

## **Job Satisfaction and Social Media Use: Cognitive Reflection and Journalists' Utilization in Egypt and the United States**

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Studies demonstrate that “social media use” is positively correlated with “employees’ job performance” and positive mediating effect. Using a comparative approach between journalists’ job satisfaction in Egypt and the United States, this article analyzes social media use through different variables including the political system, media freedom, level of journalistic training and professionalism, media regulations, and media ownership patterns. As opposed to the notion of media freedom and professionalism applied in the United States and elsewhere, the tight media environment in Egypt, especially digital media, has pushed journalists to depend more on social media. Building on the literature on social media use in journalistic workflow, we (1) apply social exchange theory assumptions of relative job satisfaction as a motivator to engage social media in journalism practice, (2) use a questions-as-treatment survey embedded experiment to isolate and prime consideration aspects of one’s job to test for a direct priming effect on reported social media use, and (3) compare social media use across comparative media systems (i.e., Egypt and the United States).

*Keywords: social media use, media freedom, professionalism, media regulations, media ownership, job satisfaction, social exchange theory, Egypt, United States*

The advantages of social media platforms as interactive information sources for journalists raise the importance of exploring ways they impact journalists’ performance, productivity, and job satisfaction. Studies demonstrate that “social media use” is positively correlated with “employees’ job performance” and with positive mediating effect/satisfaction (Cetinkaya & Rashid, 2018, p. 256). Using a comparative approach between journalists’ job satisfaction in Egypt and the United States, this article analyzes social media use through different variables including the political system, media freedom, level of journalistic training and professionalism, media regulations, and media ownership patterns in each country.

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Date submitted: 2021-10-05

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In contrast to the United States, Egypt's media is predominantly state owned/regulated, ranking 166 (of 180), according to Reporters Without Borders (2020), and its Cybercrime Law, issued in August 2018, and the state targets freedom of expression on blogs and social media (Badr, 2021). Regulation and surveillance of the digital space to curb online freedom of speech have increased, as the Egyptian government cooperates with many tech giants like Google (Ryan, 2019). Recently, new private media companies have established strong ties with state security and intelligence organizations through favored loyalist front men, who have acquired majority shares in all the private media institutions (Reporters Without Borders, 2019b). The incomparable differences in media freedom, as well as regulations and ownership between Egypt and the United States, make them a unique case for research.

The convergence of media and communication technology means using the most appropriate medium and technologies for telling a news story (Quinn & Filak, 2005; ŞUTJU, 2011). Not all journalists embrace the technologies associated with convergent newsrooms (Robinson, 2006; Singer, 2004a). When evaluating the use of social media platforms, scholars have found ambivalence, with varying levels of journalist incorporation of social media for reporting tasks (Kim, 2015; Weaver & Willnat, 2012). While leveraging social media may be a "no-brainer" for some journalists (Cision, 2015), continued ambivalence on the topic suggests variable motivating factors. In addition to material and relational motivation, journalist social media use may also be a function of the media system context in which reporters work (Gulyas, 2013). As such, we use this article to add to the literature on journalist behavior by focusing on a key element of professional motivation, job satisfaction. We argue that the extent of social media use is partly based on how journalists react when cognitively reflecting on their professional experiences.

Understanding what motivates journalists to use social media may provide better insight into follow-on questions, including the antecedents of new convergence trends and news manager strategies for inspiring convergence using different integration models (García-Avilés, Kaltenbrunner, & Meier, 2014), differentiating workflow and journalist responsibilities (Phillips, Singer, Vlad, & Becker, 2009), and putting continued emphasis on hybridity to encourage deeper audience engagement (Domingo et al., 2008). Our findings also help distinguish between journalist use of social media for critical aspects of reporting and its use for less central reporting tasks.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***On Motivations***

Goals motivate human behavior, and scholars have developed theoretical frameworks to explain the goal-based calculations inherent in human decisions. Social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976; Saks, 2006) is a key example. In perhaps its simplest form, the theory expects humans to examine costs and benefits in their relationships and to invest more in their endeavors when they perceive a sense of satisfaction or reward from their efforts (Nord, 1969).

The decision to adopt (or increase) innovative technologies such as social media is not a merely personal use decision. News managers can mandate social media policies (Ekdale, Singer, Tully, & Harmsen, 2015; Singer, 2004b). Yet, whatever the compulsion, technological adoption still faces some resistance

(Schifferees et al., 2014; Singer, 2004b). This might explain Lecheler and Kruikemeier's (2016) finding that social media is generally not a journalistic agenda setter. But if, as Gulyas (2013) argues, professional contexts alone are not reliable predictors of journalists' social media use, how much influence might cognitive reflection have on an exchange-based, satisfaction motive? Our three research questions offer ideas for leveraging the social exchange mechanism in our analysis:

*RQ1: Does reflection on relative job satisfaction motivate self-reported social media use among journalists?*

*RQ2: Which social media work functions does reflection on relative job satisfaction motivate among journalists?*

*RQ3: To what extent does reflection on relative job satisfaction exert different social media use effects across state media systems (where journalists must work through differing levels of press restrictions)?*

### **On Job Satisfaction**

Scholars have considered variants of social exchange from the standpoint of journalists and their sources and journalists and audiences (Lewis, Holton, & Coddington, 2014; Waters, 2020). In addition, Chang and Massey (2010) show that different perceived aspects of one's position (including opportunities for advancement or security) statistically predict journalist job satisfaction. Unsurprisingly, the linkage between job satisfaction and work performance is variable across literatures (Brief & Roberson, 1989; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Fisher, 2000). Feeling satisfied with one's work is part of an affective commitment and adherence to organization standards (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Meyer & Allen 1991). Contributors to job satisfaction include "achievement, recognition, growth," and "extrinsic" factors related to the work environment such as "salary, status, working conditions, etc." (Chan, Pan, & Lee, 2004, pp. 258-259; Stamm & Underwood, 1993, p. 529). However, at its core, satisfaction is a cognitive reflection on one's work and the feelings generally associated with it. Our assessment is a measurement of the effects of cognitive reflection among journalists.

Concepts such as "happiness" (i.e., positive affect toward an object), goal striving, and overall job performance contain aspects that are clearly steeped in the salience of specific thoughts (Bandura, 1997; Keltner & Gross, 1999). There is a general scholarly agreement about the link between a positive sense of one's work experience and the desire to strive for vocational achievement (Heckhausen & Heckhausen, 2010). Social exchange theory predicts that a satisfied employee will intend to do more than what is expected, including pursuing workplace innovation along technological lines (which might include social media; Haque, Uddin, & Easmin, 2019; Pierce & Delbecq, 1977; Shipton, West, Parkes, Dawson, & Patterson, 2006). As such, it makes sense to isolate relative journalist satisfaction for its causal impact on technological use in reportage.

Journalists' job satisfaction increases if they are provided with empowerment, "more autonomy, authority, and control over their work" (Beam, 2006, p. 172; Blackmore & Kuntz, 2011; Pollard, 1995). A sense of job security is also critical to job satisfaction (Ryan, 2009; Weaver & Willnat, 2012).

Satisfaction is reduced when journalists sense "incompatibility" between their expectations about work and what the job demands (Beam, 2006; Keith, 2005). Role ambiguity and role conflict also threaten satisfaction (Ilies, Dimotakis, & De Pater, 2010). News commercialization and the blurring of organizational business and journalistic operations also impact satisfaction levels (El-Nawawy & Strong, 2017). These negative influences suggest that reflection on aspects of one's job may not produce a sense of satisfaction and its attendant behavioral motives per social exchange theory. Indeed, as Lyubomirsky and Nolen-Hoeksema (1995) show, so-called rumination effects may be directed toward positive or negative foci. Journalists' workflow advancements in media technologies themselves may threaten the vocational status quo. After all, journalists—regardless of country—confront some aspect of convergence's technological requirements that forces them to engage in media work that they might not prefer, or are not as skilled at doing (Beckett, 2008; Jenkins, 2006).

Age is also a factor, especially with social media use. However, even younger journalists might be ambivalent about social media in their reporting, especially if the larger political and social contexts they work in discourage using these platforms. But the use trends still favor the young. In fact, Brandtzaeg and Chaparro Domínguez (2018) differentiate younger journalists as social media "natives" who socialize, think, and process information differently than social media "immigrants," or older journalists.

### ***Comparing Two Different Media Systems: Egypt and the United States***

We use a comparative media systems framework to assess the effects of journalists' reflection on satisfaction in two different national settings, authoritarian and democratic: Egypt and the United States. These states represent diverse circumstances that journalists in both countries encounter. Namely, both are large states (by population) that represent relatively different degrees of restrictions on press freedoms. The United States ranked 45th on the Reporters Without Borders (2020) World Press Freedom Index in 2020, while Egypt ranked 166th. We compare both countries in terms of media system, freedom, ownership, and journalistic training and professionalism.

While the U.S. media system is relatively free of press restrictions, the Egyptian one has robust restrictions. As the region's most populated country, Egypt is a unique case in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region due to the fast penetration of the Internet and digital technology (Abdullah, 2013), with mobile penetration reaching 98.8% of Egyptian households and 95% of individuals owning mobile Internet (Kibuacha, 2021). Owing to its Freedom Index rank, Egypt represents a journalistic context where social media's usefulness is clear, but social media also invites government targeting of journalists and other content creators (relative to the United States; Hamdy, 2015; Khamis, Gold, & Vaughn, 2012; Lavrusik, 2011). Meanwhile, the United States is arguably the leading example of leveraging social media for journalistic use (virtually) without government constraint. U.S. journalists have been at the forefront of social media use in their workflows, even as older media forms (e.g., broadcast) maintain their legitimacy (Willnat & Weaver, 2018). Both countries are also highly appropriate for comparison in this study given the

United States led the world's social media development, while social media played a significant role in Egypt's journalism's development, not to mention the 2011 revolution, which was predominantly covered through journalists and citizen journalists on social media, as the only available milieu (Mellor, 2005; Sakr, 2012).

On the eruption of the revolution, activists and journalists described social media as a new window to see and to be seen (Khamis, 2019; Radsch & Khamis, 2013). Confirming that digitalization is changing the Egyptian journalistic field, journalist Soha Tarek says, "New technologies made it easier for journalists to create professional stories using their mobile phones. This helps facilitating access, sharing, and exchanging information, and enhancing professionalism and free expression" (personal communication, June 12, 2020). Independent journalist, Shahira Amin, concurs, "Social media changed the way we practice journalism today. Citizen journalists determine which news goes viral and social media users share the news before it goes to print. This competition and this diversity are healthy," (personal communication, May 5, 2021). This new wave was perceived as a booster for media diversity and journalists' autonomy, enabling them to challenge governmental authority and traditional journalistic gatekeeping patterns (Khamis & El-Ibiary, 2022).

From a media systems standpoint, the two states are also interesting comparisons for how government might shape each's media ecosystem, and what government's role means for journalist professionalism more broadly. Specifically, Pintak and Ginges (2012) found that journalists in the Arab world were disappointed in their media's lack of professionalism and high levels of corruption and government control. They also found that journalists felt their professionalism was hampered by media owners "since those individuals are usually closely associated with, or inseparable from, the totalitarian governments that dominate the region" (Pintak & Ginges, 2012, p. 435).

Mainstream media in Egypt is classified by Rugh (1979) as authoritarian, for its loyalty to the regime. Even after the 2011 revolution, the media remained the same, mostly "promoting the main political, social and economic programs of the regime" (El Gody, 2014, p. 78). Recently, new private media companies with strong ties to security and intelligence organizations have bought majority shares in all the private media (Reporters Without Borders, 2019b). This environment explains why mainstream media journalists "pretend to know their audience—through technologies—and to generate 'institutional knowledge,' while they are not using the technology to address citizens' needs or be part of the discussion," El Gody (2014, p. 79) said. Journalists have been criticized for not being "connected" with their local audience or for encouraging people's participation in political debates (El Gody, 2014).

Since approving and implementing the Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes Law and the Media Regulation Law in 2018, the government can now regulate and restrict online freedom of expression and jail online users seen as threatening the regime. With those regulations, the Supreme Council for Media Regulations has the power to put citizens with more than 5,000 followers on social media, personal blogs, or websites under state supervision, blocking or suspending their accounts (Muslim, 2019). These laws legalize the blocking of 549 websites in Egypt, including news media/media outlets, representing 62% of blocked websites, human rights groups, political sites, and websites and services for circumventing censorship (Janssen, 2021).

Journalists use their “digital capital” to counter these measures and convert them to social capital via social media (Ignatow & Robinson, 2017). Interviews with journalists have shown that during Covid-19, social media helped them find and communicate with sources, generate ideas, and publicize their work, especially with media organizations facing harsh economic conditions and cutting down journalists. Eman Ouf, a journalist in *El Mal* newspaper, says, “I produce an entire story from home. I find the sources, communicate, and interview them online or on the phone, write and send out my story, to report safely during Covid-19” (personal communication, September 8, 2021). She also adds that free online training offered by various international organizations has boosted many journalists’ skills in using new technologies for crisis coverage.

Editors of blocked opposition websites use social media to reach out for audience and bypass the blocking. Khaled El-Balshy, editor and founder of *Darb*, a blocked website, says, “I have more followers on my Facebook page, where I share full text of stories, so that people in Egypt can read and interact” (personal communication, July 5, 2020). Likewise, editor and founder of *Mada Masr*, another blocked website reporting in Arabic and English, Lina Attallah, says the website team uses a Google app to bypass the blocking, then posts the link with each story on social media, so that people in Egypt and around the world can access them (personal communication, October 17, 2020).

The U.S. situation is somewhat different (although journalist pay is still low), in part, because journalists and media organizations are not under the same degree of political threat. Historically, American media was considered the “Fourth Estate”—a watchdog of sorts over government activities (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). But the challenge for U.S. journalists is that their media environment has always been vulnerable to private ownership interests. Journalists are pressed to produce evidence of audience engagement (which helps to monetize the news product; Underwood, 2001). Here, hybridity has brought the public into greater awareness of the pressures on U.S. “legacy” media outlets, and it makes the relationship between journalists and their audience much more horizontally oriented than before (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013).

Hallin (2020) reminds us that macro theoretical forces can operate across media ecosystems. However, this does not mean that social exchange forces lead to the same outcomes across systems. When reflecting on relative job satisfaction levels, Egyptian journalists are more likely to engage with social media than their U.S. counterparts because social media is the vital conduit for them to produce news in an environment where the government tightly controls more traditional media platforms (Rugh, 2007). The differences in these media systems also set up a more stringent test of social exchange theory. We would expect that Egyptian journalists already have a higher relative social media use rate—irrespective of any cognitive reflection on job satisfaction. This means the cost-benefit mechanism in social exchange may be less impactful for Egyptian reporters than for the U.S. ones. Conversely, if the Egyptians show similar responses to reflection on job satisfaction as the U.S. journalists, it will point to a rather robust social exchange mechanism in dissimilar media systems.

Social media’s usefulness for Egyptian journalists stands out in its relative independence from government interference. The Egyptian government has blocked over 500 websites with content deemed objectionable since 2017 (see Freedom of Thought and Expression, 2022). Although Egyptian government

has temporarily blocked social media sites over the last decade, doing so usually requires a larger (i.e., nationwide) shutdown of the Internet itself. So long as the Internet itself is operational, social media sites are comparatively harder to restrict than individual websites, thereby enabling the social media sites to serve a system-specific purpose as a journalistic dissemination platform. This means we might see any motivation from job satisfaction to increase Egyptian journalist social media use of some of the most basic reporting functions, including breaking news, finding sources, and monitoring social media for information about issues and events (Howard, 2011; Khamis, Gold, & Vaughn, 2012).

Across the literature, scholars have found some hesitation in using social media for sourcing stories (Artwick, 2013; Cision, 2015)—although there are examples where social media provide source material for hard news (Broersma & Graham, 2013; Paulussen & Harder, 2014). Despite restrictions on social media and blocking websites, Egyptian journalists, as we expected, keep using social media as the only available milieu to disseminate their work and reach out for the audience and sources. Yet because U.S. journalists do not need to rely on social media as a content disseminator to the same extent as Egyptians, any satisfaction-based motivation for U.S. journalists may not show an impact in using social media for these basic reporting functions.

In fact, we inquired with a group of U.S. journalists about their views on job satisfaction and social media use in reporting. We structured our interviews as a series of four focus groups of six journalists each (for a total of 24 participants) conducted during four group sessions in the fall of 2017. The sessions included a series of questions about the journalists' overall perceptions of their work responsibilities and careers. One question asked in each group sessions concerned how much the journalists enjoyed using social media in their workflows. Seventeen of the 24 participants offered a negative reply—stating in various ways that they were not comfortable using social media platforms to do their work, and the requirements made on them to do so by their managers caused resentment (making it clear that they did not link enjoyment at work with social media use). Note that these respondents did not indicate that they avoid using social media at work, only that they did not prefer to do so. These findings, though not representative of U.S. journalists, might indicate a lack of linkage between cognitive reflection on job satisfaction and social media use (at least among U.S. journalists). Some indicated that Trump's use of social media, especially in attacking media credibility, has put more pressure on journalists.

### **Research Hypotheses**

In contrast with the group responses, literature on expectations regarding positive affect (Duckworth, Petersen, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Heckhausen, Worsch, & Schultz, 2010) supports the notion that those asked to reflect on their relative levels of job satisfaction will show systematic differences in their reported use of social media in their journalistic work. This shows a satisfaction-induced willingness to strive toward career goals and innovation per social exchange theory. Note that we use the terms "satisfaction" and "happiness" interchangeably in this article. But since our cognitive experiment relies on an inventory of topics related to journalistic happiness, we transition to referencing "job happiness" in our hypotheses and discussion of results. We hypothesize that cognitively priming journalists to think about their relative level of job happiness will make them more likely to report increased social media use in carrying out their reporting work tasks (compared with those who are not primed; Goidel, 2011). We further hypothesize that

the cognitively primed Egyptian journalists will be more likely to report increased social media use (compared with their U.S. counterparts).

### ***Randomized Experiment: Priming Cognition on Journalistic Happiness***

Our expectation about the influence of cognitive reflection on relative job happiness is based on the priming effects literature (Gaines, Kuklinksi, & Quirk, 2007). Priming allows us to capture the core of social exchange theory in our assessment. The primed journalists consider how much happiness they get from specific work tasks. This reflection activates a social exchange-based consideration of whether goal striving, technological innovation, and some degree of risk-taking produces a sense of job happiness. The act of reflecting, according to our hypotheses, motivates a self-reporting of higher and more differentiated levels of social media use per the elements of social exchange theory.

At the same time, it is important to underscore the reality about journalism mentioned earlier. Exposing journalists to questions about their relative level of job happiness means not all will come away feeling positive. Indeed, satisfaction levels will be relative. We do not theorize that a specific happiness level is required to induce the social exchange mechanism whereby a respondent indicates increased social media use because the baseline happiness threshold is not clear. However, we control for relative self-reported happiness in our statistical models below to account for relative happiness level effects on reported social media use. The strength of our research design is that the random assignment for some to be primed about job happiness before survey questions about social media use is not related to respondents' specific work or comparative state circumstances.

Our respondents volunteered for survey participation by answering a fall 2018 online solicitation sent to several regional and national listservs used by journalist organizations in Egypt and the United States. Respondents accessed a Web link via the listserv announcement to enter the Qualtrics survey environment. We made the survey available in both Arabic and English. On clicking on the link, the Qualtrics algorithm randomly assigned participants to either the treatment or control survey condition as part of a questions-as-treatment experiment. Each survey respondent answered the same series of survey questions. What differed for treated respondents was exposure at the start of the survey to Ryan's (2009) intrinsic and extrinsic journalism motivator survey question battery. These items were related to the work elements that drove journalist satisfaction as discussed in our literature review. Ryan's battery measures respondents' self-reported levels of "happiness" with various aspects of their journalism work and included questions measuring prestige, praise, freedom to pick assignments, and general working conditions (see Table 1 for a complete list of items). Following the Ryan battery were the questions about social media use, and they served as the core dependent variables. Control group respondents also received Ryan's question battery toward the end of their survey (i.e., after the social media use questions).

We received 210 survey responses from Egyptian journalists. One hundred respondents were assigned the treatment while 110 were given the control version of the survey. One hundred and eighty-nine U.S.-based journalists participated in the experiment, with 99 assigned to the treatment and 90 to the control version. There was no evidence of response attrition among either the Egyptian or U.S. journalists. Despite a relatively small number of respondents, our design's purpose was not to provide a population-



based survey of journalists in the two states, and these respondent pools were large enough to allow for causal inference using statistical tests, including difference of means and regression analysis (Brybaert, 2019). Importantly, our findings add to literature that has used survey experiments on journalists to assess how cognitive exercises impact survey response (see Hinnant, Oh, Caburnay, & Kreuter, 2011, for an example of a survey experiment on another relatively small journalist sample).

The Egyptian respondent pool was relatively split in terms of sex (54% female, 46% male). Regarding the most popular area of journalism, 35% of respondents were in print media, 58% worked in online media, and seven percent worked in television. The Egyptian journalists were also seasoned—with an average of 21 years paid experience. Given the importance of journalist age in determining social media use as mentioned above, this suggests that most Egyptian respondents have enough memory of the pre-social media era (and may make comparisons between their past and current experiences). While ours is not a study of political journalism per se, the Egyptian respondents were keenly interested in politics, with two-thirds saying they were very interested.

The U.S. journalists were also relatively evenly divided by sex (52% female, 48% male), and were 71% Caucasian, 15% African American, 10% Latino, and 4% Asian. Thirty percent of the U.S. respondents worked in print; 25% were in online positions; and 45% held jobs in television news.

Like their Egyptian counterparts, the U.S. journalists were long on experience, with an average of 24 years holding positions in paid journalism. Seventy-eight percent indicated they were very interested in politics.

### ***Happiness Effects in Comparative Media Contexts***

Since assignment to treatment and control groups was found to be statistically unrelated to respondent demographic characteristics, we can first report treatment effects as difference of mean responses using the critical value from Tukey HSD tests following ANOVA (and without the use of statistical controls). Because we do not have a separate measure of social media use for respondents in the two countries, the control group's self-reported social media use serves as the baseline measure of journalists' social media incorporation into their workflows (again with the caveat that this is not a representative sample of journalists in either state).

In Tables 3–4, we complement the mean difference assessment with covariate models that add (1) respondent averages (i.e., mean scores) for job "happiness" using an additive index of the Ryan (2009) measures; (2) respondent gender (coded "1" for female); (3) number of years in journalism (continuous measure); binary measures of whether a respondent works primarily in (4) print, (5) online, (6) or television; and (7) political interest (1–3 Likert scale, 3 = "very interested"). To control for the expected use of social media in their newsrooms, we included Lysak, Cremedas, and Wolf's (2012) measure of whether a respondent's newsroom requires reporters to have social media accounts for work (coded "1" if social media presence is required). This measure serves as a baseline for incorporating social media into one's workflow. Seventy-seven percent of U.S. journalists and 81% of Egyptian journalists indicated their newsroom has this expectation. The social media covariate models use linear regression estimation.

*Treatment Question Battery Responses*

Our first outcome of interest are responses to the Ryan (2009) "happiness"<sup>1</sup> measures in Table 1.<sup>2</sup> All items were arranged on a 1–5 Likert scale, with "5" representing respondents who "strongly agree" that they were "happy" with a particular job aspect. Overall, the respondents from both states were not overly pleased with their jobs, although there was some variation in response. When comparing the between-group averages on these measures, the U.S. journalists assigned the treatment prime (i.e., those randomly exposed to the "happiness" question battery early in the survey) responded .7 points higher in saying they were happy across all aspects of their jobs in the Ryan battery (average control response mean = 1.8/average treatment response mean = 2.5). This made the average happiness means between the treated and control respondents statistically distinguishable at  $p < .01$ . The largest mean differences between the treatment and control groups were for "being busy," "having a prestige position," avoiding "going against conscience," "doing things for people," "using abilities," "doing different things," and "feeling accomplished." Items where the treatment and control means were closer, but still statistically different, included "doing things for people," "working independently," getting "praise for a good job," having the "freedom to pick assignments," having good "working conditions," and "coworkers getting along." "Happiness" with pay level showed no statistical difference between treatment and control.

On average, the primed Egyptian journalists were less likely to say they found "happiness" across the Ryan (2009) battery (average control response mean = 1.7/average treatment response mean = 2.2,  $p < .09$ ). Yet similarly to their U.S. colleagues, primed Egyptian respondents were also significantly more likely to agree that they were "happy" with "being busy," "having a prestige position," avoiding "going against conscience," "using abilities," "doing different things," and seeing "coworkers getting along." However, the primed Egyptians did not register statistically higher levels of happiness on items like "feeling accomplished," "working independently," getting "praise for a good job," having "freedom in picking assignments," and having good "working conditions." Also, similarly to the U.S. journalists, the Egyptian journalists did not show statistical differences in their "happiness" levels regarding pay.

*"Happiness"-Driven "Satisfaction" With Journalism*

Our first dependent variable links the Ryan (2009) "happiness" battery to respondent job satisfaction. Testing for this link serves as a key validity check of effects from exposure to the "happiness" question treatment battery and the theoretical concept of job satisfaction discussed in our theory. The satisfaction outcome was based on Hedman and Djerf-Pierre's (2013) measure and arranged on a 1–7 Likert scale with "7" indicating the respondent was "extremely satisfied." Underscoring the close conceptual

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<sup>1</sup> We use the "happy" and "happiness" terms here because those are the descriptors used by Ryan (2009). We use this as a close proxy for job satisfaction, which is the concept we consider to be more theoretically aligned with social exchange theory.

<sup>2</sup> See Table 1 in the online appendix: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1LrsrfRXNrhO-xI5s9Lk6TFLpBlzZV9VUaQGsRF96Zws/edit#gid=0>

relationship between the two terms, Table 2<sup>3</sup> shows that exposing treated respondents to the “happiness” battery resulted in significantly higher overall job satisfaction means for both the Egyptian (mean of 3.6 treatment/2.4 control) and U.S. journalists (mean of 5.0 treatment/3.1 control;  $p < .01$ )—although the effect was clearly stronger among the U.S. journalists.

This effect pattern holds in the covariate models (also reported in Table 2). Since we found evidence of a proportional odds assumption violation for ordered logit, we collapsed the 1–7 scale into a 0–1 binary outcome (with response categories 5, 6, and 7 coded “1,” all else “0”). Although none of the covariates were statistically significant in this model (including the “happiness” index average), the treatment effects remained robust for both the U.S. and Egyptian journalists. However, the relatively smaller treatment effect for the Egyptian respondents suggests our hypothesized expectations about these journalists may not bear out.

#### *Social Media Task Use*

Next, we focused on journalists’ social media use along 12 separate tasks based on items from Lariscy, Avery, Sweetser, and Howes’ (2009) survey, which included the core tasks delineated in our hypotheses above. Each was scaled 0–10 for frequency (0 = “never”/10 = “multiple times a day”). The models are dispersed across Tables 3 (United States) and 4 (Egyptian). To better contrast the treatment effects, we discuss the outcomes in a different order than our hypothesis list above. Again, note that our comparisons are of relative self-reported social media use, with statistical differences attributable to randomized priming of the “happiness” questions in the survey flow.<sup>4</sup>

The first job task for journalists is to check for breaking news (which corresponds with H<sub>4</sub>). Interestingly, there is no significant difference between U.S. control and treatment group respondents (mean of 7.9 control/7.8 treatment). However, and as theorized, the treatment/control difference is significant for their Egyptian counterparts (mean of 7.0 control/8.4 treatment), thereby helping to confirm H<sub>4</sub> (and, by extension, H<sub>5</sub>). This finding underscores our explanation that Egyptian journalists use social media more for core journalism functions by necessity given government restrictions on traditional media platforms. Covariates in the linear regression models are not statistically significant predictors of social media use for either U.S. or Egyptian respondents.

In contrast to breaking news use, both journalist cohorts were strongly influenced by the job “happiness” treatment in using social media to check news offered by other media organizations. On this measure, treated U.S. journalists showed an 8.3 mean versus 5.8 for the control, while treated Egyptian journalists registered a smaller, but still substantial, effect size difference of 7.1 (versus 5.1 for the control;  $p < .01$ ). As a further contrast in treatment effects, the task of finding ideas for stories showed no significant

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<sup>3</sup> See Table 2 in the online appendix: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1LsrfrXNrhO-xI5s9Lk6TFLpBlzZV9VUaQGSRF96Zws/edit#gid=1681767849>

<sup>4</sup> See Table 3 in the online appendix: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1LsrfrXNrhO-xI5s9Lk6TFLpBlzZV9VUaQGSRF96Zws/edit#gid=490396198>

difference for either set of respondents. But the outcome was different in terms of using social media to keep in touch with journalists.

Specifically, the treated U.S. journalists had a reported mean frequency of 7.9 versus the control of 6.3, while the Egyptians showed a slightly larger effect difference of 7.5 for the treatment and 5.8 for the control group ( $p < .01$ ). Regarding social media use to find additional information for a story—and in what is becoming a clear pattern for the treated U.S. journalists—respondents primed to cognitively reflect on relative job “happiness” had a significantly higher mean frequency (8.2 versus 6.8 for the control) of saying they use social media for additional story information ( $p < .01$ ). Yet there are negative and statistically significant effects from the covariates, with more experienced (and generally older) journalists showing a .12 point decrease in reported frequency and television-based journalists showing a 1.3 point drop. By contrast, neither the treatment nor covariates are statistically significant for the Egyptian respondents.<sup>5</sup>

Our expectation about Egyptian social media use for core tasks is buttressed by the next item: using social media to find sources (corresponding to  $H_1$ ). As with the breaking news item, the treatment effect is not significant for the U.S. journalists, (treatment group mean of 7.3 vs. 6.6 for the control). In terms of covariates, U.S. journalists working in online jobs show a 2.0-point increase in self-reported use of social media to find sources. By contrast, among the Egyptian journalists, the treatment shows a significantly higher mean outcome (6.9) versus those journalists in the control group (5.0;  $p < .01$ ), thereby providing additional confirmation for  $H_1$  (and  $H_5$ ).

Meanwhile, the monitoring of social media shows no statistical difference between the U.S. journalist group means (7.4 treatment/6.5 control). The situation is different among the Egyptian journalists: treated respondents show a mean of 5.1 (versus 3.8 for the control;  $p < .01$ ), thereby showing that Egyptian journalists make heavier use of social media for their core reporting functions (which is more confirmation for  $H_5$ ). Meanwhile, both sets of respondents reported following other journalists using social media when encountering the treatment prime. The treatment group mean for the U.S. journalists is 8.3 (versus 6.3 for the control), while the effect is slightly smaller, though still significant, among the Egyptian respondents (mean of 5.3 treatment/4.0 control;  $p < .01$ ).<sup>6</sup>

The final set of models in Tables 3 and 4 evaluate the last four social media tasks, starting with replying to comments made on social media about one’s work. Interestingly, there is no significant mean difference between the treatment (5.7) and control (5.0) groups among U.S. journalists, but, of the covariates, conservative respondents have a mean increase of .7 in using social media to make replies. The story is the same among Egyptian journalists, with no statistically significant treatment effect (5.4 treatment/5.2 control).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Table 3 (continued) in the online appendix: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1LrsrfRXNrhO-xI5s9Lk6TFLpBlzZV9VUaQGSRF96Zws/edit#gid=1845905077>

<sup>6</sup> See Table 3 (continued) in the online appendix: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1LrsrfRXNrhO-xI5s9Lk6TFLpBlzZV9VUaQGSRF96Zws/edit#gid=1451225590>

<sup>7</sup> See Table 4 in the online appendix: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1LrsrfRXNrhO-xI5s9Lk6TFLpBlzZV9VUaQGSRF96Zws/edit#gid=507936862>

In terms of using social media to verify story information ( $H_2$ ), we see a return to the treatment-based effect among both the U.S. and Egyptian journalists. The mean for treated U.S. respondents is 7.2 (versus 5.8 for the control;  $p < .01$ ). In the covariate model, female respondents have a 1.1 higher mean of using social media to verify information, while U.S. journalists working in online jobs also have a 1.1 higher mean of doing the same. The treatment mean for the Egyptian journalists is 6.7, versus 5.0 for the control group ( $p < .01$ ). Among Egyptian journalists, only the gender covariate is statistically significant, with female respondents showing a .97 increase in reported frequency of using social media to verify story information.<sup>8</sup>

Regarding use of social media to interview sources, both the Egyptian and U.S. journalists show treatment effects in confirmation of  $H_3$ . The treatment mean of 5.4 for U.S. journalists is significantly different from the control of 4.1, while the Egyptian treatment mean of 5.1 is significantly higher than the control of 3.8 ( $p < .01$ ). The twelfth and final task pertains to using social media to meet other journalists. There is no significant difference for this final social media outcome for either the Egyptian or U.S. journalists. At least in the Egyptian case, this may reflect the reality that meeting other journalists is not a core reporting function for which social media is considered necessary. Figure 1 summarizes the effect findings across both the treated Egyptian and U.S. respondents.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Table 4 (continued) in the online appendix: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1LrsrfRXNrhO-xI5s9Lk6TFLpBlzZV9VUaQGSRF96Zws/edit#gid=2110296558>

<sup>9</sup> See Table 4 (Continued) in the online appendix: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1LrsrfRXNrhO-xI5s9Lk6TFLpBlzZV9VUaQGSRF96Zws/edit#gid=1421189303>

	EGYPT	US
Breaking News	INCREASE	
Check Other Orgs	INCREASE	INCREASE
Find Ideas		
In Touch w/Audience	INCREASE	INCREASE
Additional Info		INCREASE
Find Sources	INCREASE	
Monitor Social Media	INCREASE	
Follow Other Journalists	INCREASE	INCREASE
Reply to Comments		
Verify Information	INCREASE	INCREASE
Interview Sources	INCREASE	INCREASE
Meet Other Journalists		

**Figure 1. Summary of statistically significant treatment effects on social media use by Egyptian and U.S. journalists.**

### Discussion and Conclusion

The crux of our findings suggests that cognitive reflection by journalists on those aspects of their jobs they derive satisfaction from is statistically linked to motivation to engage social media technologies in their work. In total, these results support the social exchange mechanism: When primed to think about what they like about their work, journalists are more likely to self-report engaging with social media technology—an activity that suggests a motive to innovate or at least embrace a technology about which journalists have shown ambivalence. The practical importance of these results is that focus on the relative satisfaction in one's work is a springboard to increased use of a core resource for journalistic workflows. As we saw in our interviews with U.S. journalists, relative job happiness levels and engagement with social media technology appeared to have a negative association. However, our experimental data showed a positive relationship. This suggests cognitive focus on aspects of job satisfaction may positively impact other parts of the journalistic workflow (a question for future research to consider). As such, our findings have professional, as well as theoretical, ramifications.

Journalist reflection on relative happiness in their work increases reported social media use. This reflection powers different social media use frequencies in certain cases but is not universal. In fact, the treatment prime failed to produce statistically significant differences in reported use for three items: finding ideas for stories, replying to comments, and meeting other journalists. We also expected a difference between the Egyptian and U.S. journalists based on the former's need to use social media for core reporting

functions, including breaking news, finding sources, and monitoring social media. In all three of these core tasks, the treatment effect was confirmed for Egyptians (while absent for the U.S. journalists).

These findings also reflect the challenging working conditions for Egyptian journalists and underscore the needed use of social media for core journalistic endeavors. Though the U.S. journalists face relative challenges in their own right, their work context does not approach what their Egyptian counterparts deal with in terms of government interference in a free press. Though these data were collected prior to the coronavirus pandemic, the government lockdowns have likely only added to pressures these journalists confront.

It is noteworthy that despite the general confirmation of the social exchange mechanism and the effect on self-reported social media use, overall responses to the Ryan (2009) battery show only a moderate sense of "happiness" with journalist work situations. Though there was strong statistical linkage between placement of the Ryan questions and respondents' reported job satisfaction levels, the "happiness" index was never a statistically significant covariate in any of the regression models. Yet the treatment's general effect consistency suggests that a deepening embrace of social media in newsrooms can be fostered by improving how journalists feel about their work. This may be promising insight for news managers who want to improve morale, productivity, and efficiency.

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