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Introduction

The media file in crisis management is one of the most important files that the decision maker must take into consideration during managing a crisis, as the media has a prominent role in addressing crises and confronting them. The media role in crisis management includes all communication activities practiced during the various stages of the crisis regardless of the means and contents used, including public relations activities and communications carried out by organizations during the crisis, as well as communication activities carried out by media outlets. But if the crisis is primarily related to media in Egypt, which has gradually lost its ability to influence public opinion, the word “crisis” acquires a special dimension.

Over the past few months, the media scene in Egypt has witnessed many developments that culminated in conducting major changes, including changing the ownership of some media outlets, merging others, and dispensing with large numbers of employees, in addition to conducting other changes with regard to the press. The most prominent change has been the Egyptian Media Group’s acquisition of Egypt’s Capital Broadcasting Center (CBC) network after buying a controlling stake of 51% of the Future Media Group, which owns the CBC network, that is owned by businessman Mohamed Al-Amin. [Egyptian Media Group, a conglomerate of all types of media; print, broadcast, and digital, owned by Eagle Capital, reportedly owned by Egyptian security and sovereign bodies headquartered in Cairo.] The Egyptian Media Group has also acquired a number of prominent investments in the media sector, including the “ONTV” Channel, founded by business tycoon Naguib Sawiris, and other media outlets

such as Al-Hayah network, Nile Radio network, Al-Asima channel, and Youm7 newspaper as well as other companies in the field of public relations, advertising, marketing and production. It has also acquired 51 percent of Presentation Sport company, 70 percent POD for public relations and media marketing, and 50 percent of Misr Cinema. The group also owns investments in Egyptian IT Company, which operates in the field of information technology.

First: Media in the Era of Sisi

Since the announcement of the overthrow of former President Mohamed Morsi on 3 July 2013, the media file has become one of the most important files that the new authorities were interested in controlling and directing in the service of their policies. Sisi has expressed more than once his interest in the media and his appreciation of its importance in forming public opinion. The Egyptian media has witnessed many changes since Sisi took office, ending with the almost full control of media inside Egypt. The authorities also adopted a variety of methods to ensure this control and punish those who may attempt to act out of step. These methods included targeting journalists through killing, arresting, and preventing them from work; suspension of media outlets and arresting their owners and managers, the blocking of hundreds of websites, the jamming of foreign and Egyptian media operating outside Egypt, the exploitation of the judiciary in prosecuting journalists on criminal charges as well as other repressive methods.

Second: Aspects of the Crisis

The reports on the Egyptian Media Group's acquisition of the CBC network coincided with the dismissal of dozens of employees in the ONTV Channel, one of the most prominent Egyptian satellite channels over the past years. Previously, the Egyptian

Media Group abruptly shut down the 'OnTV Live' channel last July, and dismissed nearly half of the Al-Hayah network's employees after acquiring it. Al-Hayah network had witnessed several crises before it was taken over by the Egyptian Media Group, including a judicial ruling on the seizure of its property because of its inability to pay its debts to the media production companies. Moreover, media observers have talked about an imminent closure of CBC-Extra News, one of the leading Egyptian news channels at present. Other satellite channels are expected to witness plans to reduce expenditure, cut salaries for employees, cancel some programs, and reduce budgets for others.

News websites circulated reports on presence of a crisis within the channel DMC Channel, reportedly owned by the intelligence, that led to the dismissal of its chairman Tariq Ismail, because of the channel's failure in addressing the audience, despite the passage of several months and the huge amounts of money spent in the preparation, launching, and operation of the channel. The crisis also led to the cancellation of the launch of DMC News, which was supposed to compete with major news channels such as Al Jazeera. These reports are likely to be credible, as a previous decision has already been made within the network to permanently close the DMC Sports channel and lay off its employees.

In recent developments, it has been noted that they have included the removal of a number of media figures who are known for their absolute support for the regime and even for inciting against its opponents, such as Tamer Abdel Moneim, who was sentenced to three years in prison on charges of issuing a check without credit a few days after he criticized his dismissal. Also, the program of CBC Channel anchor Lamis Hadidi was suspended for reportedly refusal to move to the ONTV Channel. Hadidi has

also been the subject of a major attack in state-owned media. Commenting on this, Mustafa Bakri, a journalist and TV presenter, warned in his program, that those media figures, who were fired, would become “ticking bombs” against the state, and that this is not in favor of Sisi.

In the field of the press, there was a crisis related to the high cost of printing newspapers as a result of the high prices of paper and inks, the inability of the newspapers to cover the costs of printing, distribution, and payment of journalists' salaries. This resulted in debts of millions of pounds to these newspapers, which led to stopping Al-Ahaly newspaper, organ of the Grouping Party, as well as other party organs. It is to be mentioned that the price of paper was raised by about 50 per cent, bringing the daily newspaper price to LE 3 instead of LE 2, and the weekly newspapers to LE 4 instead of LE 3. This is the second increase during the Sisi era after the price increase for the first time in March 2015, despite the decline in the distribution of these newspapers and the aggravation of losses. The main reason for the rise in the prices of paper and printing supplies is the government decision to float the Egyptian pound, raise the customs tariff, apply the VAT law, and raise the price of fuel, especially as most of these supplies come from abroad.

Al-Masry Al-Youm, one of the leading private newspapers, also has faced several crises for several months. The paper's editor-in-chief, Mohamed Sayed Saleh, was forced to resign due to the newspaper's coverage of the last presidential election. The current chief editor, Hamdi Rizq, was dismissed after the newspaper's coverage of the crisis of the construction of a church in El-Menya governorate. Moreover, it is expected that the crises of the newspaper will continue until its owners are forced to sell it to the

regime in the same manner as happened with other media outlets, according to observers.

Third: Causes of the Crisis

The current crisis can be referred to several reasons, including:

1- Political Reasons

These are the most important and influential reasons for the current crisis. The current authority seems determined to control the media completely by transferring ownership of media outlets to the state directly. The state has already acquired the main TV networks through its affiliates. The second stage is the state's closure of TV channels and the reduction of their employees, to achieve its vision of keeping a limited number of controlled media and direct them to address non-political issues, including entertainment and sports. These trends are consistent with Sisi himself, who has expressed this desire even in politics, when he said he was against the existence of dozens of political parties, and called for merging them so that only a limited number of them could operate.

The regime has also issued restrictive media laws that allow the government to punish media outlets and media professionals that may violate the guidelines given to them. These infamous laws include the Cyber Crime Law, which the Freedom of Thought and Expression Foundation considered it as a censorship of the Internet, and the new Press Law which includes penalties against Journalists and media men, and even citizens who own electronic pages of more than 5,000 followers. Decisions to block websites are considered a good choice for the regime, as they achieve their ends (i.e. preventing the media message from reaching the public) without having to arrest or directly abuse

journalists, to avoid arousing angry reactions from local and international human rights organizations.

The current regime aims to keep the media away from discussing politics as much as possible. The regime seems to have realized the lack of influence of the media and its inability to convince the Egyptians of its policies and decisions and decided that it no longer needs this large number of newspapers and satellite channels in the light of their failure. Therefore, the regime resorted to preventing them from engaging in any discussions of political matters, and only allowed them to distract Egyptians through entertainment and sports programs. At the time of the closure of ONTV Live, it was announced that it was replaced by another sports channel (ONTV Sport 2).

2- Professional Reasons

The government's control of the media has led a large percentage of the audience to turn away from these media outlets. The media used to be the most prominent player in the political arena during the period that followed the January Revolution (2011). It was also one of the main factors in inciting public opinion against President Mohamed Morsi and mobilizing citizens to demonstrate against him on June 30, 2013. However, it is obvious that the regime no longer cares about keeping these media services in the coming stage.

3- Technological Reasons

The public's interest in the media and press is gradually shrinking as the trend of social networking sites that publish news reports immediately; so there is no need for the public to buy newspapers or turn on television to follow the news. Even in the case of drama, it can be downloaded and viewed at any time via the internet, which is anyway a global phenomenon not limited to the Egyptian market.

Scenarios

Scenario I: Crisis and Media Boom

This is an optimistic scenario that we rule out: It assumes that the Egyptian media will get rid of its crises and accordingly prosper through success in achieving the required standards of credibility and professionalism amid an atmosphere that supports freedom of opinion and expression and enables media to gain the public's trust. But this scenario requires independent media, a regime willing to support such media, laws that encourage freedom of opinion and expression and cancel penalties against journalists and media professionals with respect to publishing. However, the current situation in Egypt has none of these factors.

Scenario II: Media Uprising in the Face of Power

This scenario assumes that the regime could face a strong wave of resistance from journalists and media professionals, especially those who have recently been fired, in defense of the freedom of the press and media and their freedom of action. However, this scenario requires media competencies, media awareness, and strong media institutions that can win the public opinion in Egypt in their battle against the regime. But this scenario is unlikely, given that the regime has succeeded in acquiring most of the major media under its direct ownership. Also, the regime has excluded most of the competencies, and thus almost all media outlets and newspapers are pro-regime and run by journalists and media men loyal to the government. Moreover, journalists also face an arsenal of repressive laws that are considered a sword on their necks if they showed any kind of resistance.

Scenario III: Continuation of the Crisis

This scenario expects continuation of the crises that hit and deepen the Egyptian media. This scenario is currently likely for several reasons:

First: There is no desire on the part of the regime to abandon the complete possession of media outlets and direct supervision of their activity. However, the regime adopts a systematic plan to acquire the rest of the media outlets and merge them together. Therefore, it is expected that the government will leave only two main networks: the first will be ONTV network and other channels owned by the General Intelligence Service, and they will focus on sports and talk show programs; and the second network will be DMC network, owned by the military intelligence, they will focus on reporting news. Thus it can be said that access to that situation is already the main objective of the regime.

Second: Amid similarity of the content of all media to a great extent, and the absence of any critical discourse that addresses the real issues of interest to the Egyptian citizen, the Egyptian public will continue to rely on other sources of information such as foreign media and the Egyptian media in exile.

Third: the continuous abuse of journalists and the imprisonment of dozens of them either on charges of freedom of expression, or alleged criminal charges, in addition to blocking websites, will lead journalists and media professionals either to fully comply with the wishes of the regime, to flee abroad to work in foreign media, or to retire permanently from the media and to join other professions, which will be in favor of the regime.

Fourth: The price rise in goods and services in Egypt, and the low standard of living of a large sector of Egyptians will lead to their reluctance to buy newspapers, especially in light of the decision to raise their prices.

Conclusion

It can be said that the most prominent features of the coming period in the field of media will include: a new wave of merging to a number of media outlets, continued layoff of hundreds of workers, continued decline in the numbers of newspaper distribution, closure of a number of newspapers or turning them to websites only, with the reduction of salaries or layoffs of some of employees – which will increase dependence of Egyptians on social networking sites, foreign media, and the Egyptian media in exile in seeking news. Other sectors linked to the media market, such as the printing presses, newspaper distributors and retailers, will also be adversely affected. The regime is expected to maintain pressure on other media owners to force them to sell their media outlets to the state, especially Al-Masry Al-Youm, as well as other satellite channels such as Dream, whose owner, businessman Ahmed Bahgat, has recently announced his intention to enter what he called a “partnership” with the state, justifying this by saying that it is only the desire of the state itself.