



February 14, 2011

Media Consumption during the Uprising in Egypt

Summary: Results of a new telephone poll in the cities of Cairo and Alexandria indicate that Egyptians turned heavily to satellite television to follow the events in their country during the recent protests. The pan-Arab channel Al Arabiya was the most widely used information source, well ahead of Egyptian State TV. **Poll results indicate that Alhurra TV reached a large audience during this period, with 25% of respondents saying they had used the station to follow the events – far more than either BBC or CNN.** There was substantial use of peer-to-peer communications methods like text messaging, social networking, or email, with some 20% of respondents saying that they had used one or more of these methods to keep up with the news and/or share information with friends and family – a figure that might well have been higher had the Egyptian authorities not blocked these technologies during the protests.

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Background and methodology: Following the outbreak of protests in Egypt that led to the eventual ouster of President Mubarak, the Broadcasting Board of Governors commissioned a brief telephone poll to understand how Egyptians were getting information about the events unfolding in their country. A total of 500 randomly selected adults (age 15+) in the cities of Cairo and Alexandria were interviewed by telephone for this project. Survey questions focused on the general media platforms and specific outlets used to follow the events, use of peer-to-peer modes of communication to seek and pass on information about the protests, and the extent to which normal channels of information became inaccessible during the survey period.¹

The survey methodology and the circumstances in which the fieldwork took place should be carefully considered in reviewing the results of this project. While telephone interviewing allowed for a rapid sounding of media consumption patterns even as the crisis was unfolding, use of this methodology necessitated a short questionnaire and may have introduced biases into the sample.

¹ Interviewing took place February 4 – 10, 2011. For more information about the survey, see Appendix.

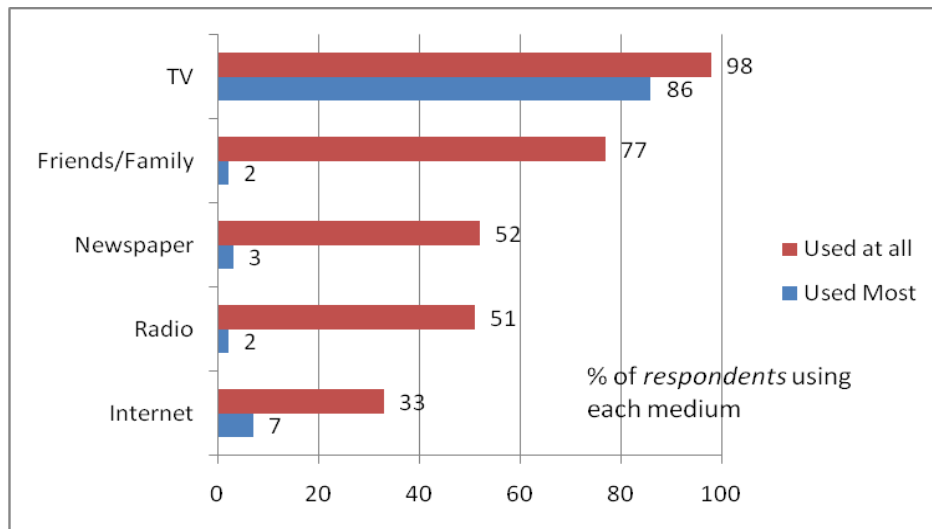


By definition, the survey results can be taken to represent only the adult population of the two cities living in households with a land line or possessing a mobile phone.² A national survey of the entire Egyptian population would undoubtedly have yielded substantially different results, given widespread variations in media access, education, and other key drivers of media consumption. Given the small size of the sample, the margin of error associated with the findings is fairly large.³

Overall media use: With all of these caveats, the results of this survey nevertheless yield a clear and striking picture of how Egyptians followed the events in their country during the days of the crisis. As can be seen below, Egyptians used a wide variety of media platforms, in addition to personal communications, to follow the events. Television, however, was clearly dominant, with 86% of respondents calling it their “most important” source of information. Interestingly, the only other medium ranked as “most important” by more than 5% of respondents was the Internet, and among those aged 20-29, the role of Internet was even more pronounced – 16% of the respondents in this age group called it their “most important” source.

Q1. “Of the following sources, which are you currently using for information about (the protests and related developments?)”

Q2. “Which is your most important source of information about the protests and related developments?”



Base: All respondents (n=502)

² Egyptian government data and previous survey results indicate that household landline penetration in Cairo and Alexandria is at least 70% and that roughly 85% of adults own a mobile phone. For additional comments on the nature of the sample, see Appendix .

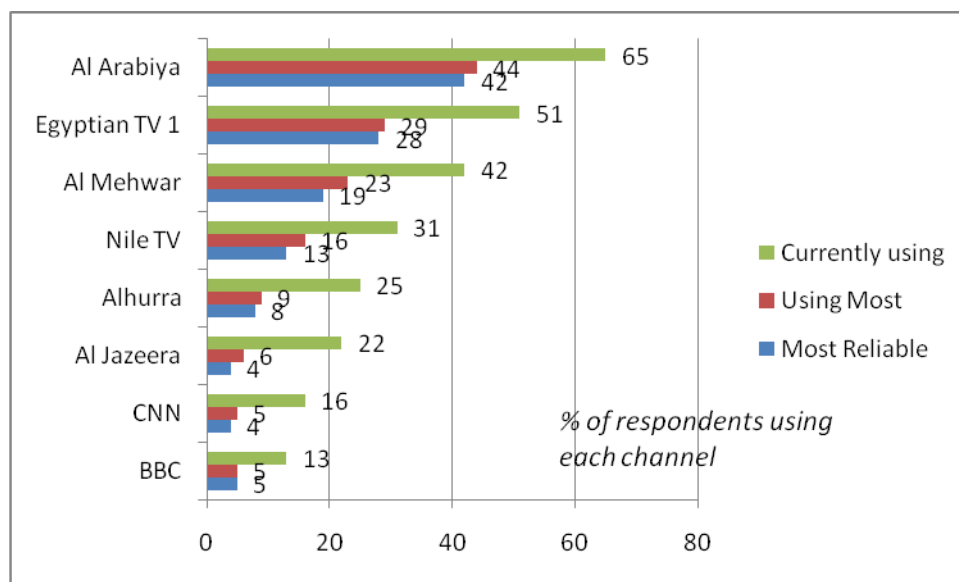
³ Results from a simple random sample of this size would in theory have a maximum margin of error of 4.3%.

Usage of specific TV channels: Survey results indicate that respondents used many different television channels to follow the protests and ensuing events. Al Arabiya appeared to be the clear favorite, followed by the main Egyptian state channel, the private Egyptian channel Al Mehwar, and Nile TV. Significant portions of the sample reported using Alhurra and Al Jazeera, while BBC Arabic TV and CNN were cited less often. Rankings of the channels in terms of “most used” and “most reliable” followed a similar pattern, with Al Arabiya clearly in the top position. These findings are summarized below.

Q1: “Of the following radio and TV stations, which, if any, are you currently using to stay informed about the protests and related developments?”⁴

Q2: “And of the stations you have mentioned, which are you using the most for information about the protests and related developments in Egypt?”

Q3. “In your opinion, which have had the most reliable reporting on these events?”



Base: All respondents (n=502). Up to 3 responses allowed for “most used”.

Among the more surprising aspects of the survey results is the comparatively low ranking of Al Jazeera, especially as previous survey research had indicated that the channel has a large following in Egypt. To at least some extent, this finding may reflect the steps that the Egyptian authorities

⁴ Use of telephone interviewing for this survey meant that the list of stations asked about had to be relatively short. In addition to the stations shown in the chart above, other stations asked about were Al Manar, Russiya-al Youm, and Deutsche Welle TV. 10% of respondents also spontaneously mentioned using Dream TV.

took to block Al Jazeera’s broadcasts in reaction to its coverage of the protests⁵. Recent (but pre-crisis) qualitative research conducted in Egypt by BBG also suggests that many Egyptians have become more mistrustful of Al Jazeera in recent years, and in particular with its coverage of their own country, though it is impossible to tell to what degree such sentiments may have affected media choices during the protests. The fact that only 4% of respondents considered Al Jazeera to have offered the “most reliable reporting” of the channels listed – coupled with the fact that the station was freely available and hence subject to viewers’ judgment during the early days of the protests – suggests that the low levels of reported dependence on Al Jazeera may to some degree have reflected viewer choice as well as the technical obstacles thrown up by the Egyptian government.

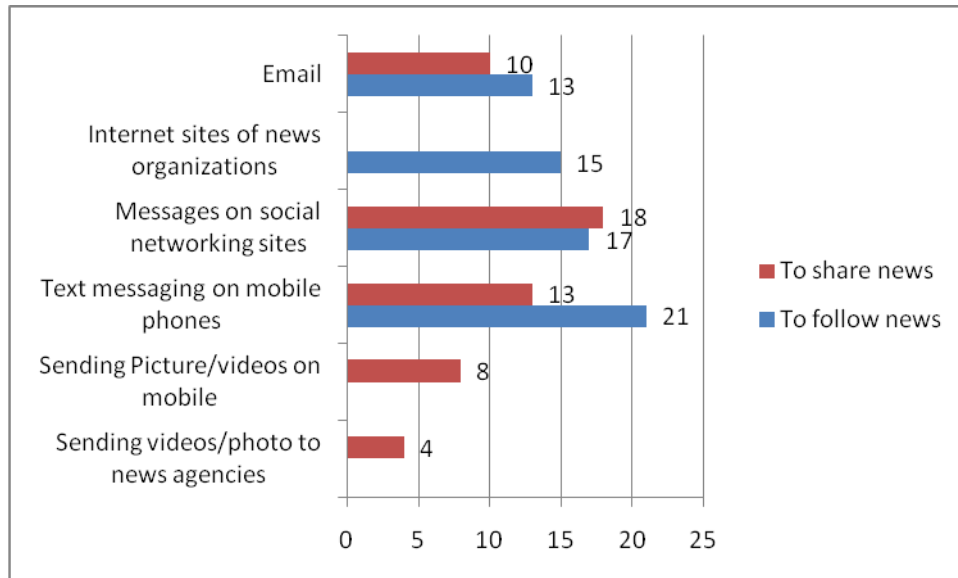
Radio: While just over half of the respondents reported having used radio to some extent to follow the events, no more than 5% had used any of the specific radio stations asked about in the survey. There was notably little role for international radio in particular: among the main international stations only BBC Arabic had an appreciable audience, with 3% reporting some use of the station.

Peer-to-peer communications: As press reports have suggested, a significant proportion of Cairo and Alexandria residents appear to have used various forms of peer-to-peer communications, in addition to accessing key Internet sites, both to follow the news and to share it with others. Roughly a fifth of those interviewed reported getting information via social networking sites and/or via text messages from friends and family; somewhat smaller numbers claimed to have used these and similar technologies to share information and news they had heard with other people. Contrary to expectations, however, usage of such technologies as text messaging and social networking sites was not markedly higher among the 20-29 age group than among the sample as a whole, and was considerably lower among the small number of teenagers in the sample.

⁵ As of January 30, the Egyptian authorities blocked Al Jazeera’s transmissions on the Nilesat satellite, which is controlled by the Egyptian government, and observers reported frequent interference to the signals of the other satellites used by the channel. It is unclear to what extent Egyptian viewers could watch the channel’s broadcasts, though a number of other channels voluntarily carried Al Jazeera’s transmissions during this period to get around the blockade.

Q. “Aside from radio or TV, have you used any of the following for information on the protests and related developments in Egypt since the uprising began?”

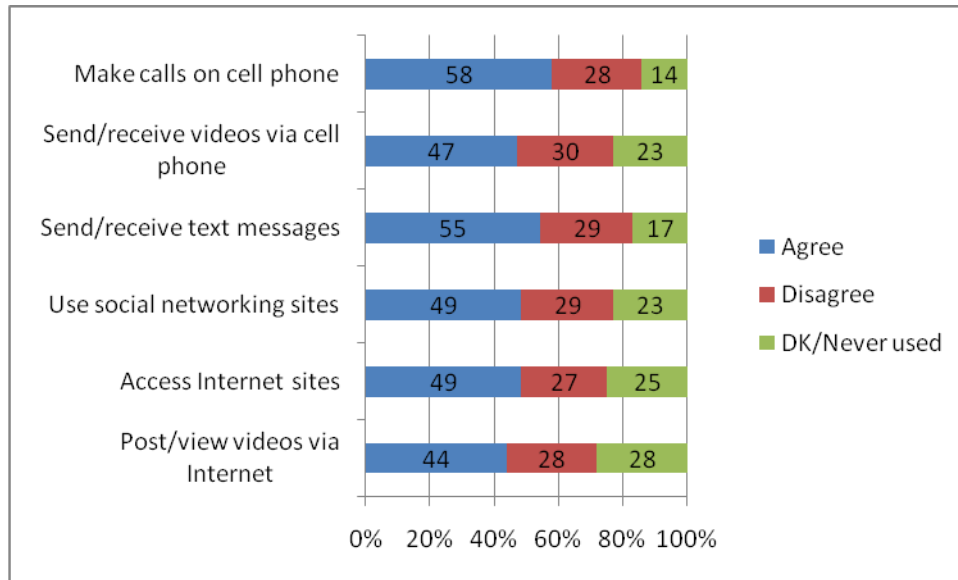
Q. “Since the protests began, have you used any of the following means to relay news you have heard to other people?”



Base: All respondents (n=502)

The findings regarding use of peer-to-peer technologies should be viewed in the context of the government’s crackdown on the Internet and mobile networks, which clearly had a significant impact. In this respect, the survey data paint a somewhat contradictory picture of the extent of these technologies’ use. More than half of the survey respondents stated that governmental restrictions had impeded their ability to use their mobiles and/or the Internet (see below). On the other hand, only around 20% reported having used the technologies in question to follow or share the news since the start of the uprising – a period which included at least four or five days when Internet and mobile access were not yet blocked. One possible explanation for this apparent contradiction is that interest in acquiring and sharing news via peer-to-peer media grew as the protests mounted, but once the crackdown on these media began, new entrants into world of social media ran up against the government blockade and were unable to make effective use of these communications methods. If this hypothesis is correct, it is reasonable to assume that the overall usage of mobiles and social networks to gather and share information would have substantially greater in the absence of government censorship.

Q. “For each statement, please tell me whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly. Restrictions on media in the past week have affected my ability to”



Base: All respondents (n=502)

Among those who could and did use the Internet to access the news, the web sites of CNN and Al Arabiya were the most frequently used – by 8% and 7% of respondents, respectively. Other sites used were those of Al Masry al Youm⁶ (7%), BBC Arabic (5%), Al Jazeera (3%) and Alhurra 2%.)

⁶ A privately owned Egyptian newspaper

APPENDIX

The foregoing analysis is based on a survey of 502 Egyptian adults, age 15+, residing in the cities of Cairo and Alexandria. The survey was commissioned by the Broadcasting Board of Governors and implemented by the Washington D.C.-based InterMedia Survey Institute in cooperation with a regional subcontractor.

Methods: The survey was conducted by telephone between February 4 and February 10, 2011. Random digit dialing was used to contact households with landline phones as well as individuals with mobiles. Within households reached by this method, respondents were randomly selected by identifying the household resident with the most recent birthday. Individuals with mobile phones were contacted via random digit dialing to mobile numbers; only those mobile owners contacted who lived in Cairo or Alexandria were selected for interviews. In the final analysis, 77% of the successful interviews were carried out by landline telephone, 23% by mobile. Data from Egyptian government sources and previous BBG surveys indicate that household landline penetration in Cairo and Alexandria exceeds 70%, while approximately 85% of adults own a mobile phone.

Survey coverage: Findings of this survey can be taken to represent only the population of Cairo and Alexandria age 15 and older and either living in a household with a landline telephone or owning a mobile phone. Given the figures cited earlier, survey coverage was equivalent to at least 85% of the adult population.

Sampling and margin of error: A simple random sample of this size would in theory yield results with a maximum margin of error of 4.3%; however, such calculations do not allow for the presence of design effects, which, while not precisely calculable in this case, mean that this is a conservative estimate. Non-sampling error and sampling bias may have introduced further errors into the results.

Comparison of this survey sample with previous face-to-face surveys in the same cities suggest that this sample is reasonably close to the general population on broad categories such as gender, education, and media ownership. The sample is, however, somewhat inconsistent with the general population with respect to age, with some measure of under-representation of the youngest (age 15-19) segment of the population. The table below compares the age composition of the phone sample to that of the Cairo and Alexandria respondents in BBG's 2009 survey of Egypt and to national population data for the entire country:

	Phone sample	BBG 2009 survey	National population
15-19	7%	17%	14%
20-29	34	29	28
30-49	43	35	36
50+	19	16	23

While the age distribution of the phone survey sample does not precisely mirror that of the population, examination of the main survey variables suggests that this age imbalance had fairly modest impact on the results. In general, teenagers in the sample tended to be less active media consumers – and, perhaps surprisingly, less active users of social media – so it is possible that if this group had been represented in the sample in proportion to its actual size, reported access to media and peer-to-peer communications networks might have been lower. However, given the small size of the teenage group in the phone sample, it would be dangerous to draw firm conclusions.

