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A comparative framing analysis of ISIL in the online coverage of CNN and Al-Jazeera

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A comparative framing analysis of ISIL in the online coverage of CNN and Al-Jazeera

by

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Dr. Raluca Cozma, Major Professor
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents:

Abdulrahman and Hussah

for their love, endless support, and encouragement.

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ABSTRACT

This study is a content analysis of how CNN and Al-Jazeera framed ISIL in their online news coverage from June to October 2014. A total of 154 stories were analyzed in order to determine the differences in the news framing and sourcing of ISIL (also known as ISIS). The websites' original languages were used, respectively English (CNN) and Arabic (Al-Jazeera). The study found that CNN and Al-Jazeera relied heavily on episodic coverage. Also, the conflict frame dominated CNN coverage while Al-Jazeera used more responsibility and economic-consequences framing. Regarding sources, the study found that CNN cited more U.S. officials while Al-Jazeera relied more on other media.

Keywords: ISIL, Framing, CNN, Al-Jazeera, Content Analysis, Episodic, Thematic

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The developments related to ISIL in Syria and Iraq since 2013 were caused by the Syrian civil war that entered its fourth year as of 2015 in addition to the unstable situation in Iraq. The political arena after the fall of the Al-Baath regime led to the establishment of the Islamic State in Iraq in 2006, which evolved six years later under the pressure of the Syrian crisis to what is known nowadays as the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL) or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. On June 10th, 2014, the world woke up to the news of the fall of Mosel, the second largest city in Iraq, in the hands of ISIL's fighters. Abu Baker Al-Baghdadi, the man who inherited the leadership of the Islamic State in Iraq in 2010, declared himself as Caliphate only three weeks after his group captured Mosel. The following step was to clear the borders between Iraq and Syria, signaling the geographical location of the so-called new state (Abbas, 2014).

The emergence of ISIL cannot be understood away from the ongoing Syrian crisis. It's, in fact, a major continuation development that resulted into the formation of an international coalition led by the United States and consisted of more than twenty countries. The coalition has started a military operation aiming to weaken ISIL and destroy it, as president Obama mentioned in his speech on September 10, 2014, as reported by the White House website (Hudson, 2014). This operation is conducted mainly via airstrikes on ISIL territories both in Iraq and Syria. Another announced goal of the operation is strengthening the moderate opposition in Syria in an effort to support it against both ISIL and Assad's regime.

In the aftermath of taking control of Mosel and prior to the formation of the international coalition, the United States had started airstrikes on ISIL north of Iraq. The United States claimed its moves were meant to protect its interests in Kurdistan and to prevent ISIL from gaining more ground that might endanger Iraq's unity. As a response, ISIL beheaded two U.S. journalists who had disappeared previously in Syria. James Feloy disappeared in November 2012 in the northern part of Syria, and was beheaded by ISIL in August 2014, in addition to Steven Sotloff, a reporter who was beheaded two weeks later.

The fast development of the situation has challenged the foreign news media outlets in the world. Foreign correspondents cannot cover the crisis from the ground as both ISIL and the Assad regime have set restrictions. Moreover, the Committee to Protect Journalists has declared Syria the deadliest country for journalists for the past three years. In 2014, the committee on its website declared that 17 journalists were killed in Syria. Yet the number of the daily stories produced by the media outlets regarding ISIL is large, which arises several concerns about the credibility and sourcing of these channels. Among these media outlets are CNN and Al-Jazeera, which are both considered elite agenda-setters in their respective regions. Robinson (1999) suggests that with the so-called CNN effect, CNN's 24/7 globe-spanning newsgathering operation challenges the traditional news cycle and sets the news agenda for journalists in the United States and occasionally accelerates foreign policy decision-making. Also, the role of Al-Jazeera on the global media arena became more prominent after 9/11 and its coverage of the war in Afghanistan showed that it " began to set the visual agenda for American news coverage" (Norris, Kern, & Just, 2003).

This is a study of how the online versions of CNN and Al-Jazeera framed ISIL in their news coverage and what news sources they relied on to tell the story. The time period

under analysis starts in June 2014, when ISIL captured Mosel, and ends in October 2014,

several weeks after the international coalition started its military operation in Iraq and

Syria. This study is important for a number of reasons. First, the Middle East's

centralization effects on the world politically and economically. Second, the growing

significance of online news alongside the need to fill the gap in the literature in this part

cannot be ignored. Third, the topic under investigation is unique and has potentially far-

reaching effects, and we need to assess the framing and sourcing of the news stories

regarding ISIL considering the fact that there are many variances in naming and attributes.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The ongoing issue of ISIL represents a major phase of the Syrian civil war that has entered its fourth year as of the writing of this study. There was no enough reason for the world community to engage militarily with this growing group in Syria except the sudden increasing role of ISIL and the spread of images of its shocking actions via social media. In the Middle East, ISIL first went public in 2013 when Abu Baker Al-Baghdadi announced officially that it had seized the Al-Nosra front, a major military group fighting in the Syrian civil war, under the name of Islamic State of Iraq and Levant. However, in the United States, ISIL gained growing attention after the fall of Mosel and later the beheadings of two U.S. journalists. To understand how two widely popular news organizations on the global scene made sense of these events, this study builds on the framing theory and is informed by literature on coverage of terrorism as well as source attribution patterns.

This study aims to capture how leading news outlets in two media systems framed the controversial and far-reaching topic of terrorism in Syria and Iraq, as represented by the rise of ISIL.

Framing Theory

The introduction of the framing approach is often credited to Goffman and Bateson as noted by Reese (2001). Goffman in (1974) defines frames as "the principles of organization which govern events… and our subjective involvement in them" (p. 192). Further, Tuchman explains that frames "turn nonrecognizable happenings or amorphous

talk into a discernible event" (1978, p. 192). Also, De Vreese (2005) defines a frame as "an emphasis in salience of different aspects of a topic" (p. 53).

Gitlin (1980) notes that a media frame makes the world beyond direct experience appear natural. Entman (1991) argues that media framing contributes in forming public consciousness (p. 141). Furthermore, he states, "framing essentially involves selection and salience," by selecting "some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient" (1993, p. 52).

Scheufele (1999) classifies previous approaches to framing research into two dimensions: the first is about the type of frame examined (media frame vs. audience frame), while the second is about the way frames are operationalized (independent variable or dependent variable). However, Maher (2001) points out that framing scholarship focuses on the constructed nature of media messages.

According to McCombs and Ghanem, "frames typically are macro-attributes, often containing a mix of cognitive and affective elements" (2001). In addition, De Vreese (2001) suggests that framing has been helpful when it comes to understanding the "media's role in political life." Tankard (2001) argues that framing "reflects the richness of media discourse and the subtle differences that are possible when a specific topic is presented in different ways" (p. 97). It is this precise media discourse that the current study sets out to explore across two media systems, as previous scholars have linked framing to attitudinal and behavioral changes. McQuail, in his book "Theories of Mass Communication" (2009), defines framing research via two main approaches: the first is about how the news is formed by journalists and the second is about how the public is affected by framing (p. 557). He also describes framing as a "way of giving some overall interpretation to isolated

items of fact" (p. 380). Indeed, Chong and Druckman (2007) argue that "framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue." Regarding the importance of framing in communication studies, they argue that frames affect the attitudes and behaviors of their audiences.

Furthermore, framing theory's main principle is observing an issue from a diversity of viewpoints and taking it as having implications for various moral evaluations or reflections (p. 104). Bennett (2011) states that "great frames help people visualize, aspire, and put messages into the contexts of their personal lives" (p. 127). Likewise, Al Emad & Fahmy (2011) consider framing as an important approach in explaining how the media influence audiences' attitudes toward wars and conflicts.

According to Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), the most common generic frames in the news are: conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality, and responsibility. Scholarship focusing on political news in general and foreign news coverage in particular found that conflict framing tends to dominate at the expense of other interpretations. In their study about the framing of European politics in the Dutch national news media, Semetko & Valkenburg (2000) content analyzed over 3000 news stories in 1997 in four newspapers and three daily television news programs. The study tested the variance in the use of frames among outlets and topics. They investigated five news frames, namely attribution of responsibility, conflict, human interest, economic consequences, and morality, and found that the responsibility and the conflict were the most used frames in the news. Also, they claim that television news in Holland was predominantly episodic. However, regarding the Dutch press, they state "the reverse was true: 32% of stories were episodic and 68% were thematic" (p. 93-102). It is this generic framing model that the

current study plans to apply to the news coverage of ISIL by two international news websites.

Dimitrova, Kaid, Williams, & Trammell (2005) used a similar framework and studied quantitatively the immediate coverage of the 2003 Iraq War in international news web sites. The sample contained of 246 news websites from 48 countries. These websites consisted of newspapers, TV channels, and radio stations, one of which was CNN. The study found variation in "the sources, issues, and amount of initial coverage on each web site" (p. 31). They used six frames in their study as follows: conflict, human interest, diagnostic, responsibility, media self-referential, and prognostic. The findings indicated that U.S. news web sites framed the war differently than the other international websites. One of these differences was "the lack of discussion of responsibility issues across the U.S. web publications," while the international websites "were more likely to discuss and analyze issues." The study found that more episodic frames were used in the coverage of these news websites (p. 35-36). Iyengar (1991) distinguishes between episodic and thematic framing, where the episodic framing is more event-oriented and fragmented, while thematic framing puts the event in context (p. 14).

Using a quantitative content analysis, Dimitrova & Connolly-Ahern (2007) studied the homepages of four major international news organizations during the Iraq War aiming to examine the media's tale of war from two different regions. Two of the websites representing the coalition were from the U.S. (The New York Times) and the U.K. (The Guardian) and the other two representing Arab media were from Egypt (Al-Ahram) and Qatar (Al-Jazeera). The study focused on the use of sources, frames, and the tone of the coverage. They found that "the tale of war was constructed differently by the different

international media" as it was one of destruction and violence in the Arab media while in the Coalition media the tale was "one of military conflict leading to the rebuilding for the people of Iraq" (pp. 153-165).

Nevertheless, framing research is not without its critics, especially when it comes to variance among studies (Elmasry, El Shamy, Manning, Mills, & Auter, 2013). This current study aims to contribute to a specific area of framing research, naming framing of conflict and terrorism, as elaborated in the following section.

Framing of terrorism

Gans (1979) observes that American news media "often limit themselves only to the most dramatic overseas events." Norris, Kern and Just (2003) define terrorism as the organized use of forced intimidation against civilians in order to achieve political goals, while framing is the "selection to prioritize some facts, images, or developments over others, thereby unconsciously promoting one particular interpretation of events" (pp. 6, 11).

During political instability, Papacharissi and Oliveira (2008) argue that news framing presents a significant "aspect of news storytelling." In addition, concentrating on comparative frames on terrorism "allows us to follow the cognitive thread between cultural differences in news practices and internationalization of terrorist events within a society." Thussu (2003) demonstrates "news is largely about conflict, and conflict is always news."

A study cited by Ryan (2004) about the war in Kosovo, suggested that Serbian media used the techniques of the so-called "patriotic journalism" by nationalizing, mobilizing, and emotionalizing the public sphere (p. 364).

Gerhards & Schafer (2013) compared the coverage of four terrorist incidents that occurred in Madrid, London, Amman, and Sharm El Sheikh in the main news shows of the CNN (US edition) , Al-Jazeera (Arabic language service), the British BBC, the German ARD. Relying on qualitative and quantitative content analyses, they found similarities in several dimensions: "the analyzed media devote nearly identical amounts of attention to the four events, employ similar stylistic devices to describe them, and evaluate them similarly." Moreover, they found differences "between CNN and Al Jazeera on the one hand, and the BBC and ARD on the other. The former interpret the attacks as an expression of a global ''war on terror'', whereas the latter see them as criminal attacks by a few individuals against the human civilization itself" (p. 1).

Regarding CNN coverage of NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, Thussu (2002) states that it "consistently reproduced the agenda set by the United States and helped to mould public opinion in support of the war" (p. 205). Also, "television live conflict can be particularly profitable if it concerns a patriotic war" (p. 210).

Schwalbe (2013) analyzed the visual framing of the invasion and occupation of Iraq in TIME, Newsweek, U.S. News, and World Report magazines. A content analysis was conducted of 2258 images in the first 16 months shows an American-centered perspective "focusing on conflict, politications, and human interest" (p. 239).

In their study about the television news coverage of America's war in Afghanistan, Jasperson and El-Kikhia (2003) compared CNN and Al-Jazeera via analyzing 164 news stories. After studying three types of frames: governance, military, and humanitarian, they found important differences between CNN and Al-Jazeera in their assessment and

explanation of the war. In terms of the military frame, they found that Al-Jazzera's coverage did not focus on the military and strategic issues as much as CNN (p. 126).

Aday, Livingston, and Hebert (2005) studied the Iraq War coverage among six TV networks (five in the U.S. plus Al-Jazeera) in order to assess the fairness and balance of the news. One of the findings was that the U.S. networks mostly ignored any "antiwar sentiment" while Al-Jazeera "devoted more coverage to protests and diplomacy," Also, the study shows that episodic coverage was dominant across all the networks (p. 17-18).

Comparing similar news stories in various international contexts, Schaefer (2003) found that "frames are likely to come into sharpest focus... through contrasting media contexts, whether different types of media such as television news, newspaper reports, magazine feature stories, and internet websites" (p. 93).

Papacharissi & Oliveira (2008) conducted a comparative framing study of media coverage of terrorism events in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Spain. Prominent newspapers in the United States and the United Kingdom were analyzed via quantitative and qualitative methods. They found that U.S. newspapers tended to use episodic frames while the U.K. ones relied on thematic coverage (p. 70).

Studies focusing on news coverage of terrorism included content analyses of U.S. embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, and the September 11 attacks in 2001 incidents. In this study, Schaefer (2003) compared the coverage of U.S. and African newspapers. He analyzed their content quantitatively and qualitatively and found that "geographic proximity and the local angle influenced the prominence and amount of coverage" of the events under study (p. 93).

Youseff (2009) used a similar research design to examine how the CNN and Al-Jazeera websites reported Iraqi civilian casualties in the 2003 Gulf War and whether their coverage represented their engagement in propaganda. Relying on a content analysis, she found that they downplayed casualties but each of them "served a different and distinct sociological function." The study looked on how each news outlet framed several events in April of 2003. More specifically, regarding the Zafraniya explosion, she points out that CNN reported the injury of one American soldier, whereas Al-Jazeera reported the injury of "a number of U.S. troops." Also, Youseff mentions that CNN tended to downplay Iraqi casualties while "Aljazeera highlighted them and cited more Iraqi sources" (p. 13-19). Also, on the same war and via a content analysis, Al-Emad & Fahmy (2008) studied the coverage of Al-Jazeera's Arabic and English online versions. They found that both sites in their coverage depended heavily on U.S. and Iraqi sources.

Regarding Al-Jazeera's coverage of the war in Afghanistan and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Miladi (2003) observes that "it turned out to be more than the American government could bear without fighting back" (2003, p. 159). He says that Al-Jazeera "has been perceived to have gained 'world fame' in the wake of the 11 September terrorist attacks in the US through its exclusive footage of video tapes of Osama bin Laden" (p. 153).

Barkho (2010) claims that Al-Jazeera aims to draw itself closer to how Muslims and Arabs see themselves and distancing itself from how others see them by constructing its reality in a way that is different from CNN (p. 164).

This study uses the case study of ISIL to examine the extent to which the two networks differ in their coverage of terrorism.

News sources

Media frames can further influence opinion via the chosen news sources, since news sources are essential building blocks in news coverage. Journalistic norms dictate that reporters must "rely on external suppliers of raw material, whether speeches, interviews, corporate reports, or government hearings" (Shoemaker, 1996, p. 122). The selection of specific attributes of a story reflects the perspective of the source feeding specific frames of interpretation. Sources that are seen as more credible have more persuasive power on opinions (Norris, Kern and Just, 2003). Also, De Vreese links frames to various sources journalists rely on, arguing that "framing involves a communication source presenting and defining an issue" (2005, p. 52).

While Gitlin (1980) suggests that other sources than officials should be taken into consideration by the media, Shoemaker (1996) noted a heavy reporters' reliance on official sources due to several factors, one of which is the convenience as well as the "regular flow of authoritative information" (p. 125).

According to Cozma (2014) "source selection is ... a key component of the final news product, and using the same sources over time has important implications" (p. 5). In addition, Shoemaker (1996) states:

"the importance of differences between media content and other sources of information about the world lies in the fact that our views of the world, and resulting actions, will be molded by our predominant sources of information: the mass media" (p. 56).

Regarding online journalism, Allan (2006) notes that it brings "alternative perspectives, context and ideological diversity to its reporting" (p. 105). It is the purpose of

this study to examine the extent to which two leading news outlets' websites relied on diverse news sources.

CNN

The Cable News Network (CNN) was first launched in 1980 by Ted Turner in Atlanta. Since then, CNN has gained a growing reputation for being one of the essential news sources in the international sphere. One of the major changes CNN has made to the news industry was its 24-hour news style. Likewise, its online version (CNN.com) provides news stories and extended news coverage, According to the web traffic data company Alexa, CNN.com is ranked 22 among the highest visited websites in the United States.

Because of the network's central position as agenda-setter in the coverage of foreign news, CNN was selected for analysis in this study. Shoemaker (1996) states "the simultaneous transmission of news from many countries has often made CNN the quickest way to get information about what's happening around the world" (p. 48). Several recent studies have demonstrated CNN's influence on foreign policy. In fact a phenomenon called the CNN effect was coined because of the network's impact (Robinson, 1999).

Thussu (2003) claims that CNN as well as other elite media set the agenda for other news outlets. He states that CNN coverage of the gulf war in 1991 "brought military conflict into living rooms across the globe" for the first time in the history of news (p. 124). In addition, Miladi (2003) notes that the Gulf war made CNN become the "eyes and ears of the world" (p. 149).

Gilboa (2005) argues that the Gulf War marked a turning point in the history of CNN. He also explains CNN's worldwide reach:

"CNN's growth and diversification, including the creation of CNN International, have affected many faces of global communications and international relations, such as technology, economics, culture, law...."

Because of CNN's far reach and continued popularity as a news source, its website was selected for analysis in this study as a representative of U.S./western media.

Al-Jazeera

Miladi (2003) classifies the Arab media into: state-owned and privately-owned (p. 151). Al-Jazeera is funded by the Qatari government, yet it has a large margin of freedom in its coverage through its many forms either via T.V. channels or websites. This differentiates Al-Jazeera from the Qatari official state-owned T.V. station run by the ministry of information. Since its establishment in 1996, Al-Jazeera network has gained increasing importance in the Middle East. Its coverage in the wars of Afghanistan and Iraq in the aftermath of 9/11 events has been controversial. The network launched its Arabic online version Al-Jazeera.net in 2001, which was followed by Al-Jazeera International and Al-Jazeera America. Al-Jazeera's effects on the media sphere in the region have brought many political tensions for Qatar with other countries, especially its neighbors. Also, during the first months of the so-called Arab Spring, Al-Jazeera has played a crucial role supporting the political change in the region.

Taylor (2003) describes Al-Jazeera as "a unique experiment within traditionally state-controlled Arab media systems that had been subjected to considerable censorship of both news and views." He also gives an example of how it is unique by mentioning that many Arab leaders in authoritarian regimes have complained about its news coverage.

Abdul-Majeed (2008) describes Al-Jazeera as a controversial Middle East-based news organization. He observes that "Al-Jazeera has been demonized by members of the Bush administration as well as some Arab and European government officials" (p. 60). He also claims that most of the previous scholarships related to Al-Jazeera focused on the T.V. channel.

Miladi (2003) suggests that the ability to give a voice to the opposing viewpoint has made Al-Jazeera a "distinct voice" in Arab and international broadcasting. Also, Miladi claims that Al-Jazeera "has become the most independent T.V. station in the region and essential viewing for millions in the Middle East and among the Arab diaspora" (p. 50).

The regular audience of Al Jazeera is 35 million, and the network is available to 310 million viewers in the Arab world and beyond. Due to the network's reach and influence in the region, Al Jazeera was chosen as representative of Arab media.

Variables

The study is investigating five generic framing variables as proposed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000): conflict, economic consequences, responsibility, morality, and human interest, as well as two other generic frames proposed by Iyengar (1991): thematic and episodic. The study also explores source attribution as dependent variables. The two news outlets/media systems represent the independent variables.

Hypotheses and research question

Relying on the literature review above, which indicates significant differences in the way CNN and Al-Jazeera cover various news topics, the study sets out to test a series of hypotheses related to framing and source attribution patterns.

Since existing scholarship is not conclusive on the use of human interest, morality, and economic consequences framing, the first hypothesis avoids making directional predictions:

- o H1a: CNN and Al-Jazeera will frame ISIL differently.

Based on the literature on conflict, responsibility, and episodic/thematic framing, the following hypotheses make more specific predictions:

- o *H1b: CNN will use more conflict framing than Al-Jazeera*

- o *H1c: Al-Jazeera will use more responsibility framing than CNN*

- o *H2: Al-Jazeera will use more thematic framing than CNN.*

Also, the study aims to answer the following question:

RQ: How does the use of sources vary between CNN and Al-Jazeera?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Population and sample

As noted by Shoemaker (1996), media content is the basis of media impact and "the most obvious part of the mass communication process." She maintains that predicting that impact and assessing what reality we consume can be indicated through studying the media content (pp. 24-25).

Thus, in order to test the hypothesis and answer the research questions above, a content analysis was conducted of news stories published on the original websites of CNN (English) and Al-Jazeera (Arabic). These stories covered the time period from June 2014 until October 2014. The two websites cover international news stories; one based in the U.S. and the other in Qatar.

The unit of analysis of this study is the textual content of the news story. The data were collected via two ways: first, CNN's stories were accessed through the Lexis-Nexis database. Second, Al-Jazeera's stories were drawn from its website's search engine (http://www.aljazeera.net). For CNN, the following term was searched: **ISIS.** For Al-Jazeera, the following term was searched: تنظيم الدولة الإسلامية **(The Islamic State Organization)**.

The population consisted of 2789 online stories covering the issue of ISIL; 724 from CNN and 2065 from Al-Jazeera. A systematic research sample of 154 news stories was drawn and coded from the two news outlets: 72 from CNN and 82 from Al-Jazeera. Every 10th story was coded for CNN and every 20th story was coded for Al-Jazeera. When selecting the sample, if the story was not clearly about ISIL, then it was skipped and the following

article in the population was selected. The period of analysis covered: the fall of the

northern major Iraqi city Mosul, the declaration of the Chaplet, the beheadings of U.S.

journalists, and the announcement of the international coalition against ISIL.

Every paragraph in the news story was coded to test for the existence of the

dominant frame among the five generic ones proposed by Semetko & Valkenburg (2000):

conflict, economic, responsibility, morality, human interest. The frames were mutually

exclusive. If more than one frame was present in a paragraph, the dominant one was coded

as present. Some paragraphs didn't fall under any of the five frames, so they were left out of

the framing analysis, but they were counted in the total number of paragraphs in the story.

Even though the Semetko & Valkenburg definitions were used, a different method was

adapted for this study as done previously by Cozma (2014): each paragraph was coded for

the existence of a frame and a total for each frame was computed instead of using indexes.

The working definitions for each type of frame are listed below:

- **Conflict frame:** highlighting conflict within individuals, coalitions, parties, or

   institutions and emphasizes the disagreement among and between them.

Example: *"Much of the lands that have fallen to ISIS and its current allies is predominantly Sunni, where*

much of the population despises al-Maliki and his Shia-dominated government's polarizing policies."

*(*CNN, Iraqis choking roads to Kurdistan fear airstrikes, wanton violence, June 13, 2014*).*

- **Economic consequences frame:** reporting the issue in terms of the financial and

   economic consequences on individuals, coalitions, parties, institutions, or the country.

Example: *"While it currently has funds from taking over oil facilities and other operations in Iraq, the*

United States believes that will not be enough to sustain ISIS if it tries to seize the entire country, the

*official said." (*CNN, U.S. official: ISIS 'credible alternative to al Qaeda', August 14, 2014*).*

- **Morality frame:** placing the issue in the background of religious tenets or moral prescriptions.

Example: *"On Thursday, more than 100 British Muslim imams and organizations condemned ISIS' tactics and joined the call for Henning to be released." (*CNN, Friends of British hostage Alan Henning plead with ISIS to let him go, September 18, 2014)*.*

- **Responsibility frame:** attributing the responsibility for an event, issue or problem to governments or to individuals, groups, parties or institutions

Example: *"Critics blame al-Maliki and his Shia-dominated government for the worsening sectarian division in Iraq three years after U.S. troops departed the country following years of war."* (CNN, Airstrikes in Iraq unlikely absent new leader, officials say, June 26, 2014).

- **Human interest frame:** carrying a human face or an emotional viewpoint to the demonstration of an issue and dramatizing the news in order to maintain audience attention (pp. 95, 96).

Example: *"Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have fled, prompting fears of a brewing humanitarian crisis."* (CNN, Joint Chiefs chairman: Iraq has asked for U.S. air power to counter militants, June 17, 2014).

Also, following Iyengar's (1991) operationalization, two generic frames were examined: episodic and thematic. Dimitrova (2006) states, "episodic news frames are references to isolated news events, focusing on discrete cases or episodes, while thematic frames provide broader societal context to issues and events." The codebook is included in the Appendix A.

Regarding the episodic and thematic frames, the coding was implemented on the whole news story not for each paragraph.

Also, each paragraph was examined for attribution to one of the sources listed below. Attributions to each type of source were then tallied as in N number of paragraphs per total number of paragraphs were attributed to source X.

Here are examples for each sources category that the study looked for in the stories:

- Iraqi official (ex: Iraqi Prime Minister Nori Al-Maliki)

- Syrian official (ex: Syrian foreign Ministry وزارة الخارجية السورية)

- Other Arab official (ex: Saudi Arabian Government)

- Kurd official (ex: Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani)

- Turkish official (ex: The Turkish Foreign Ministry)

- Iranian official (ex: Iran's state-run Islamic Republic News Agency)

- U.S. official (ex: The White House)

- International official (ex: German Diplomats)

- Transnational Organizations (ex: OPEC)

- Syrian or Iraqi citizens (ex: a resident of Karbala)

- Social media users (ex: ناشطون سوريون على مواقع التواصل Syrian activists on Social media)

- Religious leaders (ex: Yazidi religious leader)

- Other media / Journalists (ex: The online publication Globalpost)

- ISIL representatives/ Former ISIL recruits (ex: ISIL تنظيم الدولة الإسلامية في العراق والشام)

- Others (other sources not captured by the categories above. For example: Hillary Clinton, former Secretary of State)

Intercoder reliability

To ensure reliability of coding, the researcher and another graduate student in the Journalism and Mass Communication program at Iowa State University were trained on the coding procedures. They coded a random sample that represents 10% (14 stories from CNN) of the sample. The coding was conducted twice as the first round showed variance between the two coders in how they were treating conflict paragraphs. After this issue was solved, an acceptable degree of agreement between the coders was found in the second attempt using Krippendorff's Alpha. Coefficients (total average: 0.7) are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Intercoder reliability coefficients.

Variables	Krippendorff's alpha
Conflict frame	0.95
Economic frame	0.98
Responsibility frame	0.85
Morality frame	0.00
Human interest frame	0.96
Iraqi official	0.93
Syrian official	0.00
Other Arab official	1
Kurd official	0.94

Turkish official	1
Iranian official	0.00
U.S. official	0.95
International official	0.00
Transnational Organizations	0.96
Citizens (Syrian or Iraqi)	0.99
Social media users	-0.1
Religious leaders	1
Other media / Journalists	0.82
ISIL representatives/ Former ISIL	0.64
Others	0.97
Episodic/Thematic framing	1
Average	0.7

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This study aimed to compare the framing of ISIL in CNN and Al-Jazeera online coverage over a time frame from June to October 2014. CNN stories were on average twice as long as Al-Jazeera stories (23 paragraphs vs. 11). Because of that, ratios for each frame were computed rather than comparing straight means:

(Paragraphs using specific frame / Total number of paragraphs * 100 = percentage for each frame)

The first set of hypotheses focus on the five generic frames:

- o *H1a: CNN and Al-Jazeera will frame ISIL differently.*

- o *H1b: CNN will use more conflict framing than Al-Jazeera*

- o *H1c: Al-Jazeera will use more responsibility framing than CNN*

Independent-samples t-tests (Table 2) were run to compare framing patterns at the two networks and test H1a-c. CNN used significantly more conflict framing (63% of paragraphs per story versus 50% in the typical Al-Jazeera story), thus supporting H1a, whereas Al-Jazeera framed the ISIL story more in terms of economic consequences (6.5% of paragraphs compared to only 2.3% for CNN) and of responsibility (27.7% compared to 13.4% for CNN), thus supporting H1c. The two websites used similar amounts of morality and human-interest frames (both fairly low numbers, as shown in Table 1). H1a is thus partly supported.

Table 2. Differences in generic frames between CNN and Al-Jazeera

Frames	CNN	Al-Jazeera	T
Conflict	63.35%	50.53%	2.11*
Economic consequences	2.3%	6.5%	8.96*
Responsibility	13.47%	27.7%	20.33**
Morality	3.3%	3.07%	.09
Human interest	4.2%	5.6%	1.04

Note. Independent-samples t-tests ***p <.01 *p<.05*

  o *H2: Al-Jazeera will use more thematic framing than CNN.*

The analysis found that the episodic frame dominated the coverage of ISIL with 64.9% of all articles. Only 35.1% of the stories were thematic. As indicated previously, the total number of articles in the sample is 154. The episodic articles were 100 articles while the thematic were 54. CNN and Al-Jazeera were similar in this respect as shown in table 3. Cross-tabs test found no significant differences. The second hypothesis is rejected.

Table 3. Differences in thematic/episodic framing between CNN and Al-Jazeera

Framing	CNN	Al-Jazeera	Total
Episodic	62.5%	67.1%	64.9%
Thematic	37.5%	32.9%	35.1%

Note. Cross-tabulations

RQ: How does the use of sources vary between CNN and Al-Jazeera?

The final research question explored differences in news attribution patterns. Because CNN stories are twice as long (in number of paragraphs) as Al-Jazeera stories, ratios were computed for each type of source in order to run t-tests. Regarding total number of attributions, not surprisingly, there are almost twice as many in a CNN typical story compared to Al-Jazeera as follows: 15.7 attributions for CNN vs. 8.9 for Al-Jazeera.

Table 4. Top 5 most cited CNN sources

Ranking		Mean number of attributions per story
1	U.S. Officials	5.69
2	Others	2.48
3	Other Media	2.05
4	Iraqi Officials	1.13
5	International Officials	1.08

$**p <.01$ $*p<.05$

Table 5. Top 5 most cited Al Jazeera sources

Ranking		Mean number of attributions per story
1	Other Media	2.05
2	International Officials	1.08
3	Iraqi Officials	1.03
4	U.S. Officials	.91

| 5 | Transnational Organizations | .62 |

Independent-samples t-tests were run to examine differences in source attribution patterns. Table 6 shows that CNN and Al-Jazeera differed significantly in their reliance on Iraqi officials (CNN= 4% of attributions vs. Al-Jazeera = 12.6% of total attributions).

Also, the two networks differed significantly in their use of transnational organizations representing 7.23% of Al-Jazeera source attributions while in CNN they were 2.8%. Regarding social media users, a significant difference was found as Al-Jazeera use of them was 0.2% while CNN 1.7%. In addition, 29.82% of Al-Jazeera sources were other media whereas CNN's reliance on them was 14.96%. Such media sources included several magazines and newspapers from the United States (for example, *Foreign Policy* magazine) and the United Kingdom (*Financial Times*) as well as news agencies (*Reuters*) and local news organizations that do not belong to the regime in Syria (*Syria Live, Syria Smart Agency, Masar Press* and others) and in Iraq (*Al-Baghdadiayh Channel, Al-Rafiden Channel* and others).

Regarding the category "other sources," the two websites differed significantly with 15.04% of attributions at CNN and 5.96% at Al-Jazeera. Such sources that did not fit any of the exiting categories included former diplomats, such as former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Shirley Sotloff-the mother of Steven Sotloff, counterterrorism expert Philip Mudd, and others. For CNN, where other sources were the second most cited category, many such sources were former politicians, indicating that such a category would have been preferred in the current study.

Table 6. Differences in source attribution between CNN and Al-Jazeera websites

Sources	CNN	Al-Jazeera	T
Iraqi Officials	4.1%	12.6%	25.99**
Syrian Officials	.06%	1.9%	6.45
Other Arab Officials	5.83%	3.6%	1.66
Kurd Officials	1.77%	2.6%	1.55
Turkish Officials	.33%	.58%	1.79
Iranian Officials	.08%	.25%	2.41
U.S. Officials	38.1%	8.8%	45.63**
International Officials	6.6%	12.25%	6.02
Transnational Organizations	2.8%	7.23%	12.84**
Citizens (Syrian or Iraqi)	4.08%	6.09%	2.48
Social Media Users	1.7%	.2%	19.97**
Religious Leaders	2.8%	3.08%	.11
Other Media	14.96%	29.82%	31.66**
ISIL	1.56%	4.8%	8.8
Others	15.04%	5.96%	11.4**

Note. Independent-samples t-tests *$**p < .01$ $*p < .05$*

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

News frames and sources

This thesis set out to compare the framing and sourcing patterns in the news coverage of ISIL by CNN and Al-Jazeera. The results show that the conflict frame dominated the coverage of ISIL among the 154 stories in both countries that were analyzed in this study from June to October in 2014. The dominance of the conflict frame was expected because of the events' nature. This pattern is consistent with foreign-news coverage as examined by previous studies (Dimitrova, 2006).

Also, the fast developments of ISIL on the ground following its capturing of Mosel may explain the dominance of the episodic frame representing 64.9% of the whole coverage. Only 35.1% of the stories were thematic while the rest were episodic.

Regarding the 54 stories that were identified as thematic, both networks tried to explain ISIL and its advancement in Iraq in the aftermath of Mosel's fall and how it was threatening Baghdad. Overwhelmingly, Al-Jazeera focused on the conflict in Syria and ISIL's advancement there. However, CNN devoted some efforts to explore the connection between ISIL and Al-Qaeda and tried to understand the reasons leading to the bombings executed by ISIL.

Also, CNN's stories focused on the international nature of the coalition in order to clarify that the airstrikes were not conducted by the United States alone. The network explored the formation of the coalition and the role of the participant countries, and highlighted that the airstrikes on ISIL differed from the Iraq war in 2003. In addition, CNN

tried to explain how ISIL recruited and attracted westerner supporters. In contrast, Al-Jazeera's stories were concerned about Iraq's unity.

However, CNN relied significantly more heavily on conflict framing compared to Al-Jazeera (two thirds vs one half of the respective samples), supporting the U.S. media's propensity of relying on the conflict news value. This might have been dictated by the nature of the events developing in the region affected by ISIL, which saw a lot of violent conflict. The conflict in Iraqi cities received heavy coverage by both networks. This also applied to the fight between ISIL and the Kurdish army Peshmerga in several battles. The unstable situation in the border Lebanese city was covered by Al-Jazeera, while there was no mention to Lebanon in the CNN stories.

Conflict was also prevalent in stories with more local angles, reflecting political differences. Stories that were questioning Obama's strategy showed conflict between the two major U.S. parties in the CNN stories. CNN also focused on stories about the arrests of individuals with connection to ISIL in U.S. cities (Texas man, Californian man, and North Carolinian man). Also, the effects of the mid-term elections and the government shutdown received considerable amount of attention in the CNN coverage, which again translated in a lot of conflict framing.

In contrast, Al-Jazeera made significantly more room for the responsibility frame. The need of a governmental change in Iraq was covered by both CNN and Al-Jazeera, but the latter had more stories blaming the former Prime Minister Al-Maliki for the situation. The internal blame game within the Iraqi parties after the fall of Mosel was heavily covered by Al-Jazeera, including the Kurdish leader's blame on the Iraqi government regarding the

failure in Mosel. Also, external accusations were made in this matter such as the reciprocal accusations between Al-Maliki's regime and Saudi Arabia about the conflict in Iraq.

Jordan as a neighboring country for both Iraq and Syria was present in the coverage of CNN and Al-Jazeera. CNN talked about the Jordanian dilemma in terms of being home to more than 1.3 million Syrian refugees plus the economic consequences on the country, while Al-Jazeera highlighted the Jordanian role for hosting a meeting for the Iraqi opposition forces and the trail for other Jihadists regarding their links to extremist groups.

In terms of the variance between CNN and Al-Jazeera in the other frames (economic consequences/morality/human interest), some of Al-Jazeera's stories focused on the economic challenges facing the new Iraqi government and on how ISIL was benefiting from the oil fields it seized. Also, Al-Jazeera covered the damages to the Syrian oil fields because of the conflict. Yet, despite the devastation brought about by ISIL to the local economies and the refugee crisis in the area, the economic consequences and human-interest frames hardly made an appearance in the two news organizations' coverage.

In terms of human interest framing, Al-Jazeera highlighted the struggle of the refugees in Lebanon and Erbil as well as the suffering of the Yezidis and the displacement of Christians from Mosul. It also covered the Turkish detainees issue and the U.N. call for releasing them. On the other hand, CNN covered the James Foley and Steven Sotloff beheadings in addition to the British hostage John Cantlie, who was beheaded later, in a human-interest context.

Morality frames were even sparser. CNN questioned the morality of watching and broadcasting the beheadings videos such as the James Foley video. Also, Both CNN and Al-Jazeera covered the Pope reaction to the rise of ISIL.

As mentioned in the results above, CNN relied heavily on U.S. sources, buttressing

the indexing hypothesis as proposed Bennett (2011) , who explained that even though

there have been changes in the news, "most political news still originates from government

officials" (p. 118). Since ISIL is an international topic removed from Americans' first-hand

experience, reliance on U.S. officials could also be a way for CNN to localize its coverage.

This makes sense, since important events during the time under analysis included the

beheadings of the two U.S. journalists and the possible threat of ISIL to the United States.

The second most cited sources in CNN coverage was "others," which were typically former

U.S. officials that were interviewed in its stories for their opinions regarding ISIL

On the other hand, Al-Jazeera's dependence on "journalists/other media" sources in

its stories is the highest, which refers to the high number of stories citing U.S. and U.K.

media about the issues in the Middle East, one of which was ISIL. The second most cited

source in Al-Jazeera's coverage was "international officials." This category included a large

number of international players that did not fall under any of the specified categories in the

codebook, especially Iraqi/Syrian/U.S. officials. Also, the difficulties of having journalists on

the ground appears to increase the reliance on other media in the stories, and this applies

to both CNN and Al-Jazeera.

While the table of sources seems to indicate a certain diversity of sources (after all, a

typical CNN story cited an average of 16 sources), that diversity is confined to a limited

umbrella of public officials, all easily accessible by the two news organizations. Both news

outlets relied on other media heavily, curating content from wherever it was possible,

given the lack of access in the region. Voices of local citizens or social media accounts were

cited very seldom. This, again, may be explained by the restricted access to the region and the difficulty to assess the credibility of alternative accounts on social media.

Implications

The study shows that conflict framing and episodic framing dominated, following the trends reviewed in the literature. Unlike in the Papacharissi & Oliveira (2008) comparative study focusing on framing of terrorism, the current analysis found no significant differences between Al-Jazeera and the western network in their heavy use of episodic coverage. This type of superficial coverage can affect readers' understanding of complex issues.

The reporters' reliance on official sources that was noted by Shoemaker (1996) fits with the findings of this study regarding CNN, indicating that the network depends on local official voices to cover international events. Also, Al-Jazeera's reliance on Iraqi official sources in this study fits with what Youseff (2009) found about the coverage of Iraq War in 2003. However, the proximity factor appears to be stronger in the CNN case comparing with Al-Jazeera as shown above in tables 3 and 4.

By comparing the online coverage of two major networks globally, this study brings both theoretical and practical contributions. It helps advance our understanding of the framing theory in an international context as well as of the news gathering practices in diverse media systems and how they cover terrorism. While both CNN and Al-Jazeera focused on conflict-heavy episodes, these episodes tended to differ by region, and news sourcing patterns varied significantly. From a normative standpoint, these differences in how two leading international news organizations (agenda setters with arguably extensive resources) covered an important but hard to reach story show that readers should rely on

a variety of news media in order to get a more complete picture on global developments. After all, these two media organizations themselves tended to turn to other news outlets to complement their news coverage.

As of the writing of this section and almost a year after the fall of the city of Mosel, ISIL has recently captured the city of Al-Ramadi, increasing the area that is off limits to foreign correspondents while warranting more attention to the story of ISIL's expansion. Although there has been a heavy coverage of ISIL, there still exists ambiguity about the organization and its internal structure. This could indicate the need of more thematic coverage in addition to diverse news sources, especially from the ground. Since access is difficult, perhaps more reliance on first-person accounts shared on social media could be a way to get more information, especially since insurgents, citizens, and ISIL alike have been relying on social platforms to get their agendas and voices out.

Limitations and directions for future research

One limitation of this study is that the names of ISIL have been changing since its emergence. In addition, the disagreement among news networks about the name comes with the fact that ISIL itself changed its name after the declaration of the Chaplet from the Islamic State in Iraq to Levant (ISIL) to the Islamic State (IS). Moreover, before the Syrian conflict started, it had been known as the Islamic State in Iraq. As of now, almost a year after the fall of Mosel, the disagreement over ISIL names is still persisting among the news outlets.

In addition, the complicated conflict on the ground in Iraq and Syria makes it challenging for the journalists and networks covering the story to identify the various groups involved and to categorize them. This issue comes up when coding some of the

sources cited such as "Syrian Kurdish fighter." Here it becomes confusing whether to code this fighter as Syrian or Kurdish. Similarly, the fighters that neither belong to ISIL nor to the Syrian or Iraqi governments were not included in the code book, which makes them coded as "others.'

Another limitation is the way Al-Jazeera stories were collected because the website's search engine gave different, but similar, number of stories in the results every time the key term was entered. In contrast, CNN's stories were collected more conveniently via the Lexis-Nexis data base. Also, random sampling would have been preferable to systematic sampling, given Al-Jazeera search engine's unreliable algorithm.

Future research should study how CNN and Al-Jazeera framed the other forces on the ground in Syria and Iraq in comparison to ISIL. Also, it could focus on a time frame that includes fewer dramatic events and more "mundane" developments to examine whether episodic and conflict framing are the norm in the coverage of ISIL. Moreover, the differences among the other online versions of CNN and Al-Jazeera in their coverage of the conflict should be compared, as they have different target audiences.

Given Al-Jazeera's higher focus on the refugee crisis (which was captured with the human-interest frame), a future study could complement the findings of this thesis by adding the governance, military, and humanitarian frames that Jasperson and El-Kikhia (2003) used to compare CNN and Al-Jazeera.

With regard to the influence of CNN and Al-Jazeera on their media systems, there are other news outlets that also have deep interests in political and foreign news. Therefore, future attempts may consider studying a larger sample of news outlets especially in the coverage of an issue that has been affecting many areas in the world. Also,

analysis of online content should also look at visuals (photos and videos) in addition to text to better assess framing.

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APPENDIX - CODE SHEET

<u>The unit of analysis:</u> The textual form of the news story.

1. Coder Name: _____

2. Story Number: ___

3. Date of Publication mm/dd/yy: (/   /   )

4. News Website:

   - CNN.com __

   - Aljazeera.net __

5. Number of words: __

6. Total number of paragraphs: __

7. Total number of conflict framed paragraphs: __

8. Total number of economic consequences framed paragraphs: __

9. Total number of responsibility framed paragraphs: __

10. Total number of morality framed paragraphs: __

11. Total number of human interest framed paragraphs: __

 12. Sources:

   - Iraqi official __

   - Syrian official __

   - Other Arab official __

   - Kurd official __

   - Turkish official __

   - Iranian official __

   - U.S. official __

- International official ＿

- Transnational Organizations ＿

- Citizens (Syrian or Iraqi) ＿

- Social media users ＿

- Religious leaders ＿

- Other media / Journalists ＿

- ISIL representatives/ Former ISIL recruits ＿

- Others ＿

13. Framing of news story:

- Episodic frame ＿

- Thematic frame ＿

14. Notes: