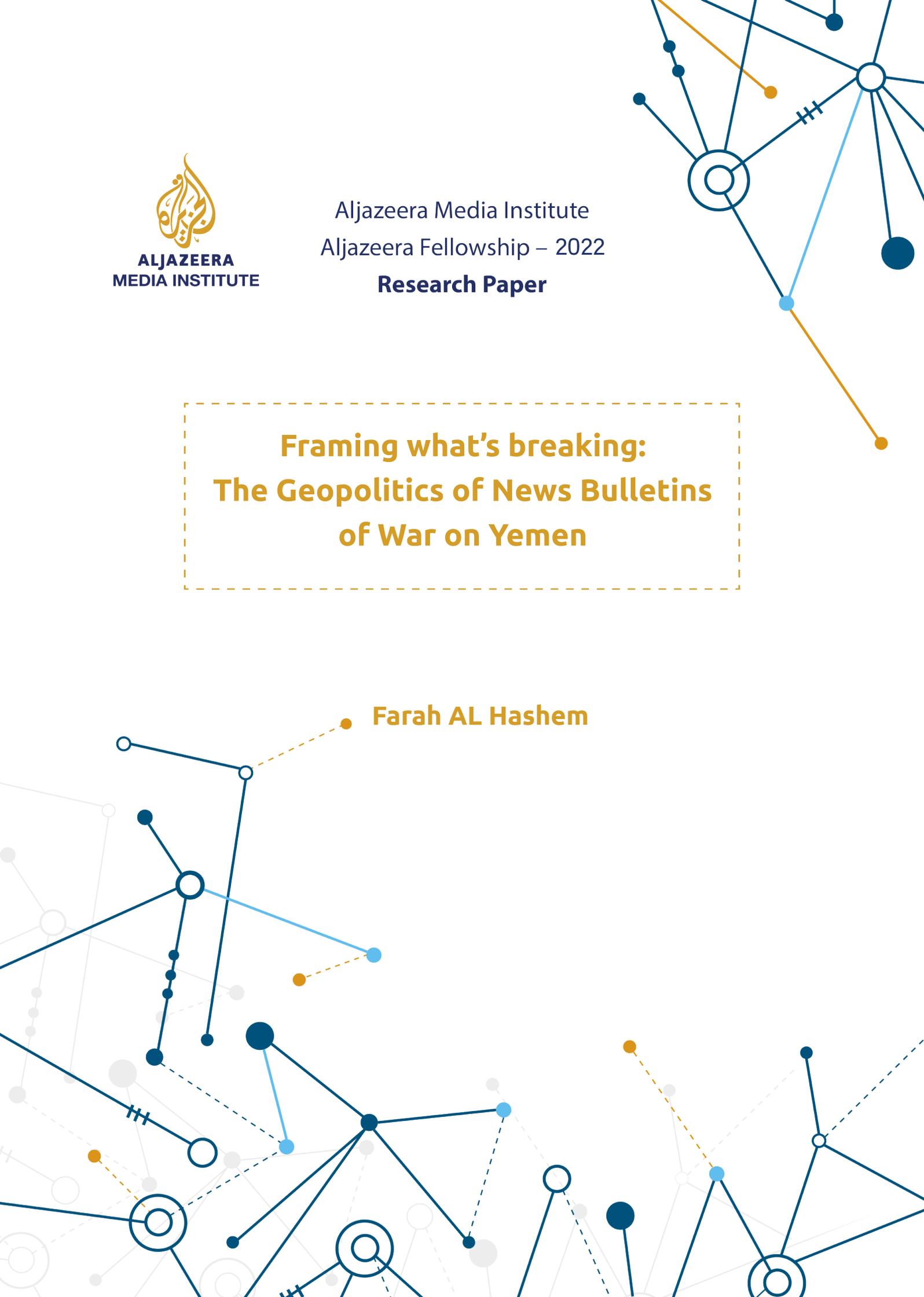




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Research Paper

**Framing what's breaking:
The Geopolitics of News Bulletins
of War on Yemen**

Farah AL Hashem



Al-Jazeera Fellowship programme

A programme launched by the Al Jazeera Media Institute aims to encourage academic research as well as to provide journalists and researchers with an opportunity to gain practical experiences and learn about applied practices in an in-depth way that contributes to the improvement of the profession of journalism, with the help of many Arab and international institutions.

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Abstract

Covering the Yemeni war is a sensitive subject, and those involved in the war are also responsible for informing the audience of the war including Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Framing news bulletins has been for years politicised according to political agenda, geographic location of the TV Network, and the finance of each channel falls directly under the control of the financier. It is all about total control of what should be informed, seen, and portrayed when it comes to Yemeni war reporting.

Keywords:

Yemen, Framing, Media bias, GCC, Houthis, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, War, Conflict, Propaganda, Geopolitics.

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Introduction

Inside the constricted partitions of the Middle East's multiple humanitarian emergencies and dogmatic wars, lies a deeply rooted problem; in a media-saturated world, it can be tricky to parse who and what to believe, with the lines between fact and fiction increasingly distorted in aesthetics of present news reporting. News coverage is faced with enduring interrogations about the nature of truth from evaluating how the conventions of coverage function to renegotiating the terms of commentary's truth with its audience.¹(Otway, Fiona: 2015)

One of these humanitarian crises lies in a larger one and was described by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as the humanitarian crisis of this century. It is the war on Yemen and, precisely, between Houthis and the UAE, Saudi Arabia's allies. This war started small in 2014 and snowballed into a regional war that has killed more than 377,000 people. Some 17.4 million are currently suffering from hunger in Yemen despite ongoing humanitarian assistance.

The war on Yemen is a perfect example that shows how media channels are part of the war. In a more logical sense, how can you report a story if you are part of the story? This brings us to the reason why in this research, AL Arabia, Al-Jazeera, ALAalam and Sky News Arabia were chosen.

The time of this research was not intentionally planned, but it was under a certain deadline proposed by the Al-Jazeera fellowship team thus allowing me to conduct the research and choose

sampling items between January and April 2022 which corresponded with the first Houthis attack on Saudi and UAE in 2022.

The Yemeni case is important to analyse from a journalistic aspect because it is one of the most difficult crises to cover considering that it has been labelled as "the forgotten war" by Amnesty International, nevertheless, it took a large portion of the newscast in Arab media. But not for the right reasons. It is, undeniably, a complicated story—one that requires a nuanced understanding of the cultures and the political currents of a whole region.

- 1- Logistically speaking, getting to Yemen is a very different experience for different groups of people - depending on if you hold, for example, a Kuwaiti Passport or a Syrian or an American Passport.
- 2- If you do get the chance as a journalist to report from Yemen, you have the north and south to cover and that means requesting 2 kinds of visas: from Saudis and Houthis.
- 3- Yemeni people do not follow international media outlets, so it is difficult to get the correct story out there.
- 4- If you cover the south and not the north or vice versa, as a journalist you will be attacked via a smear campaign either by Saudi Arabia or by Houthis and you won't be able to reveal the correct story without being labelled as biased.
- 5- Saudi Arabia, as well as the UAE, have participated in a war but, in parallel, they control a large portion of the prominent Arab media that are reporting the war as well.

¹See Author, Otway, Fiona. "The Unreliable Narrator in Documentary." *Journal of Film and Video* 67, no. 3-4 (2015): 3-23. <https://doi.org/10.5406/jfilmvideo.67.3-4.0003>.

A citation that captured my attention said by an AP journalist that usually sums up the core theme of this research. For all the disorder in this years-long war, says Maggie Michael, an Associated Press reporter, “Houthis still push stories to journalists about the humanitarian cost of the conflict. Saudi-coalition forces push information on child soldiers said to be used by the Houthis—and push back at allegations surrounding torture prisons. Ultimately, the conflict reflects the essential dilemma faced by every journalist: “You are given different versions of the truth, and your job is to dig deep to reveal what it is.” (Zainab Sultan: 2019)

So, news becomes subjective the moment the news stories are framed within a news segment by a particular channel. While reporting international news, the media select certain news sources to back up the frames they are using.

Going back a little bit to the history of this war, the reasons for the Yemen/UAE/Saudi dispute are many. The conflict has killed tens of thousands of civilians and fighters in Yemen and created a years-long humanitarian disaster in the Arab world's poorest country.

According to Kleemann 2019, Recht Berlin, When Saudi Arabia launched a war with its UAE ally against the Houthis in Yemen in 2014, soon enough the war seemed forgotten in some parts of the world by western media, but since it became one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent history suddenly a resolution was proposed by the Saudi

Arabia allies during the writing of this research in 2022.

According to Omnia El Zahar, the UAE-Saudi coalition in Yemen was always portrayed as “heroic” by AL Arabia and Sky News Arabia, but in ALAalam (Iranian funded TV Channel) the coalition was called “barbaric and led by a group of mercenaries”.

Gans said that sources are “actors that are being interviewed and they appear on-air and are used by the journalist”. They are also sources that are responsible for providing background information or story suggestions. There is diversity in news reporting, there is diversity in conflict-related news according to Atwater and Green who believed that content analysis is politicised according to the political agenda of the network.

The Houthis are portrayed as a “Gang” a “violent Militia” and a “Terrorist Group” by AL Arabia, Sky News Arabia but in ALAalam and Al-Jazeera, it is an “Ansar Allah Group” translated to “supporters of God. Johnson’s research was sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and conducted within the Cyber and Intelligence Policy Center of the RAND National Defense Research Institute in the US.

Each side of the Arab media outlet may not necessarily originate from denominationalism, but it does prompt regionalism, rivalry, and violence by humanising one side and dehumanising the other. (Johnston: 2020)

² See Zainab Sultan. CJR. “Why the Press struggles to cover the war in Yemen.” Colombia journal .2019

³ See World Health Organisation. Yearly report 2021 <https://www.who.int/emergencies/situations/yemen-crisis>

⁴ See Kleemann, Steven. “The forgotten War: Yemen” Hochschule für Wirtschaft und Recht Berlin. Universitätsverlag Potsdam. 2019

⁵ See El Zahar, Omnia. « Framing the forgotten war of Yemen: a comparative study” American University of Cairo. 2019

⁶ See Johnston, Trevor, Lane, Mathew. “Could the Houthis be the next Hizballah?” 2020 Rand journal.

According to an article published by the Atlantic Council in 2017, researcher and journalist, Afrah Nasser said that there is popularity content, a preferential treatment when it comes to news framing as the news is prioritised according to politics, geography, and state interest.

“For instance, each side depicts the other as mercenaries for the Saudis or the Iranians, respectively, and depicts their dead as the only ones worthy of being called victims.”

When Saudi Arabia launched the war on Yemen five years ago, it did not expect that the outcome would be an increase in the risks to its security and weakness in the ability to ward them off. The Houthis have succeeded in expanding their operations into the kingdom itself. They bombed its capital, Riyadh, and its vital oil facilities for refining and shipping⁷, and forced it to hold meetings of international leaders outside the capital as a precaution for their security. Iran has taken advantage of the Houthis' international isolation and their need for weapons and has strengthened its relationship with them, to be an entry point for its influence and a sword on the soft areas of the southern Saudi border.^{8 9}

So why haven't we seen this information on Al Arabia or Sky News Arabia?

There is great suffering in Yemen and the conflict consists of different aspects that

are all important. There are weaknesses and strengths in Arab media coverage of this conflict. A rapid look at the Arab media coverage of this conflict can tell us a lot about how Yemen as a country is viewed objectively. In comparison to other nations and global events, Yemen is rarely featured in a positive light and is usually portrayed as underdeveloped, totally unlivable, and dangerous. According to the Atlantic Council MENA region research centre, several essays and research papers commented on this matter and showed three main reasons like: First, Houthi forces either forcibly disappear or are framed as terrorists; second, Saudi Arabia owns 70% of Middle East Media whilst Public Relations companies are working to polish the image of Saudi Arabia, and this is shown in news reporting videos published on Al Arabia since the beginning of the war in 2014 until 2022 and during the writing of this paper. (Nasser: 2017)

According to a report published by the BBC, entitled “Saudi Arabia profile – Media” in 2019, Saudi Arabia's annexation of the region's media imitates what is happening world-wide - a minority of cosmopolitan companies gradually dictating the output of the broadcasting world. This tumbles over from the entertainment industry into the news.^{10 11}

⁷ See ALHawas, Takieh, “Dangers accelerating in Yemen: Saudi's failure in the war” ALJazeera Media institute, 2020 <https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/article/4658>

⁸ See ALHawas, Takieh, “Dangers accelerating in Yemen: Saudi's failure in the war” Al-Jazeera Media institute, 2020 <https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/article/4658>

⁹ See author ALHawas, Takieh, “Dangers accelerating in Yemen: Saudi's failure in the war” Al-Jazeera Media institute, 2020 <https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/article/4658>

¹⁰ See RSF Team “How Saudi Arabia manipulates media outlets” RSF. Paris. <https://rsf.org/en/news/how-saudi-arabia-manipulates-foreign-media-outlets>

¹¹ See Paul Cochrane “Saudi Arabia media influence” Arab Media and Society check <https://www.arabmediasociety.com/saudi-arabias-media-influence/>

During this research, it was found that many academics believed that from a commercial and economic level Saudi Arabia has a large control of media outlets. This brings us to Saudi's aim because Riyadh's political and economic influence makes the country's power paramount in a time when the media is becoming pervasive. Whether it's the survival of the royal family or retaining a powerful position in the media world, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a leading player in the region's power politics. This impacts its role as well in entertainment, in broadcasting corporations like MBC, OSN, Shahid, ART, AL Arabia, ALHadath and many other social media outlets. These words came as a response to an interview made by BBC Arabic with the managing editor of Beirut Middle East broadcasters journal Habib Battah. (RSF: 2016)

“MBC, Orbit, Rotana – all these companies have a big Saudi stake and are not really about Saudi Arabia, but about appealing to a pan-Arab audience” (RSF: 2016)

Qatar can be considered somewhat of an exception with Al-Jazeera, but when it comes to the channel applying the same exposure to governmental malfeasance and social issues in Qatar as it does elsewhere in the region, Al Jazeera comes up short.¹²

¹² See Paul Cochrane “Saudi Arabia media influence” Arab Media and Society check <https://www.arabmediasociety.com/saudi-arabias-media-influence/>

Main Question of the Research

How far does GCC state-owned media rely on their political power in their news reporting regarding the Yemen war? Do these media outlets use geopolitical differences?

in framing the narration of the Yemeni war. How independent are they in terms of newscast phraseology and media content?

There are minor concerns to consider when answering the main question; such as understanding the professional codes of those selected institutions that write, report and publish. According to Cethana Lerstad, in the realms of social, political and media ethics, Cosmopolitanism is considered the idea that all human beings belong to a single moral community; one which exists regardless of social circumstances and that there is a moral unified compass¹³ on the limits and possibilities of ethical international politics and media coverage which this research targets, there are new directions to this moral compass which appeal against one unified view of morality in political media coverage or government policy on international relations (Pinter, 1995)

The coverage of Yemen has shown different paths of professional responsibility between these TV channels due to different

editorial standards. And it is difficult to control this whether by controlling the narrative or flow of information. Misinformation and disinformation, and framing news politically, are among the major issues the media face today.

“The one with the better army may win the battle, but the one with the better story wins the war” (Ebner: 2017). *“Today, history is being written online, and through television”*¹⁴ Narratives and information are transferred through the media, social media platforms, and all modes of communication on cyberspace, setting the stage for conflict or peace. Information has exceeded borders and states and has, by and large, become controlled by capitalism’s leaders, each with their agenda. With the arrival of YouTube, TV, and Your news feed on social media. (Ebner: 2017).¹⁵

It has become extremely difficult to separate social media from TV newscasts since now all newscasts are uploaded regularly and shared on different social platforms. This research focuses on the replayed news casts newscasts covering the news of the Yemeni war as seen on AL Arabia, Al-Jazeera, Sky News Arabia, and AL ALAalam’s YouTube channel Between the period between Jan 2022 and April 2022.

¹³ Howard Fienberg, “Morality Comes to IR: Ethical Approaches to the Discipline, Jul. 30, 2010).

¹⁴ <https://www.arabmediasociety.com/weaponizing-media-and-the-dangers-of-subjective-truth-reflections-on-the-arab-media-between-conflict-and-peace-panel/wen>

¹⁵ In the words of Lt. Col. Peter Lerner, head of the Israel Defense Force’s (IDF) Foreign and Social Media office, as quoted by Professor Emeritus of Journalism and Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California, Philip Seib, in his book *Information at War*:

If you are absent on the social media space, you cede that space to the enemy. You must be there to lead the conversation, especially in war time. If you’re silent on social media, you’re not putting anything in your enemy’s way to prevent their message from gaining steam; if you’re silent on social media, you’re not getting your own message across; and if you’re silent on social media, you’re not giving your supporters ammunition to use. (Seib 2021, Chap. 4)

So why should we care about information accuracy? information is ammunition and public opinion is easily influenced with great volatility and susceptibility to manipulation. A great example of this is the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (Daesh)'s communications strategy. Daesh has established its strength largely by building a media empire that attempts to unite people across the world behind a clear cause and ideology. It also controls its narrative and story through its media outlets and by infiltrating almost all social media platforms, thereby not only communicating its agenda to the world, but also keeping its followers connected through sensationalism and a sense of community. (Asmi: 2020)

Public opinion matters. News coverage can change the story if it is delivered incorrectly. News modification or manipulation could shift public perspective and deviate from the general truth and that is dangerous.

¹⁶ See Farah Rasmi "Weaponizing Media and the Dangers of Subjective Truth: Reflections on the "Arab Media Between Conflict and Peace" 2022

Literature Review

When you read about the war in Yemen in the academic papers, they share a common hypothesis and reach a common conclusion which is that the war has been covered unjustly.

1- There were security and professional challenges for journalists to cover the war in sensitive zones in Yemen which resulted in a lack of news delivery. 27 journalists worldwide were murdered in Yemen.

2- The war on Yemen was politicised and media outlets such as AL Arabia and ALHadath played a major role in disinformation.

The first theme of this literature review is about how other academics have argued that journalism in the Gulf has undergone three important phases, the first of which started with the publication of the Journal of Kuwait in 1928 and the second took place in 1949-1956 and is remembered by the emergence of several news outlets. News Media in the Arab world, in their chapter about Media developments in the GCC region countries, have been government-owned and operated, according to Dickinson, Roger, Gunter, Barrie. They have specific concerns about the persona of the state, most often compared with that of its ruler, an unelected sovereign. There is a division in media policy and content creation among state-owned GCC channels such as Arabia, Al-Jazeera, Sky News Arabia and ALAalam Malayalam. Several studies argued this media bias, for example, the

gulf crisis raises important questions about what happens inside networks, and that it becomes part and parcel of a political-media conflict.

Al-Jazeera has gathered significant academic attention since its formation in November 1996 by Qatar's then emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa AL-Thani, who proposed the network to be a tool of Qatar's soft power (Samuel-Azran: 2013). El-Nawawy and Iskander 2003-2003 charted the network's initial phases, contending that the channel pushed the limits of free speech in an otherwise censorship-laden Arab world and forced authoritarian governments to rethink political and media strategies.

Lamloum (2004) said that Al-Jazeera was aiding in the formation of a new type of independent Arab political culture while Wojcieszak (2007) called Al-Jazeera counter-hegemonic (p.121) because she argued it operated against the basic premises of authoritarianism and censorship. Furthermore, Pintak (2011) posted that Al-Jazeera's critical news coverage may have been one important catalyst for the Arab Spring: Seib (2008) and Thus (2007) contended that Al-Jazeera's introduction of critical non-Western perspectives served to counterbalance - to at least some extent - Western news imperialism and Milady (2006) argued that Al-Jazeera helped solidify notions of Arab identity.

For example, below you will find a direct quote from Mellor and Miles (2005) that describes Al-Jazeera's style of coverage and journalistic identity,"

¹⁷ See Boyd. 1999: iskander 2007)

¹⁸ See Kosárová, Dominika.. Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya: Understanding Media Bias. 2020 10.24040/politickevedy.2020.23.4.87-108.

¹⁹ See Al-Jazeera Research, A journal article "When news is the crisis: Aljazeera and AL Arabia framing of 2017 gulf conflict" published in 2020

Al-Jazeera's news service stipulates a diversity of factual content. If one watches the 'With Haikal' documentary, one can get the impression that the channel is Nasserite in its orientation whereas 'in Witness to the Age' or 'Without borders,' a contrary impression arises that Al-Jazeera is anti-Nasserite and sympathetic to the 'Muslim brotherhood' Movement. (Mellor: 2005; Miles: 2005; Zayani: 2005).

The propagation of satellite TV news channels mirrors the depth and nature of the political revolutions in the region (Mellor: 2005; Miles: 2005). The Arab region in general and the Gulf region found themselves in the heart of the international conflict. There is no doubt there is a problem with professional news reporting in Arab media outlets chosen in this research. The solution to the political elite is not to import or export professional foreign companies to do the heavy lifting when it comes to narrating Arabic reality but, instead, to hire professional journalists and write stories within certain media law and ethics. (El-Nawawy, Iskandar: 2003; Seib: 2008).

"The growing role of satellite TV news channels can be conceived as one of the internal tools for change to contain the tensions resulting from external pressures" (El-Nawawi and Iskandar: 2003; Seib: 2008).

Mention Al-Jazeera to the average Arab, whether he may be an Egyptian, a Lebanese or a Palestinian, and the response is likely to be critical. Al-Jazeera is the Qatar-based Arab network that has become a household name in the Arab world primarily because it chose to air audio and videotapes received from certified terrorists like Osama bin Laden and over-thrown leaders like Saddam Hussein when he was in power. Egyptian officials through the years and during the Egyptian revolution in 2011 argued that Al-Jazeera flipped the truth.

Al-Jazeera was created to promote modernisation and democracy. The Emir set aside \$137 million to be used for Al-Jazeera's news coverage, hoping that it would be self-sustaining within five years of its debut on November 1st, 1996.²¹

²⁰ See Pintak, L. (2011). The Al Jazeera revolution. Foreign Policy, 1-4.

²¹ See Imad Musa, "Al Jazeera TV: When the Medium Becomes the Story," IPI Global Journalist, second quarter 2003, p. 20. For more details on the history and sociology of Al Jazeera, see Mohammed el-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar, Al Jazeera: The Story of the Network that Is Rattling Governments and Redefining Modern Journalism (Cambridge, MA: Westview Books, 2003)

Al Arabiya, Al-Jazeera & Sky News Arabia

Al Arabiya points itself to competing against Al Jazeera and was established in opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood's political agenda (Zayani, Ayish: 2006). According to academic research papers, the Al Arabia network is seen as more or less a Saudi government propaganda arm (Al-Rawi: 2016; Cochrane: 2007; Hammon: 2007; Mellor et al.: 2014).

A study by El-Nawawy and Strong (2012b) chronicled some of the direct Saudi government constraints exerted on Al Arabiya's editorial policy. Despite these constraints, however, Al Arabiya's journalists report a high level of employee satisfaction (El-Nawawy, Strong: 2012b). The Middle East Broadcasting group (MBC), wanted to establish Arabia to divert from the attention Al-Jazeera was attracting in the Arab world and to redefine the Arab narrative of current affairs. This new, upcoming channel, which is owned by Saudi Arabia, has direct contact with the monarchy.

The network possesses extraordinary viewership in the Arab region (Al-Rawi, 2016; Elmasry et al., 2013; El-Nawawy and Strong, 2012b; Nisbet and Myers, 2011), often ranking second in viewership to Al Jazeera (El-Nawawy and Strong, 2012a)

A media war is playing out during the crisis amid the divisions and the media systems at play have been at the centre of the conflict and have been politicised and weaponised to sway opinion and garner support, both within the GCC and outside as well, and to shape narratives.

Walid Fakhr El-Din, a university professor, pointed out that the media as a whole in the Arab region is "financed with political money" and is not controlled by the rules of media work, professionalism and objectivity. Furthermore, "it does not set its media policy" and is restricted and subordinate to the political leadership and those who finance it, even if it is "independent in form." He pointed out that this description applies to the media in the Gulf countries, including the Qatari media, led by Al-Jazeera, the media, and Saudi newspapers. In his interview with DW Arabic, Fakhr El-Din stressed that "the media in the Arab world has never been a neutral professional media, it is only a political means".²²

²² See Ali Alshabnan. "The Politicization of Arab Gulf Media Outlets in the Gulf Crisis: A Content Analysis" <https://www.globalmediajournal.com/open-access/the-politicization-of-arab-gulf-media-outlets-in-the-gulf-crisis-a-content-analysis.php?aid=86958>

ALAAalam (Iran)

According to Karim Jafari in his reviewed research about ALAAalam Network in 1991 entitled “بررسی رویکرد شبکه العالم به تحولات “بیداری اسلامی” translated to “*Investigating the approach of ALAAalam Network to the developments of Islamic Awakening*”

The network has a very simple structure, at the same time, small and low compared to its other regional and international competitors. The management of the network is introduced by the Deputy Foreign Minister of Sada Organisation and 109 TV of the Islamic Republic of Iran and is appointed by the head of this organisation. The head of the network oversees the production, distribution, communication with high-ranking officials of the country and the policymaking of the network.

ALAAalam has a news site that covers a wide range of broadcast programmes. This site publishes its programme in both Arabic and Persian languages, which has been expanded after the recent developments in the region and following its needs. This site also allows the audience to watch live network programmes.²³

In general, ALAAalam News Network derives its general news policies from the official policy-making centres and competent authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Although this general policy, like the domestic networks, is not affiliated with the Broadcasting of the Islamic Republic of Iran and is produced and broadcast to the taste of

its Arab audience, in general, the general policy of the system can be seen in all news sections. ALAAalam relies on the principle of oppression, revolutionary movements in the Arab world and its Islamist foundation.²⁴

On the other side of the peninsula, there is Iran which is portrayed in this research by the state-owned channel ALAAalam. According to research findings, Iran's relations with the GCC states have been troubled throughout the years. There has been a verbal war between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and Saudi officials and Iranian officials have had a tug of war in terms of authoritative control over the economic, political, and cultural influences in the region. (Litvak, Meir 2017). Iran has had, over the years, an approach to launch its nuclear programme, launch its foreign policy with the United States and Europe and there is a methodological misunderstanding of the Israeli-Palestine conflict.²⁵

The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has become increasingly important in shaping the nature of Middle Eastern security, dating back to the time of the shah. There is a long list of incidents which have intensified tensions between the two. There is a growing bank of literature that seeks to understand this rivalry with a focus on geopolitical dimensions. (Litvak, Meir 2017) As a result, this conflict spilled over into Yemen, the Syrian civil war, the Israeli Palestinian crisis, and the Lebanese internal instability.

²³ <https://civilica.com/doc/793152/>

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ See Author, Litvak, Meir. “Iran and Saudi Arabia: Religious and Strategic Rivalry.” Edited by Joshua Teitelbaum. Saudi Arabia, the Gulf, and the New Regional Landscape. Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep04754.10>.

Litvak Meir, Joshua Teitelbaum and Allison Peters - in several studies - conclude that the Saudi led coalition in Yemen has its roots in the failure of a political process supposed to bring stability to Yemen following an uprising in 2011 that forced its long-time authoritarian president Ali Abdullah Saleh to hand over power to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi.²⁶ Ending up with the Houthis movement taking control of Sanaa in 2014.

The coalition received logistical and intelligence support from the US, UK and France. (Guzansky, Yoel. 2016) Many attempts at a cease-fire failed. In late 2021, the Houthis went on the offensive in Marib, the government's last stronghold in the north. There have been several back-and-forth attacks between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia, often hitting civilian infrastructure. The conflict has also caused what the UN says is the world's worst humanitarian disaster (UN Yemen Report 2021). Four million people have been forced to flee their homes and more than 20.7 million out of the 71 million population continue to require humanitarian assistance.²⁷ According to research findings, when explaining the Yemen crisis, what happens in Yemen can greatly exacerbate regional tensions. The conflict is seen as part of a regional power struggle between Shiite-ruled Iran and Sunni-ruled Saudi Arabia. Yemen is strategically important because it sits on a strait linking the Red Sea and

the Gulf of Aden through which much of the world's oil shipments pass.²⁸ According to American research conducted in Rand California, in a report published in 2020,²⁹ Iran has dramatically increased investment in the Houthis movement raising speculation that the Houthis are evolving into another regional proxy that serves to protect and promote Iranian interests. the Houthis represent an attractive opportunity to stand against Saudi Arabia. In the Academic world, there is a good deal of scholarly literature that has examined Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya's coverage of numerous conflict and non-conflict related issues in English and Arabic, however, there are not any research findings or data that cover the gap in understanding coverage from four different state-owned media channels that are opposites in political affiliation and identity and these four are (ALArabia, ALJazeera, SkynewsArabia and ALaalam (Iranian). (T, Johnston 2020)

Some factors that contributed to this preferential coverage and division of interest include government policies changes, foreign policy transformations, international GCC relations, upheavals and conflicts that led to some cracks like the Qatar-Saudi-Emirati crisis that lasted from Jun 5, 2017 until Jan 5, 2021 then it Kuwait intervened and resolved the crisis with some international actors, including United State and France.³⁰

²⁶ News source check <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29319423>

²⁷ See Author Guzansky, Yoel. "Pakistan and Saudi Arabia: How Special Are the 'Special Relations?'" Institute for National Security Studies, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep08608>.

²⁸ See Author Third Way. "2020 Country Brief: Saudi Arabia and Its Role in Yemen." Third Way, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep26165>.

²⁹ Johnston, Trevor, Matthew Lane, Abigail Casey, Heather J. Williams, Ashley L. Rhoades, James Sladden, Nathan Vest, Jordan R. Reimer, and Ryan Haberman, Could the Houthis Be the Next Hizballah? Iranian Proxy Development in Yemen and the Future of the Houthi Movement. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2551.html. Also available in print form.

³⁰ https://www.academia.edu/35788832/Qatar_and_the_Terrorist_Blame_Game

Most of the existing theory and research into how the Houthis of Yemen are represented in the media, as well as bias in the news market, is well documented. Recent research in economics and political science explains the phenomenon by assuming that consumers want to read or watch news that is consistent with their tastes or prior beliefs rather than the truth. There is relative truth and absolute truth.

- What words were used to describe the Houthis ? (I can't seem to crop this photo. It worked with others above but this one i can't can you please help ?just crop the phrase above) it keeps showing me header information which i don't remember adding to this document

The media is increasingly interested in covering wars, conflicts and crises. However, the coverage is usually incomplete or involves many disadvantages due to the ethnic bias of journalists, the monitoring of the press by the military or governments or heavy reliance on official resources and the lack of critical reports.³¹

The relationship between governments and the media in times of crisis and war remains characterised by conflicts of interest (Biernatzki, 2003). Governments try to conceal at least some information to protect their forces from enemy actions and to ensure the success of their objectives, while the GCC media are obligated according to professionalism to obtain the maximum amount of information and disseminate it. The rapid development of technology in its relationship with the media has increased the conflict, thanks

to the speed in the broadcast of news and information and the multiple ways of spreading it through digital media platforms and social networks but this is another subject for another research, but it is a note worth mentioning.

In the last years the Yemen war has been one of the most important Arab issues, and has received a large amount of Western media coverage as well as Arab media coverage. This coverage has undoubtedly had an impact on the perception and views of this war. Sky News Arabia and Al-Arabiya consider the Yemen war to be a proxy war (Karakir, 2018) provoked by influential international and regional powers in the Middle East and the rest of the world. Another part of the GCC, represented by Al-Jazeera and ALAalam TV channels, considered the war in Yemen as an extension of what is known as the "Arab Spring". (Meyer et, al, 2018) The influence of these channels on public opinion through press coverage is the subject of much research and many theories. Lippmann in 1992 talked about the role of the press in making certain frames, saying that "the way in which the world is imagined determines at any particular moment what men will do." And it is believed that people get most information about public affairs from the news media which over time creates a frame of expectation or a dominant frame. Other researchers have focused on the importance of the media in prioritising people's interest through news coverage (McCombs and Shaw 1972) the influence of framing on public opinion (Chong and Drukman 2007) and the role of traditional and new media in framing minds (Castells, 2013).³²

³¹ See Author Joseph, Teresa. "Mediating War and Peace: Mass Media and International Conflict." *India Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (2014): 225–40. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45072817>.

³² ALsridi, Hatem and Ziani, Abdulkarim. "War and Journalism: framing the syrian and yemen war through the New York times online news coverage." University of Bahrain. 2020

In comparative analysis of research on the frames used in news videos by Al-Arabiya, Sky news Arabia, Al-Jazeera and ALAalam, based on Entman's framing theory, concluded that Sky News Arabia and Al-Arabiya portrayed Houthis as "Security threat" "Evil" and "Terrorists" "monsters" who strike innocent people with weapons and threaten the stability of the UAE and Saudi Arabia and who pose an international threat.

It is confirmed that the news has been used extensively in the Yemen conflict to influence public opinion toward allowing humanitarian intervention in the form of another military war (Simons 2016). The results of another study (Goderfroidt et al, 2016) raised questions about the neutrality of newspapers and their impact on public opinion in France, Britain and the United States and Russia through the newspapers' coverage in these countries for war in Syria. (Simons 2016).

A study analysing the frames used in the Yemen war (ELZahar, 2018) via media coverage of four television channels (Al-Arabiya, Al-Jazeera, Russia today and BBC Arabic) showed that the predominant frame in all channels is the frame of conflict followed by the frame of human interest, while the ethics frame is the lowest frame (focusing on conflict not human interest) used in all channels. A study of framing disputed accounts in the Saudi news agency, the Tehran times and Saba news about the war in Yemen, emphasised the use of basic concepts of regional conflict, terrorism, and the humanitarian crisis.

On the other hand, each agency dealt with these concepts through its different framing of conflict which served as a major point of contention between them (Vis, 2016). The framing theory remains among the most important theories of mass communication used in research so it is important to focus on how the media highlights certain events and then places them within a particular context to encourage or discourage certain interpretations so media exercises a selective influence on how people view reality. (ELZahar, 2018)

³³ (ALsridi, Hatem and Ziani, Abdulkarim. "War and Journalism: framing the Syrian and Yemen war through the New York times online news coverage." University of Bahrain. 2020

Methodology

This research based on a quantitative approach of content analysis of media coverage in Al-Jazeera, AL Arabia, Sky News Arabia and ALAalam news casts which cover primarily the Yemen war and this research study aims to understand the geopolitical impacts that provoked these selected tv networks to portray or show a biased policy toward their editorial coverage of Yemen war whether through their phraseology or terminology. This research is concerned with analysing news coverage of the Yemen war and its conflict with UAE-Saudi Arabia allies. The research answers a few questions about how these four channels, which are based in the Persian Gulf, narrated the war, specifically centring on the air attacks by Houthis on Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia Airport Abha in January 2022.

The analysis explored 40 samples, articles and broadcast material, from both factions: 10 of those samples from Al-Jazeera and 10 from Al-Arabiya (10) and Sky News Arabia (4) 10 of ALAalam. A content analysis of news-casts was carried out. Content analysis is a quantitative communication and media research method that involves systematically counting the presence and absence of aspects of manifest content (Riffe et al., 2005).

The sample date range is from 20 January 2022 to 20 April 2022

The research in this report explores the media systems' post-conflict approach and built-in narratives in reporting on four different areas:

- 1) Difference in pre-crisis and post-crisis reporting on the Yemen conflict by 4 channels**
- 2) Reporting on Economy of the Opposing Side**
- 3) Human Rights**
- 4) Terrorism Accusations.**

Sampling

The unit of analysis was the entire broadcast news segment. To find news segments, the researchers searched the Internet for available episodes airing during the first four months of the crisis - from 20 January 2022 to 20 April 2022. YouTube was used to gather news-cast episodes of Al-Arabiya.net, ALAalam and Sky News Arabia.

Not all episodes were available online, and some episodes did not provide any news segments coverage of the Houthis' military attack on Saudi Arabia and the Emirates. Only three episodes of each channel were available online. Using the available videos of news-casts of four channels yielded a total of 40 news segments. A greater number of Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera segments were available on YouTube and Sky News Arabia was found on their website as well as Al-Jazeera.

Content Multimedia Analysis

The content analysis scheme measured the dominant frame, directionality, length of news segments, keywords, language used, information sources and terrorism accusations and associations. All variables were measured at the nominal level. Coding categories were drawn in part from the literature on framing and Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, Sky News Arabia, ALAalam (Iranian) and a pre-viewing of news segments not included in the final sample. The pre-viewing revealed observations about word choices, guest contributors and terrorism associations, among other things. These observations formed the basis for some of the coding categories.

Findings and Results

This research shed light on different terms, and similar coverage by analysing news reports that appeared on four different channels between January and April 2022 on AL Arabia, Al-Jazeera, Sky News Arabia and ALAalam.

For a reader unfamiliar with the Arab world, one might wonder what the difference is. There is a Saudi Arabia, UAE, USA ally which is portrayed journalistically speaking via Sky News Arabia, AL Arabia, ALHadath, Alhurra and the second Alliance is Anti-Israel, pro Iran, presented via ALAalam, Al-Jazeera, and AL Mayadeen TV.

Below you will find a sample of forms written after careful consideration about the similarities and differences of news content in these channels and which corresponds directly with one single event which is the Yemen War from two contradictory sides: The Houthis and the Saudi Alliance.

These samples of forms targeted the frequency of coverage, whether a report included a source or not, distinctive terminologies which that defined two sides of the truth, two sides of the same war:

The Houthis VS Alliance of UAE and Saudi Arabia

Please note that this content study analyses the number of times the chosen four networks mentioned any story about Yemen War and particularly when Houthis targeted Abha Airport in Saudi Arabia and industrial areas in Abu Dhabi as well as other secondary targets during the period of January until April 2022. Saudi Arabia decided to apply a cease fire with Houthis during the first week of Ramadan in 2022 and requested an urgent meeting with the Yemeni government and other opposition representatives to find common ground.

The chosen videos were 10 videos from each TV channel, and they were selected according to the content. It is worth mentioning that the Iranian funded TV channel, ALAalam's YouTube channel, its primary YouTube channel, has been deleted for violating terms of YouTube³⁴. However, the channel created a secondary YouTube channel associated with a programme that covers a large press round up of Arab media including its own.³⁵

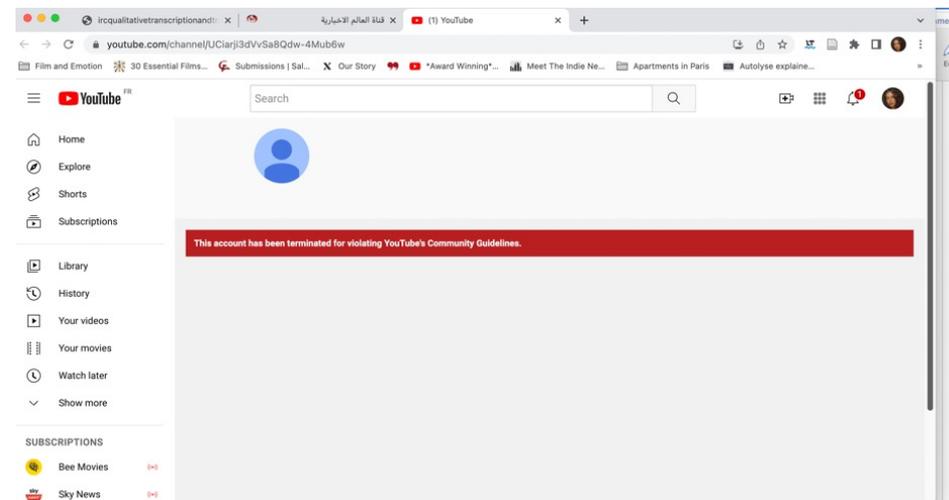


Figure 1 shows the official YouTube channel of ALAalam shut down

Forty videos of four channels were published on YouTube on their respective channels. The coding forms included questions like

- 1- How is the Saudi-UAE alliance described in the selected media outlets?
- 2- What is the name of the TV channel in question?
- 3- How many sources were cited?
- 4- What words were used to describe the Houthis?
- 5- Is there a difference between the headline of the video and the content of the video?
- 6- What are the main resources used in the video?
- 7- Does the video contain an opinion from a war analyst or mention the name of the reporter?
- 8- Does the headline use a threatening or an informative tone? Or does it solely mention the number of casualties?

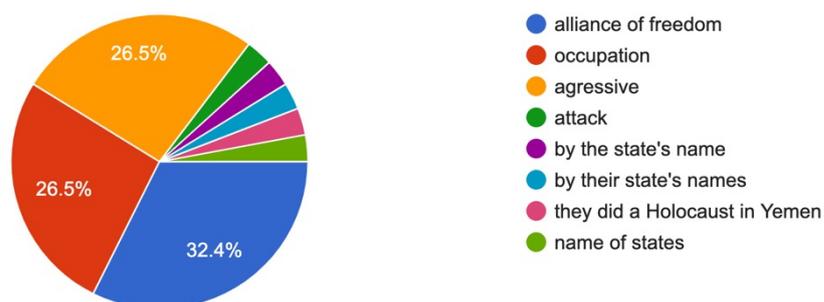
³⁴ Additional info <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCiarji3dVvSa8Qdw-4Mub6w>

³⁵ Additional info https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEnHD_8M27wYnN8s2aLa5KA

According to findings in the first table below highlighted in blue 32.4% UAE and Saudi Arabia's military coalition is described as an alliance of freedom in Sky News Arabia and AL Arabia, 26.5% the military coalition is described as an aggression by Iranian funded ALAalam channel and AL-Jazeera. 26.5% is the percentage of times this coalition is portrayed as an occupation by Iranian channel ALAalam. There are times where Al-Jazeera, Sky News Arabia, Al-Arabiya scored equally 2.9% for only using the state's names when talking about the military Saudi-UAE coalition in news. ALAalam scored 2.9% for likening Saudi-UAE attacks to a holocaust of Yemenis.

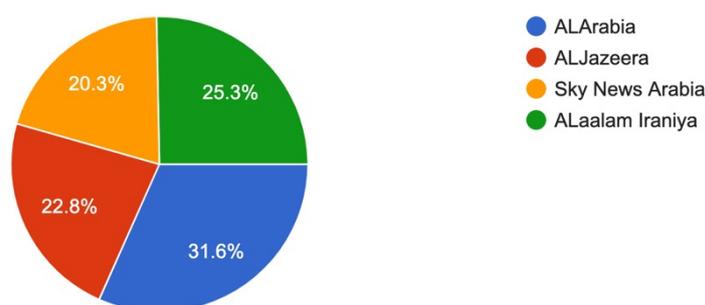
Title of this table: How is the Saudi-UAE alliance described?

34 responses



The coding forms included 20.3% videos by Sky News Arabia, 25.3% by ALAalam Iranian. 31.6% by AL Arabia and 22.8% by Al-Jazeera.

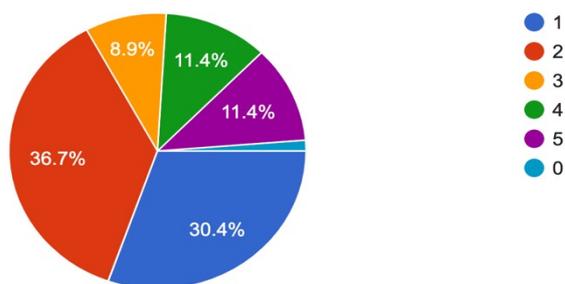
Name of TV Channel
79 responses



The only channel among the four which include more than five sources in its news report was ALAalam Iranian and, when compared with the number of sources used by other channels, it reached 11.4%. Only 11.4% of the reports by the four channels included five credible sources during the news coverage. 36.7% (the highlighted portion in red) shows the percentage which ALJazeera, ALArabia, skynews arabia has used a guest speaker, and included a governmental source in their coverage. 30.4% were the times these channels used one source in the report. Out of the four channels, 8.9% was the percentage that included newscasts that used three sources

- How many sources were included in the video?

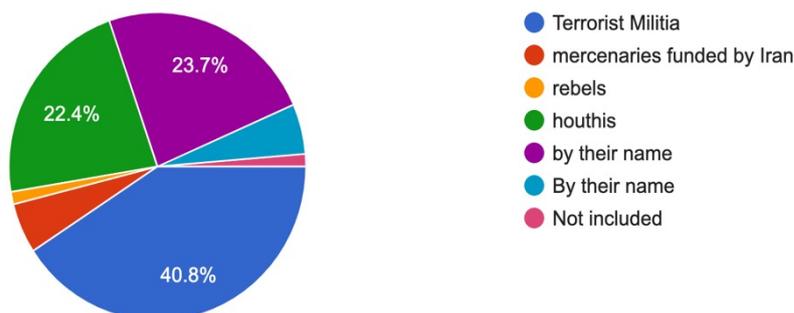
79 responses



The Houthis were described differently by four channels. 40.8% described the Houthis as *terrorist militia*. 22.4% as *Houthis*. 23.7% as *Ansar Allah – by their name*. 1.3% as *rebels* 5.3% as *mercenaries funded by Iran* and 1.3% as *other*.

What words were used to describe the Houthis?

76 responses

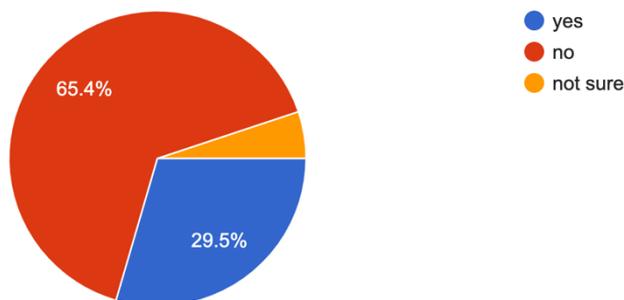


In the below table, when asked whether there is a difference between the headline of the video and the content in terms of facts and similarity the four channels scored

- 65.4% as No,
- 5.1% as not sure
- And 29.5% as Yes.

Is there a difference between the headline of the video and the content of the video in terms of facts ?

78 responses



To give an example a YouTube video dating 17th of April 2022, published on AL Arabia's YouTube channel is entitled (translated to English from Arabic): *“Nine victims including injured and dead in an explosion in Abu Dhabi”*

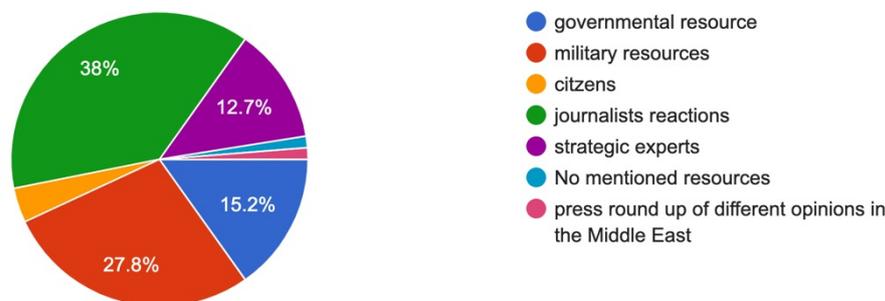
The guests appearing on TV, such as Ahmad AL-Saleh and Salem AL Yami, said these victims are of Pakistani and Indian nationalities and not Emirati. So, it is not a big explosion hence making it a *“failed”* attempt by the Houthis to attack the heart of Abu Dhabi.³⁶

Another contradiction in the news report, for example, in this same video which said in the title that nine lives were injured and three were killed also included an introduction from the presenter who said that the attack was *“light” and unalarming*³⁷ Another example shows one of the journalists on Sky News Arabia called Maged ALFarsi who is an Emirati national has made the following statement as soon as the news of the Abha airport attack happened and this was 10 minutes after the news declaration.

“We are now in the context of this urgent news and we broadcast it on Sky News Arabia a while ago in an attempt by the Houthi gang to target Abha airport, but this attack was deterred by the Saudi air defence and these drones were destroyed, but some shrapnel from the explosions led to minor injuries to travellers and airport workers Abha, when will we stand in the face of these blatant Houthi attacks..” Maged ALFarsi. Ten feb 2022.

38% percent of the videos selected for this sample used journalists' reactions, opinions and impulsive reporting when responding to attacks, 12.7% used strategic experts by interviewing them. 27.8% used military services, declarations by Houthis or UAE Alliance. 15.2% included government declarations or resources. 3.8% included citizens or vox pop as sources and 1.3% included a minor percentage of using zero sources and only reactions or the network's editorial statement.

79 responses



The table above: What were the main resources used in the videos?

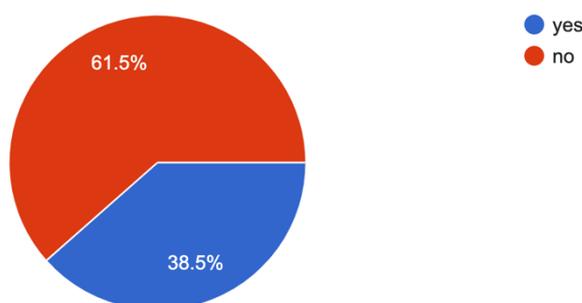
³⁶ Additional info https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Re_bP--HDp8

³⁷ Additional info https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Re_bP--HDp8

One of the interesting findings of this research is that despite the subject of this research being a war crisis, it was found that among the clips selected, 61.5% responded “No” to not interviewing or containing an opinion of a war analyst during the war coverage on selected media channels.

Do these videos contain an opinion of a war analyst?

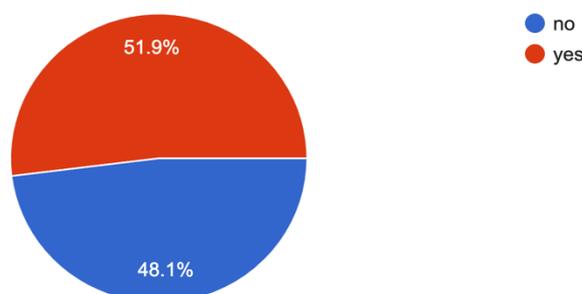
78 responses



According to academic research, war study - sometimes called polemology - is a multidisciplinary study of war as it pertains to the military, diplomatic, philosophical, social, psychological, or economic dimensions of human conflict. There are laws to look at like laws and ethics of war, the psychology of international relations and none of these were found in the selected reports whether through their coverage or the guest list.

Another surprising factor is that 51.9% responded that there was not any mention of the reporter's name or journalist's name in the news story and 48.1% responded yes.

77 responses



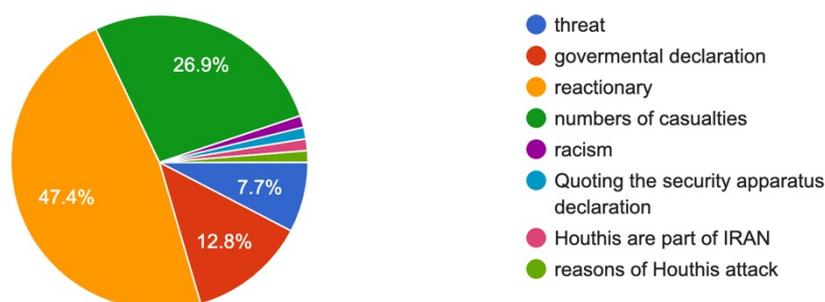
- Does the video add or mention names of the reporter or writer involved ?

Framing the manchette (headline) is a big part of journalism. Among 78 responses to this study, it was shown that 47.4% of the selected videos in the study has used the manchette as a reactionary tool using only terminologies with opposing political attacks or threats or attacking another person or another entity.

26.9% of news reports in this study focused on mentioning the number casualties during the coverage of Houthis attacks. 12.8% focused on mentioning that Houthis are funded by Iran. 7.7% used a threatening tone from Saudi or UAE government officials toward the Houthis. While 1.3 % used racist titles, as well as 1.3% Houthis are like Hizballah and part of Iran and finally 1.3% news reported used quotes from the Saudi military forces or Houthis themselves.

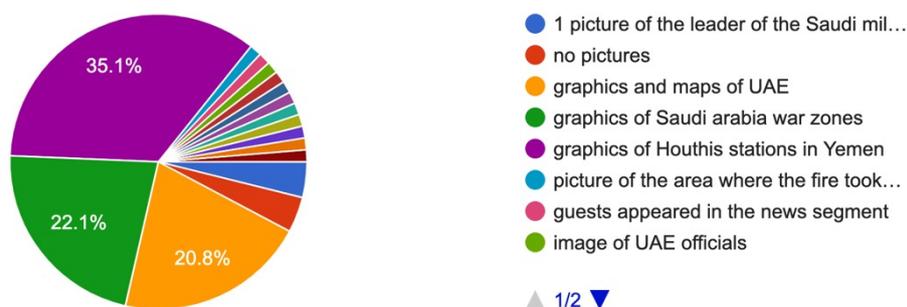
-What frames were used in the Headline and what was the tone ?

78 responses



According to the findings, 35.1% of media channels used graphics of Houthis military stations in Yemen or war locations, 22.1 % of news reports included graphics of Saudi Arabia war zones or where Houthis attacked. 20.8% used graphics of the same nature of the United Arab Emirates. 3.9% included mostly pictures of the military spokesperson of the Saudi military force alliance with UAE. 1.3% of news reports included guests' speakers during the news cast, 1.3% included zero pictures and finally 1.3% included archival pictures of Houthis attack.

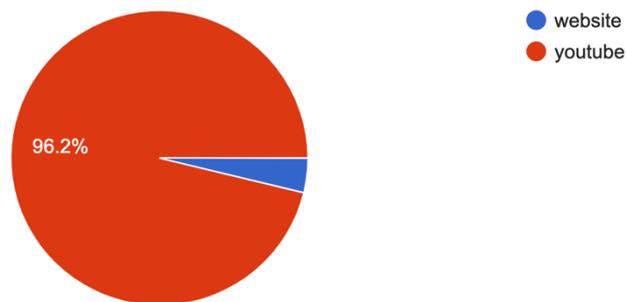
77 responses



- Did the video include photos and how many?

The news reports gathered for this report were published on the TV channel's YouTube and this includes 96.2% of the content and only 3.8% found on their original website.

79 responses



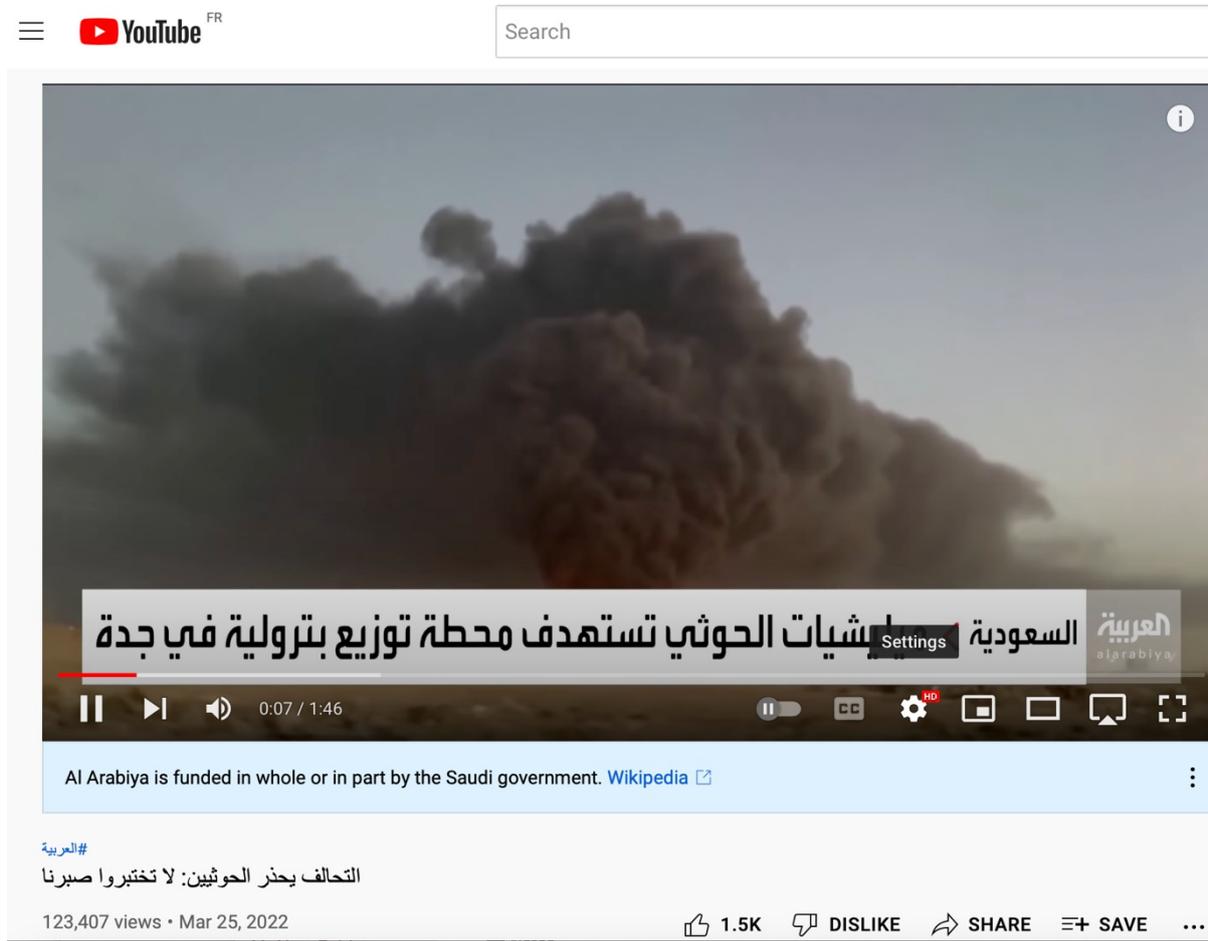
- Where is the news report /video published?

The journalistic objective of each channel in this sampling is different. 16.5% aimed at showing that life is normal in UAE and Saudi Arabia after the Houthis attacked the Abha airport and the industrial stations in Abu Dhabi. 12.7% wanted the opposite and to show that life in Saudi was under threat. 2.5% wanted to highlight that the Yemeni talks proposed by the government of Mohamad bin Salman were ineffective. 15.2% wanted to expose in their news reports the military secrets of the Houthis.

12.7% aimed in their news stories to portray the weakness of the Houthis in the war and 13.9% wanted to show the destruction of what the Saudi-UAE alliance did in Yemen.

1.3% wanted to show the US position of the war in Yemen. This was only present in Sky News Arabia’s reporting. ALAalam wanted to show the destruction that the UAE-Saudi alliance had left in Yemen. Al-Jazeera wanted to show that the military strategies of Houthis were complicated, and AL Arabia wanted to focus on the weakness of the Houthis and that life was normal and the attack was irrelevant. However, for several news clips during the month of February 2022 the content of these videos contradicted with the opinion of the journalist who is reporting as his intention was to focus on the same idea that life is normal, and the attack is weak, but the editorial department’s manchette showed the contrary; a high number of casualties and that this attack was a threat to Saudi oil stations.

Which brings us to the last item discussed in this section here, whether the text and images reflect the journalist’s objective in the news report or not; 33.8% shows it did not reflect that and 67.5% shows the text and content matched the journalist’s objective in the news report of all 4 channels.



This video for example is dated 25th march, 2022. It covers a Houthi attack on an industrial oil producing station in Jeddah. However, AL Arabia's YouTube title reflected another formula of news writing.

Their chosen news title translates as “Don't test our patience” which is clearly a direct threatening tone to the Houthis. This statement places the channel in a political position.

It is worth noting that most guest speakers who appeared on AL Arabia and Sky News Arabia are of the same political background and share the same interests and are the same people. Also, it is good to note that the social media manager of AL Arabia is Farah Al-Ibrahim since October 2016 who is a Saudi social media manager, editor and worked previously in Rotana and Edelman Middle East.

The recurring guests that appear are Salem Al Yami and Ahmad Al Saleh. Both work for the Saudi Royal Family and Salem Al Yami describes himself as a former diplomat in Saudi Arabia and Ahmad Al Saleh describes himself as an expert in regional military news.

Another finding was that AL Arabia and Sky News Arabia said that Houthis' military power was weak, and that they did not use complicated missiles in their attacks in Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia, however these same news channels confirmed later that the attack was not weak, after the news was released in ALAalam Iranian.

See Example: the photo below.

إقرار رسمي إماراتي باستخدام اليمنيين الصواريخ في استهداف أبو ظبي



الأربعاء ١٩ يناير ٢٠٢٢ - ٠٨:٥٧ بتوقيت غرينتش

قال سفير الإمارات لدى الولايات المتحدة يوسف العتيبة إن "الحوثيين" استخدموا صواريخ كروز وصواريخ بالستية وطائرات مسيرة في الهجوم على أبو ظبي مؤخرا.

This study aims to highlight news reports that are published on social networks such as YouTube and are shared or viewed thousands of times a day as a critical unit of study and an important proxy for studying decontextualised media framings.

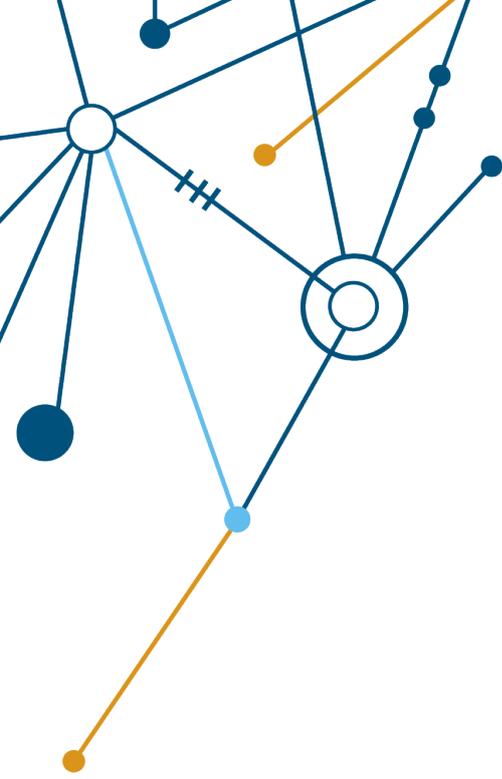
The role of news writing and reporting should not mislead us from the actual story. And that media's fast or reactionary coverage should not neglect citing war sources, and that any lack of information could impact the audience's narrative, as these misinformation or misleading media faults should not be underestimated in shaping the narrative and exposing state bias.

Al-Jazeera and Al Arabiya, both state-sponsored media, are emblematic of how these narratives are formed in the region. Further research could expand the scope of this study to include other news outlets or media platforms to obtain a more comprehensive view of the narrative building via media in the region.

An examination according to the findings of this research points to the behaviour and news strategies of the Arabic-language network, ALAalam, in the Arab developments shows that this network has outlined its important information mission based on public awareness based on the criteria defined by the news within the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This view can be well seen in the programmes of this network. The programme "I am Tehran - from Tehran" is broadcast every night by ALAalam and represents the transfer of political views in the Islamic Republic of Iran abroad and the viewers of this network. Accordingly, its news programme, ALAalam, in addition to emphasising the Islamic Awakening as the most important achievement of the Arab revolutions in the region, warns of the influence of Western and Arab currents affiliated with global Zionism in these revolutions. Unlike Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera news networks, ALAalam does not claim to be neutral in information and introduces itself as a supporter of the anti-Western and anti-Zionist resistance in the region.

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