NEWS FROM TRIPOLI, BENGHAZI, BREGA AND MISRATA: HOW AL-JAZEERA AND BBC ONLINE NEWS FRAMED THE LIBYAN REVOLUTION

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Abstract

The purpose of this research, which focuses on the framing of the 2011 Libyan Revolution on Al-Jazeera and BBC online news, is fourfold. First, it examines the use of the human interest frame on BBC and Al-Jazeera English news sites before and after the adoption of Resolution 1973, which paved the way for military intervention in the Libyan crisis. Second, the study investigates the prevalence of four media frames on the two sites - anti-war, attribution of responsibility, human interest, and military. Third, the study examines significant variations in the use of anti-war frame and military frames between the media outlets. Fourth, it investigates the type of sources attributed to the news about the Libyan Revolution, and whether the sources were linked to particular news frames. Results indicate an overall significant variation in the use of the human interest frame between the periods, pre-and-post Resolution 1973. In the prevalence of media frames, it is the military frame, which was the most occurring news frame. Whereas there was no significant variation in the use of anti-war frame between the two sites, the variation in the use of the military frame was significant. For source prevalence, it is the foreign leaders who were frequently quoted in news, followed by journalists. Moreover, such sources as civilians, Gaddafi leadership, journalists, military officials, NATO officials, and rebels were highly associated with the military frame. On the other hand, sources from foreign leaders, NGOs, United Nations, and other were linked to the human interest frame.

Introduction

The Arab World revolutionary waves will go in the annals of international politics as indelible moments of 2011. The uprisings, well-known as the “Arab Spring” saw the overthrow of three long-serving despots – Tunisia’s Ben Ali, Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak, and Libya’s flamboyant Muammar Gaddafi. The first protests in Tunisia on December 18, 2010 were the geneses of the “Arab Revolutions.” As the demonstrations gained momentum in Tunisia, President Ali threw in the towel and fled the country on January 14, 2011. His exit from power triggered similar uprisings across the Arab World – from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Syria, to Yemen.

It is the Libyan case, which took an international dimension, however – culminating in the dramatic fall of Tripoli and Gaddafi’s death. This is following the UN Security Council’s adoption of Resolution 1973 on March 17, 2011 – a harbinger to an end to Gaddafi’s 42-year reign. Key highlights of the resolution included an immediate ceasefire in Libya, approval for a no-fly zone, and a call for Libya authorities to comply with their obligations under the international law, such as the international humanitarian law, human
rights, and refugee law (UN, 2010). The uprising became the focus of the international media for the better part of 2011.

Founded on framing theory, the purpose of this research is fourfold: First, the study examines the use of the human interest frame on Al-Jazeera English and BBC online news before and after the adoption of Resolution 1973, which paved the way for military intervention in Libya. Second, it investigates the prevalence of four media frames on the two news sites - anti-war, attribution of responsibility, human interest, and military. Third, the study examines significant variations in the use of the anti-war and military frames between the two news sites. Fourth, the study investigates the type of sources attributed to the news about the conflict, and whether the sources were linked to particular news frames.

It is important to know how the human interest frame played out in news before and after the adoption of Resolution 1973, because in passing the resolution, the UN Security Council framed justification for military intervention in Libya on human interest reasons – to protect Libyan people from Gaddafi’s brutality. This will provide useful insights whether the military intervention decision was informed by the salience framing of human interest issues in news in the early days of the uprising. Examining prevalence of the four news frames will help create new knowledge on how the media framed the crisis, considering the different cultural and political environments in which Al-Jazeera and BBC news are produced.

Knowing sources attributed to war news is also important because conflicts are contentious in nature, drawing mixed reactions from different quarters. When conflicts break, political actors, journalists, civilians, and the international community, etc. don’t hesitate to voice their views – in support or against it. In addition, linking sources to particular frames will unravel the agendas of both the sources and the media in the crisis. Tracing the source-frame relationship is important, because it will help establish whether the revolution was reported objectively, or other factors overrode editorial independence.

The comparative approach is essential because it unearths important differences in the coverage of the revolution between the media outlets. Additionally, results from a comparative research are richer and provide bases for comparison and for judging the significance of a particular relationship (Donsbach & Patterson, 2004). This study’s comparative approach is anchored on three differences between Al-Jazeera and BBC: different media systems, national bias in covering international events, and the North-South global flow of information. McQuail (1994) has argued that media institutions are deeply rooted in the
sociopolitical environment in which they operate. It is a well-documented fact that in times of international events, news media tend to show national bias in reportage. From a global perspective, BBC and Al-Jazeera represent the North-South divide in information flow. Al-Jazeera is based in the global South and BBC in the global North. Thus, it is interesting to see whether the former was pro-South and the latter pro-North in the coverage of the Libyan revolution.

Communication scholarship shows limited research in the use of framing theory in an African setting in relation to conflicts. This is despite the fact that Africa has witnessed numerous conflicts in the past. There is also lack of comparative studies on how media in different regions cover war (Dimitrova & Stromback, 2005). Few studies have also compared and contrasted news coverage between the media in the West and the Middle East (Dimitrova & Connolly-Ahern, 2007). The Libyan revolution provides the perfect opportunity to fill these research gaps. Tackling these research gaps also contributes to the growth of the framing theory.

Broadcast Media in the UK and Qatar

Many factors, including the cultural and sociopolitical environment in which the media operate, influence the news production process. Hallin and Mancini (2004) contend that media systems are shaped by the wider context of political history, structure, and culture. This is so because journalistic institutions are integrated within society, something which requires them to be responsive to the same social forces that press on all institutions (Rachlin, 1988).

Established by the royal charter, the broadcast media in Britain started in 1922. This was followed by the founding of BBC radio in 1926. Seymour-Ure (1991) observes that broadcasting was then seen as a “legitimate field of public policy and its development was shaped by periodic government inquiries” (p. 60). Two government-appointed committees shaped the form of the British public service broadcasting. Reporting in 1923, the Sykes Committee recommended that radio broadcasting should remain free from government control (McNair, 2009). In 1926, the Crawford Committee called for broadcasting to be free of commercial domination (McNair, 2009). BBC ran a television service from 1936 until September 1, 1939 before resuming operations in 1946 (Seymour-Ure, 1991). BBC was expected to educate, inform and entertain (McNair, 2009).
The passing of the Television Act in 1954 (Seymour-Ure, 1991), resulted in the birth of the Independent Television (ITV) the following year (McNair, 2009). Unlike BBC which was funded through license fee, ITV was financed through advertisements. Like BBC, ITV was also required to inform, educate, and entertain (Hampton, 2003). To maintain high journalistic standards, the various stations under ITV network pooled resources to create Independent Television News (ITN) as a rival newsgathering organization (Hampton, 2003). In 1997, BBC established BBC News 24 rolling news service for domestic cable and satellite viewers (McNair, 2009). McNair says the move “further increased pressure on ITN to compete in this market” (2009, p. 120). So as not to lag behind in the emerging environment of 24-hour coverage, ITN launched ITN News Channel in August of 2000, which was renamed ITV News Channel in 2002 (McNair, 2009).

The British broadcast media has encountered several regulations since its inception. Though the "commercial and regulatory environment was in great flux between 1985 and 2000," BBC has remained independent from the state control (Hampton, 2003, p. 1011). BBC’s Royal Charter enjoined political impartiality (Hampton, 2003). That is why Curran and Seaton (2010) argue that BBC has become a world of "impartiality" and "objectivity." However, Crisell (2002) point out that BBC has never been entirely free from state pressure. This is so because: its license to broadcast is always granted for fixed periods; the state appoints its board of governors; and the state determines the cost of the license fee (Crisell, 2002). As a result, it enjoys frosty relations with state (Crisell, 2002; Curran & Seaton, 2010).

Qatari broadcast came into being in 1968 when radio was introduced, followed by television in 1970. The emergence of print and electronic media played two roles: nation building and proof of modernity (Arafa, 1994). The Qatari government also used the electronic media as a tool to make its presence felt in the Gulf region (Boyd, 1999). Though the majority of funds needed to operate television systems are provided by the government, Qatar television accepts commercials (Boyd, 1999).

Qatar’s constitutional monarchy has a more liberal political system than other countries in the Gulf States (Auter & Al-Jaber, 2003). The first media censorship in the country came into force in 1979, but was lifted in 1995 after the enactment of a more liberal press publications law (Auter & Al-Jaber, 2003). This was followed by the abolishment of the Ministry of Information in 1998. Al-Jazeera is the most well-known and most popular Arabic satellite channel, which operates on a Western mode like CNN and BBC (Auter &
Al-Jaber, 2003). Despite that the network was originally financed by the Qatari government, the network is considered a private entity (Auter & Al-Jaber, 2003).

**National Bias in Reporting International Events**

People consider national interests first in times of international events such as war. When a country is engaged in war, citizens express their patriotism by rallying behind their nation’s course. This is also reflected in the media in the form of national bias in reporting conflicts. Yang (2003) argues that national interest has a powerful role in framing the international media content because of its decisive role in making government policies and subsequent actions. Similarly, Lee and Yang (1995) argue that national interest shape the “journalistic paradigms” of international media.

Many studies have examined national bias in reporting international events (Kim, 2000; Lee & Yang, 1995; Reese & Buckalew, 1995; Servaes, 1991; Welch, 1972; Yang, 2003). Kim (2000) examined The New York Times and The Washington Post coverage of government responses and foreign policy decisions concerning the Kwangju movement in South Korea and the Tiananmen movement in China in 1980s. Findings show that in reporting the movements, the two publications were “considerably influenced by the U.S. government’s responses to the movements and its foreign policy” (Kim, 2000, p. 32). Lee and Yang (1995) also compared how Associated Press of the U.S. and Japan’s Kyodo News covered the Tiananmen movement. The researchers found that the AP reportage was “highly consistent with U.S. ideological interests in China” (1995, p. 14).

Reese and Buckalew (1995) investigated how the practices of television news work add up to coherent “frame of reference” toward the Persian Gulf War, supporting administration policy and creating an “illusion of triumph.” They examined KVUE-TV of Austin, Texas, using in-depth analysis of its coverage of the war. They found that the television’s coverage of the war “amplified the definitions of the Gulf policy advanced by the government” (1995, p. 56). Servaes (1991) investigated six newspapers in six European countries coverage of the 1993 U.S. intervention in Grenada. There were differences among the six newspapers, based on their vested political, economic, and cultural ties with Grenada, Servaes reported.

Examining four American newspapers coverage of the U.S. foreign policy about Indochina between 1950 and 1956, Welch (1972) concluded that the “press did play a crucial role in developing and sustaining mass and elite public acceptance of the administration’s view of the Indochina situation” (p. 231). In a

The BBC vs. Al-Jazeera Information Flow Dichotomy

Flow of information is an important segment in any contemporary society. “Media flows” are one of the flows that our society is constructed around. Thussu (2007) divides media flows into three broad categories: global, transnational, and geo-cultural. He further consolidates these flows into two categories: “dominant flows,” largely emanating from the global North, and “contra-flows,” originating from the global South. Sakr (2007) argues that contra-flow imply reversed or alternative media flows. The flow of information is tilted in favor of North because major global media organizations are located in the West.

BBC is one of the Western media giants dominating global information flow. The broadcaster attracts viewership of 270 million homes (Thussu, 2006). BBC’s 2008/09 annual report shows that it reached a weekly multimedia audience of around 188 million across its 32 language services (BBC, 2009). Its global presence is made possible because the broadcaster “maintains a global network of English-language correspondents and stringers” (Cheesman & Nohl, 2011, p. 220). This makes it reach not only prosperous global cities but also places where people are generally poor and places where the media are not free (Cheesman & Nohl, 2011).

The emergence of Al-Jazeera, a typical example of contra-flow, took major players in the global media industry by surprise. Never before had a media entity based in the South exhibited such an audacity to challenge the normative one-way flow of information. In the North-South information flow order, Al-Jazeera’s mission is to cover the developing world, which is largely ignored by other global networks (Rushing, 2007). The network also claims to represent the voices of the Arab street (Dimitrova & Connolly-A hern, 2007). Relatedly, Zayani (2005) explains that the network’s popularity reflects a frustration with the bias of the Western media in general and American media in particular. Echchaibi (2011) argues that Al-Jazeera has acted as the revolutionary leader and the ultimate activist the Arab world has failed to produce. In focusing on the developing world, Al-Jazeera believes that it provides an alternative perspective, particularly to the American and British news media (Sharp, 2003).
By 2006, the channel claimed to reach 50 million viewers across the world, undermining the Anglo-American domination of news and current affairs in one of the world’s most geopolitically sensitive areas (Thussu, 2006). In its news, the controversial network has attracted criticism, not only in the West, but also in its home turf – Middle East. Since its launch in 1996, Al-Jazeera has rattled governments in the Arab World by its controversial coverage of sensitive issues related to religion, politics, women, sex, poverty, and unemployment (Abdul-Mageed & Herring, 2008). However, it was Osama bin Laden’s exclusives, which catapulted the channel to the rock-star status. The network has also repeatedly scooped Arab networks on breaking news.

**Media Frames in War News**

Framing is one of the prominent theories in communication research. Today, hardly an issue of a communication journal is published without a framing study (D’Angelo, 2010). This study uses Entman’s (1993) framing definition. He defines framing as “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 52).

Framing research is divided into two categories: studies on media frames and studies on audience frames (de Vreese et al., 2001). The present research focuses on media frames in the Libyan conflict. Several studies (e.g. Kristensen & Orsten, 2007; Dornscheider, 2007; Dimitrova & Stromback, 2005; Dimitrova et al; 2005; Yang, 2003; Bantimaroudis & Ban, 2001; Iyengar & Simon, 1993) have examined the use of anti-war, attribution of responsibility, human interest, and military frames in war coverage.

Dimitrova and Stromback (2005) investigated the framing of the 2003 Iraq war in the elite newspapers in Sweden and the U.S, *Dagens Nyheter* and *The New York Times*. They found that the anti-war protest frames were more common for the Swedish war coverage. The Dornscheider (2007) study which explored whether or not the coverage of the 2003 Iraq war in *The New York Times* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) of Germany supported the U.S. and German governments’ position on the war found that war opponents (anti-war frame) “were not even among the top ten actors” (p. 37). The Dimitrova and Stromback (2005) study reported the attribution of responsibility frame to be more prevalent in *Dagens Nyheter*. Examining the coverage of the 2003 Iraq war on the home pages of 246 international news
websites, Dimitrova et al. (2005) reported that the responsibility frame was more common for international sites.

In human interest frame, Dimitrova and Stromback (2005) found that the Sweden and U.S. newspapers offered human interest stories. However, both Dagens Nyheter and The New York Times reported on the war using the human interest frame in 17 percent of their articles. Using a frame analysis technique, Yang (2003) compared the way in which Chinese media, represented by the People’s Daily Online and the China Daily, and U.S. media, represented by The New York Times and The Washington Post, covered the NATO air strikes on Kosovo in 1999. While the Chinese newspapers framed the air strikes as an intervention of Yugoslavia’s sovereignty and territory, the US newspapers framed the air strikes as a humanistic aid to Albanians to stop the ethnic cleansing initiated by Serbians. The Dornscheider (2007) study found that prisoners of the U.S. military, victims of the war, and the families and friends of U.S. soldiers, portrayed the war from a human perspective. Bantimaroudis and Ban (2001) analyzed the coverage of the 1991 Somali crisis in The New York Times and The Manchester Guardian. They found that the newspapers framed the “Operation Restore Hope” as a humanitarian operation.

The military frame was the most prevalent in the Kristensen and Orsten (2007) research. Of the 13 themes analyzed, the military theme occurred 586 times (15.7%). They content analyzed 2,045 news items produced by the Danish news media before and during the first weeks of the Iraq war in 2003. The military frame also ranked first in the Dornscheider (2007) study. The researcher reported that “with a share of 90 out of 100 articles, the military invading Iraq was the actor represented most often in The New York Times” (p. 37).

The military frame was more common in New York Times than in Dagens Nyheter of Sweden, Dimitrova and Stromback (2005) reported. The Dimitrova et al. (2005) study established that U.S. news websites tended to focus more on military conflict than the international websites. The 1991 Somalia crisis was framed as military confrontation, reported Bantimaroudis and Ban (2001). The frame was also the most occurring in The New York Times and The Manchester Guardian (Bantimaroudis & Ban, 2001). Iyengar and Simon (1993) found that ABC news content was preoccupied with military affairs during the Gulf crisis. This literature review on use of news frames paves the way for this study’s research questions 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 3, and 4:
Research Question 1a: Considering that it is based in the global South, did Al-Jazeera use the anti-war frame significantly more often than BBC in its coverage of the Libyan Revolution?

Research Question 1b: Was there a significant variation in the use of the anti-war frame between Al-Jazeera and BBC in their coverage of the Libyan Revolution?

Research Question 2a: Considering that it is based in the global North, did BBC use the military frame significantly more often than Al-Jazeera in its coverage of the Libyan Revolution?

Research question 2b: Was there a significant variation in the use of the military frame between Al-Jazeera and BBC in their coverage of the Libyan Revolution?

Research Question 3: Which was the most prevalent frame (anti-war, attribution of responsibility, human interest, and military) in Al-Jazeera and BBC’s coverage of the Libya Revolution?

Research Question 4: Was there significant variation in the use of human interest frame between the periods before and after the adoption of Resolution 1973 in both media outlets?

Use of Sources in War News

The use of sources is a popular practice in journalism. It is very rare to come across a news item not attributed to a particular source. Reporters rely heavily on sources to present a world of text to the audiences (Yang, 2003). The centrality of sources in news means they also influence the framing process. Peng (2008) points out that most of the media biases and orientation of frames have been attributed to the influence of the sources. By tracing sources in news, we can understand their relationship with frames. The use of sources during the time of wars has been examined by a number of scholars (e.g. Hayes & Guardino, 2010; Kristensen & Orsten, 2007; Dimitrova & Stromback, 2005; Ryan, 2004; Yang, 2003).

Hayes and Guardino (2010) conducted a systematic analysis of ABC, CBS, and NBC Iraq-related news before the 2003 invasion. They established that the Bush administration officials were the most frequently quoted sources. The voices of anti-war groups and opposition Democrats were barely audible, however. Opposition from abroad, especially from Iraq officials and from countries such as France was commonly reported on the networks. Politicians were the dominant sources in the Kristensen and Orsten (2007) study. This source represented more than one out of four sources, and was more linked to stories with a political, military or socio-cultural angle. The use of civilians as sources was also significant.

There was less reliance on official sources in Dagens Nyheter, a Swedish publication. This was in a study by Dimitrova and Stromback (2005) which examined the framing of Iraq war in Dagens Nyheter and The New York Times. The latter, however, relied more frequently on official government (44%) and military sources (48%) than the former – 28% and 12% respectively. They also found that articles containing the
human interest frame were less likely to cite government officials. Military sources were significantly more common for articles with the military frame. Editorial writers in ten U.S. newspapers relied heavily on official government sources as they constructed their frames following the 9-11 terrorists attack (Ryan, 2004). Yang (2003) found that Chinese and U.S. newspapers relied on very different patterns of sources. Chinese newspapers relied significantly more on Chinese sources (53.8%) than U.S. newspapers (1.4%), while U.S. newspapers relied significantly more on U.S. sources (36.7%) than Chinese newspapers (8%). This literature review leads to this study’s research questions 5 and 6:

**Research Question 5**: Which sources were the most prevalent on Al-Jazeera and BBC online news coverage of the Libyan Revolution?

**Research Question 6**: Sources were associated with which types of frames on Al-Jazeera and BBC’s online news reporting of the Libyan Revolution?

**Methods**

This study employed content analysis to examine news stories carried by Al-Jazeera English and BBC on their online news during the Libya Revolution of 2011. Content analysis of war stories helped establish the prevalence of four frames and ten sources. The frames are anti-war, attribution of responsibility, human interest, and military. The sources are: civilians, foreign leaders, Gaddafi leadership, journalists, military officials, NATO officials, NGOs, United Nations, rebels, and other. In adopting the four media frames, the present research was informed by previous impressive research (e.g. Dimitrova et al. 2005, 2005, Dimitrova & Stromback, 2005; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Kristensen & Orsten, 2007; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Yang, 2003). The use of the ten sources was informed by useful past research (e.g. Hayes & Guardino, 2010; Kristensen & Orsten, 2007; Dimitrova & Stromback, 2005; Ryan, 2004; Yang, 2003).

The definition for human interest frame was adopted from Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), while the definitions for the attribution of responsibility and military frames were used by Dimitrova et al. (2005). The anti-war frame definition was used by Dimitrova and Stromback (2005). *Human interest frame* brings a human face or emotional angle to the presentation of the Libyan conflict. It is concerned with whether the story provides a “human face” on the crisis, or whether the story employs adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion. It also addresses the question of whether story emphasizes how individuals and groups are affected by the conflict. *Attribution of
responsibility frame puts emphasis on the party/person responsible for the Libya conflict, while the military frame focuses on the military conflict/action during the revolution. The anti-war frame is concerned with existing opposition to military intervention in the Libyan conflict.

Two units of analyses were used in this study. The unit of analysis for frame occurrence was the paragraph in a news story. The unit of analysis for sources quoted was a single story. It means a source was only counted once even if he was quoted several times in a story. For source-frame association, a source was only linked once to a particular frame in a story, but at the same time, a source can be linked to several frames in a story. For example, a military source can be linked to military frame only once in a story, but, in the same story, a military source can also be linked to other frames. This means sources and frames which appeared on their own in a story (without direct link to each other) did not qualify for the source-frame relationship.

BCC and Al-Jazeera were selected for this study because they represent different viewpoints in international news coverage. BBC is among the giant media organizations in the West dominating the global information flow. Al-Jazeera is seen as a representation of the contra-flow of information, voicing the interests of the third world countries. Recently, Al-Jazeera has received a large amount of attention in the American media (Al-Jazeera, 2011). The two sites are ideal for comparative research because they are likely to show different contexts or perspectives in reporting the Libyan revolution. This is because of their different cultural and political perspectives of UK and Qatar in which the sites are produced (Kutz & Herring, 2005).

The study examined three phases of the revolution. Phases 1 and 2 were the periods before and after the passage of Resolution 1973 on March 17, 2011. These were the periods in which the frequency of the human interest frame was examined. This is so because the decision for military intervention in Libya was based on human interest reasoning – to protect people. The study period for phase 1 was between February 15, 2011 and March 16, 2011. This was the period between the first protests in Libya and the passage of Resolution 1973. Phase 2 was between March 18, 2011 and April 16, 2011 – the period after the resolution came into force. Each phase constitutes 30 days. Phase 3 is the period in which the use of the four frames and the ten sources were examined. Also explored in this phase were the source-frame
associations. The study period for phase 3 was between March 18, 2011 and August 21, 2011 - the period between the declaration of military intervention and the fall of Tripoli.

The sample size for the scrutiny of the human interest frame was 100 articles, 50 articles for each phase – pre-and-post Resolution 1973. It means each media contributed 25 articles for each phase. The sample size for phase 3 was 200 articles – 100 each for BBC and Al-Jazeera. The samples were selected through simple random sampling.

Two coders were trained on how to code the samples. They were trained in coding procedures and instructions. For high inter-coder consistency, the coders undertook a pilot coding study – using 20% of the 300 articles. This exercise encountered discrepancies in coding the military frame. The differences were addressed through refining the frame definition. Another round of coding the military frame was conducted in which a *kappa* reliability coefficient of above 80% was achieved. Overall, the pilot coding exercise yielded *kappa*’s reliability coefficients of .85 (frames), .88 (sources), and .97 (source-frame association). One-Way ANOVA was used to test statistical significance in the use of frames and sources.

**Findings**

The content analysis of the 300 articles from BBC and Al-Jazeera resulted in 6,948 paragraphs which were analyzed to detect prevalence of frames and use of sources. Of these paragraphs, Al-Jazeera contributed 3,538 (50.9%) and BBC 3,410 (49.1%). The 6,948 paragraphs were distributed as follows across the three phases of the study: phase 1 (1,081), phase 2 (1,390), and phase 3 (4,477).

Research question 1 asked: Considering that it is based in the global South, did Al-Jazeera use the anti-war frame significantly more often than BBC in its coverage of the Libyan Revolution? Results indicate that actually it is BBC which used the anti-war frame more than Al-Jazeera. Part b of research question 1 asked whether there was significant variation between Al-Jazeera and BBC in the use of anti-war frame. The variation was not significant, $F = .212, df = 1, 198, p > .05$. Research question 2 asked: Considering that it is based in the global North, did BBC use the military frame significantly more often than Al-Jazeera in its coverage of the Libyan Revolution? However, results show that it is Al-Jazeera which used the military frame more than BBC. Part b of research question 2 asked whether there was a significant
variation between Al-Jazeera and BBC in the use of the military frame. The difference was statistically significant – \( F = 7.058, df = 1, 198, p < .05 \).

Research question 3 asked about the most prevalent frame in BBC and Al-Jazeera coverage of the Libya revolution. Table 1 indicates that military frame was the most common frame – with an overall use of 55.1%, followed by human interest frame (36%). It is also true that the two media outlets promoted these two frames in their sites – with the military frame taking a lead share of 59.9% on Al-Jazeera and 47.9% on BBC. Human interest frame followed with 33.7% on Al-Jazeera and 39.4% on BBC. The attribution of responsibility frame was almost non-existent. Overall, Al-Jazeera used more news frames than BBC - 404 against 269.

Table 1: Frame Prevalence on Al-Jazeera and BBC Online News Coverage of the Libyan Revolution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>BBC</th>
<th>AL-JAZEERA</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-war</td>
<td>29 (10.8%)</td>
<td>24 (5.9%)</td>
<td>53 (7.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution of responsibility</td>
<td>5 (1.9%)</td>
<td>2 (0.5%)</td>
<td>7 (1.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Interest</td>
<td>106 (39.4%)</td>
<td>136 (33.7%)</td>
<td>242 (36.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>129 (47.9%)</td>
<td>242 (59.9%)</td>
<td>371 (55.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>269 (100%)</td>
<td>404 (100%)</td>
<td>673 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research question 4 asked: Was there significant variation in the use of human interest frame between the periods before and after the adoption of Resolution 1973 in both media outlets? Table 2 shows that there was variation in the use of human interest frame between the two periods. There were 109 human interest frames during the pre-Resolution period and 50 during the post-Resolution 1973 period – representing 68.6% and 31.4%. This variation was statistically significant, \( F = 7.483, df = 1, 98, p < .05 \). The variation was also significant in Al-Jazeera – \( F = 6.736, df = 1, 48, p < .05 \), but was not significant in BBC – \( F = 1.290, df = 1, 48, p > .05 \). Figure 1 demonstrates how the human interest frame played out in the study’s phases 1 and 2.

Figure 1: How the Human Interest Frame Played Out in Pre-and-Post Resolution 1973
In source prevalence, Al-Jazeera used more sources than BBC – 440 against 307. Research question asked 5 stated: Which sources were the most prevalent on Al-Jazeera and BBC online news coverage of the Libyan Revolution? Foreign leaders (27.2%) were the most quoted sources. Table 3 shows
they were followed by rebels (17.6%), journalists (14.6%) and Gaddafi leadership (12.9%). Whereas BBC used more foreign leaders as sources (39%), Al-Jazeera stories contained more rebel sources (20.7%).

Research question 6 asked: Sources were associated with which types of frames on Al-Jazeera and BBC’s online news reporting of the Libyan Revolution? Table 4 shows that civilians, Gaddafi leadership, journalists, military officials, NATO officials, and rebels were all associated with the military frame. On the other hand, foreign leaders, NGOs, United Nations, and other were linked to the human interest frame. However, it is notable that the military frame was more associated with the rebels (23.5%) than other sources. In source-human interest frame relationship, it is foreign leaders who were more likely to use the human interest frame (20.2%).

Table 3: Source Prevalence on Al-Jazeera and BBC Online News Coverage of the Libyan Revolution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>BBC</th>
<th>AL-JAZEERA</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civilians</td>
<td>26 (8.5%)</td>
<td>30 (6.8%)</td>
<td>56 (7.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Leaders</td>
<td>120 (39.0%)</td>
<td>83 (18.9%)</td>
<td>203 (27.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaddafi Leadership</td>
<td>27 (8.8%)</td>
<td>69 (15.7%)</td>
<td>96 (12.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>42 (13.7%)</td>
<td>67 (15.2%)</td>
<td>109 (14.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Leaders</td>
<td>4 (1.3%)</td>
<td>16 (3.6%)</td>
<td>20 (2.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>10 (3.3%)</td>
<td>19 (4.3%)</td>
<td>29 (3.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>10 (3.3%)</td>
<td>9 (2.0%)</td>
<td>19 (2.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebels</td>
<td>41 (13.4%)</td>
<td>91 (20.7%)</td>
<td>132 (17.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Nations</td>
<td>3 (0.9%)</td>
<td>10 (2.3%)</td>
<td>13 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>24 (7.8%)</td>
<td>46 (10.5%)</td>
<td>70 (9.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>307 (100%)</td>
<td>440 (100%)</td>
<td>747 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: The Source-Frame Association on Al-Jazeera and BBC Online News Coverage of the Libya Revolution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Anti-war</th>
<th>Attribution of Responsibility</th>
<th>Human Interest</th>
<th>Military</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civilians</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>12 (16.2%)</td>
<td>14 (11.8%)</td>
<td>26 (12.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Leaders</td>
<td>1 (68.7%)</td>
<td>1 (100%)</td>
<td>15 (20.2%)</td>
<td>11 (9.2%)</td>
<td>38 (18.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaddafi Leadership</td>
<td>1 (6.3%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>7 (9.5%)</td>
<td>13 (10.9%)</td>
<td>21 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>7 (9.5%)</td>
<td>24 (20.2%)</td>
<td>31 (14.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>5 (4.2%)</td>
<td>5 (2.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (1.4%)</td>
<td>9 (7.6%)</td>
<td>10 (4.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>3 (18.7%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>4 (5.4%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>7 (3.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebels</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>12 (16.2%)</td>
<td>28 (23.5%)</td>
<td>40 (19.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Nations</td>
<td>1 (6.3%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>4 (5.4%)</td>
<td>5 (4.2%)</td>
<td>10 (4.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>12 (16.2%)</td>
<td>10 (8.4%)</td>
<td>22 (10.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16 (100%)</td>
<td>1 (100%)</td>
<td>74 (100%)</td>
<td>119 (100%)</td>
<td>210 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Four broad conclusions can be drawn from the framing of the Libya Revolution on Al-Jazeera and BBC news sites: the presentation of the conflict as a military operation, the war coverage took a Western perspective, Al-Jazeera’s overzealous coverage of the crisis, and the high salience of human interest stories in the early days of the Libya revolt.
The high frequency of the military frame is the reason why the revolution was presented as a military operation. Military was the most dominant frame on both news outlets. Of the four frames examined, anti-war, attribution of responsibility, human interest, and military – slightly over half were military frames. It means the coverage focused on the military conflict or action more than other aspects of the crisis. Safe for the human interest, which had a substantial presence in the news, the other two frames – anti-war and attribution of responsibility were rarely used. In fact, attribution of responsibility was not common at all. Unlike other previous wars – for example, the 2003 Iraq War where blames were traded between pro and anti-war camps, the blame theme was missing in the Libyan revolution.

The presentation of the war as a military operation is consistent with findings from previous studies (e.g. Bantimaroudis & Ban, 2001; Dimitrova et al., 2005; Dornschneider, 2007; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Kristensen & Orsten, 2007). The military theme was the most-occurring frame in Kristensen and Orsten (2007) study, which examined Danish news media coverage of the Iraq War in 2003. Dornschneider (2007) reported that military invading Iraq was the actor represented most often in The New York Times. In the Dimitrova et al. (2005) research, U.S. news websites tended to focus more on military conflict, while the Somalia crisis was also framed as a military confrontation (Bantimaroudis & Ban, 2001). Similarly, Iyengar and Simon (1993) reported that ABC news content was pre-occupied with military affairs during the Gulf crisis. The framing of the war as a military operation is supported by the high number of weaponry used in the conflict. For the entire duration of the war, NATO aircraft flew more than 26,000 sorties, including nearly 10,000 strike missions (BBC, 2011).

Findings show that foreign leaders voices were the most heard during the coverage of the conflict. The fact that the bulk of the sources quoted were Western leaders gives credence to the conclusion that the war took a Western perspective. Thus, it is those agendas pushed by Barack Obama (USA), Nicolas Sarkozy (France) and David Cameron (Britain) which made it into the news. This encapsulates the centrality of sources in the framing process - where “media biases and orientation of frames have been attributed to the influence of the sources” (Peng, 2008).

Views from the Western leaders were consistently tied to the UN agenda in Libya – to protect Libyan people against Gaddafi’s cruelty. It was rare to come across a story attributed to a Western leader which did not contain the phrase “to protect Libya people.” This explains why foreign leaders were highly
associated with the human interest frame. The Western leaders’ monotony in pushing the human interest agenda was only broken in stories carrying views from Russia and China leaders. Officials from Russia and China were critical about the military intervention implementation process in Libya. The two were among the five abstentions from the adoption of Resolution 1973 – others being Brazil, German, and India.

Something to note here is the low presence of anti-war frame which was associated with officials from Russia and China. It means the anti-war voices remained muted in the Libyan revolution news. This is in agreement with the Hayes and Guardino (2010) findings in which voices opposed to the 2003 Iraq War were barely audible. BBC used foreign leader sources more than other sources. This captures a bias in favor of Western nations’ involvement in the Libya conflict – especially Britain – BBC’s home country. McQuail (1994) notes that media institutions are deeply rooted in the socio-political environment in which they operate. In the same vein, de Beer and Merrill (2004) observe that mass media reflect the position of dominant national actors and institutions. Research in war framing shows existence of media national bias, for example, Yang (2003). Examining how the Chinese and the U.S. media covered the NATO air strikes on Kosovo in 1999, Yang (2003) reported that the Chinese newspapers relied heavily on Chinese sources. Similarly, the U.S. media relied significantly more on U.S. sources.

This study also found that Al-Jazeera was very aggressive in covering the Libyan revolution. Al-Jazeera covered the struggle of the Libyan rebels in even greater detail and depth than it has the Arab World’s other revolutionary movements (Roberts, 2011). In frame prevalence, sources quoted, and the presence of the human interest frame before and after adoption of the Resolution 1973, Al-Jazeera gave more coverage than BBC. Whereas BBC had 269 total frames – Al-Jazeera had 404 frames – a 20% difference. Al-Jazeera used a total of 440 sources compared to BBC’s 307. This represents a difference of 17.8%. In the occurrence of human interest frame in the periods before and after military intervention in Libya, Al-Jazeera used the frame twice more than BBC – 105 against 54.

Two factors can explain Al-Jazeera’s enthusiasm in covering the Libyan revolution: the involvement of Qatar – its government – in the war, and the claim that in its news Al-Jazeera represents the “Arab street.” Qatar’s involvement in Libya conflict reflects the national bias thesis on the side of Al-Jazeera’s coverage of the crisis. In March of 2011, six Qatar Mirage fighter jets joined NATO air operations in Libya. Qatar was also the first Arab country to recognize the Transitional National Council, the rebel government in Libya.
Commenting on Al-Jazeera’s bias in the Libyan conflict, Baker (2001) writes: “If you look carefully at its recent coverage you can see the extent to which it operates with the Emir’s interests in mind – more often than not, also in accord with Western objectives when they don’t seriously conflict with the Emir’s.”

There is little doubt that Al-Jazeera’s coverage of the war represents the voice of “Arab street” claim. This is buttressed by the huge amount of coverage it gave to anti-Gaddafi rebels – its main sources for the Libyan revolution. It was more of a show of solidarity with Libyan people who were agitating for democratic change in the country. “Al-Jazeera is not a perfect news network, but it serves a critical purpose in the Arab World: it speaks on behalf of ordinary people,” Writes Nabil Echchaibi in Huffington Post. Its aggressive reporting in Libya is also supported by use of its reporters in the battlefields as news sources. Journalists were the second commonly used sources by Al-Jazeera after rebels. “The Middle East based TV outfit employs feisty journalists and often produces the-ground reporting not found elsewhere” (Baker, 2011).

The military intervention in Libya was based on human interest agenda. This is because the period leading to the passage of Resolution 1973 recorded high salience of human interest frames. The pre-Resolution 1973 phase of this study had 109 human interest frames compared to 50 in Post-Resolution 1973 phase – March 18 to April 16. It can be argued that in adopting the resolution, the UN Security Council was informed by the high frequency of human interest stories in news media. This is the period when the uprising against the Gaddafi administration gained momentum - resulting in the crush of the protesters in the Eastern rebel-held city of Benghazi by government forces. The attacks on protesters created the human face of the revolt – hence the military intervention. It is also notable that the frequency of the human interest frame decreased after the war started. This is so because journalists became pre-occupied with the military operation – pitting NATO and rebels on one side against Gaddafi troops.

**Conclusion and Future Research**

This research examined four things in the framing of the Libyan revolution on Al-Jazeera English and BBC online news: the use of the human interest frame before and after the passage of Resolution 1973, the prevalence of anti-war, attribution of responsibility, human interest, and military frames, and significant variations in the use of the anti-war and military frames between the two media outlets. The study
also examined the type of sources attributed to the news about the Libyan conflict, and more so whether the sources were linked to particular news frames.

Results indicates that military was the most used frame followed by the human interest frame. Whereas the occurrence of the anti-war frame was low, the use of the attribution of responsibility was almost non-existent. The period preceding the adoption of Resolution 1973 was marked by a significantly high frequency of human interest frame than the post-Resolution 1973 period. In the use of sources, foreign leaders were mostly attributed to stories about the crisis. They were followed by rebel and journalist sources. The military frame was associated with Gaddafi leadership, journalists, military officials, NATO officials, rebels and other sources. Foreign leaders, NGOs and United Nations were linked to the human interest frame. Moreover, Al-Jazeera offered more coverage of the revolution than BBC in terms of frames and sources.

There are two limitations in this study. One, the study used the Al-Jazeera English news site and not the Arabic-language site. Comparing both the English and the Arabic-language sites could have been a better idea. This is because the two sites are distinct in terms of editorial content and audience. Future research should consider the Arabic-language site as well. Two, the use of only BBC and Al-Jazeera to represent the media in the West and Middle East is also a limitation. To gauge whether the results from this study are generalizable, future research should strive to incorporate more media outlets from within and outside the Middle East or the West. For example, using different media houses from the Middle East can shed more light on whether it is only Al-Jazeera’s coverage which was pro-rebel fighters. Similarly, future research can also examine media coverage of the conflict in countries which were critical about the military intervention – for example, Russia, China and African countries.

References


