

Arab Journalists' Perceptions of Covid-19 as a Critical Field Moment

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Abstract

This paper examines how Arab journalists exercised agency during the Covid-19 crisis, focusing on practitioners at Al-Ahram (Egypt), LBCI (Lebanon), and Sky News Arabia (UAE). While scholarship on crisis reporting has often emphasised structural constraints such as censorship, ownership, or platform logics, this study foregrounds the lived experiences and practices of individual journalists. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, the analysis situates these actors within national and transnational journalistic fields marked by political pressures, commercial imperatives, and the disruptive context of the pandemic. Through qualitative interviews and discourse analysis, the paper traces how journalists negotiated their professional values, adapted reporting routines, and carved spaces of autonomy despite institutional constraints. Findings highlight variations in agency across national contexts: Egyptian journalists emphasised survival within authoritarian structures, Lebanese journalists drew on traditions of political pluralism amidst crisis, while Emirati journalists navigated a field shaped by state interests and regional positioning. The study contributes to crisis journalism scholarship by shifting the focus from structures to actors, illustrating how individual agency matters in understanding journalism under extraordinary conditions.

Keywords: Crisis journalism, Arab media, journalistic agency, Covid-19, Egypt, Lebanon, UAE