Manaf Bashir:

Framing an Online Social Movement: How Do the Leadership and Participants of the Egyptian 6th of April Youth Movement Frame their *Facebook* Activism?

Abstract:

The talks about the horizontality of Internet activism and the advent of social media applications have drawn great attention recently where leadership, organization and coordination are no longer tasks of a movement's leadership, but also the general participants. This content analysis research attempts to show how the Egyptian 6th of April Youth Movement framed its own activism and what this multiplicity of actors-based framing meant to social movement discourse. The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the understanding of diverse frames by leaders and participants, with the latter rapidly emerging as new agents of social movements. The findings show that the leadership and participants used similar cause, motivational and consequence frames (the three social movement framing tasks), but the leadership used these frames more frequently than the participants and had a larger influence than the participants in the overall framing of the 6th of April Youth Movement.

Agenda:

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Introduction

The advent of social movements powered by communication technologies is giving birth to new agents of information diffusion, participation and decision making in contentious politics. A growing interest in how individual participants contribute to social movements and the talks about the horizontality of Internet activism have surfaced in many academic circles, especially with the arrival of recent Internet applications such as *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Youtube*.

Using the *Facebook* page of the 6th of April Youth Movement during the Egyptian revolution early in 2011 as case study, this content analysis-based study attempts to show how an online social movement with multiple types of actors frames its own activism and what this multiplicity of actors-based framing means to social movement discourse. From the 6th of April Youth Movement's *Facebook* page, this research seeks to identify (a) the three core social movement framing tasks which the *Facebook* activists used and (b) whether there was a framing influence between the leadership and participants in these framing tasks. The study employs time-series analyses of cross-correlations to answer the research questions.

While previous empirical studies have analyzed the political uses of new communication technologies when they are adopted by a number of movements' leaders, more research is needed to determine how individual citizens are utilizing these technologies in participating in social movements, and relating such research to theory, such as framing. The literature focuses predominantly on technology as a tool for movement elites but fails to address how participants use technology and how they can impact social movements' frames and influence (Benford and Snow 2000; Buechler 2011).

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to an understanding of diverse frames by leaders and participants, with the latter rapidly emerging as new agents of social movements who also changed the nature of activism into a horizontal activism (Chadwick 2007; Buechler 2011; Hara and Huang 2011). Particularly, this study provides empirical evidence of a framing influence between the leadership and participants of the 6th of April Youth Movement's *Facebook* page. Looking at the *Facebook* posts of the leadership and participants and investigating their potential framing influence would either support or reject the debate in the literature that general participants are becoming as important as the leadership. While a case study cannot generalize beyond its context in time and place, the 6th of April Youth Movement offers encouraging lessons in understanding the complex framing dynamics between the leaders of social movements and their participants, especially when they are utilizing social networking websites.

Social Movement Framing

Social movements face crucial 'framing tasks' (Cooper 2002). As indicated by McAdam et al. (1996), social movement framing is a strategic effort by a group of people to fashion shared understanding of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action. Movements, therefore, must link their interpretive orientations with the targeted audiences with what Snow and Benford (1988) call "the three core tasks of social movement framing." According to Snow and Benford (1988), successful social movement framing depends on the application of the cause, solution/consequence and motivational framing. Social movements seek to identify the issue in which a cause or problem is extracted from, the diagnostic and first core framing task (Benford and Snow 2000). The second task involves the articulation of a consequent phase or solution, the prognostic frame (Benford and Snow 2000). The final task, and usually neglected in the social movement framing literature according to Benford and Snow (2000), is the motivational framing.

Currently in the literature, social movement framing often assumes that leading activists invent frames to recruit passive followers who have little to say about the process (Buechler 2011). The emphasis is "from the organization to the individual, not the other way around"[1] However, as indicated previously by Hara (2008), Hara and Huang (2011), Bennett (2003) and Melucci (2000), the general or individual participants of social movements are becoming as significant as the leading activists in contributing to movements' organization and leadership, especially with the help of the Internet. This shift and transformation in the role of individuals have decisive implications for contemporary forms of conflict and movement (McDonald 2006). Numerous studies have indicated that with the help of the Internet that has made individuals part of social movement discourse, social movement activism has become horizontal, where coordination and leadership are no longer limited to elite activists, but also to the general participants. Therefore, while it is true that general participants are contributing to social movements, do they, as a result, influence a movement's framing?

This research study aims to demonstrate how the 6th of April Youth Movement with its multiple types of actors frames its activism and whether or not these actors influence the framing of one another:

> **RQ1.** What frames does the 6th of April Youth Movement employ as its three core social movement framing tasks (cause, motivational, consequence)?

> **RQ2.** In their three core frames, do the frames of the leadership influence the frames of the participants? Or do the frames of the participants influence the frames of the leadership?

Both the leadership and individual participant posts in the 6th of April Youth Movement were retrieved and analyzed. By "leadership" this study refers to the posts written by the administrators of 6th of April Youth Movement and labeled under the page's name "6th of April Youth Movement." By "individual participants" the study refers to the posts written by the general public on the wall of the group's page. All posts from January 6th, 2011, to July 31st, 2011 of the 6th of April Youth Movement were retrieved directly from Facebook's Application Programming Interface (API). The total number of posts is 95,858. Since events in Egypt in this period of time differed on issues: starting from the build-up toward the January 25th revolution up until the prosecution of ousted President Hosni Mubarak and his cabinet, this study narrowed the period of study to January 15th, 2011 - February 21st, 2011. The rationale for adding 10 days before the revolution and 10 days after Mubarak's resignation stemmed from the fact that the construction of the three core frames (in addition to framing influence) would evolve rather than be established at once. The total sample size resulted in 772 participants' posts and 263 leadership posts. The unit of analysis was the post in its textual form.

First, in order to examine the visibility of the cause, motivational, and consequence frames in the posts, this study followed the methods used by Gamson (1992), Benford (1993), Maher (1995), Kensicki (2004), and Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) in identifying the three core frames in social movements[2].

Then, after identifying the three core frames of the leadership and participants in the first research question, the study's second question investigated whether a framing influence between the two groups took place during the period of the study. This was conducted by using time series statistical analyses of cross-correlations.

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1 Aguirre, 1994, p. 268 as cited in Buechler, 2011.

2 In the identification of frames, the author also followed Pan & Kosicki's (1993) approach that frames are not subjects, and Oliver & Johnston's (2005) approach that frames are not ideologies. Subjects are topics of discussions and speech (Pan & Kosicki, 1993) while ideologies are whole systems of beliefs (Oliver and Johnston 2005). A frame, in its several definitions, is an organizing idea that is shared and persistent over time, that works symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world (Reese 2001). Further measures of how to identify and valiidate frames are indicated by Snow and Benford (1988) and Cappella and Jamieson (1997).

Findings

The study makes several substantive and methodological contributions in the study of social movement framing, particularly in identifying the three framing tasks and determining a framing influence between a movement's leadership and participants.

Three Core Social Movement Framing Tasks

The Cause frame is the event or condition that is characterized as the cause and is necessary for amelioration (Hunt 1994). Starting with this frame first, the findings indicate the presence of multiple cause frames in the posts for both the leadership and participants (see Table 1).

Table 1: Cause Frames by Leadership and Participants (in %)*

Cause Frames	Leadership	Participants	Total
Information sharing & diffusion	13.3 (35)	11.8 (91)	12.2 (126)
(Demand for) Regime change	23.2 (61)	8.2 (63)	12 (124)
Injustice	14.4 (38)	4 (31)	6.7 (69)
Movement/Revolution sustainability & success	5.7 (15)	12.2 (94)	10.5 (109)
Idealized society/Utopia	3 (8)	1.7 (13)	2 (21)
Ousted regime counter-revolution	0.4 (1)	2.2 (17)	1.7 (18)
Post-revolution planning	0 (0)	2.1 (16)	1.5 (16)
Need for information	0 (0)	1 (8)	0.8 (8)
Cannot determine cause	9.1 (24)	20.6 (159)	17.7 (183)
Other[3]	27.5 (72)	19.7 (153)	21.8 (225)
No cause indicated	3.4 (9)	16.5 (127)	13.1 (136)
Total	100 (263)	100 (772)	100 (1,035)

* Numbers in parentheses refer to the number of cases

The leadership and participants used the same frames, with few frames pertaining to one group over another. As Table 1 shows, for example, the participants employed the "need for information" and "post-revolution planning" frames while the leadership did not have any mentions of these frames. Also, "ousted regime counter-revolution" frame was almost entirely employed by the participants.

The motivational frame means "a call to arms for engaging in ameliorative or corrective action"[4], where vocabularies of motive emerge in the course of interaction among movement activists (Benford and Snow 2000, 617). Motivations for participation in social movements must be created (Gerhards and Rucht 1992). Table 2 shows the motivational frames of the 6th of April Youth Movement. Neither the leadership nor the participants cited multiple motivations that would be expected in a time of revolution.

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3 'Other' as a category includes cause frames that are low in occurrences (less than 10). Some of these frames are 'commemorating the martyrs,' 'hegemony,' and 'pursuit of freedom.' 'Need for information' is in the table as an exception. Although it was only mentioned eight times, it only pertained to the participants and demonstrates their pursuit of information from the leadership.

4 Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 199.

Table 2: Motivational Frames of Posts by Leadership and Participants (in %)*

Motivational Frame	Leadership	Participants	Total
Efficacy	12.9 (34)	2.5 (19)	5.1 (53)
Solidarity	1.5 (4)	5.1 (39)	4.2 (43)
(Personal) Relevance	8.4 (22)	1.9 (15)	3.6 (37)
Other[5]	25.1 (66)	15.2 (117)	17.6 (184)
Cannot determine motivation	12.9 (34)	14.6 (113)	14.2 (147)
No motivation indicated	39.2 (103)	60.8 (469)	55.3 (572)
Total	100 (263)	100 (772)	100 (1,035)

* Numbers in parentheses refer to the number of cases

Although the leadership and participants shared similar motivational frames, their emphasis was different. For example, "efficacy" was more emphasized by the leadership than the participants, while "solidarity" was more emphasized by the participants than the leadership. Generally, however, the leadership's posts emphasized more motivational frames than the participants. This was due to the fact that two-thirds of the participants' posts did not mention or specify a motivational frame (75.4%), compared to half of the leadership's posts that did not specify a motivational frame (52.1%).

The reversal of the cause frame is what constitutes the consequence frame (Gerhards and Rucht 1992). It emphasizes a consequence or solution to a proposed problem (Snow and Benford 2000). The findings indicate a generally low emphasis on identifying consequence frames by the movement. As Table 3 shows, the consequence frames were similar between the two groups but their emphasis was different.

Table 3: Consequence Frames of Posts by Leadership and Participants (in %)*

Consequence Frame	Leadership	Participants	Total
Regime change	9.9 (26)	3.9 (30)	5.4 (56)
Urgency	4.2 (11)	2.1 (16)	2.6 (27)
Idealized society/Utopian	2.3 (6)	1.3 (10)	1.5 (16)
Failure of revolution	0.4 (1)	1.4 (11)	1.2 (12)
Economic consequences	0 (0)	0.6 (5)	0.5 (5)
Other[6]	6.5 (17)	1.1 (9)	3.2 (33)
Cannot determine consequence	1.9 (5)	1.6 (12)	1.6 (17)
No consequence indicated	74.9 (197)	87 (672)	84 (869)
Total	100 (263)	100 (772)	100 (1,035)

* Numbers in parentheses refer to the number of cases

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5 'Other' included motivations that are low in occurrences (mostly less than five). Among these motivations were 'sacrifice,' 'glory,' 'fear,' 'revenge,' 'love,' 'peace,' 'suffrage,' 'freedom' and 'faith.'

6 'Other' includes consequences that are low in occurrences. Examples included in this category are 'liberating Libya,' 'sectarianism,' and 'commemorating the martyrs.'

Table 3 also indicates that the leadership had higher frequencies than the participants in all of the consequence frames except "failure of the revolution" frame, which was the only consequence frame the leadership did not share with the participants (the "economic consequences" frame). This frame involved discussions about the economic consequences of events toward the individual citizen, institutions and the country at large, similar to the frame used previously in Graber (1993) and Semetko and Valkenburg (2000).

Leadership Framing vs. Participants Framing – Determining Influence

This section focuses on finding a causal framing influence in the posts between the leadership and participants and shows the cross-correlations for each frame.

Table 4: Frames included in Cross-Correlations

Cause Frames	Motivational Frames	Consequence Frame
Information diffusion (126)*	Efficacy (53)	Regime change (56)
Regime change (124)	Solidarity (43)	
Injustice (69)	Relevance (37)	
Sustainability (62)		
Success (47)		

* Number of cases

Starting with the "information sharing & diffusion" frame, Figure 1 indicates that the participant frame was strongly correlated with the leadership's on the first day and up until the third day.

Figure 1. Leadership and Participants Information Sharing & Diffusion Frame
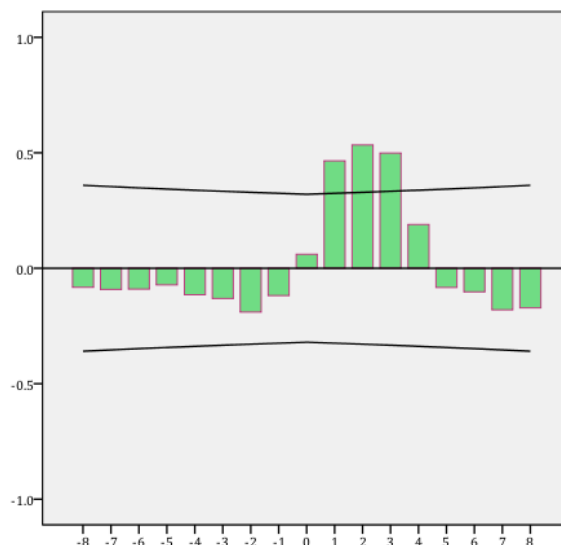

The correlations became weak and negative from the fourth day onward indicating no influence between the two groups' frames. The findings imply that the participants' discussions, which constituted the "information

sharing & diffusion" frame, were influenced by the leadership's discussions about the same frame one day after the leadership used this frame and up until the third day. Therefore, a conclusion can be made that the leadership influenced the participants to use the "information sharing & diffusion" frame.

As Figure 2 shows, the participants' frame "regime change" was not correlated with the leadership's frame during the first four days. The findings from the correlations indicate that there was no framing influence between the two groups from the first day to the fifth but show the leadership's influence toward the participants from the sixth day to the eighth. This finding means that discussions on regime change by the participants took place five to six days after the leadership discussed regime change. It can be concluded that the leadership influenced the participants in this frame.

Figure 2. Leadership and Participants (Demand for) Regime Change Frame
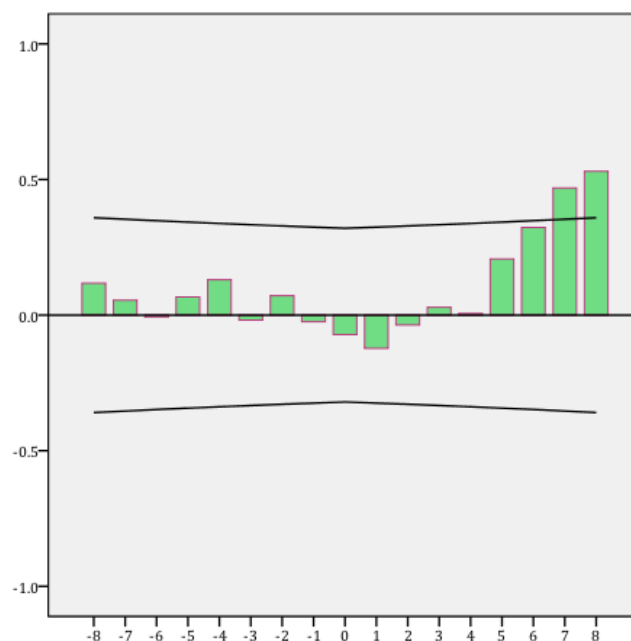
According to Figure 3, most of the cross-correlations between the two groups for the "injustice" frame are negative. The positive cross-correlations on the second, seventh and eighth days are too weak to indicate any influence. Therefore, neither the leadership nor the participants influenced each other's use of the "injustice" frame.

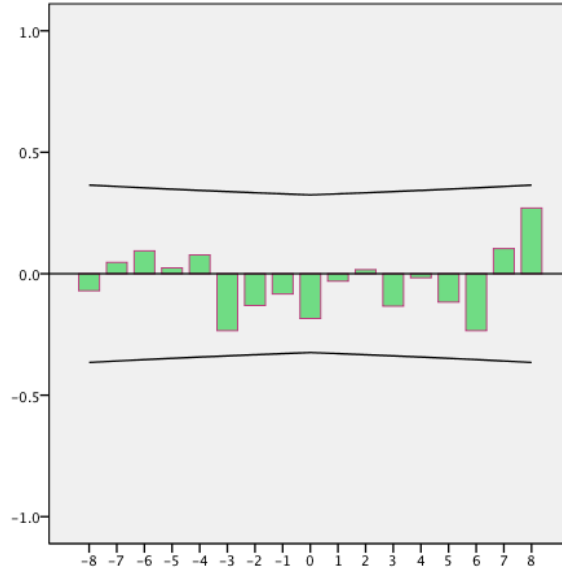*Figure 3. Leadership and Participants Injustice Frame*

Figure 4 indicates that the only strong correlation was on the second day where the participants' "movement sustainability" frame was strongly correlated to the leadership's. Therefore, the leadership influenced the participants to use the "sustainability" frame. The findings imply that the leadership's discussions about the sustainability of the movement influenced the participants to also discuss it two days after the leadership had the discussion.

Figure 4. Leadership and Participants Movement Sustainability Frame
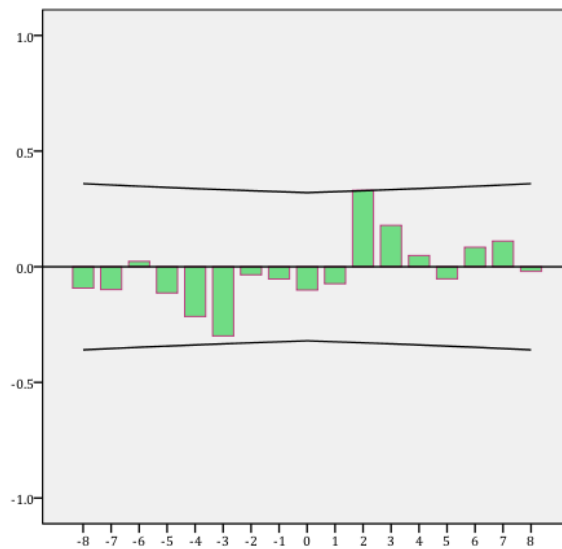
As Figure 5 shows, the participants' "success" frame was highly correlated with the leadership's frame on the first, third, and fourth day. Therefore, the findings imply that the participants' discussions about the success of the movement were influenced by the leadership's discussions after one day and up until the fourth day.
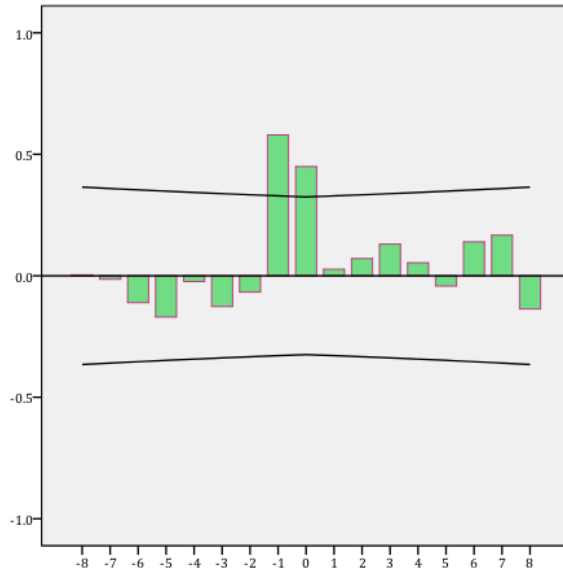
Figure 5. Leadership and Participants Movement Success Frame
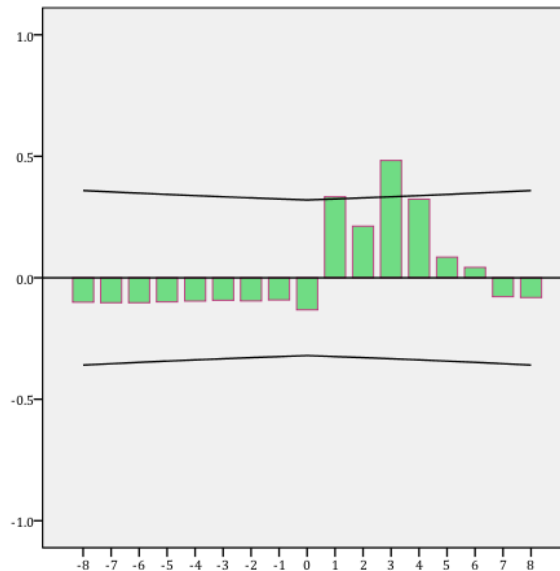
Overall, the findings for the five **cause frames** that were included in the cross-correlations indicate that the leadership's posts influenced those of the participants in the use of four frames: the "information sharing & diffusion," "regime change," "sustainability," and "success" frames. The findings also show no framing influence between the two groups in the "injustice" frame. Generally, the influence on the participants was taking place between the first and third days after the leadership used the frames. Approximately after the fourth day, the two groups did not show any framing influence, which was indicated by insignificant correlations. The only exception is the "regime change" frame where the leadership influenced the participants after six days.

As for the motivational frames, the results indicated that the two groups' discussions had different types of framing influence. As Figure 6 indicates, the participants' "efficacy" frame was unrelated to the leadership's "efficacy" frame, indicated by insignificant cross-correlations. However, the significant cross-correlations are on the left side of the figure, indicating the participants' influence on the leadership. This influence was taking place within the same day and in the following day with significant cross-correlations.

Figure 6. Leadership and Participants Efficacy Frame

According to Figure 7, the participants' "solidarity" frame was only correlated with the leadership's on the second day. The rest of the positive correlations were weak and insignificant to infer influence.

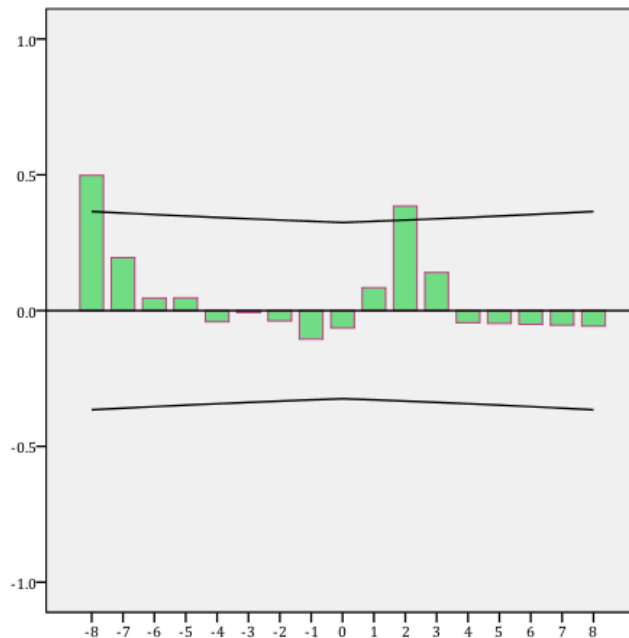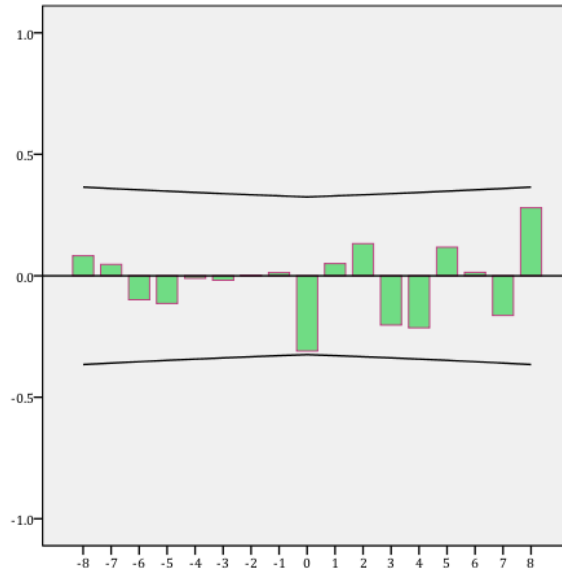*Figure 7. Leadership and Participants Solidarity Frame*

Figure 8 indicates insignificant correlations in the "relevance" frame. Therefore, neither the leadership nor the participants influenced each other's framing in the "relevance" frame.

Figure 8. Leadership and Participants Relevance Frame

Overall, the leadership's posts influenced the participants' posts to use the "solidarity" frame after two days while the participants' posts influenced the leadership's posts to use the "efficacy" frame within the same day and the following day. There was no influence between the leadership and participants in the "relevance" frame. The findings imply that the participants' discussions on efficacy influenced the leadership's posts to also talk about efficacy. This influence took place within the same day of the discussions and one day after.

Figure 9. Leadership and Participants Regime Change Frame
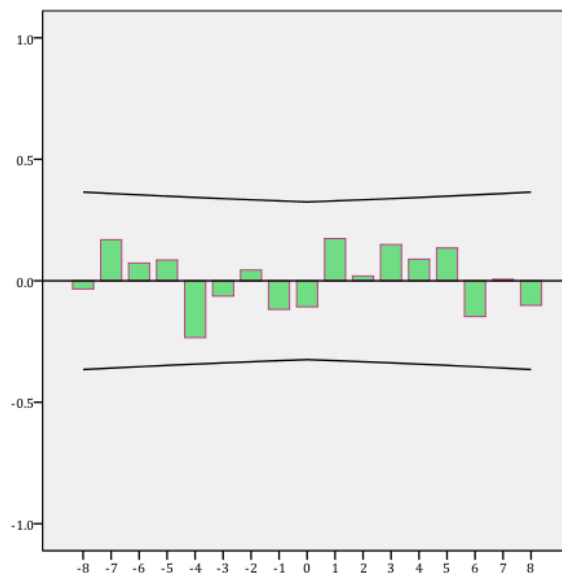
The leadership and participants' "regime change" frame is the only **consequence frame** that has more than 30 cases and qualified for the cross-correlations. There was no influence between the two groups in this frame.

The overall patterns of the cross-correlation analyses provided evidence to indicate that (a) with varying support in the Pearson correlation coefficients, many of the posts published by the leadership appeared to be leading indicators of posts published by the participants; (b) the leadership's posts, hence frames, had greater influence on the participants to use the frames than vice versa, and (c) among the nine frames, only five showed significant values in the cross-correlations. Also, the cross-correlations showed a fairly consistent influence from the leadership to the participants in four frames: information sharing, sustainability, success, and solidarity. In only one frame, "efficacy," the participants influenced the leadership.

Conclusions

The findings show that the leadership and participants of the 6th of April Youth Movement used similar cause, motivational and consequence frames (the three social movement framing tasks). However, the emphasis within these frames was different between the two groups, where the leadership was more frequent in their deployment of the frames than the participants. The findings also indicate that the leadership's posts had a greater framing influence on the participants' posts than vice versa. The time-series analyses revealed either a one-sided framing influence from the leadership to the participants in some frames, or no influence between the two groups in other frames. Therefore, the leadership had a larger influence than the participants in the overall framing of the 6th of April Youth Movement.

Despite the growing influence of general participants in social movements, the *Facebook* posts of the leadership showed a better deployment of the three framing tasks and framing influence than those of the participants. These findings argue against recent communication research that has described today's activism as horizontal and spontaneous due to the opportunities new communication technologies provide to their users. The findings suggest that while some social movement dynamics have changed due to the use of new communication technologies and what they offer to the general participants, social movement activism, in terms of framing, remains mainly a function of its leadership.

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