
REPRESENTATION OF THE HOUTHIS AFTER THE HAMAS-ISRAEL CEASEFIRE IN ARAB ONLINE MEDIA: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study examines the representation of the Houthi movement in Arab online media following the Hamas–Israel ceasefire, focusing on how linguistic choices construct political meaning and ideological positioning. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the research applies Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which includes textual analysis, discursive practice, and socio-cultural practice. The primary data consist of online news texts from various Arab media outlets including Belqees.net, Asharq Al-Awsat, Al-Ain Al-Ikhabariyah, Erem News, Al-Mashhad News, YeniYemen, and News Yemen, collected through reading and note-taking techniques, and analyzed using Fairclough’s CDA framework. The findings reveal that the analyzed Arabic online media outlets construct the Houthis through a predominantly negative discursive framework characterized by delegitimization, criminalization, and externalization. At the textual level, this is achieved through evaluative lexical choices, derogatory labels, and grammatical constructions that portray the Houthis as an illegitimate militia, a proxy of Iran, and a source of regional instability. At the level of discursive practice, these representations are reproduced through intertextual reporting patterns, selective sourcing, and the circulation of expert opinions that reinforce anti-Houthi narratives. At the socio-cultural level, the discourse reflects broader geopolitical and ideological contestations between Iranian-aligned actors and Gulf regional powers. The findings therefore demonstrate how media discourse functions as a form of symbolic power that contributes to the construction and legitimization of particular political interpretations of the Houthis and their role in regional conflicts.

Keywords

Arab Online Media; Critical Discourse Analysis; Houthi Representation; Media Discourse; Middle East Conflict.



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INTRODUCTION

The representation of the Houthi movement in Arabic online media illustrates how language plays a central role in constructing meaning and in the social representation of political actors amid the Yemeni conflict. Within media discourse, language functions not only as a means of conveying information but also as an ideological tool capable of subtly shaping readers' interpretations through particular lexical choices, syntactic structures, and narrative strategies (Fowler, 1991), (Richardson, 2007), and (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Arabic media outlets, which differ in their political orientations and geopolitical interests, frequently employ linguistic devices such as labeling, conflict metaphors, evaluative adjectives, and grammatical strategies including nominalization and passivization to construct specific images of social actors, portraying them as a "security threat," a "rebel group," or a legitimate "religious movement" (Wahid, Muid, & Dibirov, 2025). Such variations in linguistic choices demonstrate that language in news discourse is neither objective nor transparent; rather, it operates as a representational mechanism shaped by media ideology and broader political contexts (Alex, 2009).

As an ideological instrument, the media possesses significant symbolic power in shaping public opinion and plays an important role in constructing news discourses that may portray the Houthis either positively or negatively within the geopolitical context of the Middle East. This view is consistent with the statement of (Prayetno, 2023), who argues that mass media functions as an agent of social construction that significantly influences how society perceives major events, particularly in the sphere of global politics. Within the dynamics of political communication, the media is not merely responsible for disseminating information but also participates in creating and interpreting social reality according to particular interests and ideologies (Nurudin, 2017).

To uncover the ideologies embedded within such discursive productions, this study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA serves as an analytical tool grounded in a paradigm of knowledge emerging from the traditions of social theory and critical linguistic analysis (Firmansyah, 2018). According to Fairclough, discourse has at least three social functions: the identity function, the relational function, and the ideational function (Hamdan, 2019). Fairclough explains that Critical Discourse Analysis consists of three dimensions: the textual dimension (spoken language, written language, visual images, or a combination thereof), the dimension of discursive practice (the production and consumption of texts), and the dimension of socio-cultural practice (Sasmitha, 2023).

Fairclough offers three steps of analysis: description, interpretation, and explanation (Munfarida, 2014). The implementation of Critical Discourse Analysis represents a practical outcome of conceptual linguistics. This is based on the understanding that the actual use of language is closely related to conceptual linguistics. Consequently, CDA can serve as an analytical instrument for generating new insights in research and exploring their connections to ideology (Schiffirin, 1994). Within discourse analysis, discourse is applied through three distinct concepts. First, discourse is understood as a type of language used within a particular field, such as politics. Second, discourse is viewed as a social practice, meaning that discourse analysis seeks to reveal the role of discursive practices in maintaining the social world. Third, in its most concrete sense, discourse refers to a particular way of speaking that constructs meaning based on experiences interpreted from a specific perspective (Firmansyah, 2018).

Previous studies on the representation of the Houthis have primarily focused on the national conflict between the Houthis and the Yemeni government, supported by the Gulf states (Alrefaee, 2019), (Abdi & Basarati, 2016), (Al Kharusi, 2017), (Alghamdi, Kaur, & Syed, 2025), (Al-Sallal, 2024), (Hamoud & Al Mawla, 2021), (Alluhaidah, 2023), (Ayson, 2010), (Naji, 2021), (Sherif, 2025), and (Almahfali, 2020). In contrast, studies examining the representation of the Houthis in the context of the Gaza war that began on 7 October 2023 remain limited and are largely confined to discussions of sectarian discourse, particularly narratives of Shiite resistance (Shori, 2025). Furthermore, the media outlets examined in previous studies have concentrated on specific platforms, including comparisons between the Yemeni government and the opposition (Alrefaee, 2019); Iranian, Arab, and Western media (Abdi & Basarati, 2016); Al Jazeera (Al Kharusi, 2017) and (Alluhaidah, 2023); the pro-Houthi outlet al-Masirah (Alghamdi, Kaur, & Syed, 2025); CNN (Ayson, 2010); and Yemeni TV (Almahfali, 2020). These studies indicate that research on the representation of the Houthis remains relevant and warrants further investigation, particularly in light of the increasingly diverse linguistic and political contexts in which such representations are produced.

Further in-depth exploration is still required regarding how media outlets represent the Houthis through the news narratives they construct. A deeper understanding of this phenomenon has implications in several respects. First, it contributes to a better understanding of discourse production in news reporting. In this context, the present study can provide a clearer picture of the ideological dynamics that infiltrate media discourse, particularly in narratives concerning the Houthis. This can help researchers and social observers better understand how the media subtly

embeds particular ideologies in its representation of the Houthis. Furthermore, by exploring such representations, this study's findings can help identify these patterns and raise awareness of how ideologies are embedded in news narratives without readers necessarily realizing it. Drawing on Fairclough's CDA framework, the study also seeks to critically examine the power relations embedded in these media discourses by identifying which actors, institutions, or political interests are privileged and legitimized, and which are marginalized, delegitimized, or disadvantaged through particular representations of the Houthis. Such an analysis moves beyond examining discourse, text production, and ideology alone, toward understanding the broader social and political consequences of media narratives. Additionally, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of political narratives concerning the Houthis within Arab media and the interests they serve within contemporary regional power struggles.

Within the field of media linguistics, this phenomenon is particularly significant because the representation of social actors in news texts is strongly influenced by how language is used to project or obscure responsibility, agency, and legitimacy. For example, the use of material verbs with explicit agents may foreground the Houthis as aggressive actors. In contrast, passive constructions may obscure the agent of an action and shift attention toward its consequences. Media outlets also frequently employ strategies such as overlexicalization when emphasizing threats and underlexicalization when reducing the complexity of a situation (Fairclough, 2003), (Leeuwen, 2008), and (Baker, et al., 2008). Moreover, the use of war or religious metaphors may reinforce images that align with a media outlet's ideological agenda. Thus, a linguistic analysis of the representation of the Houthis provides an opportunity to understand how linguistic structures—both at the micro level, such as vocabulary, and at the macro level, such as discourse structure—are constructed to produce narratives capable of influencing public opinion and shaping political discourse in the Arab world.

This study is based on the assumption that the production of discourse in news narratives influences public perceptions of the Houthi movement's identity and representation. It further assumes that Arabic-language media outlets such as Belqees.net, Asharq Al-Awsat, Al-Ain Al-Ikhbariyah, Erem News, Al-Mashhad News, YeniYemen, and News Yemen tend to portray the Houthis through narratives that demonize and delegitimize their involvement in the Gaza war. These narratives are constructed through specific lexical choices, metaphors, and grammatical structures that shape and direct public perceptions of the movement. Finally, this study assumes that the ideological dimensions embedded within such news narratives can be identified and

critically examined through the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis.

This study aims to analyze and explore the representation of Houthi identity and activities in Arabic-language media following the Hamas–Israel ceasefire. To achieve this objective, the study employs Fairclough’s three-dimensional framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, encompassing textual analysis, discursive practice, and socio-cultural practice. Through these analytical dimensions, the study seeks to uncover the ideological orientations underlying Arabic online media coverage of the Houthis in the aftermath of the ceasefire between Hamas and Israel.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design using Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis framework. The analysis follows Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of discourse analysis. The first dimension, textual analysis, explores and describes the linguistic features employed in news texts concerning the Houthis. The second dimension, discursive practice, interprets the linguistic phenomena identified within these texts by examining the processes through which meanings are produced and circulated. The final dimension, socio-cultural practice, draws on contextual factors beyond the text to elaborate on and explain the identified and interpreted linguistic phenomena.

The primary data consist of online news articles published by several Arabic-language media outlets during November 2025, including (Belqees.net, 2025; Belqees.net, 2025); <https://belqees.net/>, (Asy-Syarq al-Awsat, 2025); <https://aawsat.com/>, (Al-'ain al-Akhbariah, 2025); <https://al-ain.com/article/yemen-gaza-war-exposure>, Erem News (Sumaih, A, 2025); <https://www.eremnews.com/news/arab-world/309mpan>, (Al-Mashhad News, 2025); <https://www.almashhad.news/347352>, (Yeniyemen.net, 2025); <https://yeniyemen.net/p-292030> and News Yemen (Abdurrahman, M, 2025); <https://newsyemen.life/article/14849>. The data comprise words, sentences, quotations, and narratives related to the representation of the Houthis following the ceasefire agreement between Hamas and Israel. This study does not seek to compare the quality or credibility of the selected media outlets. Secondary data are drawn from academic journal articles, books on Critical Discourse Analysis and Middle Eastern politics, and relevant official websites that support the research.

Data were collected using a reading and note-taking technique. The reading process was conducted in two stages. First, the news texts were read comprehensively to gain an overall

understanding of their content. Second, the texts were examined more closely to identify representations of the Houthis within the news narratives. Relevant data identified during these stages were subsequently recorded and categorized for analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework. First, the textual dimension was employed to analyze lexical choices, quotations, and narrative structures used in representing the Houthis. Second, the dimension of discursive practice was utilized to examine the processes of discourse production, distribution, and ideological construction within the texts. Third, the socio-cultural dimension was applied to explore the broader socio-political and cultural contexts that influenced the construction of media representations of the Houthis in the selected news outlets.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The data analyzed in this study consist of eight news articles published by seven Arabic online media outlets including Belqees.net, Asharq Al-Awsat, Al-Ain Al-Ikhbariyah, Erem News, Al-Mashhad News, Al-Bawabh News, and News Yemen.

Textual Dimension

In news narratives concerning the Houthis following the Hamas–Israel ceasefire agreement, Arabic online media outlets employ a variety of linguistic instruments to represent, discredit, and demonize the Houthi movement. The discussion below illustrates how these linguistic choices are utilized in media discourse.

Representation of Houthi Identity

The analyzed news reports reveal several lexical choices employed by media outlets to represent the Houthi movement. Table 2 presents the identified lexical representations.

Table 1. Representations of the Houthis in the Media

Media	Representation
(Belqees.net, 2025) and (Belqees.net, 2025)	وبما أن إيران دفعت باليمن، عبر مليشيا الحوثيين https://belqees.net/reports/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D8%BA%D8%B2%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%

تواجه مليشيا الحوثي في اليمن لحظة مفصليّة تحدّد مسارها المستقبلي

	https://belqees.net/reports/%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%BA%D8%B2%D8%A9-%D9%8A%D8%B6%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%AE%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%
(Asy-Syaraq al-Awsat, 2025)	بدأت الجماعة الحوثية في حالة ارتباك وتوجس من المرحلة المقبلة https://aawsat.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A/5196147-%D9%87%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%89-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%85-%D8%A7%D8%B
	إن حديث زعيم الحوثيين عن احتمال استئناف إسرائيل لعدوان جديد https://aawsat.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A/5196147-%D9%87%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%89-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%85-%D8%A7%D8%B
(Al-'ain al-Akhbariah, 2025)	سعت مليشيات الحوثي لاستغلالها https://al-ain.com/article/yemen-gaza-war-exposure
Erem News (Sumaih, A, 2025)	أن التهدة الإقليمية تُضعف من قدرة ميليشيا الحوثي في اليمن https://www.eremnews.com/news/arab-world/309mpan
	ورغم حديث زعيم الميليشيا عبدالملك الحوثي عن استمرار "الجاهزية" https://www.eremnews.com/news/arab-world/309mpan
(Al-Masshad News, 2025)	أن جماعة الحوثي تمر بمرحلة ارتباك سياسي https://www.almashhad.news/347352
	وكان زعيم الجماعة عبد الملك الحوثي، في خطابه الأسبوعي https://www.almashhad.news/347352
News Yemen (Abdurrahman, M, 2025)	الحوثي بندق بيد إيران ومشروعها في المنطقة https://newsyemen.life/article/14849
	وظيفة القرصنة البحرية تتيح للدول الدفاع عن مصالحها بقصف اليمن https://newsyemen.life/article/14849
(Yeniyemen.net, 2025)	قدمت ميليشيا الحوثي نفسها على مدار العامين الماضيين كـ "مدافع عن القضية الفلسطينية" https://yeniyemen.net/p-292030

Based on the data presented in Table 2, the Houthis are represented through several lexical labels, including *militia* (ميليشيا), *group* (جماعة), *leader* (زعيم), *pirates* (القرصنة البحرية), and *Iran's weapon/tool* (بندق بيد إيران).

The Label “Militia”

Five instances from four media outlets — Belqees.net, Al-Ain Al-Ikhbariyah, Erem News, and YeniYemen.net—use the term ميليشيا (militia) to refer to the Houthis. The Arabic term ميليشيا is derived from the English word *militia*, which itself originates from a Roman military term (Calder, 1910). Historically, the term referred to paramilitary groups formed by civilians. In contemporary political discourse, however, the term has acquired additional connotations and is often associated with armed groups motivated by radical ideologies or political extremism.

The Label “Group” (Jama’ah)

Two instances from Asharq Al-Awsat and Al-Mashhad News employ the term جماعة (group) to refer to the Houthis. At a literal level, this designation appears neutral. However, a closer examination reveals that these same media outlets use the term الحكومة (government) when referring to anti-Houthi Yemeni political actors. This distinction reflects the implementation of the semantic strategy known as *actor description*. By referring to anti-Houthi actors as the “government” while describing the Houthis merely as a “group,” these media outlets symbolically reinforce differences in political legitimacy and institutional authority.

The Label “Za'im” (Leader)

Three instances from Asharq Al-Awsat, Erem News, and Al-Mashhad News employ the term زعيم (za'im, leader) to refer to Abdul Malik al-Houthi, the supreme leader of Ansar Allah. Etymologically, according to (Alma'any.com, 2010-2025), the word زعيم derives from the root زعم which is semantically related to the verb ظنّ, (to suppose or to assume). The use of za'im in these news texts carries particular ideological implications. The designation za'im may imply a form of authority based on personal claim, charisma, or subjective recognition rather than formal election or institutional appointment.

Other Labels

In addition to the labels discussed above, the media employ two further expressions to represent the Houthis: القرصنة البحرية (maritime piracy) and بندق بيد إيران (a weapon in Iran's

hands). These labels appear in reports published by News Yemen and YeniYemen.net. The phrase *القرصنة البحرية* (maritime piracy) is used to characterize Houthi attacks on commercial vessels linked to Israel. Through this label, the media frames these operations not as military or political actions but as criminal acts of piracy, thereby contributing to the demonization of Houthi activities. Similarly, the expression *بندق بيد إيران* (a weapon in Iran's hands) portrays the Houthis as merely an instrument of Iranian regional ambitions. Such representations deny the movement political agency, reducing it to a proxy actor serving Iranian interests in the Middle East.

Lexical Choices and Sentence Constructions in the Representation of Houthi Activities

In representing Houthi activities, the analyzed media outlets employ specific lexical choices as well as syntactic, morphological, and semantic constructions. These linguistic strategies contribute to the formation of specific perceptions of the Houthis and their role in regional conflicts. The following discussion elaborates on each example.

Data 1

لكن الاتفاق الأخير بين إسرائيل وحماس أزال – ولو مؤقتًا – المبرر العلني الذي استخدمه الحوثيون لتبرير هجماتهم (Belqees.net, 2025)

In this excerpt, the media outlet uses the verb *أزال* ("removed"), with *الاتفاق الأخير بين إسرائيل وحماس* ("the latest agreement between Israel and Hamas") functioning as the grammatical subject. Attributing agency to a non-human entity can be interpreted as *majāz 'aqlī* (metonymic attribution) based on causality (Al-Hasymi, 2017). The sentence also includes *المبرر* ("justification") and *تبرير* ("justifying"), both derived from the root *برر*, which denotes providing reasons to legitimize an action (Alma'any.com, 2010-2025). Since this root often appears in negative contexts, these lexical choices frame the Houthi attacks as actions that require justification, suggesting they served as a political instrument to advance the movement's activities.

Data 2

إعادة صياغة خطابهم الإعلامي من "نصرة فلسطين" إلى مواجهة ما يسمونه "الحصار الأميركي"، في محاولة

لاستعادة التعبئة الشعبية (Belqees.net, 2025)

In this excerpt, the media characterizes Houthi actions through the phrase إعادة صياغة خطابهم الإعلامي (reformulating their media discourse), indicating a shift from the relatively passive rhetoric of نُصرة فلسطين to the more active framing of مواجهة or confronting the “American blockade.” The use of محاولة denotes uncertainty (Alma'any.com, 2010-2025), positioning Houthi actions as strategic and contingent rather than principled. Additionally, استعادة التعبئة الشعبية (regaining popular mobilization) suggests that anti-American rhetoric is constructed as a tool for restoring domestic support in the aftermath of the Hamas–Israel ceasefire, rather than addressing external political challenges.

Data 3

مستثمرة التعاطف الشعبي مع مأساة غزة لتثبيت قبضتها الأمنية وتبرير فشلها الاقتصادي والإداري (Asy-Syarq al-Awsat, 2025)

In this excerpt, the media uses the participle مستثمرة, derived from the root ثمر and commonly associated with gain or exploit in contemporary usage (Alma'any, 2010-2025), to frame the Houthis' actions. When combined with تثبيت قبضتها الأمنية وتبرير فشلها الاقتصادي والإداري (“to consolidate its security grip and justify its economic and administrative failures”), the wording constructs a narrative in which Houthi authorities are portrayed as exploiting public sympathy for Gaza to strengthen internal control and deflect attention from domestic shortcomings.

Data 4

برعت في استخدام لغة العداة لإسرائيل والولايات المتحدة لتصفية خصومها ووصم أي صوت معارض بالخيانة والعمالة (Asy-Syarq al-Awsat, 2025)

The verb برعت (“excelled” or “became highly skilled”) is used with لغة العداة لإسرائيل

الولايات المتحدة ("the language of hostility toward Israel and the United States"), portraying the Houthis as highly adept at employing anti-Israeli and anti-American rhetoric. The clause لتصفية (to eliminate its opponents and label any dissenting voice as treasonous or collaborative") assigns a strategic purpose to this rhetoric. The use of لام indicates a purposive relationship, suggesting that external political discourse is employed to suppress domestic opposition. As a result, anti-Israeli and anti-American narratives are framed as instruments of political control rather than genuine ideological commitments.

Data 5

مليشيات الحوثي كانت تنفذ أعمال القرصنة في البحر الأحمر بدعوى ارتباط السفن بإسرائيل لكن في الواقع كان الأمر يتعلق بتخفيف الضغط عن طهران (Al-'ain al-Akhbariah, 2025)

<https://al-ain.com/article/yemen-gaza-war-exposure>

In this excerpt, the media describes Houthi attacks on shipping in the Red Sea using the term القرصنة, which conventionally denotes the unlawful seizure of vessels and thus criminalizes these operations by framing them as illegitimate acts rather than political or military actions (Alma'any.com, 2010-2025). The use of بدعوى ("under the claim/allegedly") introduces skepticism toward the stated justification that the targeted ships were linked to Israel. Meanwhile, the clause كان الأمر يتعلق بتخفيف الضغط عن طهران ("the matter was related to relieving pressure on Tehran") shifts the explanatory frame toward Iranian strategic interests, suggesting an alternative motive behind Houthi actions.

Data 6

عودة الحوثيين للتصعيد المحلي بعد انخفاض التوترات الإقليمية، يعبر عن تركبتهم كجماعة عدوة للاستقرار، لا تستطيع العيش والبقاء إلا في ظل ظروف الحرب والنزاعات (Al-'ain al-Akhbariah, 2025)

<https://al-ain.com/article/yemen-gaza-war-exposure>

In this example, the phrase *جماعة عدوة للاستقرار* (a group hostile to stability) functions as a strong evaluative label. The noun *تركيبه* (composition or nature) suggests that hostility toward stability constitutes an inherent characteristic of the group. The clause *لا تستطيع العيش والبقاء إلا في* employs a structure combining negation (لا) and exception (إلا). In Arabic rhetoric, this construction produces a restrictive meaning (*qasr*), limiting the possibility of Houthi existence exclusively to contexts of war and conflict. Consequently, the media portrays conflict as an essential condition of Houthi political survival.

Data 7

إن الجماعة استفادت بشكل كبير من الحرب، حيث استخدمتها لتعبئة المقاتلين وترتيب أوضاعها الداخلية، لكنها اليوم تجد نفسها في مأزق بعد زوال هذا الغطاء (Sumaih, A, 2025)

<https://www.aremnews.com/news/arab-world/309mpan>

The emphatic particle *إن* reinforces the certainty of the proposition that follows. The verb *استفادت* (benefited) further suggests that the Houthis derived substantial gains from the Gaza conflict. The sentence constructs a narrative in which the war served as a means of mobilizing fighters and consolidating internal affairs. The adversative conjunction *لكن* (however) introduces a contrast, emphasizing that the movement now faces difficulties following the disappearance of what the media describes as its political cover.

Data 8

أن الجماعة باتت مطالبة بتجنّب المزيد من الهجمات الإسرائيلية والأميركية، رغم أنها لا تزال خاضعة للقرار الاستراتيجي الإيراني (Sumaih, A, 2025)

<https://www.aremnews.com/news/arab-world/309mpan>

This excerpt emphasizes the perceived necessity for the Houthis to avoid further Israeli and American attacks. The adjective *خاضعة* (subordinate or subject to) carries connotations of dependence and submission. When combined with the phrase *القرار الاستراتيجي الإيراني* (to the

Iranian strategic decision), the sentence casts the Houthis as politically subordinate to Iran, thereby reinforcing narratives of proxy dependence.

Data 9

تُعدّ الأوضاع الداخلية المتدهورة في مناطق سيطرة الحوثيين عاملاً ضاغظاً على الجماعة، إذ لم تعد قادرة على استغلال شعار "نصرة فلسطين" لتبرير الأزمات المعيشية، أو انقطاع رواتب الموظفين، أو تدهور الخدمات، ما يضعها أمام تحديات داخلية متفاقمة (Al-Masshad News, 2025)

<https://www.almashhad.news/347352>

Several evaluative lexical choices appear in this excerpt, including المتدهورة (deteriorating), قادرة (capable), and متفاقمة (worsening or escalating). These terms contribute to a highly negative portrayal of conditions within Houthi-controlled territories. The accumulation of such evaluative expressions intensifies the depiction of domestic crises and amplifies the perceived severity of the challenges confronting the movement. This strategy corresponds to what critical discourse analysts describe as lexical intensification and dramatization.

Data 10

في الوقت الذي كان المجتمع الدولي يبحث عن حلول ... كان الحوثي يبحث عن البدائل لتلك الحرب (Al-Masshad News, 2025)

<https://www.almashhad.news/347352>

This sentence establishes a contrast between two actors: the international community, portrayed as seeking solutions to the conflict, and the Houthis, portrayed as seeking alternatives to sustain the confrontation. The juxtaposition creates a binary opposition in which one actor is associated with peace-making efforts, while the other is associated with perpetuating conflict. Such rhetorical structuring reinforces the representation of the Houthis as inclined toward continued warfare.

Data 11

في اليمن لا أحد يسعى إلى الحرب ... سوى جماعة الحوثي (Al-Masshad News, 2025)

<https://www.almashhad.news/347352>

This statement employs the rhetorical construction of *qasr* through negation and exception. By excluding all other actors and attributing war-seeking behavior exclusively to the Houthis, the sentence presents the movement as uniquely responsible for the continuation of the conflict.

Data 12

لم تستفيد غزة من هجمات على إسرائيل شيء ... حاول الحوثيون استثمار تلك الحرب، وفشل (Abdurrahman, M, 2025)

M, 2025)

<https://newsyemen.life/article/14849>

The negative particle لم denies any beneficial outcome for Gaza resulting from attacks on Israel. The adjective مدمرة (destructive) intensifies the negative consequences of these actions. The use of the term استثمار (to exploit or invest in) suggests that the Houthis attempted to utilize the Gaza conflict for political gain. The final verb فشل (failed) completes the narrative by presenting this effort as unsuccessful. Through these lexical choices, the media portray Houthi involvement in the conflict as both opportunistic and ineffective.

Discursive Practice Dimension

The dominant discursive practice identified in the selected Arabic online media is the construction of the Houthis as a pro-Iranian militia, an Iranian proxy, and a destabilizing actor whose military operations primarily serve political interests rather than Palestinian causes. Across the analyzed reports, Houthi actions are consistently portrayed as ineffective in alleviating suffering in Gaza and instead as contributing to Yemen's economic and political instability.

Media narratives frequently frame Houthi military operations as a strategy for diverting attention from domestic challenges, including economic hardship, political repression, and deteriorating living conditions. This interpretation is reinforced by the lexical and grammatical patterns identified in the textual analysis, which consistently portray Houthi actions as opportunistic, self-serving, and strategically motivated.

Another recurring feature is the dramatization of Yemen's internal situation. The analyzed reports emphasize economic decline, political instability, and social crises while giving comparatively little attention to public demonstrations supporting Houthi attacks on Israel or

opposing Israeli actions in Gaza. Across reports published by Al-Ain Al-Ikhbariyah, Al-Mashhad News, Asharq Al-Awsat, YeniYemen, Erem News, and News Yemen, the Hamas–Israel ceasefire is consistently represented as creating a political dilemma for the Houthis by undermining a source of political legitimacy and public mobilization.

The findings also reveal the importance of sourcing practices in shaping discourse. Many reports rely heavily on pro-government political figures, foreign policy analysts, and forms of circular reporting in which media outlets cite one another as sources. For example, reports published by Al-Mashhad News and YeniYemen.net draw upon earlier reports from Asharq Al-Awsat and Belqees.net. Such intertextual relationships contribute to the circulation and reinforcement of similar narratives across multiple platforms.

A notable example appears in (Belqees.net, 2025)'s report اتفاق غزة يضع الحوثيين أمام خيارات مصيرية بشأن مستقبلهم واستراتيجيتهم العسكرية, which presents three possible post-ceasefire scenarios for the Houthis: ending attacks, continuing military operations, or restructuring for future conflict. The analysis relies heavily on the views of Gulf affairs analyst Gregory D. Johnson, illustrating how expert voices are mobilized to legitimize particular interpretations of political developments.

From a Faircloughian perspective, these discursive practices demonstrate how media institutions participate in the production and reproduction of ideological meanings. The repeated circulation of narratives portraying the Houthis as illegitimate, conflict-dependent, and externally controlled benefits political actors aligned against the Houthis and Iran by reinforcing their preferred interpretations of the conflict. Conversely, alternative perspectives emphasizing Houthi political agency, local support, or strategic motivations receive limited attention. Through intertextual repetition, selective sourcing, and expert legitimation, these representations become normalized across media platforms and contribute to the reproduction of dominant political narratives and power relations.

Socio-Cultural Practice Dimension

The continuous demand for rapid information encourages media organizations to frame events in line with particular ideological and political orientations. As a result, media representations not only report events but also shape public perceptions and influence how social realities are understood. From a situational perspective, the discourses identified in this study emerged following the ceasefire agreement between Palestinian resistance groups and Israel in

October 2025. Although the Houthis participated in military actions during the Gaza conflict, they were excluded from the ceasefire negotiations. This created a discursive space in which several Arabic online media outlets constructed narratives critical of both the Houthis and Iran. These narratives frequently delegitimized Houthi identity and activities while portraying the movement as an extension of Iranian regional influence.

Such representations cannot be separated from the broader political context of Yemen and the Gulf region. The findings suggest that the analyzed narratives align with the interests of the internationally recognized Yemeni government, GCC states, and other actors opposed to the Houthis. In line with Fairclough, discourse functions as a mechanism through which political interests are articulated, reproduced, and legitimized. The repeated portrayal of the Houthis as illegitimate, destabilizing, and externally controlled contributes to the maintenance of existing regional power structures while limiting the legitimacy of alternative political actors.

The findings also reflect broader ideological tensions in the Middle East. On one side are Gulf states whose political legitimacy is shaped by monarchical governance, Sunni traditions, and strategic alliances with the United States. On the other hand are Iran and actors associated with the Axis of Resistance, which promote anti-Western and anti-American narratives. Within this ideological contestation, the Houthis are frequently represented not as autonomous political actors but as proxies of Iranian regional ambitions. As these competing ideological projects confront one another, media discourse becomes a site of struggle in which political actors seek to advance their preferred interpretations of reality. The recurring representation of the Houthis as violent, illegitimate, and destabilizing serves important political functions by reinforcing anti-Houthi narratives and potentially generating public support for policies aimed at containing the movement.

A key implication of these findings concerns who benefits and who is disadvantaged by such representations. The dominant discourse appears to benefit political actors and regional powers aligned against the Houthis and Iran by reinforcing their legitimacy and policy positions. Conversely, the Houthis are discursively disadvantaged through the marginalization of alternative interpretations that emphasize their political agency, local support base, or strategic motivations. Through the repetition of these representations across multiple media outlets, particular ideological positions become normalized and reproduced as common-sense understandings of the conflict.

Within this framework, media discourse operates as a form of symbolic power. Rather than relying on coercion, it shapes consent by presenting certain interpretations of political reality as

natural and legitimate. Consequently, the findings reveal ideological antagonism and polarization within contemporary Arab media discourse, where representations of the Houthis are shaped not only by journalistic practices but also by broader geopolitical interests and power relations. In the Yemeni context, these discursive patterns contribute to the reproduction of dominant regional narratives and existing structures of power.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Arabic online media construct representations of the Houthi movement through discourse characterized by delegitimization, ideological polarization, and strategic framing. Across the textual, discursive practice, and socio-cultural dimensions, linguistic choices function not merely as descriptive devices but as ideological tools that shape perceptions of the Houthis in relation to regional conflicts, particularly the Gaza war and its aftermath. At the textual level, the analysis reveals a pattern of negative lexicalization and evaluative framing. The Houthis are repeatedly labeled as a militia, group, pirates, and an Iranian proxy, while their activities are described through expressions associated with exploitation, failure, and instability. Grammatical strategies such as restriction (qasr), contrastive structures, and evaluative constructions further reinforce representations of the Houthis as illegitimate and conflict-oriented actors. These findings suggest that media discourse actively constructs social meanings by privileging particular interpretations while marginalizing others.

At the level of discursive practice, these representations are reinforced through intertextuality, selective sourcing, and narrative repetition across media platforms. Many outlets rely on politically aligned sources, government-affiliated actors, and external analysts whose interpretations consistently frame Houthi actions through Iranian influence, opportunism, and domestic instability. The frequent use of expert voices further legitimizes these narratives while limiting alternative perspectives. Consistent with Fairclough's CDA framework, these discursive practices contribute to the production and reproduction of ideological meanings within public discourse (Fairclough, 1989).

At the socio-cultural level, the representation of the Houthis reflects broader geopolitical and ideological tensions in the Middle East. The discourse positions the Houthis within the rivalry between Gulf states and Iran, portraying them primarily as an extension of Iranian regional influence rather than as autonomous political actors. Such representations contribute to the normalization of anti-Houthi narratives and may provide symbolic legitimacy for containment

policies and other political actions directed against the movement. As Fairclough argues, power operates not only through coercion but also through the production of consent, whereby particular interpretations of reality become accepted as natural and legitimate (Fairclough, 1989) and (Fairclough, 1992).

The findings both confirm and extend previous scholarship. Similar to (Alrefaee, 2019), (Abdi & Basarati, 2016), and (Al Kharusi, 2017), this study demonstrates that political alignments and geopolitical interests shape media representations of the Houthis. However, the present study further shows how these representations reproduce broader power relations by legitimizing anti-Houthi perspectives while marginalizing alternative viewpoints. The findings also support the work of (Alghamdi, Kaur, & Syed, 2025) and (Al-Sallal, 2024), who identified significant differences in pro- and anti-Houthi media framing. This study extends their conclusions by demonstrating a notable degree of ideological convergence among anti-Houthi outlets following the Gaza ceasefire, suggesting that regional geopolitical developments can intensify discursive alignment across media platforms.

Furthermore, unlike studies that focus primarily on sectarian narratives (Shori, 2025), this research highlights the growing importance of geopolitical framing. Representations of the Houthis increasingly intersect with narratives of proxy warfare, regional competition, and post-Gaza strategic realignment, reflecting broader struggles over political legitimacy and regional influence. This study also contributes a comparative cross-platform perspective. Consistent framing patterns across multiple Arabic online media outlets indicate that ideological discourse operates beyond individual institutions and circulates across broader media networks. This suggests that dominant narratives are reproduced through shared discursive practices rather than isolated editorial positions.

Finally, by examining media coverage in the post-October 7 and post-ceasefire period, this study addresses a gap in previous research. The findings show that the Gaza war and subsequent ceasefire created a new discursive environment in which the legitimacy and strategic relevance of the Houthis became subjects of intensified media contestation. A central implication of these findings concerns the distribution of symbolic advantages and disadvantages within media discourse. The recurring representation of the Houthis as an illegitimate militia, an Iranian proxy, and a source of instability appears to benefit political actors and regional powers whose interests are aligned with anti-Houthi and anti-Iran positions. Through the repeated association of the Houthis

with conflict, dependency, and political opportunism, the discourse reinforces the legitimacy of the internationally recognized Yemeni government, Gulf states, and other actors advocating the containment of Iranian influence in the region. Conversely, the Houthis are discursively disadvantaged through the systematic marginalization of alternative interpretations that portray them as autonomous political actors or as participants in broader regional resistance movements. In Fairclough's terms, these patterns illustrate how discourse contributes to the reproduction of existing power relations by normalizing particular political perspectives while limiting the visibility and legitimacy of competing narratives. The repetition of similar representations across multiple media outlets further strengthens this process, transforming specific ideological positions into seemingly natural and commonsense understandings of the conflict.

Overall, the study demonstrates that the interplay of linguistic strategies, institutional practices, and broader socio-political structures shapes media representations of the Houthis. Through recurring patterns of labeling, framing, and source selection, Arabic online media contribute to the reproduction of ideological narratives and power relations. In line with Fairclough's CDA framework, the findings show that discourse functions not only as a means of communication but also as a site where power, ideology, and political interests are negotiated and reproduced.

CONCLUSION

The findings reveal that the analyzed Arabic online media outlets construct the Houthis through a predominantly negative discursive framework characterized by delegitimization, criminalization, and externalization. At the textual level, this is achieved through evaluative lexical choices, derogatory labels, and grammatical constructions that portray the Houthis as an illegitimate militia, a proxy of Iran, and a source of regional instability. At the level of discursive practice, these representations are reproduced through intertextual reporting patterns, selective sourcing, and the circulation of expert opinions that reinforce anti-Houthi narratives. At the socio-cultural level, the discourse reflects broader geopolitical and ideological contestations between Iranian-aligned actors and Gulf regional powers. The findings therefore demonstrate how media discourse functions as a form of symbolic power that contributes to the construction and legitimization of particular political interpretations of the Houthis and their role in regional conflicts. This study is limited to an exploration of Houthi representation in news coverage of the Hamas–Israel ceasefire from a Critical

Discourse Analysis perspective. It is expected that this research will contribute to the development of Fairclough's CDA studies, particularly those focusing on contemporary Middle Eastern media discourse. Future research is encouraged to further examine the more complex role of media, both in relation to Middle Eastern geopolitical issues in general and the representation of the Houthis in particular.

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