Transnational Media Coverage of the ISIS Threat:
A Global Perspective?

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This study examines elements of what has been defined as global journalism and compares online news stories of Al Jazeera English and CNN regarding the ISIS threat. The empirical inquiry presents the similarities and differences in transnational news outlets' coverage of a global crisis. The results of a quantitative content analysis ($N =$ 320) suggest that different transnational news outlets share some features in their news coverage of a global challenge but still differ significantly. CNN mostly cites governmental official sources, whereas Al Jazeera English relies more on information from other news media. In addition, CNN mainly adopts a geopolitics frame focusing on the strategies of dealing with ISIS, whereas Al Jazeera English uses the dominant frame of existential threat. Results further indicate that elements of global journalism do not go beyond human rights issues.

Keywords: global journalism, transnational media, ISIS, CNN, Al Jazeera English, content analysis

Introduction

As a radical militant group, ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) began to grab international news attention in June 2014 for its military conquest of Iraqi and Syrian territories, brutal beheadings and torture of hostages, ruthless treatment of local minorities, and flagrant capacity of recruiting foreign fighters. With thousands of people killed and displaced, the ISIS presence has been an obvious threat to the stability and security of the entire civilized world (Gonchar, 2014). In response to this threat, U.S.-led military forces in August 2014 launched bombardment campaigns against ISIS in both Iraq and Syria (Stewart & Perry, 2014). According to news sources, more than 40 countries have become involved in the conflict, participating in military actions or providing humanitarian aid to civilians (CBS News, 2014; Raycom Group,

2014). In sum, the ISIS presence has posed a serious intercontinental problem that involves regions and countries around the world.

Given the global nature of this crisis, the role of global news networks in covering the ISIS threat is an important and timely research topic. Satellite-based news networks such as the BBC and CNN have taken advantage of technological advances of the past few decades to transmit the images and narratives of global issues to distant countries and disparate cultures and to link individuals from every corner of the globe to the same dialogue (Guo, Holton, & Jeong, 2012). But although transnational satellite media platforms have reshaped communication and formed a global connectivity, those deterritorialized media formations are often underinvestigated in comparative communication research that is focused on the nation-state (Volkmer, 2012).

Based on the idea of global journalism (Berglez, 2007; Reese, 2008), this study examines sources and frames that two influential transnational news networks—CNN and Al Jazeera English—used in their online coverage of the ISIS threat. CNN represents the Western transnational news outlet, whereas Al Jazeera English provides coverage on behalf of the non-Western, Arabic counterpart. Specifically, this study develops a four-dimensional framing matrix and coding scheme according to different geographical levels of story context (Guo et al., 2012). This matrix is able to link each news frame to a broad story context (see Table 1).

Table 1. Framing Matrix Example.

Story context	Failing state	Political opportunism	Strategic games	Geopolitical alignment	ISIS prowess	Human rights	ISIS propaganda	Economic conse-quence
Individual								
National								
Int'l								
Global								

This study initially identifies the frames used in online news coverage and then categorizes those identified frames according to different levels of context. In doing so, this research explores whether the news frames used by the global media point to the interdependence of people and their actions throughout the world. This way of analyzing news coverage of global crises contributes to the exploration of the epistemological shift in international comparative communication research—from "national centrality" to "transnational complexity," which is caused by networked communication that creates a new form of public connectivity and often sidelines traditional media systems (Volkmer, 2012).

Literature Review

Global Journalism

As a result of globalization, international events such as war, terrorism, and health pandemics usually attract attention from media around the globe (Löffelholz & Weaver, 2008). Today's news media

content is becoming increasingly deterritorialized in that news is not restricted to a certain geographic location and involves complex relations and flows across national borders and continents (de Beer, 2010). The lines between foreign and domestic news have become blurred, just as they have in the realms of commerce, health, culture, and the environment (Cottle, 2009a). Simply put, "We are now entering into a time when no news is foreign, as the connection between people everywhere are so dense and immediate that nothing we do is constrained within the bounds of a nation-state any longer" (Nurmis, 2014, p. 1).

This trend shows that it is outdated to simply use the traditional nation-state framework to interpret international news and ignore the complexities of globalization. The current crisis suggests the necessity to revisit the conceptualization of the world risk society, which posits that threats to a nation-state extend to the whole of humanity as well (Beck, 2006). These threats deliberately move beyond the confines of the nation-state and "methodological nationalism" (Volkmer, 2012). As Esser (2013) noted, scholars cannot explain a globalized world by limiting themselves to the national framework for examining social phenomena.

By examining power, space, and identity, Berglez (2007) proposed a notion of global journalism that might be an epistemological fit for transnational media research in a global context. As he illustrated, global journalism is a news style that uses a global outlook to investigate how people in different parts of the world are interrelated in their actions, practices, life conditions, and so forth. Likewise, Reese (2008) stated that in an emergent global news arena, newsgathering practices orient journalists beyond national boundaries in a deterritorialized fashion. Diverse, multiple perspectives in societies around the world lead to a simultaneity of awareness among global audiences that makes them more interdependent. Reese (2008) pointed out that in this interconnected world, journalism must navigate between its "vertical orientation," aligned with its host nation-state, and a "horizontal" perspective that is characterized by a more cosmopolitan, pluralistic, and global outlook that transcends narrow national frameworks. Reese (2008) and Berglez (2007) went so far as to consider the "global outlook" as the theoretical underpinning of the notion of global journalism. With a global outlook, global journalism is a news style that can transcend national frames of references, contextualize motives, expose interconnectedness, and explore the scope of problems as well as human consequences (Cottle, 2009a).

The notion of global journalism is innovative and timely. After all, journalism is a social practice that must adapt to global influences, even though one big "global village journalism has not evolved" (Reese, 2008, p. 243). However, in addition to connection and interconnectedness, globalization's multifaceted nature has complicated media research and has led to the difficulty of establishing a clear operationalized definition of global journalism. In a time of globalization, what kind of journalistic practices (e.g., news reporting, news writing) can be perceived as global journalism? Does it really exist? Can it be observed in practice? Is it just an alternative explanation to foreign correspondence?

Global journalism is a theoretical framework whose relevance is supported by research. In Ojala's (2011) qualitative analysis, news coverage on U.S. president Obama's speech in Cairo revealed that the speech content was not only relevant at the nation-state level; a transnational news narrative was presented in news texts. More recently, Leuven and Berglez (2015) explored the global journalism practice in three major newspapers: *The Times* of the United Kingdom, *Le Monde* of France, and *De Standaard* of

Belgium. They operationalized global journalism by two measurable variables—complex relations (consisting of global space, identity, and power) and reader engagement techniques that can be measured by the links between global conditions and home audiences in news coverage. In addition to offering an operationalized definition of global journalism, these empirical studies drew a distinction between traditional foreign reporting and global journalism. Whereas foreign reporting puts news stories in a national context, global journalism is focused on connections among disparate events, processes, and global settings. In this way, the practice of global journalism demonstrates global powers, identities, and spaces.

News Domestication

Several scholars have devoted significant efforts to justify the concept of global journalism (Berglez, 2007; Reese, 2008), but other media researchers still concentrate on units of analysis that are defined by territorial borders (Hanitzsch, 2009). The traditional nation-state level of analysis dominates the field of journalism studies, especially when dealing with foreign news reporting. For example, Clausen (2003) analyzed international news production of Japanese and Danish news organizations and suggested that, even in a globalized world, international events are still disparately interpreted by news media in different countries through a nation-state prism. Moreover, Riegert (2011) concluded that most national TV news coverage of international events portrays national actors and various national perspectives. Hawkins (2002) found that, even among transnational news outlets, the presentation of different sides was absent from news coverage in several specific cases. For example, in the coverage of the 1991 Gulf War, CNN's reporting was characterized as "concentrated and emotion-based coverage of a select conflict, packed in an oversimplified 'moral play' format of good versus evil" (p. 63).

These empirical findings indicate not only the "domestication" of international news events through a national lens but the centrality of the nation-state paradigm (Olausson, 2011). This traditional vertical view is the opposite of the horizontal view of global outlook. These two de facto conflicting views represent the globalization and domestication discourses in journalism and media studies.

Transnational Media Research

The tension between globalization and domestication has made transnational media research an important topic (Löffelholz & Weaver, 2008; Merrill & de Beer, 2004). Among multiple approaches and paradigms, news media framing is relatively prevalent and compelling. Within the past decade in academia, researchers have demonstrated how global issues were framed in news media—from the HIV pandemic (Bardhan, 2001), to the 2003 SARS crisis (Tian & Stewart, 2005), to the 2003 Iraq War (Dimitrova & Ahern, 2007), and the global financial crisis of 2007–2008 (Marron, 2010).

A framing approach is useful for understanding transnational comparative media research, because it not only suggests the extent to which certain news frames are shared in different news media but reveals "which force—domestication or globalization—has more influence on news media's framing of a given issue" (Guo et al., 2012, p. 1919). According to Entman (1993),

to frame is 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)

Similarly, McCombs and Valenzuela (2010) saw the focus of framing on the salient characteristics and attributes in how news is portrayed in mass media. In other words, by making certain aspects of media content more salient, meaningful, or memorable to audiences (Entman, 1993), framing leads to different constructions of reality (Dimitrova & Ahern, 2007).

For a comparative approach to studying news media, many researchers have used framing to examine different types of media coverage and make comparisons between different contexts. Vreese, Banducci, Semetko, and Boomgarden (2006) investigated the news coverage of the 2004 European parliamentary elections in 25 member states of the European Union. By examining the prominence of EU political actors and related institutions in different countries' news coverage, the study found that the EU election was much more visible in 10 new member states' news media than it was in 15 old member states. Still focusing on EU topics, Cauwenberge, Gelders, and Joris (2009) compared how French, Dutch, and Belgian quality newspapers framed the EU constitution. They found the news frames of "economic consequences," "conflict," "human rights," and "nationalization" in different countries' newspapers.

With regard to the global warming issue, Good (2008) analyzed different frames used in the news coverage of climate change in U.S., Canadian, and other international newspapers. The research suggested that the U.S. newspapers were more likely than papers of other nations to marginalize climate change and global warming in their news coverage.

In exploring another sensitive and controversial global topic, Shehata (2007) investigated Swedish and American elite news press coverage of cartoons portraying the Muhammad. The study's findings indicated that the frame of intolerance was dominant in media coverage, and official voices were frequently cited.

By combining the comparative approach with framing analysis, the studies cited above intended to capture the nuance and unique features embedded in the media coverage of the global news events. Their insightful analyses suggest that framing played an instrumental role in helping media outlets to construct transnational events, but these studies were restricted to the nation-state level of analysis.

To fill this gap in research, the current study uses framing and quantitative content analysis to examine the similarities as well as differences in CNN's and Al Jazeera English's online news coverage of the ISIS threat. Furthermore, by linking news frames to news story contexts, this study measures whether the force of globalization has shaped the two media outlets' framing of the ISIS threat.

CNN and Al Jazeera English

CNN and Al Jazeera English are ideal organizations to investigate. First, CNN has a staff of more than 4,000 and reaches nearly 260 million global audiences ("CNN Changed News," 2005). Similarly, since Al Jazeera English was launched in 2006, its programming has been distributed to more than 260 million homes in 120 countries (Figenschou, 2014). In addition to their global scales, the "CNN effect" (Hawkins, 2002) and "Al Jazeera effect" (Figenschou, 2014) reflect the two news outlets' well-known reputations. Second, at the organizational level, the two news organizations claim their global visions in their mission statements. CNN aims to "broadcast news stories to countries all over the world in English and the various regional languages" (CNN, 2015). Likewise, Al Jazeera English intends to "challenge the established narratives and give a global audience an alternative voice . . . keep global viewers informed" (Al Jazeera English, 2015). Compared to national media, these outlets are relatively independent of domestic regulations and states' institutional political elites because they benefit from new technologies and operate at a transnational level (Wojcieszak, 2007). Thus, the evidence of global journalism might be more easily observed in their news coverage.

Although the mission statements of the two news organizations state that they represent global outlooks, it is impossible to ignore their specific countries of origin—CNN in the United States and Al Jazeera English funded by a ruling family in Qatar (El-nawawy & Iskandar, 2003). Therefore, to examine elements of global journalism, the following research questions were posed:

RQ1:   *What types of news stories about the ISIS threat were presented online by CNN and Al Jazeera English?*

RQ2:   *How did CNN compare to Al Jazeera English in terms of citing different sources in its news coverage?*

RQ3:   *How did CNN compare to Al Jazeera English in terms of using different frames in its online coverage?*

RQ4:   *To what extent is global journalism manifested in CNN's online coverage of the ISIS threat?*

RQ5:   *To what extent is global journalism manifested in Al Jazeera English's online coverage of the ISIS threat?*

Method

Quantitative content analysis is used in this study to examine news sources, news frames, and geographical story contexts in the online coverage by CNN and Al Jazeera English of the ISIS threat. This approach was selected because Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2014) described quantitative content analysis as "a systematic, replicable and statistical method in which to describe the communication, draw inferences about its meaning or infer from the communication to its context, both production and consumption" (p.

19). In this study, a news item is understood as the group of continuous verbal elements that exclusively refer to the ISIS threat; it does not include photo and video elements.

Sample

For choosing the CNN news items, LexisNexis was used to generate 644 news items from June 1, 2014, to December 31, 2014. Because LexisNexis had no comprehensive data for Al Jazeera English news items, the search engine on Al Jazeera English's official website was used; it yielded 588 news items from June 1, 2014, to December 31, 2014.

All news items were downloaded and converted into PDF text files for analysis. To generalize a seven-month collection of online news stories, a sampling of five constructed weeks was used, based on Hester and Dougall's (2007) proposal. This analysis resulted in a final count of 320 news items (180 for CNN and 140 for Al Jazeera English).

Coding Scheme

In this study, 11 variables were coded. These variables included story type (1); source type (1); geopolitics (4) consisting of failing state, political opportunism, strategic games, and geopolitical alignment; existential threat (4) consisting of ISIS prowess, human rights crisis, economic consequences, and ISIS propaganda; and story context (1).

The story type variable included four categories: news briefs (news items of up to three paragraphs that report information of contingent events), news articles (news items that report what happened, who, how, when, and where), features (news items that focus on individual experiences or testimonials by the author as a witness to one or more events or use literary language in news texts), and opinions (news items that include reporting of facts and in-depth analysis).

Document sources and human sources in the stories included government, business, military, news media outlets, international organizations, ordinary people, civil institutions, ISIS/insurgent groups, experts from various fields (not affiliated with the other categories), and some anonymous sources. These source variables were developed from a preliminary analysis of 20 online news reports from CNN and 20 from Al Jazeera English.

This study also included several news frame variables. Initially, two primary frames were identified: geopolitics and existential threat (see Table 2). Under the primary frame of geopolitics, four secondary frames were further identified, including the failing state (focuses on Middle Eastern nations), political opportunism (focuses on political debate and unification), strategic games (focuses on nations' strategies of dealing with ISIS), and geopolitical alignment (focuses on nations' cooperation with ISIS). Under the primary frame of existential threat, the four secondary frames were identified, including ISIS prowess (focuses on ISIS's military), human rights crisis (focuses on a humanitarian disaster caused by ISIS), economic consequences (focuses on the ISIS threat from an economic perspective), and ISIS propaganda (concerns the efficacy of ISIS's recruiting message). All news frames variables were developed

from a preliminary analysis of the selected online news stories and previous framing studies (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974).

Table 2. News Frames.

Geopolitics	Existential threat
Failing state: Governments in affected regions that have failed to maintain political and/or social order	*ISIS prowess*: ISIS militant group's military advances and territory gains
Political opportunism: Political separation and unification; it especially addresses political debate or discussions between different political parties in response to the ISIS threat	*Human rights crisis*: A humanitarian disaster caused by the ISIS militant group
Strategic games: Specific nations' political, military, or lawful strategy to deal with ISIS	*Economic consequences*: Emphasis on news events from an economic perspective
Geopolitical alignment: International relations between different nations	*ISIS propaganda*: Efficacy of ISIS's recruiting message

The story context variable measured the geographical space of the news story context presented in online coverage. This contained four categories: individual (the story context is based on individual persons or a family), national (news stories takes place within a media host nation), international (deals with relations between two to five nations), and global (news story involves more than five nations or an international organization such as the United Nations). It should be noted that CNN's host nation is the United States, so only the news stories that happened in the United States could be coded as national. The same rule is also applied to Al Jazeera English (host nation of Qatar).

Moreover, one criterion of a global news style is to "report space as multifaceted geography, with processes and practices simultaneously occurring in separate places worldwide" (Berglez, 2007, p. 850). Therefore, this study considered that the more nations and regions are simultaneously involved in a news story, the more likely it is that the news story adopts a global news style to report the event.

Two trained coders each coded the same 10% of the entire sample to test intercoder reliability. Later, 32 stories from the total 320 were randomly selected to check the levels of agreement between two independent coders in coding the variables of story type, news sources, news frame, and story context. The intercoder reliability determined by Krippendorf's α was .81 for the story type, .88 for news sources, .73 for news frames, and .77 for story context. In addition to Krippendorf's α, another index of reliability—p percentage agreement—was used in this study, because "it is simple, intuitive and easy to calculate" (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002, p. 590). In this study, all categories achieved at least 80% agreement. Final results of intercoder reliability across all variables were acceptable.

Results

For both CNN and Al Jazeera English*,* four news story types—brief, news article, feature story, and opinion piece—were disproportionally used in their online coverage (see Table 3).

Table 3. Story Types in CNN and Al Jazeera English.

Story type	CNN (*N* = 180)		Al Jazeera English (*N* = 140)	
	n	%	*n*	%
Brief	5	2.8	21	15
Article	112	62.2	88	62.9
Feature	17	9.4	7	5
Opinion	46	25.6	24	17.1

Note. News story type was coded on predetermined numeric values.

Among 180 CNN news samples, 112 (62.2%) were articles, 46 (25.6%) were opinion pieces, 17 (9.4%) were feature stories, and 5 (2.8%) were news briefs. Among 140 Al Jazeera English news stories, the most common story type was the article (62.9%), then almost equal numbers of news briefs (15%) and opinion pieces (17.1%), whereas feature stories accounted for a relatively small percentage (5%), in sharp contrast to other news story types (see Table 3).

Al Jazeera English used more briefs in its news coverage than CNN. However, there was no significant difference between the two media outlets in their use of other news story types. For both media outlets, the article, which reports basic factual information of an event, was the most common story type.

News Sources

In covering the ISIS threat, the two transnational media outlets cited multiple sources in their news coverage. An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to compare the mean difference in the number of sources cited in news presented by CNN and Al Jazeera English. The retrieved test statistics indicated that the number of sources cited in CNN (*M* = 2.72, *SD* = 1.42) was not significantly different from the number of sources cited in Al Jazeera English (*M* = 2.51, *SD* = 1.34), *t* (318) = 1.38, *p* = .17, *d* = 0.15.

To investigate what types of sources were cited in CNN's and Al Jazeera English's online coverage, several cross-tabulation tests were run for pertinent variables. The results revealed differences in how CNN and Al Jazeera English cited source types in their online coverage.

For CNN, the following sources most frequently appeared in news coverage: government officials (80%), other news media (37.8%), military (31.3%), ordinary people (26.1%), and experts (24.4%). For Al Jazeera English, the most frequently cited source was other news media outlets (64.3%), followed by government officials (48.6%) and the military (37.9%). In terms of the most-cited sources, CNN was different from Al Jazeera English (see Table 4).

Table 4. Sources Used in CNN and Al Jazeera English.

Sources	CNN (N = 180)		Al Jazeera English (N = 140)	
	n	%	n	%
Government official	144**	80	68**	48.6
Business	0	0	1	0.7
Military	56	31.1	53	37.9
Expert	44	24.4	26	18.6
News media	68*	37.8	90*	64.3
International organization	21	11.7	16	11.4
Ordinary people	47	26.1	31	22.1
Civil society	34	18.9	29	20.7
Anonymous	16	8.9	11	7.9
ISIS/insurgents	22	12.2	16	11.4

* p < .05. ** p < .001.

Overall, the test statistics revealed a significant difference between CNN and Al Jazeera English in terms of using government official sources, χ^2 (1) = 34.79, p < .001. For CNN, 80% of online reports cited government official sources; in contrast, only 48.6% of Al Jazeera English online news coverage cited government official sources.

Another significant difference between CNN and Al Jazeera English was in their use of other news media outlets as sources, χ^2 (1) = 22.14, p < .001. In comparison, 37.8% of CNN and 64.3% of Al Jazeera English online reports quoted news media outlets' sources.

News Frames

The third research question asked what frames CNN and Al Jazeera English adopted in covering the ISIS threat. The test statistics indicated a significant difference between CNN and Al Jazeera English in terms of adopting different news frames, χ^2 (7) = 48.99, p < .001 (see Table 5). Of the eight frames investigated in this study, several frames clearly differed between CNN and Al Jazeera English. First, for CNN, a large amount of its coverage focused on the strategic games frame (28.9%), followed by the political opportunism (19.4%), human rights crisis (18.3%), and ISIS propaganda (15%) frames. For Al Jazeera English, the strategic game frame was the most-adopted frame as well (26.4%). However, the other extensively used frames were the human rights crisis (21.4%), ISIS prowess (17.9%) and failing state (13.6%) frames.

Table 5. News Frames Used in CNN and Al Jazeera English.

	CNN (*N* = 180)		Al Jazeera English (*N* = 140)	
Frame	*n*	%	*n*	%
Failing state	4*	2.2	19*	13.6
Political opportunism	35*	19.4	5*	3.6
Strategic games	52	28.9	37	26.4
Geopolitical alignment	11	6.1	17	12.1
ISIS prowess	17*	9.4	25*	17.9
Human rights crisis	33	18.3	30	21.4
Economic consequence	1	0.6	2	1.4
ISIS propaganda	27*	15	5*	3.6
Total	χ^2 (7) = 48.99**			

* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .001.

Story Context

The last two research questions asked to what extent the global journalism news style was presented in the online news coverage of CNN and Al Jazeera English. Several cross-tabulation tests were run for relevant variables. The test statistics indicated a significant difference between CNN and Al Jazeera English in terms of the geographical context of their news stories (see Table 6).

Table 6. Story Context in CNN and Al Jazeera English.

	CNN (*N* = 180)		Al Jazeera English (*N* = 140)		Total	
Story context	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Individual	8	4.4	12	8.6	20	6.3
National	73*	40.6	0*	0	73	22.8
International	83*	46.1	114*	81.4	197	61.6
Global	16	8.9	14	10	30	9.4
Total	180	100	140	100	320	100

* *p* < .05.

Eight of 180 CNN online news stories (4.4%) and 12 of 140 Al Jazeera English (8.6%) online stories focused on individuals or families. Most of these stories addressed human rights issues and the influence of the ISIS recruiting message on individuals. In CNN's coverage, 73 of 180 (40.6%) news stories were national. In sharp contrast, there was no national story in Al Jazeera English's coverage. This is the most obvious difference between CNN's and Al Jazeera English's online coverage. At the international level, there was a significant difference between CNN (46.1%) and Al Jazeera English (81.4%). Meanwhile, 16 of 180 (8.9%) CNN stories and 14 of 140 (10%) Al Jazeera English stories presented the ISIS threat at the global level of context.

To comprehensively examine the evidence of global journalism in the two media outlets' coverage, a cross-tabulation test was run to analyze the association between news frames and story context. For CNN, the test statistics revealed a significant difference between story context and news frames. At the individual level, CNN had 8 stories in total. CNN mainly adopted the frames of human rights crisis (50%) and ISIS propaganda (50%) to cover the story. In 73 national-level stories, the political opportunism (43.8%) and strategic game (34.2%) frames were mostly suggested. In 83 international-level stories, strategic game (32.5%) and human rights crisis (24.1%) were the most adopted frames. Last, at the global level, CNN had 16 news stories. The human rights crisis (43.8%) and the ISIS prowess (25%) frames were the two frames most used by CNN (see Figure 1).
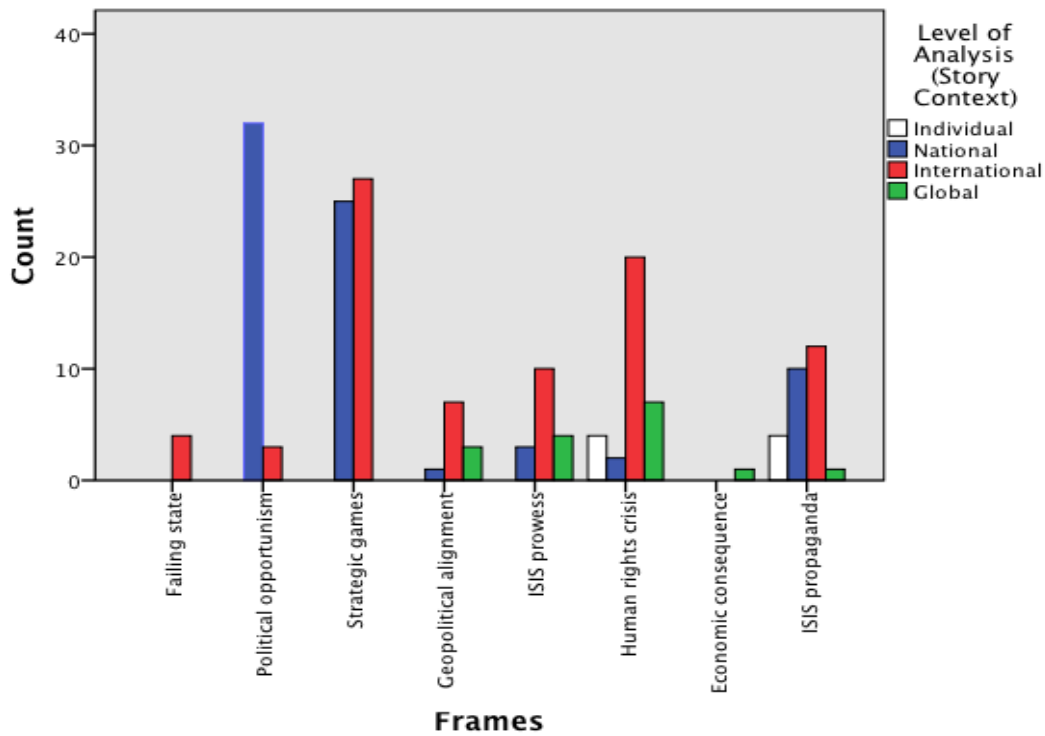

Figure 1. News frame and story context in CNN.

For Al Jazeera English, test statistics also demonstrated a significant difference between story context and news frames (see Figure 2). At the individual level, Al Jazeera English had 12 stories. It mostly adopted the human rights crisis (83.3%) frame. In 114 international-level stories, the strategic games (29.8%), ISIS prowess (18.4%), and failing state (14.9%) frames were most used. In 14 global-level stories, the ISIS prowess (28.6%) and human rights crisis (28.6%) frames were adopted and equally presented. In terms of presenting the ISIS threat at the global level, CNN and Al Jazeera English adopted nearly the same frames in their online coverage.
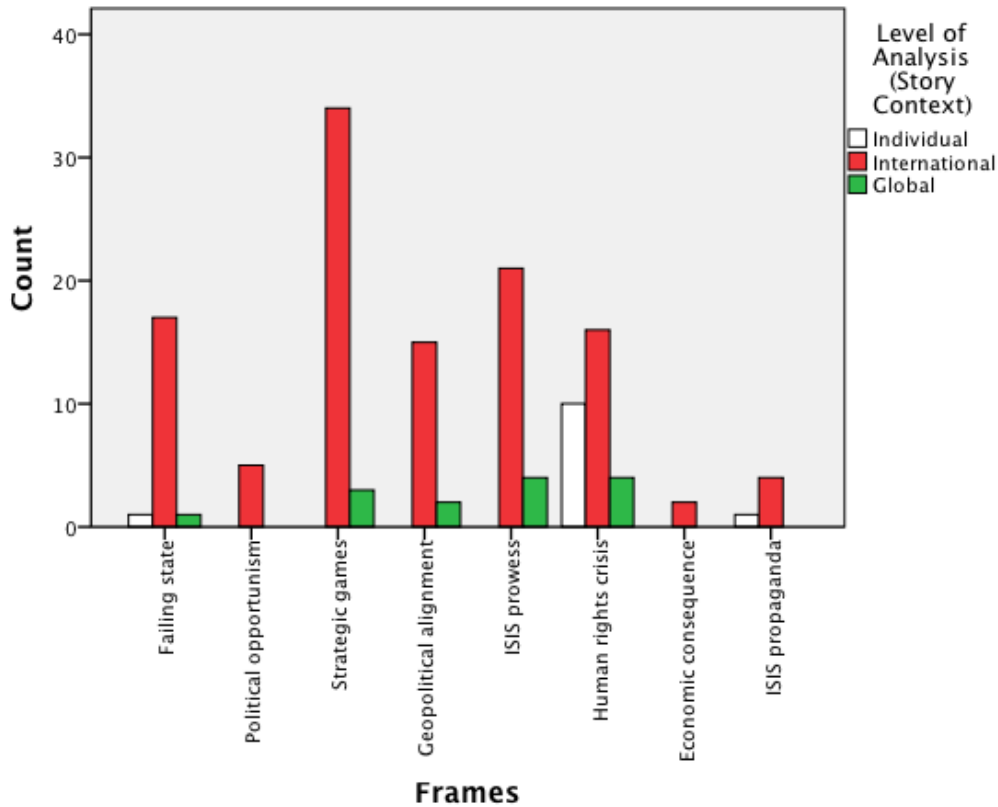
Figure 2. News frames and story context in Al Jazeera English.

Discussion

        The findings of this study reveal that CNN and Al Jazeera English used different story types to present the ISIS threat. Among the different story types, news articles were mostly used in the online news coverage of the ISIS threat. In addition to news articles, several feature stories were presented in the news coverage by the two media outlets. Producing feature stories requires news media and journalists to send information directly from the front lines. The presence of feature stories in the online news coverage of CNN and Al Jazeera English reflects the two media outlets' capacity of global access. In covering ISIS, CNN and Al Jazeera English were able to send their correspondents to key areas and collect firsthand news materials. Both CNN and Al Jazeera English had a relatively large number of opinion pieces in their coverage. Those opinion pieces not only presented factual information but demonstrated in-depth analysis of various issues.

The two news media outlets investigated in this study relied on a fairly similar mix of sources in their online coverage of the ISIS threat. Source use was similar for both CNN and Al Jazeera English. Among the 11 different types of sources identified in the study, both channels turned to government officials most frequently. This finding supports previous research that government officials have much influence on the media coverage of news events (Crawley, 2007; Gans, 1979; Shehata, 2007). The two transnational media outlets' dependence on government officials indicated that, although transnational media outlets benefit from advanced technology and operate at a global level, political powers still influence their news reporting.

The sources most used by Al Jazeera English were other news agencies such as Reuters, Agence France Press, and U.S. national broadcasters such as CBS and ABC. This implies that, in addition to sending its own correspondents on the ground, Al Jazeera English might actively seek out international cooperation with other major news agencies. Similarly, several CNN news reports cited other news outlets as sources in its coverage. However, instead of citing sources from international news agencies, CNN relied more on U.S. national news agencies such as ABC and Fox News.

In addition, some online reports from CNN and Al Jazeera English cited military officials. The difference here is that CNN's military sources were mostly from the Pentagon and were other high-ranking U.S. military personnel, whereas Al Jazeera English's military sources were a combination of U.S. military officials, generals from Middle Eastern nations, and individual soldiers.

The online coverage of CNN and Al Jazeera English differed in their use of news frames on reporting the ISIS threat. The dominant frame used in the two news media's online coverage was the strategic game frame. This seems logical because ISIS has posed threats to the entire civilized world. This requires each legitimate government or nation to implement appropriate strategies to deal with ISIS. However, the proportion of stories using the political opportunism frame in CNN was much higher than in Al Jazeera English. This reflected CNN's heavy emphasis on political debates in its news stories. In comparison, Al Jazeera English seemed barely concerned about that aspect and instead frequently discussed issues of human rights.

Another difference between the two media's online coverage was the use of the failing state frame, which focuses on the Arab nations that are vulnerable to ISIS military advances. In the coverage of Al Jazeera English, the failing state frame played a prominent role, whereas CNN rarely adopted that frame. This could be partly explained by one of the editorial policies of Al Jazeera English: the focus on locals' perspectives in news stories (Figenschou, 2014). The prominent role of the failing state frame also implied that, although Al Jazeera English is a pro-Arab transnational news outlet, it frequently reported news from the perspectives of Arab nations and demonstrated how different Arab nations dealt with ISIS threats. Meanwhile, the proportion of stories employing the ISIS prowess frame was much higher in Al Jazeera English than in CNN. The reason for this might be that ISIS threats were geographically closer and more imminent to the Arab nations than to other parts of the world. These findings reflect that, unlike the other Arabic channels backed by the ruling families, Al Jazeera English distinguished itself by interactivity with local audiences (Sakr, 2005).

The human rights crisis frame was presented in the news coverage of both CNN and Al Jazeera English. The use of the human rights crisis frame in media coverage might be due to ISIS human rights violations. The last difference between CNN and Al Jazeera English was in their use of the ISIS propaganda frame. CNN was more likely than Al Jazeera English to emphasize ISIS social media information efficiency.

In sum, the most common frames used in CNN's coverage were strategic games, political opportunism, and human rights crisis. According to this study design, these common secondary frames suggest that, when CNN covered the ISIS threat, it adopted the primary frame of geopolitics. In other words, the political aspects of the event were the focus of CNN's online reports.

For Al Jazeera English, the most common frames were strategic games, human rights crisis, ISIS prowess, and the failing state. These common frames illustrated that Al Jazeera English's news coverage adopted the existential threat frame as a primary frame for its news stories.

This study investigated whether the force of globalization had shaped the two transnational news channels' online coverage of the ISIS threat. As Volkmer (2002) noted, "CNN invented a new form of international reporting, which extended narrow, national journalistic concept by including new political contexts and enlarging political horizon beyond a single-nation-state" (p. 317). However, the findings of this study suggest that CNN reports focused on a global crisis using a national lens.

For Al Jazeera English, national stories (focused on Al Jazeera English's host nation Qatar) were completely absent. Al Jazeera English did not report any piece of information related to the Qatar government's stance on and response to the ISIS threat. According to Wojcieszak (2007), Al Jazeera English was relatively independent of domestic regulations and the state's institutionalized political elites, because a transnational media outlet benefits from advanced technology. This might explain why few national news stories were presented in Al Jazeera English.

It is also interesting to note how news frames were categorized under different levels of geographical context in the two media's online coverage. In the CNN coverage, individual stories were focused on beheaded Western journalists and ISIS recruiting efforts toward U.S. citizens. In comparison, Al Jazeera English's individual stories focused on displaced local religious minorities, the social suppression of women, and ISIS recruiting efforts. So at the individual level, the two news media mostly used the human rights crisis and ISIS propaganda frames to present the news. However, stories differed slightly in terms of news angle.

At the national level, CNN extensively focused on U.S. political debates and national strategies. Much of CNN's online news reports mentioned debates between Republicans and Democrats regarding ISIS. Some opinion pieces even questioned President Obama's Middle East policy and the efficacy of his administration's strategy of dealing with ISIS. Meanwhile, news coverage showed that U.S. political elites perceived ISIS as a terrorist group posing political and ideological threats. This seems logical because, although ISIS seemed far away from the U.S. homeland, American audiences were concerned about the possible spread of terrorism and whether their nation would become involved in another Middle East conflict.

At the international level, CNN's news coverage focused on how other nations have implemented strategies to deal with ISIS threats. Because ISIS recruitment messages have influenced so many youth in Western nations such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada, it is understandable why the strategic game frame was mostly adopted at this level of context. In covering this kind of story, the human rights crisis frame was adopted. Similarly, at the international level, most stories in Al Jazeera English related to how different nations implemented strategies to deal with ISIS. It focused its coverage on how ISIS achieved its territorial gains in Iraq and Syria. For handling this kind of report, Al Jazeera English adopted the ISIS prowess frame.

Last, at the global level, the news coverage of both CNN and Al Jazeera English was mostly related to human rights issues and analysis of the ISIS militant group. At this level, news stories were not limited to one or several nations. Instead, the whole context was put into a global setting. The global-level stories demonstrated that ISIS threats constituted an urgent cross-continental problem that challenged all societies. In the two media's coverage, global-level news stories involved either a majority of nations around the world or the United Nations. For instance, one news story in Al Jazeera English reported how the United Nations implemented sanctions on the finances of ISIS leaders. Another story from Al Jazeera English examined how the world's audiences reacted to suppressed Yazidis. In this global context, the two media outlets linked different world locations to illustrate a news event.

Conclusion

This study analyzed how two prestigious transnational news media covered a prominent global event—the ISIS threat. It also examined whether global factors had a significant influence on transnational news media's coverage of a global issue. Domestic factors played a substantial role in the media covering political aspects of an issue, whereas a global perspective was adopted when the media focused on human suffering. Future studies on global journalism should use qualitative textual analysis to investigate the meaning embedded in news texts and thus contribute to the theoretical construction of global journalism.

Global journalism deserves more scholars' attention in today's globalized world. This new theoretical framework needs more empirical studies to examine and support. In journalism and comparative media studies, going beyond the traditional nation-state level of analysis is clearly an important priority for future work.

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