Another limitation stemmed from the blockage of Yemen Portal by the Yemeni government a few days after the interviews for this study were completed in Yemen. The ban prevented thousands of Internet users in Yemen from accessing the website. This also meant that the data analyzed through Yemen Portal was for the period from the date the search engine started on May 1, 2007 and to –but not including- January 19, 2008, which was the date the website was banned from access in Yemen.

1.4 Thesis outline

As noted earlier, this research is aimed at studying the structure, content, ideology, role and impact of the Yemeni news websites. To achieve this, the thesis is divided into seven chapters. Following the Introduction chapter, the Theoretical Framework and Previous Research chapter aims at identifying relevant theories and research work on new media in general and when appropriate, work in the field of news websites in particular. It was found that the area is quite new for academia and hence cited theories and works were limited, particularly for Yemen.

The third is the Methods and Material chapter, which includes subsections each on one of the three methods used: content analysis, CDA and interviews. The chapter examines

\footnote{One of the interviewees said in a private meeting after one of the group interviews that he was unconformable in providing some information about the website for whom one of the interviewed fellows worked.}
how material was gathered and used along with aspects of generalizability, reliability, and validity of the methods and data.

The Results and Analysis chapter of the study examines and interprets the findings obtained by the methods described in the preceding chapter. Here, there will be three distinct sections, of which the first describes the results of the quantitative analysis of the YNCS with summaries, tables and graphs. In the second section, the findings of the CDA of the selected sample of articles will be revealed. The third section will present the findings from the interviews, which have also touched upon issues related to the findings of both the quantitative analysis and the CDA.

The Conclusion chapter sums up the study by analyzing the findings of the three methods and connecting them with literature and previous work. It has a more holistic approach by making sense of the study's results to form the whole image in the context of Yemen.

The Conclusion chapter is followed by the Biography and the Appendices chapter, which is composed of five different appendices (A, B, C, D, and E). The first appendix is on the summarized statistics of the websites comprising of the YNCS. The second listed the participants in the interviews while the third included the question guide used during the interviews. The fourth section contained the translated articles analyzed by the CDA method while the fifth and final appendix is as a personal chronology related to Yemen Portal.
2 Previous Research and Theoretical Framework

The previous research and theoretical framework relevant to news websites in general, and news websites in Yemen and the Middle East in particular were examined in this chapter. Some of the theoretical aspects of new media were the bulk of the theoretical framework section, which were also be used in the Conclusion chapter of the study.

2.1 Previous research

News websites in general are a relatively new subject of study. Almost all the previous research concerning online news was exclusively done in the West and had little relevance to the status of news websites in Yemen.

Nonetheless, some of those studies were noted in this chapter along with the few studies on the Internet in Yemen and the Arab world. The aspect of online news genre and research on how readers read online news were also mentioned.

2.1.1 Research on Internet in Yemen

Upon exploring academic studies related to the Internet in Yemen, it was concluded that there were very few such publicly available studies. Furthermore, it was found that this very study may be the first academic research on Yemeni news websites. Part of the factors that may have not permitted such an in-depth study before was the lack of a research tool to count and statistically derive a conclusive map of the YNCS. Until Yemen Portal was created, the possibility for such an effort was limited.

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, news websites are a relatively new phenomenon in Yemen as the first website with exclusive regularly updated news content came about in 2002. It is hence understandable that there may have not been many studies in this particular field.
One of the few studies on Internet in Yemen was a research\textsuperscript{16} entitled "Internet in Yemen: Problems and Prospects" written by Dr. Jassim Jirjees and Mohammed Al-Sanabani (1999), both who were media researchers in Yemen at the time of the publishing of their study. The researchers scanned the homepages hosted at the TeleYemen ISP server and used questionnaires for collecting data.

The study evaluated Internet services in Yemen from inception up to the end of 1998 and pinpointed "the problems faced by Yemeni users of the Internet, the constraints confronting its diffusion in Yemen and the profits gained by subscribers." (Jirjees and Al-Sanabani, 1999). Many of the Internet-related problems mentioned in the study dealt with computer illiteracy, poor infrastructure, high costs, and other factors.

Those same challenges were also raised in a 2002 study by Ibrahim Al-Kibsi, who is an information technology expert and researcher, when he emphasized the deficiencies in infrastructure and poor standards in the public communication sector. In his research on "Information and Internet in Yemen", Al-Kibsi noted that the lack of English language skills was another obstacle that hindered the growth of Internet in Yemen, (Al-Junaid, 2002) especially as English remains the language used for a healthy 56% of the WWW, while Arabic constituted less than 0.1%. (Ebbertz, 2002)

Al-Kibsi mentioned the dangers the Internet posed to the culture of the society, which is largely poorly educated. He noted that many young Internet users are using the less useful aspects of the technology such as pornography and gaming websites. (Al-Junaid, 2002)

Al-Kibsi's research also revealed that 90% of those using the Internet were students or expatriates living in the country with some spending as much as four hours daily at Internet cafes. His research concluded by noting the importance of raising awareness of the useful features of the Internet in the form of communication and research. (ibid)

A recent study done in 2007 was carried out by Rajeh Qaid, who focused on the specific aspect of electronic commerce in Yemen. In the conclusion of his study entitled "E-
commerce, its economic prospects, development demands, and applications in the Republic of Yemen", Qaid found that Yemen remained quite weak and unable to provide the appropriate platform for e-commerce. His study noted the overall low standards of service in the country and the poor utilization of the technology for business. (Al-Mutairi, 2008)

He noted that there were limited efforts to implement e-commerce projects in Yemen and doubted the feasibility of an electronic government amidst a very low internet penetration rate. (ibid)

Another study on the use of Internet in Yemen was done by researcher and human rights activist Gamal Eid. In a study published in 2005 with the title "Yemen: all roads lead backwards", Eid notes the tremendous challenges facing the Internet sector in Yemen including the government's monopoly in providing the service to the public. In his study, which was part of a book he wrote entitled "The Internet In the Arab World: A New Space of Repression?", the researcher said blocking websites for political or cultural reasons as well as removing barriers between computers at Internet cafes to eliminate privacy have lowered the number of Internet users. (Eid, 2005)

"Both the Yemeni Ministry of Communications and the Yemeni Ministry of Culture have banned and monitored many websites, actions that have led to a decline in Internet usage in Yemen. Governmental policy is not limited only to monitoring of the websites. The government went farther when it ordered that Net cafes remove the barriers separating one user from another, thereby violating users' privacy." (Eid, 2005)

2.1.2 Research on Internet in the Arab world

A 2006 study on Internet in the Arab world done also by Gamal Eid was entitled "Implacable Adversary: Internet and Arab Governments". In his work, Eid examined the infrastructure of communication and Internet in Yemen as well as other Arab countries.

---

17 Gamal Eid is a prominent Egyptian activist and researcher who had written several books and studies on freedom of the press, human rights and information technology in the Arab world. He is the director of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information
He noted that the Internet helped promote democracy in Yemen and other countries in the region. (Eid, 2007)

Yemen and Egypt share some characteristics, as Eid noted, particularly in terms of the use of websites to promote certain ideologies and beliefs. Opposition parties found a means to convey their message to the public despite the government's strict monopoly of broadcast media. Eid's research concluded that the Internet has contributed positively to democracy to the region.

"Thanks to the internet, pro-democracy movements which are different from legal political parties can announce themselves via constructing a website along side other Islamist websites. This is the best evidence on the important role played by the new tool (i.e., the internet) in respect with advocating different political situations." (ibid)

Among the studies found to have researched the Internet in the Arab world was a 2003 book by Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas entitled “Open Networks Closed Regimes: The impact of the Internet on Authoritarian Rule”. Among other points, the lack of adequate academic research in the Internet field was emphasized by the authors. (Kalathil and Boas, 2003)

"Despite the prevalence of popular punditry on the Internet's democratizing effects, little attention has been paid to the issue in academia. Most of the scholarly literature on democratization does not explore the role of the Internet or even the information and communication technologies (ICTs) that predate it.” (ibid:3)

The study by Kalathil and Boas had a broad look at the Internet and how it is used by repressive regimes, including two Arab countries: Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. It is worth noting however that the impact felt in Egypt and the UAE may be larger than Yemen particularly as the latter has a much lower rate of Internet penetration. Egypt has about 7.5% and UAE has 38.4% of its population with Internet access, both which are much higher than Yemen's level of less than 1%. (World Internet Stats, 2008)

The two authors listed several studies that pointed to the Internet’s influence on society in general and on the political direction of some countries in Eastern Europe and China in
particular. They also noted that there is literature carried out on Internet policy issues, much which is based on experience in the US and Europe and have little relevance to the situation in Yemen. (Kalathil and Boas, 2003)

One of the recent studies on the subject was “The Information Revolution and Developing Countries”, a research by J. Ernest and Wilson III, who argue that the Internet is contributing directly in promoting development in poor countries in the political and economic sense (Wilson, 2004).

Furthermore, American researcher W. Sean McLaughlin carried out a study on "The use of the Internet for political action by non-state dissident actors in the Middle East". In his work, he argued that dissidents, who may constitute a political opposition, are likely to utilize the Internet to wage an information attack against the government or to propagate a specific political message (McLaughlin, 2003). This notion seems to comfort to Gamal Eid's (2006) conclusions concerning the growing use of the Internet by opposition political parties in the Arab world (Eid, 2006).

Similarly, the government, McLaughlin (2003) said, is bound to do the same, creating a balance of power between the two sides on the Internet. Although he did not mention Yemen specifically, much of what he referred indicates that Yemen may indeed be within his target scope as it is after all, a Middle Eastern country.

In a recent study by Ahmed El Gody entitled "New Media, New Audience, New Topics, and New Forms of Censorship in the Middle East", the Internet was examined as one of the new media with a growing presence in the Middle East. (El Gody, 2007)

El Gody concluded that the Internet has served as a platform for regular Arab citizens to discuss political, social and religious issues that affect their lives. He noted that despite censorship practices by governments, the Internet allowed Arab society to more fully participate in the decision making process in the real world, locally, regionally, and internationally. (El Gody, 2007:230) But he equally emphasized the challenges facing the use of the Internet, including self-censorship.
"all governments create an atmosphere of fear to intimidate Internet users so that they would practice what is known as social responsibility censorship. Arab states punish those who cross Internet lines." (ibid:229)

El Gody's study was published in the 2007 book "New Media and the New Middle East" by Philip Seib, who himself argued that the "Internet can generate political pressure because it is itself intrinsically democratic and can foster populist participation." (Seib, 2007:5)

In Seib's book, Ibrahim Saleh wrote a chapter on "The Arab Search for a Global Identity: Breaking out of the Mainstream Media Cocoon". In his study, which dealt with new media and its growing role in democratization in the Arab world at large, Saleh reviewed the top six reasons for using the Internet in the Arab world and found that news content came in second place only after email. News was followed by information, chatting, entertainment, and social issues respectively. (Saleh, 2007:26).

Although the author did not take Yemen as an individual case, his conclusion on the distribution of Internet users matched the findings of Ibrahim Al-Kibsi in that it is the young who are making the most conform to of the Internet.

"With respect to the Internet, the majority of users are youth and young adults. While the first category uses the Internet mostly for emailing, downloading entertainment material, chatting, and other features, most of the young adults use it for following up the news or looking for information." (Ibid:27)

Another author participating in Seib's work was Samar al-Roomi, who wrote an essay on "Women, Blogs, and Political Power in Kuwait." Al-Roomi's focus on Kuwait did not prevent her from making generalizations concerning the role of the Internet in democratization in the Arab world at large. She noted that Arab Internet users have become more self-confident. (Al-Roomi, 2007:142)

"They believe in their own potential and in enlarging their social circles. While becoming more, self-assertive, Arab Internet users have also more assertive, Arab Internet users have also become more assertive about what they really want out of life." (ibid)
One of the interesting studies relating to the Internet's potentials in democratization in the Arab world was done by Orayb Aref Najjar, whose research was about "New Palestinian Media and Democratization from Below." In his work, Najjar pointed out the Internet's use in extending the reach of Palestinians and broadening their horizons in politics, education, and human rights. (Najjar, 2007) He even noted how the Internet, for Palestinians in particular, became an essential tool for everyday communication.

"Sam Bahour says that, 'Given Israeli occupation constraints, the Internet has been used as a tool of necessity and not a tool of luxury in order to maintain connectivity amongst each other and with the outside world.'" (ibid:196)

In their book entitled "New Media in the Muslim World", editors Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson paid significant attention to the evolution of the WWW in the Arab and Muslim world to becoming an important propaganda medium. (Eickelman and Anderson, 2003).

In a chapter on "The Internet and Islam's New Interpreters", Anderson (2003) noted how the WWW facilitated linkage over discursiveness and extended presentations of original material that could have been in printed or audio-visual format.

"And it [the WWW] brings together something of the moment. Into this world come people with views about Islam who are able thereby to extend those views into newly public forums-a "public" that is defined (like the readership of early newspapers) by those with access to its techniques." (Anderson, 2003:50)

Anderson noted that the Internet migrated from less public to more public spheres "by linking people, social networks, and modalities of thought in transnational networks of which they are in part the expression and in part its builders." (ibid:57)

Although the study targeted the Muslim World, which is much beyond the Arab world, many of its points are also applicable to Arab countries including Yemen, which is predominantly Muslim.
An essay on "The Birth of Media Ecosystem: Lebanon in the Internet Age", published in the aforementioned book was written by Yves Gonzalez-Quijano, who goes into detail in describing the content and structures of prominent Lebanese news websites. In his conclusion, Gonzalez-Quijano notes how online publication significantly contributed to spreading a new journalistic style that places more value on the sheer amount of information at the expense of contextualization and analysis. (Gonzalez-Quijano, 2003) This particular aspect of some news websites was found to match the behavior of government news websites in Yemen as shall be described in the findings chapter of this study.

The author noted that Lebanese press chose to establish a presence on the Internet by creating their news websites in order to strengthen their ties with foreign-based readership so as to play a more significant role in a new regional and even global space. (ibid). Yemen Times, which is the largest English newspaper in Yemen had similar motives behind the launch of its website in 1997, becoming the first Yemeni newspaper to establish presence on the Internet and at the time became one out of only 32 websites hosted in Yemen. (Al-Qadhi, 1998) This marks the similarities of objectives that some Arab media may have in terms of their intents from riding the Internet wave.18

2.1.3 Research on online news

After some effort, only a few studies were found to have tackled the aspect of online news in particular. Among them was an essay by Diana Lewis. In her work on "Online News: a new genre?" Lewis (2003) noted that if Internet continues its current openness to the public, it will inevitably result in the shift of power, which will result in the reduction of the power of mass media in news creation and distribution to a limited degree.

---

18 I personally observed and participated in the process of establishing and maintaining yementimes.com, which is the website of Yemen Times.
"Online news will not oust traditional news forms. But, as a growing part of the system of news production and circulation, it is redefining older news structures, and subtly changing the way we conceive of news." (Lewis, 2003:102)

The author detailed the differences between traditional news in the print and broadcast media and online news. She indicated that news websites and a new and unique genre is emerging out of online news with characteristics that differ from both print and broadcast media. She noted that online news appears to be theme-based, was held together graphically, and underwent progressive updating. (ibid).

In their 2002 study on "The Online News Genre through the User Perspective", authors Carina Ihlstrom and Jonas Lundberg shared a similar view that a new special genre for online news has evolved. They argue in their research that although news websites and newspapers may often carry similar content, the way the content is laid out and presented to the user are categorically different. (Ihlstrom and Lundberg, 2002)

"Since the newspapers, despite their similarities, have some different forms, the differences have revealed what elements seem to be the better design choice, from the user perspective, and whether the better elements have genre or non genre forms." (ibid:112)

They also noted that a particular unique aspect of the genre is the news stream, which was found to be similar in the nine Swedish newspaper websites they analyzed. Timely news updates were found to be crucially important and hence were presented in a prominent location, often giving news websites an edge compared to print and broadcast media. (ibid)

Furthermore, Lundberg (2001) had a separate study in 2001 on "On-line Newspapers and Genre Development on the World Wide Web", in which he examined the genre analysis of online newspapers revealing how their mediating form affected news related activities. In his findings, the author concludes that there was evidence of a special genre of online newspapers. He also concluded that online news genre supported different activities than printed papers. Meanwhile, papers that used digital material for their website treated it differently and sometimes incorrectly. (Lundberg, 2001)
The author also noted that "structures were dependent on a particular set of mediating roles, which may cause problems when altering the current designs or using them elsewhere." (Lundberg, 2001:9)

Another study that Ihlstrom carried out with Lars Bo Eriksen was on the "Evolution of the Web News Genre - The Slow Move beyond the Print Metaphor". In their 2000 study, the authors unveiled a pattern that signaled that online news websites were moving towards building a common genre that would set them apart from traditional media. (Ihlstrom and Eriksen, 2000)

They found that news websites started to use news streams increasingly to support the proposition that web media can be used to mainly disseminate hard news to reach the audience as fast as possible. The study was done on Scandinavian newspapers with online news content. (ibid)

It is important to note here that those researches have been focused on Western standards of online news and many have been done many years ago, which may have an implication of being potentially be out of date.

A more recent and interesting research on online news was jointly carried out by Stanford University and Poynter Institute under the name "Stanford-Poynter Eyetracking Study", of which the last of the series "Eyetracking III" was released in 2004. The study aimed at learning how Internet news readers went about using news online. The results were based on observations of 46 people for one hour as their eyes followed online news and real multimedia content. (Outing and Ruel, 2004)

The study came up with some specific results, of which the most important were.

"1) The eyes most often fixated first in the upper left of the page, then hovered in that area before going left to right. Only after perusing the top portion of the page for some time did their eyes explore further down the page.

2) Dominant headlines most often draw the eye first upon entering the page -- especially when they are in the upper left, and most often (but not always) when in the upper right."
The study served as a rough guide to help news websites structure their content to attract users and produce more relevant information useful for the readers. Some of the findings indicated that the size of paragraphs and type of font did matter. The type of content was also important and stories with relevant headlines to the interests of the readers received greater attention.

Although this study focused on a narrow group of users representing volunteers for the eye tracking experiment, the results of the study should be an eye opener of the possibility that Arab Internet users may have certain interests in news websites that may be different than what is provided in the other types of media. This is a relatively untapped field of research and study in the Middle East.

This study on Yemeni news websites, as will be discussed in the Conclusion chapter, has noted a contrast with the some of the previous research findings, particularly concerning the finding of a unique online news genre, which seems to have not yet evolved in Yemen.

### 2.2 Theoretical approaches

The theoretical approach for this study were predominantly based on the new media theory scholarship by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, whose work is reflected in their 2000 book "Remediation: Understanding New Media". The authors' main concepts concerning new media were applied to the WWW in general and particularly to Yemeni news websites when possible. The three main aspects of the theory discussed in this study are *Immediacy*, *hypermediacy*, and *remediation*. (Bolter and Grusin, 2000)

The chapter starts with a general definition of new media theory followed by introduction of the WWW and its context within new media. The study assumes that pages created on
the WWW inherit the characteristics of new media\textsuperscript{19}. This assumption is necessary in order to apply the theoretical framework on Yemeni news websites in this study. It will also be useful to relate to the ideas portrayed in the subsequent chapters.

### 2.2.1 New media theory

Although this study focuses on Yemeni news websites, theoretically, they need to be put in a broader context involving the Internet, communication, media, and digital technology. This is how the analysis of new media theory has come to be important and relevant.

New media theory, as defined by Jeffrey Bardzell in his work "New Media Theory Primer", is defined as "an intellectual discipline that examines the nature, roles, and functioning of new media objects (that is, works) in their cultures." (Bardzell, 2008)

However, "new media" itself are quite new and their definition is not yet standardized. In their book "New Media: A Critical Introduction", Martin Lister et al. noted that the term remains enormously general and vague. (Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, Kelley, 2003)

The use of the term 'new' in 'new media' is used to mark a break with history because it is assumed to be an outgrowth of the so-called "old media", whose definition has not been standardized as well. But generally speaking, old media are the forms of communication prior to the digital world. This includes traditional media such as magazines, newspapers, television, cable, and radio. Naturally, new media would be the contrast of old media, which explains why the Internet is part of new media as it is fully digitized. (Lawson-Borders, 2003)

Although there are different approaches in the field of new media theory, this study will only be dealing with the work of Bolter and Grusin, which was found to be the most appropriate for this study.

\textsuperscript{19} Given that the World Wide Web is an essential part of new media
Among approaches of other researchers, it is worth noting the new media theory approach by Bryon Hawk, who examines both media and new media as a complex ecological and rhetorical context. In the "New Media Theory" series he edits, Hawk notes that "the merger of media and new media creates a global social sphere that is changing the ways we work, play, write, teach, think, and connect." (Hawk, 2008)

However, Hawk also acknowledges that this field is rather new and requires more work related to digital media.

"Because this new context operates through evolving arrangements, theories of new media have yet to establish a rhetorical and theoretical paradigm that fully articulates this emerging digital life." (ibid)

2.2.2 The World Wide Web

Bardzell (2008) established that new media have specific genres that would fall into one of the following:

"Websites, computer applications, video games, interactive multimedia, chat interfaces, televised sporting events (Olympic opening, Superbowl halftime shows), cell phone interfaces, hypertext novels, digital video, blogs, interactive mapping, training simulations, virtual reality, museum kiosks, multimedia presentations, e-cards, and more." (Bardzell, 2008:4)

As one of the genres of new media, websites will be our case study and representative sample of new media. Hence, it will be useful to learn how websites emerged in general before we tackle each of the three aspects that websites inherited as a genre of new media.

The World Wide Web (WWW) was invented in 1989 by Tim Berners-Lee as an Internet-based hypermedia initiative for global information sharing while at CERN, the

---

20 Today, Tim Berners-Lee serves as the Director of the World Wide Web Consortium. He is also a Senior Researcher at MIT’s CSAIL where he leads the Decentralized Information Group (DIG), and Professor of Computer Science at Southampton ECS.
European Particle Physics Laboratory. When the WWW exploded in the 1990s, it enabled millions of Internet users across the world to become socially innovative despite their limited technical knowledge because of the user-friendly interface that it had. (Castells, 2001)

Traditional media, such as TV and newspapers used the WWW to broaden their audience and expand globally. Today, newspapers are often read online. Castells (2001) noted that one-third of Americans read news online at least once a week. This percentage is much smaller in developing countries, signaling a very acute digital divide in access to news on the WWW caused by uneven globalization. (Lister et al., 2003:200)

But this digital divide in terms of access to the Internet is most severe in the least developed countries such as in some African countries, where many university students and instructors have increasingly become dependent on the technology to communicate and access information while the overwhelming majority of the people are deprived access to this technology. (Banda, 2008)

Nonetheless, the growth in the use of the WWW is noticeable in Yemen, which has been, as noted in the introduction chapter, progressing in the last few years in terms of number of Internet penetration and number of computers.

As noted in the section on Previous Studies, some researchers such as Lewis (2003), Lundberg (2001), and Ihlstrom and Eriksen (2002) argued that with the advancement of websites, specialized online news content started to emerge as a genre of its own. With its combination of advanced technology and traditional media content, this genre captured the attention of scholarship, resulting in more interest in online news as a field of study. The development of online news into a genre conforms to the three new media theory aspects: *immediacy, hypermediacy*, and *remediation* as will be discussed in the next sections.
2.2.3 Immediacy

As defined by Bolter and Grusin, *Immediacy* for new media can be understood in its ability to minimize the medium between the user, who seeks information on the one hand and the source of information on the other. In other words, the more a medium allows seamless, direct, and transparent interaction, the more *immediacy* it can provide.

An example noted by Bolter and Grusin (2000) is the use of a desktop metaphor present in most personal computers since the introduction of Windows 95, which eliminated the wholly textual command-line interface. By enabling the user to use a mouse and click on an icon and drag it, new media has tried to minimize the complex low-level programming instructions that would have been needed to do the same task. Similarly, the touch screen used for bank transactions for example, is also an indication of *immediacy*, i.e., achieving the same result with fewer gadgets and operations.

*Immediacy* allows novice users with little or even no technical experience to do rather complicated tasks that decades ago would have required extensive knowledge. Virtual reality is another example demonstrating the notion of *immediacy*. Three dimensional video games today allow the player to use his own hand to hit or strike in the virtual game and if it the game comes with a helmet that can track head and eye movement, it would allow him to duck and maneuver as if he would do in the real world.

Voice commands are another example that, if perfected as a technology, could bring yet more *immediacy* to desktop applications. Similarly, the available text-to-voice technology has already participated in helping the hearing-impaired or handicapped to communicate with others as is the case of renowned scientist Dr. Stephen Hawkings, who is severely disabled. Dr. Hawikins uses a computer system attached to his wheelchair to talk, compose speeches and research papers, browse the WWW, and write e-mails\(^2\)\(^1\).

---

\(^{21}\) Professor Stephen Hawking describes how his computer works here: [http://www.hawking.org.uk/disable/computer.html](http://www.hawking.org.uk/disable/computer.html)
There are various other examples that illustrate how new media is moving us towards a more direct and immediate experience. The authors have stressed that there is still a long way to go as technology remains in progress in this regard.

"What designers often say they want is an 'interfaceless' interface, in which there will be no recognizable electronic tools- no buttons, windows, scroll bars, or even icons as such. Instead the user will move through the space interacting with the objects "naturally," as she does in the physical world." (Bolter and Grusin, 2000:23)

In recent years, immediacy has also been an ambition of some news websites because the feel of a news website is quite different than an actual newspaper. News websites have to place articles, pictures and other contents to be compatible with the browsers, computer screens, etc. Immediacy is supposed to allow a user to view the content online in a way that is closest to reality as possible.

Among the initiatives to achieve this very goal for news websites was taken by the New York Times, which developed the software "Times Reader" that allows the reader "with a click of a mouse to move from page to page, follow jump lines, and scan for interesting stories, photos, charts, the ads, even the fine print, whether or not he is online." (Scanlan, 2001) See an illustration on how the program is used in figure 2.

The program could be installed on a laptop, which can be folded inside out, turned 90 degrees and read on the computer as if it were an actual newspaper. Such a project may even contribute to increasing interest in reading newspapers, especially in a time of a decline in newspaper circulation in the United States, which is partially due to the emergence of online news. (Paroski, 2005)

This is what Poynter Institute researcher said Chip Scanlan said about the Times Reader:

"I feel like I've regained the pleasure of newspaper reading, the daily romp through a social record, without losing some of the digital advantages of electronic news delivery." (Scanlan, 2001)
It is important however not to confuse that version of the newspaper with the newspaper's website, which may have totally different content. One could argue that having the same print version online would limit the potentials the WWW. Otherwise this would contract the notion that online news is developing its own genre. (Lewis, 2003)

TV news websites have also increasingly been allowing video content on their website with a similar feel and look to their actual TV channels. Until recently, Al-Arabiya TV had on its website a free continuous live stream of its 24-hour Arabic-language news channel. Al-Jazeera English still has a small screen on its website broadcasting the exact same live content that could be watched on TV. CNN has a free service called CNN live, which is not a replica of its actual channel coverage but has many common elements. The channel has its own staffers and could be viewed streaming live for most of the day. To conclude, immediacy is an attribute of new media that uses its fast-paced and developing technology to eliminate complicated procedures required to communicate, access information, and use other services offered by the media.

22 The channel can be viewed at: http://edition.cnn.com/video/
2.2.4 Hypermediacy

Another aspect of new media raised by Bolter and Grusin (2000) is hypermediacy, which is the new media's ability to combine multiple types of media in one. The authors presented the heterogeneous 'windowed style' of the WWW as an example. (ibid:39)

In one single website page, there could be text, images, video, and audio. Although the authors presented an example of the USA Today's website, which at the time of publishing the book, did not have video, they have pointed to the trend that continued ever since in the direction of heterogeneous media content on the web.

There are currently websites that have online chatting and even two-way video and audio communication capabilities on the same browser interface.

Advancement in browser and third-party software integration, such as Macromedia Flash, has allowed a seamless integration of different media content. The phenomenon of YouTube is a solid example of hypermediacy on the WWW. This is what technology writer John Dvorak said about the "YouTube Phenomenon":

"What makes YouTube a hit is its ability to transcode anything and produce an easy-to-watch and easy-to-embed streaming flash movie. You simply upload a video you made on a digital camera or camcorder, and YouTube's computers turn it into a flash video. Producers, the public, wannabe actors, corporations out for publicity, and clip collectors all use YouTube."
(Dvorak, 2006)

Hence, two aspects of hypermediacy can be stated as follows:
- More diverse types of media (video, audio, text, images)
- Multiple contents (blog entries, online comments, original website content)

Those aspects of hypermedia are also evident in news websites in Yemen. However, due to limited bandwidth and speed limits in Yemen as noted in the introduction chapter, video and audio content takes much longer to receive. Nonetheless and based on the findings of this study, comments on news articles on websites, blog entries, and forum
discussions are on the rise in Yemen. Even some Yemeni news websites have allocated part of their pages for discussions, allowing diverse content to emerge.

*Yemen Portal*'s statistics have found that more than 30,000 comments were posted to Yemeni news websites during May 2007-January 2008, which indicates a significant hybrid of reader and producer content on the same web page, which in turn is an indicator of *hypermediacy* in Yemeni news websites.

Websites in general are centered on *hypermediacy* and in fact the main language that is used to lay content on the WWW is HyperText Markup Language (HTML) and today's WWW is structured in a way that allows a diversity of types of content to appear simultaneously to the reader.

*Hypertext* may be defined as a work which is made up from discrete units of material in which each one carries a number of pathways to other units and an aspect that comes handy with hypertext is interactivity. (Lister et al, 2003) This is demonstrated in reading a website for example. To access a certain page, a request must be issued by the user, after which a response must come within the transferred packet of data that is then communicated with the user's browser so as to placed incoming data in a specific way, i.e., text or multimedia.

A way a website is displayed may change based on the user's preference or setup. With dynamic web content, custom designed websites with different styles for the very same page are possible. An example is *My Yahoo* or *News Google*, as both allow the user to alter the looks of the page in many ways. This is not possible with a book or a newspaper.

### 2.2.5 Remediation

The final and an important argument of Bolter and Grusin (2000) is new media is *remediation*, which is broadly defined as the representation of one medium in another. The authors argue that *remediation* is defining the very characteristics of the new digital media.
"What might seem at first to an esoteric practice is so widespread that we can identify a spectrum of different ways in which digital media remediate their predecessors, a spectrum depending on the degree of perceived competition or rivalry between the new media and the old." (Bolter, Grusin:45)

However, the concept of remediation itself could also have more than one interpretation. Bert Vandenbussche notes that there are three possible interpretations of remediation by Bolter and Grusin. The first may refer to the repurposing of the content of one medium into another such as the case of print newspapers and websites, both which could carry the same text. The second meaning could mean the transformation of one medium into another. However, the third meaning of remediation can be defined as hybridization, which is the creation of a new form of media from two separate media. (Vandenbussche, 2003)

Without disputing the other two definitions, this thesis uses the first definition of remediation, which is the repurposing of the content of one medium into another. This is particularly useful in understanding how the message contained in one electronic medium –website- could be the same as the one carried by another print medium -newspaper.

An example of remediation is the use of websites that carry text and images. The electronic medium in this case –the computer- is only a means to gain access to printing, photography or painting and is not an opposite. In fact, the WWW has simply remediated older forms of media and did not challenge them. This explains why photographs still exist and so do paintings, newspapers, radios and TV sets.

The major difference, as Bolter and Grusin (2000) argue, may be in the ability of new media to duplicate the content electronically without erasing the original older media, and therefore it maintains a sense of hypermediacy and multiplicity. The aspect of remediation may appear to be harmful to older media when the content is copied and old medium destroyed, such as the case for example with a very high quality scan of a painting and then destroying the original. But it may be viewed as useful to the old media when "the electronic version is offered as an improvement, although the new is still
justified in terms of the old and seeks to remain faithful to the older medium's character."
(ibid:46)

One aspect pointed out by the authors was the possibility of new media to absorb the older medium entirely, so that the discontinuities between the two are minimized.

"The very act of remediation, however, ensures that the older medium cannot be entirely effaced; the new medium remains dependent on the older one in acknowledged or unacknowledged ways." (Bolter, Grusin:47)

Remediation can be demonstrated in the WWW's engagement with TV in a competition in which each medium is trying to remediate the other. There are satellite TV companies today that provide broadband Internet access via satellite and allow the user to browse the WWW on TV and watch channels while sending an email. Similarly, an increasing number of websites are offering TV programs online, allowing the user to browse the web and simultaneously watch a TV episode. The competition is both economic and aesthetic. (ibid:47)

In Yemen today, a particularly interesting remediation phenomenon is in the making as newspapers have become accustomed to reproduce the content of news websites. As will be described in the interviews findings section of this study, there were cases in which content of news websites was printed on paper and distributed as bulletins in some remote areas of the country. Although this does not signify the trend from electronic to print format, it does however confirm that the material on websites is sometimes used in print mediums. This very content may then be read out in mosque sermons to villagers who may have never even heard about the Internet.

This is a three medium process involving voice, print, and digital media basically carrying the very same content, which is the message that the website originally had.


2.2.6 Summary

New media theory is a relatively new and not fully explored in terms of academic research and literature. Among the available references was the work of Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, who have come up with three concrete characteristics that define the role and functioning of new media in general: immediacy, hypermediacy, and remediation.

The three aspects were applied to the WWW and found to be applicable to a large extent. **Immediacy** was evident, for example, in the evolution of computer software to allow novice users to access the WWW and browse websites easily. An example of **immediacy** on the WWW was demonstrated in the initiative by the *New York Times* to grant users an ability to browse the newspaper seamlessly through a specific software package.

**Hypermediacy** in new media in general and on the WWW in particular is evident with the multiplicity and variety of content available on websites including text, video, audio, and images. This **hypermediacy** is also reflected in the type of content available as well as in the source of content, which is increasingly becoming user-driven.

The aspect of **remediation** has been demonstrated in the way new media replicated content of old media in the form of scanning paintings, copying videos to CDs and DVDs, and using newspaper material on the WWW. In Yemen, an indication of new media's **remediation** is demonstrated in having websites copy and publish content obtained from newspapers and vice versa.

In conclusion, the theoretical framework application of **immediacy**, **hypermediacy**, and **remediation** proved to be compatible and practical for this study, both in the context of the Internet in general and Yemeni news websites in particular.
3 Methods and Material

Three different methods were used in this study. First, content analysis was employed to answer the first research question, i.e., to find the structure, content, traffic of the YNCS by analyzing content obtained during May 1, 2007 and January 18, 2008.

Thereafter, the study applied qualitative analysis by carrying out focus group Interviews of a selected group of YNCS experts. Those interviewees were asked to comment on the content analysis findings in an effort to cross-validate the results through triangulation, which is "the use of more than one approach to the investigation of a research question in order to enhance confidence in the ensuing findings." (Bryman, 2008:1)

The interviewees were also asked to express their views on the role, ideology and impact of Yemeni news websites. A CDA was applied on six stories covering a politically sensitive event that took place on January 13, 2008. The analysis was used to examine the ideological slants of the sources that published it and come up with a generalization for Yemeni news websites. This helped in uncovering the bias interpreted in the sampled articles from an independent perspective. In this chapter, each of those methods was described in detail in terms of approach and materials.

3.1 Quantitative analysis

'Quantitative analysis' and 'content analysis' are intermittently used in this essay to refer to the definition by Kimberley Neuendorf, who said:

"Content analysis is a summarising, quantitative analysis messages that relies on the scientific method ... and is not limited as to the types of variables that may be measured or the context in which the messages are created or presented". (Neuendorf, 2002:10)

It's important to note that unlike the conventional definition of content analysis as a method to analyze text, (Macnamara, 2006) there was no quantitative textual analysis applied in this study, which focuses more on the mere statistical analysis of other
characteristics of websites as will be explained throughout this chapter.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program for Windows XP was used to statistically analyze data retrieved from Yemen Portal. The data retrieved from Yemen Portal was in the form of data tables reproduced internally from the website's MySQL database, which was built over time and contained 49,443 articles from seventy sources. For this analysis, websites were divided according to their political affiliation and were thereafter measured in terms of number of sources, number of articles, frequency of updates, article visits, and interaction levels based on the data that was derived mechanically from the database.

### 3.1.1 Cases analyzed

The cases used for the SPSS analysis includes all Arabic-language news stories stored in the database of Yemen Portal during the period from May 1, 2007 to January 18, 2008. Those 49,443 cases were obtained from seventy sources representing various Yemeni news websites. Each of the sources had all their stories processed together to formulate a set of data for each of the sources as follows:

- The numbers of articles from each source were added up to come up with the total stories from that source.
- The number of times each story was visited was added up for all stories to come up with the total number of article visits for each source.
- The total number of comments for each source was obtained by adding up the number of comments to each story from that particular source.
- The stories that had an associated picture were added up together for each source to come up with the total number of illustrated stories for each source.
- The date of the first article published was subtracted from the date of the last

---

23 SPSS is software used by researchers to carry out complex statistical analyses. See http://www.spss.com
24 MySQL is a multithreaded, multi-user SQL database management system. It is one of the world's most popular online storage databases
25 Political affiliation indicates whether a news websites leans to the government, the opposition, or is independent.
METHODS AND MATERIAL

article published by a particular source (until January 19, 2008) to find the number of days\textsuperscript{26} the website remained active. If a website was not updated for a period of 30 successive days or had its website inaccessible for a full week before January 19, 2008, it was considered dead and was flagged accordingly. The rest were considered active websites.

- The frequency of updates for each source was obtained by dividing the total number of stories for that source by the number of days it was active.
- The average article visits for each source was obtained by dividing the total number of article visits by the number of articles it produced while active.
- The average number of comments for each source was obtained by dividing the total comments by the number of articles that source produced while active.

3.1.2 Sampling approach

Given that Yemen has a multi-party political system, there are government, opposition and independent news websites. Government websites are defined as those that are owned by the General People's Congress\textsuperscript{27}, which is the ruling party, or the government. Although this definition may not be technically accurate if we use the literate meaning of 'government', a special definition of government websites is used in this study to refer to those that are run by the governing entity, which could either be the governmental institution –such as a ministry of information- or the ruling party.

Furthermore, opposition websites were defined as those that are run by the opposition political parties or dissident entities abroad. Meanwhile, independent news websites are those with no form of political affiliation and claim to be politically independent.

This sample is considered adequately representative of the general Yemen news websites arena because it includes all major Yemeni news websites and spans a period of more than eight months.

\textsuperscript{26} This measure is extremely important because some news websites were born relatively recently (after yemenportal.net was launched) but had to be included in the research for reliability aspects. The 'days' indicator is crucial for the accurate comparison of average production frequency.

\textsuperscript{27} Since the General People's Congress won handily in the 2003 elections, it gained total control of the parliament and formed a single-party government thereafter.
The selection of certain websites from *Yemen Portal* was based on the following criteria:

- The popularity of the websites measured based on personal experience gained from years of regular browsing, reading and exploring news websites
- The understanding of the political context of Yemen
- Traffic rankings of the major websites as viewed on *Alexa* and *Google*\(^{28}\)
- Personal communications with colleagues and persons who use the Internet often to access news on Yemen

The sampled period starts from the day *Yemen Portal* started collecting data on 1 May 2007 and covers more than eight and half months. Initially, the sample period was supposed to be nine months (until the end of January), but it fell short due to the fact that on January 19, 2008 the *Yemen Portal* domain (yemenportal.net) was banned\(^{29}\) by the Yemeni authorities in Yemen\(^{30}\).

In retrieving the unit data for this study, an SQL\(^{31}\) query was executed on 49,443 cases from *Yemen Portal* to retrieve the following information for all the seventy sources analyzed:

- **Source Website (name)**
- **Date of First Article Fetched**
- **Date of Last Article Fetched**
- **Political Affiliation** (opposition, government, or independent)
- **Number of Days Active**
- **Average Frequency of Articles per Day: (total number of articles/days active)**
- **Total number of articles**
- **Total number of article visits**
- **Total number of comments by readers**
- **Total number of pictures**
- **Average times of article visits: (total article visits/number of articles)**
- **Share of illustrated stories: (illustrated articles/number of articles)**

---

\(^{28}\) Although Alexa is the most popular online traffic generator used to assess the popularity of websites, it does have its short-comings. Hence, Google and personal experience were factored in.

\(^{29}\) The Yemeni government monopolizes Internet service in Yemen and all subscribing accessing the Internet need to do so through one of two companies, both which are controlled by the government. Hence, when banning a website, the government effectively prevents all users in Yemen from accessing it.

\(^{30}\) Read more about the ban and its implications in the personal chronology (Appendix (E)).

\(^{31}\) SQL (Structured Query Language) is a computer language designed for the storage, management and retrieval of data in computerized relational database management systems and is widely used.
- **Average number of comments per article: (total comments/number of articles)**

This information was retrieved from SQL in Microsoft Excel format. New SPSS data sets were set up and formatted tables were imported to create distinct SPSS data as described in the next section.

### 3.1.3 SPSS variables

Four separate SPSS data sets were established. The first was for all sources (70 cases). Three other data sets were created for cases based on political affiliation (government, opposition and independent). The variables assigned for the main data set are as shown in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1: SPSS variables assigned for the main data set**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Name of source website</td>
<td>String</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days</td>
<td>Number of days active</td>
<td>Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Average updates per day</td>
<td>Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Affiliation</td>
<td>Government, opposition or independent</td>
<td>Nominal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Number of stories from that source</td>
<td>Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views</td>
<td>Total number of times the source's stories were viewed</td>
<td>Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>Total number of comments the source received</td>
<td>Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictures</td>
<td>Total number of illustrated articles the source had</td>
<td>Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average views</td>
<td>Average number of views per story</td>
<td>Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average comments</td>
<td>Average number of comments per story</td>
<td>Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average pictures</td>
<td>Average number of pictures per story</td>
<td>Scale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although variables shown in Table 3.1 are used for all sources regardless of their political affiliation, the same set, with the exception of the 'Political Affiliation' variable, were also used for each of the sub-sets representing the three groups of sources: *government*, *opposition* and *independent*. 
3.2 Critical discourse analysis

The aim of the CDA was to find the ideological struggle of websites belonging to the three political affiliations when dealing with a politically sensitive story. Ideology in this study is based on the definition by Van Dijk (2001), who said ideology is a form of special social cognition shared by social groups.

This study uses this definition to explore the ideology that may be represented by the three groups of websites (independent, government, independent), which may be bonded by their specific political affiliation, and hence may share common beliefs that guide their discourse. (Van Dijk, 2001:12)

3.2.1 Sample of articles

Firstly, the event whose coverage we will analyze was chosen. Secondly, six sources that covered that very event were selected. In this section, the basis on which those stories were chosen will be explained.

3.2.1.1 The event

The event to analyze needed to be of interest to both the media and the public. The more interest there is to the event itself, the more likely the website covering it will pay attention to the framing and details, which will probably reflect its ideology because it is an opportunity to market its message given that high readership is expected. To find such events, Yemen Portal's visitor logs were examined.

From observations of Yemen Portal's traffic statistics, a repetitive pattern was found: When a major event happens in Yemen, the readership level of Yemen Portal witnessed a sudden spike on the day the event took place. This has been the case for a number of times. For example, the day it was officially announced that the former head of
parliament Sheikh Abdullah bin Hussein Al-Ahmar died December 29, 2007, the hits\textsuperscript{32} of the website reached more than 190,000, which was far above the average daily hits at the time of about 125,000.

Another spike was witnessed on January 13, 2008, when the number of hits reached more than 202,000, which was the highest number of hits the website had got until it was banned in Yemen. A quick look at the news of that day pointed to the conclusion that news about the killing of protestors in the southern city of Aden\textsuperscript{33} was dominant.

Based on those findings, it was concluded that coverage of the Aden protests and killings would perhaps serve well for the CDA.

What further encouraged the selection of that event for sampling was the fact that it dealt with the increasing separatist calls to end unity between former south and north Yemen. This was generally a taboo issue in the print media and quite sensitive as it would often strike the chord with the government, opposition, media and public at large.

\subsection{3.2.1.2 The sources}

To compare the ideological struggles through CDA, websites representing the three politically affiliated groups: government, opposition and independent were chosen. Furthermore, it was ensured that only those websites that had a representative in the interviews would be used. It was important to associate the feedback of the interviewees with the CDA findings to form a complete picture for the conclusion of this study. A story covering the very event –mentioned earlier- was found in each of the news websites, whose representatives attended the interviews. All websites, except one, published a story about the demonstration on the same day of the event.

The six websites that were chosen and whose representatives were present during at least once of the group interviews are described in Table 3.2.

\textsuperscript{32} Technically, the term 'hits' refers to the number of times yemenportal.net was accessed for the retrieval of any content whether text or multimedia (picture, etc.) It should not be confused with 'article visits', which is an indicator of how often a particular article was accessed by clicking on its title on yemenportal.net.

\textsuperscript{33} Details about this event are found in the CDA section in the Findings Chapter.
Table 3.2: Story sources, dates and titles of stories used for the CDA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two citizens killed, 17 wounded, among them 7 soldiers at (the reconciliation of the Hashimi station)</td>
<td>Source: <em>Al-Motamar Net</em></td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Jan 13, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two citizens killed, 16 others injured in Aden and security apprehends the accomplices</td>
<td>Source: <em>September Net</em></td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Jan 13, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Killed and more than 7 Injured in Clashes with Security at Reconciliation Festival in Aden</td>
<td>Source: <em>Al-Sahwa Net</em></td>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>Jan 13, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Socialist Party: The regime betrayed the national project and works to tear the social national fabric</td>
<td>Source: <em>Al-Wahdawi Net</em></td>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>Jan 14, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massive Popular Rally Witnessed by Aden City, a Festival that Started with Tears and Ended with Tears and Blood... And at the End, Two killed and more than Ten Injured, Tens arrested, and the Crowds Hold One of the Gunfire Shooters and Burn his Clothes</td>
<td>Source: <em>Mareb Press</em></td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Jan 13, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riots and clashes kill one person in Aden, separatist flags raised</td>
<td>Source: <em>Naba News</em></td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Jan 13, 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


3.2.2 CDA phases

The CDA provides a sense of the bias and belief of the article's source. To achieve this, each of the six articles was analyzed independently by applying a combination of CDA steps based on Huckin (1997) for lexical comparisons and Van Dijk (2001) for ideology and political discourse analysis. Special attention was also paid to the characteristics of online news articles, which is different in terms of layout and position compared to print articles.

The following stages were found to best meet the requirements.

Stage 1: Examination of the headings, font size, and other visual features:

In this stage, the text’s size, fonts, text style and other attributes that may stand out are taken into account and analyzed to see whether the author intended to maximize or minimize the impact of those elements.

Stages 2 and 3: Thematic structure and Discourse schema

Here, an attempt is made to see if there was thematic progress in the form of a structure that could be identified. The thematic ideas and their meanings were analyzed to understand the message the writer wants to convey through its discourse schema. Furthermore, this is the stage that examines missing context, biased approaches and other features that resemble ideological approaches.

Stage 4: Examination of lexical choice and lexical markers

Various words and phrases that suggest bias and emphasis –not neutral- were examined and dots were connected to find any links they emphasize or contradict the main thematic structure and discourse schema of the article.

Stage 5: Examination of the text in light of broader ideological, political discourse

The final and most significant conclusion of the analysis would be in the broader ideology based on the political discourse present and the political context in reality when the story broke out. It is essential to put this in context to truly understand the significance of the underlying ideological message aimed at the reader.
CDA takes a particular interest in the relation between language and power (Wodak and Meyer, 2002:2). Therefore, special attention was paid to key phrases and words that strike the chord with a person who lives in the cultural and political environment. For a non-Yemeni reader or even for a Yemeni who is not familiar with the political reality of post-1994 Yemen, it may be difficult to understand the significance of some of the clauses examined. Those clauses could be very telling when defined within the context of the source's ideology.

3.3 Interviews

The interviewing method was used to find the views of the producers of the online news content and they basically represent website owners and employees who are best acquainted with how their online news is perceived and what the role, ideology and impact of Yemeni news websites are and should be. To interview producers of News Yemeni websites, a visit was paid to Yemen in the beginning of January 2008 for a month-long stay in the capital Sana'a, where focus group interviews were held.

3.3.1 Interview type

Given that the study focuses on news websites as a sector representing diverse affiliations, it was concluded that it would be best to have discussion groups in an interactive environment involving representatives of this sector rather than have individual interviews for each website producer. This is why focus group interviews were used with a general guide with specific themes (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002:176). Such a method proved to be useful in sparking interactive discussions that brought about new issues that were not initially foreseen and may have not been pursued through individual interviews that lack interactivity.
The interviews were utilized to achieve three main missions. The first was to have a background idea about the participating news websites in particular and Yemeni news websites in general. The second was to get their feedback on the results of the content analysis carried out for the YNCS. The third and most important was to analyze their views on the role, ideology and impact of Yemeni news websites.

The interviews were held as moderated round table discussions over three days where specific thematic questions were asked and an opportunity was be given for the different interviewees to respond. As new relevant topics and issues emerged in the discussion, there was a chance to raise new questions, which meant the interviews were semi-structured, non-standardized (Kvale, 1996:27). Such a mechanism allowed the discussions to have a balance between a strict and an informal environment, as the interviews were well-guided to set the conditions for a detailed interpretive analysis (Deacon 1999:55).

Specifically, the interviews were designed to get the views of the producers who are assumed to have the best understanding of their own news websites as well as the overall environment and conditions for Yemeni news websites at large. Their role in their respective websites would also allow them to provide relevant information regarding financial resources, roles, impact, ideologies. Similarly, the interviews helped confirm and explain the factors that led to the findings of the content analysis so as to achieve triangulation.

### 3.3.2 Interview themes

Interviews were divided into three themes in three different sessions held in the mornings of 13, 14 and 15 January 2008. The first theme was introductory and focused on the technical aspect of the Internet and Yemeni news websites. The second was focused on economic and administrative level, while the third dealt with questions on the ideology,

---

34 The Yemeni governments allocated a significant budget to utilize the internet to promote their own propaganda and to possibly cast a shadow on and respond to growing influence the opposition may have in cyberspace.
impact and future of news websites. This schedule was made in a way to help guide and fine tune the discussion for the last day.

The technical aspect of news websites was important as it dealt with the infrastructure in terms of reliability, cost, and efficiency of internet service and other aspects such as power and equipment supplies that news websites use to stay online and that online journalists use to communicate, receive and send information.

The aspect of administration was particularly important in terms of handling the expenses of cadres and facilities used to keep the website running. Some of the results from the first day were used to fine tune and guide discussion in this session.

The third theme focused on the defining roles that separate the three groups of websites (independent, government, opposition) in terms of the role, ideology and impact. Much of the questions and ideas presented on the third day used the results of the first and second day interviews. The complete interview guide can be found in Appendix (C).

### 3.3.3 Sample of interviewees

Given that they were focus group interviews, focus group sampling was used to identify the most representative sample by contrasting interests on the issues reflected (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, Murdock, 1999:55).

As mentioned in the earlier section, there were three sessions for the interviews and hence, when invitations were sent out approximately a month before the scheduled days of the interviews, each invited website was requested to nominate someone with knowledge in the topic of discussion. However, most of the websites responded by nominating the top website manager for the interviewee. Originally the samples were selected based on the topic of the interviews. But later and during the sample selection procedure, it was found that none of the websites had employees specialized in each of the topics but most interviewees had sufficient knowledge to contribute in the three days.
Generally speaking, the focus groups to interview were research-constituted groups. This permitted sample composition flexibility in assembling three groups (ibid: 56).

As suggested by Deacon et al (1999:57) in having each group composed of between five to ten individuals, each group for the three days was intended to be composed of six individuals. Given that the study focused on Yemeni online news sources only, the invitations requested individuals working at or for websites and had sufficient knowledge about the production phase.

Typical-case sampling as defined by Deacon (1999:53) was used in selecting the websites to participate. This intent was to find websites that best represented each of the three groups (government, opposition, independent). Given that the total number of interviewees would be six per session and there were three groups, two websites were intended to participate on behalf each of the groups. Those two websites representing each group were chosen based on the number of article visits as noted in the content analysis35. The two highest in the number of article visits were invited to represent their group.

Initially, the idea was to have a website with the highest level of article visits along with the lowest level of article visits. However, identifying the websites with the lowest level of article visits proved challenging and potentially erroneous as some of those websites were not updated often and some even died during the sampling period for this study. It was later concluded that choosing the highest two from each group would be the best alternative. Table 3.3 shows the top two websites –sorted in order- based on the number of article visits.

Upon selecting the websites, invitations were sent asking them to nominate persons whose experience and knowledge best matched the subject of discussion for the given day. Emphasis was placed on selecting individuals with a sufficient level of knowledge in website management or employees at the Information Technology (IT) department for the first day. Requests were made to nominate the financial and human resource staffers for

---

35 Yemenportal.net counted the number of article visits based on user clicks on the link leading to the details of a story or its original content on the source website.
the second day, while the owners or managers of the websites were invited to participate in the third day's interview.

**Table 3.3: Sampled websites considered for the interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political affiliation</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Article visits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>1) Almotamar Net (almotamar.net)</td>
<td>6,571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Mayo News (mayonews.net)</td>
<td>4,937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>1) Alsahwa Net (alsahwa-yemen.net)</td>
<td>7,490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Aden Press (adenpress.com)</td>
<td>4,952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>1) Naba News (nabanews.net)</td>
<td>24,040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Mareb Press (marebpress.net)</td>
<td>19,401</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, government website Mayo News was dropped because it had suspended its website at the time of the interview and hence, the next website in order was Saba News, which was invited to take part. However, despite several emails, calls and faxes, no one turned up from Saba News for the interviews. Due to time constraints, snowball sampling as noted by (Deacon, 1999:60) was used and eventually a representative participated on behalf of September Net, which is another prominent government news website representing the military forces. However, the website had a low number of article visits of 950, which is less than one fourth of the figure of Saba News. But this did not constitute a major flaw given the fact that the range of average of article visits for government websites –as will be shown in the content analysis findings chapter- was relatively small.

Furthermore, the second position holder in the opposition bloc Aden Press was dropped because no representation inside Yemen was available for interviewing as the website itself operated from the U.K. Hence, snowball sampling was used again and with 3,273 article visits, the third position holder Al-Wahdawi Net was invited instead. Appendix (B)
shows the representatives who attended from the different websites and the sessions they
attended. Although the plan was to have two representatives from each website on each
of the three days, some invitees did not show up or even call while others brought
company with them from the same website thinking that their expertise may assist during
the interview. Those extra guests were allowed to participate\textsuperscript{36}.

None of the interviewees objected to having their names and titles mentioned in this
study and some, in fact, thought that anonymity may impact the study negatively. Some
had even stressed that they won't actively participate if they remained anonymous. Hence
the name and affiliations of the interviewees were disclosed openly in this study. It is
worth noting that anonymity may not be effective to conceal the identity of the
interviewees given, for example, when talking about a specific website which is known to
be run by one or two individuals, readers acquainted with it would easily identify the
interviewee.

3.3.4 Interview schedule

The three-day program for the focus group interviews was based on themes set up in
advance. Intermitted throughout the different sessions, there was room for subjects that
crossed through the topics of the three sessions. Furthermore, in the conclusion of each of
the three sessions, common questions were raised to sum up the findings and link them to
the main topic of this very study, i.e., the traffic, structure, role, ideology and impact of
Yemeni news websites.

Table 3.4 gives an overview of the subjects of discussion for the three days. The
questions raised during those sessions are found in Appendix (C).

\textsuperscript{36} It is not acceptable in our customs to ignore or marginalize a person seeking to participate in a gathering
or even an official meeting. Accommodating new persons brought more diverse views and experiences but
may have given more time to websites with more than one representative.
Table 3.4: Days, themes, and key points raised during the group interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date and duration</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Key points raised</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan 13 (09.00-13.00)</td>
<td>A Technical and Technological Perspective</td>
<td>- infrastructure, facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- quality, affordability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- reliability, security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- privacy, blocking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 14 (10.00-13.30)</td>
<td>A Look at Human and Financial Aspects</td>
<td>- income, marketing,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- training, education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- expertise, design companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 15 (10.00-13.30)</td>
<td>Role and Impact: Now and into the Future</td>
<td>- examples of role, impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- where a difference was made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- current trends and future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All discussion sessions were held in the morning hours. On the first day (January 13), almost all participants came on time at 09:00 and the interview lasted for four hours with a brief break every two hours. But on the second and third days, some participants were late, which resulted in delaying the interview for an hour. The period was then extended to 13:30. The discussion was enhanced with vibrant discussions that raised several new topics that were not initially planned. Some “probing” as defined by Deacon (2002:289) was done to encourage some of the occasionally inactive participants to engage more effectively.

The first interview was deliberately scheduled for the technical aspect because the discussion's results were used to optimize the questions for the second and third interview sessions that dealt with the financial/human resources and decision-makers groups successively.

Some of the participants who did not attend the discussions on the second and third day were interviewed independently but with the exact guidelines that were used for the group discussion so as to maintain an acceptable level of reliability. Furthermore, Nabil Al-Sufi, the founder of *Al-Sahwa Net*, which is the first Yemeni news website with purely
online news content, was also interviewed to have in-depth background information about the historical development and other aspects of news websites in Yemen. He also is the editor-in-chief of News Yemen, which is one of the successful independent news websites. His feedback was mainly for background.

3.3.5 Questions for each of the themes

As described earlier, there are three distinct themes for each of the sessions. Each of those themes had underlying questions related to the theme but deal with the more complicated issues that need to be explored to answer the research questions. Hence, several points were set as guidelines to focus on the different points raised in each theme and some are described as follows.

Theme 1: A technical and technological perspective
- Internet as a service and commodity
- Launching and maintaining websites
- Available facilities, equipment and software
- Online readers
- Steps needed to have a greater role and impact

Theme 2: Human and financial Aspect
- Establishing and administrating a news website
- Human resources
- Financial resources
- Strategy for development
- Present and steps needed for a better future

Theme 3: Role and impact now and in the future
- State of the Yemeni news websites
- Government news websites
- Opposition news websites
- Summary and future prospects
Each of those sessions also had a discussion at the end at which point all topics were summed up and linked to the theme. It is important to note that each of the questions asked for each of the segments were useful to have a clear and conclusive picture of the state of Yemeni news websites, what they are going through, their role, their ideology, priorities, and impact.

Although some questions may appear to be irrelevant to the research question, they were used to guide the interviews, fine-tune topics of discussion and questions for the next session, and most importantly, allow the interviewer to grasp all the needed background information to have a comprehensive understanding, which turned out to be vital for carrying out this study adequately.

### 3.4 Generalizability, validity, and reliability

The quantitative method used a set of data that spanned a period of more than eight months, covered all major news websites and included a sample of about fifty thousand articles, making it adequately representative of Yemeni news websites for the period from May 1, 2007 to January 19, 2008. Furthermore, given that it used scientific statistical methods on the information stored in the database and derived directly from the respective news websites, the results should also be valid. Furthermore, the results should also be reliable given that they are based on carefully configured fetching mechanisms applied and tested over several months through Yemen Portal.

The validity of the study was reconfirmed on multiple occasions during the period of the study itself. Among the notable examples was the cross-validation/triangulation achieved when interviewees confirmed and justified the statistical results obtained by Yemen Portal concerning the production frequency, article visits and comments.

Furthermore, the representatives of the two independent websites with the highest article visits and comments Mareb Press and Naba News verified independently the validity of
the statistics derived from Yemen Portal concerning the most read articles during the period from October 1, 2007 to February 1, 2008. This indicated that Yemen Portal readers and readers of those two websites had similar interests.

Furthermore, the material is fetched from the Yemen Portal database system using SQL, which is the most common standardized language used to access databases. The results were retrieved mechanically and analyzed using SPSS, which is also known to be a highly reliable program that is used by universities across the world for quantitative analysis. This makes the end results quite reliable because the same experiment can be duplicated many times again and yet come up with the same results.

Although the generalizability for the findings of the CDA and interviews is not guaranteed because of the limited size of the sample, the CDA method was reliable and valid enough given the approach used for analysis of the stories covering the politically sensitive event in question.

From a personal position, what adds to the validity argument is the fact that I was present in Yemen during the event analyzed and was aware of the political and cultural context in which the event played out and how it was covered. I was also aware of the political affiliations and biases of the websites issuing those stories and had been in direct communication with their representatives during and after the event covered in the stories.

In terms of interviews, the validity level is high enough given that all interviewees were digitally recorded and the input provided was clear and was not ambiguous, minimizing the possibility of misinterpretation. Whether what the interviewees said reflected the reality and remains difficult to prove. There was general consensus, however, on many of the issues discussed, although there were also times when opinions diverged.

There was one more concern that emerged in relation to the interviewing method, which uses focus group interviews. As noted by Lindlof et al (2002:181), it is possible to arrive to a biased conclusion that may not necessarily be reflective of reality and hence cannot be reliable for the case of focus group interviews in general because of the potential
rivalry or because of self-censorship particularly as anonymity is impossible in cases where multiple interviewees are present. This aspect is one of the potential disadvantages of such interview types that could affect the reliability of the study.

In a specific case, one of the interviewees revealed information privately that he said would have not been able to provide in front of the other interviewees, raising the question on whether all that he wanted or others wanted to say in the meeting reflects all that they could have said in private.

Nonetheless, the disadvantage from this aspect does not outweigh the positive aspects that emerged from the focus group interviews and they were found not to notably affect the overall validity and reliability of this study.
4 Results and Findings

The first section of this chapter presents the findings of the content analysis with supporting tables and figures. The second section will deal with the CDA results that are aimed at finding the ideological tendencies and biases of the different sources. The third section will thoroughly examine the findings of the interviews that would answer many of the questions raised on the role of Yemeni news websites and their perceived ideology and impact.

4.1 Quantitative analysis

A quantities analysis has been made for stories retrieved and stored in a Yemen Portal database from seventy sources over the period from May 1, 2007 to the January 18, 2008. This section is partitioned to subsections explaining how data was collected and analyzed. It is worth noting that this is a pure statistical analysis based on factors that are not textual and is hence not a textual analysis that is often used in linguistic and media research. This study is purely driven to calculate non-textual factors such as article views, associated pictures, comment entries, number of articles, etc.

4.1.1 Mechanism of data gathering

_Yemen Portal's_ crawler robot\(^{37}\) started crawling the web in May 2007 and by January 2008, had fetched about fifty thousand articles from seventy Yemeni news websites. The process was fully automated. Every thirty minutes, a script connects to sources based on a task scheduling mechanism. The script starts at the top of the hour and goes to check the list of sources to access. It then accesses each of the websites and checks the available news articles. If those articles already exist in _Yemen Portal's_ database, they are checked.

\(^{37}\)crawler robot is a term often used to describe the software program that mechanically and periodically accesses other websites, retrieves their information and stores it locally.
RESULTS AND FINDINGS

if they had new comments. If they did have new comments, those comments are added to the database instantly. After checking the first story, the robot checks the next and continues iteratively until it reaches the maximum number of articles to check from any source. The robot was configured to fetch only 15 articles at a time. This means that the maximum number of articles that could be fetched from any source on any day is 15 by 48 or 720 articles. In total, that would mean that the engine has a maximum capacity of fetching 720 by 70 or 50,400 articles from the YNCS per day. This is sufficient to ensure that all major stories are fetched and stored.

After checking a particular source for content, the robot moves to another source and does the same. Initially, one page of each website is checked. That page would usually be the main page but occasionally, it may also be the local news page to ensure that content stored in Yemen Portal is news related to Yemen and not international or other news. Once the links to the new stories are found, the robot iteratively fetches each of those articles as well.

Every article is then stored as one MySQL table entry with several properties such as the title, picture location, URL address, comments, story text, writer, date, etc. There is also a property for the number of visits, which is initialized to 0 after an article is fetched. That property is updated every time the article's link is clicked by a particular user. This ensures that the number of visits for each article is properly measured based on the person viewing it, i.e., successive clicks by the same user on the same article link will only be counted once.

Upon storing all this content, the next stage is to process this data and group it to be categorized based on political affiliation. To do this a special MySQL query is processed and the results are stored in a Microsoft Excel sheet that includes all relevant information that could help create the tables needed for the SPSS analysis. The process to obtain the data from the almost fifty thousand articles is based on multiple platforms and operating systems. The table of factored data grouped by political affiliation is shown in Table 4.1. This data was derived from the master table in Appendix (A), which is the data used for this study's content analysis.
Table 4.1: Summary table for all sources based on political affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gov.</th>
<th>Opp.</th>
<th>Ind.</th>
<th>Total or Avg.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of sources</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of articles</td>
<td>21,323</td>
<td>6,395</td>
<td>21,725</td>
<td>49,443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total article visits</td>
<td>27,786</td>
<td>21,298</td>
<td>80,762</td>
<td>49,513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average days active</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dead (inactive) websites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of production</td>
<td>9.43</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>4.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total comments</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>980</td>
<td>31,868</td>
<td>33,241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total pictures</td>
<td>9,454</td>
<td>1,210</td>
<td>7,987</td>
<td>18,651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average visits per article</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average comments per article</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average pictures per article</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources allowing comments</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.2 Yemen's news websites explored

As noted earlier, Yemeni news websites were divided in this study based on political affiliation. The study found there were nine government websites of which three are run by the ruling party and six are run by a governmental body. The study also found that there were nine opposition websites. Figure 3: Sources based on political affiliation
websites, of which two were dissident websites operated from abroad and seven belonged to opposition political parties. Meanwhile, the largest block of websites was the independent as there were 52 independent sites.

As can be seen in figure 3, independent websites formed the majority of websites with about 74% of all websites. Meanwhile, opposition and government websites had a limited presence of about 13% each.

However, seven out of the 52 independent websites died over the period of the study as shown in Figure 4. This indicates that some independent websites may have not been able to sustain themselves, which is in contrast to the government and opposition websites. Only one government website, Mayo News, died during the period. Reports about the demise of the popular Mayo News, which is one of three websites run by the governing political party the General People's Congress, suggested in an official statement it posted on its website that it ran into financial difficulties because of insufficient funding. (Mayo News, 2007) However, in late January 2008, Mayo News was re-launched.

Meanwhile, opposition websites have all remained active during the time used for the analysis. This demonstrates their keenness to maintain continuous presence on the Internet.

Figure 4: Dead and active websites
RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### Table 4.2: Distribution of articles with pictures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source affiliation</th>
<th>Pictured articles</th>
<th>Average pictures per article</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>9,454</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>1,210</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>7,987</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>18,651</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.35</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for pictured articles, government websites had most of the pictures (51%) followed by independent websites (43%) and opposition websites with (6%). As can be seen on Table 4.2, the average number of pictures per article is quite similar for all three groups showing that roughly one article per three has at least one picture associated with it.

An important aspect to note here is that young news websites are often independent and as can be viewed in the Appendix (A), the average number of days active for independents is 177, which is 42 days shorter than the opposition websites and 73 days shorter than government websites. In other words, the news websites with the shortest life span are independent, indicating that it may be easier to establish independent websites than to do so for opposition and government websites, but on the flip side, it is more difficult for independent websites to remain active. Aspects concerning the lifetime of websites will be explored further in the interviews findings section.

### 4.1.3 Government sources: doing more, getting less

As can be seen on table 4.1 presented at the beginning of this chapter, throughout the period from May 1, 2007 to January 18, 2008, nine government websites produced 21,323 articles, which is almost equivalent to the 21,725 articles produced by 57 independent websites. Meanwhile, the nine opposition news website had only produced 6,395, demonstrating that government and independent websites account for the majority of produced news content available online on the YNCS.

---

38 Any article that has an associated picture, could be one or more pictures, but only one is counted per article. Pictures are not always hosted on the source website as hot linking of pictures (linking a picture on a website that belongs to another website) is also quite common.
The aforementioned results, shown in figure 5, take into account the overall total article production and visit levels. But when taking the averages into consideration, it was found that the update frequency of government sources are approximately five to one compared to opposition or independent sources.

Figure 6 also demonstrates that this volume of production was not translated in article visits as government websites got 27,786 article visits, which is about a third of the 80,762 article visits to independent websites.

Government websites also failed in terms of average article visits per article when compared to opposition. Although government sources got a higher number of article visits than opposition websites, which got 21,298, on average article visits per article, they got less than half of that of opposition websites. This signals a pro-opposition bias of readers, who seem to be looking for oppositional viewpoints and coverage.

Furthermore, there is a gap

Figure 5: Number of articles and article visits

Figure 6: Production frequency and average article visits for websites based on political affiliation
in terms of average frequency and production, which demonstrates that government websites have been doing much work in putting up content but not getting a sufficient return on their investment.

On the other hand, independent and opposition websites were gaining the bulk of this readership as can be illustrated despite their lower update frequencies.

4.1.4 Readership and comments

One of the important measurements of this study was the number of comments that each of the groups: government, opposition and independent, received from visitors.

The number of comments corresponds to the number of the entries -usually by different users- that were approved by the administrator of a website. Not all websites have this feature.

But in each of the groups, there were websites that allow comments, which are usually moderated to prevent spammers from abusing the service. The distribution of websites that allow comments is shown on figure 7.

The study revealed a very large gap between the independent on the one hand and government and opposition websites on the other. In total, there were 33,241 comments, of which 31,868 were comments to articles produced for articles published on independent websites while opposition websites had 980 and government websites had a mere 393 comments for a period of eight and a half months.
The gap is illustrated on figure 8, which confirms that comments are a specialty of independent websites.

The following sections on findings of CDA and interviewees bring interesting conclusions explaining the possible reasons behind this massive gap.

It is important to note that as a percentage, a smaller share of government and opposition news websites offer the capability of commenting on articles, which suggests a policy by those sources to prevent comments from appearing. However, in explaining why not many comments appear on news websites that allow comments depends on whether this is prompted by the readers, who may be refraining from posting because of disinterest or skepticism in the moderation process, particularly if they had tried to comment in the past only to find that their comments did not appear or it may well be because of heavy filtering justified by the websites' strict political ideologies on the various issues. Both possibilities will be dealt with in depth in the next sections of this chapter.

![Figure 8: Number of Comments](image)

Table 4.3: Distribution of comments among independent websites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Websites</th>
<th>Number of Comments</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mareb Press</td>
<td>15,268 (47.9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naba News</td>
<td>12,315 (38.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>5,285 (13.50%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, among independent websites, the top two websites in terms of number of comments *Mareb Press* and *Naba News* had about 86.5% of the comments appearing on all independent websites as shown on Table 4.3. This suggests that the two websites enjoy an active role in interacting with readers and have reached a superior level not only among independent news websites, but also among all websites.
4.1.5 Some websites do better than others

The study found that within each of the three groups, there are often wide ranges between the top and bottom ranking websites in terms of article visits, production frequency, and comments. This gap is particularly evident in Independent websites as shall be described in this upcoming subsections.

4.1.5.1 Government websites

For government news websites, the divergence was evident as seen in figure 9 when comparing the frequency of production (the produced articles per day) for the state-owned websites such as Saba News (a news agency) and *Al-Thawra News* (official daily) with those websites that are run by the ruling party such as *Al-Motamar Net* and *Mayo News*.

![Figure 9: Comprehensive outlook at different factors for government news websites](image)

Yet, as can be seen in figure 10, six out of the nine sources fell within a range of +/−4 points from the average. The case of Al-Wahdah website, which was more than eight points below average, is attributed the newspaper's being produced on a weekly basis. On the other hand, Saba News and *Al-Thawra News* were found to be the highest in production rate because they are the official news agency and the website of the largest
official daily newspaper respectively. Those two institutions are steered towards pouring as much information on the government as possible.

![Figure 10: Scatter graph demonstrating the range in production](image)

Article visits averages (number of article visits per article) for the different government websites reflected a more evenly distributed spectrum as all websites except one were within +/-2.0 points from the mean. However, there is a slightly better showing of sources run by the ruling party compared to those run by government institutions.

This may suggest a pattern that state-run news websites focus on producing content and sending out information in large quantities, i.e., quantity-focused, while websites run by the ruling party had an emphasis on quality, hence producing fewer stories with greater appeal. The sections on the interviews findings in this chapter will further explain the higher article visits level.
The two aspects that were very similar among all websites is the level of pictures and the level of interaction, which is—as previously mentioned- quite low overall.

4.1.5.2 Opposition websites

The analysis of opposition websites seems to have two distinct findings. Aden Press, which is a dissident website run in the UK and banned in Yemen has had the highest level of article visits as can be see in figure 11. *Yemen Portal* was the only Yemeni source to provide Internet users in Yemen with content from *Aden Press*. The news website represents a pro-southern slanted position by publishing articles calling for the separation of the former south from the Republic of Yemen. The website had gained popularity since turmoil and tensions started to intensify between former south and north Yemen in 2007 and continued to intensify during the time of this study.

Although article visits were based on the clicks on the title of the story, that doesn't necessarily mean that the reader was able to read the story itself because some of the

![Figure 11: Comprehensive look at different factors for opposition news websites](image-url)
sources –including Aden Press- were banned by the government of Yemen at the time of this study. If a user clicks on the link to a specific story, the number of article visits is increased by one and then the user is taken to that article. If the link is broken, it may be mainly due to one of three reasons. It may be because the website was under maintenance, the story itself was deleted\(^{39}\), or the website may have been banned. Nonetheless, this measure is acceptable as an indicator of a reader's interest in a story.

The dissident website of Aden Press attracted about 11 visits per article, despite the fact that it did not have a high update frequency, nor did it have comments. This indicates that frequency of updates and comments could on occasions not have a direct impact on article visits, but it is the content, which is often controversial in the case of Aden Press, that may be attracting readers.

On the other hand, *Al-Sahwa Net*, which represents the largest opposition bloc in parliament, i.e., Islamic Congregation for Reform party, had a higher level of production frequency as it produced an average of more than 10 articles per day, yet it lagged in terms of average article visits behind Aden Press, Al-Shora and *Al-Wahdawi Net*, all three which have a lower production frequency.

Meanwhile, Al-Eshtiraki Net was the only website that had a significant number of comments of 958. The website represents the Yemeni Socialist Party, which has been the most vocal in producing critical reports of the regime over the years. It was banned more than once in the past and its editor-in-chief was imprisoned by the authorities in late April 2008.

As the case with the government news websites, picture levels for opposition websites remained somewhat intermediate and there wasn't obvious divergence in this aspect.

---

\(^{39}\) There are cases in which sources post a story but after it gets tracked and fetched by yemenportal.net, that story gets removed from the original source for different reasons.
4.1.5.3 Independent websites

Despite having a lower update frequency than government websites as shown in figure 6, content on Independent news websites were generally quality -and not quantity- oriented.

Figure 12: Comprehensive look at different factors for the top independent sites

Figure 13: Relative factors comparing the top 10 websites in article visits
Independent news websites have attained a significant presence on the Internet in Yemen over the last few years and as demonstrated earlier in figures 5 and 8, they are the recipient of the majority of article visits and visitor comments.

On the other hand, one evident finding from the study was the wide gap in terms of article visits between the few top independent websites on the one hand and all other independent websites on the other. Figure 12 shows how the top 10 news websites in article visits dominate in frequency as well as in number of article visits. The same conclusion is reached in terms of average article visits, comments and pictures as can be seen in figure 13.

Allowing comments and interaction with readers are exemplified clearly in the top two independent websites Naba News and Mareb Press, whose updating frequency were also high. But they were shared at the top in terms of article visits with other well-known independent websites such as Al-Ayyam and News Yemen as can be seen.

Similar to the case of opposition and government newspapers, picture levels somewhat remain intermediate and there wasn't obvious divergence in this aspect. However, the major difference between independent websites and the rest is their interactive capacity through comments as described earlier.

### 4.1.6 Summary and discussion of the findings

The quantitative analysis has revealed a number of findings, which can be summarized as the following:

**Finding 1**- Most of Yemeni news websites are politically independent while opposition and government websites equally have a much smaller share in terms of number of sources. Furthermore, it is the independent websites that have shorter lifetime spans, with some being born after Yemen Portal was established and others died soon after the portal started collecting data. This denotes that
independent websites are easier to establish than opposition and government websites. Possible explanations for this are examined in the next sections.

**Finding 2** - Government news websites outmatched both opposition and independent websites in terms of the production rate of news articles. This indicates a role of dissemination as much information as possible by government sources, which is a role often reflected by the news agency and the official daily *Al-Thawra News*. Opposition and Independent news websites lagged behind in terms of quantity of articles, suggesting an approach dealing with quality rather than quantity.

**Finding 3** - Opposition websites topped independent and government websites in terms of average article views. Independent websites came as a close second while government websites were a distant third. It is apparent that a larger production frequency does not necessarily result in high readership figures. It signifies however, that visitors are more interested in articles by independent and opposition websites.

**Finding 4** - Only a small portion of websites allow comments. But among those that do allow comments, independent websites accounted for the absolute majority. Opposition websites ranked a distant second while government website ranked third with a relatively insignificant number of comments. The aspect of comments is extremely delicate and interpretation of those results could only be made with qualitative methods as in the coming sections.

**Finding 5** - When comparing websites within the same political group (government, independent, opposition), government websites seemed to enjoy a relatively common average that was not far from the mean value in terms of frequency of production and article visits. However, a greater deviation was noticed for opposition and independent websites, which were topped in average article visits and comments by *Mareb Press* and *Naba News*. This indicates that independent websites are more diverse in their appeal as some may have very high article visits while others perform poorly.
It is important to emphasize that this section was aimed at showing the results of the statistical analysis and what they indicate. However, in order to rationalize those findings, the two other methods: CDA and interviews were employed. Those methods complement this section's results because unlike quantitative methods that deal with the question of 'what?', those two other methods deal with the questions of 'why and how?'

The next two sections will go into depth to explain the possible reasons behind those findings, particularly from the perspective of the content of articles and the role and impact of those websites.

### 4.2 CDA: Ideological tendencies of Yemeni news website

The quantitative analysis has provided a comprehensive glimpse at Yemeni news websites. With CDA however, this study attempts to analyze how the political affiliation and its connected ideology may impact the way news websites cover specific events. As noted in the Methods and Material chapter, ideology is defined in this study as "a special form of social cognition shared by social groups." (Van Dijk, 2001:12).

In order to understand the ideological tendencies of Yemeni News websites, coverage of a politically sensitive event was analyzed for six politically distinct Yemeni news websites. However, in order to properly analyze those stories, it is important to have an adequate understanding of the political context in which those stories were published. It is also useful to get a rough idea about the sources and their affiliations.

In this section, the background of the event and the source websites is provided. Thereafter, the findings of the CDA are conveyed under thematic subsections.
4.2.1 Event and sources analyzed

Yemen's unity has in recent years been publicly criticized by several outspoken southern figures who claimed that the 1994 civil war, which ended with the victory of the North over the South, had resulted in a long-term occupation of former South Yemen. (Whitaker, 2001).

In 2007, calls were made public in Yemen for the first time to end unity and take Yemen back to its pre-unity status before May 22, 1990. Rallies against the regime, which is led by former North Yemen President Ali Abdullah Saleh, increased in number and strength during the time of this study.

There were times when rioters tore posters of President Saleh in public\(^{40}\), which resembles an increasing public outrage and bitterness among southerners towards the regime\(^{41}\).

However, as the case with many politically sensitive issues, public calls for separation of South and North were not tolerated by the regime as anti-unity public rallies were often crushed. Article no. (103) of the Yemeni press and publications law prohibits public expression of what may be deemed as 'prejudicial to national unity' or what might 'spread a spirit of dissent and division'. (Al-Bab, 1990)

4.2.1.1 Anti-unity rally turns violent

On January 13, 2008, a large rally was held in the southern city of Aden to mark the 22\(^{nd}\) anniversary since the bloody events of January 1986 when about 4,000 men, women and children were killed because of internal fighting among the political elite in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (also known as South Yemen). (Gent, 1987:335)

The rally was entitled "Assembly for Tolerance and Forgiveness among the Sons of the South" and in a public statement, the organizers said their aim was to bridge any divides and end any prejudice feelings among southern factions towards each other. Among the

\(^{40}\) The coverage of the 13 January 2008 demonstration by Mareb Press explicitly mentioned one such case

\(^{41}\) Some of those protests were posted online and are viewable on http://youtube.com.
plans was to unite the southern front against a presumed common enemy represented in the injustice the south was perceived to have been subjected to since the 1994 civil war. (Yafea Press, 2008)

According to eyewitnesses\(^{42}\), although the rally started peacefully, it developed into a bloody confrontation between rioters and the police, which used teargas and live ammunition aimed at the protestors killing two and injuring several others. There were different interpretations by the different sides concerning how the confrontation began and who started the fire as government sources claimed there were gunmen among the crowd shooting at the police, while protestors denied those claims and alleged that the police forces used brute force to disperse the peaceful crowds.

Nonetheless, the government had a media blackout and prevented journalists from covering the event. International broadcast networks failed to take footage and report about the demonstration. Furthermore, national broadcast media, which are fully monopolized by the state, have also shunned the event that had been anticipated for many days. However, the government did issue warnings against any 'unlicensed' rallied on January 13, 2008. (ibid)

Newspaper readers had to wait for a full day to pass before learning of the event. Al-Ayyam, which is an Aden-based independent daily newspaper, published a detailed report on the event the next day. All other daily newspapers reported the event from a pro-government perspective. Most other newspapers were weekly, and hence they published analyses on the event days after it took place.

This left the stage clear for Yemeni news websites, which were able to report about the event as it was unfolding. The aspect of *immediacy* of news websites (Bolter and Grusin, 2000) gave them an edge that proved to have an impact even on newspapers that published the news at a later date\(^{43}\).

\(^{42}\) I have personally called and confirmed this information from eyewitnesses in the ground in Aden

\(^{43}\) Several newspapers reported about the event with reliance on news websites as their source. The study has found that newspaper's usage of news website content has been steadily on the rise (see the interviews findings section for more on this).
4.2.1.2 News websites covering the event

Several news websites were quick to update their pages with the latest from correspondents on the field in Aden. Those news websites had various affiliations and covered the event differently. The six stories analyzed for this study came from six different Yemeni news websites: Mareb Press (independent), Naba News (independent), Al-Motamar (government), September Net (government), Al-Sahwa News (opposition), and Al-Wahdawi Net (opposition). All of those websites however were based in the former north of the country, which is home to about 81% of the Yemeni population (National Information Center, 2004).

All of the aforementioned sources covered the event on the same day except Al-Wahdawi Net, which covered it the next day, i.e., January 14, 2008.

Among all news websites, independent Mareb Press and Naba News had the highest level of article visits overall for the period of this study. Mareb Press was founded in 2005 by two journalists, of whom one worked for the opposition Islah party and was based in the city of Mareb. Meanwhile, Naba News was founded in 2005 by an Iraqi resident who once worked as the managing editor of Al-Motamar Net, the official news website representing the ruling party, the General People's Congress. So even though the two news websites claim to be independent, the affiliation of their founders was not. Whether the founders' affiliation was a factor in the way their websites covered the event was questioned and examined in the focus group interviews.

Meanwhile, founded in 2002, Al-Motamar Net is, as noted earlier, is the mouthpiece of the GPC. September Net website is also a government website that is known to be the electronic mouthpiece of the military forces. Both websites have a strong presence online while the only difference is that September Net is part of a larger media group that also publishes a newspaper under the name '26 September', which is fully funded by the Yemeni Ministry of Defense.

On the other hand, opposition websites Al-Sahwa Net and Al-Wahdawi Net are purely partisan news websites representing the views of their opposition political parties, which are the Islah Party and the Nasserite Unionist Party respectively. Al-though the parties
they represent also have newspapers under the same names *Al-Sahwa* and *Al-Wahdawi* weeklies, the content of their websites is handled independently from that of the newspapers.

Founded in 2002, *Al-Sahwa Net* is the oldest Yemeni news website that had exclusive news content. It remains among the most popular today as it represents Islah, which is the largest opposition party in the parliament (22.6%). But it ranked below other independent news websites such as *Mareb Press* and *Naba News* in terms of article visits according to this study's content analysis.

On the other hand, *Al-Wahdawi Net*, which was founded in 2003, remains one of the active, yet less popular, opposition websites focusing mainly on issues that are anti-government and promoting the partisan views of its political party. It has fewer resources compared to *Al-Sahwa Net* because the party it represents has a much smaller representation in the parliament (1.9%).

Hereafter, the actual CDA will start. The full translated texts and photos were laid out in a fashion similar to the original stories and are, along with the URL links to the original stories, available in Appendix (D).

### 4.2.2 Action and reaction

Just after the rally turned violent and reports of deaths emerged, the first news websites to report about the event were *Al-Sahwa Net* and *Mareb Press*, both which are known to have a strong oppositional stance although *Mareb Press* claims to be an independent news website. *Naba News* followed soon after with a story that was followed by stories from the government websites Al-Motamar and *September Net*.

It is important to note that stories about the rally being planned had already been published before January 13, 2008 by *Mareb Press, Al-Sahwa Net* and *Naba News* but it was totally ignored by government news websites, which published stories quoting
government officers warning of any unlicensed rallies. Only after the events unfolded and the deaths reported that government websites started publishing stories about the event.

This very action and reaction is a strong indication that government websites were minimizing the importance of the rally, while opposition and independent websites were eager to report about it as soon as it started.

Furthermore, the coverage of independent and opposition websites was more in-depth and both *Mareb Press* and *Al-Sahwa Net* had exclusive footage of the event and were shown in large size format. On the other hand, *September Net* had no photos while *Al-Motamar Net* had an extremely small and barely visible picture of demonstrators with signs seen from a distance but part of the picture included a view from behind of a soldier. Although only part of the soldier's head and shoulder was visible, it illustrates that the security has been in control of the rally.

There were several peaceful rallies in the south that were covered adequately by the opposition and independent websites but rarely mentioned by the government websites. It is hence logical to conclude that it is only after the rally turned violent and people got killed that the government websites responded with their own version of events.

### 4.2.3 A small station gathering vs. a massive rally

One of the most visible and fundamental differences in the way the event was covered by government, opposition and independent news website was the level of importance each source gave to the rally.

It is worth noting that the official news agency Saba published a rather small article representing the government's version of what happened. The CDA has found that coverage of the story by the two government websites was mostly identical as they both relied heavily on the agency's story. While Al-Motamar seemed to have only made minor alterations to the original story, *September Net* added exclusive information. The two stories downplayed the significance of the event and blamed protestors for the violence
and the two had a clear anti-rally slant that appeared to be more of a reaction to coverage by other news websites.

*Al-Motamar Net* went furthest by likening the rally to a gathering at a bus terminal. In the story's title "Security Source: Two Citizens Killed, 17 Wounded, among them 7 Soldiers at (the Reconciliation of the Hashimi Terminal)" tried to make a mockery of the rally and diminish its importance by renaming it in the story's headline from its official name 'Assembly for Reconciliation and Forgiveness among the Sons of the South' to '(the reconciliation of the Hashimi terminal)'. The parenthesis and the reference to the Hashimi Terminal, which was the initial assembly point for the event, demean the rally further.

For a regular Yemeni reader, the rally's association with 'terminal' may be understood as a bunch of passengers waiting for a bus.

This is in total contrast to how the opposition websites presented the event. *Mareb Press* for example, had a long headline starting with a metaphor: "Festival that Started with Tears and Ended with Tears and Blood... And at the End, Two killed and more than Ten Injured, Tens arrested..." The impact that such a title has on an online reader would be strong and reflects the high importance the story gives to the rally and the aftermath. The headline also reflected the change of nature of the event from a peaceful rally to a bloody clampdown. But the title also included mention of the crowds holding to one of the shooters and burning his clothes, which reflected a sense of rage and retaliation. The emphasis was the excessive use of force by the police against a peaceful rally that resisted in its own ways.

One relatively large photo was posted along the *Mareb Press* story, reflecting the large masses of demonstrators. The impression such a photo may leave could be a sense of an event of a large scale and a peaceful nature at least until clashes started. There were instances when *Mareb Press* described the scene of the rally in detail. Such an effort was not done by any of the other news websites. An example of this description is as follows:

*The crowds also chanted slogans and traditional poetry calling for the alignment and unification behind the southern case and they also chanted in the name of the South and in the*
name of the Southern leaders Ali Nasser, Al-Attas, Al-Beidh and also raised the pictures of the Southern martyrs.

The headline, content and size of photos were similarly strong with Al-Sahwa Net, which had two large pictures showing an injured man being transported on a stretcher inside a medical facility illustrating the article's emphasis on human casualties and the intensity of the situation. The two pictures were positioned in the center of the page, but one was at the top and the other in the middle of the text. The sense of rush and urgency was apparent in the room,. This is yet another indicator of the prominence the opposition sources gave to this event. They are pushing the reader and urging him to read the story throughout.

4.2.4 Who started the fire? Who is the victim?

Another prominent difference between the stories was in reference to how violence in the event started.

The September Net story noted in the title that "Security Apprehends the Accomplices", indicating that the perpetrators who started the violence by firing gunshots and exploding a sound bomb were infiltrating elements and not the security forces, who are the ones accused to have started the fire in the stories of the two opposition websites along with Mareb Press.

In the September Net story, the source accused 'Infiltrating elements' of the violence without saying who they were or to whom they belonged. The loaded words of 'criminal', 'cowardly', and 'troublemakers' were used to put those elements in bad light and to blame them for the violence that followed. However, the source still did not deny that the killing of the protestors was done by the security forces themselves. At the end of the story, it hinted that this action (again without specifying what exactly) that was triggered by those 'troublemakers' was to blame for all that happened later because their actions attempted
to destabilize the city of Aden, picturing the city as a place where there was peace and security before this happened.

Furthermore, an emphasis was made on the seven soldiers wounded in the confrontations to show that security forces were also victimized in the clashes. The tone of the story was clearly anti-rally as can be seen in this quote from the official source, which is the only source quoted throughout the story:

"It is quite clear that there are elements that wanted with this criminal and cowardly act to elicit sedition and disrupt security and stability in the governorate of Aden."

The story did give some details about what happened. It said the elements in the crowd snatched a weapon from one of the soldiers at the scene. This illustrates that the soldier didn't suspect that a person would come and steal his weapon. The source was quoted thanking citizens for their cooperation and denunciation of the acts by the infiltrating elements. This assumes that the crowds were on the security forces' side helping the state and condemning the elements, who have come in large numbers, according to the source, from other governorates. This is an attempt to divide the crowd to two groups, one evil – with the protestors- and one good –with the state. On the other hand, the source accused those elements of trying to incite sedition and destabilize security in the governorate of Aden, which is a way to refer to the situation of Aden as stable until those elements started causing trouble.

An obvious discrepancy in the article was noticeable when the source started by noting that the infiltrating elements started their acts during the functioning of the event, but in the third paragraph, the same source contradicted itself and said that the 'criminal’ elements committed their acts after the function had ended. This discrepancy weakens the credibility of the source significantly.

Another note is the obvious redundancy and emphasis on the notion that it is the elements that shot gunfire and exploded sound bombs. The story mentions that it is those elements who committed those acts three times at the beginning, middle and end of the story, which is a repetition aimed at asserting to the reader so he/she would have no doubt left
that it is not the authorities, but rather those elements that are to blame for the violence and the resulting deaths and injuries.

Some of the aforementioned words were also used by *Al-Motamar Net*, creating the belief that the two websites—despite not belonging to the same entity—may have similar editorial policies, ideologies and common sources of information.

In total contrast, violence was squarely blamed on the government in *Al-Sahwa Net* and *Mareb Press* stories. *Al-Sahwa Net*'s story conveyed an unequivocal notion that security forces used force just as crowds started to chant slogans that were against unity and for independence, which suggests that the regime is for unity and against independence. The story supports the suggestion that the security forces may be part of an occupation that crushed a peaceful demonstration that calls for freedom. Furthermore, the story reflected its bias when it failed to mention the security men that were among the victims and its failure to report on the government's claims that there were elements within the demonstrators that triggered the violence.

Similarly, *Mareb Press*'s story focused on the positive aspects of the rally, as in saying it was an event to create an atmosphere of reconciliation and forgiveness and in supporting the southern cause, etc. On the other hand, significant space was given to the use of force by the authorities in terms of shooting with live ammunition, rubber bullets and teargas. It is worth noting that both government websites omitted any reference to the use of teargas or rubber bullets, confirming their pro-government and anti-rally bias.

*Al-Wahdawi Net*'s story was a step further in reporting an official opposition reaction by a leading opposition figure on the events as a whole. With its headline: "The Socialist Party: The regime betrayed the national project and works to tear the social national fabric", the story brings a purely one-sided perspective against the government. It is not clear if the title was a direct quote from an opposition figure representing the Yemeni Socialist Party, which is the second largest opposition bloc in the parliament, or a paraphrase but it certainly has a strong wording particularly in the use of 'betray' and 'tear the social national fabric'. An example quote reflecting this anti-government sentiment is:
"the authority's project is not in defense of unity as it (authority) falsely and deceptively claims, but is rather in defense of its illegal interests that were set up by a small group of corrupts and powerful individuals based on acts of 'fayd'\textsuperscript{44} and hooligan robbery of public and private properties and transferring national treasures to private belongings in one of the most greedy and disgusting acts of power abuse."

The story, which had the logo of the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) as the only picture, used the phrase 'a horrid criminal act' in describing the way the security forces supposedly quashed the rally. It was followed by a statement saying that this was a mere addition to other similar acts, conveying a message that this, in fact, is the regime's way of dealing with other peaceful rallies. It hereby suggests that the rally was peaceful and that the regime is oppressive and ruthless. Words and phrases such as 'greed', 'ugliness', 'abuse of power', 'theft', 'barbaric robbery', 'criminality', 'corruption', 'authoritative', 'illegal interests', 'destruction', 'promoting backwardness', plus a host of others have all poured to one direction: from opposition to the regime, giving the article a clear biased perspective and used the rally as an opportunity to launch a partisan attack against the regime.

However, the story did not cover how the conflict started and did not give any voice to the regime nor to did it quote the demonstrators or organizers of the event. Despite having the source from the YSP condemning the brutal assault against the rallying crowds, the story lacked information about the killed and injured and touched briefly on the frictions between the south and the north without explicitly supporting the calls to split the country into two. This clearly illustrates a motive to use the event for scoring some points against the regime rather than for the focus of the plight of the demonstrators.

Finally, Naba News went out of its assumed independent role and blamed the rallying crowds for the confrontation, which it said, was started when groups within the crowd started rioting when they refused to move to the 22 May Arena, which the news item explains, was the venue where the event was supposed to be held. It missed the details on

\textsuperscript{44} The word 'fayd' is a unique term used in Yemen and is close to 'seize other people's property' often used in a tribal context.
whether security forces attempted to move the crowds by force or not and how exactly the rioting begin. The story went on to blame the crowds for starting to attack and rob stores. It also highlighted the security forces' restrain and refrainment from using excessive force, demonstrating a clear bias in favor of the regime.

4.2.5 Government, opposition websites missing the context

Government and opposition websites left out the context of the event, what it meant, who organized it, what impact it could have. All government and opposition stories also left out the motives behind the rally, the separatist calls in it and the slogans said during the event and how they reflect the growing anti-unity sentiment in the country. This is a fundamental analogy illustrating the priority those websites give to the news details of an incident that reflect a specific standpoint instead of providing objective and neutral perspective of an event.

The stories on Al-Motamar Net and September Net were more to do with how the security and authorities handled the outbreak of violence instead of the motives behind the activity and the anti-unity sentiments, which were not mentioned at all. Emphasis was given to the source's words on arresting the accomplices, taking the wounded to hospitals and urging the public to cooperate with the authorities to bring back security. The emphasis was on the troublemakers and their action's consequences –leading to deaths and injury-and also on the reaction of the security in arresting those troublemakers and managing the situation. In other words, government websites took the event as a simple act of violence like a robbery or murder and did not link that to the ongoing turmoil in the south nor did it connect it to the previously held rallies, of which most were not even covered by government websites.

This demonstrates a lack of acknowledgement by the government websites of a trend and it is similar to what is generally reflected in the government-owned broadcast and print media. This demonstrates that perhaps, the ideology this runs the different government media has extended to the online media as well, reflecting the pro-government stance.
The conclusion of the story on Al-Motamar makes it look that the incident is merely a summer cloud and will pass with the help of citizens:

\[
\text{At the same time, (the official source) asked all citizens to cooperate with the local authority and security apparatuses to bring back calm and peace to the city of Aden and to enforce security and stability in the governorate.}
\]

Meanwhile, opposition websites have attempted to see this as an opportunity to jump on the anti-government sentiment in the south without necessarily supporting calls for separation of the south and the north and without acknowledging the motives behind the rally. The story of \textit{Al-Wahdawi Net} for example manipulates the reader by providing only one viewpoint reflecting the opposition party as if it were representing the demonstrators and the former south as a whole. It left out all the other political parties as well as the government and voices from the rally itself. It was merely a paraphrasing and quoting of a statement by the Yemeni Socialist Party. So basically, the news item served its propaganda role in promoting an opposition message and did not stand neutral or attempt to be unbiased in the article's discourse.

\textit{Mareb Press} and \textit{Naba News} however, did provide some insight into who organized the event and what it stood for. But they took very different paths in characterizing the rally.

\textit{Naba News} promoted the notion that the rally was weakening and demonstrators had to go to lanes and back alleys to drum up support from the people of Aden. The use of the 'separatist' adjective often has a negative connotation in the minds of Yemenis in general, hence driving many readers to think negatively of the whole rally. The website paraphrased the demonstrators' response to the question on why they did not move to the 22 May Stadium was a way to confirm the guilt of the demonstrators for not holding their event in the stadium. It effectively used the words of the demonstrators against them. Furthermore, doubt was cast on the legitimacy of the event when the story highlighted the boycotting of the event by Al-Noba, who is one of the prominent southern leaders.

Meanwhile, the story of \textit{Mareb Press} included several words reflecting the might of the demonstrators such as "massive crowds" –repeated twice- in describing the scene and the
"hero" welcome the leader of the organizing committee had received. The source also noted how the correspondent on the ground failed to record what the speakers said because of the "unrelenting chants" by the crowds, which chanted with voices that "rocked the whole terminal". All of those words and phrases reflect connotations that amplified the impact of the rally and affected the neutrality of the news story.

Furthermore, the use of words like "insisted on" in describing the will of the crowds to challenge the authorities was evident in more than one place. It also gave more power to the crowds in that they had it their way. The reference to the crowds continuously as to how the moved, what they thought, why the acted, reflected a sense that the writer is almost part of the crowd and not an outsider observing the situation. This also reiterated the bias to the rally.

This in contrast with the stories in the government websites, which emphasized the power of the authorities and portrayed the crowds as weak, easily manipulated and need the state's protection from the 'infiltrating elements'.

### 4.2.6 Summary and discussion of the findings

The CDA has yielded a number of findings that could be summarized as follows:

**Finding-1**: Government websites refrain from covering politically sensitive events unless they are forced to in reaction to other stories that may have appeared in independent and/or opposition news websites. This reiterates the notion that news websites, just like any other media, are used by governments in repressive regimes for public opinion manipulation and hence, are a platform to send out ideological propaganda to the public. Again, this has to do with remediation (Bolter and Grusin, 2000) as the message remained the same but the medium has changed from print and broadcast media to news websites.

**Finding-2**: Opposition websites use events that portray the government in bad light to promote their own partisan ideologies. In many instances throughout the
Results and Findings

story by Al-Wahdawi Net for example, little had to do with the event itself but much was criticism to the regime as a whole. Attention to details, particularly if they it would favor the government, is often neglected.

Finding-3: Independent news websites include more in-depth information and detail on sensitive events and use a more journalistic approach in covering the event. However, this coverage, although less biased than opposition or government sources, has its drawbacks as noted in finding 4 below.

Finding-4: Independence of news websites is not a guarantee for neutral and objective reporting. It was obvious that the two independent news websites with the highest article visits have biases towards or against the government. This aspect was played out clearly throughout the text of the story.

Hence, it is possible to conclude that news websites are an extension of the print press that has been politically charged since freedom to establish newspapers was granted following Yemen's unity in 1990. Ideology and political direction of an owner of the media may be one of the factors behind this bias, which is arguably, less obvious in independent websites.

An interesting finding from the CDA is the re-emergence of the immediacy aspect of news websites. Websites have demonstrated their ability to transmit content—pictures and text—quickly and directly from the field to allow the public to gain access to the latest details in a timely fashion. This very feature has forced government websites to react as they may have felt threatened by a growing sympathetic sentiment towards the demonstrators, and would hence like to combat this influence by producing their own material, which may not always be well received as concluded from the quantitative analysis.

To explain why government websites failed to receive as much readership as opposition and independent websites, the interviews method was implemented. This method, whose results are provided in the next section, will shed more light on the role and impact of news websites from the perspective of experts in the production stage of online news.
4.3 Interviews: producers have their say

Given that the quantitative analysis has provided us with the findings pertaining to the structure, content and traffic of news websites, and given that the CDA has provided us with a glimpse of the ideological struggle found in the three groups of news websites (government, opposition, independent), it is now the turn of the interviews method to answer the remaining questions. Those questions are centered on two fundamental issues:

- **Cross-validating, justifying the quantitative analysis findings**
- **Understanding the role, ideology, and impact of news websites**

To answer those questions, three focus group interviews were held in Sana'a, Yemen during January 13-15, 2008. In those interviews, 12 individuals representing six Yemeni news websites participated.

In this section, quotes, paraphrases along with relevant background information were used to come up with concrete findings answering the questions pertaining to the aforementioned points, which will also permit the answering of the research questions of this study.

The findings of the interviews were split into two subsections. The first aims at cross-validating and justifying the quantitative analysis results and the second deals with the impact, role, and ideology of websites. Those two subsections are then divided to themes that may be connected with each other. This will permit more coherence and smooth transition given that the focus group discussions were less restricted and were of an open format that led to having bits and pieces of information dispersed throughout the three days of the interview.

Chunks of quotes were provided to allow the interviewees to convey their input in their own words, which were originally in Arabic but were translated to English.

It is important to note that Mr. Nabil Al-Sufi of *News Yemen* was quoted in this section to provide some background information. He has not taken part in any of the focus group interviews. All other individuals quoted in the section were part of at least one of the
three group discussions. Furthermore, some of what they said may have been mentioned in separate interview that were done at a later stage.\textsuperscript{45}

4.3.1 Cross-validating and justifying the quantitative analysis findings

As can be recalled, the quantitative analysis came with five main findings. Those are taken one by one, cross-validated and justified based on the input provided by the interviewees. Although quotes will be used to illustrate the points raised by the interviewees, emphasis will be given, whenever possible, to real life examples that those interviewees have gone through in their experience as producers of online news content for their respective websites.

4.3.1.1 Structure of the YNCS

It was found through the interviews that government and opposition websites are static or grow very slowly in number mainly because they were already set up years ago. In the case of the government, all state-run media institutions have a website. Hence they may well be in full capacity. Similarly, all major opposition parties have their own website and don't want or can't afford to setup more websites.

This leaves room for growth in the independent website sector, particularly as the cost of website hosting in Yemen has been going down over the years. That explains why the majority of websites in the Yemeni News Cyber Sphere (YNCS) that is analyzed for this study are independent websites (74\%) compared to only 13\% opposition and 13\% government websites.

\textsuperscript{45} Mr. Mohamed Al-Salahi, Mr. Ali Al-Saqqaf, and Adil Abdulmughni were each interviewed once independently at a date later than the focus group interviews to make up for their absence in some of the crucial sessions of the focus group discussions.
However, statistics shown in Appendix (A) show that soon after some independent websites emerge, they died out quickly. Similarly, there were websites that remained active for a long time, resulting in a very low frequency of production level.

Mr. Aws Al-Iryani, who is a software engineer and a technician representing *Al-Motamar Net*, said that establishing a website could have not been easier or cheaper today. But it is the process of maintaining the website and preventing it from crashing or being hacked that matters the most. Many of the emerging independent websites use free software, whose source codes are publicly available. But Al-Iryani noted that to establish a website that could survive in the long-term, exclusive hosting software is needed.

"The design of websites can be likened to the work of tailors. They even use an English expression 'tailor made'. So if you go and buy a ready suit, you are forced to accept some of its defects, for example, the shoulders appeared to be ok but the sleeves were too long. You are able to change it a little according to the ability of the tailor in modifying without showing that it was modified. But when you design something from scratch, you do it to be exactly suitable, so you design the suit to fit the client according to his requests." (Al-Iryani)

Therefore, if there were more independent news websites emerging, that doesn't mean that they are posed to succeed. Most interviewees agreed that there is a mushrooming phenomenon with new websites emerging but with little capacity to compete with the well-established news websites.

Mr. Nizar Al-Abadi, Managing Editor of *Naba News* went further in suggesting that many of those websites that join the independent news websites group are efforts by individuals.

"And there are even individuals who would like to represent themselves and not political parties. I know individuals who have created websites and have no political party backing them. They are educated individuals who like to convey information in a special way." (Al-Abadi)

This confirms the statistical findings of the quantitative analysis, which showed a high number of dead websites that initially emerged as independents but expired later. It also
explains the huge gap between the top ten most visited independent news websites and the remaining websites, of which many are launched by individuals who were unable to maintain or update them properly.

Furthermore, interviewees representing independent websites acknowledged that due to shortage of staff and resources, they often resort to copying content from newspapers and use it on their websites often with attribution to the source but sometimes without crediting the source. They said content is shared between newspapers and websites in a two way seamless manner although this is an ethical dilemma. This re-iterates the aspect of remediation as noted in the Previous Research and Theoretical Framework chapter of this study.

Sometimes journalistic content done by newspaper journalists is used for websites when the newspaper fails to have it published online. As Mr. Fahmi Al-Olimi of Al-Sahwa Net noted, often times, staff shortage forces him to ask a journalist working for Al-Sahwa weekly to do some coverage for an event and submit it as if it were a regular piece to be published in the newspaper. This suggests that a special genre for online news is yet to evolve in Yemen.

This allows us to make our first finding for the interviews findings section.

**Finding-1:** Independent websites constitute the majority of Yemeni news websites in the YNCS because they are easier to establish. However, they also have a high probability of dying out early because of lack of resources or improper management and/or design.

### 4.3.1.2 Production frequency

The quantitative analysis results revealed that government websites produce much greater material on average per source per day compared to independent and opposition websites.

All interviewees agreed with this result asserting that government websites and those that belong to the ruling party see their role as a disseminator of information about
government activities. Hence, it would be expected that they would produce content more frequently.

Mr. Nadim Ali Al-Jamali is the Secretary Editor of September Net, a government news website representing the military forces and funded by the Minister of Defense. Al-Jamali believes that there is a fundamental flaw in news websites, including government websites, in the understanding of what is news.

He complained that government websites receive so many news items from the official news agency Saba and other government institutions and hence feel obliged to have them published regardless if they are newsworthy or not. This is what Al-Jamali said about routine official news items such as inaugurations of projects, travels of official, signing of deals, etc:

"This is of no concern to me or to the reader. In online journalism we are dealing with people with brains and using modern technology. Those issues don't concern them. Therefore, I believe that those should not be considered news items." (Al-Jamali)

A secondary factor that makes government websites publish more articles is their financial resources, which are often higher compared to opposition and independent websites. Al-Jamali said his news website gets all the resources he needs to produce. This is a luxury that most other interviewees said they lacked.

Mr. Mohamed Al-Salahi, the Editor-in-Chief of Mareb Press said government websites focus on quantity rather on quality, which explains the findings.

"This is a policy by their [ruling] party. They cover activities, workshops, and other news about a minister did something and other similar news. They focus on pouring material without focusing on issues that concern readers... Financial resources are also obviously better with them." (Al-Salahi)

Mr. Nizar Al-Abadi of Naba News emphasized this view by saying:

"Governmental websites sometimes publish issues that are -forgive me for being blunt- petty. They were petite issues... They [governmental websites] often have something official that has
to be covered such as official activities concerning the state and the government, which have to be covered.” (Al-Abadi)

Al-Abadi noted that *Naba News* would have published many more interesting reports if it had the resources to hire staffers and purchase equipment needed to increase production.

The overall sentiment throughout the interviews matches the raised points by Al-Jamali and Al-Abadi, whose views were also re-iterated by Mr. Abdulmalik Al-Fohidi, the Editor-in-Chief of the government website *Al-Motamar Net*, which is the mouthpiece of the ruling party's –the GPC- on the Internet. Al-Fohidi noted that his website has 21 staffers, of which seven journalists work in the editorial department of the website. This is a much larger number compared to opposition and independent websites, who complained bitterly.

Hence, the second finding of the interviews can be noted as:

**Finding-2:** Government news websites produce more content related to government activities or stances regardless of whether they are interesting to the public. Unlike independent and opposition websites, they have the sufficient resources and staffers to produce a greater volume of articles.

### 4.3.1.3 What online readers want

As Mr. Nabil Al-Sufi, the Editor-in-Chief of *News Yemen*, once said, "the reader in Yemen is an oppositional reader or a reader with an oppositional mood." He was responding to a question on why opposition news websites received the highest level of article visits compared to independents, which came as a close second and government, which came a distant third.

This view is confirmed by all interviews without exception. Fahmi Al-Olimi, the Manager of the News Department of *Al-Sahwa Net* opposition website said readers believe that opposition websites are the most vocal in voicing critical opinions of the regime and that is what readers want.
"As for what distinguishes the opposition websites, they are the refuge for whoever wanted to blast the regime or complain against authoritarian oppression, etc. So we receive a volume of information and calls in this aspect. There are even those oppressed in some institutions complaining about a manager or a minister. They reach out to us because they see us as the most vocal." (Al-Olimi)

Government websites failed in attracting readers because of the pro-government content that they have. This is the very content that they find every day in the broadcast and print media and would hence not spend money at Internet cafes to visit websites whose content they could get free of charge on TV, radio. The limited margin of freedom is what holds Al-Motamar Net back, according to its Editor-in-Chief, Mr. Abdulmalik Al-Fohidi. Given that Al-Motamar Net represents the GPC, its content must not be critical to the regime and hence, the website limits itself to content approved by the government.

Al-Fohidi said the restrictions sometimes go too far and he gave a recent example when he proposed writing a story about the severed undersea Internet cables, which resulted in disruptions to the Internet in Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

"Then I wanted to write a news item about this but they refused. I asked why, they said we would create a diplomatic crisis with Saudi Arabia (laughs)." (Al-Fohidi)

But interviewees also agreed that both government and opposition websites have their own restrictions given that they get paid by institutions to get an ideological message out to the public. They also agreed that despite the taboos that independent websites may have, in comparison, independent websites have the greatest margin of freedom, allowing them to have the critical articles of both government and opposition that readers like to read.

Mr. Mohamed Khidr, who is the head of the English department of Al-Motamar Net noted that quality is what lacks in government websites, whose role seems to be common in all Arab countries and is centered on 'anything that is pro-government goes'.

"The reality is that in all Arab countries, official press tries to publish as many news as possible. This volume is because it will cover almost all governmental institutions and their
activities. It considers this coverage part of its mission because a minister, general manager and governor in any Arab country will direct the representative of a governmental newspaper to publish articles about his activities as he sees it as some sort of propaganda for him before the regime. In terms of quantity, this is true. But coming to quality, does it rise to the standard? No." (Khidr)

Al-Abadi of Naba News said it is independent websites that attract the highest number of article visits because they can publish whatever content they want and would hence not worry about what the government or the opposition pundits think.

"The independent websites have freedom and are not restricted by political directives or specific programs. They have the freedom and most have comments as a new service to readers allowing greater interaction. This is nonexistent in other websites." (Al-Abadi)

Based on the answers to questions on article visits to each group, a finding was reached justifying the low readership levels for government websites and the high level for opposition and independent websites.

**Finding-3:** Independent and opposition websites fare better than government websites in terms of article visits because they are more critical of the state and have a higher margin of freedom to tackle controversial topics and those are the articles that appeal to online readers.

### 4.3.1.4 Comments

The last finding of the quantitative analysis was the level of comments for the different Yemeni news websites. The study found that independent websites receive the majority of comments from online readers.

Interviewees reached a consensus that the reason behind that is mainly because of editorial policies of the respective websites. They also noted that it largely depends on the story being commented upon.

Al-Abadi of Naba News referred to the coverage of the January 13, 2008 rally that took place in Aden and whose coverage was analyzed in an earlier section.
"... For example, protests broke out in Aden, let's say, the January 13 incidents, most readers would head towards the opposition newspapers and websites. Why? Because they know that this incident targets the state and hence the regime will not talk about it. Or they are already used to the way the state deals with such incidents. Where does he go? He goes to the websites that talk openly and that give the names of those killed and etc. Those websites will attract them." (Al-Abadi)

Mohamed Al-Salahi, the Managing Editor of Mareb Press, which shares the top spot with Naba News as the highest Yemeni news websites in number of comments, added that credibility in publishing comments is also important. When asked why do government websites have few comments compared to independent websites, he said:

"It is because of the level of freedom. When you increase the level of freedom, you attract readers. It is also the level of credibility... When a reader comes in and comments and then you publish his comment is contrary to when a reader comments but his comment never gets published. Then he wouldn't try commenting again." (Al-Salahi)

The view of Al-Salahi was also shared by opposition websites participating in the interview. Ali Qais, who works as a technician and reporter for Al-Sahwa Net said the party decided not to allow comments because of the implications that comments would bring with them.

"Concerning comments, we were told that if we allow them, we will be opening the gates of hell. You need someone specialized only to moderate comments. It is difficult for you to allow them to come out directly. It is essential to read them before having them approved." (Qais)

Other interviews noted that comments require a great degree of scrutiny and tolerance.

Al-Fohidi of Al-Motamar Net noted that there are times when comments cannot be tolerated or accepted for specific articles.

"...we face a problem for being a ruling party as we some times get comments that include cursing so sometimes we have to ignore comments all together. For example, if there is a news item about the President of the Republic, I deal with it as a news item for the President. So twenty comments would come after the President so sometimes I have to... For example,
RESULTS AND FINDINGS

yesterday, I faced a comment on an article that I wrote, he said ‘you, son of a criminal, ..’ but I insisted on having it posted.” (Al-Fohidi)

Furthermore, a very important factor that came up during the discussion was resources, particularly staffers. Qais noted that in order to establish a well-managed comment section for the website, there needs to be a dedicated staffer whose job is to only moderate and approve comments. This view was approved by Al-Fohidi, who said it is not only that a staffer is needed, but a rather qualified staffer.

"Most of the comments are ignored because of (the lack of) this person, because we don't have an individual with enough time to keep on moderating comments. Sometimes you wonder if you will be looking for news items to post or moderate the comments of visitors. This is a problem. It also needs someone who is politically aware and also linguistically because sometimes, as mentioned before, in the middle of the comment, he puts in some insults.” (Al-Fohidi)

From the above, one can conclude the fourth finding on this section:

**Finding-4:** The top independent websites dominate in terms of number of comments received to their articles because of their high readership levels, their high margin of freedom, and because they have the qualified staffers that can moderate and allow the publishing of comments in a timely fashion.

4.3.1.5 Top spots for Mareb Press and Naba News

One of the pressing questions throughout the interviews was the leadership positions of the two independent news websites *Mareb Press* and *Naba News*, both in terms of article visits and comment rates.

No single answer by any of the interviewees was able to answer those questions. It was also tricky to try to get the answers from the websites' representatives, who were both present during the interviews. In answering the question, a more comprehensive analytical approach was pursued. It is important to note that comments and article visits were somewhat related for the two websites because the two highest in number of
comments were also the two highest in average article visits although the race between the two is too close to call.

Some interviewees suggested that it may be because the two enjoy the highest level of professional journalism. Others noted that it is because they have a high margin of freedom and allow a diversity of opinions. In all, it was evident that the two websites share more in common than what sets them apart.

Most interviewees noted that *Mareb Press* leaned to the opposition, particularly the Islah Party, while *Naba News* leaned towards the ruling party, the GPC. But that did not explain why they both ranked similarly at the top.

One of the bold statements trying to interpret the strong performance of *Mareb Press*, which is also known to have plenty of exclusive photographs and breaking news stories, came from its Managing Editor Mohamed Al-Salahi.

"I heard from others, and I think it is true, that we have raised the limits of freedom in Yemen on websites. I challenge anyone to publish an article for Munir Al-Mawari or Lutfi Shatara on his website. Now newspapers are publishing for Munir Al-Mawari. He, Munir Al-Mawari, had even once said, 'newspapers used to avoid publishing my writings until Mareb Press did.' Now newspapers are indeed copying from our website and publishing." (Al-Salahi)

Al-Salahi also noted that there is a blurry line between what material is suitable for newspapers and others suitable for news websites. He argued that there is extreme shortage in skills in online journalism and it is often the case that articles published on *Mareb Press* were intended to be published in a newspaper and were written by a journalist working for a newspaper. This further conforms the notion that online news genre in Yemen is nonexistent.

In other words, it is the excessive freedom to publish extremely critical reports. This could be supplemented to the other factors such as the frequency of updates, the diversity of content and the margin of freedom and the high volume of comments.

---

46 Munir Al-Mawari is a Yemeni American based in Washington DC and is known to have published extremely critical articles bashing the regime and President Ali Abdullah Saleh on multiple occasions
On the other hand, *Naba News* was found to be strong because of its persistent follow up of corruption scandals and controversies. Furthermore, exclusive pictures of various events gave *Naba News* an edge as noted by Al-Iryani.

"Concerning images in particular, the most distinguished website is Naba News because most of them are exclusive and they even did a category for illustrated photographs. It is based on 'you focus on something, and go photograph it'." (Al-Iryani)

Nonetheless, each of the two websites had a number of features that made each unique and strong in a special way. This leads us to the final finding of this section.

**Finding-5: Mareb Press and Naba News led all other Yemeni news websites in article visits and comments because they had critical content that dealt with controversial topics, because they allowed a very high margin of freedom for comments and writers, and because they had special quality niches such as exclusive photographs**

### 4.3.2 Role, ideology, and impact

As we have come to see, interviewees have given their justifications for the statistical analysis findings. However, part of this study also deals with what role do those websites play in the context of their mission and activities. Furthermore, interviewees were also asked about the ideological stances of the websites, particularly based on their political affiliation or even in relation to the owners, which is the case for independent websites.

Finally, this section produces the findings concerning the impact that news websites might have had in the past by allowing the interviewees to note their personal and professional experienced and how their work may have had an influence on Yemen.

#### 4.3.2.1 Role clear for opposition & government, unclear for independent websites

Interviewees have arrived to a consensus in each of the focus group interview sessions that each website that was established in Yemen had a fixed role to play based on the
objectives that were set by the owners or founders of that particular website. This role could vary widely based on the ideology of the owner. Furthermore, an overall consensus was reached in that news websites are following the same pattern of newspapers particularly in style and content. They noted that most online journalists writing and reporting for news websites are or were print journalists in the past.

For the case of opposition websites owned by political parties, they have a very well-defined and set agenda, according to Mr. Ali Qais of Al-Sahwa Net. He noted that the owner of the website, the Islah Party, established the website as part of its media efforts to promote the ideas and news that conform to the party's ideology, which is mostly Islamic and critical of the current government\(^{47}\).

Those notes were reiterated by Mr. Fahmi Al-Olimi, the News Department of Al-Sahwa Net, which abides by the policies of "the political party that it represents to convey its message to the reader."

Similarly, the Al-Motamar Net website, which is owned by the ruling party the GPC, has its own agenda of promoting the government's policies and ideas and often rebuking or criticizing the opposition as noted by its Editor-in-Chief Mr. Abdulmalik Al-Fohidi. He had to say this about party-owned websites in general.

"The news websites that were formed were originally established for political reasons and hence have a role to play." (Al-Fohidi)

Al-Fohidi suggested that Yemen Portal should have put Al-Motamar Net along with Al-Sahwa News as part of a separate group under the category of 'party-owned websites' as their role and missions seem to be driven by political ideology.

However, he also acknowledged that currently, Al-Motamar Net is pro-government because the government is formed by the ruling party which also owns his website.

\(^{47}\) The Yemeni government at the time of this study was composed of the General People's Congress Party, which is a moderate party with a more liberal stance on a number of cultural and political issues compared to the Islah Party.
RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Consensus was reached on the role of government-owned news websites in publishing as much information on government activities as possible and to occasionally react to what is published in other non-government websites. This was also related to the statistical findings that showed that government websites have a much higher production rate compared to independent and opposition websites as mentioned previously.

But Mr. Nadeem Al-Jamali of September Net noted that in order to get the message out to the public, putting up irrelevant yet interesting news items often helps.

"It is true that the governmental news items that are being published are merely to inform the readers even if he only had to look at the title alone and not visit the story. But if you visit our websites [September Net], we take news items even from other Arabic websites so as to attract the reader. When I merge the governmental together, we need to be aware that our website is not purely official in its presentation. It is somewhat semi-official. We try to diversify. We use interesting articles because we need to let the reader enjoy reading while we simultaneously accomplished our mission. When the reader reads this regular news item or the interesting news item, he notices the other headlines 100%. " (Al-Jamali)

Al-Jamali noted that this method was developed to avoid the dullness that exists in government websites that attempt to flood their pages with pro-government related activities and opinions, which is largely viewed as what they were founded to do. But Al-Jamali, like all other interviewees noted that a government website cannot accomplish its mission unless readers do read its news and that means there needs to be some 'sensationalism' to be competitive.

"News is eventually sensationalism, as he [Nizar Al-Abadij said. It is like 'a man bites a dog and not a dog bites a man' type of thing. It is because it is known that dogs often bite humans, but when a human bites a dog, this is news." (Al-Jamali)

What was more complicated to derive was the role of independent news websites, which were categories in this study as Yemeni news website that claim to be independent.

48 The term 'independent' websites was disputed throughout the discussions and the result from that will be discussed later in this section.
RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This however does not necessarily mean that they do not receive funding from a specific entity and hence have a specific role that it is supposed to play.

Interviewees did not agree on one common role that those news websites play because it largely depends on the owner and his/her convictions.

There are times when the role of a news website changes and evolves in time. This was precisely what happened to Independent news website Mareb Press according its founder Mr. Mohamed Al-Salahi, whose project was a personal initiative to promote the image of Mareb governorate. And the website, according to Al-Salahi, succeeded in changing the perception of Mareb for many people, who used to view it "as a remote, backward, infested, and poverty-stricken governorate."

Today however, the role has moved from Mareb and even beyond Yemen as a whole. By establishing an English section, the website is aiming higher.

"Our aim is to bring foreign readers and deliver our voice internationally." (Al-Salahi)

Mr. Jabr Sabir, a correspondent working for Mareb Press stressed that the website is distinct and unique in that it does not work for anyone and can hence have its independent role to play.

"The website is distinguished with its neutrality and does not belong to any side or political party but it is rather independent and by maintaining objectivity and neutrality, it attempts to achieve its mission to reach the highest number of readers whether domestically, or, because of it being electronic, internationally to those concerned with Yemen abroad." (Sabir)

What was found to be common between the experience of Mareb Press and Naba News is their extra struggle to prove themselves in a competitive environment where resources are limited.

Mrs. Ala'a Al-Saffar, the Editor-in-Chief of Naba News noted that her website's role and mission is to "inform the world about what is happening inside Yemen." Unlike Mareb
Press however, the website's role does not include informing the readers on events outside Yemen.

Independent websites present in the discussions were eager to explain that profitability was not part of their objective although generating income is important to maintain and develop their websites. This is a major difference between government and opposition websites which have entities that fund them to promote a specific political ideology.

One aspect that makes independent websites unique is that they don't have a legal status in the country in terms of representation and hence, they cannot issue invoices nor do business transactions. Interviewees complained about this deficiency and noted it constitutes a serious threat to online news websites in general, but is particularly troublesome for independent news websites that are not affiliated to a newspaper or a specific political entity.

On the other hand, the roles of independent websites could change based on the owner's own ideology, most interviewees said. This explains why some websites lean towards the government while others lean towards the opposition. Some see running a website as part of an individualistic ambition to pursue wealth, popularity, advocacy or other interests.

Hence, we can conclude the sixth finding on the issue of the role as follows.

**Finding-6:** While government websites' role is to mainly disseminate information about government activities and react to the opposition, party-owned websites –whether opposition or ruling - play a partisan role in disseminating information representing their party's views. But the role of independent websites varies based on the owners and managers.

### 4.3.2.2 An ideologically charged environment

Now that the study has analyzed the role of websites and their perceived missions, it is important to put this in context with the ideology that often drives those roles.

The only block that was found to have ideological harmony within it was the government group, which is totally and firmly behind the ideology of the General People's Congress,
the ruling party in Yemen. The GPC is the party that controls more than 79% of the parliament's seats and is led by the President of Yemen Ali Abdullah Saleh, who is the party's chairman.

Restrictions on what news content could be produced in government news websites have been based on the ideology of the ruling party. The example of the report on the severed Internet cables mentioned earlier is one of the examples noted. Mr. Abdulmalik Al-Fohidi linked this to the mentality that operates the partisan newspaper industry.

"Al-Mithaq newspaper embrace the viewpoint of their party, which sometimes undermines the piece of information they had to serve a political purpose." (Al-Fohidi)

Websites representing opposition political groups or dissident websites have diverse often conflicting ideologies even if they belonged to the same opposition alliance. A good example is the case of Al-Wahdawi Net and Al-Sahwa Net, the first representing the pro-Arabism Nasserite Unionist Party, while the other represents a pro-Islamist conservative ideology. The two also differ from another opposition website Al-Eshteraki, which represents the Yemeni Socialist Party. Yet all the three parties have certain common interests, which include the aspiration to take over power from the GPC.

The ideologies of each of those parties are clearly reflected in the content of their websites, interviewees agreed. Sometimes those very websites clash, but some other times they meet. What bring them together are their own party's directions.

Interviewees noted however that those very ideologies are what restrict them from achieving better readership and interaction with online readers. Independent websites have a greater level of maneuverability, particularly if they are without an ideology. The political neutrality of some independent websites allowed them to grow in popularity and credibility.

---

49 Al-Mithaq is a weekly Arabic-language newspaper representing the ruling party (GPC)
Mr. Ali Al-Saqqaf, the Editor-in-Chief of *Al-Wahdawi Net* and also Al-Wahdawi Weekly said political ideology governing what opposition and government websites could or could not tackle hinders their growth.

"What makes independent websites more attractive to readers is their higher level of freedom because they can publish news from the opposition as well as those from the government along with news that cannot be published by the government or the opposition. Hence they have a greater readership base given they deal with the three aspects of news" (Al-Saqqaf)

Not having specific ideological strings attached has once again proved an asset for independent news websites, according to Mr. Nizar Al-Abadi of *Naba News*. Comparing his website to *Al-Sahwa Net* proves a point.

"Don't forget that Al-Sahwa is a party-owned website and hence it has specific policies, unlike us. It has a specific message to convey. Our message is general. It is a message of national development. We want to raise cultural and social awareness, etc. We are trying to make ourselves feel that the country is still an open arena and there are vast issues that you could write on." (Al-Abadi)

The same notion resonated in what Mohamed Al-Salahi of *Mareb Press* said although he pointed out that his website leans to the opposition but that is not because of an ideology issue.

"I would tell you honestly that we do lean towards opposition and many would consider us opposition. We are seen as affiliated to Islah. But we are part of the people and people are not satisfied with the conditions of the country. But you can't accuse me of being part of a specific entity." (Al-Salahi)

The total editorial independence of websites was disputed by almost all interviewees. The notion of truly independent website was rebuked even by Al-Abadi, who claims his website is independent, but not *totally* independent. This becomes clearer for cases that touch a nerve, such as the secessionist movement in the south of the country.
"There is no total independence. There is semi-independence. You have freedom and diversity. But affiliation is evident for all websites. All websites have their bias. But the level of independence differs. In certain situations, you can be independent. When the country is in calm political circumstances, I increase the number of articles about corruption, etc. But when the situation becomes more sensitive, for example, resulting from a crisis in the south about secession, etc., I reduce such things so as not to add insult to injury. I try to strike a balance." (Al-Abadi)

Hence, the following finding could be concluded from the aspect of ideology.

**Finding-7:** Ideology plays a major role in opposition and government websites, which often sacrifice neutrality to stick by their own editorial policies set by those ideologies. Independent news websites however, follow a more unrestricted approach, allowing them to cross ideological lines and reach a wider base of readers.

**4.3.2.3 Impact felt directly, indirectly**

All interviewees agreed that news websites do have an impact. However, measuring this impact and concluding which group of websites (government, opposition, independent) had the strongest, has proven to be a challenge.

When it comes to taking full potential of online media, among the main concerns raised in the interviews were the weak power and communication infrastructure, the high cost of internet tariffs, the bans practiced by the government every once in a while, plus the very high poverty and illiteracy levels in the country.

Despite the above problems however, interviewees said news websites had a direct impact on the public in different ways.

In the case of government websites, some interviewees noted that press releases, statistics, announcements, and other breaking news that concern government decisions, are followed up closely and do have an impact.
Among them was Mr. Mr. Fahmi Al-Olimi of *Al-Sahwa Net* opposition website, who acknowledged the influence government websites have in providing the official view, which apart form its impact on the public sentiment, it also allows opposition websites to react and analyze.

"We always tend to look into the main official newspapers such as *Al-Thawra*, *September* and the *Saba* agency because they are the ones that supply official news. In addition, we also follow *Al-Motamar Net* continuously given that it is the mouthpiece of the ruling party as it reflects the policies of the party and what it produces. We follow the official news media because we get to know about the appointments and statements. But we follow the ruling party's website constantly because it represents the view of its party and what serves their policies. These websites have political influence" (Al-Olimi)

Most interviewees agreed that reaction to some of the stories published is proof their websites are having a direct impact. Some interviews noted that the most influential websites are those representing the government and the ruling party because they are directly connected to decision-making process.

Al-Olimi added that the impact of his website is felt by many.

"The online media was able in the last period to have an impact on lives of the people and on individuals. For example, a number of persons call me on during the day. A student calls me saying he was held for not having a student ID. A teacher calls me saying that the manager of the [teaching] center came and dismissed him. A soldier calls me saying he didn't receive his bonus. So he calls wanting to reach *Al-Sahwa Net* feeling that it will have an impact." (Al-Olimi)

Al-Olimi went back to implicitly refer to the restrictions that his and other websites face when trying to abide to the ideology of their parties, missing a greater potential impact.

"But to have a greater impact on the political situation in the country, those websites need to favor the public's interest over their own. They should not use up all their time, energy, and space to cover the political party's affairs and issues related to responses and bickering. The nation, the citizen, the poor and the oppressed need to be given a share to have an impact on the decision making process." (Al-Olimi)
Meanwhile, Mr. Ali Al-Saqqaf of *Al-Wahdawi Net* opposition website emphasized another aspect of the impact that websites of opposition political parties may have.

"Party-owned websites in particular have a significant impact in terms of provocation and incitement targeting their base readers." (Al-Saqqaf)

The same conclusion on non-governmental websites was also reached by Mr. Nadeeb Al-Jamali, who works for government website *September Net*.

"As for the websites' impact on the public, this is indeed the case. Those websites are trying to provoke the public. As an opposition or independent website, my mission is to get the people to act. Even the government can use websites for the same purposes." (Al-Jamali)

Mr. Mohamed Al-Salahi of *Mareb Press* said the government started to consider the impact of news websites more seriously after the 2006 elections.

"I believe that after the 2006 elections, the government took websites seriously because the organizations and donors that were monitoring the elections, including the American National Democratic Institute depended when writing its reports on the elections in Yemen on websites for 60% or 70% of their contents." (Al-Salahi)

Al-Salahi then gave instances when his website made a difference. One notable example was when his website published an opinion piece by dissident Yemeni American Munir Al-Mawari, who wrote that a US company the Yemeni minister of energy signed a deal that turned out to have an unclean record in terms of manipulation of stocks.

"...websites participated in exposing corruption scandals. When Mareb Press first posted an opinion by Munir Al-Mawari about the nuclear energy deal, it was widely circulated in local newspapers. So the government reacted to it." (Al-Salahi)

Mr. Nizar Al-Abadi of *Naba News* said his website once published a story about 17 officials who looted pieces of land in the southern governorate of Shabwa.
"As a consequence of this story, the general secretariat of Al-Motamar had to convene. That meeting was triggered by that news article. There is certainly an impact." (Al-Abadi)

One relatively recent and memorable case in which website's impact was the case of a 2-year-old girl that was lost in Yemen's capital Sana'a. Three hours after a news item with a picture of the girl was posted on News Yemen on March 9, 2008, a person who had read the article identified the girl and informed the website, which in turn informed the girl's father who went to the area to be reunited with her three days after she was lost for three days. Figure 14 shows a snapshot of a news item published after the girl was found.

Several similar instances were presented by Al-Salahi and Al-Abadi, confirming that there is indeed a direct impact in specific cases. However, another impact was indirect and it was also confirmed by all interviewees. This was websites' role in serving as a source used for other media.

The most common aspect of using news items of websites is done by newspapers, which often copy the content from a news websites with or without referring to the source. This process results in having the original message of the website reach readers of the newspaper who may have never used the Internet before.

Mohamed Al-Salahi even noted that some individuals print news articles and photocopy them in large quantity to be sold to people in smaller towns where Internet access is limited.
"News from Mareb Press gets printed in Al-Dhale'. My colleague Bilal Rubiya operates an Internet cafe and once told me 'Would you believe it if I tell you that we are making ends meat from your website?' I asked why? He said 'Every day, I print a bundle of documents of news about the south along with the comments.' He said that some don't have access to the Internet so he sells daily from one to two hundred copies. They seem to be doing quite well... I expect this to increase particularly as the elections are coming up." (Al-Salahi)

So electronic forms of news, according to the interviewees, can be converted to printed form and disseminated to large numbers of people, enforcing the notion that news websites are having an indirect impact. Al-Salahi also noted that sometimes, mosque preachers would use material obtained from one of the Yemeni news websites to convey a message to people praying in the mosque, which is an indirect impact in the form of audio. Thus far, Radio and TV are yet to be affected however.

Some interviewees argued that if websites did not have an impact, the regime would not have resorted to censoring them from public access.

Furthermore, another important aspect that was noted by some interviewees is the fact that in Yemen, families are often large and gatherings take place quite often. Hence if one person learned the news from a website, that news gets disseminated quickly across families and even villages. In Yemen, messages conveyed by word of mouth do reach a distance.

One more indirect impact noted by interviewees was the use of news website content in mobile short messages (SMS). Some websites such as Al-Sahwa Net and September Net have a special SMS news alert system, which depends heavily on the online content generated for online audience but summarized to fit in small SMS messages.

It is also a two way process as users can send SMS messages to news websites to inform them of a newsworthy event, as Mr. Fahmi Al-Olimi of Al-Sahwa Net said.

"For us, some people simply send us an SMS message on the mobile phone after we inaugurated Al-Sahwa Mobile service. So we forward this piece of information to our correspondent to verify it and so on. Sometimes it turns out to be a true event, and sometimes
not. And when this person finds his information being shown on Al-Sahwa Net, he becomes motivated to work with us again." (Al-Olimi)

Some interviewees even went as far as noting that websites have started to become a reliable source for international media. Among them was Al-Wahdawi Net's Mr. Adil Abdulmughni, who said that newspapers abroad follow and republish news of websites often.

"Websites contribute more to change in the country in a different way. Now the Western newspapers often republishes reports and articles posted in news websites and hence websites are actively contributing in setting the agendas and policies in the country itself even if the percentage of visitors in the country is smaller than that of visitors abroad because their news articles are being republished in newspapers." (Abdulmughni)

This influence, according to both Al-Abadi and Al-Salai has exceeded Yemen's borders. Such a global impact would not have been possible with a geographically distributed media such as local newspapers. Al-Abadi gave a specific example.

"On the international influence, we once published a report on the American National Democratic Institute when Robin Madrid was the director of the institute. The second or third day, Robin Madrid submitted a complaint to the Prime Minister and another to the General People's Congress and other high-level officials, whom she sought as mediators, all for this report. We wrote a report on the events in Bahrain, from which the Democratic Institute was kicked out. So she said, 'that is it. We will be paralyzed by such rumors.' This is one of the indications of the influence of websites even on international organizations." (Al-Abadi)

In conclusion, one can reach the following finding on the impact of news websites.

**Finding-8:** Although it isn't clear which of the three main groups of news websites (government, opposition, independent) has the greatest impact, news websites in general do have an impact. This impact is both direct in the form of causing reactions to published articles, and indirect in having news content from websites republished or delivered via other media.
4.3.2.4  The future is here

Interviewees were mostly excited about the future of online journalism in Yemen and gave several reasons for that. Among the most common was the global trend that points to more digitalization of news coverage.

The tone of optimism was also relevant to expectations for a more adequate infrastructure. Mr. Jabr Sabir of Mareb Press said the use of the Internet is on the rise, and that could not but mean that news websites will become more important in time.

"In technical and technological terms, we can see a noticeable improvement. See how things have changed from two years to now. How many Internet cafes were there then in Yemen? They were four or five. But now you find them all around you. The technology in general became accessible." (Sabir)

Mr. Mohamed Al-Salahi talked about how his website was able to reach a high level of readership with limited resources and service interruptions. Hence, he feels any development in the infrastructure of the service would boost the Internet and hence, would propel news websites towards greater growth. However, he also signaled that amidst the ongoing competition, some independent websites, including his own may perish if sustainable income was not achieved.

"Websites will have a great impact. They will change policies and limit corruption... But you still cannot have high expectations. Websites cannot continue easily. Walid, I tell you that I fear the day of reckoning. I fear that day particularly because we are an independent website and I tell you frankly that I would rather close down the website rather than having to sell my principles." (Al-Salahi)

A similarly cautious sense of optimism was conveyed by most interviewees. Most interviewees suggested that in order for the online media to prosper, they have to be recognized by the state and that would not happen without having an entity that would defend news websites and work for their common good. Such a body was proposed throughout the interviews and was often referred to as a league for Yemeni news websites.
Mr. Fahmi Al-Olimi of *Al-Sahwa Net* stressed that the league has to be formed for news websites could flourish.

"As for the future of online media, I believe they will have greater impact if they unite under one umbrella. I believe that now we only have dispersed media as everyone is working in isolation from others. But if efforts are joined together and promote a specific cause, I expect that they will surely have a stronger influence on the political process. This entity [league] is the most important thing because it will prioritize the general interest over the private interest." (Al-Olimi)

Mr. Ali Al-Saqqaf of *Al-Wahdawi Net* opposition website said the trend is unstoppable and will continue.

"We have become accustomed to checking all the websites for any important article, which we could either take as is and acknowledge its source or use it as a basis for a story that we could pursue ourselves... The influence of those websites will increase in time and will possibly compete with newspapers. There is a trend signaling that websites will continue to grow." (Al-Saqqaf)

But just as the sense of optimism is there in terms of overall growth and impact, a sense of fear was also noticed when discussing issues of ethics and abuse of news websites. Mr. Abdulmalik Al-Fohidi of *Al-Motamar Net* government website said he feared the politics and partisan bickering in newspapers is slowly migrating to the cyber sphere.

"But I notice that whatever happened to the print journalism is now repeating itself in online journalism. This is what I feared. I was once in a meeting with a group of colleague editors in chief as we agreed that politics is the plague affecting journalism in this country." (Al-Fohidi)

A serious note about the future of news websites was raised by Mr. Adil Abdulmughni of *Al-Wahdawi Net*. He recalled efforts by the government to restrict or regulate news websites by issuing laws that may criminalize online journalists.
Another source of concern expressed by some interviewees was the banning of news websites, which were mainly dissident websites. However, at the time of the interview the ban of website was not a serious concern given that only a few websites at the time were banned. Furthermore, the majority of interviewees approved the ban of websites that were deemed to have an anti-unity stance. Such a stance was rejected by Al-Abadi, who said that the ban of news websites will not be practical in the long run.

"I am against the policy of blocking websites because if a specific website is broadcasting from London and you fear for me [as a citizen], then there are even websites that broadcast from Israel. There are websites that target your religion and websites that target your Arabism, others that target your morals. How many can you block?" (Al-Abadi)

Given that the unprecedented wave of news websites banning –including Yemen Portal- took place after the interviews were conducted, this aspect will be dealt with in the conclusion chapter. Furthermore, the interviews also took place before Yemeni minister of information Mr. Hassan Al-Lawzi warned news websites of prosecution using the penal code if they carried stories that were deemed harmful to the national interests of the country or to unity.

Hence, the main finding concerning the future of news websites in Yemen is as follows.

**Finding-9:** The future of Yemeni news websites is promising and may contribute in shifting power away from traditional media, particularly with the improvement of communication infrastructure. The main concerns stem from possible legal acts and website bans by the government, which could restrict online press freedom and affect this sector altogether.

---

50 No public statements were made of the discussions that were held about the draft law.
51 At the time of the interview, yemenportal.net was not banned yet.
52 Those threats were condemned by the Centre for Training and Protection of Journalists’ Freedom, which viewed them as an indicator that the government is insistent on continuing the ban of news websites.
4.3.3 Summary of findings

Interviews have been quite informative in giving an in-depth understanding about Yemeni news websites and confirmed the findings of the quantitative analysis on the bases of the experiences and knowledge of individuals working in this sector.

The interviews cross-validated and justified the findings of the content analysis. High production levels of government websites were attributed to their role seen in disseminating as much information that is pro-government as possible regardless of quality. On the other hand, online readers in Yemen lean to critical and sensational reporting, which is mostly available in independent and opposition websites.

Independent websites, on the other hand, proved to be the most tolerant in accepting reader feedback that may contradict with government and/or opposition views. This allowed them to receive the bulk of comments. Meanwhile, only a few of the independent news websites had a high level of article visits and comments and that was attributed to the fact that many independent websites were set up by individuals using cheap software and were not followed through and hence died out soon after or became slow in their progress.

Roles of news websites varied based on political affiliation as government websites were viewed as governmental tools used to disseminate information and respond to criticism of the regime. Opposition news websites that belonged to political parties were more concerned with criticizing the regime and representing the views of the political parties they represent. Independent websites, on the other hand, had a more liberal and unrestricted role in reporting critically about the government and opposition.

Ideology wise, other than government websites, which carried and strictly abided by the ideology and principles of the ruling party, each other news website had its own distinct ideology. Independent websites were less concerned with ideology and rather represented their owners, giving them a wider area of maneuverability.

The impact of news websites was direct in resulting in reaction to articles published and indirect in terms of serving as a source for other types of media. However, both impacts
remained relatively low and difficult to measure due to the small percentage of online users in Yemen.

Finally, Yemen's news websites were seen to have a future ahead of them given the local and international trends. But obstacles in the form of potential laws, ethical practices, and websites bans remain a concern. The overall sense was that news websites will continue to grow and prosper and have a greater impact in the future.

4.4 Discussion of study's findings

The study found the structure, traffic, and content of Yemeni news websites through content analysis and cross-validated and justified them by interviewing experts in the production phase of online news content. It also analyzed a sample of the produced content to have an understanding of the ideology and bias in that those articles, which were considered representative samples of Yemeni news websites at large. Interviews were also used to understand the role, ideology and impact of news websites.

4.4.1 Triangulation achieved

When discussing the findings, it is important to note how they should be seen in the context of Yemen as an emerging democracy with a regime that is considered authoritarian and with a population suffering from high poverty and illiteracy levels. The findings reveal an interesting impact of news websites in a way that may have not been expected in a country where the Internet penetration ratio is around 1% (Internet World Stats, 2008).

The fact that interviews validated the content analysis findings affirms the triangulation aspect of this study as the quantitative method findings were confirmed by qualitative analysis. Furthermore, the findings of the CDA were similarly confirmed by the interviewees, which could arguably be considered another cross-validation of the finding.
4.4.2 Cyberspace found to be breathing space

Given the findings of this study, it is probable that new media in general and news websites in particular are sending out a critical anti-government message that may somewhat reduce the effectiveness of the regime's deployment of traditional or rather 'old' media such as the country's monopolized TV and radio channels, the official news agency and the official daily newspapers. The ban of news websites such as Aden Press and search engine Yemen Portal are indicators that the authorities are sensing this impact, which was clearly lauded by the interviewees as noted in previous sections.

One could argue that news websites are becoming some sort of breathing space for many Internet users in Yemen because websites were the only relatively unrestricted space where online readers could learn information that may otherwise not be available for public access as such information is often deemed to have crossed the red line based on the press and publications law of Yemen.

This explains the desire of readers to read news articles critical of the regime in opposition and independent news websites but which are not normally available in government news websites. The government's strategy in using its news websites to promote government news on routine activities and missions may have backfired in driving away readers and weakening credibility. Hence, the government has failed to properly make use of the Internet to get its message out because having content online is useless unless it is read by the public.

In total contrast, the opposition has more effectively used the technology to promote its ideology and differences with the government and to promote the political parties it represents. This role was emphasized in the interviews but was also resembled in the coverage of opposition news websites including the article from Al-Wahdawi Net analyzed in this study.
4.4.3 Independent websites: successes and challenges

Independent websites, on the other hand, had mixed success as only a few news websites were able to achieve high readership levels while the majority fell far behind. Publishing exclusive and controversial topics was key, according to the interviewees, in creating this gap and allowing some websites to reach high levels of readership while others struggled not only to compete, but to remain active. The findings confirm that independent news websites are often struggling as they depend on their own resources to survive and achieve a level of growth necessary to compete. This financial shortage was not as severe with opposition and government websites, which have budget allocations regardless of their performance.

Interactivity in the form of comments by readers has generally been accepted as an indication of how well connected a website is with the readers and is often boosted by high levels of freedom and flexibility. Government and opposition websites have both fallen behind in the number of comments because of their strict policies in not allowing comments that could be found offensive or in conflict with the stance of the website's owners. This affirms the notion that strict ideological allegiance could be a liability in terms of interaction with readers.

Although ideology is a major factor behind the editorial decisions and policies of government and opposition websites, independent websites are not immune to bias. The coverage of the January 13, 2008 demonstrations in Aden in the two prominent independent news websites Mareb Press and Naba News exemplifies this bias and exposes total independence as a myth, particularly with issues that are politically sensitive. The study found that the results of the CDA and the interviews concerning the level of independence of independent newspapers have been cross-validated, exposing a possible vulnerability of the study's classification of 'independent websites'. How can one define an independent website? Although this study based its classification on what the website owners say, this classification could be misleading given that several news websites are owned and run by individuals known to have very close connections with the regime or the opposition. This subject remains quite open for different interpretations.
that go beyond the scope of this study. Nonetheless it is an important factor to consider for future research.

4.4.4 An impact despite the odds

Despite the poor communication infrastructure, high Internet costs, and low computer literacy levels, the Internet's presence and impact in Yemen are felt in different ways. But news websites have a long way to reach a mostly illiterate population\(^53\) that mostly rely on the broadcast media, which are monopolized by the state and often carry a pure pro-government message particularly for politically-sensitive issues such as unity and the person of the president. On the other hand, newspapers remain legally restricted and slow to report on events, particularly as most newspapers in Yemen are weekly. Journalists and editors in daily newspapers tend to be extra cautious and practice a strong degree of self-censorship to avoid being closed down or have their journalists prosecuted (Al-Saqaf, 2006).

The impact aspect of news websites was strongly emphasized by all interviewees, who failed however to identify which group of websites (government, opposition, independent) is more influential. Nonetheless there are actual stories and cases that prove news websites did have an impact. Measuring this impact however remains subjective and could be misleading given the country's low Internet penetration rates compared to their counterparts in the region.

The findings have nonetheless confirmed that there is a trend. This trend is in the direction of more information and more interactive opportunities between the readers and the producers of news online. The cautious optimism of interviewees in the future of online journalism in Yemen is a result of their experiences in the past as many journalists working for online media have been or even remain journalists in newspapers, which remain vulnerable to lots of legal obstacles.

\(^{53}\) Yemen has one of the highest illiteracy rates in the world, according to the CIA Factbook the literacy level is just over 50% (CIA, 2008).
5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has achieved its goal in answering the questions of the research through three different methods. The questions on the structure, content, traffic were answered with quantitative analysis and were cross-validated with interviews. Similarly, the findings of the interview method have cross-validated the CDA findings concerning the aspect of ideology of news websites.

This chapter attempts to connect the dots and link the answers derived from the findings to the theoretical framework as well as parts of relevant previous studies. It also incorporates some of my personal observations during the process of carrying out this study as well as recommendations for potential research in the future.

5.1 First glimpse of Yemen’s news cyber sphere

For the first time, this study provided the first glimpse of the YNCS. The content analysis of the YNCS was possible through Yemen Portal, which is the web crawler and search engine that tracked seventy Yemeni government, opposition, and independent websites in a period exceeding eight successive months.

The study found that the majority of news websites are independent, which is the fastest growing sector. But several independent websites died during the period of the study. It was concluded that this is mainly due to financial as well as technical difficulties that the initiators of those websites face. Similarly, the interviewees also confirmed the other problems mentioned in previous studies on the Internet by Al-Kibsi, and Qaid. (Al-Junaid, 2002), (Al-Mutairi, 2008)

Particular emphasis was made on the weak infrastructure, the lack of resources, both human and financial, as well as the high costs of the Internet and the high illiteracy rates, which combined, constitute the biggest hindrance for the growth of news websites.
Furthermore, as noted by Eid (2005), government restrictions and website bans are also partly to blame.

As noted in the New Media Theory section, the WWW provides a great degree of *Immediacy* (Bolter and Grusin, 2000). This was also a driving force to create news websites despite the aforementioned constraints. Yemeni citizens' curiosity and hunger for news and views that were not reflected in the broadcast media drove them to explore alternative means to access information about local events happening in areas where media coverage is scarce. The coverage in six websites presented in this study concerning the January 13 protests in Aden is an example of what makes news websites unique. That very event was not dealt with the broadcast media and hence, the first to break the news and the only source of it for some time were news websites.

In brief, news websites have become an increasingly useful source of information and the growth in number and popularity of websites is poised to grow. This is particularly true for independent news websites, which can be launched by individuals, groups or companies without the need to have the backing of a political party or the government.

However, this growth may be hindered if the government decided to proceed in issuing a law that may regulate websites and force online journalists to abide by regulations similar to those that restricted print journalists in the past. This growth may also be hindered if the government decides to follow Bahrain's lead in mandating registration of local websites. (RSF, 2005)

### 5.2 Independent websites bring diversity

Independent websites have surpassed opposition and government websites in their combined levels of article visits and reader comments, which are the two main factors signifying the popularity level of the news websites in question. Article visits are high for independents and opposition because online readers seek news that is not already in the broadcast and print media. Government websites are not receiving much because their
coverage is similar in style and content to what people have been listening to on radio, watching on TV, and reading in official newspapers. This is when opposition as well as independent website do much better by attracting this segment of the community that wants to hear the alternative, often oppositional coverage and views. Comments in particular encourage readers to return frequently as it enhances interaction through a two-way content-driven mechanism allowing the reader to have a voice.

Interactivity is one of the main characteristics of hypermediacy as noted by Lister et al. (Lister et al, 2003). The two most popular Yemeni independent websites Mareb Press and Naba News have given considerable attention to comments and it seems to have paid back handsomely with high article visits and interaction levels. As noted by Nizar Al-Abadi of Naba News, sometimes a reader may want to open the website to learn what other readers commented about. This sets the stage for hypermediacy in the text content level, meaning that content provided by the producer would be presented on the same page with comments by multiple people.

However, as noted earlier, independence of news websites –politically and economically– may not necessarily be reflected in the neutrality of those news websites. Those websites are often influenced by the owners' ideology and biases. Each of the two independent websites examined in the CDA has demonstrated contrasting biases when covering the January 13 protests. While Naba News leaned towards the government, Mareb Press had more of an oppositional stance, raising the question of neutrality of independent websites as a whole. But despite this obvious bias, there are positive aspects of professional journalism found in the coverage of those two websites, emphasizing the conclusion that independent websites are perhaps the closest to neutrality and objectivity.

5.3 Online news genre nonexistent

Although not properly researched in this study, online news in Yemeni news websites did not yet develop in its own unique genre but is rather using the newspaper news article genre. Interviewees revealed that the role of newspapers is now being shared by websites.
They noted that news websites and newspapers in Yemen carry out similar roles and have similar content and in fact are often driven by similar ideological motives. This contradicts the findings of Lewis (2003), Ihlstrom and Eriksen (2002), and Lundberg (2001) and others as outlined in the Previous Research and Theoretical Framework chapter. The authors argued that an online news genre is emerging in some countries such as Sweden and the United States. But the same cannot be said on Yemen's online news.

I argue that part of the reason behind the lagging of Yemen in terms of developing an online news genre is the lack of financial and human resources. Independent news websites for example seem to struggle for survival and have not yet had enough resources to qualify their cadres. Furthermore, the need to develop this genre is not there as the level of competition has yet to intensify. So far, many of the journalists working for news websites are actually print journalists. News websites of opposition and government news websites were merely established to reflect the views of their owners, suggesting a continuation of the trend of official dailies and party-owned weeklies.

This brings us to the conclusion that remediation, as pointed out by Bolter and Grusin (Bolter and Grusin, 2000) and in websites are demonstrated in the way that newspapers have started to move their material online, ensuring that the same style and content is also available digitally. This phase is still relatively recent for many media in Yemen. In fact, a significant number of Yemeni newspapers have not yet established themselves online.

Remediation has also been reflected in terms of ideology, which is and always was a strong force driving media policies, particularly for government and opposition newspapers. This very ideology is thought to have also become a major part of how news websites are being used. Representing this ideology has largely dictated the way opposition and government news websites covered politically sensitive events.
5.4 Impact and reactions of today may decide tomorrow’s course

The impact that news websites have had was thoroughly noted in the findings chapter. But what is important to note here is that the Yemeni government has implicitly shown concern about the growing impact of news websites by blocking several websites after January 19, 2008. On that day, Yemen Portal, which is the research tool used for this study primarily for the content analysis, was blocked without giving any explanations. The ban followed a steady growth in number of users and articles retrieved and displayed on its pages. Since then, more than twenty websites were banned, bringing the total number of banned websites in Yemen to over 20 websites, which were mostly blocked for content deemed harmful to the country’s national interests.

As noted earlier, the impact of websites could be direct or indirect. The direct impact is resembled in exposing corruption, resulting in investigations or in touching people's lives, such as the case of the lost Yemeni girl, who was found by a person who saw her picture on a website. But it is the indirect impact that constitutes a major concern for some websites owners. In a globalizing world, what is published on one website in Yemen reaches out to the international community, exposing things to the eyes of the world. Arguably, if it were not for Yemen Portal or for youtube.com, footage of the demonstrations of thousands of protests on January 13 in the city of Aden may have not been noticed by the international community. Those very images may have been the reason why Yemen Portal was banned and it may also be a cause of worry for other websites that fear repercussions from their actions.

"It is widely believed that the Internet poses an insurmountable threat to authoritarian rule. But political science scholarship has provided little support for this conventional wisdom, and a number of case studies from around the world show that authoritarian regimes are finding ways to control and counter the political impact of Internet use." (Kalathil and Boas, 2003)

Based on my study's findings, I can wrap up with the following bold conclusion. If the government stopped banning websites, prosecuting online journalists, and carrying out any other intimidations against websites and their owners, news websites are destined to grow and have a greater impact on other media, on politics, and on the lives of Yemenis.
It will then be safe to assume that this study will probably need another follow-up to assess how the situation has changed in the coming years, particularly as the global trends towards a more open and transparent online village appear to be unstoppable.
6 Bibliography


• Bardzell, Jeffrey (2007) *New Media Theory Primer* [WWW]  


• Bryman, Alan (2008) *Triangulation* [WWW]  


  http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1759,2010339,00.asp (April 28, 2008)

• Ebbertz, Martin (2002) *Das Internet spricht Englisch ... und neuerdings auch Deutsch* [WWW]  
  http://www.netz-tipp.de/sprachen.html (April 27, 2008)


• Eid, Gamal (2005) *The Internet In the Arab World: A New Space of Repression?* [WWW]  

• Eid, Gamal (2007) *Arab Activists and Information Technology - The Internet: Glimmer of Light in Dark Tunnel* (WWW)  


• Fattah, Khaled (2008) Party pluralism in Yemen [WWW]  
  (April 27, 2008)

• Gent, Maurice (1987) "The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, Politics, Economics
  and Society: The Politics of Socialist Transformation" *International Affairs*
  *(Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* Vol. 63, No. 2 (Spring, 1987), pp. 335-336

• Gharbia, Sami Ben (2008) *Yemen Blocks Independent News Websites* [WWW]
  http://advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/2008/01/26/yemen-blocks-independent-
  news-websites/ (April 27, 2008)

• Gonzalez-Quijano, Yves (2003) "The Birth of Media Ecosystem: Lebanon in the Internet Age"

• Hawk, Byron (2008) *New Media Theory* [WWW]


• Ihlstrom, Carina and Lundberg, Jonas (2002) "The Online News Genre through the User Perspective. Computer Society" *36th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS'03) - Track 4 January 2003:103a*

• Internet World Stats (2008) *Internet Usage in the Middle East* [WWW]

• Internet World Stats (2008) *Yemen Internet Usage*[WWW]


• Kalathil, Shanthi and Boas, Taylor C. (2003) *Open Networks Closed Regimes: The impact of the Internet on Authoritarian Rule* [WWW]


• Lister, Martin; Dovey, Jon; Giddings, Seth; Grant, Iain; and Kelly, Kieran (2003) *New Media: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge


• News Yemen (2008) *Yemeni Media Celebrates the Launch of 'Abwab'*
  [WWW] (April 27, 2008)


BIBLIOGRAPHY


## 7 Appendices

### 7.1 Appendix (A): Master statistics table for the YNCS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>days</th>
<th>frequency</th>
<th>affiliation</th>
<th>count</th>
<th>views</th>
<th>comments</th>
<th>avg_views</th>
<th>avg_comments</th>
<th>avg_pictures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nabanews</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>9.54</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2332</td>
<td>24040</td>
<td>2319</td>
<td>10.19</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marebpress</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>10.12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2477</td>
<td>19401</td>
<td>814</td>
<td>7.95</td>
<td>6.17</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alteef</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13.77</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adenpress</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>4952</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>11.58</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nasspress</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.31</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hnto</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>2023</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>7.61</td>
<td>1.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yemenews</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.42</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aladhwaa</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>949</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>7.82</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sanaapress</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>2369</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>5.69</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alwatanaye</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7.13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>newyemen</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>1282</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alshora</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>655</td>
<td>3002</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alayyam</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>8.73</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>6205</td>
<td>2249</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alwahladawi</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>763</td>
<td>3273</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tahama</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shamssannews</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>2292</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alhadathymen</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>898</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mayonews</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>6.31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1630</td>
<td>4937</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1081</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asrarpress</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yemenjournal</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aleshteriaki</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>669</td>
<td>1529</td>
<td>958</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>belaquood</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>978</td>
<td>3283</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hoodonline</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alsahwayemen</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>10.70</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>2676</td>
<td>7490</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>newsyemen</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>9.25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2374</td>
<td>6175</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shfaiyah</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>902</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>almotamar</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>10.55</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2583</td>
<td>6571</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alhaqeqah</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>702</td>
<td>1700</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>581</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>algomhoriah</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>7.17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1535</td>
<td>2941</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hadhramaut</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hadhramoutpress</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>526</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hdramut</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alwahdah</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mostakela</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>almethaq</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>6.17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1557</td>
<td>2481</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>847</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Min</td>
<td>Max</td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>Q4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>altagheer</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yeph</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ebnalyaman</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>muharrer</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14october</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>9.19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2202</td>
<td>2275</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emlaqah</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>erback</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yemenpress</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hadramouttoday</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alwasat</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>raynews</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>522</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mukallaradio</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sabanews</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>16.84</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3983</td>
<td>4199</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3197</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>newomma</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yemenobserver</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ye26</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yemenhurr</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>althawranews</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>18.09</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4445</td>
<td>3254</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>todaynews</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1076</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ashiaa</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>almasdar</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>islahforums</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anaween</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>almenpmnews</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>albalagh</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alnedaa</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>algahdym</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yemennow</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26sep</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>13.25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3296</td>
<td>954</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>1029</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alahale</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alsharea</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yemenradio</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>646</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reefnews</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>soutalgnoub</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* All the information obtained from about fifty thousand records has been grouped in this table, which is the master table used for the study
### 7.2 Appendix (B): Participants in the focus group interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Sessions attended</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Al-Motamar Net</em></td>
<td>Mr. Abdulmalik Al-Fohidi</td>
<td>Editor-in-Chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Al-Motamar Net</em></td>
<td>Mr. Aws Al-Iryani</td>
<td>Website designer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><em>Al-Motamar Net</em></td>
<td>Mr. Mohamed Abbas</td>
<td>Head of English Dep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>2,3</td>
<td><em>September Net</em></td>
<td>Mr. Nadim Ali Al-Jamali</td>
<td>Secretary Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Naba News</em></td>
<td>Mrs. Ala'a Al-Saffar</td>
<td>Editor-in-Chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>2,3</td>
<td><em>Naba News</em></td>
<td>Mr. Nizar Al-Abadi</td>
<td>Managing Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>1,3</td>
<td><em>Mareb Press</em></td>
<td>Mr. Mohamed Al-Salihi</td>
<td>Managing Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Mareb Press</em></td>
<td>Mr. Jabr Sabir</td>
<td>Correspondent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Al-Sahwa Net</em></td>
<td>Mr. Ali Qais</td>
<td>Technician, reporter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>2,3</td>
<td><em>Al-Sahwa Net</em></td>
<td>Mr. Fahmi Al-Olimi</td>
<td>Manager, News Dep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><em>Al-Wahdawi Net</em></td>
<td>Mr. Ali Al-Saqqaf</td>
<td>Editor-in-Chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Al-Wahdawi Net</em></td>
<td>Mr. Adil Abdulmughani</td>
<td>Technician, reporter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.3 Appendix (C): General guidelines for the focus group interviews

As noted in the methods chapter of this study, the interviews conducted were rather informal and flexible. However, each of the three days of the interviews did have questions and points to guide the discussion. As noted in the methods section, the first and second days were a background and agenda setting introductions for the core questions presented in the third day, whose discussion was the most relevant to the research questions.

Here I present the interview guides for each of the three days.

All answers and discussions were fully transcribed and translated into English, and it was often the case that some interviewees answered some questions before others, which is expected in an open informal focus group interview.

7.3.1 Technical overview (Day 1 - Jan 13)

* Participants' self introduction and a briefing of the website he/she represents and answering the question of: what is the message/role of your website and its objectives?

First topic: Internet as a service

1- How do you evaluate the general services provided by Teleyemen and Yemen.Net (the two Internet service providers in the country) in terms of speed, down and up linking?

2- What about interruptions? Can you rely on the service to host websites in Yemen?

54 The recording of the interviews and English transcriptions are available upon request from the author
3- What about blocking of websites, including adult and proxy websites?
4- Is the cost of Internet reasonable? What about the feels for ADSL and ISDN?
5- Does the quality of Internet service reflect on the overall level of Yemeni news websites and the service it provides? How?

Second Topic: Design, updating, and design of news websites
1- Do you depend on design and hosting companies for your websites or do you have your own team to do that? Why?
2- How many employees do you have and what are their expertise and qualifications?
3- Do the companies designing websites have sufficient expertise and technical capabilities?
4- How is competition among those companies in terms of prices and quality?
5- Does the level of those companies affect the overall quality of news websites and the message they convey? How?

Third topic: Equipment and available software
1- Do news websites in general – and yours in particular- have the equipment and technical supplies necessary to deliver its duties?
2- What are the programs used to update the websites? How often –on average- do you update your website? How many persons/machines are used for this process?
3- Do you depend on pictures often? What are the picture sources? Do you use the same pictures frequently for similar articles? What about exclusive pictures? Do you obtain them by scanning paper pictures or do you use digital cameras?
4- Do you suffer from interruptions of electricity? Do you depend on electrical stabilizers to stabilize the current and prevent damage that may be caused by any potential interruptions?
Fourth topic: Readers

1- What is the share of your readers in Yemen and abroad? How do you justify this?
2- Do you believe that the service and cost of Internet have effected your readership?
3- Do you believe comments contribute in raising the level of your website? Why?
4- Do you face inappropriate comments often? Do you censor or edit them? How?

Fifth topic: Needed steps

1- What are the steps that website owners could do to increase their websites' performance (such as: acquiring more equipment, increase salaries, allowing more freedom, etc.)?
2- What is required from the companies that provide Internet service?
3- What about website design and hosting companies?
4- How do you view the future of online media in the technical aspect?

Additional comments, questions, and discussion
7.3.2 Human and financial resources (Day 2 - Jan 14)

* Participants' self introduction and a briefing of the website he/she represents.

**First topic: Establishing and management of websites**

1- When and why did you establish your website? Who is the founder? What was the capital it started with?? How big was your cadre then?

2- How are decisions concerning your website taken concerning subjects handled, hiring and training of staff, and other steps to develop your website?

3- Is your website part of another larger establishment (such as a newspaper)? If so, is your website's independence affected by that?

**Second Topic: Human resources**

1- How many employees does your website have? What are their qualifications and experiences?

2- Do you have sufficient human resources?

3- What are the academic and work experiences of your cadres?

4- Do you train continuously? Have you or do you coordinate with donors in terms of providing training programs for your staffs?

5- What are the main obstacles facing you when looking for staffers to work for you?

**Third topic: Financial resources**

1- What are your sources of income and are they sufficient?

2- What was the level of growth witnessed in your earnings since you establish your website?

3- In case you receive funding from the government or the ruling party, how does that affect your editorial policies?
4- Are advertisements a major source of income for your website? Why?

5- Are the financing levels related to the overall performance level of your website in comparison to others?

Fourth topic: Strategy for development

1- Do you have an annual development plan for your website in terms of developing its financial and human resources?

2- Have you done or are doing any marketing work for your website?

3- What are the major obstacles that you face when trying to convince advertisers to advertise in your websites?

4- Do you believe in the importance of having a league (syndicate) for websites?

5- What are the priorities concerning the development of your website?

Fifth topic: Reality on the ground and needed steps

1- Do you see that the current reality of websites does not require a law to regulate websites? Why?

2- What are the steps that need to be taken by owners of websites to enhance their performance (eg., provide more equipment, raise wages, allowing more freedom, etc.)?

3- What do you believe the government should do to improve the level of online media in general (subsidies, reduction of Internet prices, etc.)?

4- How do you view the future of online media in terms of human and financial resources?

Additional comments, questions, and discussion
7.3.3 Yemeni news websites and political impact (Day 3 – Jan 15)

* Participants' self introduction and a briefing of the website he/she represents.

**First topic: Reality of news websites**

1- What are the main news websites in your opinion and how do you assess their political impact?

2- Does not having a law regulating news websites a positive or negative thing? Why?

3- What are the obvious differences between independent, government and opposition websites in terms of target group, financial resources, human resources, ease in accessing information etc.?

4- Do you believe in the independence of the establishments that own the websites will improve their impact and effectiveness or the opposite? Why?

5- Is it worthwhile blocking political websites? Why?

**Second Topic: Government websites**

1- Why have government websites surpassed other websites in terms of the number of produced content?

2- Us the financial position of government websites better than opposition and independent ones? Why?

3- Is there a large gap in terms of human and financial resources between governmental websites and those run by the ruling party?

4- What is the reason that government websites have performed weekly in comparison to independent and opposition websites in terms of article visits and comments?

5- How does the political affiliation (and ideology) of government websites affect readership?

6- What is the content that attracts readers to government websites?
7- What makes government websites distinguished? (e.g., not seeking profit, not focusing on controversial subjects, etc.)

8- What are the main obstacles preventing government websites from reaching out to readers?

**Third topic: Opposition websites**

1- How do you assess the financial situation of opposition websites?

2- What is the opposition's ability in terms of access to information and exclusivity in pictures, etc.?

3- What makes opposition websites distinguished and hence more readable compared to government and independent websites?

4- How does the political affiliation (and ideology) of opposition websites affect readership?

5- What makes opposition websites appealing for readers (what kind of content attracts readers)?

6- Do you find intense competition on coverage of certain events between opposition, government and independent websites? How?

7- What are the major obstacles preventing readers from yet increasing their readership/interaction levels further?

**Fourth topic: Independent websites**

1- How do you justify the high level of overall comment and article visits for independent websites despite the lower frequency of production compared to government websites?

2- How have those websites able to compete with government and opposition websites without steady income?

3- What is the ability of independent websites to compete in terms of accessing information and exclusivity in pictures?

4- What explains the big gap between a few top independent websites with the rest (e.g., mushrooming)?

5- Are independent websites truly independent (and are not driven by an ideology) as they claim and are not affiliated to a certain entity? How can you verify that?
6- What attracts readers in independent websites?

7- How do assess the impact of independent websites compared to others with partisan or government agendas?

**Fifth topic: Conclusion and future prospects**

1- Do those websites have an impact in the reality of today? Will they have a greater impact in the future? How?

2- Do you believe that websites (particularly independent and opposition) have an active role in shaping public opinion and energizing the street or in establishing strong links with the civil society towards achieving more public participation, demonstrations in the future?

3- What are the most effective approaches in which the online media could have a substantial impact on policies on all levels (locally and internationally)?

4- Do you expect an increase of the impact of websites on broadcast and print media in the future of Yemen? Why?

5- Any other views that you have concerning the future of websites and their political impact in Yemen?

**Additional comments, questions, and discussion**
7.4 Appendix (D): Translated articles used in the CDA

7.4.1 Government Website I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source:</th>
<th>September Net</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Affiliation:</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URL</td>
<td><a href="http://26sep.net/narticle.php?lng=arabic&amp;sid=37049">http://26sep.net/narticle.php?lng=arabic&amp;sid=37049</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>January 13, 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two citizens killed, 16 others injured in Aden and security apprehends the accomplices

Section: Local News

An official source in the Local Authority and the Security Committee of the governorate of Aden stated that during the functioning of the so-called "assembly for reconciliation and forgiveness" today January 13, 2008, some infiltrating elements launched sound bombs in the area of the rally.

Furthermore, they stole the automatic machine gun of one of the soldiers by force, and at the same time started to shoot gunfire randomly on the citizens participating in the rally at the Hashimi arena as well on security men, which resulted in the killing of two citizens and injury of nine other citizens and seven security men.
The source said the security apparatuses were able to apprehend those infiltrating elements that shot gunfire and sound bombs along with the equipment that they processed, and they also rushed the wounded to the hospital”.

The source noted that this act committed by those criminal elements has come just after the activities of the rally and assembly have ended and people started leaving the Hashimi arena.

The source said: "and it appears clearly that there are elements that wanted through this cowardly and criminal act, to It is quite clear that there are elements that wanted with this criminal and cowardly act to elicit sedition and disrupt security and stability in the governorate of Aden.”

And he added: The local authority has formed an investigation committee to investigate this incident to learn the background, motives, and circumstances of this criminal act.”

The source renewed its gratitude to fellow citizens in the governorate for their cooperation and condemnation of those acts that were committed by those elements that had flocked to the city of Aden from other governorates. At the same time, (the official source) asked all citizens to cooperate with the local authority and security apparatuses to bring back calm and peace to the city of Aden and to enforce security and stability in the governorate.

26 September Net / Saba
Sunday 13 January 2008
Security Source: Two citizens killed, 17 wounded, among them 7 soldiers at (the reconciliation of the Hashimi station)

An official source in the Local Authority and the Security Committee of the governorate of Aden stated that during the functioning of the so-called "assembly for reconciliation and forgiveness" today January 13, 2008, some infiltrating elements launched sound bombs in the area of the rally.

At the same time, they have shot gunfire at the participating citizens present at the Hashimi arena and at security men, which resulted in killing two citizens and injury of nine other citizens and seven security men.
The source said the security apparatuses were able to apprehend those infiltrating elements that shot gunfire and sound bombs along with the equipment that they processed, and they also rushed the wounded to the hospital".

The source noted that this act committed by those criminal elements has come just after the activities of the rally and assembly have ended and people started leaving the Hashimi arena.

The source said: "and it appears clearly that there are elements that wanted through this cowardly and criminal act, to It is quite clear that there are elements that wanted with this criminal and cowardly act to elicit sedition and disrupt security and stability in the governorate of Aden."

And he added: The local authority has formed an investigation committee to investigate this incident to learn the background, motives, and circumstances of this criminal act."

The source renewed its gratitude to fellow citizens in the governorate for their cooperation and condemnation of those acts that were committed by those elements that had flocked to the city of Aden from other governorates. At the same time, (the official source) asked all citizens to cooperate with the local authority and security apparatuses to bring back calm and peace to the city of Aden and to enforce security and stability in the governorate.

*Source: Saba*
7.4.3 Opposition website I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source:</th>
<th>Al-Sahwa Net</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Affiliation:</td>
<td>Opposition (mouthpiece of Islah Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URL</td>
<td><a href="http://www.alsahwa-yemen.net/view_news.asp?sub_no=1_2008_01_13_60693">http://www.alsahwa-yemen.net/view_news.asp?sub_no=1_2008_01_13_60693</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>January 13, 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Al-Sahwa Net exclusively publishes names and pictures of the injured and killed at the reconciliation festival

Two Killed and more than 7 Injured in Clashes with Security at Reconciliation Festival in Aden

13/01/2008 Al-Sahwa Net – Aden – Exclusive – Coverage and Photos by Sameer Hassan

One of the wounded on a stretcher at Al-Naqeeb Hospital (Al-Sahwa Net–Exclusive)
Two persons died and six others injured in clashes today Sunday between security forces and thousands of participants in the Reconciliation and Forgiveness Festival at the Hashimi terminal in the city of Sheikh Othman Aden.

"Al-Sahwa Net" has learnt that those killed were Saleh Hassan Al-Bakri from the Radfran City, Mohamed Ali Muhyi from Taiz City, who passed away immediately after arriving to Al-Naqeeb Hospital in Al-Mansoora City.

The sources told "Al-Sahwa Net" that 7 injuries were transported to Al-Naqeeb Hospital in Al-Mansoora while others, whose number wasn't clear yet, to the Al-Gomhoriya Hospital in Khor Maksar, of which some injuries were described as critical.

The sources noted that among those injured were Nasser Saeed and Saleh Abu Bakr and Abdullah Ali Nasser Al-Bakri and Thabet Al-Gahooli and Qassim Hussein.

During the hospitalization process (2) (Al-Sahwa Net–Exclusive)
The massive festival of supporters of the Assembly for Reconciliation and Forgiveness among the Sons of Southern Governorates witnessed by the Hashimi terminal arena in Sheikh Othman resulted in clashes between the participants and security, which used live and rubber bullets and teargas to disperse the participants.

The engagement had come after the participants' chanting of slogans and revolutionary sons, through which they called for the independence of the South and also called for the return of Ali Nasser Mohamed, Ali Salem Al-Beidh and the participants raised the flag of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and the map of the South calling for an overwhelming against what they called the occupation of the South and robbery of its resources.

The clashes between the security and participants resulted in a state of riot, in which the participants burnt car tires, blocked the street surrounding the area and the nearby roads at the festival's arena. Al-Sheikh City is currently witnessing a status of relative calm after dispersing the participants although presence of security forces can be seen in the lanes and streets of the city of Sheikh Othman.
7.4.4 Opposition website II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source:</th>
<th>Al-Wahdawi Net</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Affiliation:</td>
<td>Opposition (mouthpiece of the Nasserite Unionist Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URL:</td>
<td><a href="http://alwahdawi.net/narticle.php?sid=3630">http://alwahdawi.net/narticle.php?sid=3630</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>January 14, 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Socialist Party: The regime betrayed the national project and works to tear the social national fabric

Section: Local News

The Genera Secretariat of the Yemeni Socialist Party held a joint meeting with the political department yesterday night in which it condemned the security's oppression of the crowds of Reconciliation and Forgiveness in Aden, considering the security's acts towards the participants in the festival "a horrid criminal act, and a new addition to the collection of adventurous acts that the authority has committed and continues to, against the social peaceful movement in the southern and other governorates."

The meeting called in a statement it released "the party's members and cadres to have the spirit of national courage that they are known to have and to bond strongly with the popular social movement and be present at the forefront of all peaceful activities without hesitation and work on enforcing this historic action and expand it to all Yemeni areas to create a political, social, national, peaceful, and comprehensive national movement to force the regime to give in to the people's demands."
And it added that the authority's project is not in defense of unity as it (the authority) falsely and deceptively claims, but is rather in defense of its illegal interests that were set up by a small group of corruptions and powerful individuals based on acts of fayd and hooligan robbery of public and private properties and transferring national treasures to private belongings in one of the most greedy and disgusting acts of power abuse.

And the statement said that the authority's acts prove that it does not have a political national project that would provide solutions to the problems laid out by the protesting peaceful movement as much as it has a project for dominance, power, and violation of laws and legitimate rights.

The Socialist Party emphasized the idea of reconciliation and forgiveness "given that it is an honorable effort and a step towards spreading the culture of forgiveness on a national Yemeni scale and achieve comprehensive national reconciliation to get the country out of its crisis of quarrels and scars of violence and wars.

And it added "the authority of robbery and fayd has betrayed the national democratic project that was brought about by the 22 of May 90 unity and since the end of the 94 summer war, started non-national policies that are built on hammering any national partnership in authority and wealth, destroying the apparatuses of the former Southern state, sacking its civilian and army employees, robbing rights and properties, practicing blunt acts of discrimination in citizenship, enforcing the values of backwardness, inciting all sorts of quarrels and violence, reviving old conflicts, and resisting efforts for reconciliation and forgiveness."

And it stressed that the authority is attempting, through such acts, to tear the social national fabric "thinking that tearing the people and keeping them busy with conflicts, acts of revenge and vengeance will allow it to control the fate and destiny of people for ever.

*Al-Wahdawi Net*

*Monday 14 January, 2008*
7.4.5 Independent website I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source:</th>
<th>Naba News</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Affiliation:</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URL</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nabanews.net/news/12357">http://www.nabanews.net/news/12357</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>January 13, 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Riots and clashes kill one person in Aden, separatist flags raised**

Sunday 13-January-2008

Naba News – Exclusive / Saqr Al-Muraisi, Noor ba Dhiab
Slashes erupted at ten o'clock in the morning of today Sunday between security apparatuses and participants in the reconciliation assembly, resulting in the death of one person and several injuries, whose number has not been specified yet.

The eruption of those clashes comes after a series of acts of rioting and destruction executed by groups of the participants who refused to go to Aden's 22 May Arena, which was supposed to be the place where the event would be held based on an agreement reached with the organizers of the assembly. They rather preferred to be distributed in several other areas including Hashimi parking lots at Sheikh Othman and also at the dar Saad area in an attempt to drain efforts by the security forces, according to some sources within the demonstrators, who confirmed to "Naba News" that the refusal to confine the crowds within the 22 May Arena stemmed from fear of being held under the control of the authorities.

Participants at the assembly, which started in an early hour today with the absence of Al-Noba -who announced his boycotting of the event- transformed the event to a demonstration in the streets of Aden in which they raised the flags of the (former) southern separatist state and chanted separatist slogans calling for the independence of the south, calling the authority occupation forces and attacking the sons of the northern provinces racist and sectarian rants.

Army units were seen chasing a number of rioters in the Sheikh Othman area and firing rubber bullets to the air to keep the protestors away from the stores and outlets, which they started attacking and looted in a time Aden's markets had closed its doors in anticipation for such acts.

According to the correspondents of "Naba News", the demonstrators were trying to expand their presence to several interior areas in Aden with the hope of picking up public support to double the impact and lengthen the period of the events.

On the same level, sources told Naba News that acts of banditry and looting took place in the main streets leading to Aden after armed militias, which were set up by societies and the Joint Meeting parties since yesterday with the justification of "state-created potential
obstacles to the assembly", established checkpoints to stop and prevent the movement of cars and snatching the valuables of the passengers of a car, whose drivers are loyal to the regime.

They also noted that the acts erupted after an argument developed between a security checkpoint at the entrance to Aden and the (separatist) Member of Parliament Ali Al-Shunfura, who refused to submit his weapon to the checkpoint and assaulted one of its members, after which he speeded away. A security crew attempted to chase him but he was able to escape to an unknown area in Lahj. The acts of banditry came one hour after this event that took place at five o'clock today early in the morning.
Mareb Press publishes a detailed report on the second anniversary of the Reconciliation and Forgiveness:

**Massive Popular Rally Witnessed by Aden City, a Festival that Started with Tears and Ended with Tears and Blood… And at the End, Two killed and more than Ten Injured, Tens arrested, and the Crowds Hold One of the Gunfire Shooters and Burn his Clothes**

*Section: Local News*

As expected based on what had happened in the previous events that took place in Aden in the last months, when the regime's security and military apparatuses attempt to prevent and suppress those events, the crowds insisted on attending.
And this is what happened in this activity, which was called for by the Assemblies of Reconciliation and Forgiveness in the Southern Governorates as they specified the 13th of January as a day to celebrate so as to make this unfortunate day in the black history of the Southerners a day of ultimate reconciliation and forgiveness from the days prior to independence till today.

A day before the event was held, Aden witnessed a security siege concentrated at the entrances to the city as those forces tightened security at checkpoints by focusing their inspections on citizens who were boarding cars and buses that had 12 or 20 plates. They also started after that to prevent buses with those plate numbers from coming in, especially if they were coming from Al-Dhale' or Radfan, which forced those passengers to get off and use other means of transportation to enter Aden.

In the morning of the festival, the local authority and security committee of the governorate in particular changed their previous plans as it did not close down the entrances to the roundabouts and streets leading to Khor Maksar City and Sheikh Othman but attempted to establish some checkpoints around the Hashimi terminal at Sheikh Othman and the Arood Arena at Khor Maksar.

But at the Hashimi terminal of Sheikh Othman, and despite the siege on all entrances to the terminal from all sides, supplementary military and Republican Guard forces were used. Those forces initially started using teargas and rubber bullets to prevent the crowds from entering the terminal, which resulted in the injury of one person. But the insistence of the crowds to move in to the terminal and celebrate the occasion was overwhelming.
particularly as crowds were coming in large numbers from all directions towards the terminal despite the security forces, which had to leave the terminal, in which the crowds were determined to celebrate.

The massive crowds raised banners in Arabic and English that carried the phrases (Long love assemblies for reconciliation and forgiveness) and asked the international community to hear the demands of the Southerners and to support their case.

The crowds also chanted slogans and traditional poetry calling for the alignment and unification behind the southern case and they also chanted in the name of the South and in the name of the Southern leaders Ali Nasser, Al-Attas, Al-Beidh and also raised the pictures of the Southern martyrs. There was also a metaphorical board of six hands holding a peace pigeon. Those hands symbolize the six governorates that constituted the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen.

In the reconciliation festival, a number of speeches were delivered by a number of leaders of the South including bin Fareed, Ali Munassar, Al-Khabaji, Shallal Ali, Intisar Khamees, and Hassan ba Oum, who had come to the festival a while after it started and who was received a hero's welcome and was arm carried from the entrance of the terminal to the place where the speakers were gathered. The crowds were chanting his name and the name of the South and the phrases 'revolution, revolution, O South… revolution, revolution, O ba Oum'. As time passed, the festival expanded due to the increasing flow of crowds coming from all districts of Aden.

Approximately at 10:30, and as the massive crowds were chanting in one voice that shook the whole terminal (my country, my country, the country of the South, a republic with Aden as its capital), suddenly, smoke and gas bombs followed by live ammunition started pouring on the crowds from all sides from the roofs of the area around the terminal and from the street entrances, which led to the killing of two persons:

- Seyd Saleh Abu Bakr / from Yafi
- Mohamed Ali Mohamed / Jabal Hubaishi / Taiz

Ten persons were also injured and were transported to Al-Naqeeb and Sabir Hospitals in Al-Mansoora. Massive crowds have also arrived to Al-Naqeeb Hospital to donate blood
for the wounded and instant donations were collected in front of the hospital to treat the injur ed and everyone participated.

At Al-Hashimi terminal, the crowds were determined to return back again to the terminal and chase the attackers and were able to hold one of the armed men and took his weapon, undressed him and burnt his clothes at the center of the terminal.

Then they started attacking one of the street hostels 'loqantas' that were located in front of the terminal and where soldiers from the central security forces were firing gunshots and smoke bombs towards the center of the terminal, resulting in shattering the windows of the of the hostel and also bringing down one of the large-size satellite dishes.

Afterwards, the demonstration marched from the terminal towards the 22 May Stadium, which was more than 3 kilometers away after they had heard that security forces have trapped some citizens inside as they came into the place from the early morning to participate in the festival given that they learned it would be the place the event will take place based on an article on the front page of the Al-Ayyam Daily's edition that came out in the morning of the same day with a large headline saying that the governor had allowed the festival to take place in the stadium.

After the demonstration arrived to the stadium, it started shattering the pictures of President Saleh that were placed at the main gate of the stadium.

The army and security forces that arrived to the stadium from Khor Maksar district started shooting live ammunition and targeting the crowds with teargas bombs, resulting in dispersing the protestors who returned to the city of Sheikh Othman. Afterwards, the security forces executed a campaign of random arrests targeting tens of persons who were thrown to the prison of Sheikh Othman.

An political statement was issued by the reconciliation festival and we will be publishing it soon.

Mareb Press – Exclusive – Aden – Ali Nagi
Sunday 13 January 2008
7.5 Appendix (E): Personal chronology

I recall the day I met my supervisor Dr. Stig-Arne Nohrstedt days after I returned from Yemen, where I was doing my interviews for this study and where I went under considerable stress because of the ban of my website Yemen Portal. Apart from his encouragement and support, I am grateful to him for urging me to write this personal chronology and supplement it with this formal study.

In this brief chronology, I informally, and away from the academic writing standards, which I have loved to hate, present my personal chronology from the moment I returned to Yemen to do my field work until the day I submitted this very document you are reading.

7.5.1 Yemen Portal establishes itself in Yemen

When I returned to my home country Yemen to do my actual interviews as part of my qualitative analysis, I was full of pride and joy to learn that many of the people I met had already made Yemen Portal one of their favorite sites to visit. They were impressed with the idea of one place where one could find the latest headlines from tens of websites without the pain of having to look at each and every one of them to get a full picture of who is saying what.

"Hello Mr. Walid, the editor of Yemen Portal…" one person told me when I was waiting for the elevator to visit a friend in an apartment building in Sanaa. I asked, "How did you know it was me?" He answered by saying he knew me already as the editor-in-chief of Yemen Times, but he was also following the news and realized I had set up the search engine, which he thought was "a splendid idea".
Others were also happy to have come to witness an innovation that was in fact the first of its kind in the Arab world. The people I asked to come for the first interview made it on time at 9:00 on January 13, 2008. It was a day I would never forget because just as it was a historic day for me in establishing an office for my website in Yemen and having the first interview in it with the bosses of the most prominent and well-known websites in Yemen, it was also the day marking the bloody demonstrations that took place in Aden City.

On that day, the interview was mostly focused on the technical aspect of the web and how news websites were coping with the problems the Internet is facing in Yemen. It was on that day however, that I got the first hints from one of the interviewees that Yemen Portal may be blocked.

Aws Al-Iryani, a leading IT figure and company owner told me he feared access to my website from Yemen could be shut down because I had allowed separatist news websites to be present on the search engine. I explained that I did not believe the government could do that because that basically means that they could as well close down every search engine available because all of them index websites not based on what the government wants, but on what is available online. So I disregarded that threat and went on with the interviews.

### 7.5.2 Yemen Portal: a platform for all with no exceptions

On the first, second and third days of the interviews, I had opposition, government, and independent website representatives present. I conveyed to them my initial findings from my quantitative analysis tests. I told them that readers of the search engine were more interested in opposition material and were less inclined to view government content. I explained to them how important this is as an indicator of how users react to content based on the political affiliation of the source. I must say that government website representatives looked uneasy, but had to accept the reality on the ground. The facts were
right in front of them and the process that unveiled those facts was totally transparent and straightforward.

Just after the interviews were over, I realized that my website had suddenly had a spike on the day of the demonstrations in Aden. I found that most of the news read on that day was about the demonstration, and the most read articles were those on the opposition and dissident websites, some which even brought pictures of the event.

Furthermore, YouTube videos of the demonstrations in the south were also fetched and stored in Yemen Portal's database. Those videos were shot by amateurs participating in those rallies, which turned violent—as mention in this study—and led to the killing of two and injury of many. The government's version of the event blamed the protestors for the killing and violence. However, ironically, as the government was defending this version, videos on Yemen Portal pointed to the other direction. The gunfire was targeting the masses, protestors were peaceful, unarmed, and were confronted with brute force and were running away from the armed forces. Those images were revealing a discrepancy in the government's claims. But those videos were not available on broadcast media, which are monopolized by the state and they weren't reported by international or regional media, whose correspondents were prohibited from filming the event.

Hence, it all came down to Yemen Portal as it suddenly became the website that brought everything to the open. Yemen Portal virtually became the only source of information for Yemenis who wanted to learn what exactly happened and what is everyone saying about the event because it was the only way for many Yemenis to learn about the event from the perspective of dissident, opposition, and government sides.

7.5.3 Website blocked, blacklisted

However, on January 19 and just after sunset, I tried to open the website and it was gone. I got emails and phone calls asking 'what was going on?' but I didn't have a proper response. I had not thought that the website was in danger of being blocked so I thought it
may have been a malfunction. So I called a few friends outside Yemen and they said it was working fine. I also opened the website in Yemen via a proxy and it came out normally. That was the moment I realized that the problem had to do with something inside Yemen. I called the Internet service provider's emergency number and complained and all they said was that they didn't block the website and blamed some technical problems at the website for the fault. But the confirmation came to me when I realized that a few other websites were also blocked on the same day.

Figure E.1 illustrates how devastating the impact of the ban was.

That was the moment I realized that Yemen Portal has been blacklisted. I appealed to the authorities, I asked for the support of the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate, which actively protested the ban with an official statement. But it got no where.

Nonetheless, I had already –at the time- established a mirror website so Internet users in Yemen could learn about the alternate website and visit it instead of the original website. That first alternative domain was yemen.arabiaportal.net.

### 7.5.4 Solidarity meeting

By the time the ban took place, I had already established good links with dozens of news website editors and owners. Before the ban, government, opposition, and independent websites were happy to be in touch and to explore areas of cooperation. I had already proposed to have a meeting with the different websites to discuss means of cooperation and mutual benefit to enhance news websites in general, discuss challenges and seek
solutions. The meeting was supposed to be an attempt to get to know each other. But after the ban, the main objective has changed to expressing solidarity and opposition the ban of *Yemen Portal* and other blocked websites and also calling for their release as soon as possible.

The meeting made headlines not only in Yemen, but also in Sweden, where Nerikes Allehanda picked up the story as seen in figure E.2.

I was also interviewed by Reporters sans Frontiers and Swedish Radio. The issue had started to grow internationally, and so was the pressure on me personally. I have come to realize that with the ban in place, my status has become suspicious so as my motives and functions within *Yemen Portal*. Some accused me of being a separatist and others said I was seen as an agent who works for a foreign entity.

The final straw was when a reliable friend and member of the Yemeni journalists syndicate assured me that my websites was shut down for Yemeni users following a political security meeting discussing the separatist propaganda in the country and who promotes it. They listed *Yemen Portal* as one of the sources and hence acted upon that by closing it down and send a warning signal to its managers.

### 7.5.5 Resistance... the only way

When I found myself accused of running a separatist propaganda tool for the separatist and dissident factions, I was confronted with three options. The first was to allow the government to manipulate my website's content by giving me a list of websites that I

---

55 A scan of the story can be found at: http://yemenportal.net/na.jpg
could allow and those that I couldn't and hence effectively become a tool in the hands of the regime. The second was to totally shut down the website, potentially affecting my master studies, depriving thousands of Yemenis from using its service, and emphasizing the notion that arm twisting and harassment by the government is fruitful and does lead to results. And the third option was to move to resistance gear.

Needless to say, it was a decision I thought about thoroughly because resistance in our part of the world is close to the meaning of political suicide and exposure to all sorts of possible means of intimidation and risks. But that was a risk I was willing to take because I felt that I was resisting oppression on behalf of citizens who wish to access information, of websites who wish to have their freedom of expression, and even of scholars who wish to use research tools that are scientifically sound and are not subject to manipulation or bias. What made me even more comfortable with this decision was the incredible support I got from my instructors and colleagues at the university program I was studying in. My university instructors Stig and Roland had started a full-scale campaign to help me out by communicating with the media, freedom advocates and the university's rector office. How could I let them down? How could I surrender?

Upon taking the decision, I gathered my strength, met with my sister and explained to her what is at stake. I told her to distance herself from my website. She was the editor-in-chief of *Yemen Times*, which I myself managed from 1999-2005 so I felt that her association with me could put her in trouble. But tension was mounting because the authorities were uneasy with my insistence to mobilize banned websites to resist the ban. In a meeting I had with the deputy minister of information, I was clear in that the ongoing ban is a violation of my right and should not be accepted. He decided to ignore the case altogether and let me fight my war alone. Soon after, I found my support in Yemen dwindling with many websites hesitant to communicate or even publish any press releases about my case. It went on until the day I was planning to return to Sweden to resume my degree. I initially had my plans to remain until the website was unblocked. But the longer I stayed, the more obvious it came to me that the government was stubbornly active in pursuing online media and exerting more pressure. So a day before I
was supposed to leave the country, I was told that I had to appear at the traffic authority because of my car. But the call was not verified to be from the traffic authority and colleagues realized that maybe the first phase of a stage of harassment that I should be aware of and anticipate given that I did not surrender to the ban.

The situation became worse when I got confirmation that the political security office was to convene again to ban my website again and move to a second stage of intimidation. I therefore decided to fly back to Sweden. That was certainly not the best time for me to be trapped, prosecuted, harassed, or even imprisoned. So I bid my sister farewell and can still recall her being worried that I may be detained at the airport, particularly as my website has been increasingly associated with the growing separatist movement in the south. I myself was somewhat wary that something could go wrong and I may not return to resume my studies. My professor Stig was concerned and I could feel that from his emails.

I breathed a sigh of relief after I made it to the plane just after midnight without a problem and sent a GSM SMS message to my sister, who had not slept well that night because she was worried I may not make it. I feared that if I would be detained in Yemen, how my wife and two daughters would cope without me in Sweden. I had left them there without the slightest idea that I would be in the position I was. Nonetheless, arriving to my apartment at Örebro safe and sound and reuniting with my family was a cherished moment indeed.

7.5.6 Bringing the content of banned websites to one place

Upon returning to Örebro, I started planning for the different phases of resistance. The first phase was to identify the banned websites and bring their contents together. I created a special domain called blocked.arabiaportal.net for news websites that were banned to have their material published in full. So anyone accessing that domain will be able to
view a saved copy of the news and opinion articles published in any of the banned websites. Furthermore, anytime the government blocks the website, I would create an alternative domain and send a mass email to my subscribers, whose number has exceeded one thousand by the end of April 2008. I would also send the new link to all news websites so they could post it as well to let their readers know about it. This way, I would effectively neutralize the ban to a large extent. The government would have to follow up with me each and every time and ban my new domain. This would often take many days.

And I was right! The mechanism worked for some time. The alternative domain worked well as readers started to access it instead of the usual domain. While the alternative domain was working and before I flew back to Sweden, I had already established the third domain and had it ready. I also had written a press release in advance and a template for a mass email to be sent to all members and people whom I knew were interested in the developments of the portal. I also hired a friend to be my representative in Yemen. His role was to basically rally support around the portal and call for the support of international organizations, embassies, media, and civil society organizations. I gave him my personal car, gave him the keys of the Yemen Portal office in Sana'a, and allocated for him a modest salary so he could do all the activism work needed to keep pushing for the unblocking of my website. I felt that he was reluctant about activism but did it for the friendship that we had.

But then, as expected, the government went on to block my alternative domain, leading to a devastative impact similar to the one done to the main domain (see Fig E.3). So I went ahead with my plans and activated the second alternative domain (yemenportal.org) and sent my representative in Yemen the press release stating how Yemen Portal was able to set up the second alternative domain in a record time of

Fig E.3: Impact of the second ban
half an hour after the ban of the second domain. That news made headlines all over Yemen.

### 7.5.7 A violence turning point

Many news websites published the news and I felt I had won the battle with the state. All the content of all banned websites are now still available at yemenportal.org/blocked. This way, the effect of the ban was neutralized. The government had no other choice but to accept defeat. But that is not what happened.

Sadly, just a day after the second alternative domain was set up, my car was vandalized as a few men quickly drove to the place where the car was parked after midnight, and smashed the front windshield (see fig E.4). This event had traumatized Yemen Portal's representative and friend. He reported to the police and realized it was all to do with the search engine. He had a family, a pregnant wife who was on the verge of delivering. He also had kids. He said he was not willing to risk his life and I realized it is best for him to resign. It was the right thing to do for him. He had another full-time job and was doing this for me as a friend and also for the extra income. But he realized the risk was much higher than the reward.

The news about the attack raised a lot of eyebrows on the international level. Many advocacy groups including RSF and Article 19 condemned the attack and called for an immediate investigation. But the investigation never materialized, the culprits were not found, and the threats remained and intensified. So I had to close down my office because I feared consequences to the building, which belonged to Yemen Times, where my sister

Fig E.4: Yemenportal's car vandalized
worked. The worst thing that could happen is for them to attack the newspaper for hosting the website's office. So I issued a press release and let everyone know that *Yemen Portal*’s office is now closed. It has no representation in Yemen and hence, no one to physically intimidate.

7.5.8 A wave of threats

In time, I realized that the number of comments accusing me of treason have increased in number and strengthened in tone. They are now viewing *Yemen Portal* as a greater threat for a very simple reason: it resisted. None of the other banned websites was able to have the technical capabilities to rise and resist the ban. So it was a first time for a website to show off. This explains why many online comments were fierce and strong in their accusations against my person. Some have even called to execute me and others called for my public prosecution as a traitor.

Nonetheless, I had a mission to believe in and I had the support of my university, friends, family, other banned websites, and most importantly, my own convictions and conscience. I knew what I was doing was the right thing and once you know you are doing what is right, nothing could lure you to take any other path.

Therefore, I went on in implementing yet the second stage of resistance. This was the establishment of *Yemen Portal*’s proxy. This proxy would allow anyone in Yemen to open any banned site. If you knew the alternative address that was working for *Yemen Portal*, you will be able to get through and bypass the government's firewall. The proxy succeeded for some time, particularly as it had an SSL connection, a secure method that prevents the Internet service provider from knowing what you are viewing.

This was a time of confusion for many. The alternative domain was working, the government didn't stop it. But the Internet itself has become unstable. There were problems and disconnections. My friends noted that the ministry of communication was in chaos. Soon I learned that the ministry was undergoing an overhaul of its software and
machines. Despite many attempts to know what was going on, the level of secrecy was extremely high. There was something fishy, but no one knew exactly what it was.

But one thing was for sure. They did not change their mentality concerning banning websites and that was confirmed when they returned weeks later with better software products and more advanced machinery that would allow banning websites almost instantly, or automatically.

Soon after they seem to have installed all their equipment and trained their staff, they went on to block the third domain. So I set up the fourth domain (yemenportal.info) and I also set up freeyemenportal.org, an advocacy blog telling the story of Yemen Portal and providing updates on what has been done and information on how to support. The website was established with the help of Mid East Youth, which is an organization that has been defending freedom of expression online. By then, I had already compiled a long list of media reports and statements by advocacy organizations that supported the website and its mission to combat website censorship.

7.5.9 Government lost battle, but war continues

The government didn't give up in the war that it waged against the portal. It kept on blocking all the alternative domains that I have set up. But what it didn't know is that I have been working on a special program that would allow users in Yemen to access Yemen Portal despite the ban. It was an idea inspired by "Access Flicker!", a plug-in program by Iranian Hamed Saber. He gave me permission and support to use his idea to unblock Yemen Portal.

So I worked tirelessly to rewrite the program to match my requirements and added some encryption methods to ensure that the government would have a tougher time trying to decode it. It is a plug-in used for Firefox browsers. I wrote it, tested it, and waited for the best moment to have it launched.
The moment came when I have exhausted all my alternative links as I had already used up 6 domains all blocked by the government: yemenportal.net, yemenportal.org, yemenportal.info, yemenportal1.info, yemen.arabiaportal.net, and even freeyemenportal.org.

That was the moment I decided to get this program out to the open and not surprisingly, I named it "Access Yemen Portal!". It was about time. So I launched it publicly with a statement affirming that the era of blocking websites in Yemen is now over. The plug-in perhaps had the biggest impact that had ever been made in Yemen's anti-website censorship movement.

Thousands of Yemenis downloaded the program and installed it on their computers, allowing them access to the whole WWW without restrictions. Furthermore, pages of all the websites that are blocked had an associated link to the proxy, hence allowing them to access all material on websites whether they were banned or not with a click of a mouse button. This new mechanism proved extremely powerful and has effectively rendered the ban of Yemen Portal useless.

Since then, the website grew by leaps and bounds and rebounded to surpass its earlier levels of readership as can be seen in figure E.5. So far, Yemen Portal has won the battle, but the war remains. Those who do not use the plug-in cannot access Yemen Portal and none of the banned websites. There are efforts to spread the word and let users know they don't need to remain uninformed. A special script was designed for that purpose.

The government is not giving up easily, and I do not expect them to be thrilled by this development. Friends have been sending me messages warning me that the government has reached a stage in which it could do anything against me to kill this plug-in,
particularly as opposition and dissident websites have been more active recently amidst more violence taking place in the south and with the turmoil all over the country caused mainly by government's acts of imprisonment of opinion makers and politicians, closure of newspapers, and harassment of journalists.

7.5.10 Looking ahead

The government has been quite vocal lately in condemning websites that 'promote hatred', 'sectarian divide', or 'harm national unity', etc. I know they are directly referring to Yemen Portal and other banned websites. The ministers of interior, communication, and information have been drumming up for a confrontation with websites in the future and are preparing for the issuance of laws to penalize websites using a special cyber crimes law and even the penal law that could result in penalties.

The future is unpredictable and the threats and risks are high, not only for me as an activist in promoting freedom of expression online, but even for citizens, whose rights to know have been violated. There is a time in every generation of information leaders when they have to accept the risks and hope for the best.

I have found a lot of warmth and support here in Sweden. This encouraged me to look into new aspects of using this technology to circumvent the ban in other Arab countries facing similar concerns. The next stage may be to expand the success of Yemen Portal to include other countries, where online media are oppressed.

Therefore, I plan to do my PhD to study news websites in other Arab countries and hopefully use the technology to enhance access to information and combat website censorship wherever it may be. There certainly is a long way to go… But we can take it a step at a time.

Walid Al-Saqaf
May 20, 2008
Örebro, Sweden