

THE UNSEEN FRONT: A CALL FOR OBJECTIVE MEDIA REPORTING IN WARTIME

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Abstract: The role of news media during and in pursuit of war has been a hotly debated topic since the Vietnam War. Some argue that the media can play a positive role by informing the public and holding governments accountable, while others believe that it can be used to manipulate public opinion and support for war. This paper examines the instrumental and genuine value of media during conflicts, drawing on research from political science, communication studies, and journalism.

Keywords: News media, War, Conflict, Media effects, Public opinion

Introduction

What is the instrumental or genuine value of media during conflicts? The role of news media during and in pursuit of war has been a hotbed of discussion since the Vietnam War (Robinson, Goddard, Parry, & Murray, 2009). The invasion of Iraq by the United States under the Bush administration even generated concepts such as the “CNN Effect,” and the last two decades have largely focused on how media was operationalized during wars (Gilboa, 2005). It is often asserted that in times of war, media outlets obtain a key role in mobilizing public support for the persuasion of political interests through the coverage of violence (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Entman, 2003; Lecheler & De Vreese, 2018; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). News media has the potential to conceal losses, cover up non humanitarian tactics for their political authority, and exaggerate these sorts of incidents for political rivals. This approach and explanations of media performance were formulated into three models: elite-driven, independent, and oppositional (Robinson et al., 2009). These media-performance models were often used to make sense of warmongering, constraining, and oppositional news flows during wars that had a regional and global impact.

The Yemeni Civil War, which started in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, has been one such case in the sense that it caused a plethora of regional and global concerns about interstate conflict and humanitarian issues. The study acknowledges the previous scholarship on the securitization of borders and its effect on interstate conflict (Arieli, 2016). The local, regional, and global media outlets have presented contrasting views on the incidents during the war (Abdullah & Elareshi, 2015; Bajs, 2019; Efe, 2019; Elzahar, 2019; Grigoroudis, 2017; Mejalli, 2019). By investigating two different media sources, this study tries to analyze this contrast in the presentation of the war utilizing the media-performance models typology of Robinson, Goddard, Parry, and Murray (2009). The news media outlets were sampled from Saudi Arabia and Qatar as these states have presented very divergent conflict-management systems through their most prominent media outlets. Several studies have

already revealed that the countries of the Middle East have been following different conflict-management strategies (Posthuma, 2011). The focal point of the data acquisition term revealed how these media outlets would fit into the performance models and what the practical results of each performance type were. The pilot tests and the data analysis showed that there was not much activity that could be considered under the oppositional model (Gause, 2000). Hence, the spectrum of modeling was made bipolar for less fuzzy results.

This study makes two distinct contributions to literature through a unique data set and its focus on the non-Western context. First, it contrasts the news media's performance and tone toward war depending on the direct and indirect engagement in a specific war. While analyzing Saudi news media outlets' presentation of the Yemeni war, the study focuses on avoiding incidents that may hurt the influence and leverage of the Saudi elite classes. Second, the study examines the Qatari news media's attitude toward the Yemeni Civil War to show that the less belligerent states or indirect engagers of war have a higher potential for more independent media performance. Third, by analyzing Qatari news media's presentation of the civil war, the study will illustrate how bilateral political rivalries may affect news media independence on the same issue. This contract reveals itself in Qatari news media's presentation of the Yemeni war before and after the 2017 Gulf crisis.

The study presents its theoretical approach and a summary of the media environments in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The results are presented after explicating the details about the methodology and measurement.

Theoretical Approach

The traditional understanding of the journalistic media simply postulates that it serves as a strategic actor in the policymaking process (Baum & Potter, 2008). Rather than independently conveying the facts, the media ill-informs the public for the interests of the ruling elite (Brody, 1991; Djankov, McLiesh, Nenova, & Shleifer, 2003). This traditional understanding has inspired many academic studies, especially after Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky published their path-breaking study, *Manufacturing Consent*, in 1988.

Unlike this propaganda model, a new strand of scholarship suggested that the live coverage of events, especially in war zones, dramatically altered the relationship between elites and the media (Beaufort, 2018; Bennett, 1990; Mullen & Klaehn, 2010). Popularized as the "CNN Effect," this argument suggests that the media pressures the leaders and forces them into a certain policy by influencing public opinion in a certain direction (Gilboa, 2005). The U.S. decision to invade Iraq in 2003 revived the traditional approach in different subdisciplines, such as terrorism and critical security studies. Scholars rushed to investigate the large corpus of media reports to show "the political and constructed nature of threats" (Lusk, 2021, p. 2). For example, securitization theory has been employed extensively to investigate how political leaders use the media (security agencies) to construct some subjects as a threat (Balzacq, Léonard, & Ruzicka, 2016).

Building on traditional and critical literature on the relations between the media and political elites, this article suggests hypotheses to understand the representations of the Yemeni Civil War in two big media outlets of the Arab world, Al Arabiya, and Al Jazeera. First, media institutions controlled by

countries directly involved in the war present the facts by demonizing one of the warring sides. Robinson (2012) asked two fundamental questions about the extent of media cheerleading in pursuing wars and its capacity to limit states from engaging in such antagonism. Especially after the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the relevant literature has been preoccupied with the debate over whether the news media promote wars or soothe them. In this regard, many studies proved that media is, in fact, elite-driven and, therefore, a faithful servant of the state (Balci, 2010; Robinson et al., 2009; Wolfsfeld, 1997). The present study derives from this hypothetical ground. It exposes how autocratic settings promote warmonger and elite-driven news media even at a higher scale through Al Arabiya's presentation of the Yemeni Civil War.

However, the scholarship did not completely omit the human essence in journalism and paved the way for media-performance models independent of the political setting and state interests (Althaus, 2003; Robinson, Goddard, Parry, Murray, & Taylor, 2016). This was not just a perspective toward how the news was presented to the audience through news media, but it also had faith in public opinion. Often referred to as liberal-democratic, this approach argued for the necessity and possibility of independent, unbiased, and impartial news media performance (Entman, 2003; Hallin, 1994). The idea of independent news media and public opinion was rooted in creating democratic constraints on politics through news flow (Baum & Groeling, 2009; Baum & Potter, 2015). However, the insistence on impartiality and virtues in autocratic political settings seems to be leading the news media outlets to focus on the humanitarian issues caused by the conflicts between states. The study aims to test and scrutinize this hypothesis through Al Jazeera's efforts to impartially present the humanitarian side of the war to raise global awareness.

The study also used substantial contributions from the mediatization literature. The study applies a triangulation method through quantitative content analysis and the qualitative evaluation of these findings (Olsen, 2004). The authors also used news media paradigms such as mediatization, media-performance models, and news framing. Despite the heavier derivation from media-performance models, the study also used the stages of mediatization with a specific focus on the third and fourth stages, where the framing of news, agenda setting, and execution occurs (Strömbäck, 2008).

The news media literature almost always focuses on the media performances of the states that were engaged in wars directly and are mostly driven by issue salience (Carruthers, 2011; Dimitrova & Connolly-Ahern, 2007; Hutchinson, 2008). However, to what extent the news media content is affected by war when a state is an indirect party is a question that remains ambiguous to the field. It is arguable that the distance to the war-making, both in territorial and political means, may provide a cushion for news media to have some maneuvering space. Al Jazeera's case poses a great potential to see if states leverage such indirect engagements to use the tone and content of the news media for bargains during bilateral and regional problems such as the Gulf crisis in 2017. How did the diplomatic crisis between Qatar and Saudi Arabia affect Al Jazeera's presentation of a war in which Riyadh is directly involved?

Case Selection and Methodology

The Yemen War was chosen to scrutinize the research question as it comprises an ongoing war with at least two external parties involved with influential news media outlets. Since Middle Eastern states with

major media outlets are involved in this war, there is a certain chance of a content tone divergence. To observe and analyze the differences in news performance models, Qatar and Saudi Arabia were selected to conduct the most similar systems with different outcome (MSDO) methods with a deductive approach. The MSDO technique is usually used for intermediate Large-*N* studies that are variable-oriented for pattern determination (Berg-Schlosser & De Meur, 2009). As several scholars have asserted, comparative media studies are mostly based on the “most similar systems” design in search of particularities (Hallin & Mancini, 2011). A typical “most similar systems” design requires all control variables to be similar except for one aspect. For the Saudi and Qatari cases we can say they are both authoritarian political settings, kingdoms, have natural resources, rich economies, high GDP per capita, etc., but their way of news framing (the independent variable studied) is quite different, which makes it accurate for a comparative study between Saudi Arabia and Qatar (Anckar, 2008). This study applies a variable-oriented analysis under MSDO, which is thought to be applicable to several cases. Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera come to the front in an almost intrinsic manner since they, especially the latter, have become the ruling presenters of mainstream ideas in the region (Seib, 2005, 2008; Zayani & Sahraoui, 2017).

This study was designed to test and compare two similar systems to discover particular patterns of differences about the coverage of the Yemeni war. The frequency test resolved the question about the uniformity of news representation for the relatively lengthy period of five years. With the help of a clear-cut coding sheet, the news articles were categorized with a significantly high level of intercoder reliability/concord between the two coders. Additional qualitative analyses supporting the quantitative (Chisquare and frequency) analysis elaborated on the insights revealed through the relatively large data set. The abstract nature of raw data in Large-*N* studies was avoided by implementing on-the-point assertions about the patterns of differences.

Measurement and Variables

A quantitative content analysis was applied for this research as it is a widely used measurement tool in media and communication studies (Krippendorff, 1989). Content analysis helps scholars trace the absence or presence of content in output for a certain period (Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf & Kumar, 2016). This study analyzes the Arabic coverage of the Yemeni war in two leading Arab news websites, Al

Jazeera (<https://www.aljazeera.net/>) and Al Arabiya (<http://www.alarabiya.net>) for five years, from April 1, 2015, to March 31, 2020. This period experienced the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the Yemeni war, and the Qatari/Gulf crisis in 2017. The English versions were also analyzed, and it was discovered that there are several differences between the two versions, with the Arabic websites being more comprehensive in content and frequency. It should also be underlined that the social or mental mobilization of the Arab societies should categorically necessitate the analysis of the Arabic media outputs rather than English, which has a narrower audience in the region.

This study considers news content as the outputs of certain political situations and developments to direct public opinion in the desired way. The independent variable in this research was the interstate political rivalry that then affects the intervening variable of the belligerence status of a country in a war,

explaining the dominance and the salience of news content toward that issue. Hence, the dependent variables were the aspect of interest and the nature of coverage affected by the political authority's position in or toward a salient issue.

Among the several potential control variables, the United Nations' active role in the Yemeni Civil War and its position were selected to test this study's causality chain. This selection comes with feasibility measures since the data were already obtained within this research. Most news articles about statements of U.N. envoys, U.N. meetings, and so on, 67.9%, are coded as mixed. This shows that the nature of coverage of U.N.-related news was objective at a certain level, which indicates that U.N. actions generally do not affect the nature of coverage in any direction. The positive and negative nature of coverage about the U.N.-related news articles has a ratio of 26.6% and 5.5%, respectively. For the U.N.'s position toward the Yemeni Civil War to be a control variable, the variances between precrisis and postcrisis periods should coincide with the research data. The data about the positive nature of coverage shows that the U.N.'s position toward Saudi actions shows a slight increase of 2%, from 25.7% to 27.7%, although Al Arabiya poses much higher percentages with a significant increase in the postcrisis period from 79.5% to 92.1%. However, Al Jazeera shows a change in the opposite direction, from 61.5% to 15.5%, in the positivity of the content. For the negative nature of coverage, the United Nations' position toward the issue favored the Qatari side with an increase from 0.5% to 11%, although the negativity in the news used in Al Arabiya decreased from 2.7% to 1.5%, showing no proof of interdependence. Al Jazeera on the other hand, increased the negative tone in the news articles from 9.2% to 57.1%, which indicates that the United Nations' negative approach was instrumentalized by this outlet without a general accord. Last, the objective approach of the United Nations shows a significant decrease from 73.6% to 60.3%. Al Arabiya's objective/mixed coverage decreased from 17.7% to 6.3%, indicating clear irrelevance between the United Nations' position and its nature of coverage despite moving in the same direction. Al Jazeera followed a mixed nature of coverage ranging from 29.1% and 27.3% between the pre- and postcrisis periods, which plainly signifies that the United Nations' position did not cause any similar shifts in Al Jazeera's mixed coverage of the Yemeni Civil War. The control variable tested the data and the causality chain in terms of serendipity and specified that there is a clear interdependence between the variables selected within this study.

About other variables examined in accordance with the aforementioned research questions, *salience* is the variable that illustrates the prevalence of an issue. The salience variable helps the coders in terms of crystallizing the selectivity of the websites on certain issues, such as humanitarian crises, war crimes, and lack of public services. *Naming* indicates the coverage of the Yemeni war focused on the political and military structures like Houthis, the Yemeni government, coalition forces, national armies, and more. The difference in *naming* these structures reveals how the newspaper sources diverge in coverage. *The WPR (What's the problem represented to be?) approach* offered by Bacchi (2012) enables coding to single out the core of any content. This method focuses on how a news story is built and what lies in its center. The WPR variable was divided into four categories as actions, issues, naming, and news events. Moreover, the *tone of content* variable was used for detailing the positive and negative tones in the coding of news articles. If the tone of content in a news article was found to be leaning

positively toward the Yemeni government, Saudi army, or the coalition forces, that news article was coded as positive. But news articles with delegitimizing or an overall negative tone of content toward these organs were coded as negative. Thus, the content's positivity or negativity is determined by the news articles' presentation of the Yemeni government, Houthis, coalition forces, Saudi army, Yemeni army, U.N. bodies, and war-caused issues. A positive tone indicates that the Yemeni government, coalition forces, and Saudi and Yemeni armies are supported and affirmed. Conversely, the negative tone specifies the news articles with delegitimizing or negating aspects designed to hurt the Saudi-UAE-Yemeni Government's prestige.

Sampling

The unit of analysis for this study was the news stories published and stored in the website archives. The unitizing process was implemented through categorical distinctions, which include references to names—as in our case, some keywords bear multiple interpretations (Krippendorff, 2018). For instance, Houthis are putschists to one side and rebels to the other. Overall, 3,016 news stories were sampled in this research. The content about action, problem, naming, and news events was included. The sampling was realized with a stratified sampling method with a certain approximate number of units previously determined for each newspaper as subpopulations.

The news archives of the two media outlets were searched using five specific keywords as Yemeni war [الحرب اليمنية], Yemeni Crisis [تمزأ نميلا], Yemen [اليمن], Houthi [الحوثي], and Coalition [التحالف]. Through a systematic random sampling method, we gathered 3,016 news articles (1,502 news from Al Arabiya and 1,514 news from Al Jazeera). This number was reached with certain considerations for the outlets' feasibility and equal monthly representation. To reduce content repetition, the minimum number of days between articles was coded as three, and the maximum was seven to include at least one story per week. Articles representing the tone of content published on the same days were rarely used, and news from noncorrespondent days was included occasionally.

Coding and Intercoder Reliability

A coding sheet was constructed for the content analysis alongside an elaborated visual presentation provided to coders. Coders were selected from PhD students who are native Arabic speakers. Two types of questions categorize the objective and subjective features of the news sampled. Objective features include the date, size, indicative words, and so on, whereas subjective features focus on the aspects of interest and the nature of coverage. There were specific pejorative words defined after the dummy test, such as terrorist, separatist, putschist, and militia, and legitimizing words, such as legitimate, humanitarian, and aid, were highlighted to increase the intercoder compliance. The coders were provided with three categories (positive, negative, and mixed/unclear) in terms of grouping the news according to the subjective features of a news story. The positive news was coded as one, while negative and mixed were coded as -1, 0, respectively. The coders determined the positivity or negativity of a news article considering the nature of coverage that is observable in at least 75% of the text.

The intercoder reliability was measured through a dummy test including 300 units. The reliability tests were applied to measure the independent variables' impact accurately. Per Holsti's method, the intercoder reliability scores were above .85 for all categories. The agreement on the mixed/unclear

category was above .95, while positive and negative categories presented varying levels between .85 and .90. Another intercoder reliability test made was Scott's Pi, which is specific to coding processes with two coders only. The Scott's Pi test generated 0.85 overall consistency between coders, which is in the top-level accord between coders. The detailed Scott's Pi tests for Al Jazeera and Al Arabia generated intercoder reliability scores of 0.79 and 0.87, respectively.

Media Environments Led by Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya

Scholarship hints at severe reservations about the media environments' liberty in terms of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, often highlighting the high level of mediatization (Guaaybess, 2013; Mejalli, 2019; Pintak, 2008). Maintaining a tight grip on the media, the Saudi and Qatari monarchies present their arguments through these international media outlets for greater bargains in the international arena. The instrumental value of these outlets is elaborated in the following section with an emphasis on how they have become the leading regional sources of targeted news presentation.

Al Jazeera

Established in 1996 with the support of the State of Qatar, Al Jazeera quickly became one of the most influential media organs in the Arab world. Though the network's live coverage of Operation Desert Fox in 1998 enabled it to be recognized regionally and globally for the first time, the Palestinian Intifada in 2000, the Afghanistan War in 2001, the Iraq War in 2003, the Israel-Hezbollah War in 2006, Gaza War in 2008–2009, and the Arab Spring in 2010–2011 all increased its reputation as one of the leading global media outlets (Abdelmoula, 2015). Although Al Jazeera introduces itself as “an independent news organization funded in part by the Qatari government” (*Al Jazeera English*, 2018, para. 1), the network's relationship with the political authority in Qatar has always been a matter of debate. The network, while expressing many human rights violations in Arab countries, has preferred to remain silent on some political issues related to Qatar (Figenschou, 2014). On the other hand, Al Jazeera has been criticized for its news media performance through the reports like Shiite protests in Bahrain against the monarchy and Muslim Brotherhood–sided coverage in Egypt (Al-Rawi, 2017).

The economic support provided by the Qatar administration to Al Jazeera has always been the subject of discussion on the network's claim of having an independent broadcasting policy. The U.S. Embassy cables leaked by WikiLeaks pointed out that Qatar used Al Jazeera as a *bargaining tool* in foreign policy negotiations. The cables, for example, reported that Qatari-Saudi relations “are generally improving after Qatar toned down criticism of the Saudi royal family on Al Jazeera” (Booth, 2010, para. 7). Although Al Jazeera chose not to comment too much on the U.S. cables, the network presented itself as an example of independent journalism by publishing The Palestine Papers, which “look inside the continuing negotiations involving high-level American, Israeli, and Palestinian Authority officials” (Carlstrom, 2011, para. 2). This one-sided policy falsified the claim that “Al Jazeera is state-funded in terms of financial resources, but independent operationally” (Figenschou, 2014, p. 27) and suggested that this independence is contextual and conditional (Figenschou, 2014).

The findings of some studies provide a powerful demonstration of this suggestion. For Zayani (2013), who examined media politics through Al Jazeera's Palestine Papers, the network's decision to publish these leaks was “a political decision as it is hard to disengage Al Jazeera from its Qatari sponsor” (p.

30). Samuel-Azran's comprehensive study, based on Al Jazeera's coverage of Saudi Arabia during the Qatari-Saudi conflict, also enables us to scrutinize whether Al Jazeera's editorial policy confirms Qatar's political discourse. He has found a strong correlation between Al Jazeera's tone toward Saudi affairs and the existence of the Qatari-Saudi conflict and argued that "Qatar invented a new model of public diplomacy by operating Al-Jazeera as a hybrid state-sponsored/private network, effectively transforming the network into a highly potent public diplomacy tool" (Samuel-Azran, 2013, p. 1293). Ajaoud and Elmasry (2020) and Kharbach's (2020) studies on the 2017 Gulf crises, comparing Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, also conclude that "both networks adopted the positions of the governments to which they are allied" and supported their employers to gain political influence (Kharbach, 2020, p. 12).

Al Arabiya

Al Arabiya has been broadcasting since 2003, and its website (alarabiya.net), used in this study, went online only a year later. The channel was established with impactful Saudi sponsorship under the Middle East Broadcast Centre façade (Behraves, 2014). Thus, in return, the biggest consumer market of this media outlet is, by a large margin, the Saudi and United Arab Emirates nationals.

Similar to Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya also produces news content under a state-dominated media structure with certain limitations to its maneuvering (Al-Rawi, 2017; Mellor, Ayish, Dajani, & Rinnawi, 2011; Rugh, 2007). Two structural aspects illustrate the limitations of Al Arabiya's objectivity: financial dependence and ideological exclusion. This news outlet was a state-based project as a reaction to Al Jazeera's rise after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States and the 2003 Iraqi War (Iskandar & El-Nawawy, 2004; Seib, 2007). The rich oil industry has been fueling Al Arabiya to develop a regional media outlet that promotes "Saudi" opinions with a certain potential to resonate with Arab audiences (Zayani & Sahraoui, 2017). This has built an immense financial dependency on the media organization as it became increasingly ideological in its news and broadcast (Abdulmajid, 2019). A close analysis of more than 1,500 news articles on the Yemeni war plainly illustrates that the organization does not have a broad palette of opinions, especially on political issues.

As the Freedom House records specify, the Saudi Arabia media environment functions under "not free" conditions. It is observable in the quantitative analysis that Al Arabiya is almost always on the monarchy's side. As the 1992 Basic Law does not endow journalists with judicial leverage, there have been several cases of official harassment, lengthy prison sentences, and even assassinations, like in the recent case of Jamal Khashoggi. With all these contractions and limitations on opinion diversity, Al Arabiya stands closer to pro-Western monarchies such as Kuwait, Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, under the "moderation axis" (Zeng & Tahat, 2012). Although there is an inclination to modernize the media sphere, the Saudi Arabian media environment has only modernized in terms of more inclusiveness for content. Several scholars still argue that Saudi media outlets have a conventional obligation to be "loyal" to the monarch (Rugh, 2004; Zayani, 2012).

Findings

This study illustrates how Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya portrayed the Yemeni war and the impact that the 2017 Gulf crisis had on how this specific war was presented in these media outlets. The study is based

on the claims that the content and intensity of the media coverage of the war, presented by the statesponsored media organs of the countries that are parties to the Yemeni war, differ according to their active positions in the war. The crisis and political rivalries that broke out during the war-caused changes in the way these media outlets presented the war to their readers.

Table 1. The Frequency Test's Results for Each Media Outlet.

Al Jazeera Frequency Analysis (Quarterly)					Al Arabiya Frequency Analysis (Quarterly)					
Quarter	Observed	Pearson d	Expected d	Expected exp	Observed d	Expected d	Observed exp	Pearson		
2015Q2	79	75.100	3.900	0.450	90	75.700	14.300	1.644		
2015Q3	70	75.100	-5.100	-0.589	74	75.700	-1.700	-0.195		
2015Q4	76	75.100	0.900	0.104	77	75.700	1.300	0.149		
2016Q1	80	75.100	4.900	0.565	74	75.700	-1.700	-0.195		
2016Q2	80	75.100	4.900	0.565	82	75.700	6.300	0.724		
2016Q3	66	75.100	-9.100	-1.050	70	75.700	-5.700	-0.655		
2016Q4	83	75.100	7.900	0.912	74	75.700	-1.700	-0.195		
2017Q1	71	75.100	-4.100	-0.473	66	75.700	-9.700	-1.115		
2017Q2	73	75.100	-2.100	-0.242	75	75.700	-0.700	-0.080		
2017Q3	81	75.100	5.900	0.681	77	75.700	1.300	0.149		
2017Q4	91	75.100	15.900	1.835	76	75.700	0.300	0.034		
2018Q1	85	75.100	9.900	1.142	74	75.700	-1.700	-0.195		
2018Q2	79	75.100	3.900	0.450	75	75.700	-0.700	-0.080		
2018Q3	75	75.100	-0.100	-0.012	76	75.700	0.300	0.034		
2018Q4	62	75.100	-13.100	-1.512	77	75.700	1.300	0.149		
2019Q1	74	75.100	-1.100	-0.127	74	75.700	-1.700	-0.195		
2019Q2	65	75.100	-10.100	-1.165	76	75.700	0.300	0.034		
2019Q3	71	75.100	-4.100	-0.473	76	75.700	0.300	0.034		
2019Q4	70	75.100	-5.100	-0.589	78	75.700	2.300	0.264		
2020Q1				71	75.100	-4.100	-0.473	73	75.700	-2.700
				-0.310						

Notes. Al Jazeera stats for Pearson Chi = 13.2064 (Pr = 0.828), Likelihood-ratio chi2(19) = 13.1657 (Pr = 0.830); Al Arabiya stats for Pearson Chi² = 5.3395 (Pr = 0.999), Likelihood-ratio chi2(19) = 5.2394 (Pr = 0.999).

The frequency test, conducted for the salience variable and shown in Table 1 (see Appendix here: https://docs.google.com/document/d/11HgDkCPV77T_iOZq_apsSvReCRlVrGb1/edit), which measures the distribution of news selections from Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya over the years, reveals that the distribution does not cluster around a single period. Instead, the data indicate that there is a balanced distribution. The test result, $\chi^2(19) = 13.2$, $p = .82$, in which Al Jazeera's news distribution is divided into quarterly periods, shows a balanced distribution of news across quarters. Likewise, the quarterly frequency test results for Al Arabiya, $\chi^2(19) = 5.33$, $p = .99$, indicate a uniform distribution of news over the sampling period.²

The tone of content parameter was included to show how these two sites differed in news flows. To understand how Al Jazeera's coverage of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi-led coalition has changed with the Gulf crisis in the context of the Yemeni war, the chi-square test was conducted to assess the association between the interstate dispute and the tone (negative, positive, mixed) toward Saudi Arabia/the coalition. The results illustrated in Table 2, $\chi^2(2) = 454.0$, *Cramer's V* = .54, $p < .001$, show a strong correlation between the time factor and Al Jazeera's tone of content in presenting news. Moreover, Al Jazeera's tone of content toward the parties in the Yemeni war is mostly compatible with Qatar's political position both before and during the crisis. The rate of negative news for Saudi Arabia and the coalition before the crisis, 9.2% ($n = 61$), dramatically increased to 57.1% ($n = 482$) during the crisis. Similarly, Al Jazeera's positive tone in presenting news decreased sharply with the crisis from 61.5% ($n = 405$) to 15.5% ($n = 131$). The only area where no significant difference emerged between the two periods was in the news with mixed tones. The analysis emerging from the data obtained from Al Jazeera confirms the hypothesis that media controlled by state apparatus is forced to adopt the tone at least to a certain extent that best suits the political position of its sponsoring country during the war. That Al Jazeera retained almost a 10% negative news flow threshold toward a coalition ally of Qatar before the 2017 Gulf crisis, revealed that this media source had a fabric of independence, but it had to adapt to the political agenda under certain circumstances. Moreover, the finding that Al Jazeera's positive tone of content toward Saudi Arabia even after the Gulf crisis was 15.5% shows that it is not merely confined to the political agenda.

Table 2. Al Jazeera Chi-Square Test Results.

	0	1	Total
-1	61	482	543
0	192	231	423
1	405	131	536
Total	658	844	1502

Notes. Pearson $\chi^2 = 454.0025$ (Pr = 0.000), Likelihood Ratio $\chi^2 = 498.5824$ (Pr = 0.000), *Cramer's V* = 0.5498.

Table 3. Al Arabiya Chi-Square Test Results.

	0	1	Total
-1	18	13	31
0	117	54	171
1	526	786	1312
Total	661	853	1514

Notes. Pearson $\chi^2 = 52.0294$ (Pr = 0.000), Likelihood Ratio $\chi^2 = 52.0290$ (Pr = 0.000), *Cramer's V* = 0.0854.

Al Arabiya stood out with news presentations in favor of the coalition, adhering to the position of Saudi Arabia, the leading force of the Yemeni war, before and during the Gulf crisis. However, the results of the chi-square test shown in Table 3, $\chi^2(2) = 52.02$, *Cramer's V* = .18, $p < .001$, show that there is a moderate correlation between timing and the tone of Al Arabiya's news about the Yemeni war. Al

Arabiya's news discourse, which has become more defensive with the Gulf crisis, consolidates this correlation. The rate of positive news, which was 79.5% ($n = 526$) before the crisis, reached 92.1% ($n = 786$) with a certain increase during the crisis. Negative news, which was also low (2.7%; $n = 18$) before the crisis, dropped further during the crisis, by 1.5% ($n = 13$). Another category in which a significant change occurs proportionally is the mixed news category. The proportional decline in this news—before the crisis, it was 17.7% ($n = 117$) but fell to 6.3% during the crisis ($n = 54$)—corresponds to the increase in positive news. The analysis emerging from the data obtained from Al Arabiya also confirms the hypothesis that states use mass media outlets to legitimize their political goals and their actions in wars to which they are a party.

The problems represented in the negative and mixed-style news of both media outlets (particularly about Al Jazeera), on the other hand, cluster around certain categories. Negative news on Saudi Arabia is gathered under the following headings: (1) *Houthis*: Relations within the Houthi-led alliance, foreign aid to the Houthis, the statements of Houthi leaders and the allies, and the international declarations in favor of the Houthi are included in this category; (2) *Human rights*: News covering all the criticisms of the Saudi-led coalition and its components in the context of human rights violations and war crimes, news covering the protests against the Saudi-led coalition in different regions of the world, critical articles in the Western press, and statements by countries that sell arms to the coalition forces to suspend agreements because of the coalition's human rights violations are included in this category. (3) *Coalition forces*: News about the disagreements between coalition components, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and the loss of life and financial difficulties experienced by coalition forces are included in this category.

The naming parameter scrutinizes how media outlets describe political or military organizations. Moreover, was their level of interest and their position in the war a factor? Although 51.65% ($n = 32$) of Al Jazeera's negative tone of news ($n = 61$) in the precrisis period was mostly Houthis, 43.35% ($n = 26$) was coalition forces, and 5% ($n = 3$) was human rights. The significant increase in negative news ($n = 482$) during the crisis leads to a change in the proportional distribution of content categories. Human rights news, the weakest category before the crisis, came to prominence with the crisis with a rate of 41.9% ($n = 202$), indicating the compatibility of Al Jazeera for the independent news performance model. Coalition forces news, with a rate of 32.15% ($n = 155$), follows human rights-related content in terms of density. The coverage of Houthis was in last place with 25.95% ($n = 125$). These rates suggest that Al Jazeera restricted its pro-Houthi coverage while highlighting anti-Saudi news during the crisis. This is also quite significant in showing that Al Jazeera stood on its ground of objectivism and independence and did not exploit war content even when the political setting allowed it. In other words, despite its problems with Saudi Arabia, Al Jazeera avoided following an editorial policy that would create the impression it was a pro-Houthi media outlet.

For Al Arabiya, although 50% ($n = 9$) of the few negative news ($n = 18$) published in the precrisis period mentioned the achievements of the Houthis in the war front, another half of the negative news ($n = 9$) was in the coalition forces category. Human rights criticisms against the coalition were not included in the sampled news. Al Arabiya, which further reduced the number of negative content ($n = 13$) during

the crisis, did not feature reports on human rights criticism during this period and shared Houthis ($n = 8$) and coalition forces ($n = 5$) news.

Discussion

About the main research question and the quantitative tests applied to the obtained data, it can be asserted that the mass media outlets in countries that are belligerent in wars tend to present it more positively or less negatively. Requiring larger quantities to measure and conduct further testing, the case study provided promising insights on several dimensions. At first, the study provided another proof-like study for the arguments that political authority controls and channels the media outputs (Mellor, 2005; Mohammed, 1987). This question is relevant today as numerous dimensions of mainstream arguments are still vigorously investigated through different case studies. Second, the initial point of the study was to illustrate the diversity in the tone of content in political issues and war in particular. This study also provides potential insights with a large data set open for further inquiries. The Houthi keyword highlighted the impact of naming and demonization in news media while comprising an important part of the data. The usage of naming in war content or conflictual situations is a highly engaging topic in modern content analysis studies as this study also proved that identity comes to the fore. In the case of the coverage toward Houthis, Al Arabiya put forward a certain characteristic of being a putschist, militia, and terrorist rather than being a historical Arab tribe that could be constructive for its Pan-Arab cause. This study also provides data for further research on naming and blame-oriented content with its data acquired on the crisis, Yemen, and coalition keywords. Qatar's diversifying activity level in the Yemeni war and the fluctuating course of SaudiQatar bilateral affairs provided a suitable platform for providing these insights on news content on war.

Furthermore, this study also contributed to the idea that media outlets use independence depending on their political surroundings about salient issues (Bacchi, 2012; Robinson et al., 2009). It was observed that bilateral or regional crises had caused fluctuations in both intensity and the tone of the news articles. Al Arabiya's firm stand on the Saudi side has crystallized the impact of active leadership in conflicts about the tone of the content.

In addition to confirming the claim that Al Jazeera is the "soft power tool" serving Qatar's political agenda, the analysis of the data also shows, even during the most critical periods of the war, the tone of content and intensity of coverage by two separate state-sponsored media outlets is different. Whereas the changing news policy of Al Jazeera after the Gulf crisis was expected, its tone of news presentation in the precrisis period was not on the same level as that of Al Arabiya, despite all its support for the Saudi-led coalition.

Al Jazeera directed a few accusations of human rights violations toward Saudi Arabia in the precrisis period and tried to establish a *balance* under the principle of objectivity by including some of the news on the progress of the Houthis on the war fronts and the losses of the coalition forces. Therefore, based on the tone differences in the news of Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, which were on the same side in the precrisis period, we determined that the content and intensity of the news presented by these state-sponsored media outlets differ depending on the fabric of independence and ideal of objectivism.

Likewise, it was observed that Al Jazeera's news presentation style during the crisis period changed gradually. Al Jazeera broadcasted negative news on the United Arab Emirates, one of the coalition's main allies in the crisis's first periods. But during the war and based on the critical statements of the

international public, the dose of criticism against Saudi Arabia increased. However, Al Jazeera avoided negative news about the Mansour Hadi Administration, the local Saudi ally. It was also found that Al Jazeera, which refrains from making news affirming the Houthis and attaches importance to international legitimacy, avoids moves that isolate its host country in international public opinion and pays attention to the *independence policy* while reporting against Saudi Arabia.

However, Al Arabiya has presented news with a harsher turn of expression and content. Although Al Arabiya branded the Houthis as *terrorists* in the news about the coalition's operations, it also refers to them as *putschists* in the operations of the Yemeni army. Again, when talking about the Houthi administration, the phrase *coup administration* and when talking about social events, *rebel militias* are frequently used. As a reflection of the Saudi rhetoric, Al Arabiya also uses the *Iranian-backed* label when discussing the Houthis' missile attacks.

Moreover, another notable change discovered through this research is that the positive tone of news articles also rises above the standard thresholds during salient crises. The increased frequency and the positive tone of the news articles published on Al Arabiya after the 2017 crisis indicate that statesponsored media usually tend to overlegitimize and promote schemata that conserve their political superior's prestige. Thus, not only does the negative and critical tone in the news articles published by a media outlet sponsored by a political authority become sparse but also the positive and legitimizing opinions become prevalent over time.

About the four main findings of the keyword content analysis, it can be asserted that Al Jazeera's support for Saudi Arabia and the coalition in the precrisis period was a balanced endorsement, as the network occasionally published critical news about the coalition. These also included news against Saudi Arabia in the context of human rights and shared some news that might be useful to the Houthis. However, during the crisis period, the network intensified the coverage of Saudi Arabia and the coalition in the context of human rights violations. It gave more space to the disagreements among the coalition components. On the other hand, while Al Jazeera covered peace talks and humanitarian/economic crisis content in mixedtoned news under the same keywords in both periods, it published mutual attacks content mostly under the keyword "Coalition" during the crisis, differently from the precrisis period. Therefore, it can be argued that the positive tone of content in Al Jazeera's news flow toward the coalition actions before the crisis left its place to a mixed tone of news during the crisis.

That the negative tone of content used by Al Arabiya was mostly in the news on Houthis is an expected finding. The very limited negative tone of content seems to be a used instrument to create a sense of objectivity in the readers' minds. Al Arabiya's news content on responsibility, mostly used in news articles about peace talks, was gathered mostly under the crisis theme. This might indicate that Al Arabiya covered news articles on peace talks to put the responsibility on larger international organizations and others. Moreover, Al Arabiya's problem-oriented news content was observed to accumulate in the Yemen keyword as the humanitarian side of them was crystallized. A substantial portion of the action-focused content, such as mutual attacks or military operations, was focused on

the Houthi keyword for two potential reasons. First, to legitimize the military intervention in Yemen and, second, to delegitimize and demonize the Houthi rebels.

Conclusion

This study was an endeavor to contribute to the content analysis literature with the much needed and widely omitted studies on non-Western contexts. Another aspect of this study, thought to be a beneficial contribution, is providing data and analysis about media-politics interaction in totalitarian media environments such as monarchies. The content analysis literature led by the U.S. scholarship usually focuses on democratic environments where a certain level of free competition is a fundamental aspect of the media environment. However, the news content produced in non-democratic political settings is still valuable research material for tracing patterns of similarities and differences.

Three main discoveries of this study may be presented in the following order. First, this study has proven that turbulence in interstate affairs affects how mass media outlets present each other's actions. Second, English or local language (Arabic in this case) usage has a remarkable impact on the actions, naming, and news events which might be a resourceful topic for further inquiries. Last, the media outlet's position in wars may experience swift changes toward the other pole if the context and the environment are highly polarized. However, this does not mean that a mass media outlet is completely confined to the political agenda, as Al Jazeera's news content showed that it protected a level of independence even under bilateral and regional crises.

Another important aspect revealed during the research is the access to websites and their archives about feasibility, as the newspapers in Arabic or other non-Western languages are harder to delve into. This might be the reason behind the lack of recent content analysis studies on past political crises, the lack of diversity in studied media outlets, and the frequent preference for English versions about news content in the Middle East. Further studies applying different methodological approaches, such as most different systems, to compare a media outlet from the Middle East with one of the outlets from mass media such as BBC, CNN, and more, or a major outlet of another region interested in the same topics may lead to alternative arguments. Last, should the world society consider polarized war news's legitimizing and prolonging effect? May this be one of the reasons that wars and innocent deaths have become a natural part of people's daily routines?

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