

Image Policy and Foreign Policy-Making: A Narrative Analysis of Iran's Representation in Online Media in Egypt and Algeria (2020–2025)

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Abstract

The North African region occupies a strategically significant position in Iran's foreign policy, owing to its predominantly Muslim demographics and enduring historical-cultural ties with West Asia. Within this context, Egypt and Algeria stand out as influential media hubs shaping public discourse across both the Arab world and the African continent. This study explores how Iran is narratively represented in leading Egyptian and Algerian online newspapers—al-Ahram and al-Youm in Egypt, and Echorouk and Annahar in Algeria—between 2020 and 2025. The main research question is: How do narrative constructions of Iran in Egyptian and Algerian digital media shape the country's regional image and the broader perception of its political and cultural role in North Africa?

Drawing on qualitative narrative analysis, the research identifies recurring storylines, interpretive frames, and moral evaluations embedded in media portrayals of Iran. The findings indicate that Iran's image across both Egyptian and Algerian media remains predominantly negative, often framed through themes of sectarian tension, ideological rivalry, and regional intervention. However, Algerian coverage presents a somewhat more nuanced and pragmatic tone, occasionally depicting Iran as an autonomous geopolitical actor resisting Western dominance. The study concludes that Iran's current mediated image limits its ability to gain meaningful attention or credibility among African public audiences. The persistence of fragmented and often unfavorable narratives has restricted the resonance of Iran's cultural and political messaging. To address this gap, Iran must adopt a more coherent, transparent, and context-sensitive communication strategy aimed at rebuilding trust and improving its visibility within African public spheres. Such efforts are essential if Iran seeks to transform symbolic recognition into sustainable regional engagement.

Keywords: Iran's image policy, North Africa, narrative analysis, media representation, Egypt, Algeria.

Introduction

In the contemporary media landscape, international perceptions of states are increasingly mediated through digital narratives that define friends, foes, and strategic partners. Mass media have become key arenas in which the legitimacy, intentions, and identity of states are negotiated and reframed. For Iran, a country whose foreign policy discourse emphasizes ideological solidarity, resistance, and regional influence, understanding how it is represented abroad has become vital to assessing its image policy and soft-power projection. This study examines the evolving media image of Iran in two pivotal North African contexts—Egypt and Algeria—between 2020 and 2025. These years encompass a turbulent period in regional politics: the normalization of relations between several Arab states and Israel (2020–2022), the outbreak of the Gaza War in 2023, and the escalation of direct hostilities between Iran and Israel in 2024–2025. Concurrently, Iran intensified its diplomatic engagement with African and Arab nations, seeking to reposition itself as a constructive actor in a reshaped regional order. Within this shifting geopolitical environment, the narratives circulating in Egyptian and Algerian media serve as revealing indicators of how Iran's foreign image is constructed, contested, and circulated across the Arab–African interface.

The central research questions guiding this inquiry are as follows: How do Egyptian and Algerian media narratively frame Iran's role in regional politics? Is Iran portrayed as a stabilizing force, a revolutionary ally, or as a destabilizing and sectarian threat? To what extent do the dominant narratives in these two national media ecosystems reflect ideological proximity, geopolitical rivalry, or pragmatic neutrality toward Iran? To address these questions, the study employs a qualitative narrative analysis of selected online media content from leading outlets—including *Al-Ahram* and *al-Masry al-Youm* in Egypt, and *Echorouk* and *Annahar* in Algeria. The narrative approach allows for the identification of interpretive patterns, recurring storylines, and framing devices that underpin Iran's mediated identity (Riessman, 2008; Ottosen, 1995). Rather than focusing on isolated news items, the analysis seeks to uncover broader story structures and moral discourses embedded in media representations. Online media were selected as the primary corpus because they have become the dominant channel for political communication and public debate in both Egypt and Algeria, particularly during moments of regional crisis. The selection of the 2020–2025 timeframe captures a multidimensional phase in Iran's

external relations—from diplomatic outreach in Africa to heightened confrontation with Israel—thereby offering a comprehensive view of how its image fluctuates across contexts of war, negotiation, and ideological competition. By integrating insights from narrative theory and image studies, this research contributes to a nuanced understanding of how North African media articulate Iran's place within the broader Arab and Islamic world. It situates media discourse not merely as a reflection of state policy, but as an active site of meaning-making that shapes public consciousness and geopolitical imaginaries across the region.

1. Literature Review

The present study seeks to assess the image of Iran's foreign policy in the North African region, with particular attention to Egypt and Algeria. Within the broader field of Iranian foreign policy toward Africa, several scholarly contributions stand out, including those by Nourigholamzadeh and Amiri (2020), Mohammadi and Badr-Gharmi (2022), and Shariati and Rasuli (2024). Persian-language scholarship has produced a steadily expanding body of research examining the interaction between media and foreign policy, especially in relation to how communication technologies shape national images and diplomatic behavior. Hakim (2019), in *The Influence of Media on Foreign Policy*, contends that the communication and information revolution has significantly enhanced the media's role in both the formulation and perception of foreign policy. Similarly, Zolfaghari (2020), in *The Impact of Mass Media on the Formulation and Implementation of Contemporary Foreign Policy*, argues that mass media operate not only as cognitive instruments shaping public opinion but also as tools of political authority through which states can legitimize or challenge prevailing international narratives. A further contribution by Bozorgmehri and Nemati (2011), *The Impact of Media Diplomacy on Foreign Policy: An Explanation of Strategies*, conceptualizes media as a form of “diplomatic capital”—an instrument capable of influencing international negotiations, managing crises, and shaping political agendas. Collectively, these studies underscore the reciprocal relationship between communication systems and policymaking, wherein the “politics of image” increasingly defines the contours of foreign relations in the digital age. Much of the existing literature has focused on the media's capacity to construct or distort the image of nations. Farghani and Ahmadi (2011), in *Portrayal of Iran's Nuclear Activities in International Television*

Networks, demonstrate that international media coverage can align global public opinion with the political objectives of dominant powers, thereby marginalizing alternative perspectives, such as those advanced by Iran. From a comparative standpoint, Tarasheva and Wheeler (2019), in *The Image of a Country Created by International Media: The Case of Bulgaria*, reveal how international media tend to reproduce negative stereotypes, shaping perceptions that transcend policy realities. Likewise, Wang and Wang (2018), in *Chinese Perceptions of the EU: The Impact of Social Media Use*, show that digital media platforms can foster mutual understanding between regions, suggesting that mediated communication has become an indispensable component of contemporary diplomacy.

Additional references underscore the complex interplay between media systems and foreign policy formation. Duncombe (2017) examines how digital diplomacy reshapes state behavior; Mohammadi and Hossaini (2020) discuss the media's agenda-setting role in Iranian diplomacy; and Khosravi and Rahimi (2021) explore how national image influences international negotiations. Classic works such as Robinson (2017), Baum and Potter (2008), Peffley and Hurwitz (1992), and Hulme (2001) provide broader theoretical insights into the relationship between media framing, public opinion, and policy decision-making. Despite the diversity of these contributions, a critical gap remains in the literature: few studies have systematically investigated how Iran's foreign policy both shapes and is shaped by its mediated image in other countries—particularly within the Arab and African media spheres. Addressing this gap, the present study integrates the “politics of image” framework into the analysis of Iran's media representation, aiming to contribute to a deeper understanding of how media narratives influence policy perceptions, strategic legitimacy, and the prospects of Iran's regional diplomacy.

2. Theoretical Framework & Methodology

The Image Theory in international relations and political communication addresses how states are perceived and represented by other nations and their publics. According to this theory, countries are not understood as objective realities but as subjective mental images—constructed and circulated through symbolic mediation. These images typically categorize nations as “friends,” “enemies,” “opportunities,” or “threats,” with the media serving as a primary mechanism for their production and reproduction (Ottosen, 1995). Within this framework, a country's image represents a

composite of beliefs, perceptions, and emotions regarding its political, economic, cultural, and moral characteristics (Oppenheimer, 2006). Such images tend to be simplified and generalized, reinforced through media discourse, education, diplomacy, and political rhetoric. From a political theory perspective, the friend–enemy distinction—first articulated by Carl Schmitt—constitutes one of the conceptual foundations of image politics, since international relations inherently operate through processes of boundary-making between “us” and “them” (Geró, 2017). Contemporary research emphasizes that these images are dynamic and mutable. For example, during the Cold War, Western media portrayed the Soviet Union as an existential threat, whereas post-1991 representations recast Russia as a market opportunity (Williams, 2018). Thus, image politics are contingent on geopolitical transformations and the evolving media discourses that interpret them.

From a psychological standpoint, the enemy image is often shaped by negative generalizations, labeling, and the perception of unilateral threat—serving to legitimize defensive or even aggressive actions (Oppenheimer, 2006). Conversely, friend or opportunity images are anchored in notions of trust, cultural affinity, and shared interests (Davies, Milner, & Tingley, 2021). In parallel, Thussu (2005) highlights the structural inequalities of the global information order. The flow of news and information is predominantly unidirectional—from the center to the periphery—creating a dependency in which wealthier nations impose their informational frameworks upon less-developed societies. This vertical communication system, dominated by Western transnational corporations, commodifies information and perpetuates asymmetries in global media representation (Thussu, 2005, p. 60). At the media level, news agencies construct and guide public perceptions through selective framing, lexical choices, and source bias. Coverage of wars, for instance, often relies on threatening or humanizing metaphors and symbolic imagery that reinforce specific national images (Ottosen, 1995; Williams, 2018). Media thus play a critical role in constructing the “Other,” embedding national identities within a web of politically charged meanings. In summary, Image Theory posits that international politics are shaped not only by material power but also by the perceptions and representations states hold of one another. These mediated images, transmitted through journalism and official discourse, influence foreign policy orientations, public opinion, and

intergovernmental relations. Consequently, analyzing media-based image politics becomes a key tool for understanding how processes of “enemy-making” and “friend-making” operate within the international system (Gerő, 2017; Wehner, 2023).

This research adopts an interpretivist qualitative approach, employing narrative analysis to examine how Iran is represented in Egyptian and Algerian media during the 2020–2025 period. The emphasis lies not on the quantitative volume of coverage but on the core narratives that embody the “image of the country” (Image Theory) within media discourse (Ottosen, 1995; Gerő, 2017). Narrative analysis seeks to uncover the underlying structures of meaning and the ways in which stories are constructed in media texts, rather than merely counting words or themes (Riessman, 2008). Accordingly, each news report, editorial, or analytical article in the selected newspapers is treated as a narrative unit with its own structure, protagonists, antagonists, and internal value systems (Somers, 1994). The corpus of analysis consists of major Egyptian and Algerian newspapers that maintain active online editions and regularly publish foreign policy coverage, including *al-Ahram* and *al-Masry al-Youm* (Egypt), and *Echorouk* and *Annahar* (Algeria). The timeframe—from January 2020 to October 2025—captures several major regional developments: the Arab–Israeli normalization process, the 2023 Gaza War, and subsequent escalations involving Iran's regional role. Sampling follows a purposive strategy, focusing exclusively on reports, op-eds, and analytical pieces that explicitly reference Iran and contain narrative-forming elements—such as metaphors, portrayals of leadership, or friend/enemy framing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The analytical process proceeds in three stages: open coding to identify key themes within each narrative (e.g., Iran as a security threat, cultural Iran, religious Iran); axial coding to reveal connections among themes and map relationships between positive and negative representations (Charmaz, 2014); and interpretive analysis to uncover the narrative logic and compare the discursive orientations of Egyptian and Algerian newspapers toward Iran. To enhance interpretive validity, cross-source comparison is applied between newspapers and official governmental discourses (Wehner, 2023). Additionally, to strengthen reliability, the findings are reviewed by two coders (Miles et al., 2014). This methodological design enables the study to move beyond surface-level textual features toward an interpretive understanding of how Iranian identity and intent are narratively negotiated in two contrasting North African contexts.

3. The Portrayal of Iran in Egyptian Media

Egypt is among the African countries with one of the oldest traditions of newspaper publication. Compared to other African nations, it has the largest number of media outlets, with dozens of newspapers and magazines published in both print and online formats. The majority of Egyptian newspapers are state-owned or affiliated with religious institutions. According to Egyptian media law, publication licenses are granted exclusively to legal entities by the Supreme Press Council, which effectively limits the press landscape to institutions and political organizations aligned with the state. Consequently, Egyptian media largely reproduce and reinforce governmental discourse. Among the country's major publishing institutions are *al-Ahram*, *al-Gomhuria*, and *Akhbar al-Youm*, each of which not only publishes its own flagship newspaper but also oversees the publication of a range of specialized periodicals in economics, society, and religion. These institutions have even established affiliated research centers. Egypt also hosts dozens of non-Arabic-language publications—in English, French, Armenian, and Turkish. Interestingly, in the early twentieth century, three Persian-language journals (*Hekmat*, *Parvaresh*, and *Sorayya*) were published in Egypt, though currently no Persian-language media outlets exist in the country. According to the 2025 Reporters Without Borders index, Egypt ranked 170th globally in press freedom, reflecting its highly controlled media environment (RSF, 2025). The Egyptian media outlet selected for this study is the online edition of *al-Ahram*. Founded on August 5, 1875, *al-Ahram* is Egypt's oldest and most widely circulated newspaper and is considered one of the most authoritative references for written Arabic across the Arab world. In 1950, the Middle East Institute described *al-Ahram* as “the Times of the Arab world,” comparable to *The Times* in the United Kingdom or *The New York Times* in the United States. Despite this reputation, the newspaper has frequently been criticized for its close alignment with state narratives and heavy censorship. During the editorship of Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, *al-Ahram* gained international prestige as one of the world's ten most influential newspapers. The institution also established a network of research centers, including the *al-Ahram* Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS), where Arab scholars analyze domestic and international affairs. Among these centers, the Iran Studies Unit was once responsible for publishing a Persian-oriented monthly entitled *Mukhtarat Iraniyah* (“Iranian Selections”), which analyzed Iran-related issues—though this publication appears to have been discontinued. Given *al-Ahram's*

extensive coverage of political, economic, and social issues, and its large circulation among Egypt's intellectual and policymaking elite, it exerts substantial influence on Egyptian and African public opinion. In its reporting on Iran, *al-Ahram* provides daily coverage and analytical commentary on Iran's domestic affairs and foreign policy—particularly during periods of heightened tension. Considering its institutional structure and the broader state-controlled nature of Egyptian media, its portrayals of the Islamic Republic are particularly revealing of how national image and political narratives are constructed. Moreover, Saudi financial support to certain Egyptian newspapers and columnists has further shaped the framing of Iran in Egyptian media, contributing to asymmetric narrative flows that rarely receive counter-responses within Egyptian or African public spheres. Over time, these mediated representations become internalized as collective perceptions of Iran among audiences.

3-1. Narrative Construction of Egypt–Iran Relations

For over four decades following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Egypt and Iran have maintained cold and distant diplomatic relations, a fact consistently reflected in *al-Ahram's* narrative framing. The newspaper frequently revisits the origins of this estrangement, typically citing Ayatollah Khomeini's decision to sever diplomatic ties with Cairo following Egypt's 1979 Camp David Accords with Israel, and Egypt's later decision to host the exiled Shah of Iran (Ahram Online, 29 May 2023). This framing portrays the rupture as a unilateral act of hostility by Iran, suggesting that Tehran imposed a binary choice on Cairo—between solidarity with the Islamic Republic or alignment with Israel—while simultaneously condemning Egypt for providing refuge to the Shah. However, an interpretive reading of this narrative reveals an underlying discursive asymmetry: *al-Ahram's* framing aligns with Egypt's post-Nasserist, pro-Western orientation, presenting Iran's revolutionary stance as the primary obstacle to normalization. From the perspective of Image Theory, this representation situates Iran as an ideological “other” whose regional policies and anti-Western positions are seen as threatening Egyptian interests.

In recent coverage, *al-Ahram* reported on the meeting between Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei and the Sultan of Oman, framing it as an indication of Tehran's eagerness to restore relations with Egypt (Ahram Online, 29 May 2023). The article emphasized Iran's overtures while highlighting Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry's televised remarks denying any

diplomatic progress, reiterating Cairo's unchanged position toward Tehran. The report also discussed Iran's initiative to establish direct Tehran–Cairo flights, presenting it as a unilateral gesture by Iran (Ahram Online, 2 Jul 2023).

Further, *al-Ahram* linked Egypt's stance toward Iran to Tehran's relations with Saudi Arabia, suggesting that any genuine rapprochement with Egypt would depend on Iran's reconciliation with Riyadh. This relational framing reflects how Egyptian media situate Iran's image within broader regional power alignments rather than purely bilateral dynamics. Citing analysts such as Mohamed Abbas and Eman Ragab, *al-Ahram's* commentary consistently frames Iranian diplomacy as one-sided and reactive, portraying Egypt as cautious and conditionally receptive to engagement. Abbas characterizes the relationship as “asymmetric,” implying that Tehran seeks normalization primarily for strategic relief from isolation (Al-Gamal, 15 May 2023). Ragab reinforces this view, arguing that no meaningful change in Egypt–Iran relations can occur without a substantive shift in Iran's regional behavior, particularly regarding Syria, Palestine, and Iraq (Ragab, 6 Jun 2023).

Through these narrative structures, *al-Ahram* constructs an image of the Islamic Republic as an isolated, interventionist state seeking partners in Africa to escape international isolation. This portrayal, consistent with the logic of Image Theory, underscores how media framing operationalizes political distance through discursive “othering.”

3-2. Narrative Construction of Iran's Relations with Arab States

A significant portion of *al-Ahram's* Iran-related coverage since 2023 has focused on the Saudi–Iran rapprochement, a topic of particular relevance to Egyptian and African political audiences. While Egyptian policymakers continue to exercise caution toward Tehran, *al-Ahram's* reporting suggests that improved Iran–Gulf relations, especially with Saudi Arabia, could indirectly influence Egypt's diplomatic posture. Following President Ebrahim Raisi's initiative to reestablish ties with Riyadh, *al-Ahram* published multiple analyses decoding Iran's new regional strategy, often interpreting it as a tactical maneuver aimed at regaining legitimacy rather than a substantive policy transformation (Ahram Online, 17 Jun 2023). In its coverage of Iran's naval exercises in the Persian Gulf, *al-Ahram* exhibits a pattern of lexical variation, alternately referring to the body of water as “the Gulf,” “the Persian Gulf,” and “the Arabian Gulf.” This inconsistency reflects an editorial strategy of discursive

neutrality—an attempt to avoid alienating Gulf allies while maintaining journalistic ambiguity. However, *al-Ahram*'s reports frequently describe Iran's seizure of foreign oil tankers as “adventurism,” neglecting to contextualize such actions within the broader framework of U.S. sanctions and maritime security tensions. The newspaper routinely reproduces claims that Iran “occupies” the islands of Greater and Lesser Tunbs and Abu Musa, aligning its terminology with Emirati and Saudi narratives (Ahram Online, 2 Aug 2023). Through these discursive strategies, *al-Ahram* participates in the regional reproduction of Iran's image as a destabilizing actor, reinforcing a perception of Iran as an assertive yet isolated power. This process of mediated othering, consistent with Image Theory and the interpretivist approach adopted in this research, reveals how narrative framing and linguistic choices serve as mechanisms of symbolic boundary construction in the Egyptian media's portrayal of Iran.

3-3. Narrative Construction of Iran–West Relations

Al-Ahram, along with several other prominent Egyptian media outlets, has consistently devoted considerable attention to the anti-Western and anti-American positions of the Islamic Republic of Iran, particularly those articulated by the Supreme Leader (Ahram Online, 2 Nov 2022).

Notably, *al-Ahram*'s relatively sympathetic tone in certain reports—especially those addressing U.S.–Iranian tensions—suggests a gradual recalibration in Egypt's, and more broadly the Arab region's, attitudes toward Washington. While this shift may indicate a subtle estrangement from U.S. policy, it should not be interpreted as a rapprochement with Iran. At best, it can be compared to the Late-Pahlavi ambivalence toward the United States in the final years of Mohammad Reza Shah's rule.

In another series of reports, *al-Ahram* focused on Iran's nuclear program, presenting it as a central component of Tehran's confrontation with Washington (Ahram Online, 11 Jun 2023). The coverage implicitly questioned the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear activities, framing them instead as evidence of Tehran's defiance of Western norms. Analysts affiliated with *al-Ahram* have also devoted extensive attention to Iran's military capabilities, particularly in the context of the Russia–Ukraine war (Ahram Online, 12 Jul 2023). The alignment of *al-Ahram*'s framing with that of U.S. officials—especially through the reproduction of allegations concerning Iranian military support for Russia—reveals a distinctly

negative tone toward Iran. Within this narrative framework, the West is implicitly endowed with a degree of legitimacy in its regional interventions in West Asia and Eastern Europe, while Iran is depicted as an opportunistic actor inclined toward confrontation and adventurism vis-à-vis the United States. In another series of reports, *al-Ahram* focused on Iran's nuclear program, presenting it as a central component of Tehran's confrontation with Washington (Ahram Online, 11 Jun 2023). The coverage implicitly questioned the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear activities, framing them instead as evidence of Tehran's defiance of Western norms. Analysts affiliated with *al-Ahram* have also devoted extensive attention to Iran's military capabilities, particularly in the context of the Russia–Ukraine war (Ahram Online, 12 Jul 2023). The alignment of *al-Ahram's* framing with that of U.S. officials—especially through the reproduction of allegations concerning Iranian military support for Russia—reveals a distinctly negative tone toward Iran. Within this narrative framework, the West is implicitly endowed with a degree of legitimacy in its regional interventions in West Asia and Eastern Europe, while Iran is depicted as an opportunistic actor inclined toward confrontation and adventurism vis-à-vis the United States.

This mode of representation not only mirrors the language of Western outlets such as The Guardian and Reuters but also functions as a mechanism for reproducing the West's image of Iran as a repressive, hyper-security state. One of *al-Ahram's* most recent analyses—issued by the *al-Ahram* Center for Political and Strategic Studies—addresses the twelve-day war between Iran and Israel. The report outlines sixteen “strategic lessons” for Egypt and the Arab world, emphasizing deterrence as the key to national security and asserting that only states capable of an effective retaliatory response can avoid Israeli attacks. According to *al-Ahram*, Iran's demonstrated capacity to inflict damage on Israel was a decisive factor in Tel Aviv's request for a ceasefire via Washington. The analysis concluded that, despite Israel's and the United States' conventional superiority, their strategic goals in Iran were not achieved. Moreover, the report praised Iran's “strategic rationality” in avoiding escalation and highlighted the limits of regional hegemony, noting that the reluctance of non-state allies to enter the conflict exposed the constraints of proxy warfare. *Al-Ahram* ultimately inferred that the cessation of hostilities between Iran and Israel marked not an end to tensions but the beginning of a new phase of strategic rivalry in the region (CPSS.Ahram, Jul 2025).

3-4. Narrative Construction of Iranian Society

al-Ahram's portrayal of Iranian domestic affairs reached its peak during the 2022–2023 protests, widely referred to by the opposition as the “Mahsa Revolution” or “Women, Life, Freedom” movement. Drawing heavily on Western media sources, the newspaper characterized the events as the “greatest challenge to the Islamic Republic since 1979,” echoing the terminology used by *The Guardian* (6 November 2022). Throughout this period, *al-Ahram* provided continuous coverage of developments in Iran, linking the anniversary celebrations of the 1979 Revolution in February 2023 to the preceding unrest. By doing so, it sought to frame Iran as a politically unstable state on the verge of major social upheaval or even a renewed revolution.

A narrative analysis of *al-Ahram's* linguistic and thematic choices indicates a deliberate emphasis on alleged human-rights violations and state repression, aiming to construct Iran's image as an authoritarian regime in the eyes of African and Arab audiences. The newspaper also attributed public discontent to economic decline and to Iran's alleged military support for Russia in the Ukraine war. While the former claim partially reflects socio-economic realities, the latter appears less grounded in domestic evidence and more consistent with Western diplomatic rhetoric. This convergence suggests a structural alignment between Egypt's state-affiliated media discourse and that of Western outlets when addressing Iran's domestic and international behavior (*Ahram Online*, 11 Feb 2023).

The evaluation of Iran's image in Egyptian online media from 2020 to 2025 reveals several dominant narrative trends. First, Iran is represented simultaneously as an influential regional power and a potential threat to Middle Eastern stability. Egyptian mainstream outlets—particularly those aligned with Cairo's official foreign-policy stance—focus on Iran's nuclear ambitions, its support for resistance groups in Lebanon, Palestine, and Yemen, and its rivalry with Saudi Arabia. These elements are framed as sources of instability and competition. Conversely, a smaller subset of independent Egyptian media presents Iran as a rational actor with strategic deterrent capacity and an adaptive foreign policy capable of managing threats and external pressures. Such portrayals recognize Iran's military and diplomatic acumen, its experience in confronting Israel and the United States, and its role within the “axis of resistance,” while simultaneously emphasizing the limits of Iranian hegemony and the country's domestic constraints. Overall, the mediated image of Iran in Egyptian discourse constitutes a

hybrid of threat perception, strategic respect, and conditional rationality. It reflects the intersection of regional power politics and Egypt's pragmatic foreign-policy orientation vis-à-vis both Tehran and Western or Persian Gulf actors.

Table (1). Narrative Dimensions of Iran's Image in al-Ahram (2020–2025)

Dimension	Core Narrative Proposition	Image Policy Orientation
Political	Iran is portrayed as a strategically influential yet politically isolated actor, whose assertive regional behavior coexists with internal vulnerability.	Critical - Ambivalent
Religious	The narrative frames Iran as a promoter of Shia ideology that challenges Arab–Sunni unity and regional religious equilibrium.	Negative
Economic	Iran is represented as a potential but uncertain economic partner, constrained by sanctions and domestic mismanagement.	Cautious - Pragmatic
Military	Iran's military posture is narrated as dualistic—a defensive resistance discourse presented by Iranian sources, and an aggressive destabilizing force in external media framing.	Negative - Contradictory
Scientific / Technological	Iranian scientific progress is acknowledged but frequently subordinated to military or political motives, limiting its portrayal as independent innovation.	Neutral - Skeptical
Diplomatic	Iran appears as an interventionist yet necessary actor in regional diplomacy, whose influence is tolerated but carefully monitored by Arab governments.	Cautious - Conditional

Source: (Author)

4. The Portrayal of Iran in Algerian Media

Algeria, the largest country in Africa since the partition of Sudan in 2011, remains a critical media hub on the continent. With a population projected to reach approximately 47 million by 2026, the nation possesses a complex and multilingual media landscape shaped by its colonial history and cultural heterogeneity. Due to the

long-standing presence of France in Algeria, French continues to coexist with Arabic as a dominant language of communication and journalism (Hafez, 2007). Consequently, both state-affiliated and independent newspapers are published in French and Arabic, reflecting the country's multicultural and multivocal media sphere. The Algerian press system encompasses a broad array of publications, including the prominent Arabic-language newspapers *El Watan* and *El Khabar*, and the major French-language dailies *El Moudjahid* and *Liberté*. These outlets collectively address a wide spectrum of topics—ranging from local politics and international affairs to the economy, sports, and culture—serving as crucial intermediaries between public opinion and state institutions. As of 2025, Algeria hosts more than 300 media institutions, including approximately 180 active newspapers and 4,000 professional journalists (IRNA, 8 August 2018). Internet penetration is estimated at 77%, with roughly 37 million Algerians connected to online platforms (Kemp, 3 March 2025). However, the Reporters Without Borders Index ranks Algeria 126th globally in press freedom, reflecting the tension between state control and journalistic autonomy.

The Algerian Press Service (APS), founded in 1961 during the War of Independence, remains the country's sole official news agency. Since its nationalization in 1985, APS has provided multilingual coverage in Arabic, French, Amazigh, and English. Alongside traditional media, digital journalism has grown rapidly over the past decade, prompting the Algerian government to issue specific regulatory frameworks for the establishment and operation of online media platforms. Given the historical and linguistic influence of France, French-language newspapers in Algeria often echo elements of French foreign policy perspectives. Therefore, this research focuses primarily on two leading Arabic-language digital outlets—*Echorouk Online* and *Annahar Online*—which maintain high readership across North Africa and provide distinctive indigenous narratives about Iran. Both outlets are major agenda-setters in the Algerian and broader Maghrebi media space. *Echorouk*, one of the most influential and multilingual media groups in North Africa, operates news platforms in Arabic, French, and English, in addition to running a popular television channel and maintaining extensive activity across global social networks such as Facebook, Twitter (X), and Telegram. Similarly, *Annahar* functions as a privately owned media conglomerate encompassing a highly trafficked online news portal and a private television channel, known

for its populist yet wide-reaching coverage (alger.mfa.ir, 2024).

This study, similar to the analysis conducted for Egypt, employs a qualitative narrative approach to examine selected reports and editorials from *Echorouk* and *Annahar* published between 2020 and 2025. Following the methodological framework adopted in comparative image studies (Ottosen, 1995; Entman, 2004), the research examines how these outlets construct Iran's image across political, religious, economic, military, and diplomatic dimensions. Rather than analyzing every published article, the focus is placed on key narrative frames and recurring storylines that reflect how Iran is symbolically represented in Algerian public discourse. By combining media framing with narrative inquiry, the analysis seeks to identify the interpretive logics underlying Algerian representations of Iran. This hybrid methodology enables a nuanced exploration of discursive convergence and divergence between Egyptian and Algerian media portrayals, situating them within broader regional communication patterns and geopolitical alignments.

4-1. Narrative Construction of Iran–Algeria Relations

Algeria represents one of the few Arab–African states that, in recent years, has exhibited a degree of willingness to maintain and even expand cultural relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Nonetheless, given the long-standing fluctuations and recurrent tensions in bilateral relations, Algerian media outlets often adopt inconsistent and occasionally adversarial stances toward Iran, frequently portraying it as an interventionist actor in domestic Arab affairs. Within the framework of narrative analysis, the media discourse in Algeria constructs Iran's identity through selective storytelling and interpretive framing of historical and contemporary events. A representative example of this trend can be found in Edris Rabouh's article, "Iranian Interventions and Their Impact on Algerian–Tehran Relations," published in *Echorouk Daily*. The author adopts a distinctly critical position, characterizing Iran as an interfering power within the Arab world and, specifically, in Algerian domestic affairs.

Rabouh describes the history of Iran–Algeria relations as "turbulent," attributing these oscillations to what he calls Iran's "policy of exporting the revolution" and its "tolerance of intervention in the internal affairs of Islamic countries." He presents Algeria as a peace-seeking nation that historically supported Iran at critical junctures, such as mediating the Iran–Iraq border dispute during the Pahlavi era and aligning with the revolutionary forces during the 1979 Iranian Revolution. According to Rabouh, these

gestures reflected Algeria's own revolutionary heritage and its commitment to international solidarity against Western imperialism.

However, Rabouh contends that Iran failed to reciprocate these gestures of goodwill. He accuses the Iranian government and diplomatic corps of misjudging Algeria's internal political situation following the October 1988 uprisings, alleging that the Iranian embassy supported opposition elements and even hosted meetings among Algerian political leaders. While this assertion lacks corroboration, such narratives reveal how Algerian media construct a perception of Iran as an intrusive and politically naïve actor—an interpretation that continues to shape public discourse decades later.

The article further cites Iran's alleged missteps, including what it describes as inappropriate reactions by Iranian officials to the assassination of Algerian President Mohamed Boudiaf and the purported siege of the Algerian Embassy in Tehran by certain political groups prior to his presidency. Rabouh also references Iran's decision to open a consulate in Oujda, Morocco—near the Algerian border—during a period of heightened tension between Algeria and Morocco. He interprets this as a direct threat to Algerian national security, which, in his narrative, justified Algeria's expulsion of Iranian diplomats and the subsequent severance of diplomatic ties in the early 1990s. From Rabouh's perspective, Algeria's decision to renounce its role as Iran's protecting power in Washington and to accuse Tehran of supporting terrorist groups marked the culmination of Iran's alleged interference. Even when Iran chaired the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in the late 1990s, he argues, Algerian diplomacy resisted Iranian overtures due to Tehran's continued pursuit of influence within Algeria's domestic political sphere. Yet, this narrative analysis reveals a deeper layer: Algerian media's representation of Iran is shaped less by verifiable diplomatic behavior and more by enduring frames of “soft interventionism” and “ideological exportation.” Such framings reinforce the collective memory of Algeria's revolutionary autonomy vis-à-vis foreign ideological powers.

Rabouh's article further extends this narrative into the 2000s and 2010s, arguing that Iran has shifted from overt political interference to soft interventions through cultural diplomacy. He cites the activities of Amir Mousavi, Iran's former cultural attaché in Algiers, as evidence of this continuity, accusing him of “suspicious social media activism” and “unofficial provincial engagements.” According to Rabouh, these alleged behaviors led to Mousavi's departure in 2018. This episode, recurrently invoked in Algerian media, exemplifies how past and present narratives coalesce to

perpetuate a discourse of vigilance toward Iran's cultural presence. At the conclusion of the analysis, the author asserts that although Algeria seeks to maintain and expand its relations with Tehran, it remains highly sensitive to any perceived interference by the Islamic Republic of Iran in Algeria or in other Arab countries in the Persian Gulf region. According to the author, such relations can only be meaningfully realized if Iran refrains from interventionist actions that undermine Arab sovereignty. The article further emphasizes that “Algeria is committed to the collective security of the Arab world,” a stance reflected in its reactions to attacks by Iran's allies against Saudi and Emirati interests. Rabouh argues that Algeria is “eager for Arab reunification, the revival of joint Arab initiatives, and the strengthening of its immunity against Iranian interference.” He concludes with a pointed remark, noting that “Iran interferes in Algeria despite the geographical distance—let alone in its immediate neighborhood in Iraq, the Levant, the Arabian Peninsula, and Yemen” (Ribouh, 12 Feb 2022).

This concluding perspective encapsulates Algeria's cautious diplomatic posture: while open to constructive engagement with Iran, it defines the boundaries of cooperation through the lens of non-interference and collective Arab security—a theme recurrent in Algerian political discourse and echoed across its major media outlets. Despite these accusations, Algerian media simultaneously acknowledge the country's pragmatic interest in maintaining diplomatic ties with Iran. Coverage of high-level meetings between Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, Iran's Foreign Minister, and his Algerian counterpart Ramtane Lamamra—for instance, reports headlined “Tehran Calls for Convening the Joint Economic Committee with Algeria”—illustrates a dual narrative. On one hand, Iran is portrayed as eager to strengthen cooperation; on the other, Algeria is depicted as cautiously receptive yet alert to perceived risks of interference (Echorouk online, 8 Jan 2023).

From a methodological perspective, these discourses exemplify the narrative variability that narrative analysis seeks to uncover. Algerian media, particularly *Echorouk* and *Annahar*, construct Iran's image through repetitive storytelling patterns that oscillate between cautionary tales of interference and pragmatic acknowledgment of Iran's geopolitical relevance. This dichotomy—of engagement versus suspicion—constitutes the dominant narrative frame through which Algeria's mediated perception of Iran is articulated from 2020 to 2025.

4-2. Narrative Construction of Iran's Relations with Arab States

Another dominant narrative thread in Algerian media discourse concerns the representation of Iran's relations with Arab countries. This theme frequently appears in *Echorouk* and *Annahar's* reporting on Iran and serves as an indicator of how Algerian outlets situate Tehran within the wider Arab political and identity framework. Consistent with the methodological framework of narrative analysis, these representations reveal how Algerian journalism selectively frames episodes of rapprochement or confrontation to produce a coherent image of Iran's regional conduct.

Across multiple reports, *Echorouk* presents Iran's attempts to restore relations with Arab states—particularly Saudi Arabia—as a positive development, reflecting Algeria's broader preference for inter-Arab reconciliation and stability (Abdol-Momen, 8 Jul 2023). Similarly, *Annahar's* coverage of the diplomatic normalization between Tehran and Riyadh, though framed through the lens of caution, reveals a generally favorable perception of dialogue. In one notable headline, “Iran Sets a Hypothetical Deadline to Reopen Its Embassy in Saudi Arabia,” the newspaper recounts the 2016 rupture in diplomatic relations following the execution of Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr and the subsequent attack on Saudi diplomatic missions in Iran. However, by emphasizing the latter event in its headline—“the attack on Saudi diplomatic missions”—*Annahar* subtly reinforces the image of Iran as a state that disregards diplomatic norms, even as it acknowledges the proximate cause of the crisis in Riyadh's execution of the cleric (*Annahar*, 17 Apr 2023).

This rhetorical structure—a balanced narrative underpinned by moral asymmetry—is characteristic of Algerian narrative framing of Iran: while the restoration of ties is depicted as beneficial, the underlying storyline often positions Tehran as the instigator of conflict and Riyadh as a rational actor seeking peace. In another *Annahar* report authored by Sharik Ali, Iran is explicitly blamed for the rupture, accused of exhibiting “illogical and undiplomatic behavior” toward Saudi Arabia. The article constructs a binary narrative in which Saudi Arabia symbolizes moderation and diplomacy, while Iran embodies aggression and ideological excess—an interpretive frame consistent with Image Theory's depiction of the “enemy image” as emotionally moralized and historically sedimented (cf. Herrmann, 1985; Cottam, 1994).

One of *Annahar's* most revealing analytical pieces, published on 15 June 2025, adopts a broader regional perspective. Framed as a chronological review of events between 7 October 2023 and the

Israeli attack on Iran in June 2025, the article seeks to contextualize these turning points as defining moments in Middle Eastern power realignment. It characterizes 7 October 2023—the beginning of the Gaza war—as “the collapse of Israel's security order and the onset of a new phase of asymmetric deterrence,” while describing the June 2025 Israeli airstrikes on Iran as “the day of balance consolidation,” when regional power structures were fundamentally recalibrated. The article concludes that the Middle East has entered an era of genuine multipolarity: Washington no longer stands as the “sole arbiter,” and Tehran, despite international isolation, has consolidated its strategic relevance within the region's evolving security architecture (Annahar, 15 Jun 2025). Within the logic of narrative analysis, these articles exemplify how Algerian media construct Iran's image as a paradoxical actor—both a challenger to Western hegemony and a destabilizing force within the Arab sphere. The coexistence of admiration for Iran's defiance and anxiety over its ideological assertiveness reflects a nuanced but ambivalent identity narrative, one that sustains the image of Iran as simultaneously powerful and problematic.

4-3. Narrative Construction of Iran's Relations with the West

The second major thematic axis in Algerian coverage of Iran concerns Tehran's relations with the West, particularly the United States. Algerian newspapers frequently interpret the Iran–West dynamic as a litmus test for Tehran's global legitimacy and as a variable shaping its relations with Algiers itself. From a methodological standpoint, this focus exemplifies the “narrative interdependence” that Image Theory anticipates: perceptions of a state's external alignments influence its broader reputational profile within third-party media (cf. Herrmann & Fischerkeller, 1995).

In this respect, *Annahar* provides extensive coverage of the indirect Tehran–Washington negotiations mediated by Oman, treating them as crucial developments for regional stability (Annahar, 23 Jun 2023). Other reports discuss the possibility of U.S. or Israeli military confrontation with Iran, yet they are notably restrained in tone—neither overtly sympathetic to the West nor explicitly antagonistic toward Iran. This moderation contrasts with earlier, more polarized framings and suggests a degree of professional neutrality in Algerian reporting on Western diplomacy.

Nevertheless, a consistent pattern emerges: while Western sanctions on Iran are routinely mentioned, the human and humanitarian impacts of these sanctions are largely omitted. Instead,

Algerian news narratives prioritize Iran's countermeasures—its acceleration of nuclear enrichment, restrictions on International Atomic Energy Agency inspections, and resistance to Western pressure (Isa, 10 Aug 2022). This selective framing constructs Iran not as a victim but as a defiant and opaque actor, emphasizing its assertiveness rather than its vulnerability. A representative example is *Annahar's* analytical piece by George Issa, titled “Are the United States and Iran Near Reviving the Nuclear Deal?” (Isa, 10 Aug 2022). The article underscores the Algerian press's sustained interest in Iran's engagement with Western powers, suggesting that Tehran's diplomatic standing in Algeria is closely tied to the trajectory of its Western relations. The underlying implication, consistent with Image Theory, is that a positive shift in Iran–West relations enhances its perceived reliability and prestige within Algerian discourse, thereby opening pathways for improved bilateral cooperation. Overall, the narrative analysis of these reports reveals that Algerian media interpret Iran's diplomacy toward the West as both a measure of its rationality and a precondition for its reintegration into the global system. Consequently, the outcome of Tehran's interactions with Washington symbolically conditions Algeria's willingness to view Iran as a credible and cooperative partner.

4-4. Narrative Construction of Iranian Society

Algerian media also devote sustained attention to Iran's domestic political and social developments, particularly those relating to political stability and governance. This interest reflects Algeria's own historical experience with political upheaval and reform, rendering Iran's internal dynamics a meaningful mirror for self-reflection within Algerian public discourse.

Coverage of the autumn 2022 protests—sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini—offers a revealing case. Most Algerian outlets, including *Annahar*, adopted an overtly sympathetic tone toward the protesters, describing the events as “the most serious challenge to the Islamic Republic since the 1979 Revolution.” Headlines framed the protests as nationwide uprisings and used emotionally charged language such as “the killing of Mahsa Amini,” thereby reinforcing a human-rights–oriented narrative aligned with Western coverage. Citing data from international NGOs, *Annahar* reported “over 500 deaths and 20,000 arrests,” framing the Iranian government's response as repressive and authoritarian.

Further stories amplified this portrayal. Reports quoted Robert Malley, a senior U.S. negotiator on Iran, as claiming that Tehran

“has unjustly deprived thousands of political prisoners of their freedom.” Another piece highlighted the detention and hunger strike of filmmaker Jafar Panahi, constructing a moral dichotomy between state coercion and artistic resistance. These reports (Annahar, 28 Jul 2021) collectively reproduce what narrative analysts term the “moralization of image”—a process in which complex political realities are simplified into moral binaries of oppressor and victim (cf. Galtung, 2002).

Following Israel's June 2025 attack on Iran, *Annahar* continued this narrative trajectory by linking internal repression to external aggression. Citing Western sources, it claimed that “after the twelve-day war with Israel, repression intensified in Iran, with more than 21,000 arrests and rising executions” (Annahar, 31 Oct 2025).

The newspaper also highlighted ethnic dimensions of discontent, asserting that “Arab minorities in Khuzestan are being displaced through state-engineered water deprivation” (Annahar, 26 Jul 2021), and even framed the executed terrorist Habib Chaab (Habib Asyud)—leader of the separatist group Harakat al-Nidal—as a “political dissident.” This selective omission of his orchestration of terrorist attacks, including the 2018 Ahvaz parade massacre, underscores the persistence of distortion mechanisms in media image construction (Annahar, 12 Mar 2023).

The use of emotionally resonant slogans—such as those quoted from Tehran protests (“No Gaza, No Lebanon, my life for Iran”)—further reveals how Algerian media domesticate Iran's political dissent into familiar regional frames, positioning Iranian citizens as rejecting Tehran's regional interventions. This interplay between domestic unrest and foreign policy critique consolidates a stable narrative identity of Iran as an ideologically overextended state alienated from its own populace.

From a methodological perspective, these discourses epitomize the narrative selectivity and moral coherence that Image Theory predicts in intersocietal perception. Algerian media systematically omit Iran's scientific and cultural achievements, thereby reinforcing a one-dimensional image of political repression and ideological rigidity. In doing so, they perpetuate an “enemy image” that, while not overtly hostile, prevents the normalization of Iran's symbolic presence within Algeria's media imagination.

Based on the analysis of dominant trends and prevailing narratives, the image of Iran conveyed to audiences through Algeria's major online media outlets can be summarized as follows: Iran is portrayed as a regionally influential actor that nevertheless

operates under conditions of weakness and pressure. The media emphasize that Iran remains relatively isolated, burdened by international sanctions, and challenged by domestic crises. In these portrayals, Iran appears as a strategic player—particularly in areas such as nuclear policy, regional security, and the Gaza conflict—yet not fully central in shaping broader regional decision-making processes. Within the framework of image politics, Iran is also depicted as a state struggling with internal issues such as human rights concern and economic hardship.

Nevertheless, Algerian media analyses simultaneously present Iran as a symbol of independent thought in the Middle East—a country that, although sometimes perceived as a threat and representing a paradoxical mix of regional strength and vulnerability, should not be subject to any “radical or destabilizing transformation.” From this perspective, the idea of fundamental regime change in Iran is framed as both risky and misguided. At the same time, several reports reveal a more nuanced layer in Algerian media discourse. In some instances, these outlets offer balanced coverage of Iran's foreign policy, notably by reproducing Iranian officials' statements in full. Western states are occasionally criticized for failing to fulfill their commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). A notable example includes *Echorouk* and *Annahar* publishing the full text of a statement by Abbas Araghchi, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister, which criticized Western double standards and articulated Iran's official position—one of the rare instances where Iranian diplomatic perspectives gained meaningful traction in African media narratives (*Annahar*, 01 Jul 2025). The following table, derived from an in-depth content analysis of dozens of news items and analytical reports from *Echorouk* and *Annahar* between 2020 and 2025, summarizes Iran's mediated image across various dimensions:

Table (2): Narrative Dimensions of Iran's Image in Echorouk and Annahar (2020–2025)

Dimension	Narrative Representation	Image Politics Orientation
Political	Iran is portrayed as a strategically influential yet politically marginalized actor, whose regional ambitions are constrained by isolation and internal fragility.	Critical - Ambivalent
Religious	Media narratives depict Iran as actively promoting Shia influence and pursuing	Negative

Dimension	Narrative Representation	Image Politics Orientation
	an ideological agenda that threatens Arab–Sunni cohesion and regional balance.	
Social	The dominant narrative emphasizes domestic hardship, social inequality, and public dissatisfaction, framing Iran as a society burdened by internal crises.	Negative
Economic	Iran is described as economically constrained by international sanctions, with limited reliability as a trade partner despite its market potential.	Cautious - Pragmatic
Military	Iran's military posture is constructed as paradoxical—portrayed both as a symbol of resistance and as a source of regional instability in global narratives.	Cautious - Contradictory
Scientific / Technological	Little explicit coverage is observed; Iran's technological progress is often linked to its defense and nuclear programs, rather than civilian innovation.	Neutral - Skeptical
Diplomatic	Iran is framed as an interventionist actor in regional affairs, including Algeria, yet narratives also acknowledge the potential for cautious rapprochement.	Cautious - Conditional

Source: (Author)

This synthesis, grounded in the study's qualitative media content analysis methodology, highlights that Algeria's online mainstream media construct a dual image of Iran: one combining strategic influence and internal fragility, admiration for its resistance posture, and skepticism toward its domestic governance. The resulting portrayal situates Iran as both a pivotal and problematic actor within the post-2020 Middle Eastern geopolitical narrative.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that a central shortcoming of the Islamic Republic's external conduct is not merely a deficit in material capabilities or diplomatic reach, but an underappreciation of how Iran is perceived by foreign publics—an omission that carries tangible costs for the formulation and implementation of foreign policy. The study finds that mainstream Egyptian and Algerian

press portrayals converge on a set of negative and ambivalent tropes: Iran is depicted as a strategically consequential but internationally isolated actor, beset by sanctions, domestic socio-economic hardship, and human-rights controversies. Simultaneously, Algerian coverage occasionally acknowledges Iran's independent geopolitical posture and strategic rationality—producing a more nuanced image than the predominantly security-focused framing observable in Egyptian outlets. These cross-national differences track domestic media ecologies and political structures: Algeria's more pluralistic media space yields comparatively balanced narratives, whereas Egypt's state-aligned, security-oriented press environment reproduces threat-centered frames. Importantly, the analysis also indicates that a substantial portion of Iran's image in African media originates from Western news agencies and syndicated sources, yet even within local African outlets, Iran's portrayal rarely departs from these negative templates, suggesting a diffusion of externally produced narratives into regional information circuits. This structural dependence on Western-sourced framing further constrains Iran's ability to shape its own image and connect meaningfully with African audiences. Methodologically, the study contributes to the literature by demonstrating the analytic utility of narrative analysis for image-construction research: rather than counting headlines or topic frequency, the approach reconstructs the storylines and interpretive repertoires through which publics come to understand an external actor. Theoretically, the findings reinforce Image Theory's claim that international politics are mediated as much by representation as by material power; media narratives act as mechanisms of friend-making and enemy-making with concrete policy ramifications. From a policy perspective, three interlinked recommendations follow directly from the evidence. First, Iranian foreign policy should institutionalize audience-centered perception assessment—that is, systematic, empirically grounded monitoring of how target publics represent Iran, conducted from those publics' vantage points rather than from Tehran's assumptions. Second, Tehran should adopt an integrated strategic communication and public diplomacy framework that pairs political messaging with verifiable, tangible engagement (e.g., science-for-development initiatives, cultural programming, and visible cooperation aligned with Africa's Agenda 2063). Third, engagement with African media ecosystems—through transparent briefings, exchanges with independent journalists, and timely corrective communication—must become a routine element

of bilateral diplomacy, not an ad hoc afterthought. Ultimately, the study underscores that Iran, with its current media image largely filtered through external lenses and locally reproduced distortions, cannot expect to gain sustained attention or credibility among African publics. Reputational repair will require not only rhetorical adjustment but a consistent, transparent, and audience-aware strategy of narrative rebuilding. In sum, if Iran seeks to convert regional capabilities into sustainable influence, it must complement hard-power strategies with credible, empirically informed, and locally resonant communication efforts that are responsive to the normative expectations of the publics whose cooperation it seeks.

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