



CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE 2010 IRAQI
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION: A COMPARATIVE
STUDY OF CNN AND AL-JAZEERA (ENGLISH)

BY

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for the degree of Master of Human Sciences
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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the objectivity in the coverage of the 2010 Iraqi parliamentary election by CNN and Al-Jazeera in their websites. The news coverage was examined for 42 days from 12 February until 26 March 2010, from the starting day of the election campaign to the announcement of the election results. The total samples collected were 112 stories, of which 38 of them were from CNN and 74 from Al-Jazeera. The data were coded for sources of news (official and non-official), direction of the news stories (favourable, unfavourable and balanced/neutral), and frames (responsibility, conflict and human impact frame) to test whether there is any significant variation between the two networks in their coverage of the event. Quantitative Content Analysis as a research method is used to investigate how the networks objectively covered this election. The Chi-square analysis yielded many significant findings which clearly distinguished Al-Jazeera as covering the election more objectively than CNN based on their comprehensive usage of news frames, presence of balanced/neutral news and employment of varied news sources. Even though one hundred percent of objectivity will never be attained as argued by scholars, in this study it can be concluded that Al-Jazeera, in comparison with CNN, displayed more objectivity in its coverage of the 2010 Iraqi parliamentary election.

خلاصة البحث

لقد اعتمد البحث على الموضوعية في تغطية كل من قناة (CNN) وقناة الجزيرة الإنجليزية للانتخابات البرلمانية العراقية التي أجريت في مارس 2010م والمقارنة بينهما في ذلك، حيث قامت الباحثة بتحليل الأخبار التي بثتها القناتان منذ اليوم الأول من بدأ الحملة الدعائية في 12 فبراير ولغاية يوم إعلان النتائج في 26 مارس من عام 2010م، وذلك من خلال الاستناد إلى عينات متضمنة لـ 112 عرض إخباري، أخذ 74 منه من قناة الجزيرة و38 منه من قناة (CNN) وذلك عن طريق الموقعين الإلكترونيين للقناتين، ثم بدأ البحث بترميز البيانات من حيث المصادر الأخبار (الرسمية وغير الرسمية)، والحيادية (مواتية، غير المواتية ومتوازنة/محايدة)، والأطر الإخبارية (المسؤولية، الصراع، الاهتمامات الإنسانية). وقد استخدمت التحليل الرقمي للمضمون لكي يكشف عن مدى الموضوعية في كلا القناتين. وكانت نتائج التحليلات مربع كاي (Chi-square) للملاحظة والتي ميزت بصورة واضحة الفرق بين الجزيرة و (CNN)، ووجدت أن الجزيرة مارست المبادئ الموضوعية أكثر من (CNN) من حيث التغطية المشبعة للإطارات، والحيادية في تقديم الخبر، والحصول على الأخبار من مصادر مختلفة. على الرغم من أننا لا يمكننا الحصول على الموضوعية بشكل كامل بنسبة 100 %، خصوصا أن فكرة الموضوعية الدقيقة قد تراجعت عموما. لكن في النهاية، خرجت الدراسة بالنتيجة التالية وهي أن الجزيرة مقارنة بـ (CNN) ظهرت أكثر موضوعية في تغطيتها للانتخابات البرلمانية العراقية لعام 2010.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Communication).



.....
Norbaiduri Ruslan
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Communication).



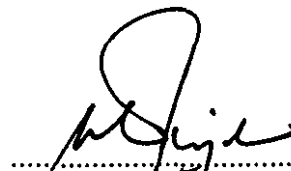
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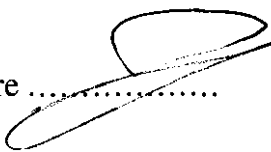


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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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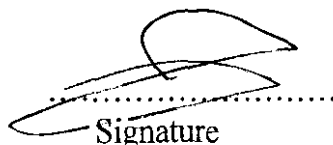
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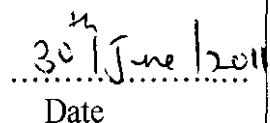
**CONTENT ANALYSIS OF 2010 THE IRAQI PARLIAMENTARY
ELECTION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN CNN AND
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*To my dearest parents,
My beloved children,
My loving husband,
who always help me to succeed in my life.*

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Throughout modern history, people have depended on the mass media for unfolding news events around the world. Global media networks have made world news more accessible than ever before. Satellite technology removes the boundaries across countries and overwhelms the national media; the quick transmission of news gives the media a symbolic power in the modern world. Global satellite channels, such as CNN, BBC, and Al-Jazeera, disseminate news that are unfolding and inform audience of issues and events that come from distant places.

Objectivity in presenting news is a major principle of journalism. Reporters should consider it an essential goal of their work. Objectivity which is characterized by balance, accuracy, realism, separation of facts from opinion, presentation of all main relevant points and avoiding slant would enable the press to present two sides of an issue, thus avoiding bias (Everette & Merrill, 1996).

Media are important means for influencing people during any political event, such as elections. Before or during an election, the media play a great role to inform people about the candidates' campaign, the views of the political parties and so on. Perhaps, global news channels like CNN and Al-Jazeera have more interest in the 2010 Iraqi parliamentary election, to show the entire world the situation in the post Saddam Hussein Iraq, or how Iraqi people are involved in a democratic system.

After several years, for the first time, Iraq is experiencing a democratic system. Even though the political and security gains are not stable, at least the Iraqi state has

entered the transitional period from emergency to development. Democracy in Iraq offers the best hope for solving Iraq's problems over the long term of the totalitarian system. Barro (1999) argues that Iraq has good foundation to exercise democracy:

The various socioeconomic indicators that academics use to assess the probability of democracy succeeding also suggest that Iraq has a reasonably good foundation to make the transition. In key categories such as per capita income, literacy, male-to-female literacy ratio, and urbanization, Iraq's numbers are comparable to those of many other states that have enjoyed real progress in the transition from autocracy to democracy, such as Bangladesh, Kenya, and Bolivia. (p. 180).

Shortly after the Iraq 2003 war, the Bush administration returned rule to a selected Iraqi government on June 28th 2004. The first election in Iraq after the war was held on January 30, 2005. The election selected 275 seats as a National Assembly (Khan, 2010).

The 7th March, 2010 parliamentary election in Iraq represents the second election after the 2003 war. In this election more than six thousand candidates from 82 political parties across the country participated in it. The main political parties are: the State of Law coalition led by current Prime Minister, Nuri Al Maliki; the Iraqi National Alliance (INA), such as the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI); the Sadrist trend; the Kurdistan Alliance (KA); the Tawafuk coalition; the Iraqiya coalition, led by former Prime Minister, Iyad Allawi; and the Iraq Unity coalition led by Interior Minister Jawad Bolani. The election resulted in a partial victory for the Iraqi National Movement, led by former Prime Minister, Ayad Allawi, which won a total of 91 seats, making it the largest alliance in the Council. The State of Law Coalition, led by current Prime Minister, Nouri Al-Maliki, was the second largest group with 89 seats.

In addition, a series of violence was recorded during the election process. According to the Iraq Body Count, during the election period from 12 February (when the campaigning started) until 7th March (Election Day), at least 228 people were killed. Another 176 people were killed in the period between Election Day and the announcement of the final results.

This study analyses the media coverage of the election. The purpose of the study is to examine whether CNN and Al-Jazeera cover the news of the 2010 Iraqi parliamentary election objectively.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Objectivity as a method of presenting news helps journalists to “understand their biases, and the accepted narratives” (Everette, 1996: 113). According to Zhao (1989), one of the meanings of objectivity is “treating a subject so as to exhibit the actual facts not coloured by the feeling of the writer” (p. 1). The ideal of journalistic objectivity may be seen in multiple dimensions: practical, strategic, economic, and ideological.

The objectivity principle guides journalists from bias reporting, in that, it is important to report news from different sides of an issue. The question here is, does objectivity prevail in news reporting of major news networks such as CNN and Al-Jazeera? Or how far is objectivity practiced in their news writing and reporting?

Generally, studies on the differences of news coverage of Iraq between CNN and Al-Jazeera centred on war. Abdallah (2007) investigated how the CNN and Al-Jazeera represented their national interests in their coverage of the Iraqi War. Overall, the results suggested that the CNN had a more pro-war tendency while Al-Jazeera reflected a more anti-war stance. Robert and Jan (2004) analysed news reported by Al-Jazeera, CNN and Fox News during the days leading up to the fall of Baghdad. They

found that Al-Jazeera showed the horrible and horrific side of the war. At the same time, it also attempted to get close to the ordinary Arab citizens - its target audience. On the other hand, Fox News and CNN appeared to favour the war to rally support for the American action in Iraq. Carney (2006) found that Arab channels identified Iraqi war as an occupation, while CNN referred to it as liberation. Moreover Iraqi soldiers are referred by CNN as “Republican Guard”, whilst they were called “resistance” by Al-Jazeera.

There are a number of studies that have investigated the differences in the way CNN and Al-Jazeera cover and present news, (Abdallah, 2007; Al-Nawawy, 2008; Carney, 2006). However, the findings are not substantive in number and in-depth which warrant more studies to be conducted in this area with specific issue/event as a focus. In this respect, this study chooses to focus on the Iraqi 2010 election to further understand whether objectivity in news reporting of the event prevails in these two major news networks. In this study, the researcher chooses two English networks to compare between them: CNN, (which represents the West) and Al-Jazeera, (which represents the East), as the population of the study, to examine the objectivity in their coverage of the 2010 Iraqi parliamentary election.

In fact, this type of study would also unearth framing strategies used by the two networks and the type of sources they used. Thus, the Iraqi 2010 election would serve as a convincing case study to assess how objectivity is constructed in the news media.

This study is also interested to examine whether the distribution of news sources and the frames for reporting news regarding the election process differ significantly between the two major networks. The dominant frames and sources that the networks used in the articles would allow us to determine the objectivity of their

coverage of the Iraqi 2010 election. According to Stempel and Culbertson (1984), prominence and dominance in news might both reflect assertiveness, credibility, accessibility, and other factors. Neutrality, as a part of the journalistic culture is another variable that is used in this study to investigate whether there is a significant difference in the way the two networks present their paragraphs, (favourable, unfavourable, or neutral).

When differences in reporting occur for the same event, there is a possibility of bias reporting and objectivity becomes rather questionable. Due to this argument, further investigation is therefore needed.

The purpose of this study is to analyse the objectivity of the CNN and Al-Jazeera in their coverage of the 2010 Iraqi parliamentary election. In addition, these two channels are selected for their reputation as the most influential media networks in the world and the important role that they play in forming public opinion.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There are a number of significances of this study. First, it will contribute to the studies on news coverage of CNN and Al-Jazeera on Iraq. There are a number of researches that have interests in this area and it is hoped that this study would inform future research that look into the variables under study, which are objectivity in news reporting, framing and use of different sources.

Second, there have been many observations and speculations about the differences of news reporting between CNN and Al-Jazeera. Therefore, more empirical studies in this type of investigation would significantly contribute to the literature. Furthermore, the fact that the origins of the two networks are from different sides of the world could reflect differences in their culture of reporting. In other

words, the ‘proximity’ and the affiliation that the two networks have with the object of news reporting may influence the way they report events.

This study could also trace if such sentiments exist, (even though, it is not the main focus of the study) whether it might impede objective reporting and speculate how such reporting may have far reaching impact on audience interpretation of the event, especially those who have no direct contact with the subject.

The study is also important because it will investigate objective reporting by news channels, especially after the September 11 attacks. Since then, journalistic objectivity has been a matter of frequent argument among Western media. Perhaps the 2010 Iraqi parliamentary election is the best testing ground to study the objectivity between these two global media networks, CNN and Al-Jazeera.

In summary, this study is significant because it will analyse the media coverage of the 2010 Iraqi parliamentary election by CNN and Al-Jazeera by examining their objectivity, and how they cover the election. Specifically, are there any significant differences in the way they report this election process and do the differences between Eastern and Western media affect their objectivities? Finally, the study is also significant because it will examine the importance of sources in news reporting by identifying the role of news sources as a tool to examine objectivity in the media.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to examine the coverage of the 2010 Iraqi parliamentary election by CNN and Al-Jazeera, and the specific objectives are:

1. To analyse the media coverage by CNN and Al-Jazeera of the 2010 Iraqi election.

2. To investigate the objectivity of CNN and Al-Jazeera in their coverage of the 2010 Iraqi parliamentary election.
3. To examine the type of framing that CNN and Al-Jazeera often used in their coverage of the Iraqi parliamentary election.
4. To find out the type of news sources used by Al-Jazeera and CNN.
5. To examine whether the direction of news reporting is neutral in CNN and Al-Jazeera while they cover the 2010 Iraqi parliamentary election.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There is one main research question with three sub-research questions proposed for this study which are:

RQ1: Which news network is more objective in their coverage of the 2010 Iraqi parliamentary election?

RQ1a: What types of news framing do CNN and Al-Jazeera often used in their coverage of the Iraqi parliamentary election of 2010?

RQ1b: Do CNN and Al-Jazeera neutrally cover the news stories?

RQ1c: Do CNN and Al-Jazeera use diversity of sources in their news stories?

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study examines the media coverage of the Iraqi 2010 election by Al-Jazeera and CNN. It focuses on how both channels presented the coverage of the election. Samples of the news coverage of the election are drawn from both Al-Jazeera and CNN websites, during pre-election to post election period which is identified to be between 12th February and 26th March 2010, also the day of announcement of the results.

OVERVIEW OF THE METHODOLOGY

This study conducts a systematic quantitative content analysis of news stories on the 2010 Iraqi Parliamentary election in Al-Jazeera English and CNN websites. Since the purpose of this study is to investigate how CNN and Al-Jazeera objectively covered the Iraqi election, it is argued that content analysis is the most suitable method to study the presence and frequency of those phenomena. Furthermore, content analysis is applicable to many areas of inquiry in the field of mass communication research (Riffe & Freitag, 1997; Yale & Gilly, 1988).

The data are analysed using SPSS 16.0. Descriptive statistics are used in the data analysis while Chi-square analysis is used to analyse significant differences between these two networks in their news coverage of the 2010 Iraqi parliamentary election. All relevant news stories are tested in terms of their objectivity in their selection of news sources, direction of news, and news framing.

In brief, in the methodology chapter the researcher explains how content analysis would assist the investigation of the phenomena under study. The chapter discusses the research design, unit of analysis, sampling procedure, operational definitions of the variables, coding, data collection, data analysis and inter-coder reliability.

SUMMARY

This chapter covers the background of the study, statement of the problem, significance of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, scope of the study, and an overview of the methodology. This study attempts to understand how media coverage of the 2010 Iraqi election is objectively performed by Al-Jazeera and CNN.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews the literature in four areas: (1) objectivity in the news; (2) media framing theory; (3) political background of Iraq; and (4) news networks: Al-Jazeera English and CNN. The hypothesis underpinning this study is also discussed at the end of this chapter.

OBJECTIVITY IN THE NEWS

In this section the main discussion centers on three issues: (1) objectivity in the news; (2) use of sources in news; and (3) directions of news. These are the main variables that are examined in the study. It is important to understand the role and practice of objectivity in major news networks because it has bearing on the way news are written and subsequent interpretation by audience.

Accuracy and balance are fundamental principles of journalism, in which the inclusion of opposing views is called for. There are four criteria that constitute objectivity in news reporting from the perspective of Western liberal democracies. They are absence of personal subjectivity, fairness in presenting the relevant sides, skepticism toward all sides, and providing factual context (Donsbach & Klett, 1993). However, it is rather difficult to achieve absolute objectivity. According to Trioen and Carpentier (2008), “objectivity as a value always deals with particular journalistic practices, but can never fully realize the ideal-concept of objectivity, there is a gap between objectivity as a value and objectivity as a practice” (p. 2). Collingwood (cited

in Munro) “acknowledges that one hundred per cent of objectivity will never be attained”

According to Schudson (2001), the management of objectivity in media studies is:

The objectivity norm guides journalists to separate facts from values and to report only the facts. Objective reporting is supposed to be cool, rather than emotional, in tone. Objective reporting takes pains to represent fairly each leading side in a political controversy. According to the objectivity norm, the journalist’s job consists of reporting something called ‘news’ without commenting on it, slanting it, or shaping its formulation in any way. (p. 150).

The objective journalists typically reject inaccuracy, lying and misinformation. It is probably more accurate to say that journalists struggle to give the most truthful version of events that can be obtained at any time. Objective reporting has been defined by Boyer (1981) to consist six elements which are:

- balance and even-handedness in presenting different sides of an issue
- accuracy and realism of reporting,
- presentation of all main relevant points,
- separation of facts from opinions, but treating opinions as relevant,
- minimizing the influence of the writer’s own attitude, opinion or involvement,
- avoiding slant, rancour or devious purpose, (cited in McQuail, 1992: 184).

Hackett and Zhao (1998) also argue about the importance of balance in presenting news. According to them, objectivity provides a way in public discourse of evaluating press performance, which is how far news media stay fair in balance and bias. It is argued that “the western media are not objective in their news reporting of Iraq and Afghanistan” (Aday, Livingston, & Hebert, 2005: 6), and this is more pronounced ever since the September 11, 2001 incident.

One can consider the 2003 Iraq War as a good example for addressing how objectivity is constructed in the news by CNN and Al-Jazeera. As Mohammed Al-Nawawy (2008) notes, “in the war of Iraq images and words, each side accuses the other of bias, of hiding the truth and of using loaded terms” (p. 14). Words with different meanings were used by both Al-Jazeera and the Western media to suit their target audiences. For example, when Al-Jazeera referred to American officials, they used the term “claim” to imply the response may mean something else or be false. At the beginning of the Operation Iraqi war, CNN referred to troops entering Iraq as “Coalition Forces” while Al-Jazeera used the term “invading Americans” or “invading forces.” The war headline was “Operation Iraqi Freedom” but Al-Jazeera’s headline was “War on Iraq”, showing opposition to war in Iraq (Carney, 2006).

Hanley reported in May 2003 that:

There are two wars going on in Iraq, one is a gripping made for TV show starring brave US and British troops putting their lives on the line to bring freedom to oppressed Iraqis. Little blood is spilled on camera. Soldiers pass food out to starving Iraqi civilians and prisoners. Unlike the U.S or Western news outlets, Al-Jazeera seemingly focused on the most terrifying aspects of the war. Jihad Ali Ballout, spokesman for Al-Jazeera stated, “Al-Jazeera is just trying to do its job, like everyone else covering the war in Iraq. We don’t decide what our viewers should or should not see. War is innately ugly (p. 1).

Some scholars (Hackett & Zhao, 1996; Merrill, 1984) have argued that the ideal objectivity is simply not possible or perhaps not even desirable. For example, they outlined multiple reasons why journalists cannot adhere to strict objectivity, including powerful external and internal pressures in news production, framing in news stories, and unintentional biases in the use of language. The researchers have questioned the concept of journalistic objectivity, and they said that the idea of scientific objectivity in general has declined (Garyantes & Murphy, 2010).

The recent situation of Iraq offers a rich laboratory to study objectivity among global media outlets. Aday et al. (2005) studied many of US news networks in comparison with Al-Jazeera and they found that culture has a significant influence on network's objectivity and that there was indication that the networks covered the event biased of their country of origin. It was also found that American networks were not very critical of the war compared to Al-Jazeera.

Therefore, examining objectivity is required and further investigation is needed to investigate the presence of balance and accuracy in the news coverage of the 2010 Iraqi parliamentary election by CNN and Al-Jazeera. In this study, the researcher examines the objectivity of both networks, by focusing on balance reporting in the news paragraphs and diversity of sources used by them while covering the election.

News Sources

This section discusses news sources and its significance in establishing news credibility. Reese and Shoemaker (1996) describe sources as “external suppliers of raw material, whether speeches, interviews, or corporate report” (p.127). They highlight that sources provide journalists with information materials such as press releases, press conference, and government reports. Gans (1979) defines news as “information transmitted from sources to audiences” (p.80), and that the journalists are summarizing and alerting the information that is suitable for their audiences.

In order to maintain balance in news, the journalist's reports of issues/events should rely on different sources. It is important for researchers to analyse the distribution of sources and examine news sources because media channels may claim that they are free and objective in their reports. Sutter (2004) highlights the