

**The Road to the White House through Arab
Eyes: Analysis of Frames and Credibility as
Presented by Alarabiya, Alhurra and
Aljazeera**

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THE ROAD TO THE WHITE HOUSE THROUGH ARAB EYES: ANALYSIS OF FRAMES AND CREDIBILITY AS

PRESENTED BY ALARABIYA, ALHURRA AND ALJAZEERA: ABSTRACT

The study looks into the 2008 American Presidential Election from two sides; the way the news channels frame the event and the way a sample of the audiences interpret it. Drawing on literature concerning framing theory which describes the practices employed by mass media to present world events in familiar and understandable formats to audiences, the study examines the coverage of the 2008 American Presidential Election on three trans-border news channels broadcasting in Arabic. A number of stories covering the American election campaign broadcasted on *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera*, are included. The study assesses general frames used to describe the event by each channel. The analysis reports the frames generally employed by the three channels are relatively similar, suggesting a global effect on the media in following the Anglo-American model of journalism when reporting international events. The differences appear when reporting regional issues between the two Arabic trans-border channels *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera* on one side and *Alhurra* on the other suggesting a link between journalistic ideology and framing. The second part of this thesis is the exploratory audience study which attempts to provide insights into perception of Arab news coverage - particularly in Saudi Arabia. The audience study uses a questionnaire and focus group methodologies on a sample of participants with high television news consumption levels, measuring the perception of news channels credibility in specific and credibility of media in general, and exploring the possible presence of a link between consumption level of news and perceived news credibility. Moreover, examining how audience analyse news and how their opinions about the event have been shaped by media framing.

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Chapter 1 - INTRODUCTION

Every morning en route to work, Abdullah, who lives in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, enjoys a daily morning fix of news and music by listening to the station *American Forces Network Radio*. By the time he returns from work he will have checked a dozen local and international news websites. He enjoys quietly reading his favourite newspaper before dinner, followed by watching a television news bulletin on *Aljazeera* to keep up with the latest developments he has heard and read about throughout the day. At the weekends he enjoys watching an episode of the show *Arab Idol*, a genre that was copied from the Western version, and also a couple of episodes of American crime and hospital series with Arabic subtitles. According to Abdullah, the plethora of media channels had enabled him to feel like he is living in America, a country he has always yearned to be in, and one in which he understands the policies, culture and society through news, talk shows and drama. Through listening and watching American shows, his English language has improved substantially, and by watching the Arabic format of American and British shows, he feels safe that his children are not exposed to culturally incongruent material via mass media. Abdullah is one of the millions of people in the Middle East and around the world enjoying their lives through the interconnected media network that is transforming the planet into a global village.

The concept behind this thesis began in 2008 with an aim to study the effect of globalisation on the media and audiences in the Middle East; as applied to a sample of news watchers based in Saudi Arabia, the country that owns the majority of trans-border media channels available in the Middle East region; as well as influence and shape the media production of the entire Arab world (Boyd, 2001). However, the idea of the study expanded to include Arabic news media performance and impact on audiences. The media event to base the work on was chosen to be the American presidential election.

Like any year, 2008 was full of events; however, news relating to the American presidential election was the major story of the year. As labelled by Newsweek Magazine the event is “The First Global Election” with polls showing high fascination with the outcome across the world (McGuire 2008, p.3). The whole world was keeping a close eye on proceedings, not least the Middle East, which featured highly in the rhetoric

policymaking of candidates. Therefore, the choices that the 44th President of the United States of America will make are likely to shape the future of this region. News channels from all parts of the globe focus their attention on such event for many reasons, but the position of the United States as the main world geopolitical superpower gives it a newsworthiness status that only very few countries enjoy. Consequently, the interest with which American presidential elections are observed generally at the international level is perfectly understandable. Nevertheless, the United States as the major play-maker in what is taking place in the Arab region at all levels meant that the 2008 presidential election had significant meaning. The turmoil and chaos around the globe resulting from American plans and policies, particularly in the Middle East, ensured that the majority of the world was observing this global media event. The 2008 American presidential election generated a unique set of challenges to journalists and media organizations. How should the media frame the presidential race? How should the main elements of the political and electoral systems in America be defined? And from a regional point of view, what different perspectives are Arab trans-border media taking in their coverage of this global event?

The structure of the study was inspired by a similar study, '*Bad News from Israel*', the work of Greg Philo and Mike Berry from the Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG) that explored the differences in news coverage in the way Israelis and Palestinians were presented on British television channels, and the different knowledge and understanding of audiences from the US, UK and Germany (2004). The analysis presented in my thesis incorporates both sides of the communication equation; mass media transmitting a message and audiences evaluating it. Thus, the focus of this study is to investigate the type of messages the news media presented during the period of the 2008 American presidential election and how people understood the media in terms of exposure level, trust and credibility perception. In this thesis, I am attempting to look closely at how ideologically different news channels in the Middle East varied in their coverage of the 2008 American presidential election, and how a segment of the Arab audience, despite their physical distance from the United States were interested in this event due to the effect of globalisation, highlighting exposure patterns to news television media during this world event and how they are related to perceptions of credibility. Finally, the news analysis study will be linked with the audience perception of the event by comparing the individual frames audiences have to the media frames presented in the news.

The aim of the research is to discuss and analyse the main themes presented within news broadcasting to audiences in the Middle East, and how these audiences perceive such an event. In other words, the main focus of the research is to document the differences in reporting of Arabic broadcasting news channels using quantitative and qualitative content analyses to compare the dominance of various frames in the coverage of the 2008 American presidential election. Similar studies with the same intention have also focused on troubled areas of the world and how the Western media has covered their stories. In this study, the focus is reversed, and a major American political event is read and analysed through the Arab media and its audience; with the intension of participating in the media research domain.

Some more interesting features of the 2008 American presidential election made it more appealing and anticipated by audiences in the Arab region; the presence of a woman candidate (Hilary Clinton), the winning Democratic hopeful (Barack Hussein Obama) who is of African-American origin and believed to be the son of a Muslim immigrant, the chaos prevailing in region which is blamed mostly (not to say solely) on the policy of the American administration in general and the Republican ruling party specifically, and the fear of a continuing deterioration of conditions if the same party were to win the election again. These events, features and questions raised offered an exceptional opportunity to investigate the coverage based on culture and perception.

A basic assumption of this thesis is that the frames used by the Arab mass media to interpret the election and its aftermath offer important clues about the main features of Arab media culture and ideology employed to explain world events. A key aspect I am examining is how closely Arab mass media follow framing practices of the Anglo-American model of reporting on election campaigns.

The empirical part of this research will focus on framing analysis of the news, in which editors decide to highlight and expose certain aspects of news stories using headlines, studio analyses, graphics and interviews with political experts. This framing process whether applied consciously, to serve certain interests and ideologies, or unconsciously, by broadcasting events as appeared on news agencies' feeds, will convey certain understanding among audiences and obscure other sides of the story.

The study developed to explore the news output of three influential trans-border media providers targeting Arab viewers - *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera* - and their coverage of the 2008 American presidential election and the manner in which the audience received and interpreted the events as presented in the mass media.

This chapter will begin by discussing the way media deal with global events such as presidential elections, along with the rationale and significance of the study. A following section will highlight the main research questions and focus, followed by an outline of the methodology selected for this study. Finally an outline structure of the thesis indicating what each chapter is about will be presented.

1.1 The Trans-border Media and the American Presidential Election

The coverage of trans-border mass media around the world have created what Thussu (2006) referred to as “global media events”. The mass media decide to hype up certain events and promote them as news with worldwide interest (Thussu 2006, p.181). Events such as the Olympic Games, the Royal Wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton in 2011, Queen Elizabeth’s Diamond Jubilee in 2012 and the American presidential elections are shared by viewers worldwide, covered by mass media all over the globe and are shaping what is known as the global village.

This thesis’s intention is to study the global event of the 2008 American presidential election as broadcasted on a sample of Arab trans-border channels. On the same note and due to its easy accessibility and high element of trust, research findings have revealed that television news is the most watched and trusted mass media channel for world news information in the Middle East (AAG, 2007).

One of the major global events that the whole world followed was the 2008 American presidential election, not least the Arab world and the Middle East region which figured highly in speeches and policymaking plans of both candidates, Republican hopeful John McCain and Democrat hopeful Barack Obama. *Arabian Business Magazine* featured a

question on its cover ‘How the 44th President of the United States of America Could Change the Middle East forever?’¹ *Newsweek Magazine* (2008) referred to it as ‘The Global Election’, reporting the high record of worldwide fascination with the outcome especially with Obama as a person ‘Obama became the world’s candidate’ (McGuire 2008, p. 28). Even the journalistic style of writing criticized the heavy depiction of the event in terms of horse-racing; ‘Framing the event in America appeared to be different from the rest of the world. In the United States, the pundits framed campaign much as the previous elections; a horse-race with the battle ground states’ (McGuire, 2008, p. 28). This emphasis on framing elections in a competition/race style has been employed in American mass media. Based on the previous argument, the focus of my study is on the frames used by a selection of Arab trans-border mass media to describe the global event and whether it would be similar to the style of the Anglo-American media coverage or differ due to a focus on the regional dimension of the event’s outcome.

Outside of the United States, the election played large and transformational: a 21st-century man whom the whole world can identify versus an old cold-warrior out of synch with the complex political and economic crises of our age [...] the world loved the idea that a black man named Barak Hussein Obama could become America’s 44th president after a 200-year string of white guys named Washington and Jefferson, Clinton and Bush (McGuire 2008, p. 29).

The interest of Arab trans-border media channels in this event can be viewed in many ways and explained by several reasons “two wars and a global financial crisis which to a great extent had their origins in decision taken in Washington DC” (Freedland, 2008). The 2008 American presidential election generated a unique set of challenges for journalists and media organizations in the Middle East in terms of how to frame the election and what main points to focus on in electoral systems to simplify the process to their audiences.

¹ An example of the Arab media support for the American presidential candidate Obama was observed in several newspapers, magazines and television shows; such as *AlQahera Alyoum* show in June 2008, *Alshabab Magazine* Interview with Arabic political columnist Jihad Alkhazin and *The First Edition* Television Show to name a few. Some Arab media discussed the performance of Islamic prayers for Obama to help him win the election.

1.2 The Rationale

The number of trans-border Arabic news channels has increased since they started in the 1990s, but as yet have not been analysed content wise using a systematic method. At the same time there is a need for more empirical research and data about audiences in the Middle East and how they perceive different mass media outlets in terms of trust and credibility.

In order to understand what is happening in the Middle East today, and to have any sense at all of what will happen in the future, we need far more data than what we currently have. As the Arab world gets more deeply enmeshed in satellite television, we know shockingly little about what people in the Middle East watch and how they interpret that information [...] eventually, we could see television uniting the region in a way that has not been envisioned for decades - although we may witness a new Middle East united through commerce or we may see a new Arabism emerge which comes from the grassroots up rather than from top down. (Alterman, 2005, p. 207)

Despite increasing popularity by Arab mass media as a phenomenon, being researched in the work of many Arab and non-Arab scholars, Hafez (2007) believed that the research is still an “infant science” (Hafez, 2007, p. 57). Hafez (2008) traced back the increased interest in Arab mass media research after the September 11 attacks, when *Aljazeera* broadcasted several audio and video messages from the leader of Al-Qaeda (p.9)². As a result, some research titles and reports were published investigating media performance of *Aljazeera* and its role in presenting a different perspective to what western media was broadcasting.

It is perhaps symptomatic that even years after 9/11 hardly any content analysis on *Al-Jazeera* exists that combine quantitative and qualitative state-of-art methodology. Channels like *Aljazeera* are much debated, but they are still under-researched. (Hafez, 2008, p.9)

² Examining the role of media within the cultural context in the Arab World, Sabry (2008) reported that the interest in the Middle East as an academic subject in modern history began with the event of 9/11 and its aftermath labelling the increased interest as a “Trojan horse” (p. 239)

This situation applies to audience research in the region as well, “that is full of barriers and constraints” (Amin, 2008, P. 87). Amin stated the resistance presented by Arab governments and officials towards the execution of audience research especially surveys:

Although a large number of scholarly works have been published on Arab media audience in the past decade, the bulk of these works has both a low theoretical content and a lack of unbiased empirical data. This is partly a result of the barriers to obtaining primary data as well as a lack of accurate secondary data and trained communication researchers [...] thought should also be given to using research methods that surmount the barriers to survey and opinion research and capture the viewing habits and preferences. (Amin, 2008, p. 87)

The majority of audience research is conducted on behalf of advertisers or particular stations, but their findings are rarely made available to publics and other researchers to use as background information. Moreover, there is an argument regarding how biased the results generated by marketing research companies could be as they tend to be commissioned and work to satisfy their customers.

In short, even if there is more information available today than in the past, existing audience market data is of limited utility for academic research except for broad generalizations. (Lynch, 2008, p. 19)

As mentioned earlier, each mass media channel has its own ideological agenda in addition to other political, social and economic influences that play a key role in determining the main focus of the news bulletins. This study is looking at these differences in coverage as they indicate different ideologies and agendas through the prism of framing analysis. As Shoemaker and Reese (1996) stated, news “is a socially created product, not a reflection of an objective reality.” (p. 24).

However, it is possible that the three news channel will adopt the same style in the coverage of the 2008 American presidential election, and this could be interpreted such that for international events, Arab news channels will resort to the Anglo-American format and way of coverage, due to their basing of the news on the coverage available from news agencies, wires and other international news organizations. Differences in ideology, framing and coverage in my opinion could appear more prominently when

ideas are related to regional matters and not to international events. However, reading the same statement differently, it could be argued that since the three news channels *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera* are broadcasting the event to Arab audiences, the news frames and discussions may be depicted in a way that is systematic and similar by all three ideologically different news channels.

We can find a great number of publications attempting to participate in investigating and analysing the history, evolution and development of mass media and trans-border satellite channels in the Middle East from different perspectives and under various political and media theories. However, very few studies have been dedicated to examining the effect globalised news media has on its recipients. Moreover, very little research has focussed on Arab news analysis and none on framing. There is an arguable lack of an analytical approach to Arab trans-border news media – what is available is mainly concerned with the observations of writers or detailed descriptive reports of its inception and development - and the voices of ordinary television audiences are yet to be fully researched. These two points taken together with the fact that trans-border channels have become a prominent element in the Arab social and political scenes, mean that there is an urgent need to systematically and empirically look into the content of the Arab trans-border news channels, the way these channels present their news and how a sample of Arab audiences interpret this presentation. Therefore, the aim of the study is to document differences in coverage across ideologically different trans-border news channels broadcasting in Arabic, focusing solely on the global event of the 2008 American presidential election. Simultaneously a second part of the research will focus on a sample of Saudi audience, trying to understand how they evaluate the media news output in terms of credibility and performance. Moreover, how the event of 2008 American presidential election is perceived and framed in their minds.

This study targets Saudi audiences, a country which owns the majority of mass media outlets in the region (Boyd, 2001). It is generally important for government officials, media operators and television producers to know how people watch, evaluate and believe the news. Researching viewing habits and credibility perception among other political views of Saudi audiences in particular was not studied before. I found it hard to trace any published work done in the political field and credibility perception in Saudi Arabia. Due to the reserved nature of Saudi publics when it comes to expressing political

and social views, which I witnessed while conducting the focus groups, might arguably be another factor for the scarcity of research conducted in this field. I believe that this study that is done on a sample of Saudi audience will contribute to the wider domain of understanding Arab audience viewing habits and news credibility perceptions.

The news content analysis deals with three trans-border news channels broadcasting in Arabic with notable differences in their news coverage and arguably separate agendas. The Qatar-based satellite leading news channel *Aljazeera* is considered to be the most credible and trusted news source for the majority of people in the Middle East (Allied Media Corp, 2007). The *Alarabiya* News Channel is privately owned by Saudi businessmen and transmits from Dubai with a moderate tone regarding conflicting events and has the highest viewing rates in Saudi Arabia according to a viewership survey released in 2006 by IPSOS Stat.; it is considered the most trustworthy channel among Saudi viewers (Arab Advisory Group, 2007). *Alhurra* is an American-funded satellite news channel broadcasting from Washington DC and is managed by the American Congress as a model of foreign media channel transmitting news to an Arab audience.³ *Alarabiya* has been always accused of being pro-American policies; *Alhurra* is funded by American Congress a fact that leaves no place for much criticism, and *Aljazeera* that is continuously accused of being virulently anti-American.

The first part of the empirical work will look into a number of stories broadcasted by the three trans-border news channels *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera* over a period of nine months (beginning in June 2008 and ending in February 2009). The study assesses the general themes used to describe the event by each channel. One possibility is that the coverage of the three news channels of the event will be similar and therefore accepting Williams' argument (2011) about international journalism and the way all mass media follow Anglo-American style of journalism.

³ The highly viewed news channels in the Middle East are *Aljazeera* and *Alarabiya* and this was initially the focus of the study. During primaries in March and April 2008 (not included in the study), I noticed that both Arabic channels use the same frames, narrations and studio analyses to portray American election news. The idea was developed to include an American news channel for the sake of comparison. My access to all-American news channel was restricted and therefore it was agreed to include *Alhurra* as an American news channel broadcasting in Arabic for Middle East audience and report differences in coverage, if any.

The second part of the empirical work is an audience survey which attempts to provide insights into the perception of Arab news coverage - particularly in Saudi Arabia - the use of television as a source of information, and how the audience perceive terms such as news credibility, bias, interest and impartiality in relation to consumption levels. How the American presidential election was perceived among a sample of Saudi professionals is also examined. Examining how audience understanding, consumption and opinion are shaped or affected by media reporting, how an audience analyses news and how public belief and opinion have been shaped by media is also investigated. In other words, the link between the mass media framing presentation of the event and the individual frames audiences have is examined.

In producing this study, the two empirical parts, news framing analysis and audience credibility perception, are intended to highlight the main frames used by Arabic trans-border news channels. Therefore, the study uses a content analysis methodology in the section analysing the news about the American presidential election that took place in the year 2008 and later in January 2009 for the inaugural ceremony, and a questionnaire and focus group methodologies to study audience credibility perception during this event.

In this study the focus is on a purely major American political event is read and analysed through Arab media and its audience, and it intends to participate in the media research domain and discourse which mixes globalised news events with a local reading. In other words, the study attempts to shed light on the frames news channels use and the preconceived frames embedded within people's minds regarding a global event such as the American presidential election of 2008.

The study will start by identifying the purposive sample of news stories featured on the three news channels, *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera*, during two nightly bulletins and a roll-on news brief recorded over a period of ten days across four event intervals (the last primary, Democratic Party's Convention and Republican Party's Convention, Election Day, and Inaugural ceremony in 2009). The purposive sample includes all the news stories featuring campaign developments and portraits of candidates.

The study highlights a number of areas where there were competing perspectives over how the 2008 American presidential election and 2009 inaugural ceremony were explained and understood. These include the following news reporting frames: *Horse-*

race, Human interest, Issues and Policies, Conflict, Historic Victory and Regional. To achieve a comprehensive overview of these frames, the prime focus was on the news title and the introductory passage read by the anchors, and this frame is considered to be the dominant frame. Other frames emerging from within the news reports and interviews were included when they exceeded two lines or more of the transcribed news. There is specific focus on the portrayal of Obama, whether in personality, political narrative or in a racial referral. Although the resulting numbers of dominant frames might be similar across the three news channels, the discourse within the news stories varies considerably, and this is highlighted in the discussion section of the study which indicates the differences in agendas and ideological stand.

There is a great deal of literature available studying election campaigns which focuses on the horse-race frame at the expense of other frames. According to several studies, media producers have been overworking the concept of who is ahead and who is behind (i.e. Patterson 2005, Gan *et al.* 2005); as the concept of competition and race appeals to audiences and make the long campaign period enjoyable. This point may suggest that even news produced in the Arabic media will employ the same trend and this will be discussed in the results of the news analysis.

The audience study is based on two focus groups and a survey questionnaire that incorporates general viewing habits, consumption, media credibility definitions. The survey then moves to more specific questions about the audience's level of interest in news regarding the American presidential election and how, in their view, this event will affect the region. The study also includes the perception and frames about the election progress and Obama as a future president, as the audience survey was conducted in August and September of 2008. The study aims to establish a link between the pictures of reality as news channels are trying to frame them and the subjective reality in the perception of the sample audience.

1.3 Structure of the study

The nature of this study requires the use of two different methodologies in obtaining the data and results. Following this introduction chapter, the study proceeds with a brief

overview on the evolution of trans-border channels in the Middle East, their history, beginnings and how globalisation has affected the way Arab audiences are now thinking about the world and their own countries and policies. It is well documented that the Middle East region has suffered for a long time from a lack of press and media freedom, but due to the trans-border media channels, the press, Internet, and social interaction channels this restriction that has been imposed for decades is no longer viable. The chapter includes an overview on each of the three channels, *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera*, in order to identify the differences in ideology and agenda each one has.

The third chapter reviews the past research literature available in the fields of mass media globalisation and political communication. This chapter includes an overview of the election studies undertaken in the United States, framing theory, and their strengths and weaknesses. There is a need to distinguish between media and individual framing at this stage as this will be used later to relate the news study with the audience survey. The main argument in the audience study is to measure credibility perception and how factors such as exposure affect media perception, and so credibility perception studies are also reviewed in this chapter.

The study then describes the methodologies used and identifies the news and audience samples as well as the different framing criteria. This chapter also includes the main research target which documents the difference in reporting of the event of the 2008 American presidential election and its coverage by three Arabic trans-border news channels in the Middle East together with how their audience perceived the credibility of news mediums.

The two data analysis chapters include the news framing analysis and the audience survey respectively, which focuses on the importance of the event, credibility perception and individual framing and how it relates to the media framing of an event.

The news framing analysis chapter will identify in details the four major election intervals – the last primary in June 2008, the Democratic Party's National Convention and the Republican Party's National Convention in August and September, Election Day in November 2008 and the Inaugural Ceremony in January 2009. After providing a detailed account of the news broadcast during each of these intervals, the study will identify the main frames in terms of numbers and percentages for each channel and compare the

results and discourse provided by each channel. This comparison between the frames will allow the main research question that assumes that each news channel will present different dominant frames. Moreover, the news analysis will look into the news sources used by each channel and try to justify the use of particular sources by particular channel. Finally, the analysis will compare the coverage of the three news broadcasts in terms of the frames used by American news channels, as the main argument presented by Williams (2011) posits the influence of Anglo-American style of journalism on the media worldwide.

The audience analysis chapter is divided into two main parts; the first utilises two focus groups (a total of ten participants) and the second a questionnaire (a total of 50 participants). The two methods are similar in target and measure the same elements: news exposure, credibility perception, interest in the American election campaign and individual frames. The two main analysis chapters (the news and the audience) are linked by comparing the media frames to individual frames; attempting to look for similarities or differences between the frames presented by the media during the 2008 American presidential election and the frames embedded in the minds of a sample audience.

Finally, the research ends with the conclusion chapter which summarizes the key findings and further research work to be done.

Chapter 2 - TRANS-BORDER CHANNELS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

In order to understand the nature of the trans-border Arabic mass media and the effect of television news and the possible impact on audience perceptions, this chapter will begin by highlighting the content of television news in the Middle East region and how news might vary by type/ ideology/affiliation of channel broadcasting the news. The work aims to introduce Arab trans-border mass media from a historical viewpoint with special look at satellite news television. It intends to address the factors instigating the launch of trans-border media in the Arab-speaking countries in the Middle East, such as political, cultural and economic elements that play role in the present status of these trans-border channels. The chapter will look at various media scholars' classification of Arab television, and how and when the phenomenon of trans-border channels started to emerge. Later there will be a short account of the three channels researched in this study; *Alarabiya, Alhurra* and *Aljazeera*.

Arab region comprises of twenty two countries listed in alphabetical order: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.⁴ The common feature of this region is that Arabic is the official language among citizens.

The World Bank classifies Yemen, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon as lower-middle-income countries; Oman and Iraq as upper-middle-income; and Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates as high-income oil exporters [...] income is one indicator of media development and penetration, but educational level, journalistic traditions, and the political system are likewise important determinants of media development (Amin 2001, p. 23-24)

The rise of the prominent mass media role in the Middle East started according to researchers during the 1950s and 1960s (Amin 2001, Aldawood 2004, Sakr 2007,

⁴ United Nations Development Programme: Arab States. Online source <http://arabstates.undp.org/>

Mellor 2011) with the Arab unity discourse promoting identity, heritage, common culture and religion ‘to take pride in their Arab national identity and their membership in one *Umma* (or nation)’ (Mellor 2011, p. 19). It is the year when Arab states became independent and free from foreign rule. At this stage, Egyptian media was dominating the Arabic scene with *Sawt Alarab Radio* station broadcasting across the region. It is worth noting that the big impact Egypt had on the media at this early stage was not solely due to the professional format the message was delivered in, rather the rigid and unappealing governmental messages the other media services around the Arab countries used to present to their audiences.

Historically, the mass media in the Arab world have been generally characterized by the high level of government control as authorities and officials were aware of the power of mass media broadcasting as a ‘mobilizing tool’ from the start of radio and television transmission. Media systems were under ‘absolute monopolies’ of the Arab governments (Amin 2011, p. 29).

Radio and television, in particular, are of immense values to these governments because of the relatively high illiteracy rates in the Arab world. Because radio and television bypass illiteracy, they are frequently used as a propaganda arm by Arab governments to control and mobilize the public. (Amin 2001, p.29)

Consequently, the information and news broadcasted on these state-owned channels were aiming to glorify the governments’ achievements that own the mass media outlets; no opposition viewpoints were introduced or discussed on government-owned Arab media channels. “The emergence of transnational television to, from and within the Middle East was a phenomenon of the turbulent 1990s, a decade that started traumatically with the Iraq invasion of Kuwait” (Sakr 2001, p. 1).

Several scholars have worked on identifying the main features of trans-border channels in the Middle East. The main narrative reappearing in all literature focused on bias and independence of such media. For example, Fandy (2007) argued that

despite the claims of channels to be totally independent, privately-owned and free from government control, they remain acting as political tools.

In addition to state influence on programming and the general direction of a news channel, perceptions of other states are also significant. For example, many Arab states still perceive *Al-Jazeera* to be an arm of the state of Qatar [...] in one incident, Saudi Arabia responded to the intensification of anti-Saudi programming on *Al-Jazeera* by recalling its ambassador Qatar in 2002 [...] they have thus reacted to *Al-Jazeera's* programming using a state-to-state response, namely by serving their diplomatic ties with Doha (Fandy 2007, p.3)

Thus Fandy assumed the idea that Arabic trans-border channels are directly or indirectly affiliated with certain ideologies and agendas; they are driven by 'intra-regional conflicts' (2007, p. 39). He also argued that the Western theories on media are incapable of translating the situation of Arabic channels as they do not conform to any media system model that "Hallin and Mancini lay out in comparing media systems" (Fandy 2007, p.2)⁵. Despite the claim of Arab trans-border media to be independent and commercially oriented, Fandy viewed the dynamics of Arab media as a unique system that does not fit into any of the media classifications proposed by western scholars.

On a similar note, Mellor (2011) provided an outlook on how Arab media 'industries' have moved from functioning under totalitarian government control to commercially-oriented services which are still under the tight-hands of governments. There is a limit to criticism and counter debate based on ownership perspectives for many of the channels "for example, the Saudi-owned *Alarabia* have limited scope for criticising the UAE or Saudi governments, and criticism of friendly co-member of the Gulf Co-operation Council is also off limits" (Sakr 2007, p. 83)

⁵ Fandy listed the following media systems: Commercial in N. America and UK, Corporatist model dominant in N. Europe, Mix between commercial and ties to social and political groups as in Spain and Italy (2007, p.2).

The off-limit topics that channels refrain from discussing are usually imposed by news editors whose jobs are to implement the general style and generate revenues “...tententious and restricted it might still be [...] the mass media, especially of press and TV, struggle for their survival as a commercial complex under authoritarian rule” (Hafez 2008, p. 1-2)

Moreover, even with privately-owned trans-border channels which revenues generated from sponsorships and commercial advertisements, there is always a struggle to create a free and open domain to politically criticize countries’ policies. With most of the advertising money nowadays coming from Saudi Arabia, owners of these broadcasts will think twice before upsetting such a big financial source.⁶

Today, Saudi Arabia commands an immensely powerful position in the pan-Arab media, encompassing the whole gamut of political, entertainment and religious programming [...] liberally employ entertainment as a means of offsetting political news (Hammond 2008, p. 336).

Until the early 1960s the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was hesitant to embrace the media wave that was spreading across the region especially in Egypt (Boyd 2001, p. 43). At this stage the notion of Arab nationalism was at its height backed by the Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Naser through their media propaganda device *Sawt al Arab Radio* (Arab Voice) (Yamani 2008, p. 325). The event of the ‘Six Day War’ in 1967 made Saudi government and many other Middle Eastern states realize the effect of broadcasting on publics in mobilizing them and to a further extent ‘brainwash’ their minds; especially when they have almost no effective radio defence (Yamani 2008, p. 324-325).

In the 1960s Saudi Arabia realized the need to create a ‘viable media programme’ (Yamani 2008, p. 327) to counteract the effect of the Egyptian media propaganda that was reaching audiences in Saudi Arabia with information that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia did not want to endorse. King Faisal in 1963 announced

⁶ Douglas A. Boyd (2001) cited this fact in his work on Saudi Arabia’s International Media Strategy: Influence through Multinational Ownership; and Naomi Sakr (2007) in *Arab Television Today*

the start of television system symbolizing modernization in the country (Boyd 2001, p. 46).

Between 1967 and 1974, the Al Saud succeeded in creating one of the best-financed and most powerful electronic media systems in the Middle East. It was Prince Fahd who oversaw this development, and who [...] reaped its political benefits from the 1970s onwards (Yamani 2008, p. 328)

Yamani (2008) writing about *Saudi Arabia's Media Mask* noted the dominant financial and political influence of the Kingdom in taming the media in the Arab world; stating the 'addiction' of media to oil money (p. 324).

The effect has been to create a kind of *cordon sanitaire* around Saudi Arabia in the Arab media, a sanitised zone where no news inimical to the realm of Al Saud can make its way through the purified information ether [...] has been the gradual Saudisation of pan-Arab media (Hammond 2008, p. 337).

The wealth of oil and petrol reserves in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, that started booming in 1970s, has positioned the Kingdom as the superpower of the Arab region. The tight media control and authoritarian system became clearly obvious when Iraq invaded its neighbouring country Kuwait in August 1990.

Most Saudis learned about the invasion three days after it occurred, while those who had access to Radio Monte Carlo (Middle East), the Voice of America or CNN discovered the extremes of the Saudi state's censorship [...] the Saudi government's inability to control information from outside the country would become a constant source of worry [...] most Arab states are protective of any news that could humiliate the Saudi ruler's pride. Today, such channels are especially supportive of the Saudi news campaign against Iranian hegemonic ambitions, especially as this is the political line supported by the USA (Yamani 2008, p. 328-329)

Until the beginning of the 1990s, the only other television media choice than the available terrestrial government-controlled television was the Atlanta-based American satellite news network CNN, which was covering Gulf War from the battlefield and the channel's signals were easily picked up on special antennas in

Saudi Arabia and the Arabia Gulf States. CNN news broadcasting was mainly targeting American troops based in the Arabian Gulf and the “Arab elites and decision makers of the Arabian Gulf states” who can understand the language and afford the service (Sakr, 2007).

Sakr (2007) reported on the work of previous research dealing with the effect of political events as a result of media influence and how it was framed in terms of the ‘CNN effect’ (p. 6). The influence was looked at in studies related to this topic on how such American news channel can play a role in influencing policy makers instead of audiences. “More loosely, the implication is that, whatever their influence on public opinion, the media can bring pressure to bear on those in power to change their policies” (p.6). Moreover, Sakr also referred to a similar observation in media research known as the ‘*Aljazeera* effect’ which is not looked at from the prism of influencing officials in the Arab world.

The potential for representations via the Arab media to influence the decision of Arab political leaders is an important issue to be addressed. It could be shown that the existence of media narratives and images of war, conflict, angry crowds, or even just some forms of media discourse, had an identifiable impact on policy in their own right, then some of the grander claims made for new Arab media might carry weight (Sakr 2007, p. 6).

Nisbet and associates (2004) noted the positive ‘indirect’ effect of Western media that “has aided the creation of a new television news paradigm in the Muslim world.” (p.18). The Gulf war had opened the doors for the concept of trans-border Arab channels that started broadcasting from London, which was Middle East broadcasting Centre (MBC) arguably the first privately owned satellite channel (Boyd, 2001). Funded by a Saudi member of the royal family, MBC started in September 1991 as a news channel attempting to frame political events in Arabic language from an Arabic viewpoint. However, this channel quickly transformed to be an all-family channel focusing more on entertainment and social programming.

Arabic trans-border channels kept on increasing in numbers; however, mostly they were satellite channels that are owned by governments; each Arab state had several satellite stations beaming signal from ArabSat to Arab audiences via

satellite dishes. Examples of the satellite/trans-border stations owned by Arab governments are the Egyptian Satellite Channel (ESC) and Dubai Media television (EDTV) among others. Most of the private networks that were launched at this stage were owned by Saudi businessmen and royalties for example Arab Radio and Television Network, known as ART, broadcasting from Italy; followed by the first subscription satellite service in the Middle East, Orbit Satellite Network in 1994 which started transmitting from Italy as well (Sakr 2001).

Orbit Satellite Network offered a collection of Western and Arabic channels showing 24/7 Arabic and American movies, television drama, Arabic and Western music channels and entertainment programmes. Orbit Network was the first to launch an “Arabic language news programming commissioned from a public service source, The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) from 1994-1996” (Sakr 2007, p. 5). To summarize the rise and fall of *BBC Arabic* television service under the Orbit umbrella, we can see that it started as a novel service in the Middle East region, not compromising or abiding by certain redlines that they should not cross. This courageous take on events in the Middle East back in 1994 was new to Arab audiences. However, due to the high subscription fees to get access to Orbit Network Channels, *BBC Arabic* service effect was limited to a niche market audience mainly in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. The service was later shut down due to the criticism of Saudi government on a domestic matter that was presented in a ‘news night’ style of program (Richardson, 2003).⁷

Many scholars observe the launch of *Aljazeera* as a result of the end of BBC Arabic Television in the region (Sakr 2001; Boyd 2001; Richardson 2003). By the time Saudi private media Orbit cancelled BBC Arabic Television service, another news channel was launched from the Arabian Peninsula with the name of *Aljazeera*.

The failure of BBC Arabic Television is a sad story because of the death of a dream. At the time, the greatest loss was thought to be the fact that tens of millions of Arabs were being deprived of an unbiased, modern

⁷ Boyd (2001, p. 53) indicated the event that caused Orbit to ‘unilaterally’ break contract with BBC was a Panorama program on *BBC Arabic* News Channel showing “secretly filmed” double execution beheading.

television service tailored to their own cultures and in their own language [...] *Al-Jazeera* Satellite Television went on air at the beginning of November 1996, staffed chiefly by former members of BBC Arabic Television, all of them fervent believers in the BBC ethos of balance and fairness (Richardson, 2003).

After several years of Saudi domination of the media scene, Qatar entered the news competition and launched *Aljazeera* News Channel in 1996. Unlike *BBC Arabic* service, this new news channel was open to air free of charge to anyone who owns a satellite dish.

Al-Jazeera, dedicated exclusively to news and current affairs, swept onto television screens across the region by breaking taboos. It did so as part of a wider shift away from earlier Qatari norms that began when Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa AlThani ousted his father and took over as emir in June 1995 [...] the launch of *Al-Jazeera* was only one element of the new emir's agenda for change [...] under the decree that state-owned venture was capitalized at \$137 million [...] but the government deliberately distanced itself from the operation by keeping the *Al-Jazeera* logo devoid of any mention of Qatar. It said the start-up funds for the station were a loan, to last five years (Sakr 2001, p. 56-58).

The new Qatari regime signed bilateral agreement for security with the United States of America, and on the soft power front *Aljazeera* was launched to "keep Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt on the defensive, or at the very least to respond to attacks appearing in the Egyptian and Saudi Arabia media" (Fandy 2007, p. 46)

Saudi Arabia entered the domain of news television mass media in 2003 by the launch of *Alarabiya* News Channel; which has according to many observers started as a response to *Aljazeera*'s domination of the media scene. The news channel is part of MBC Group that operates different television and media genres with several channels under the same ownership and management. "Despite *Alarabiya*'s existence, statistics showed *Aljazeera* is attracting the biggest audiences of any news channel in two major markets, namely Egypt and Saudi Arabia" (Sakr, 2007, p. 147).

When *Alarabiya* started up in 2003, its management revealed that they have two objectives behind the launch of the new news channel: to present news differently from what is on offer by Arabic media channels and specifically *Aljazeera*; and to generate financial revenues. It was a new concept in the region to find a news channel aiming at financial success; however, *Alarabiya* had an edge when it comes to better access than *Aljazeera* to Saudi news sources and Saudi advertisers. This aim is highly applicable in the case of *Alarabiya*: firstly, it is under the umbrella of MBC Group which is the biggest media corporation in the Middle East and receives the highest annual advertising revenues; secondly, it is not controversial in its news coverage and not siding with or against any of the Arab regimes which makes it favourable for all Arab State advertisers to promote their products on *Alarabiya*'s screens. However, this arguably objective (neutral and impartial) coverage from every part of the Middle East has changed recently when the Arab Spring started two years ago.⁸

The style of Western news has its influence both on news stations and audiences within the Arab region; with news channels thriving to produce the events in a collection of values such as impartiality and freedom of speech, and attempting to emulate news structure and delivery procedure. The Western media has also had an indirect impact on public opinion, news consumption and perception among viewers in Arab region. Even though Arab publics have had limited exposure to Western media, the structure, and format of news coverage has provided an alternative image of what Arab news media could provide (Hafez 2007).

Fandy identified a number of main characteristics of the Arab trans-border media, which are directly linked to issues of “ownership and regulations, content, and habits and practices at both individual and institutional levels” (Fandy, 2007, p.8). He concluded the following notes: Arab trans-border media are still government-controlled-either directly or indirectly, even when they give the impression of utterly independence and privately-owned. Secondly, Fandy observed

⁸ The neutral tone and coverage of *Alarabiya* has faltered and changed to adopt the official political viewpoint of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia towards the uprising taking place in the region: against resistance movement for long time in the case of Egypt, which changed later on, and strongly with the uprising in the case of Syria as I observed. It could be argued that the news on *Alarabiya* is promoting the political stand of the United States of America when it comes to Middle East issues.

a trend that is known as, 'anywhere but here' phenomenon citing the example of *Aljazeera* News Channel in reporting all events in the Middle East and taming news coming from where it broadcasts; Qatar. Thirdly, that Arab mass media are characterized by the concept of news receiving as opposed to news gathering referring to Arab media inability to create events but rather depending on news agencies to provide them with the information. Fandy (2007) in the previous characterization was attempting to distinguish between Arab and Western media as many Western media analysts nowadays tend to talk about television channels like *Aljazeera* and *Alarabiya* as if they were Arabic language equivalents to Cable News Network (CNN) and BBC in terms of being major news sources (p.2), which according to Fandy is inapplicable.

On a wider scale of audiences, there is no doubt that Arabic trans-border news channels have become platforms for free public discourse and can set agendas of public debates on the national, regional and international issues ranging from political democratization, to intellectual freedom, to understanding about peace in the Middle East. For example a daily show on *Aljazeera* called '*Aljazeera Herald*' that receives calls from Arabs all over the world voicing their distress, anger and ambitions towards regional political issues. The type of participation that appears on this show in particular is a rich platform for studying the freedom of speech in the Arab region. Thus, Arabic trans-border channels nowadays arguably offer a new horizon of programming that targets a wide variety of audiences in the region. This observation can be seen in social media platform as well as on Arab news websites where they offer readers a platform in the form of comments or personal blogs. However, these freedom of speech outlets in different Arab media channels so still witness extensive censorship process before allowing it to be posted online to others to read it in the case of news websites and blogs, and cutting off calls in the case of television programmes.

2.1 News Channels in the Study

2.1.1 Alarabiya News: an Overview

In a similar context to the reviews on Saudi media history that was presented earlier in this chapter by Boyd (2001) and Yamani (2008), Hammond looked at the situation as preserving Saudi Arabia's created 'Cordon Sanitaire' in the Arab media (2008, p. 335).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia invested early in the media industry starting with international newspapers based and printed in the UK such as *al-Hayat* and *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, with a wide array of Arab reporters and political analysts who either refrained from discussing some critical matters within the country, or supported every act that was made by Saudi officials (Hammond, 2008).

Later the domination over Arab media continued in the 1990s with the numerous satellite channels owned by Saudi royals and businessmen.

The effect has been to create a kind of *cordon sanitaire* around Saudi Arabia in the Arab media, a sanitised zone where no news inimical to the realm of Al Saud can make its way through the purified information ether [...] indeed, the corollary to the much-lauded advent of *Aljazeera* in the Arab media, or the 'Aljazeera revolution,' as it is sometimes referred to, has been the gradual Saudisation of pan-Arab media; *Aljazeera* cannot be understood except against the backdrop of creeping Saudi domination of the field (Hammond 2008, p. 337)

The majority of media literature associated the launch of *Alarabiya* with *Aljazeera* competition, which continued attacking internal matters in many Arab countries especially Saudi Arabia. However, the start of the channel on 'the eve of the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq' was an interesting observation which

suggested it was an American media propaganda tool in the region justifying the attack and occupation (Ayish 2011, p. 92).⁹

Alarabiya was launched in Dubai the year 2003 by the Saudi privately owned trans-border network pioneer MBC. It is owned by Arab Group International Holding Company, broadcasting more than ten free-to-air channels, Three FM radio stations, a magazine and three online news sites. It was believed that the start-up of the channel came as an all-news channel to compete directly with Qatar-based *Aljazeera* news (Feuilhrade, 2003).

Saudi Arabia launched *Al-Arabiya* after eight years of relentless attacks by *Al-Jazeera* on the Saudi political order and the Saudi royal family. *Al-Arabiya*'s programming shows that the station is more than an alternative to *Al-Jazeera*; it is a counter-missile directed at the Qatari news channel itself, *Al-Arabiya* is known for picking up the slack in areas such as the relations between Qatar and Israel (Fandy 2007, p. 53).

The main objective behind *Alarabiya* was declared in an interview published by New York Times with the Director of the channel, Abdul Rahman Alrashed, "the station was founded to cure Arab television of its penchant for radical politics and violence" (Worth, 2008). However, it is widely believed that all the money poured into the launching of *Alarabiya* was meant to "reassert" the dominance Saudi Arabia has on the Arab mass media scene after losing much of that domination following the rise in *Aljazeera*'s global profile and popularity (Fandy 2007, p. 64). It is also believed that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia wanted to present the United States with a vision of 'moderation' in the Arab world (Hammond 2008, p. 336)¹⁰. However, it was noted since its launch, a restraining tone when dealing with

⁹ For some time, *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera* were considered as promoting "extremism" by Bush administration because of their arguably supportive coverage of Iraqi insurgency, which led to two-week ban from covering Iraqi official activities in September 2003 (Fandy 2007, p. 65).

¹⁰ In 2004 George W. Bush appeared on its screen to comment on charges of torture after Abu Ghraib Prison scandal "Washington had clearly established by this time who was on its side and who was not" (Fandy 2007, p. 65). In January, 2009 the newly elected American president Barak Obama gave the "first formal interview to the Arab world mass media via *Alarabiya* (Khan 2009, ABCNews.go.com)

sensitive matters in Arab countries unlike the daring coverage and analyses *Aljazeera* used to present to Arab audiences (Lynch, 2004).

The news channel presents at least two on-going shows since the beginning. Firstly, *Special Mission*, which adopts the format of *BBC Panorama* nightly program in the sense of investigative reporting of critical matters in the Arab world. There is an emphasis on economy and investment projects in terms of special news segments and entire weekly show, as well as a show from inside the United States of American. And secondly, another cultural show called *Spotlight*, that mainly focuses on talents in the Gulf region in general and Saudi Arabia in particular. However, unlike *Aljazeera*, there is no presence of any Islamic shows on *Alarabiya*.

The channel was criticised by several Muslim clerks and viewers for the terms it uses in describing the killings that take place in Palestinian territories. The channel does not describe civilians killed by Israeli Army as ‘martyrs’ which some Arabs may consider as being pro-Israel¹¹. However, it is a personal observation that nowadays the majority of Arab news channels stopped using the word ‘martyr’ in the narrations about killings taking place in countries like Gaza and Iraq, among these channels are *Alarabiya*, *BBC Arabic*, *Alhurra*, *Abu Dhabi News*, *Sky News Arabia*, *LBC*. It appears to be related with the ideas of neutrality and objectivity in news.

The plethora of satellite channels in the Middle East in particular the news oriented broadcasts, despite being affiliated to certain governments, have contributed to the ‘political reform’ in the Arab world by creating awareness among the publics about democracy and human rights, and worldwide political developments. “The perceived political role of leading television broadcasts like *Aljazeera*, *Alarabiya* [...] has led some researchers to describe these channels as forces of democratization in the region” (Ayish 2011, p. 97-98)

¹¹ There is a Facebook group called ‘Anti-Alarabiya TV: the Jewish News Channel’ which cites regularly the arguably unaccepted terms used when describing casualties in the Palestinian territories: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87%D9%89-%D9%82%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-Anti-Alarabia-Tv/105994356145411>

However, when *Alarabiya* went on the air, it promised its audience objectivity and accuracy, with a motto of “*Alarabiya: To Know More.*” The channel claimed to be providing a neutral unbiased coverage. The promise from the news channel, and many other media outlets, is not viable any more since the beginning of the chaotic revolutions in the Middle East in 2010. *Alarabiya*’s main news headline since two years ago is about Syrian Militant Groups trying to resist the brutal ruling regime with images of the killing and bombing of entire villages, there is no presentation of the other side of the story.

2.1.2 Alhurra News: an Overview

Last century has witnessed the broadcasting of several western media channels into the Arab world. It started with foreign radio broadcasting services reaching Arab audiences in the 1970s such as Radio Monte Carlo, BBC Arabic Radio and Voice of America that were tools to provide uncensored news and information to people in the Middle East who had previously no access to similar forms of mass media. These radio services were seen as vehicles to enhance public diplomacy between the nations.

In the 2000s, the Arab media scene witnessed governments of several western countries entering the domain of television as a soft media power. The following are examples of the substantial numbers of foreign media news channels targeting Arab audiences around the world: France launched a joint public- private television news network called *France 24* by the end of 2006, aimed at helping to express the French views and values to international audiences. *Russia Today*, a state-funded satellite television channel, went on air in English in December 2005 to broadcast news from Russian perspective around the world and followed an Arabic service in 2007. Consequently, BBC World Service launched its Arabic trans-border news channel in 2008 which was funded by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office. More additions to the trend that entered the Arab media skies was the American backed *Alhurra* and the German public broadcaster *Deutsche Welle*, and the latest addition is Sky News Arabia started broadcasting in April 2012 from Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

The main motive declared behind these intentions was the desire to counter the influence of existing channels such as CNN and BBC world in the case of *France 24*; *Aljazeera* News in the case of *Alhurra*; or maintain a key position in global media in the case of the BBC. *Aljazeera* responded in a way with *Aljazeera English*, 24-hour news broadcast in English targeting foreign viewers.

Highlighting the initial idea behind the launch of *Alhurra* Channel, Abdel Samei (2010) traced it back to Garfinkle's notion of 'war on terrorism' which documented the strategies adopted by the American government to win this war in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks on the United States. One of the main strategies was winning the campaign of 'war of ideas' by "de-legitimize the idea of murdering civilians for political causes" and rectify the image of the United States of America and its policies in the minds of other nations "One pillar of this campaign, then, was the use of media in telling America's point of view on events and correcting the misrepresentation over US policies in the region" (AbdelSamei 2010, p. 92). The American Government thought of directing its messages through the power of mass media to people of the Middle East; hoping to rectify the image of the United States and win minds and hearts of people of that region. Two broadcasting channels, *Radio Sawa* and *Alhurra* satellite television, were launched.

The American media effort, directed toward Arab audiences, was developing in a parallel way with the American military moves in the region. In the case of *Radio Sawa* the message was directed to the Arab youth presenting a mixture of contemporary Western and Arabic music squeezing a news brief depicting the world according to American agenda and perspectives (Aldawood 2004, p. 68, my translation).

On a similar note, Aldawood argued that American politics relies heavily on media to manipulate minds and that is what Collin Powel, the former American Foreign Minister, in 2002 meant by 'rectifying the path of Arab media.' United States of America viewed Arab media role as crippled for several reasons: 1) Arab media do not glorify the image and role of the United States, on the contrary, 2) Arab media are not practising freedom of speech and accountability as they belong to governments explicitly or implicitly, and 3) Arab media play a role in creating

public opinion regarding the United States of America as the enemy (Aldawood 2004, p. 80, my translation).

For the above reasons, Aldawood justified the launch of American news channel broadcasting in Arabic called *Alhurra*; to set an ideal example for what Arab media ‘must’ be like (p. 81).

It is an American mass media project through which the United States is telling the region that *Alhurra* is the ideal example of what media should be [...] it is reiterating that the Arab media are not professional and impartial; starting from the name chosen for the channel, The Free Channel (*Alhurra*). It is a symbol of twisting the truth and Americanizing the Arab minds and souls (Aldawood 2004, p. 82, my translation)

According to the official Website *Alhurra.com*, the channel’s objective is to “provide accurate and relevant news to people of the Middle East, the United States of America and the world; enhancing values of democracy and debate through hosting a number of discussion programmes that examines political and social issues appealing to the audience in the Middle East.” *Alhurra*, which means the free one in Arabic language, was launched in February 14, 2004 and is financed by the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), “which serves as a firewall to protect the professional independence of its broadcasters” (*Alhurra.com*). *Alhurra* is marketed with slogans about promoting democracy and human rights in the region with promotional segments showing white horses racing in a white horizon of infinity coming to an end with the title of station ‘*Alhurra*’ written in red font.

Alhurra is viewed by many people as the “government spin from a government; they do not fully trust to begin with” (Fandy 2007, p. 111)¹². The channel also failed to present attractive productions to Arab audiences.

The gap between Arab audiences’ high expectation of *Alhurra* as an American style channel with the standards of NBC and CNN, and what they

¹² Opposite viewpoint is presented by the management of *Alhurra* which claims, according to public polls conducted in the Middle East, that the news channel is reaching millions of Arab viewers every week.

received, low-quality reporting with a conservative Lebanese slant, undermined the station's credibility as a serious news outfit (Fandy 2007, p. 108).

The failure to reach target audience in Fandy's opinion is due to the lack of management understanding of Arab market (2007).

Understanding audiences, its sensitivities and vulnerabilities, is a crucial step in building an effective public diplomacy channels between east and west; it could be very powerful tool. That step was left out in the case of *Alhurra* [...] in a complex, fragile environment like the Middle East, public diplomacy voices should be chosen with great caution. As they stand now, *Alhurra* and *Radio Sawa* are embarrassments to the United States (Fandy 2007, p. 116- 117)

The fact that Obama after his appointment addressed the Arab world through giving an interview to *Alarabiya* instead of *Alhurra* is an indication to how far behind *Alhurra* is lagging in the competition with Arab trans-border channels, I argue.

In her work on public diplomacy in the age of regional media, Abdel Samei (2010) pointed out that the challenges facing *Alhurra*; being one of "the latest additions in the Arab mass media scene", competing with Arab trans-border channels especially *Aljazeera* which have been well established as the "go to" source of information (p. 93). The competition along with the perceived ideas about the hegemony role of United States in the region; and the discrepancy in editorial content and "professional irregularities" all are factors contributing to weaken the position of the *Alhurra* (p. 95). AbdelSamei believed that placing a veto on some active political figures such as the Islamists groups and Hizbullah in Lebanon is harming the credibility and objectivity of the station's news coverage (2010, p. 102). These editorial constraints and the pressure to compete with major Arab news channels and the need "to satisfy Congress, American Conservative press and people in Washington D.C as well as Arab audience" is an unattainable goal (Abdel Samei 2010, p. 102).

Aldawood viewed the American model of promotional media as the one in *Alhurra* Channel a repetitive work done by countless American Administrative over

the years, “repeating the same failure schemes” (2004, p. 68). The management of the channel, according to Aldawood, overlooked the historic and cultural backgrounds of people in the region especially religion “as the Arab mentality are attached to religion regardless of their ambitions about the American dream” (Aldawood 2004, p. 68, my translation).

It is obvious, according to Aldawood (2004) that the channel is not aiming at beautifying the acts and plans of America towards the Arab region; it is aiming clearly at “brainwashing” some basic principles in the minds of Arabs and Muslims.

In that sense the news on *Alhurra* refers to Palestine as the Palestinian Territory and to Israel as the Jewish Country; and the acts of resistance are referred to as acts of violence or terrorist attacks at some points. These terms used heavily in a media outlet such as *Alhurra* is tuning the Arab minds into forgetting about their rights and treating the enemy and occupier as a friend and cohabitant (Aldawood 2004, p. 82, my translation)

Most of the literature covering *Alhurra* channel was in the form of staff interviews, and comparative observations. One of a few studies conducted on *Alhurra* focused on credibility of the channel among a sample of Arab university students in Kuwait, the UAE, Jordan, Palestine, and Morocco. Links were thus made between exposure level and perceived credibility. The relatively low news-credibility showed in the study suggested that audience awareness of a source’s intention would negatively affect the source’s credibility. Because many Arab media users today are “intensely aware of the American administration’s motives in trying to win Arab hearts and minds and to improve its image in the Arab world”, they have a tendency not to trust news broadcast on *Alhurra* (El-Nawawy, 2006). The study indicated that even after the launch of *Alhurra* and *Radio Sawa*, attitudes toward American foreign policy have slightly worsened.

2.1.3 Aljazeera News: an Overview

The Qatar-based *Aljazeera*, which was launched in 1996, is considered to be the first specialized Arabic trans-border news channel that places Arabic news on the global media scene. In 2004 *Aljazeera* was named one of the top five brands both globally and in Europe and Africa, coming in ahead of the BBC and just behind Nokia (Rusch, 2004).

Fandy (2007) reported the beginning of the success of two major news channels, CNN that was globally acknowledged after the live coverage of American military actions against Iraq in 1991 and *Aljazeera* global presence as a result of the ‘war on terrorism’ which has arguably captured attention of people to the news channel around the globe (Fandy 2007, p.47).

When it comes to ownership, *Aljazeera* has a special status. It was funded initially by a “five-year loan of \$150 million from the Qatari royal family”, yet claims ‘independence’ from any government body (Miladi 2006, p. 949). The majority of staff working for *Aljazeera* had had the experience of working for trans-border broadcasters such as the BBC, which pioneered the idea of pan-Arabic news television by launching *BBC Arabic Television* in 1994, in collaboration with the Saudi owned Orbit network. The service was cancelled in April 1996 when the BBC in UK aired stories that Saudi found objectionable (Miles, 2005).

Trans-border channels in general and *Aljazeera* in particular, have been considered by some media critics as ushers of Arab democracy and civil society. On the other hand, critics of *Aljazeera* highlighted how the channel is presenting anti-Israeli or Anti-American discourse. It was the first news channel to conduct interviews with Israeli officials, to present the picture from all angles and meet its promise mentioned in the slogan ‘*Aljazeera*: presenting the point and counter viewpoint.’

By inviting Western as well as Israeli experts into its studio-based debate, *Aljazeera* helped broaden the terms and scope of the Arab media discourse, in the process also earning the displeasure of Islamic fundamentalists , as well as left-wing opinion in the region (Thussu 2006, p. 191).

Aljazeera presented a contradiction to some observers; it is considered anti-Israel and anti-America when it focuses primarily on news from Gaza and Iraq highlighting the killings and massacres taking place on daily basis as well as documenting through short videos broadcasted before and after the news bulletins, the history of Palestinian towns occupied by Israel. At the same time, *Aljazeera* is the only Arab channel that pioneered the trend of interviewing Israeli officials in order to cover news events comprehensively, this in a way is viewed as a way of legitimizing the Israeli actions in a region that considered Israel as a country and government to be an occupier and enemy.

In few years after its launch, *Aljazeera* manages to anger countries like Jordan, Kuwait, Algeria and the Palestinian Authority, among others by giving air time to exiled Middle East dissidents and by tackling controversial internal affairs in these countries. It reaches global recognition by screening videotapes from Al-Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden after the 9/11 attacks on the United States. *Aljazeera* was the only channel with access to self-proclaimed terrorist group Al-Qaeda members and feature their video and audio messages on its channel and website. However, this impartiality and editorial independence according to Fandy (2007) can only be proven when tackling issues beyond the island of Qatar.

By the time the USA invaded Iraq in March 2003, *Aljazeera* had already evolved into a serious and even alternative network – and not just in the Arab world. Its English- language website, launched at the time of *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, became a popular source for journalists, activists and others interested in the nuances of the conflict (Thussu 2006, p. 191).

Aljazeera enjoyed a couple of years of being the dominant news source in the Middle East, according to Thussu (2006) until the Saudi-owned *Alarabiya* started broadcasting 24-hour news format from Dubai in 2003, claiming to epitomize ‘Arab modernism’ - a code for its pro-Western orientation (p.192). There is no doubt that *Alarabiya* presence on the media scene in a short space of time competed with *Aljazeera* as the main source of news on television in the Middle East. However, it is arguably safe to say that audiences do not have loyalty to one news channel, they resort to the one that gives them preferred reading and wealth of information at a

particular event despite all polls and marketing research figures released by each channel about viewership and ratings.

The structure of the programming on *Aljazeera* news channel is generally as follows; news come at the top of each hour, with an extended one-hour bulletin every two hours, alternating between a roll-on and a bulletin. The shows on the news channels include; a daily evening show analysing current events hosting experts and analysts, *Opposite Direction*, *More than a Viewpoint*, *Beyond Frontiers*, *From Washington*, and an Islamic weekly live show interacting with viewers and calls regarding Islam in daily practices. *Aljazeera* is arguably by far the only trans-border news channel in the region that allows veiled newscaster to appear on screen reading the news, a show about Islamic affairs, and rumours that managerial board of the channel is from a certain Islamic faction; these facts may indicate certain ideology and highlight an obvious agenda for *Aljazeera* that can easily be detected when watched regularly.

The way *Aljazeera* frames its news in ‘common injustice’ format resonates with the dissatisfaction of Arabs and Muslims with historical and present incidents- such as the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, the American occupation of Iraq and the American bias with regards to Israeli affairs in the Middle East region- contributes to the success the news channels has enjoyed for years since its start (Sabri 2008).

Related to the previous point, *Aljazeera* is arguably the only news channel in the Arab world, and the world, that dedicates extensive footages and short clips about massacres and genocides in Palestine and Iraq. A daily report on history of old Palestinian villages that are under Israeli occupation these days entitled ‘*Our Right that should not be Forgotten*’ with long with vox pops reporting Palestinians talking about their misery due to the occupation¹³; it is arguably sensationalism by all means, which explains the inclination of the news channel to highlight all Arab issues and rights in majority of news stories in the same sensationalising tone, as

¹³ These clips entitled ‘*Our Right that should not be forgotten*’ were broadcasted in June 2008 before news bulletins. It is my observation and not trying to generalize it as a fact. I am unaware if similar short videos are being aired after this period.

well as the news developments on the 2008 American presidential election which will be discussed further in the results and analysis chapter.

This point was discussed in Fandy's work (2007) about the anti-Americanism on *Aljazeera* noting that most the editors and journalists are from Palestinian and Arab diaspora origins which shape the ideological orientation of the news. "The fact that local stories are not covered on *Al-Jazeera* and *Al-Arabiya* allows for the dominance of pan-Arab and therefore the anti-American, stories to dominate the airwaves." (Fandy 2007, p. 65)

In conclusion, this chapter introduced the main characteristics of Arab trans-border media according to several scholars. A significant observation is the fact that Arab media rely on gathering news rather than generating news, which may lead to the assumption that this will present a similar coverage to the international news agencies; a key issue that this thesis is attempting to investigate further. On a similar note, this chapter proposed a link between the ownership, type of news coverage, frames and topics that can be discussed. It has been argued that each independent channel will still have ties to certain political ideology and agenda. At the same time, these trans-border channels allow the possibility of more freedom of speech to viewers who are interacting and voicing their opinions through different political shows, especially in the case of *Aljazeera*. The overview accounts of the three channels *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera* revealed the differences in ideological stands and financial dependency.

The following chapter will review the literature of two media – related concepts, credibility perception and news framing. The whole trans-border media system stems from the globalisation effects and interaction with media, therefore, a closer look at the meaning and influences of globalisation on media will be tackled before going into details to the two concepts.

Chapter 3 - LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review chapter aims at studying the concepts that are presented in this thesis: globalisation and media, media framing, individual framing, and audience credibility perception. For the 2008 American presidential election, the main focus of this research, the idea of globalisation and how mass media are playing a role in fostering this concept is to be looked at the beginning of this chapter.

The media globalisation brings people from all over the world together through mass media interaction in what is referred to as McLuhan's *Global Village* or what Williams (2011) labelled as '*interconnectedness*' with each society reflecting on the world events according its own terms and cultural referrals. Thus, the first part of the literature review chapter is focusing on globalisation and media.

Furthermore, as the nature of this research includes two concepts to be implemented the literature will include a review on the media credibility perception - the part that is related to the audience study, and the framing analysis for the part on the news coverage of the 2008 American presidential election and the 2009 Inaugural Ceremony.

Thus, following mass media and globalisation section of the literature review, there is a review dedicated to framing as a theory stemming from media effects research. Moreover, the framing part of the review will identify the differences between mass media frames and individual frames as the thesis analysis attempts to combine both terms and conclude whether or not what media present as news frames are being received as intended by audiences.

The chapter proceeds by reviewing the literature available on the concept of mass media credibility perception; different credibility measures used in previous research and identifying the main credibility scale – Gaziano and McGrath (1985) - that measures the credibility of different mass media outlets and credibility of news in general. A conclusion will summarize some of the most significant findings from the literature review where mass media framing and audience credibility perception of news are concerned.

3.1 The Mass Media and Globalisation

It is integral to look at the concept of globalisation and media collectively in order to better understand the way news channels function in covering major world events. Moreover, it is essential to explore the concept of globalisation as it relates to what this study intends to achieve, which is mainly the effect of global event on mass media channels, international journalism and news in specific that are operating in other countries and catering for different audience.

There is an undeniable affinity between mass media and globalisation. Media attempt to reach as many people as possible with messages, and globalisation facilitates communication by ‘shrinking’ the world and making connectivity easier. The media likewise facilitate globalisation by providing motivation for expanding our communication and our business around the globe. Thus, globalisation affects media, and media affects globalisation. The connection between mass media and globalisation has been identified by many scholars; most theorists agreed that “there is particularly no globalisation without media and communications as many of the definitions directly or indirectly acknowledged” (Rantanen 2008, p. 4).

As Williams (2011) stated that globalisation has generated greater ‘interconnectedness’ between people and nations and this had shaped the standards of reporting and journalism around the world to adopt the Anglo-American model (p.41). Consequently, the global event, in this study the 2008 American presidential election, is reaching audiences in different cultures differently¹⁴. It has an effect on the directly related American audiences, but has another effect on people from other cultures.

The connectivity between different parts of the globe via media does not reach people in a homogenous way. There are factors stated by researchers that play role

¹⁴ Philo and Berry (2004) concluded that different ideological beliefs will lead to substantial difference in coverage between media stations. On the other hand, Williams (2011) viewed the effect of media globalisation as creating a trend of similar coverage that follows the Anglo – American news model. This will be further investigated in this research and results will verify which stand was followed in the coverage of 2008 American presidential election.

in the effect it has. Tomlinson (1999) depicted it as a complex connectivity status with a number of different ‘modalities’ including social, political, economy and media communication (Tomlinson 1999, p. 2). Therefore, each society will ‘digest,’ ‘package’ and ‘analyse’ global media messages according to different parameters or ‘modalities’ as stated by Tomlinson. This is similar to a filtration process in which nations will choose to place certain world news and events in certain format or frames that are comprehensible and accepted within their societies.

On a related note, the global media experience allows this interaction between local and global which can create a culture with a mixture of both elements. If we refer to the example of Abdullah given in the first paragraph of this introductory chapter, we can see that there was an adoption and acceptance of foreign values and cultures intertwined with local content in the global media setting. However, Williams (2011) viewed media in the globalised world as “helping to forge national identity” (p. 33).

Now the media facilitate the emergence of a transnational culture, drawing on symbols, products and images that come from anywhere in the world. The relationship between the ‘local’ and the ‘global’ is posited in theoretical terms primarily as either/or, as mutually exclusive categories, and the rise of global is portrayed as happening at the expense of the local or national (William 2011, p. 34)

Similarly, AbdelSamei (2010) argued that globalisation created crisis of identity for many states. Explaining this point, the researcher discussed that local nations due to technology and advanced media mass communications are exposed to international cultural products such as movies, Internet, novels and news that “compete with the domestic media and dominant culture” (p.60). Simultaneously, local nations are still attached their heritage, culture and interact with the surroundings through living in the community and through local mass media that have revolutionized and repackaged the message in attractive, modern format.

Identities are not static, this competition engenders a process of reconstructing identities as people may assert or redefine who they are as individuals, communities or nations through a wide range of media outlets such as television, music, Internet, etc., and drawing on a vast range of

domestic, regional and transnational cultural sources (AbdelSamei 2010, p. 60).

The information revolution, as one tier of globalisation, has allowed the population of the world to move closer together, to know about, and see one another. This could not be achievable without the power of the mass media and their global agenda (Williams, 2011). In that sense, globalisation enhances conscious among audiences about cultures and problems in other places, other people, and other lifestyles. Previously, there was a one-sided framing and interpretation of events imposed by mass media in certain cultures, however, with globalisation and the dominance of international news agencies, the coverage of events is shaped to be more comprehensive and bearing more than one side to each event. An example of that function of globalisation in that sense is during the American-led war on Iraq in 2003, in which all major American and European mass media channels were covering the event from a unilateral viewpoint, justifying the attack by claiming that the Iraqi regime is threatening the world by possessing weapons of mass destruction. On the other hand, the coverage of *Aljazeera* News Channel of the 2003 war on Iraq presented to its global audiences an alternative views from Iraqi perspective; “the important role of *Aljazeera* was that it set the agenda for news stations in the US and the UK, the two main combatants” (Lilleker, 2008, p. 87).¹⁵

Any discussion of the media and globalisation should first start with a definition of both terms. The term media has long been associated with “various means of communication,” such as printed news communications like newspapers, television, radio, and movies. The word is also used to refer collectively to the press and news reporting agencies (technicalterms.com). These two definitions are the ones most commonly used and are typically ones that are generally meant by the term. However, given the proliferation of new communication technologies, the definition of the mass media has been evolving accordingly. Wirtz (2011) defined media by explaining that:

¹⁵ This is not contradicting Williams’ argument. In my opinion it manifests the effect of globalisation in terms of a wealth of information where more than one source is portraying world events to audiences.

It encompasses all goal-oriented technical means or instruments for the procurement of information in print, visual, or auditory forms as well as the organizational and institutional entities behind them that generate and provide this information. The information is directed, in a traditional manner, at a broad and public audience (Wirtz 2011, p. 8)

Rantanen (2008) writing about *Media and Globalisation* reiterated the key role of media and mass communication in individual lives and in the development globalisation; the work was based on exploring the media role in defining the concept of globalisation and not just acknowledge it. The definition referred explicitly to the role of media and mass communication in the globalisation domain:

Globalisation is a process in which worldwide economic, political, cultural and social relations have become increasingly mediated across time and space (Rantanen 2008, p.8)

The definition of globalisation has been hotly contested over many years, and no consensus has ever been reached on exactly what it means; it can be detected on many fronts; political, economy and mass communication. Martha Van Der Bly has dubbed the term ‘a triumph of ambiguity,’ (2005) although citing Khor’s economically oriented definition as a traditional one: “international economic integration that can be pursued through policies of ‘openness,’ the liberalization of trade, investment and finance, leading to an ‘open economy.’”(p. 875). Realistically, though, globalisation means much more than economic integration. It also comprises the idea of interconnectedness and a drawing together of cultures by virtue of their more ready access to each other. Globalisation, then, has been defined by some scholars in terms of what it can do as much as by what it is

Rantanen cited Giddens as providing the term in the most ‘neutral’ way as the “intensification of world-wide social relations, which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (Rantanen 2008, p. 6). Giddens viewpoint of globalisation focused on the social interaction between people in distant places around the globe and become aware of what is happening in other cultures. However, Giddens later added to his argument the role of mass media and technology in condensing time and space

entities enhancing to the extent of enabling the “intrusion of distant events into everyday consciousness” (Laughey 2007, p.97).

By the same token, Tomlinson (1999) understood the concept of globalisation as the ‘complex connectivity.’ (p.2). Tomlinson followed Giddens in his argument viewing the result of intensification of certain social relations arising from the constant process of interaction that is a result of globalisation.

Marshall McLuhan wrote in 1967 that “the new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village” (Lule 2012, p. 1). By this he is suggesting that people around the world are no longer distant and unconnected from each other, but electronic communication makes it seem as if they all lived in the same village. It is essential to note that the notion of ‘global village’ by McLuhan is one of the most criticized concepts in globalisation debate, in which an assumption about homogenization in the information, news and cultural exchanges between nations is introduced. Several scholars (e.g. Appadurai, 1998) rejected the ‘romantic view’ of the world in its ‘smooth flow’ and homogeneous exchange of cultural products, arguing that interaction between globalisation forces and different cultures and ideologies will lead to ‘heterogeneous dialogues’ (Thussu, 2006, p.62).

Looking closely at the case of the Middle East mass media and the effect of globalisation, we can witness the acceleration in the communication industry in terms of technology and media development. However, this development is still controlled by politics. Arab mass media as a positive impact of globalisation have moved from the media monopoly of the state to private broadcasting enterprises but remained functioning within the political boundaries and inhibitions.

It will also continue to be an issue of public debate when it comes to cultural identity, with more television stations carrying Western-style programming that has less relevance for indigenous cultures and social systems (Mellor 2011, p. 172)¹⁶

¹⁶ The reference of ‘western’ media practices and format is about the American hegemony in particular and European effect to a less extent in terms of cultural products, journalistic norms and style.

On the other hand, however, the mass media are centralized, and they distribute their message through global media systems like CNN that send out the same message to all. Different messages reach different consumers depending upon their interests, their affiliations, and the sites they visit online. Therefore, unlike life in a 'global village', where everyone knows everyone and the same message is sent out to all, life in the age of globalisation and its associated mass media is about sending the message to all, but each receiver will understand it differently to the other. Thus, globalisation is affecting media by diversifying the messages that media send out and the audiences that the messages reach (Norris *et al*, 2003).

On the same subject, Held (2004) distinguished between two categories of globalisation theorists, those who embrace the view that it is tangible and real are called the 'positive' globalisers and on the opposite end are the 'pessimistic' globalisers. Where the former focus on the capacity of the concept to bring people together in understanding about cultures and nations by transferring ideas, technologies goods and media, which in return become beneficial on social, political and economic fronts (p. 22). Pessimistic globalisers believe that the world is less diverse and homogeneous; it is a place where powerful nations dictate their agendas and cultures. Therefore, pessimists believed the effect of globalisation is harmful to some nations and endanger identities.

Hafez (2007) dismissed the concept of globalisation as a 'myth' arguing that it is not leading to greater interconnectedness and is developing at a modest degree than it is generally assumed due to the hold nation states retain over political, economy and cultural life and activity (p. 168).¹⁷ The debate over McLuhan's global village imbalance in interaction between the west and the rest of the world have some scholars such as Laughey (2007) and Thussu (2006) to highlight the notion of 'Americanisation' or the transfer of American way of life to other nations. A variety of terms emerged from the American cultural hegemony such as 'Coca Colarization' 'CNNization' and 'McDonaldization' through which American values and lifestyle is disseminated (Laughey 2007, p.165).

¹⁷ Kai Hafez dedicated an entire book *The Myth of Globalisation* to analyse the degree to which the concept actually taking place.

With the growth of media strength in global world changes, some fundamental transformation appeared in the ‘detachment’ from the specific cultural taste (Williams, 2001, p. 34). In other words, Williams stated the effect globalisation has in enhancing mass media practices and international journalism.¹⁸

The beginning of international journalism appeared at a national state level, as mass media outlets functioned as informational tools to their audiences. In the nineteenth century, each nation had its own news agency that provided news to the world “participating in the national rivalries that characterised international relations in this era” (William 2011, p. 23). The rise of news agencies altered the process of news presentation and distribution nationally and internationally. However, bias and unfairness was arguably detected at that time due to the financial constraints that force news to be shaped within the boundaries and standards accepted by the state. News in Europe in the 1850s focused on international events happening in Africa, America and Asia as it was ‘less risky’ than reporting ‘domestic affairs’ (Williams 2011, p. 45).

When national news agencies started to adopt the commercial model of reporting, this has shaped the international journalism to become more uniform in terms of standards, style and language used as they are serving global audiences.¹⁹ This, according to Williams, is due to the high level of ‘interconnectedness’ generated as a result of the ‘shrinking of distances’ between nations, people and professionals, the standards of international journalism around the world has changing and is expanding to conform to the Anglo-American model of journalism.²⁰

However, even though the style of international journalism around the world looks identical and is “very American in style” due to the appearance of anchors, studios,

¹⁸ The gathering and production of foreign news is referred to as international journalism. Terms such as trans-border and foreign correspondence convey the same meaning of international journalism in William’s book *International Journalism: Journalism Studies- Key Texts*

¹⁹ Reuters was first to supply news in commercial format to clients. It was founded in 1851 as an extension of powerful British Empire.

²⁰ Anglo-American news values and practices in international journalism are described by Williams (2011) as ‘professional’ model. This is mainly due to the role of English language around the globe in education and publications that are majorly American and British.

format and reporters (p. 173). There are also national outlooks and angles when it comes to reporting and shaping the news:

The professionalization of Third World journalism into the western model is seen as a means to reinforce the dependency of Latin America, Africa and Asia on the rich industrial countries of the West and their news media. Anglo-American journalism and news-making values and practices are becoming a universal standard for the remainder of the world (Williams 2011, p. 13)

Despite the claims about the universal/homogeneous standards of international journalism that is formed by the domination of global news agencies, the receiver side of international correspondence, the editor, plays a vital role in determining what to be broadcasted and in what frame. Culture, politics and agendas are all factors shaping the way international news is presented in different media channels.

On another note, globalisation is considered a facilitator in weakening the state control over the mass media presentation of news and events. It helped relatively bypassing censorship in the Middle East countries for instance through modern media technologies and acclaimed independence. The deregulation and privatization of media has worked as a ‘catalyst’ for the expansion of private media networks and made satellite television aim beyond the borders of the country they are based in. Consequently, the privatization has opened the door for more audience oriented media product focusing on the market and advertising revenues which lead to a more liberal agenda (Thussu 2006, p.186).

This same point was raised by Fandy (2007) in his work on *the Uncivil War of Words*, that pointed out the despite the privatisation of trans-border Arab media outlets, they are still “governmentally controlled” in a way or another (p. 3). It is arguably true that Arab media these days enjoy great freedom in terms of criticizing some governments and policies; however, it is noticeable controversial issues concerning local matters in Saudi Arabia cannot be discussed on Arab media channels as they fear to face what happened to *BBC Arabic* Television when it was part of Orbit Network; when once discussed a Saudi matter in an unfavourable way, the channel was shut down by Orbit. In general Arabic media are aware of their red lines and tend not to cross these lines especially with a country like Saudi Arabia,

which not only the biggest contributor in satellite network providing services for all private channels but because it is the biggest provider for advertising revenues to these channels.

The same point raised on presenting world events in a culturally congruent format to reach the target audiences was further referred to as ‘domestication’ of news, which is translating the news for the local audience and framing it in ways aiming to reach certain culture. In other words, how globalisation effects and media expansions together interweaved to continue alter social norms and cultural conversations through the events of the world. This was also called global ‘counterflow’ by Thussu (2006, p. 185).

A similar concept about balancing global news with national perspective was introduced by Sreberny (2000) as by being ‘glocal’. Journalist and international news editors around the globe established a connection between covering the world events as well as catering for the needs of their audiences. It is crucial that media satisfy particular audiences and clients by making story ‘clear and understandable to people at home’ (Williams 2011, p.173).

The effect of the globalisation process on personal attitudes and perspectives is described by some scholars as ‘cosmopolitan audiences’ who are citizens of the world with international outlook on global events. Cosmopolitanism is the acquired global sense, a sense of “awareness of ambivalence in a milieu of blurring, differentiations and cultural contradictions” (Beck 2006, p.3). In Tomlinson’s words it is the ability to have ‘unlimited cultural disposition’ to the local surrounding; living both local and global at the same time.

Being a ‘citizen of the world’ means having a cultural disposition which is not limited to the concerns of the immediate locality, but which recognizes global belonging, involvement and responsibility and can integrate these broader concerns into everyday life practices (Tomlinson 1999, p.185).

Cosmopolitan in the definition of Tomlinson are not the elites or ethnocentric; they are normal people with active sense of ‘belongingness to the wider world’ (Tomlinson 1999, p. 194). They recognize their own ‘cultural dispositions’, at the same time are aware of the world’s offerings of many other cultures as well.

Cosmopolitans think beyond the local surroundings and show interest in global events and are able to enter into intelligent relationship of dialogue with others.

There is the aspect of a state of readiness, a personal ability to make one's way into other cultures, through listening; looking, intuiting and reflecting. And there is cultural competence in the stricter sense of the term, a built-up skill in manoeuvring more or less expertly with a particular system of meaning and meaningful forms (Hannerz 1990, cited in Rantanen 2008, p. 120).

Rantanen (2008) viewed cosmopolitanism as an act of 'awareness or attitude'; it is an identity like any other but this does not mean it is an overall identity that excludes every other identity. "People can develop a cosmopolitan quality, a cosmopolitan identity" (Rantanen 2008, p. 124)

Rantanen argued that complete cosmopolitans have to meet five 'zones' or qualities and none of these zones is sufficient in itself, and that one has to probably meet more than one zone to achieve the cosmopolitan quality. The zones are: the ability to speak another language in addition to the mother tongue; the mass media; living and working abroad or having members of the family living in a different culture/abroad; sharing a life with someone from a different culture; the interaction with foreigners in the local surroundings (p. 124). However, I am considering the participants engaged in my audience study to measure credibility perception of different media channels and to comment on the event of the 2008 American presidential election part of the cosmopolitan and global audiences. They are cosmopolitans based on their willingness to engage with other cultures through media and communication; they are aware of what is taking place around the world and have opinions on matters that exist away from their own habitat. In my opinion, cosmopolitanism can exist through media globalisation and it has immense effect on the attitude and outlook of audiences if they are willing to interact and be exposed to other cultures. This willingness coupled with good/high level education and serious exposure to international mass media is shaping the new citizen of the globe.

In conclusion media and globalisation are mutually impacting. Globalisation affects media by integrating the mass market of capitalism and decentralizing the mass media, making both their message and their audiences more diversified. Media affects globalisation by driving consumers to buy, obtain, or enjoy things that they have seen on the Internet but do not have in their locale. News channels, Internet sites and the social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are erasing the borders between countries that exist at a geographical level and creating a universal environment in which distance and culture are no longer barriers to communication. Arguments and debates on media and globalisation range from the question of whether globalisation of media is producing a society that is more homogenous or one that is more diverse to the issue of how to contextualize the hyperspaces that have become detached from their local environment. The various themes dealt with differently by the globalists, and the sceptics can be argued about in multiple ways and from a variety of perspectives, which highlights the fact that media and globalisation mean something different depending upon which lens the theorist is looking through. In the last analysis, it must be acknowledged that both the media and the process of globalisation are constantly evolving and therefore always in flux. The definitions, debates, and arguments about them of today will be different in five years and radically different in ten. Ultimately, what will always link them is that both are driven by people along other economic and political forces, who in turn drive the technology and the social change necessary to shape both forces into ones that are relevant for the current day.

The 2008 American presidential election is an example of a global event that has been broadcasted on all news outlets around the world. The framing analysis approach is widely applied to monitor media content and practises, as it will be revealed later in the analysis that some media channels are affected by globalisation and the usual way Anglo-American media frame presidential election events, while others resort to a more culturally congruent frame to shape the event, as referred to by some scholars in the domain of international political communication as ‘Easternization’ of television.

The Middle East region and the media practices there is part of the global world. The mass media interact with regional and international events just like any global

media would do. The region has particular characteristics and cultural dispositions, but that fact is applicable to other nations as well. As globalisation is affecting the dynamics of the entire world on all levels, more emphasis is applied on international news and events. It is just like the nineteenth century era when news referred to information about other nations that is considered 'less risky' than discussing internal matters, the same is happening nowadays when news channels avoid tackling sensitive internal matters and focus more on global and international events.

3.2 News Framing Analysis & Audience Credibility Perception: Background

Looking at the two concepts of media framing and audience credibility perception of news, it is arguably conceivable to assume a link between the impact mass media have on the audiences with respect to information, idea formation and decision-making. Landeville stated the power of media framing in influencing people's perception about world events, arguing that "the concept of media-framing suggests the news media tell the public how to think about issues [...] frames can influence how people interpret and evaluate political information" (2007, p. 4). This makes media framing and audience credibility significant factors during news media coverage of the American presidential elections.

Framing employed during political elections may directly impact political debate. Kim, Scheufele, and Shanahan found 'issue farming' and 'demographic characteristics' influence voter 'decision-making' (2002, p.103). There also seemed to be a difference in how news media frame domestic versus foreign policy issues during elections. Callaghan and Schnell (2001) found that news media in the United States of America provide 'specific frames' in its political coverage of domestic issues that 'may differ' from the government's and interest groups' positions, but Zaller and Chiu found there is 'little framing difference' when it comes to foreign policy (1996, p.383- 385). These two previous findings were conducted in the United States of America, however, by the same premise I am assuming that ideologically different Arab news media will report on American domestic affairs in

similar framing way but will differ when reporting on international and Arab affairs expected from candidates and parties in the 2008 American presidential election race.

Framing of candidates and the issues important to them by news media channels cannot be underestimated for the influence they play in shaping the political process in American society. During American presidential elections, framing of candidates and the issues can make all the difference between winning and losing. During 1992, Landeville maintained that economy was a major issues that “swayed in President Bill Clinton’s favour,” but argues the news media “describing the economy as in dire shape” persuaded news consumers that a change of presidents was the “only remedy” (2007, p. 4).

Framing, as mentioned earlier, is one aspect of influencing viewer exposure to information, thinking and decision-making. Another important aspect that either makes voters embrace or reject news media framing is their perception of news media source credibility. At no time is this more critical in the democratic process than during the American presidential elections, when campaign rhetoric and news media framing are high. Ironically, viewer perception of news media credibility is low. David Geary wrote that in September 2004, a presidential election year, Gallup Polls showed that “news media credibility was at its lowest point” (2005, p.8). Many cite the ownership of traditional media by the wealthy elite as one reason for this loss of credibility. Knowledge of media ownership has been found to increase scepticism among news viewers (Ashley, Peopel and Willis 2010, p. 37).

Several studies on mass media credibility perception used the scale introduced by Gaziano and McGrath (1985) that is comprised of 12 items (Abdulla *et al.* 2002, p. 1). One explanation for the loss of credibility of traditional news media channels could be that consolidation of ownership of traditional news media outlets by the wealthy elite in the United States has increased scepticism regarding objectivity among consumers of news.

Framing may be less significant if news consumers continue to lose credibility in the news media content and framing of candidates or issues. In contrast, news framing may play a large role in the political process outcomes in the United States

for those news media channels considered credible by news consumers. Some studies support the notion that framing and credibility of news media by news audiences is directly connected. Cappella and Jamieson found that journalistic norms affect how people perceive credibility of news media, reporting that “campaign coverage framed around the horserace helps fuel voter cynicism” (1997, p. 79). Such findings highlight a relationship between framing and news media credibility perception.

3.3 Media Framing

Framing in general terms is defined as the selection and presentation used by the mass media to highlight certain aspect of news story and prioritize events in order to help audiences understand world news. One of the widely quoted definitions is by Entman (1993) who stated:

Framing occurs when media make some aspects of a particular event more salient in order to promote a certain problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation (Entman 1993, p. 52).

Highlighting the effect of media framing in the political communication domain, Entman wrote:

Frames call attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements, which might lead audiences to have different reactions [...] the frame in a news text is really the imprint of power – it registers the identity of actors or interests that competed to dominate the text (Entman 1993, p. 55).

The concept of framing is extensively researched by Robert Entman who argued that the concept of framing manifests the influence of media messages over the way of thinking of recipients illuminating the cultural aspects that enhance this ‘influence’ (Entman 1993).

Culture in the definition of Entman is “the empirically demonstrable set of common frames exhibited in the discourse and thinking of most people in social grouping” (Entman 1993, p. 53). These ‘set of common frames’ are what Entman referred to later as ‘culturally congruent’ media content to demonstrate the substantial effect of media framing.

A similar framing definition with more functional side to the concept is presented in the work of Cappella and Jamieson (1997) who perceived news frames as “those rhetorical and stylistic choices that alter the interpretation and perception of the topics treated” (p.33). In their definition, Cappella and Jamieson stated the power of the media in altering ideas in the minds of people. The media framing in the definition is concerned with the effect on various levels. On a similar note, Landeville (2007) suggested that through framing media tell the publics what to think about and can influence how people evaluate political information. One of the effects, they noted, that framing as a process is widely used to describe media structural bias in election campaigns. American mass media according to Cappella and Jamieson (1997), tend to portray election campaigns in strategic contexts, which lead audience to be critical towards what they see. In other words, the way American mass media channels are highlighting election campaign news as a game/horse-race is consequently leading audiences to lose trust and believe in such mediums.

The function of framing is to “simplify, prioritize and structure the narrative flow of events” (Norris *et al.* 2003, p. 10). This cropping of facts about event will “unconsciously” promote one/more interpretation among viewers (p. 11). The work of news framing acknowledges and agrees with norms, culture and values of certain environment and therefore, will shape public opinion. In a broader sense, the ‘one-sided’ framing of events will work to reduce dissonance within society but at the same time, being exposed to global news agencies and international channels will add a new perspective to the interpretation which is known as ‘double-sided’ portrayal of events (Norris *et al.* 2003, p. 13).

Framing analysis according to Abdel Samei (2010) does not focus on what kind of news topics and issues are covered but “why” and “how” these issues are covered (p. 34). It goes beyond stating which frames are used in the news to why

these frames are used by this specific medium and news source; it shows the emphasis given in a certain piece of news. Media frames are deliberately employed in news in order to define problems, identify causes of events and suggest solutions. Moreover, framing was closely related to discourse analysis, according to Abdel Samei (2010), except that the latter does the focusing on certain aspect of the story by “figuring out the layers of presence within a text” (p. 34).

Media editors can make parts of stories appear more prominent by placing news in headlines or repeatedly emphasize as certain aspects of the story, or by relating them to culturally congruent symbols (Liebes2000; Abdel Samei 2010). This point in particular agrees with what the current study is examining through the introduction of the ‘regional frame’ in which American presidential election news developments on all the three channels broadcasting in Arabic was discussed from the prism of the Middle East region and future policies to be undertaken. However, Entman (1993) concluded that even when the news editors decided to play down or “obscure” parts of the news story, it can be highly noticeable in the minds of audiences if it “comports” with existing schemata in receivers’ belief system (p. 53).

The criticism given by Entman (1993) to the framing research as being “scattered” and inconsistent, was the base for working on framing typology proposed by Scheufele (1999).

Scheufele (1999) presented previous framing research outcomes in terms of ‘theory of media effects’. The work on framing research according to Scheufele lacked systematic approach and “theoretical model” which limits the “comparability” of results (p. 103). In an attempt to establish an empirical framework for framing media effects, the author developed a model identifying four framing concepts that “should be addressed in future research: frame building, frame setting, individual level process of framing, and a feedback loop from audiences to journalists” (p. 103).

Classifying the effects along the application of mass media and audiences and framing as independent and dependent.²¹ For the media effects, Scheufele considered the presentation process and comprehension of news and specified the two concepts under media frames and individual frames (1999, p. 106). To distinguish between the two types of frames, the author based the argument on what Kinder and Sander (1990) suggested as explanation for the two frames:

Frames serve as “devices embedded in political discourse, “which is equivalent to the concept of media frames and as “internal structures of the mind” which is equivalent to individual frames (Scheufele 1999, p. 106)²²

The other dimension of framing typology as media effects research is the dependant and independent classification. When looking at framing as independent variable, “the most logical outcome is a link to audience frames” (Scheufele 1999, p. 107). This independent variable of media framing will affect audiences understanding.

Entman further work continued to establish a conceptual connection between framing and bias in an article arguing that bias reporting is a “consistent patterns in the framing of mediated communication” (Entman 2007, p. 163). The present study of Arab media coverage of the event of 2008 American presidential election was initially going to be an analysis of bias in coverage, drawing from similar American studies that took the same position. However, the element of bias was not easily detected in Arabic news media as in the American counterparts; thus, the study focuses only on framing news analysis and will focus on the tone of each news channel in the representation of event. There will be biased reporting in some incidents depending on the type of news story and the stand of the channel from the event.

De Vreese (2005) outlined theory related to framing concept in media analysis. The work defined framing as a dynamic process and ‘not static’ that involves two

²¹ De Vreese (2005) proposed similar typology based on issue – specific and generic frames drawing from existing research. This typology will be discussed later in this chapter

²² According to Scheufele,(1999) these definitions are by Kinder and Sander (1990). I am quoting Scheufele’s work in *Framing as a Theory of Media Effects*

steps: firstly, the frame building which is the construction of the news in a certain way/frame to give certain meaning. Secondly, the frame setting step that is the interaction between media frames on offer and the schemes in minds of audiences (De Vreese 2005). Through this dynamic process, frames could function as independent variable and dependent variable. The explanation is given as follows:

For example media frames can be studied as the dependant variable, i.e. the outcome of the production process including organizational pressures, journalistic routines, and elite discourse. Media frames may also be studied as independent variable, i.e. the antecedents of audience interpretations (De Vreese 2005, p. 52)

Furthermore, Twenkbury and associates (2000) highlighted the two known frames, which are media frames and individual frames adding a new angle to the debate with the introduction of what is referred to as “advocacy frames” (Twenkbury et al., 2000, p.805). The media frames according to many scholars describe the way journalists and news editors present and frame their stories about political issues, events, and people to the publics; individual framing represent how people analyse the news and comprehend it based on the internal structure of mind (schemas) gathered from previous experiences, knowledge and other forms of daily interactions. “The single greatest power of media frames is their ability to provide and/or activate information, thereby shaping individual frames” (Twenkbury *et al.* 2000, p.805). The third type of framing referred to as policy advocate was introduced by Twenkbury and associates and referred to the control of how an issue or a candidate is approached and portrayed (i.e. explanation and argument intended to persuade in news reports). In their work, they examined different combinations of advocacy frames and study how they may alter the interpretation and opinions of the audiences. They build a two-wave classical model that focused on which advocacy explanation of issue and events are accepted and retained. They concluded that participants’ interpretations were influenced by how dominance the frame is presented in the media story coverage (Twenkbury *et al.*, 2000)

Arguing about individual-level effect of framing, Scheufele (1999) stated that research that studied outcome of framing assumed “direct link between media frames and individual-level outcomes.” (p. 117). Nevertheless, Scheufele

questioned the relationship between mass media and audience framing noting that research has not answered clearly this question. Explaining the role of editors/journalists in shaping news in a certain way, Scheufele cited the phenomenon that was labelled 'news wave' by Fishman where journalists are looked at as audiences who have been exposed and influenced by frames set by news media and is "reciprocated" by other media outlets (Scheufele 1999, p. 117).

News framing can be easily recognized in coverage of stories within election campaigns. The familiar *horse-race frame* - who is ahead, and who is behind in the competition. The polls that is a feature in all American presidential elections is the reason Patterson (2005) cited as the cause of the focus on the horse-race frame when covering election news (Patterson, 2005). The availability of polls nowadays, have led journalists to frame election development based on the position of candidate in the election surveys, argues Patterson. At the same time, Patterson viewed these polls as 'necessity' in 'modern campaign' generating interest in the event.

Patterson criticized the heavy usage of horse-race frame during election campaigns in several observations, which sets out to "show that journalists continue to craft superficial images tied to candidates' support in the polls and that they continue to construct election narratives rooted in the candidates' position in the race" (Patterson 2005, p.717). Patterson viewed journalists dependence on polls adversely affects the quality of American election coverage (Patterson 2005, p. 716).

Using the title "Feeding the Horses" Patterson acknowledged the use of polls in both the United States and Europe to frame election news as sporting event. However, it is only in the United States of America where journalists relied on the horse-race frame to the extent that "overshadows" other frames (Patterson 2005, p. 718). To give justification for the difference in coverage between European coverage and American media reporting, Patterson referred to media objectivity as a concept for explanation. According to him, European journalists are more "selective" than the Americans, highlighting casual of actions and different ideologies. For American media, the objective coverage lies in "partisan neutrality" (p. 717). "They typically refrain from compositions that suggest one party has the

better candidates or policies. It is a model of reporting that European newspaper journalists find puzzling and unnecessarily confining” (Patterson 2005, p. 718).

On a similar note, this inclination by journalists to frame election news generally as a race/game appeared to negatively affect media objectivity and practices according to several scholars. Hence, frames are not driven out by practices of objective journalism (Gan *et al.*, 2005). Consequently, the presence or absence of objectivity could be a factor in determining news frames employed by media (Gan *et al.*, 2005).

3.3.1 Framing Practices

As mentioned earlier, framing analysis is considered a part of media effects studies. This proposed effect of media framing can often lead to bias in coverage resulting in ideological, political and bias differences between media channels. Despite this reality, all news media resort to framing in the coverage of all political events.

Entman (2004) stated that the power of the news frames will not be substantial unless these frames appear to be compatible with the culture/society the message is directed at “the more congruent the frame is with the schemas that dominate the political culture, the more success it will enjoy” (Entman 2004, p.14).

Shoemaker and Resse (1996) highlighted factors that are socially and ideologically influential in determining how journalists construct their news. The factors are the conventional elements of economy influences, political system, cultural notions and values, and frames presented by powerful elites. Since several of these factors are related to culture and society, the use of frames is expected to vary across different media channels targeting different societies. One of the major influences was the ideological background and political interests of the media that direct the tone and shape of events portrayed to publics (Shoemaker and Resse, 1996). These factors are basis to what I am intending to achieve in my research, which I am examining three popular Arab news channels with arguably different agendas and trying to outline the main differences in their coverage for the event of

2008 American presidential election. The comparison to outline the differences will be based on the variation in framing used to portray the different events in the presidential election. On a similar note, Gan *et al.* (2005) perceived the dominance of certain frames in mass media as a result of “vicious circle” that includes media practices, audiences and political figures presentation (p. 461)

Examining the link between ideologies and framing has been the centre of many studies (AbdelSamei 2010; Worsham 2009; Gan *et al.* 2005; Massey 2000; Shoemaker and Reeses, 1996). Massey (2000) content analysed news newspaper framing of the Southeast Asian smoke-cloud ‘haze’ in 1997-98. Massey concluded the general emphasize to “downplay” the “confrontational” political “sensitive frames” and to emphasize the mildly - toned one; leading to the support of the argument that Asian journalism, although adopt the Western model of journalism routine, tend to be careful when reporting ideological and national issues largely close to their home countries (p. 72). In other words, they cannot be critical of the performance of the government as the expected role of journalism should be. These findings by Massey are relatively related to what Fandy argued about the characterization of Arab mass media. There are similar trends in mass media of countries that arguably lack democracy, like Asian and Middle Eastern mass media in this example, in which Middle Eastern mass media cover extensively any event outside of the home country of the news channel broadcasting from. For example what Fandy reported *Aljazeera* doing in taming the critical tone when it is about a matter in Qatar (Fandy, 2007)

A cross-national study focusing on comparing Swedish and Belgian Election news was conducted by Stromback and Aelst (2010) and concluded that the type of the media channel running the news stories will determine and define the type of frames these channels emphasize. In other words, “commercialism” played a major role in frames used to compete for audience. The study found that “game frame” was more employed in mainstream mass media channels than in public service television. Two frames dominated the coverage of mainstream/commercial television and tabloid newspapers: game frame and personalized frame. They argued that the target of mainstream/commercial mass media is to attract more audiences and enhance advertising revenues; therefore the use of what seems to

package the news in an attractive frame such as the game frame and personality information. On the other hand, public service televisions around the world aim to provide correct information and news (Stromback and Aelst, 2010).

Investigating the relative link between the frames (such as economic and conflict) and the local spin on news stories; the launch of the Euro in three media channels from three different European countries was analysed as a case study. The results showed that approximately 50 per cent of television news coverage was devoted to politics and economy news. The focus given by media workers was to economic consequences of the event but not to the conflict it could bring to the countries (De Vreese *et al.*, 2003). Researchers believed that mass media in the European countries rely heavily on reporting the conflict in any news stories, but at the Launch of Euro this aspect was missing from their coverage.

The generalization offered by De Vreese and colleagues (2003) about the domination of conflict frames in European journalism was detected in the work of Schuck and associates in 2010. European parliamentary election was the focus of the work that employed content analysis to investigate frames presented in national news coverage of all European Union countries. The work identified four features of media coverage during the event: 1) framing election in terms of “conflict”, 2) framing elections in terms of “horse-race”, 3) framing election in terms of “strategy”, and 4) “meta-coverage”: focusing on the role of the media during election campaigns (Schuck *et al.*, 2010, p. 3). The most prominent themes in news were conflict and strategy frames that were featured three times more than the horse-race and meta-frame.

Park (2003) examined the frames used in American television news coverage when reporting on news from Korea and Japan. Park utilized predefined framing categories that included, “conflict or international relationship”, “economics”, “democracy” and “protests” and finally “disaster” frame. The study established a connection between the political relations between nations and the influence of news and frames used by mass media. For the economy in Japan, American media portrayed it as a rival economy, and for Korea the frame used to define the economy was “cooperative”. These findings highlight the argument regarding the relationship between ideology and framing. When there are certain political ties

between nations, the portrayal of these nations will appear in positive lights and vice versa.

Bosman and d'Haenens investigated the link between news framing and bias in reporting (2008). The researchers looked at the aspect of selection in the definition of framing as a direct interpretation of bias; "framing, then consists of ways to introduce bias in an article in the sense that the mere facts are imbued with meaning and evaluation" (p. 738). The study compared frames used by two popular newspapers in the Netherlands over three time periods based on three series of events about Pim Fortuyn.

For their quantitative comparison, Bosman and d'Haenens used a 'deductive approach' based on pre-determined frames that were presented in news stories. They employed the Conflict frame, the Human-interest frame, the Responsibility frame, and the Morality frame. They found, what several previous studies have concluded, that the degree of framing is positively corresponding with the relationship newspapers have with the news subject. However, different patterns of framing have emerged with time which was interpreted as an adaptation to "the demands of reality" (Bosman and d'Haenens 2008, p. 746).

In a comparative critical discourse and framing analyses, a study was conducted to point out the differences between news stations with regard to the message (AbdelSamei, 2010). The researcher compared *Alhurra* news programmes with *Aljazeera* shows. The work was based on theoretical frame work of 'hegemony' concept; AbdelSamei (2010) cited James Lull (2000) argument that the failure of hegemony with its dominant ideology (*Alhurra* in the case of this study) becomes visible when the "counter – hegemonic discourse" is stronger²³ (AbdelSamei 2010, p. 18).

The research analysed four political programs on *Aljazeera* and *Alhurra* over a period of four to six months and established seven categories/frames that were featured in the shows; "Internal Arab problems and issues", "Arab issues on the

²³ My interpretation is *Aljazeera* is representing the counter – hegemonic discourse. In other words, Arabs, will not be exposed to media message broadcasted from American media as long as they have the credible news source that satisfies the need for information and is consistent with their believes and culture.

international front”, “Matters about the United States of America”, “Palestine, Regional domination”, and “General global problems”. The study concluded that Palestine as an issue received intensive coverage on *Aljazeera* while situation in Iraq was the focus on *Alhurra* shows. When the study focused on one news event, looking closely the war on Gaza as a case study, AbdelSamei inferred that “regional identity” was prominent on *Aljazeera*, stressing “Arabism” in terms of the glorious history, shared religion and culture as the determining elements of identity. On the contrary, *Alhurra* left out “regional identity” frame and focused on “regional political division” (AbdelSamei 2010, p. 165). The history frame was presented on *Alhurra* in light of present and future rather than the past; the history on *Aljazeera* was about the present and the “idea of resistance as it is the essence of Arab identity in *Aljazeera*’s perspective” (p. 228). In contrast, *Alhurra* employed a “futuristic approach” and neglected debates about religion and history, broadcasting views from “liberal” figures in the Arab region and Israel. On the other hand, *Aljazeera* appeared to be “evidently more open to persuasion and orientations in the Arab world, even if it seeks to promote the idea of Arabness with its constituent elements of identity such as history, language and religion” (AbdelSamei 2010, p. 4). This same conclusion was seen in my analysis of *Aljazeera* news when broadcasting short films before each news segment about the Palestinian towns and people and reminding audience that Palestine is an Arab land and this right should not be forgotten.²⁴The potentially different ideological perspectives of the news channels will be explored in my study in order to further situate these existing studies.

3.3.2 Framing Analysis on American Presidential Election

In contested political processes such as presidential elections, candidates and the news media secure power by defining what is legitimate or illegitimate through framing of either a linguistic, textual or visual manner. In many ways, these frames compete to produce a social reality that will either be rejected or embraced by news media viewers. The process of framing must be understood as an intentional effort

²⁴ These short videos about occupied Palestinian towns were broadcasted on *Aljazeera* during the month of June 2008 under the title of ‘So We Won’t Forget our Rights’

to manipulate frames in the service of political ideology and power. Frames also impact speakers and listeners regardless of whether we like it or not. As such, the question of framing is not one of whether candidates are effectively framing but “how they are framing and to what effect” (McCarty 2007, p. 9). McCarty maintained that winning of election does not lie in winning political debates, but in to those candidates/hopefuls who “succeed in framing the terms of the debate” (2007, p. 9). McCarty explained the contemporary process of framing and winning political contests:

If a majority of voters accept the way one candidate frames the debate, and they reject the attempts of a second candidate to re-frame that debate, the first candidate will win the election. And where issues are too complicated, or where there is a storm of contradictory and unreliable information (much of which may now be created intentionally for the purpose of keeping voters confused about the issues) voters tend to vote for the candidate who worldview they identify with most readily (McCarty 2007, p.9).

The contentious 2000 American presidential election outcome and George W. Bush’s decision to invade Iraq in response to the events of 9/11 greatly exacerbated and polarized political rhetoric and issues at stake in the 2004 election. McCarty argued that:

The use of framing techniques by politicians explained some of the important changes taking place in the way political rhetoric around hot-button issues were being created, deployed, and how the public experienced this intentionally polarized rhetoric (McCarty 2007, p. 3).

Frames are social interaction devices that reflect “multi-layered assumptions, values, and logics that give meaning to, enable and constrain, selected thoughts and actions” (McCarty 2007, p. 6). Framing as a process is broadened to encompass the concepts of ideology and cultural domination in contemporary times.

Studying the 2000 American presidential election coverage by the Brazilian media, Porto (2001) concluded the Brazilian media were following American model in journalism where the concentration was heavy on the coverage of election as a

horse-race. As well as the horse-race frame, the study noted the prevalence of episodic frame. The use of episodic frame, focusing on the immediate event without giving much of a background, pretexts and consequences, lead to incomplete comprehension of events on the part of audiences, argued Porto.

The regional frame appeared on the television coverage as well as in the newspapers in Porto's work (2001). Despite differences in media usage of frame, the horse-race appeared to have the most substantial dominance in the coverage of the campaign news, a fact that Porto found to be similar to the way American mass media present election news. Porto referred to this as following "the American media model" (Porto 2001, p.32). This impact of Anglo-American journalistic practices in which same frames used in American media is used by Brazilian journalists, in this case the horse-race frame, might inhibit audience interpretation and assessment of the electoral campaign or the significance of the event.

Frames and framing in news media is significant because framing used in news media is often the result of bias, ideological, or political differences. Despite this reality, all news media resort to framing of candidates and issues of importance during elections in general and American presidential elections in particular. Framing is often a product of political candidates' image handlers as much as an outcome of news media presentation. Framing in terms of American election is defined as "the process by which some aspects of a candidate's character or governing ability are emphasized over others in such a way as to promote a particular interpretation or evaluation" by news media audiences (Grabe and Bucy 2008, p. 2). Framing can just as readily be applied to significant issues as candidates during presidential election campaigns.

Grabe and Bucy (2008) conducted a content analysis of network news coverage of the 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004 presidential elections, focusing on the visual "representation" or framing of candidates (p. 1). They discovered that three primary "visual" frames emerged during these presidential elections to frame major candidates: 1) The ideal candidate; 2) The populist campaigner; and, 3) Sure loser (Grabe and Bucy 2008, p. 2).

Despite the ability to frame a presidential candidate from one perspective or

another or in one light rather than another, not all frames are one-size-fits-all when it comes to effectiveness. In their study of the four presidential elections from 1992 to 2004, Grabe and Bucy found that “the populist frame is a favourite among image handlers and news media, but it does not become all presidential candidates equally” (p. 1). The ‘populist’ frame did not fit presidential candidates John Kerry or Al Gore as neatly as they did Bill Clinton. Political pundit James Carville maintained the framing for Democrats had no ‘narrative’ or ideological stance that could compete as frames against Republicans in 2000 and 2004 (Grabe and Bucy 2008, p. 28).

The influence of gender whether in the case of candidates gender or news media reporter, seems to have an impact on framing of presidential candidates and issues. Grabe, Samson, Zelenkauskite and Yegiyan (2011) conducted content and framing analysis involving male and female reporters across four American Presidential Elections from 1992 to 2004 (Grabe *et al.* 2011, p. 285). Findings included the fact that fewer women than men reporters were involved in election coverage, but women were “tonally tougher watchdogs” than men (Grabe *et al.* 2011, p. 283). This is important because it implies that women more than men are willing to challenge the prevailing frames of candidates and/or issues during presidential election coverage.

Where framing is concerned, the researchers’ findings show distinct differences between male and female reporter framing of the candidates. Grabe *et al.* (2011) found that in terms of framing candidates “male reporters were strongly associated with a masculine approach that emphasized the competitiveness of campaigns. By contrast, women correspondents employed both more feminine and gender-neutral frames than their male colleagues” (Grabe *et al.*, 2011, p.285). The paucity of women in broadcasting during presidential elections may be why men and women vary in how they frame candidates and the issues during presidential elections.

Overall, there were some major discrepancies revealed in presidential election candidate news coverage where gender is concerned. Grabe *et al.* reported: “Men outnumbered women reporters at a ratio of 4.5 to 1. Compared to male colleagues women practically were overlooked for live link-up conversations with anchors- despite the fact that they were as likely as men to report live from the campaign

trail” (p. 302). In this sense, reporters of different gender are ‘framed’ in such a way as to lend varying degrees of credibility to them. As Grabe *et al.* report: “There are potent symbolic displays in defining a reporter as an expert-someone knowledgeable enough to be ‘interviewed’ by the anchor” (2011, p. 302). Women were nearly invisible in this capacity during these four elections, which may explain why they are perceived as less credible news media representatives than men. This is true even though this study found that through four presidential elections there “were no differences between men and women reporters in terms of objectivity or the tonal valence of their reporting” (Grabe *et al.* 2011, p 303).

News media framing during political campaigns does not just impact adults. Young adults were very influential in the outcome of the 2008 presidential election, and a significant factor in the 2004 election. Channel One TV is the main source of presidential election news for public schools, broadcasting to more than 30 per cent of the American teenagers in the school system (Worsham 2009, p. 2). During the 2004 American Presidential Election, Channel One was owned by PRIMEDIA, a corporation that formed alliances with conservative evangelist and lobbyist Ralph Reed, Jack Abraham, and anti-tax think tanks (Worsham 2009, p. 2). By the 2008 presidential election, Channel One was acquired by Alloy Media and Marketing, which formed alliances with NBC, Bill Clinton and Hollywood-based social action group Participant Productions (Worsham 2009, p. 2).

Worsham’s framing study investigated how political campaign issues and political actors were framed differently during the 2004 and the 2008 American presidential elections under these different ownership and alliance arrangements. The research highlighted various findings that show outside influence on news media framing of election candidates and issues. Worsham found that during the fall campaign seasons in 2004 and 2008 Channel One devoted a ‘significant portion’ of its broadcast time to the presidential campaign and campaign issues (p.11). Framing of such issues was highly distinct.

For example, the study found that framing of the issue of political protestors on Channel One in 2004 and 2008 was radically different. Frame researchers analysing coverage of protestors in the media have historically found a ‘consistently negative frame’ when reporters construct representation of protestors for news consumers

(Worsham 2009, p. 12). However, protestors were constructed in highly distinct ways during the 2004 and 2008 Channel One coverage of them. Worsham reported: “During the 2004 campaign season, protestors were framed as a threat to teenagers engaged in the political process and as a disruption to the processes of democracy” (Worsham 2009, p.12). These constructions occurred primarily during the Republican convention. Protestors and John Kerry were framed as ‘angry, critical outsiders’ (Worsham 2009, p. 13).

By the time of the formation of the new ownership and alliances in 2008, Channel One’s framing of protestors for news audiences was radically different. During protests at the Republican Convention this time, the anchor journalist reminded viewers that protestors protesting are exercising their ‘First Amendment right’ (Worsham 2009, p. 14). One attorney specializing in First Amendment law was asked why people protest, responding: “Well, because people care, people know this is a political season, they want to express their views, they want to get involved” (Worsham 2009, p. 15). Such studies support the contention that news media framing is shaped by different forces, from audience’s prurient interests and corporate sponsors to ideological or even personal bias in ownership. In many ways, they define deeply held beliefs about the processes and functions of democracy.

During the 2000 presidential election, Coleman and Banning argued the candidates used visual framing to achieve “second-level agenda-setting” (2006, p. 313). Coleman and Banning used this framework to investigate the affective framing of George W. Bush and Al Gore in 2000. Findings showed a favourable news media bias for Al Gore compared to George W. Bush: “Network TV news coverage included nonverbal behaviour for Al Gore that was more positive than George Bush’s, and those who watched were significantly more likely to hold attitudes that mirrored the media portrayals” (p. 313). Such findings seem to corroborate the significant influence of the media in shaping public perceptions of candidates and issues during presidential election campaigns.

In a study focusing on identifying frames, ideology and objectivity of newspapers; Gan *et al.* (2005) analysed articles about the 2000 American presidential election as featured in the French *Le Monde*, and the *Straits Times* from

Singapore. Researchers maintained the strong relationship between mass media and journalistic practices and the state, citing Singapore's government control on media content and the "subjective" French way of reporting which is for "*Le Monde*, by contrast, is a typical exponent of the French way of reporting and, as far as the journalistic ideal of objectivity is concerned, 'the French tend not to believe in it'" (Gan *et al.* 2005, p. 447).

Gan *et al.* (2005) assumed that, because of these differences in attitude towards objectivity, different news frames will be dominant for these two newspapers. The two main premises of the study were linking frames to ideological objectivity by comparison; and monitor the change in framing practices that appears when an 'external stimulus' interrupt the ordinary flow of news events; in this case the election deadlock.

The findings supported the idea, that the type of frame used in the reporting of the 2000 American presidential election is related to the type of media channel and country's position toward objectivity and democracy. However, according to the analysis these two newspapers are "similar" in many aspects regarding journalistic practices (p. 457). Nevertheless, the differences found in framing are influences:

At least in part, by socio-political contextual factors (e.g. each country's experience with democracy and its relationship with the US) [...] at the time the study was conducted Franco-American relations were better than they are now (the US had not yet invaded Iraq), and Singapore-US ties were not nearly as strong (a mutually beneficial free trade agreement was signed in 2003), so the differences in international relations was relatively small (Gan *et al.*, 2005, p.457).

Despite the previous finding, the study noted that *Le Monde* focused relatively frequently on issue/policy frame in tandem with the horse-race (p. 457). Referring this to the intellectual nature of the French newspaper which "lean towards interpretation of events and commentary, and would hence tend to highlight issues and policies in their coverage as something to comment upon" (p. 457)

Differences in ideology between the two media sources prompted the result of significant difference in the dominant frames employed. However, the horse-race

frame was the main theme used by the two ideologically different newspapers. In the conclusion the researchers resorted to one of two possibilities to explain results: 1) mass media ‘unintentionally’ follow and copy each other especially when it comes to world events; or 2) what was named ‘trail of power’ in reporting which referred to journalists follow the norms when it comes election news that resulted in excessive use of horse-race frame just like the American media coverage (Gan *et al.*, 2005).

The mass news media validate candidates and issues of significance through framing and media exposure of them to voters. Parmelee (2002) explored the frames emerging in presidential primaries campaigns (p. 317). Parmelee found that “while the candidates used a variety of frames, all six shared one frame: mass media as supplier of candidate validation” (p. 317). Presidential primaries are often the first chance many presidential candidates get to frame their character and the issues/values that are of significance to them. News media framing at this stage in the presidential election is critical to how news media consumers will ultimately view or perceive the candidates and issues of importance. The framing analysis showed that although all seven presidential candidates from both parties used diverse frames to paint themselves and the issues, all of them featured on similar frame: “mass media as supplier of candidate validation” (Parmelee 2002, p. 327). This revealed how framing is used to shape image and ideology but also to attract news media, thereby increasing the validity of the primary candidate as presidential material.

The results of Parmelee’s framing analysis of the 2000 American presidential primaries finds the following distinct frames used in news media accounts of the candidates: the Democrats represented by Bradley receiving Leadership and Electability Frames; and Gore framed as Values. Despite these different frames, there was one frame that consistently was used by all; “I’m qualified for president because the media say I am” (Parmelee 2002, p. 321). However, despite these frames used by candidates and their handlers, not all were successful in getting the media to frame them in this manner. There is obviously some degree of overlap between candidate framing and news media framing, but how successful this framing becomes, ultimately, in the news media differs among candidates.

Presidential Primaries often show how the elite media are able to shape which candidate and/or issues are framed effectively or ineffectively. Miller, Andsager and Riechert (1998) conducted a framing analysis of presidential primaries that reflects how, despite candidates try to frame their image or issues stance in other media, news media do not always reflect them in the same manner. News coverage of the candidates was examined using articles published in three the American elite newspapers. Miller, Andsager and Reichert's study revealed that framing of candidates differ in press releases than the news stories. Despite having news media handlers and despite having their own views of how they and their issues should be framed, political candidates often experience different degrees of success in how they and their issues are reflected or framed by news media.

Today's political process makes it plainly evident that news media framing of presidential candidates begins prior to the presidential election. It begins with the primary campaigns run by parties to see who will wind up as that party's candidate in the general election. Because of the increased importance of political primaries, often an "intra-party conflict," framing analysis of news media during the primaries is highly significant to shaping presidential elections (Miller, Andsager and Riechert 1998, p. 312). Miller, Andsager and Riechert contended:

Primaries have affected the strategies and tactics of the candidates. They have influenced the composition and behaviour of the candidates. They have changed the decision-making character of the national conventions. They have shifted the power within the party. They have enlarged the selection zone of potential nominees (Miller et al. 1998, p. 312).

In a content analysis study of American television news coverage of the 2008 presidential election, Fransworth and Litcher (2011) content analysed six presidential elections revealed that what we are told to think about by television journalists and editors - the horse-race, candidates who seem to be scheming at every opportunity, and the human failings of the candidates - are not matters likely to make informed citizens or congenial voters. Nor does the generally declining amount of policy-oriented coverage do enough to remind citizens about the importance of political participation (Fransworth and Litcher, 2011).

A study targeting the same event as the one I am researching in this thesis is by Cruikshank (2009) that monitored the coverage of the American presidential election on three transnational channels targeting worldwide audiences. These channels were *Aljazeera* English, BBC and Russia Today. The aim was to examine news framing of the event and the candidates as portrayed by each of the three channels. Cruikshank argued that Obama was positively portrayed on the three channels, depicting Obama as ahead of other opponents running for presidency and being a strong leader that is needed at the time. Nevertheless, a negative frame used with Obama which is the possibility of him being “untrustworthy” (p. 46). McCain, on the other hand, was negatively depicted as lagging behind Obama in the election race, which was framed as a horse-race account on both *Aljazeera* English and the BBC. Russia Today, however, which focused more on giving more details about the American voting processes, framing the election as being unfair to voters, thereby negatively framing the long celebrated American democracy. The three networks based their coverage on American polls which explained the framing of the development as a competition/race. *Aljazeera*, in particular, positively covered Obama’s campaign depicting it as the start of serious change in the American relation to the rest of the world, and to the Arab region in specific.

Cruikshank (2009) concluded that the similarity in coverage between the three trans-border news channels in framing the election is influenced by the governmental relationships between American and the countries where news channels are broadcasting from. *Aljazeera* English and BBC were similar in most of the frames used especially the horse-race while Russia Today framed the election in an unfair angle for the voters and refrained from using the notion of ahead and behind race in the news. The findings showed the contrast in the way each mass media channel was framing the event mainly based on their political relationships and ideologies. The channels who adopted the American model of coverage of election showed affiliation with American media and policies. On the other hand, Russia framed heavily the event in light of policies and logistics of the election which was portrayed as unfair and that could be linked to the position between Russia and the United States of American when it comes to world politics.

This research is similar to my study in terms of news framing analysis across ideologically different transnational channels and results obtained will be compared and contrasted with the findings of Cruikshank in *U.S. Presidential politics on the Global Stage*.

The media construction of candidate credibility largely takes place through framing. One cannot engage in meaningful discourse about candidates or issues without some frame of reference. Eargle, Esmail and Sullivan examined presidential election news stories from the perspective of personality traits of hopefuls (2008, p. 8).²⁵ The main purpose of the study was to explore if mass media framing of candidates varied based on their race/ethnicity, gender, and other characteristics. Researchers found that:

vast majority of news coverage tends to address issues other than candidate characteristics,' but that racial/ethnic minorities and females 'do receive more press coverage addressing their racial/ethnic and gender characteristics than do other candidates (Eargle, Esmail and Sullivan 2008, p. 8).

Studies of online news media framing during presidential elections often rely on Entman's concept of 'framing bias in media as a means to influence the distribution of power' (Ter Molen 2011, p. 67). Ter Molen's study explores framing in the online edition of the English language *The Korea Times* during the 2008 American Presidential Campaign. Ter Molen finds that *The Korea Times* used the

Deictic expression 'we' to express and (re)construct nationalistic views on three salient issues: the Korean-US Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA); the economy; and, North Korea/nuclear weapons/Kim Jungil (Ter Molen 2011, p. 67).

From this framing analysis, Ter Molen concludes that *The Korea Times* "reconstructed" John McCain's image as 'militarily dangerous,' while also "mitigating Barack Obama's opposition to KORUS FTA and willingness to meet

²⁵ Data during the 2008 presidential election were recorder from American television channels in alphabetical order: CBS News, CNN, FOX News, and MSNBC (Eargle, Esmail and Sullivan 2008, p. 8).

with Kim Jungil” (p. 67). Obviously this kind of framing not only reconstructs but purposefully attempts to persuade audiences of news media to its own perspective or worldview.

As this study attempts to combine news framing analysis as the main focus of the thesis with a part discussing audience understanding and framing of the 2008 American presidential election, the literature review will proceed to examine research conducted on the topic of Audience media credibility perception. This research expands its scope to encompass analysis of credibility perception as well, since media performance is part of the questionnaire.

3.4 Audience Credibility Perception

Despite the significance on news viewers of framing in the news media during political campaigns, a host of studies report a loss of credibility of news media among news media viewers, especially among traditional news media. Oyedeji (2006) defined media credibility as

Audience’s perceptions of a news channel’s believability, as distinct from the believability of the individual journalists and sources, media organizations, or the content of the news itself (Oyedeji 2006, p. 1)

The concept of media credibility has not been measured and/or defined in standard process. However, “the most consistent dimension of media credibility is believability” (Flanagin and Metzger 2000, p. 521). The researchers defined mass media credibility as a ‘multidimensional concept’ consisting of believability, accuracy, trustworthiness, bias and completeness.

Audience perception of news media source credibility is imperative if viewers of news media are to be swayed by framing. In that sense, credibility is a matter of perception that one may develop based on certain qualities. Moreover, credibility can be viewed as a filtration process that help retain information, believe in it or discard it.

The previous passage does not claim the dependence of credibility perception

on media news framing; both concepts are independent and it is not crucial for any framing analysis to be preceded by audience credibility perception of the medium or the media channel studied. However, I argue that both concepts are interrelated; framing the news in a certain way or being slanted towards certain party or position will lead to a certain perception of the media channel in minds of the viewers; in return affecting either negatively or positively the credibility of the medium. As the background section of this literature review (3.2) establishes how framing news, especially election campaign in the United states of America can affect the audience perception of certain media not just because media through framing process tell the public what to think about issues but in many ways the media tell people how to think as well (Landeville 2004, p.4). In the United States in particular media channels can make voters during election campaigns embrace or reject certain standpoints and candidates as media based on ideological affiliation and other interests portray and frame people and events in certain light.

However, the effect of media framing on audience media credibility perception can be detected and noticeable in my opinion when it is about more regional/national issues to the audiences. I assume that because the issue of American presidential election is not of major proximity to the audience I am questioning, the notion of credibility will not be solely based on the performance of Arab trans-border media during that campaign but a more general perspective. I assume that audience will be more vigilant in terms of media credibility when the event is more of a national nature to them; just the same effect American media have on American viewers in terms of political stands and media evaluation.

Most studies traced the beginning of credibility measurement to Hovland and Weiss (1951). However, Gaziano and McGrath (1985) attempted to define media credibility research noted the two media credibility “ancestors” are Charnley (1936) who researched newspapers reporting accuracy and the Yale group work on believability of source (Gaziano and McGrath 1985, p. 1). In their work on testing the process of “forgetting”, Hovland and Weiss found that audiences or “subjects” at the time of exposure ‘discounted’ material from ‘untrustworthy sources (Hovland and Weiss 1951, p. 635).

One of the widely used credibility scales is the Gaziano and McGrath credibility scale that was introduced in their 1986 study of newspaper and television credibility. The American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) in 1985 commissioned a study to measure attitudes towards individual media and news media credibility in general. The research goal was to highlight the credibility of television news as a media channel and “disentangle” it from that of newspaper (Gaziano and McGrath 1985, p. 3). The researchers stated that “it appears that although people’s attitudes toward credibility of newspaper and television are often similar, when forced to choose, they are more likely to pick TV than newspapers as more credible” (Gaziano and McGrath 1985, p. 3)

Basing the work on people understanding of the concept of credibility, factor analysis yielded 12 items that were grouped together to form a measurement for credibility. This constructed credibility measure can be used as a “yardstick” with which to measure results, according to Gaziano and McGrath (p. 3). The point that was assumed at the beginning of the research of choosing television as the most credible source when asked to pick one mass medium was proved later in the results of the survey where “television was the choice of the largest percentage of respondents” for each of the above measures except for understanding controversial news about local issues in which newspapers were chosen (Gaziano and McGrath 1985, p. 20).

The 12-item scale included as factors in measuring credibility of television and newspaper in Gaziano and McGrath study are “fairness”, “bias”, “telling the whole story”, “accuracy”, “respective of privacy”, “watching for people’s interest”, “concern about community’s well-being”, “separating facts and opinions”, “trustworthy”, “concerning about public interests”, “factual”, “professionalism” and “training of reporters”.

The study of Gaziano and McGrath initiated questions about freedom of the press, when respondents were most likely to support press freedom when media serve as watchdogs over government (Gaziano and McGrath, 1985). The researchers concluded that people perception of newspaper and television credibility is frequently related to their attitudes toward press freedom, except when it “prevents the right of ordinary citizens to receive fair trials” (p. 21). My study has

drawn from the work of Gaziano and McGrath concerning their credibility measures to evaluate credibility of different news sources and channels as it will be discussed in chapter four, the methodology.

Abdulla *et al.* (2002) conducted an extensive study on perceived credibility of newspapers, television news, and online news. Basing the work on the credibility measure proposed by Gaziano and McGrath, results of the study showed that respondents viewed television and newspapers in similar way; and Internet news had different evaluation. But respondents judged “all three news media most positively in terms of current, up-to-date, and timely” (Abdulla *et al.* 2002, p. 2).

The exploratory study revealed the difference in how Americans citizens perceive credibility of different media outlets in 2002, post September 11 world. This fact was not factored into the questions or discussions while conducting the study but it was on the minds of researcher in their analysis of results.

It is highly likely that news consumers are quite interested in news that is not just up to standards prior to the September 11 terrorist attacks, but perhaps seek news that exceeds them. While this study does not assess this, it may be a factor in respondents’ assessments of the credibility of newspapers, television news and online news (Abdulla *et al.* 2002, p. 16)

Park (2005) utilized a variation of Gaziano and McGrath credibility scale to compare South Korean Nationals’ perception of media credibility. The research examined the overall media credibility and what factors determine the measurement. The literature background of the study highlighted the different findings from previous researches in which some found online media to be more credible than traditional ones (Park 2005, p. 238).²⁶

Despite what the previous studies concluded, Park found that Korean public perceive traditional news media “as more credible than online news” (Park 2005, p. 242). The overall evaluation of credibility of news media did not include Internet

²⁶ The national survey consisted of a representative sample of 1500 adults, used a combined credibility scale – Meyer believability and Gaziano and McGrath credibility index, adjusting some elements and phrases to suit Korean society and media systems.

news, as Park stated: “it appears likely that the Internet is not thought of as a news medium” (p. 243). Television news were evaluated on elements of creativity and providing information whereas newspapers were rated based on performance in the form of accuracy, fairness and socially significant aspects. The news on the Internet was not viewed in terms of creativeness but as information providing, accuracy, completeness and fairness. An additional element to the credibility measure is found in this study in the form of social utility aspect, in which the question was asked whether the medium reports socially meaningful stories and advocating freedom of speech. These two aspects were determinants in the case of credibility perception of television and newspapers but not the Internet.

Studies on mass media credibility perception acknowledged the fact that the increase use and reliance on a particular medium means the high credibility rating of it (Flanagin and Metzger 2000; Ayish 2004; Johnson and Fahmy 2008; Merhabi *et al.* 2009). This hypothesis was the basis of the research conducted by Andrew Flanagin and Miriam J. Metzger to measure the credibility perception of several mass media outlets. The research found that the sample of undergraduate university students and a convenient sample of non-college respondents perceived newspaper information as the most credible source amongst television, radio, magazines and the Internet. The level of credibility of the different information sources was similar irrespective of information type. Moreover, the study found no verification of the sources in the case of the Internet and explained this by referring to the credibility of the content rather than the medium; reliance on the Internet as news source has shown an influence on the perceived Internet credibility. Furthermore, the fact that Internet sites are linked to television and stations such as CNN makes it unnecessary to verify the originality and credibility of the source and the information presented (Flanagin and Metzger 2000).

Incorporating source credibility with audience perception, Johnson and Fahmy (2008) argued that perception of credibility “resides in audience members themselves and different audiences can hold wildly different perceptions of a source’s credibility” (Johnson and Fahmy 2008, p. 338). The study asked audiences of *Aljazeera* to judge its credibility based on the station’s “depth”, “accuracy”, “fairness”, “believability”, “trustworthiness” an “expertise” (p. 339). The factors

that were considered to have a direct impact on the source credibility were demographics and political factors. Moreover, factors like freedom of press, reliance and ideology were believed to have an indirect effect.

The study found that *Aljazeera* viewers judged it as ‘highly credible’ on five of the six credibility measures reporting the highest score to be for the expertise factor (Johnson and Fahmy 2008, p. 353). The argument given by researchers on this particular point was that the network gained the experience through employing international “news-gathering techniques” (p. 353). The study revealed that respondents who are younger and relied heavily on *Aljazeera* are more likely to judge the network as credible. On the other hand, the lowest score was given to the element of fairness where editors of the network deliberately present the news with from an Arab perspective view point to compensate for lack of Arab viewpoints on controversial matters in European and American media.

International media such as CNN and BBC that presented in the research were considered to be ‘news authorities’ by respondents and were rated highly on the expertise scale; as Johnson and Fahmy argued that this is not a surprise as they are the news station model on which *Aljazeera* is modelled. The international ‘news authorities’ were doubted (rated low in credibility) on truthfulness as they were perceived by the respondents to “distort the news by filtering it through a western lens” (p. 354).

As Johnson and Fahmy (2008) defined credibility as the perception of audiences rather than being a characteristic of the source; the study shows viewers of *Aljazeera* perceiving it as more credible than CNN and BBC; if the study was done on viewers of the western news channels the results will be different, the study argued. Ideology and freedom of the press did not reveal any indication to credibility perception in the case of this study. However, the research highlighted a weakness in terms of defining ideological aspects of respondents (used American model employed in numerous studies asking to identify themselves as liberal or conservative) and suggesting that future studies should rely on ideology through questions that conform to the norms and cultural understanding of each designated region.

Mehrabi and associates (2009) proposed factors that may influence media credibility perception on a sample of users of television and Internet. Independent variables such as media reliance, media exposure and issue salience were examined against the credibility perception. Moreover, the results revealed that these variables had 'positive contribution' and 'significant relationship' in determining media credibility (p.136). Researching the news media credibility on the Internet and television, Mehrabi, Hassan and Ali (2009) found a positive correlation between perceived credibility and the amount of Internet usage and television watching time. The study explored the news credibility perception of television and the Internet among a sample of non-academic professional university staff and found it moderately low (p.145). For academic professional university sample, the credibility perception of Internet and television was revealed as positive (Mehrabi *et al.*, 2009, p.145).

Another news credibility perception measurement derived from McCroskey and Yong scale is employed in a study conducted by measure is used by Xi Mao (2003). The study discusses the audience's perception by examining the viewership to understand the basis on which people build their credibility toward TV news (p. 4). The researcher identifies credibility perception as a "cognitive awareness that people accumulated through education, experience, political views among other factors" (p. 4). It is also linked to exposure level and affinity. However, the seven-point scale used in assessing the measurements adopted from McCroskey and Yong (1999) were modified to correspond to the nature of the Maltese society, where this study took place. The measurements comparing the performance of CNN and BBC included: intelligence, training, expertness, brightness, informational, honesty, competency, trustworthiness, morality, and ethicality.

The convenience sample included 250 respondents who preferred BBC news referring to it as impartial and not controlled by any governmental agendas; with reputable history in the media, offering more news analyses and covering all parts of the world. As for CNN credibility the sample considered it to be too biased with their American double standard.

They criticized that CNN provided little coverage of European countries and developing countries. They also pointed out that the main tone of CNN was

too sensational. While the “immediacy” and on the spot “presence” were what the respondents appreciated CNN most for. Some respondents said that the news offered by CNN were more digestible (Xi Mao 2003, p. 56).

However, participants viewed CNN as an immediate source of major events news citing incidents like Crash of World Trade Centre and the Gulf War where the channel pioneered in its coverage. Research concludes that major political events could arguably increase the interest of audiences in a medium or another.

Another media credibility research focused on elements such as interpersonal interactions and exposure level as factors determining credibility of different mediums. Kiouisis conducted a study that explored perceptions of different news media outlets (2001). A randomly selected sample of Texans filled out a survey to assess their attitudes toward three media channels: television, newspapers, and online news. Results showed that people are “generally sceptical of news from all three media channels, but rate newspapers with the highest credibility, followed by online news and televisions news, respectively” (Kiouisis 2001, p.381). The results concluded a negative relationship between interpersonal discussions and television news credibility and a marginal association between media frequency of use and public perceptions of credibility across television, newspapers and online outlets. The findings suggested people are sceptical of news presented on television, newspapers and online websites. (Kiouisis 2001).

El-Nawawy (2006) concluded that audiences’ awareness of source intention to persuade audience would negatively affect credibility of the source. Studying the attitude of college students towards American-funded Arabic media (*Radio Sawa and Alhurra Television*), El-Nawawy found that such media do not enhance public diplomacy in minds of Arab students but on the contrary had worsened the attitude towards America. The findings suggest “slightly positive correlation with perceived credibility of *Alhurra* but not with *Radio Sawa*” (El-Nawawy 2002, p.132). Moreover, the study could not verify a relationship between the frequency of media exposure and the perceived media credibility of the *Radio Sawa* and *Alhurra Television*. El-Nawawy attempted to establish a relationship between watching other Arab twenty-four-hour trans-border news channels and perception of credibility of *Alhurra* news, which revealed a negative credibility perception of

Alhurra news coverage when ‘compared’ to other news channels (p.131). In my thesis, *Alhurra* is presented as one of the three channels in the news analysis and credibility perception among the sample of Saudi audiences. The outcome in the results chapter will reveal to what extent these findings agree with what is presented in my study. This is considered to be an important aspect researched in literature and therefore, I am attempting to explore it further in this thesis.

Contrary to the findings of El-Nawawy’s research on *Alhurra* Television and *Radio Sawa* (2006), a study that was conducted in UAE found that American government was effective in reaching its objectives in the Muslim World through the media channels (Christie and Clark, 2011)²⁷. The study employed the uses and gratification media theory as well as the credibility perception; trying to investigate and compare the level of trust and credibility of a nationally representative sample of the 15 to 34 year old population in United Arab Emirates toward *Alhurra* Television. The credibility was measured based on elements of accuracy, completeness, knowledge, bias and trust. Christie and Clark concluded that the American government have been effective in “reaching some public opinion objectives” (2011, p. 367). The analysis of overall credibility shows the medium “to be relatively strong in all five dimensions of credibility examined” with the strength appearing in the dimensions of knowledge and accuracy (p. 367). The favourable views obtained from listeners of *Radio Sawa* could indicate the successful objective of the media project. However, it was revealed that *Radio Sawa* and *Alhurra* may not be as credible when compared to other sources of Arabic news television available in the region. Furthermore, the favourability of the communication tool does not reflect on the favourability given to the United States which is interpreted as not being effective in “winning hearts and minds in the way desired” (Christie and Clark 2011, p. 369).

Ayish (2004) defined credibility of news stations through establishing connections between “exposure patterns” during a crisis time (the Anglo- American invasion of Iraq) and the credibility perception of the mass media. He attempted to find out the most credible source according to the sample employed to draw

²⁷ The Christie and Clark’s study (2011) was supported by a ‘grant from the Public Relations Society of American Foundation and a grant from the University of Texas at Arlington’

information from about this war. Surveying credibility perception of media among university students from different Middle Eastern-countries backgrounds, Ayish (2004) observed that Western media as well as western “governments” were not thought of as credible by the sample in this study. According to Ayish’s argument, this ‘guilt-by-association’ trend goes back to the mid - 1960s when Voice of America (VOA) Radio were received suspiciously by Arab audiences who considered this service to function as a propaganda device to transmit views from the “hostile foreign government”. Ayish (2004) concluded in his work that television is by large the first credible source, followed by newspapers and to a less extent online media. Findings supported previous studies of having a positive relation between amounts of time spent enjoying the certain mass medium and credibility perceptions. This is in a way is what my research is trying to find out while researching the credibility perception of the news.

Another study focusing on the 2003 Iraqi war was conducted by Choi, Watt, and Lynch in 2006, investigating the perception of the Internet as the most credible mass medium for information regarding this event. The work was based on the ‘hostile media effect’ meaning the process by which some news audiences, “when highly involved in an issue, tend to perceive balanced and neutral news coverage as biased against their point of view and judge the news content as less credible” (Choi *et al.* 2006, p. 215). According to Choi and associates, the concept of credibility has been defined in three interrelated ways: a) “message” (the perceived characteristics of news content) b) “source” (sender of the message) c) “media” (the perception of news channel’s believability (Chi *et al* 2006, p. 212). The study assumed vacillation in the attitude toward media based on the position of audiences regarding the war. “The Iraq War provided an ideal situation in which to probe the relationship between an issue-involved audience and their perceptions of credibility of different news media” (Choi *et al.* 2006, p.222). The sample participants were categorized according to their position from the war into: opponents, neutrals, and supporters. Opponents of war showed significant difference in the perception of the Internet as the trusted and credible media source that provided diverse points of views in accordance with their stance (Choi *et al.*, 2006). Therefore the results viewed the Internet as an alternative source for those seeking different viewpoints than the salience ones appearing in traditional mass media. Diversity in the sources

of information was the main credibility criterion in case of the Internet; while television was perceived as the source of available live visual images.

Choi and associates (2006) argued that whenever a salient issue creates a high split among audiences, news credibility is “both a subjective perception by audiences and a function of their cognitive processing mechanisms” (p. 223). The study demonstrated evidence that hostile media effect ‘continues to hold even when the sizes of partisan groups differ and when the issue at stake engages general news audiences (p. 223). The study shed light at the journalistic practices that is challenged in the area of “balance reporting” when there are many available media outlets for audiences to receive information from.

The findings of this study suggest that news producers cannot strike a balanced stance simply by steering a median or centrist course. For many salient news topics, the emerging relative sizes of opposing and supporting audiences may differ, and this degree of difference may accelerate the so – called ‘spiral of silence’ effect on public opinion for whichever side has the smaller audience (Choi *et al.* 2006, p. 224).

One of the biggest reasons traditional news media has lost credibility with viewers of news is the fact that a handful of wealthy elites own the majority of media channels. Ashley, Poepsel, and Willis (2010) conducted a study exploring the relationship between awareness of media ownership and the perceived credibility of the medium with regard to print news (p.37). The sample was made up of students that were “randomly exposed to an article on the pros and cons of media ownership or poetry” (Ashley *et al.*, 2010, p.37). Students read and analysed four news stories, analysing each using the Gaziano and McGrath credibility scale (Ashley *et al.*, 2010, p.37). The results showed “significant differences in judgments of general accuracy and superficiality” (Ashley, Poepsel and Willis 2010, p.37). The researchers concluded that the awareness of media ownership resulted in the increase in ‘critical responses to news media’ (Ashley, Poepsel and Willis 2010, p. 37). The results might also help explain why a number of studies show a loss of credibility in traditional news media as consolidation of ownership continues.

Mitu (2010) argued that a variety of factors influence news reception in

individuals, a primarily subjective experience. Interpreting news and news media credibility is a complex cognitive and affective process, wherein viewers must rely on previous knowledge of an issue to ‘construct an interpretation’ of a news item (p.131). Interpreting the news by news consumers is a process that is dependent upon ‘person-specific and ‘issue-specific’ factors (Mitu 2010, p. 131).

The lack of any credibility research in a developing country like Bangladesh prompted Andaleeb, Rahman, Rajeb, Akter and Gulshan (2012) to focus on this goal in a country that is witnessing an increase in the number of television stations appearing on air. The research found that the main tendency of audience is to judge television news as credible (Andaleeb *et al.* 2012, p. 83).

Researchers set five factors that they suggested could affect credibility perception of news television²⁸. These factors were shown to have significant and similar trend in the measurement of credibility. Nevertheless, the independent variable (perceived independence of television channels) was the lowest of the five factors, suggesting the link between ownership of the media – “generally owned by prominent political groups or commercial personalities” – and the credibility perception of the source (Andaleeb *et al.* 2012, p. 83).

David Geary (2005) researched the decline of news media credibility, finding that news media credibility. Elsassser (2010) supported Geary’s finding, maintaining that 29 per cent of respondents, in a study conducted by Pew Research Centre, “say that news organizations get the facts right, while 63 per cent say that news stories are not exact” (p. 5).

One explanation for this decline of public confidence in news media is the trend of dissatisfaction with almost all institutions in the United States. Others say the decline in news media credibility stems from consolidation of media ownership and wealthy elites’ control of the news media. Others have found scepticism among news media viewers increases greatly when news media frames political candidates in an election race in terms of a horse race, even though candidates in the 2000

²⁸ The five factors used in the study as credibility measures were: independence of the medium, social responsibility, professionalism, impartiality and objectivity, quality of news

election were found to frame the contest as a horserace more than the news media in their own media efforts (Bucy and D'Angelo 2004, p. 13).

3.5 Conclusion

To wrap up this chapter I attempt to review key issues that presented throughout the entire study. Beginning with the globalisation as the umbrella under which all trends and concepts of modern international communications lie, this chapter pays closer look at the debates related to the issue in addition to many other concepts that stems from the idea of globalised media, such as media 'counterflow' and cosmopolitanism. It described the continuous transformation in the media and audiences as a result of the 'shrinking' and 'interconnected' world we are living in.

In order to study the media content during presidential election, the research resorted to the framing approach, thus, the review of literature on framing and the studies that adopted the same methodology. Of the main points that stood out while reviewing the framing literature was that framing as a paradigm received a great deal of criticism. Entman referred to it as the "fractured paradigm" and other misrepresented framing theory as an extensive of agenda-setting. Regardless of the critic, the framing approach is continuously and extensively used in the media, highlighting the way media channels operate and sometimes linking the concept of framing to other notions such as bias and objective media practices.

Several theories were presented to explain the extensive use of framing in news media stories. Entman (2004) viewed framing as a way of presenting news in a culturally congruent format helping audiences to relate to what is being broadcasted and this aspect is what gives the media the powerful effect on audiences. However, despite the social and political forces that may affect the structure and framing of the news, the journalist largely will conform to dominant professional journalistic ideology that is based on Anglo - American model of objective journalism (Gan *et al.* 2005; Porto 2001; Massey 2000).

As mentioned by several scholars, the powerful effect of media is in telling audiences how and what to think about; "the ability to provide and/or activate

information, thereby shaping individual frames” (Twekbury *et al.* 2000, p. 805). These individual frames that manifest the personal interpretation of the news are the degree to which media channels are being successful in conveying the messages to audiences. If media frame event in a certain way, audience will accept the reading offered by the media and it will be their own individual frame. However, this will affect the credibility of the medium in case the audiences decided to reject the media messages and frames (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). In other words, how content - credible audiences perceive certain media or channel will determine how they will interact with the message it provides. If the medium is considered biased or promoting certain dubious agendas, people will refuse to accept the messages from that medium and may discard it as an information source all together.

However, despite using framing analysis to examine media events such as terrorism and economical aspects of the news; it is considered the preferred method when analysing election news. The framing categories took different names and types, but one frame is widely used and notoriously known, the ‘horse-race’ frame that has proved to be popular among media editors during election campaigns. Scholars against the media extensive employment of the horse-race in media coverage think this frame does not deliver the true picture of event; in fact would negatively affect the media coverage; and news would not be driven by objectivity journalism practices (Gan *et al.* 2005; Patterson 2005).

Other observations that were drawn from reviewing the previous work on news framing especially while discussing events that are happening on a worldwide scale are; firstly, the use of regional frame; which depicts the possible outcomes of certain event with regard to that specific nation or country. This was observed in the work of Gan *et al.* 2005; Porto 2001) where global event – the American presidential elections – was put into a regional perspective by the news media channels studied in these researches. The second observation was the tendency of journalists to adopt the US/Western model – or as some refers to as Anglo-American journalistic model – in covering news events where they rely mainly on copying how American media frame their news; this is highly detectable in the extensive use of the horse-race frame by many transborder channel while covering

several American presidential elections (Cruikshank 2009; Gan *et al.* 20005; Porto 2001).

The framing literature review tackles the framing of American presidential election in specific as it is studied across great number of research papers. Two interesting studies by Cruikshank (2009) and Eargle *et al.*, (2008) concluded the media coverage of this election in particular highly celebrated the racial/ethnic minorities and gender discourse.

In my study there will be an examination of the differences in reporting and framing three Arab news channels used attempting to relate this to the ideology and political agenda each channel has. There will also be a link between the media news framing analysis and audience/ individual framing, which is according to Iyengar (1991) will be a relationship between the two types of frames depending on the salience of the issue.

The credibility perception of the media is another empirical side of this thesis hence the look at different credibility measurements and related studies to draw some guidelines for the present work. I argue that media framing is indirectly affecting the credibility perception in the minds of audiences. However, I stress that the more the event is of regional nature to the audiences the more the issue of media credibility becomes vivid in the minds of the people. People might rate the credibility of the medium based on their preconceived ideas regarding a certain medium; but when it comes to coverage and framing of certain Middle Eastern events, they will be more vigilant with regard to media credibility.

Several studies measuring credibility perception of news media conclude the positive relationship between the awareness of the source intentions, interests and ideologies and the rating of credibility given by the people (Hovlans *et al.*, 1963; Kiouisis 2001; Ayish 2004; El-Nawawy 2006; Ashley *et al.*, 2010). Credibility is also affected by level of exposure (Scheweiger 2000; Ayish 2004; Mehrabi *et al.*, 2009). Other factors such as educational level and interpersonal discussions negatively affect the credibility perception of the media resulting in people being more sceptical (Kiouisis 2001).

The present study draws from past research findings concerning measurements of credibility perception and its relation to concept such as reliance and exposure levels. Measuring credibility and trust towards Arab trans-border news channels, the study asked to evaluate the trust and satisfaction with what media in the Middle East are presenting. Moving away from credibility, the audience study attempts to measure the degree of interest in the event of American presidential election and what framing audiences acquire (referred to as individual frames) from watching the event on various news outlets. One of the aims of this thesis is to try to establish a link between media framing of the 2008 American presidential election and individual frames people have about the event; to investigate to what extent the two types of frames are corresponding.

The next chapter highlights the main methodologies used in this thesis and the questions that the study is attempting to answer.

Chapter 4 - METHODOLOGY

4.1 Study Background

Focusing on trans-border news broadcasts, this study examines the way in which several presidential election intervals of the 2008 campaign and candidates are represented and discussed. Primarily I aim to combine a framing news analysis with a study of audience news credibility perception. In other words, my central aim is to shed light on the frames which are potentially embedded within people's minds regarding the global event of the 2008 American presidential election as well as the frames presented in news channels selected in this research.

This is a study about television news coverage of the 2008 American presidential election and how this coverage relates to audience understanding, beliefs and credibility perception. In producing this study the intention was to highlight the main frames used by Arabic- broadcasting news channels and examine the role of the mass media in the construction of audience knowledge. Therefore, the thesis employs predefined frames in the part investigating the news coverage of the 2008 American presidential election and a questionnaire and focus groups methodology to study the audience credibility perception during this event.

This study was originally inspired by the work of Philo and Berry – part of the Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG) - in *Bad News from Israel* (2004). Their study demonstrated the power media has in influencing public perception through their use of textual analysis and audience studies. The Glasgow University Media Group continued the work on Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a new event added to the old analysis, which is the Israeli attack on Gaza covering two months of events (December 2008- January 2009). In *More Bad News from Israel* (2011) and *Bad News from Israel* (2004) the two researchers reported a favourable inclination towards the Israeli side in the media coverage in the UK. “It can be seen that journalists who do try to feature both sides of the conflict are facing something of an uphill task. There is less to fear in criticising the Palestinians, but to criticise Israel can create major problems” (Philo and Berry 2011, p. 2).

However, my study has shifted in focus to include a framing analysis as opposed to only investigating the discourse that appeared on different ideological news channels. Unlike the GUMG, the present work will not look at bias as a pivotal point for comparison, but at frames used differently by different ideological news broadcasts. The combined analyses in studying the news content and audience perception was presented in the work of Philo and Berry as they saw shortcomings in reporting one side in the analysis - because research which is based only on content analysis leaves the researchers in the position of simply speculating about the impact on audiences in terms of news and media channels.

Researching news content in framing terms and audiences' media credibility perception go hand in hand with the two framing concepts that were identified by several researchers: the media frames and individual frames. Scholars suggested that frames serve both as "devices embedded in political discourse", which resonates with the concept of media frames, and as an "internal structure of the mind", which is equivalent to individual/audience frames (Scheufele 1999, p. 106).

This thesis has two empirical parts: the news framing analysis and the audience media credibility perception. For the news analysis, the work will focus on the news textual content trying to allocate it to the corresponding predefined frames. As Philo and Berry (2004) proposed that media play a role in shaping the reality of a certain event in accordance ideology and history.

Ideas are linked to interests and these competing interests will seek to explain the world in ways which justify their own position. So ideology (by which we mean an interest-linked perspective) and the struggle for validation go hand in hand (Philo and Berry 2004, p. 95).

Part of the thesis focuses on the role of the mass media in these ideological debates, and how the reporting of events can be depicted by different ways of understanding which are related to perspectives and interests. The structure of a news report is controlled by several factors such as authority, relevance and proximity (Philo and Berry 2004, p. 96).

Philo and Berry (2004) have studied the coverage of television news of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and how this coverage was related to audience understanding and interest. The news analysis looked for bias in the coverage and the different ways in

which events were explained by ideologically different television news channels using a developed content analysis method known as *Thematic Analysis*. The analysis devised areas of news coverage which contributed to the qualitative assessment of the relative prominence. News headlines and interviews were analysed in order to underpin how they shape the understanding of the conflict as well as the series of events, and how actions and motives of the parties involved in the conflict were presented.

As mentioned earlier, the work of Philo and Berry in *Bad News from Israel* inspired the main premise of this research. However, the framework of the current study uses news framing analysis for the news analysis of the 2008 American presidential election and the credibility perception for the audience section. I argue that areas of coverage used as titles for the thematic analysis in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are similar to using predefined frames that are used to understand the way in which Arabic news channels covered the American election. Similarly, the audience analysis in my thesis is trying to go beyond establishing a connection between the ways audiences are framing the event and therefore shows more interest in measuring the news credibility perception in order to create a more varied side to the audience study.

The news framing analysis deals with three trans-border news channels broadcasting in Arabic with notable differences in news coverage and arguably separate agendas. The Qatar-based leading satellite news channel *Aljazeera* is considered to be the most credible and trusted news source for the majority of people in the Middle East (Allied Media Corp, 2007). The *Alarabiya* News Channel is privately owned by Saudi businessmen and transmits from Dubai with a neutral tone regarding conflicting events. It has the highest viewing rates in Saudi Arabia according to a viewership survey released in 2006 by IPSOS Stat and is deemed the most trustworthy among Saudi viewers (Arab Advisory Group, 2007). The American-funded *Alhurra* is a satellite channel broadcasting from Washington D.C. as a model for the many foreign media channels transmitting news to Middle East audiences in Arabic language, such as *France 24*, *Russia Today*, and *Deutsche Welle* (See chapter two for a more detailed account of these three Arabic trans-border news channels).

This chapter will start by identifying the general research questions and sub-questions that this study is trying to find answers for. The next part will identify the different

methodologies used to examine news frames and audience perception, followed by description of the news intervals and audience samples.

4.2 Research Question

As noted earlier, the main target of this study is to investigate the differences in reporting of Arabic news channels and perception of frames and credibility among a sample audience. Similar studies with the same target/aim and nature have focussed on troubled areas of the world and how international mass media cover the stories. In this study the focus is reversed; a purely major American political event will be read and analysed through the Arab media and audiences.

This study thus incorporates both sides of the media process; the media transmission and framing of messages to audiences in a certain light and the evaluation of these framed messages and the designated media outlets by viewers. Thus, the focus of the study is to investigate the type of messages the news media presented during the period of the 2008 American presidential election and how people understand the media in terms of exposure level, individual frames and credibility perception. Three main research questions are addressed in this study:

RQ1: How do ideologically-different news channels vary in their coverage of the 2008 American presidential election *vis-à-vis* the frames they deploy?

RQ2: How do mass media exposure patterns during the 2008 American presidential election relate to audiences' credibility perceptions?

RQ3: How does the concept of individual framing of a media source relate to the media framing?

Based on the results of previous media research, the connection between ideology and news framing has been noted (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Massey, 2000). It is likely, given the differences in agendas, that each of the three news channels in this study will emphasize different frames in their coverage of the 2008 American presidential election. Therefore, the main research focus is investigating the different frames employed by the three media news channels *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera*. On the other side, there is

also a probability that there will be similarity in the dominant frames among the three news channels during the coverage of the campaign events.

The audiences receiving news about the American presidential election will have their own interpretation of the event which is either influenced by the mass media frames or by their own knowledge and social interactions. If the mass media have influenced the individual frames of the audiences then this will demonstrate the great power the mass media have on the public. The effect of media coverage and framing on the audience can be manifested in the form of how viewers evaluate the credibility of the channel in terms of embracing the frames they are transmitting and the high levels of exposure to this particular medium for information and news.

As discussed in the literature review regarding the framing analysis of American presidential elections, there are a number of frames usually used to describe the election event. However, there is a great deal of literature that studied election campaigns and stated that the news emphasized the horse-race frame at the expense of other frames. Thus, researchers have criticized the heavy employment of the horse-race frame at the expense of other frames (Patterson, 2005). Patterson (2005) argued that the concentration of the news on the horse-race can negatively affect the coverage and journalistic objectivity of the news production process. Based on previous findings, my study could reach a similar conclusion that the horse-race frame is the most commonly used frame by the three news channels as Williams (2011) maintained the effect of globalisation on the journalistic style around the world prompting editors to follow the Anglo-American model of news reporting. A similar conclusion was reached by Gan and associates (2005) of 'news wave' in which media copy from each other.

As for the audience credibility perception part of the study, a questionnaire method and focus groups are used which focus on participants' consumption as opposed to their credibility perception of the news media in the study. The main question in this part of the study is how credibility relates to news exposure levels and to individual frames. The questions tackling the level of media exposure was formulated in a way to precisely measure exposure level as opposed to preference and credibility. The study assumes that when a news source is considered significantly credible, the level and time of exposure will increase significantly.

The main objective behind the inception of *Alhurra* television was to help explain various aspects of American foreign policy and to provide information about basic characteristics of American society that are important for Arab and Muslim audiences to know and understand (William 2004, p.154). This position of the channel is arguably regarded suspiciously by many Arabs due to the increasing dissatisfaction with the American presence in Iraq and its handling of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Consequently, there is a chance that the sample of viewers in this research will not perceive *Alhurra* News as a credible source of information due to the obvious American connection.

As the audience study was conducted before Election Day, there was an interest in knowing their views about the foreseeable future, outcome and effect on the region. This is asked via questions about expectations of the winner, the frame they have about the Arab mass media coverage in general and in particular regarding reporting on the 2008 American presidential election campaign and who is the candidate who will work best on behalf of the people in the Middle East. The assumption is that this event is of interest and is important to the audiences so they will form individual frames of the event, which might be/not, affected by what is presented on the news.

4.3 Research Methodology

4.3.1 News Framing Study

In order to present a comprehensive picture of the 2008 American presidential election as covered by the three news channels: *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera*; and to allow room for a comparison based on the texts and ideological differences, this study will look at the nature of frames used to present the developing event as well as the quantity of these frames.

After systematically developing a matrix of codes that each news story will fall into, these codes appear to resemble a framing analysis and some of the work on the codes was inspired by the criteria developed Gan *et al.* (2005) in their research on the coverage of the 2004 American presidential election (see Appendix One). Other frames are introduced in this study and therefore the codes are formulated based on my understanding of the

general framing theme. As the study's main focus is to document the differences in coverage among the three news channels, this framing analysis will provide a platform for this comparison to take place.

4.3.2 Credibility Perception Study: Audience Part

In this part of the study I attempt to provide and document insights into the perception of Arab news coverage and the public understanding of the mass media systems in Saudi Arabia, where the majority rely on television to be their primary source of news and information about the world (Arab Advisory Group, 2007). This study attempts to examine how audience belief, consumption and opinion are shaped or affected by the reporting of the mass media, how the audiences analyse the news, and how their beliefs have been shaped by the mass media.

The expansion of political content in Arabic on television and the Internet during the late 1990s and early 2000s was not matched by a corresponding volume of media-effect studies. This could be because of the same combination of official and informal constraints that restricted public opinion polling until the early 2000s. Trans-border television channels in the Arab region have had an impact on increased public awareness of international events. Such a professional balanced coverage was first seen on *Aljazeera*²⁹ when it was the first to interview Israeli officials which had never before occurred on any Arabic television and has now become a common practice.

There are two types of surveys: descriptive and analytical. Descriptive surveys seeks to obtain information about demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status, occupation, race or ethnicity, income and religion and to relate this information to opinions, beliefs, values, and behaviours of a group of people. Analytical questionnaires seek to find out why people behave the way they do. Analytical surveys attempt to determine if there are causal relationships between certain kinds of behaviour and various social and demographic characteristics of people (David and Sutton, 2011).

²⁹ *Aljazeera* stayed true to the channel slogan '*Aljazeera: presenting viewpoint and counterview point*'

In order to prepare an easy-to-comprehend questionnaire, there was a need to conduct a pilot study prior to the actual survey and focus groups. A total of ten questionnaires were used during the pilot stage and these helped in developing the question sequence and structure further. The two focus group samples were asked more open-ended questions to see what problems would arise. The purposive sample employed in the two focus groups, with a total of ten participants, was selected on the basis of television news consumption, age over thirty years old, education level, and employment status. They can all be classified as upper middle class.

A total of 50 face-to-face questionnaires were completed. This empirical work cannot be reliably generalised to the population as they lack external validity. The results collected provide exploratory information that can produce useful data. Participants were highly educated (university level) and worked in diverse sectors; government, management, academics, professionals and business owners. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire on their news consumption, television viewing habits, perception of events and credibility rating of the news channels in this study. The field work and data gathering were conducted in September 2008 following the announcement of the two official candidates (Barak Obama representing the Democrats and John McCain representing the Conservative Party) in the American presidential election (see Appendix Three for the questionnaire).

There are challenges when conducting audience research studies in the Arab World. This could be potent when discussing politically-sensitive topics and often faced by reluctance on the part of participants. Therefore, a convenience sample is the most appropriate for such studies (El-Nawawy, 2006, p.128). The difficulty of the situation was looked at from a different perspective:

Audience research in the Arab countries of the Middle East is still in its infancy, impeded by historically authoritarian governments whose strict control and distrust of mobilizing effects of mass media have hampered the development of indigenous approaches to communications research in general and audience research in particular. Arab communication research has been blocked by inadequate funding and insufficient resources in universities employing overworked, undertrained, and unpaid faculty staff. Professional audience research has likewise been hampered by the lack of well-trained

researchers with experience in communications research techniques that meet international standards [...] in addition to the myriad permissions that a public survey must receive, there is a broadly interpreted law that prohibits the publication or distribution of material damaging to the reputation of the country (Amin 2008, p.71)

There was a shift as well in the audience stand. Holding the focus groups proved to be hard in Saudi Arabia due to the unwillingness of participants to share their personal political view, even when it is related to the media. It was also difficult to invite women in particular to gather in the residence of an unknown person (myself). I started with two focus groups which are part of the study presented and then resorted to the questionnaire technique as I sensed it would be more convenient and less time consuming for the participants. The typical disadvantage of focus groups is that participants may feel intimidated or overshadowed by the presence of other people and this was evident in the two focus groups I conducted.

4.4 The Content of the Study

4.4.1 News Selection during the 2008 American Presidential Election and 2009 Inauguration Ceremony

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the work in this thesis was inspired by the way in which Philo and Berry (2004, 2011) constructed their sample in *Bad News from Israel*. In this they sampled several time intervals (specific days and months) in order to document the thematic analysis work. In my study I refer to the CNN.Com website on Election 101 where the 2008 American presidential election event is classified as: 1) Primaries; 2) Party Conventions; and 3) Election Day and beyond (CNNPolitics.com).

The sampling process started with the last Primary in Montana and South Dakota in June 2008, followed by the Democratic Party's National Convention in August 2008, the Republican Party's National Convention in September 2008, Election Day in November 2008, and finally the Inauguration Ceremony in January 2009 (the election campaign intervals and number of news bulletins and roll-on news segments are indicated in Table 4.1 below).

A purposive sample of two nightly bulletins and one midday news - brief from each of the three satellite news channels, *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera* concerning the 2008 American presidential election events were selected for the study. Each individual news story is treated as a unit of analysis. My central aim is to explore the type of coverage trans-border mass media broadcasting in Arabic dedicated to this major event and to document any differences across a sample of three widely viewed Arabic news channels³⁰. However, taking into account the news style, the funding and political affiliation of each of these three trans-border channels, I am expecting that the results of this study will reveal differences in coverage in terms of the themes and frames used.

After watching the recorded news, translating them and transcribe the content, I identified a number of reoccurring themes that election coverage was based on. These included the following frames: *Horse-race*, *Human interest*, *Issues and Policies*, *Conflict*, *Historic Victory* and *Regional*. Some of these frames are selected from previous research work on framing election campaigns such as *Conflict*, *Horse-race*, *Human Interest and Issues* and *Policies*. I sensed the need to include *Historic Victory* after watching the news on Election Day and Inaugural Ceremony as reporters were inclined to frame the event in this light. The *Regional Frame* is the one used by many research studies that have previously studied international events as it appears in the national mass media.

To achieve a comprehensive overview of the frames, the prime focus was on the news headline and introduction passage read by the anchors. Other frames emerging from within the news reports and interviews were included when they exceeded two lines in the transcribed news reports. I decided not to overload the results of the thesis with numerous frames as some will not appear substantial if not discussed for long enough within the news segment. I assume after looking at news transcripts that if the frame is given two lines or more (20-25 words) that this is reasonable to count it as a frame.

In the coding of the election articles, both the headlines and the news introduction are taken as the basic units of analysis and comprise the dominant frames. "Headlines are also included because they serve as initial cues favouring a particular interpretation by

³⁰ In 2009, a survey showed that these three channels were the most viewed and provided credible news with *Aljazeera* receiving 95 per cent in vote, *Alarabiya* 93per cent and *Alhurra* 87per cent. The poll was conducted on a sample of 77 critics from different Arab countries

invoking salient concepts in the minds of the readers” (Gan *et al.*, 2005, p.451). Table 4.1 summarizes the events, dates and recording periods, as well as the number of American presidential campaign stories featured on *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera* based on the sample of news bulletins recorded for the purpose of this research.

Table 4.1 - Election campaign news selection

Campaign Event	Recording dates	Number of election stories on		
		<i>Alarabiya</i>	<i>Alhurra</i>	<i>Aljazeera</i>
Last Primaries	1-10 June,08	5	5	5
Democratic National Convention	22-28 August, 08	18	13	15
Republican National Convention	29 Aug- 8 Sept, 08	4	6	4
Election Day	3-12 October, 08	14	15	15
Inaugural Ceremony	16- 25 January,09	2	2	4
Total		43	41	43

The ‘number of stories’ column in the above table indicates the stories about the election campaign which were selected from a total of 132 news broadcasts taped (bulletins and roll-on news) per channel over a ten day period during the last Primary, 17 days over the two Parties’ Conventions (second interval in the campaign recording period), ten days around Election Day and ten days around the Inaugural Ceremony in January 2009. However, not every day and each news bulletin or news-brief included news about the 2008 American presidential election and therefore these were not included in the framing count and the analysis of the news. All news broadcasts that included news about the 2008 American presidential election developments are coded in full. For each campaign sample I decided to focus on ten days of recordings; two days before the event day and a few days after to document the aftermath. It is worth noting that the coverage of the Election Day and the Inaugural Ceremony continued nonstop (live coverage with no beginning or ending as in traditional news bulletins) which means that there was no other events broadcasted during the live events, and news coverage continued without the restraint of a regular news schedule. On Inaugural Day, the number of stories is based on the live coverage that took place over a two hour period and the mentioning of the event results in other news broadcasts later during the day.

4.4.2 Framing Categories

The news framing analysis is based on reviews of previous studies which have no definitive boundaries on how frames should be applied when studying certain events or mass media coverage. Several frames have been identified in previous election studies. These pre-existing frames can be limiting when applied to Arab trans-border channels content, as the use of a conflict frame, for example cannot be detected as this is rarely used by the Arab media so some frames are underused in the context of this study.

When recording news frames for this thesis, each story is analysed for the presence of different frames. Each of these stories falls into one of the broader subject frames that were identified as follows:

- *The Conflict Frame*. This is generally how political news is commonly presented as stated in the work of Schuck *et al.* (2010). It emphasizes the differences between parties and individuals. Such news commonly reflects the disagreement between parties by focusing on their views towards issues or the policies each embraces. Some studies referred to this frame as ‘strategy frame’. Despite previous research suggesting the ability of this frame to ‘mobilize audiences’, Vliegenthart and associates (2008) concluded that it can negatively affect support for policies in European countries leading to confusion on the part of recipients of the news.
- *Horse-race frame*. This frame is a common frame that focuses on the development of the campaign as a race between the candidates based on the polls indication. The emphasis is on who is advancing and who is falling behind and therefore relies on polling numbers. Studies on the coverage of presidential elections in America have stressed how journalists rely heavily on the horse race frame to report campaigns (Patterson, 2005; Gan *et al.*, 2005). Patterson (2005) criticized the heavy use of the horse-race frame referring to this process as “crafting superficial images tied to candidates’ positions in the race” (p. 719). In this study, the frame is used to describe how each candidate is performing and moving during the campaign developments.

- *Human Interest*. Also referred to as the ‘personality frame.’ The tendency of the mass media to cover event from the human side of issues, building stories around political figures’ personal lives. The 2008 American presidential election involved many interesting personalities running for presidency, relating to gender (Hilary Clinton as the first female running for the Presidency), political stance towards the Arab region and ethnicity (Barak Obama as the first Black candidate to be nominated for President).
- *The Issue/Policy Frame*. This frame provides justification and background information in the implementation and undertaking of a certain policy. However, to ensure exclusivity of the categories, the consequences of American policies on the Middle East in specific will not be categorized under this frame but a regional perspective frame, which is discussed in detail later.

Beside the dominant frames that have been identified by many scholars in the field of political communication, I observed new frames emerging in the 2008 American presidential election and these were used by the mass media channels in this study.

- *Regional perspective frame*. It was observed that journalists in their coverage of global events tend to frame the news from the perspective of their own region (Porto 2001; Gan *et al.*, 2005). This frame stresses the impact on the region as a repercussion of external stimuli such as the American election, foreseeing how each candidate, and later on the president’s agenda, would affect the situation in the Middle East. The regional perspective frame gives the news a more local flavour, and makes it more accessible and comprehensible to Arab audiences. It represents what Entman (2004) referred to as the power of mass media framing that is witnessed in the process of adapting the news in a culturally congruent format.
- *Historical victory*. This frame in particular is not used in any previous election news framing research. This title emerges as a frame because of the outcome of Barak Obama, an African descendant, becoming the 44th President of the United States of America. Obama’s winning of presidency election was viewed as impossible and when it did happen, the framing was portrayed as a historical victory.

Because some subjects are more prominent in news stories than others, frames will be coded with prominence and emphasis within the news story. Some subsidiary frames may arise during a news segment, for instance, but unless present in two or more sentences they are not included. In order to reduce the ambiguity over the news frame categories, a series of questions inferred from the work undertaken by Gan *et al.* (2005) were modified accordingly to help in the coding process. Each frame comprises of four questions that aid in measuring the extent to which certain frames appear (see Appendix One).

The coding of *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera* was performed by the researcher. Prior to the actual coding, there was a pilot test using a random set of stories to test the applicability of the framing questions. The coding procedures were then refined after the pilot test to achieve greater clarity and reliability during the actual coding.

4.4.3 Audience Analysis Sample

In my study I am combining focus groups with questionnaire techniques. The initial intention was for me to conduct the entire audience study in a focus groups format, but this proved to be unsuccessful and time consuming. I sensed that some participants were unable to speak their minds freely, especially during personal political views about a future president and the effect he will have on the region. The ideal scenario was to gather ten participants in each focus group and lead a discussion on the mass media and the American presidential election. I tried inviting people to participate but was faced by refusals and negativity. I was asked about the political entity funding this study and the motives behind the audio recording of the discussions. On the day of the first group discussion only three people showed up and we had to cancel it. However, I was able to collect data from two focus groups and decided to continue the work in the form of questionnaires instead.

There were two focus groups conducted, each composed of five viewers. The focus of the group discussions was to document how interested a sample of Saudi viewers were in the American presidential elections and news in general.

The first focus group was composed of five male members and took place in August 2008. The group viewed a sample of news from the period of the Democratic National

Convention and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and discussed their general views about what was presented in the news. At this stage, the target of the discussion was an event that was presented on a DVD - the last primary held in June 2008 which contained Obama's speech before the AIPAC, in addition to the evaluation of individual news channels studied in the news analysis section of this thesis. The second group was a mixed-gender group with three females and two males (two couples and one single female) and they also watched the same sample of news.

As far as is possible, I selected participants for both the focus groups and questionnaire samples to be homogeneous in terms of education, profession and age, in other words people who would meet and speak with each other in the normal course of their lives.

The first group of participants were as follows: a doctor, business owner, lawyer, news caster, and public sector employee. The second group was composed of two married couples (an engineer and a school teacher), two university lecturers and a female newspaper journalist.

Participants in the questionnaire sample ranged from 30 to over 61 years old. The majority of the sample fell in the category of 41-50 years, 28 per cent (n= 14) were 30 years old, 18 per cent (n= 9) were between the ages of 31-40. Their professions varied: business owners, academics, professionals (engineers and physicians), managerial and financiers, and some other jobs such as media professionals and artists. They were all university graduates and the sample was equally divided between men and women. The following tables (4.2, 4.3 and 4.4) illustrate the demographic characteristics of the questionnaire participants.

Table 4.2 – Questionnaire Participants age groups

Age Bracket	Male	Female
30 or under	-	-
31-35	5	9
36-40	5	4
41-45	12	6
46-49	2	3
50 or above	1	3
Total	25	25

Table 4.3 - Questionnaire Participants' professions

Profession	Male	Female
Engineers	9	-
Managers	5	3
Business executives	5	-
University professors	2	1
Financier	1	-
Physician	1	2
Government clerk	1	2
Customer services	1	2
Teacher	-	7
Human Resources	-	1
Private business owners	-	5
Artist	-	1
TV presenter	-	1
Total	25	25

Table 4.4 - Questionnaire Participants' educational background

Education	Male	Female
High School	-	-
University degree	18	22
Graduate degree	7	3
Total	25	25

4.4.4 Questionnaire Outline

The survey utilized a paper questionnaire which included closed and opened-end questions. The open-ended questions yielded more detailed information regarding perceptions of transnational news channels, news values, and their assessment and interest in the American presidential election. The face-to-face questionnaire interview was devised in English but translated by myself into Arabic. Two moderators, a male and a female, were recruited to also contact participants in Saudi Arabia as well as completing this task myself. There are several reasons for the use of moderators. Firstly, as I had read about how hard it is to conduct surveys in the Middle East (Amin, 2008) I did not want to face any challenges or waste time, therefore I decided to enlist the help of two moderators who work for a marketing research company (PARC Jeddah) in a private capacity as through their posts they hold what is known as a license to conduct such research in Saudi Arabia. Another reason for the use of a male moderator is mainly to contact male participants from a variety of professions. The female moderator's help was needed to facilitate the process and to vary the participants' backgrounds and professions. The help of moderators was enlisted as I did not want to limit the sample to people I work with or friends and family as that might bias the results. I personally conducted five pilot surveys as well as nine questionnaires out of a total of 50.

The questionnaire is composed of four parts (see Appendix Three). In the first part, participants were invited to disclose their news consumption habits, and were asked about the amount of time spent using different types of media daily, their first and second source of news, and time spent watching television news in specific. There is a question about the proximity and importance of news stories depending on geographical and national factors and also a question on the most trustworthy television news channel.

The second part of the questionnaire focuses on the perception of news credibility which is one of the main focuses of the study, the performance of television in the Arabic world and a discussion about credibility. Respondents were asked to rate credibility based on a scale adopted from the Gaziano and McGrath (1985) credibility measure, in which some elements had been modified to suit the setting of the study. This scale is a multidimensional measure composed of 12 items. The credibility questions start with the general Arabic news channels performance, then move to the three news channels selected for this study; *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera*. The perception of media credibility is measured according to a five-point Likert scale ranging from: (5) strongly agree, (4) agree, (3) neutral, (2) disagree, and (1) strongly disagree. The measurements/items in the scale are based on fairness, bias, completeness, accuracy, respect of privacy, watch for people interests, concern for community, separation of fact and opinion, trustworthy, factual with sources around the world, professionalism and training levels, and covers all sides of story. Respondents were asked 'How would you rate this channel's credibility?' scores for the 12 measures of credibility are then combined into an index for each news channel which is the summated mean.

In this part of the questionnaire news reliance as another independent variable from the first part of the questionnaire is discussed. This was measured by the simple statements of: I rely on (the selected media) to get news. In the work of Mingxin (2006) reliance was measured using the following statement: on average how long do you not use media, thus you may feel something missing from your everyday life? The responses ranged from "never had the feeling", "6-7 days", "4-5 days", "2-3 days", "1 day", indicating the reliance on media gradually increases. The same question is used in this questionnaire to measure reliance.

The third part of the questionnaire is related to news about the 2008 American presidential elections, candidates, and Arab mass media performance with regards to this event and the impact it might have on Saudi Arabia. The main question in this part is the frame participants have in mind about the American presidential election as portrayed in the Arab news media. The question asked was as follows: how do you describe (the image you have) the current American presidential election as you watch it on Arabic news channels in a few words?

The last part of the questionnaire is demographical and gives personal data for the participants, e.g. profession, age and education (See Appendix 3).

4.5 Limitations of the Study

As with any research method there are reported drawbacks when using the content analysis methodology. Determining a representative sample is an obstacle in presenting results which can lead to observer bias in the choice of texts to be analysed. This study employed a systematic sampling procedure, in which three news segments were chosen daily from each of the three news channels according to the assigned campaign intervals. Nevertheless, the study is not making any claims about the ability to generalise the results beyond the specific event studied, the 2008 American presidential election, and the news sampling periods.

Determining measurable units within the sample is another obstacle when employing framing analysis methodology. This was identified as each news story was considered to be a unit of analysis. The dominant frames were chosen based on the news titles, and the general frames used within the news story was determined based on the length of presentation, with each frame having to be at least two sentences long.

4.6 Chapter Summary

This is a study about television news coverage of the 2008 American presidential election and how this coverage relates to audience understanding, beliefs and credibility perceptions of different news mediums. The research is based on two methodological approaches, firstly, a framing analysis of the news broadcast over the duration of the 2008 American presidential election and the 2009 Inaugural ceremony, and secondly, an audience questionnaire and focus groups methodologies are employed to measure the credibility perception of the news media performance and the event in general.

In order to justify the use of the two approaches and the combination of news framing analysis with audience credibility perception, I argue that both approaches go hand in

hand with the two framing concepts: media framing and individual framing. It is also believed that the way in which news channels frame events and personality is related to the evaluation and credibility perception people give to these mass media outlets.

The main focus of the study is to document the differences in coverage by comparing the dominant frames employed by three popular news channels in the Middle East, *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera*, and to simultaneously highlight the main individual frames a sample of viewers have for the 2008 American presidential election as covered by the media. The study involves the measurement of the credibility of the three news channels and the mass media in general, along with other independent variable such as reliance and exposure level.

In this chapter I identified the news sample and the audience sample, and the way in which data was collected to generate framing categories and questionnaire sections.

The following chapter will describe the results and analysis of the findings in order to answer the research questions presented in this section of the dissertation.

Chapter 5 - NEWS ANALYSIS FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The focus of this thesis is to examine and analyse the type of message presented by the news media during the 2008 American presidential election and in particular to note how ideologically different news channels in the Middle East vary in their coverage.

This thesis poses a set of issues to be explored. Williams (2011) suggested that the news media unconsciously promote one particular interpretation of events amongst its audiences and this is referred to as the adoption of an Anglo-American model of journalism by media organizations throughout the world. This assertion will be examined in relation to the findings of this study. Another issue is the fact that despite the Western emphasis on the coverage of trans-border channels around the world, they do not obscure national and cultural identity. In other words, how do they present a global event with a domestic/regional twist?

The stated focus of this part of the thesis is to examine the frames used by television news channels broadcasting in Arabic language to identify any differences in coverage stemming from different ideological stands. Moreover, what are the similarities in frames used, if any, between Arab trans-border news channels and their Anglo-American media equivalents? Is the coverage similar in style to the Anglo-American media model or has the Arab media acquired a character of its own and does it exhibit a regional dimension reflecting the political interests and cultural boundaries, ideologies and beliefs of Arab audiences? By using as an illustration the 2008 American presidential election it is assumed that there would be a clear distinction between the Anglo-American style of the American presentation of the event and its subsequent interpretation by the three news channels, *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera*; with their differing styles and political perspectives.

For comparison purposes, the *Project for Excellence in Journalism* (Pew Research Centre in Washington DC) and the *Princeton Survey Research Associates* (1998) developed a pilot study to identify various narrative story-telling frames employed in presenting the news in the United States of America. To discover whether the news media

in the Middle East employ the same model it would be helpful to note how the various news frames are employed.

5.1.1 The American Model

The Project for Excellence in Journalism (Pew Research Centre in Washington DC) and the *Princeton Survey Research Associates* (1998) found that the three frames that might be deemed combative (horse-race, conflict and revealing wrong-doing or injustice) accounted for 35 per cent of all lead stories (against their overall representation as 31 per cent of all stories). The three explanatory frames (history, process and trends) they found were placed as lead stories only eight per cent of the time and represented 13 per cent of all stories. Stories built around personalities amounted to only 7 per cent. The project concluded that stories framed around competitiveness were placed in such a way as to convey greater news value. Stories that are exploring policy amounted to only eight per cent of stories and tended to be placed lower on the front page (10 per cent versus 9 per cent generally). The project observed that building stories around conflict, winners and losers and revealing either injustice or irony has become the most common way of framing the news in the United States.

5.1.2 Framing Analysis

This chapter will aim to examine the presence of any differences in reporting and frames used by the three trans-border channels, *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera*, as well as to establish relationships between the amount of coverage, the tone of presentation and the prevalent news frames employed and the news value attributed to stories and the characteristics of the news channels; and attempt to justify the arguments presented in the previous research chapters. It deals with the news analysis of the 2008 American presidential election and the inaugural ceremony that took place in January 2009.

By analysing the topics or 'story subjects' framed and the 'news sources' quoted in news stories, the differences between television news channels can be identified and mapped in order to reveal which frames are reported most frequently with regard to the case study event, and which news sources received the most coverage and how they were used. The results could be misleading due to coding errors or misjudgement on the part of the researcher as to where each story belongs or what it means, and the systematic way of recording news could interfere with the overall sum of frames. To minimize the error

factor, each story frame was measured according to the presence or absence of four questions describing each frame (See Appendix 1)³¹

This chapter will start by giving a detailed account of the news coverage of the 2008 American presidential election during the four different sample periods – the last primary, the two parties’ conventions, Election Day and the Inaugural Ceremony in January 2009. The study will proceed to highlight the main frames used during the news narrative and present quantitative and qualitative reports of the frames featured on the three news broadcasts, identifying the dominant frames within the overall collective frames and comparing the differences in reporting based on the frames used³². In the final section, there is an examination of the way the issue of ethnicity appeared in the news during the election campaign in relation to Barack Obama, then hopeful of becoming the 44th President of the United States of America, before the chapter closes with a summary of the findings and conclusions in respect to the analysis of news framing.

5.2 News Samples: Overview

5.2.1 First Sample: Last Primary

The study of the news coverage starts with a sample of news segments that were broadcast during the last primary in South Dakota and Montana. This is a particularly interesting time for Arab news, as it also included the presence of party candidates before the American Israeli Public Affair Committee (AIPAC) in which they declared their solidarity and support for Israel. Coverage of the AIPAC on the three news channels under analysis will be further explored to help highlight ideological perspectives and news practice differences.

³¹ Adopted from the study conducted by Gan, Faith; Joo Leng Teo and Benjamin H. Detenber. 2005. Framing the Battle for the White House: A Comparison of Two National Newspapers’ Coverage of the 2000 United States Presidential Election. *Gazette: the International Journal for Communication Studies* 67(5): 441-467

³² I found similarities in the coverage of the three news channels therefore decided to highlight the news content as election intervals and not as news channel presentations. I found it easier to spot differences in coverage between the news channels.

The news sample included news recordings from the 1st to the 10th of June 2008, with three news segments daily per channel. Each news story on the election is treated as a unit of analysis, including the headline, introduction read by newscasters followed by the news report (whether a live feed accompanied by a correspondent or recorded footage from news agencies) and/or interviews with political experts, politicians or correspondents.

The News: around this period, Barack Obama appeared to secure enough delegates and succeed to be nominated as the Democratic Party candidate to run for President of the US. The news portrayed these events under a horse-race theme, supplying results and predictions of who would be the Democratic nominee. Features like ethnicity (Obama) and gender (Hillary Clinton) are among the dominant themes at this stage. During the early days of this period, news bulletins showed contradictory stories ranging between sources reporting on Clinton's withdrawal from the race, followed by total confirmation that Senator Clinton was still among the presidential candidates.

To demonstrate the way each channel employed the horse-race frame during this stage, here are several examples: *Alarabiya* labels this interval of events as "The Democratic Race," *Aljazeera* "The Final Miles; Clinton vs. Obama," while *Alhurra* portrayed it in a neutral general tone "American Presidential Election." The tone of the titles, in my opinion, also has an impact on the content of the news bulletins. *Alarabiya* hosted an extensive interview and a number of reports talking about the prospects and potential scenario for Clinton's upcoming strategy:

"It is going to be unrealistic to believe that Senator Clinton will be able to change the positions of super delegates by August. The wise move she could have is to withhold her campaign and wait till the convention month in hope that some sort of scandal or mistake that Mr Obama can commit. If she doesn't quit now, we are going to witness what's called the Armageddon scenario for the Democratic Party." (Peter Finn, CEO Finn Media Corporation. Political media expert appearing on evening news report for *Alarabiya* 03/06/ 2008)

Another studio analysis on the *Alarabiya* news channel focussed on the possible chance that Clinton would be appointed Vice President, titling this as the end of the road to the first American female nominated president and the beginning of a rein of the first

Black person to be president. *Alhurra* also debated the possibility of Clinton being selected as Vice President to restore unity within the Democratic Party.

The horse-race frame at this stage of the election was the dominant frame, and was highlighted between Hilary Clinton and Barack Obama, with McCain not yet featuring. However, Hilary Clinton was featured on both *Alarabiya* and *Alhurra*, referring to possibilities for her to win more nominations (*Alarabiya*) and to take a position as Obama's Vice-Presidential nominee (*Alhurra*). On these two news channels there was still a tone of uncertainty regarding Obama as the Democratic nominee despite all the indications that confirmed this. In contrast, *Aljazeera* did not waste time talking about Hilary Clinton and her future options as a politician, and the support *Aljazeera* gave to Obama in its coverage was obvious. “*The world awaits the first Black nominee in presidential race*” (*Aljazeera News Headline*, 03/06/08)

Some may interpret this observation as a signal of biased reporting. However, I tend to relate it to the nature of each channel, considering *Aljazeera* to be the more outspoken and daring news channel of the region, while *Alarabiya* represents the voice of moderation and impartiality, and *Alhurra* is pro-neoconservatives.

The prediction aspect of this frame continued to appear on *Alarabiya*, with speculation about the scenarios Senator Clinton was to take in case she lost the race. The news report reiterated that:

“The first woman to run for presidency’ is not going to withdraw from the race, indeed she is going to withhold and wait for a scandal to hit Obama and convince super delegates that she is the right person for the party’s nomination.” (Interview with Hisham Melhem, Arabic Journalist specialized in American Affairs. *Alarabiya*, 03/06/08)³³.

The news reporting on *Alarabiya* took a different form and relied on different sources. Most of the time it contained a mixture of sources, such as a correspondent’s report,

³³ Melhem was presented as an American affair expert by the channel in his several appearances during the 2008 American election campaign. However, he also works as Washington D.C. bureau chief for *Alarabiya*.

footage with an expert commenting on the event, an agency news report followed by a studio or satellite live interview.³⁴

Another dominant frame appeared to emerge during the speeches each hopeful presented before the AIPAC, and this was the regional frame. American relationships with Arabs and Israel also prevailed as each hopeful gave a speech before the AIPAC. An obvious difference between the three news channels can be detected in the headline each news station chose to use. *Alhurra*'s headline highlighted Obama's words about Iran's nuclear weapons threat; while *Aljazeera* and *Alarabiya* chose Israeli security and absolute American support. However, for news story *Alarabiya* focused mainly on Obama's words about Iran's nuclear threat, the same as coverage by *Alhurra*, while *Aljazeera* moved to analyse motives, plans and future strategies in the Israeli Palestinian conflict. My interpretation of *Alhurra*'s coverage would be that the channel is targeting Arabs with a mission to rectify the American image and therefore it cannot present news topics that will cause unrest in the region or among its audiences instigating any hatred towards America. Hence, *Alhurra* avoided totally (both in headline and news story) tackling the issue of American support for Israel.

Alarabiya opened its evening news during the AIPAC with the following headline: "*The Democratic presidential hopeful Barack Obama reiterated his support for Israel and pledged never to negotiate its safety and security.*" The news story continued with excerpts from Obama's speech about the unity of the two nations, followed by an interview with Washington-based Arabic news analyst *Hisham Milhem* who reported that the Democrats are and have always been Israel's best friend in the White House, which makes no difference in terms of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution but showed a slightly diplomatic inclination on the side of Obama as opposed to McCain.

It is useful to note that *Alarabiya* as a news channel during the coverage of the 2008 American presidential election did not broadcast any positive views of Obama in relation to future Middle East policies. In fact there was an interview given around Election Day talking about racism in the Middle East and the way many Arab leaders cannot accept the idea of having a Black leader of the world. The same interview mentioned the historical

³⁴ It is also worth noting that the roll on news usually relied on an introduction by the news anchor followed by a report taken from agencies, possibly because of the time constraints in news briefs.

and strong friendly ties many Arabian Gulf leaders have with the Republicans, both as a party and as Presidents due to the fact that they have petrol and gas trading relationships.

This study is not concerned about bias in media coverage, however, it can be observed in *Alarabiya's* coverage. Nevertheless, the news channel followed the other two channels in covering the historic win of Obama as the first Black American to be elected President.

Alhurra's headline “*Obama secured his nomination as a democratic candidate for presidency and pledged to put an end to Iran's nuclear plans.*” The news story included parts of Obama's speech on Israeli security with no further interpretation or interviews.

Aljazeera's headline appeared as follows: “*Obama has pledged unwavering support for Israel, promising to provide financial grants worth \$30 billion in the next 10 years.*” The news followed with some snippets from his speech about the peace process which is in the national interests of America and Israel; then a brief on Clinton's speech confirming that Obama, her competition, is going to be a good friend for Israel.

The study examined the sources each news broadcast chose to employ. Table 5.1 shows the different sources used during the last primary in June 2008. The diversity in news sources can be seen on *Alarabiya* news broadcasts through the array of Arab and American political analysts asked to comment on the daily developments through studio and recorded interviews, as well as the reliance on news agencies and correspondents. However, this does not seem to be the case for *Alhurra*, where the channel focussed on news agencies, live updates from correspondents and one American political analyst. *Aljazeera*, in a way similar to *Alhurra*, presented no analysts or studio interviews and broadcast only correspondents' reports and news agencies updates. This was just the news sources for the last primary period and there will be further analysis of the sources across the entire news sample which will give a clearer indication as to what each channel used as their main news sources.

Table 5.1 - News sources as appeared on *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera* (June, 2008) *

	<i>Alarabiya</i>	<i>Alhurra</i>	<i>Aljazeera</i>
American Political Experts	1	1	-
Arab Political Experts	2	-	-
Correspondents	1	1	2
News Agencies	2	3	2
Locals	-	-	1

*total number of news stories in this sample of news is 5 per channel

5.2.2 Second Sample: Parties' Conventions - August and September 2008

The Democratic Party Convention was held in Denver, Colorado and took place in August 2008. On 27th August, Barack Obama received the official nomination and Senator Joe Biden accepted his nomination for Vice President. The following night Obama gave a speech of acceptance at INVESCO Field.

The Republican National Convention took place in Minnesota from 1st – 4th September 2008. However, Hurricane Gustav hit during the time of this convention period and consequently all activities were put on hold until the second scheduled day. John McCain was nominated as the Republican Presidential Candidate and Sarah Palin as the Vice-Presidential candidate.

This sample of the study received the most coverage on the three news channels, possibly because of the long continuous period of recording that combines two events (Democratic Party Convention and Republican Party Convention). *Alhurra* started its news bulletins with a title followed by a brief report and in some cases live coverage from a location but never conducts interviews with specialists and analysts during the news bulletin. In contrast, *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera* opted for more live correspondents and interviews and analyses during the coverage on both *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera* appeared more resourceful. Although I am not aware of the financial resources of each news channel, the fact that *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera* presented more lively and interactive coverage would be logical due to high financial resources allocated to such an event unlike the case for *Alhurra*.

The News: *Aljazeera* reported on the historical backgrounds and animal symbol stories representing each of the two competing parties (*Aljazeera* evening news, 22/08/2008). Upon the appointment of Joe Biden as Vice President, the news was shaped in a more interpretive style discussing the reasons behind this choice and employed a strategic frame for this purpose.

“Obama’s political weakness is the international and foreign affairs; and he is now trying to rectify this.” (*Aljazeera* evening news 23/08/2008).

There was further reporting of the new unity within the Democratic Party, citing the support Senator Clinton gave to Obama and Biden:

“Democratic Party is embracing its power for the new race against Republicans.” (*Aljazeera* news headline 23/08/2008).

Aljazeera reported a news segment on New York Jews and how they feel about Obama’s election, a story angle that was missing from the two other channels.³⁵

Still entitling the election coverage as ‘*The Race to the White House*’, *Alarabiya* focussed on Biden as the old dark horse who will save Obama’s campaign (evening news 23/08/08).

When Joe Biden was named the Democratic Party Vice President, *Alarabiya* launched an extensive report on his professional and personal life, including his religion and reasons behind this appointment. Biden as a person and politician was highlighted with a tone of uncertainty it was noted that this appointment will help Obama move forward in the election race. This news story contained a human interest frame and main policy/strategy frame: “He will cover the weakness in Obama’s foreign policy expertise but will Biden as an old horse be able to push forward with the notion of change?” (*Alarabiya* evening News 23/08/08). This point appeared on both *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera* channels with almost the same title.

³⁵ This news story featured several Jewish people in New York and they voiced worries about Obama as a candidate who might not be friendly to Israel. However, there was a consensus that both parties – Democratic and Republican - are compromising what they believe in to win the election race.

The same approach appeared again when Sarah Palin, Alaska's Governor, was chosen to be the Republican Vice President. Reports were broadcast on her career achievements, age, political viewpoints, and how she funded her university education by participating in a beauty pageant. The news in part of the analysis concentrated on the history of American women in Vice Presidency nomination. Justifying the appointment of Palin:

“She epitomizes youth, elegance and managerial experience. Neither Biden, nor Obama or McCain knows about governing a state [...] it is a strength point that makes Palin shine.” (Interview with Hisham Melhem, Arabic Journalist specialized in American Affairs. *Alarabiya* evening News 30/08/08)

By the time the Republican National Convention took place, Hurricane Gustav had hit America and almost all activities were put on hold; *Alarabiya* portrayed McCain as a man of actions not words.

“He is a maverick. He can protect America in the future as he did all his life, and he has an innovative plan for health care [...] he talks to people as if he is one of them, there will be change coming to America [...] he turned the situation to his favour even his age is seen now as a gift to be employed for the good of America” (excerpts from several news bulletins' reports on *Alarabiya* evening News 04-05/09/08)

The portrayal of McCain and Palin as supporters of Arab minorities in America was highlighted in the news through an interview with a Muslim preacher living in America about his position on Republican's policies towards Islam and Arabs. The interviewee stressed that McCain and Palin will be good friends to the true Islamic faith (*Alarabiya* evening News 02/09/08).

Alhurra continued the coverage with the headline “*The Road to the White House,*” and reported that Biden is the one who will be ready to take on the actual role of president (*Alhurra* evening News 23/08/08, by newscaster).

The human interest frame appeared to be prominent in the news sample studied for *Alhurra* news. A personal account of Biden and a similar one on Sarah Palin were both reported. Another profile on Obama's personal life was broadcasted after his election as America's 44th President. During the period of the Republican Convention, *Alhurra*

tackled a personal issue in Palin's life, her daughter's pregnancy, a matter that contradicted her values as a conservative. This was justified as follows:

“This matter is in her favour. It shows that she is a normal citizen having the same family problems as anyone else in America [...] this matter should provoke people to vote for her” (Sam Brownback, Kansas Governor on *Alhurra* evening news 02/09/08).³⁶

The same sequence of events and coverage was applied to the Republican's Convention period in September, when Sarah Palin, Alaska's Governor, was named as McCain's deputy. The reasons behind this choice were cited and a brief about Palin the woman was broadcast in terms of a human interest frame. Hurricane Gustav halted the convention but more news about Palin and McCain's personal lives and expectations were broadcast.

Within the period of the Democratic Party's Convention in August 2008, more issues and policies adopted by the party were highlighted, such as environmentally friendly states, substitute energy resources and labelling the convention as 'green'. *Alarabiya* reported that “These matters are what worry American citizens at the moment due to high gasoline prices,” (*Alarabiya* evening News bulletin 27/08/08, Colorado Correspondent).

The same coverage under this frame was used during the Republican Party's Convention in September 2008, in reporting how Hurricane Gustav had forced the Republican Party to cut short the event along with McCain's speech in order to concentrate on helping people affected. “It is a clever tactic from the party to show that McCain cares about American people and not about his image and speech,” (*Alarabiya* Minnesota Correspondent evening news bulletin 01/09/08).³⁷

Aljazeera provided more detailed reports than the other two news broadcasters on the policies and plans of each candidate during the election campaign period and again later after the appointment of Obama. The coverage to an extent was similar to that of the

³⁶ I am relating this point to what some writers viewed that the role of *Alhurra* is to brainwash Arab minds, transcending American values and lifestyle making this issue appears as normal and in favour. The other two channels did not discuss this issue as far as this sample is concerned.

³⁷ I noticed a favourable and positive tone towards McCain in the news stories broadcasted by *Alarabiya*

American mass media in terms of discussing internal American problems and possible plans and promises to fix them. Employing this frame in its coverage, *Aljazeera* tried to add extra information and used explanation graphs. This could be seen as a way of adopting Anglo - American journalism practices but also that the channel is examining extensively all aspects of this election campaign.

Table 5.2 indicates the similar coverage between the three news channels in their use of correspondents to report on the developments of the event. However, *Alarabiya* tended to rely more on locals and Arab political analysts' views and *Alhurra* concentrated more on American political analysts. It is noted that *Alhurra* relied on correspondents and news reports, whereas *Alarabiya* showed diversity in its number of sources and personalities interviewed. Just like the other two news broadcasters, *Aljazeera* interviewed American political experts and also to a lesser extent than *Alarabiya*, local Americans, as in the report featuring the New York Jewish community and their conflicting viewpoints on Obama.

Table 5.2 - News Sources as featured on *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera* (August-September, 2008)

	<i>Alarabiya</i>	<i>Alhurra</i>	<i>Aljazeera</i>
American Political Experts	4	5	3
Arab Political Experts	4	-	-
Correspondents	8	9	9
News Agencies	5	7	5
Locals	3	-	1

5.2.3 Third Sample: Election Day - November 2008

Election Day took place on November 4th 2008 in 50 American states and the District of Columbia. People of the United States of America cast their votes for the two opposing presidential candidates.

Alhurra reported that Virginia had voted Democrat for the first time in 40 years (*Alhurra* evening News, 5/11/ 2008, by newscaster). Obama was immediately declared the winner in California, Oregon, Washington, and Hawaii, whilst McCain won Idaho,

and the Electoral College totals were updated to 297 for Obama and 146 for McCain (270 are needed to win).

McCain gave a concession speech half an hour later in his home state of Arizona. President-elect Obama appeared on November 5 in Grant Park, Chicago, in front of a crowd of 250,000 people to deliver his victory speech. Following Obama's speech, spontaneous street parties broke out in cities across the United States of America and around the world.

The News: a few days before the actual Election Day portrayed the two candidates as being in a horse race to achieve the coveted seat in the White House, America and worldwide. The news concentrated on the polls and the heated competition between the two candidates in different states. The news concentrated on the horse-race frame by broadcasting polls results. Polls, according to Patterson (2007), correspond to horse-race portrayal in news stories and that is apparent in the sample I am researching. A new aspect appeared in 2008 American presidential election regarding ethnicity, which is an issue that did not occur in previous election campaign and was highly celebrated in the news channels. *Alarabiya* entitled its election coverage as “*The Race to the White House*” written on a blue map of the United States, the word race in red and White House in white.

Headline: “Obama is ahead of his opponent by six points, just hours before decision day which if happened that will make Democratic hopeful the first American president from African descent.” (*Alarabiya* midday News 03/11/2008)

Approaching the final days of the American election in November 2008, *Alarabiya* labelled the event as the highest anticipated election in history, featuring how both candidates were competing to achieve the presidency seat in the White House, and talking about polls and the effort exerted by McCain to minimize the difference in votes (*Alarabiya* evening News 03/11/08, by newscaster).

To show the contrast in the election proceedings, *Alarabiya* initiated its evening news citing the political strength of each candidate. McCain had represented Arizona in the House of Senates since 1986 and there was no doubt he would win Arizona in this election, but the popularity of Obama had surpassed all expectations and hit McCain hard

in Arizona. The race coverage focussed on Obama and McCain giving last-minute speeches around the American states to gather as much support as possible. Despite *Alarabiya*'s efforts to be neutral in coverage, offering each candidate in the race the same amount of time in its reports and news headlines, there was a sense of hesitation in reporting the possibility of Obama's winning the race:

“The fierce election race has almost reached its final destination and the two candidates are spending time touring the states [...] Obama will need the support from Pennsylvania while McCain need Ohio's votes. Political analysts have noted that Obama- through his two-year campaign- managed to succeed in talking more Black Americans- comprising 16 per cent of the population- into voting, while others warn of what is known in American politics ‘the Bradley Effect’ referring to Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley who unsuccessfully ran for Governor of California in 1982 and was defeated due to racial reasons as underlined by analysts” (*Alarabiya* midday News 03/11/08, report).

The idea of a horse race continued on *Alhurra* which showed the differences in points each candidate had, leaving Obama in the lead position six points ahead of McCain in six states out of eight, among which were Ohio and Florida (*Alhurra* evening News 03/11/08, by correspondent). In a tone that could be perceived as biased, and was missing from the other two channels while covering the same period of time, *Alhurra* added in a later news bulletin that Senator McCain is minimizing the voting difference according to a recent public poll (*Alhurra* evening News 03/11/08, by newscaster).

Headline: “A fierce horse race and McCain is working to minimize the difference” (*Alhurra* evening News 03/11/ 2008).

Correspondent: “McCain succeeded in gathering people's votes in Pennsylvania, the state that known to be Democratic for so long [...] as for the industrial state of Arizona that is characterized by its strong economy and low tax rates, it is very likely that McCain is going to win here.” (*Alhurra* evening News 03/11/08, correspondent)

Alhurra, like the other two channels, continued the coverage into the last hours of the election, with reports from different states through a network of correspondents and via

satellite links with correspondents. At this stage, *Alhurra* chose to label the election news “*America Vote*” with no graphics which *Aljazeera* and *Alarabiya* had utilised throughout the election months.

There is no doubt that the *Aljazeera* news channel was extremely supportive of Obama, which is opposite *Alhurra*’s position. The coverage continued from the west coast of the United States to the east coast by evening time. Virginia, a Republican State since 1964, was one of major reporting hubs for the progression of election. At this stage it was announced that Obama was ahead in five states out of a total of eight major states (*Aljazeera* evening news 04/11/08, by newscaster).

From *Aljazeera*’s studio in Washington D.C., the news continued with the following titles: “*Obama and McCain eagerly awaiting results (on fire)*,” “*the eagerly awaited master of the White House; change of faces or policies,*” and “*Election polls; the distance between reality and fantasy.*”

Aljazeera news started reporting news bulletin from Washington D.C. in November 2008 with main anchors broadcasting live from there, in addition to the regular correspondents within different American states. The news on *Aljazeera* was entitled “*The Whitehouse; Election in a New Colour*” with graphic images moving between McCain followed by Obama, and graphics showing the oval office and a vague image of the back of a man standing by the window. The report followed the two candidates’ visits to Florida, the state that contributed crucially to the election of George W. Bush. A detailed report showed the main internal issues which mattered to American voters as opposed to what was the prime focus eight years ago which was what’s officially called the ‘*war on terrorism*’ (*Aljazeera* evening News 03/11/ 2008, news report).

Following up on the progress of the event just a few hours before the winner was announced, *Aljazeera* used its own correspondents to cover the situation in Colorado and Florida. The live reporters from Colorado showed an inclination towards Obama’s campaign. Even with entire reports framing the last minute developments in a horse-race frame, it can be inferred that *Aljazeera* news was pro-Obama throughout the entire campaign coverage. This was unlike *Alarabiya* which tried to balance the news reported between the two candidates; and *Aljazeera* even with its main headline for the entire

period “*Election in New Colour,*” was hypothetically voting for Obama. The following are reports from *Aljazeera* correspondents that emphasize this point:

Colorado Correspondent: “I have been looking for any Republican here and cannot find any trace of them. It seems that the situation here is very hard on Republicans, got hold of some who refused to appear on camera but said that they have huge respect for John McCain, but he has two major problems running for president. The first is Sarah Palin and the change of the traditional Republicans agenda to favour Neo-Republicans. Therefore, they are very hesitant to vote; in fact many Republicans here vote for the democratic candidate...” (*Aljazeera* evening news 03/11/ 2008, reporter on the ground)

Florida Correspondents: “It is a vigorous competition here in Florida, the state which counts for 27 electoral votes. McCain was here in Tampa this morning; where thousands of troops’ families live here. He promised them victory and honour return. It was all rhetorical nothing definite and no plans were laid on the table. The effect of Obama here is very visible, hundreds are waiting for hours under this sweltering sun to cast their votes; they like the new spirit, slogans and agenda he is promoting and promising. Saying so, we shouldn’t be misled by polls and believe that it is a winning state for Obama we have to wait as the difference between the competing candidates is only two points; Florida voters understand their historic role in elections.” (*Aljazeera* evening news 03/11/ 2008, reporter on the ground)

In a soft side news approach, *Aljazeera* reported how the charm of Illinois’s Senator is attracting millions around the globe. The news reported:

“In America the rocker Bruce Springsteen singing I want my dream back, I want my America back, I want Obama and this obsession continues beyond the 50 States of America. In Kenya arts, sports and witchcrafts are all performed to show support to Obama, a musical is played portraying the life of Obama, a football team named after him and a fortune teller announces that he is the coming president. In Japan, the city that has the same name is rallying for the big day, they can’t vote but they are supporting by dancing and hanging posters of Mr Obama. In Indonesia, the house that he lived in as a child. The owner

announced that he had offers from three Dutch businessmen to buy the house and convert it into a museum but he turned offers down” (*Aljazeera* early evening News 03/11/ 2008, news report).

The popularity of the Democratic candidate was further analysed in a studio interview with Peter Beinart, a journalist and expert in American foreign affairs. The optimistic tone is highly noticeable in this debate:

“If Obama won, the whole perception of the United States of America will change. He started by tackling issues like the global warming, shutting down of Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp, reducing the number of troops in Iraq and dealing differently with the struggle between Israelis and Palestinians [...] I don’t think McCain has the same support worldwide according to polls. McCain has different agenda when it comes to global warming and Guantanamo detention Camp. Nevertheless, they have the same views with regards to the gradual withdrawal from Iraq. I think during Bush presidency we reached the lowest point as a country and any new president regardless of whom will improve the image even if slightly” (*Aljazeera* evening News 03/11/ 2008, studio interview).

On the effect of George W. Bush on McCain’s campaign, *Aljazeera*’s White House correspondent noted that the declining popularity of Bush which had reached 22 per cent - the lowest since 1952 – had prompted the Republican candidate to steer away from him, emphasizing the different approaches he had with regard to internal policies. A detailed studio interview followed with William Galston, a political theorist, who was introduced by the news anchor as an American Internal Affairs Expert. Galston reiterated the negative effect Chaney had had on the campaign of McCain due to the failing popularity of Bush and Chaney at that time.

On *Alhurra*, the Democrat candidate was portrayed as follows:

“Barack Obama succeeded in reigniting the youth’s and minorities’ will to go to polls and vote; he relied on donations from voters and not the federal financial support. Obama also managed to organize his campaign where supporters knocked on the doors to convince people to go and vote for Obama” (*Alhurra* evening News, 03/11/ 2008, White House Correspondent).

Building towards the final hours of the day before decision time, *Alarabiya* continued its coverage like the other two channels, with a focus on who was perceived as a better candidate for the Arab world. However, the news focused on American internal affairs explaining the differences between each candidate in terms of national agendas and policies, which were deemed more important to American voters than in 2004 (*Aljazeera* evening News 03/11/ 2008, news report). Paul Salem, the Director of the Carnegie Middle East Centre in Beirut explained to *Alarabiya* the ranking of priorities:

“The urgent issues in the region are the same for both of them. Topping the list is Iraq, then the WMD in Iran, the interrelated issues in Afghanistan and Pakistan and finally the Israel- Arab conflict. Both candidates are attached to very influential Jewish lobby, which certainly will bias the judgement of the coming president” (*Alarabiya* late evening News 03/11/ 2008, studio interview)

The following day the three channels dedicated their entire coverage to extensively analysing the situation in the Middle East after the election of the new president and the future of the world. Talking about the concept of change, a news report on *Alarabiya* focused on ordinary people from areas of conflict in the region and how they were anticipating the results of the election.

Iraq is one of the areas in the world most affected by American policies and Iraqis especially awaited the name of the new president given that each candidate had a different agenda with regard to the battle on the ground and the withdrawal of troops. Images were broadcasted showing people reading newspapers reporting the American elections on the streets. An old man in traditional clothes said in news report (vox pop) on *Alarabiya* said:

“We hope the new American president will have a peaceful perspective towards our land, that after 35 years of oppression under the tyrant regime we are still tied and can’t live freely or use our own resources as we should” (*Alarabiya* midday News 04/11/ 2008, news report).

In Israel, a healthy number of people were hoping that McCain will win the presidential election, and an Israeli man stated that:

“McCain is going to be elected president as he is a true friend of Israel and will work for the benefit of the country” (*Alarabiya* midday News 04/11/ 2008, news report)

In Pakistan, where the war on terrorism revolves around, people thought that it was over for Bush and his policies in the country (*Alarabiya* midday News 04/11/ 2008, news report).

Alhurra, like the other two channels, continued their coverage of the last hours of the election by reporting from different states through a network of correspondents and via satellite links with correspondents in the Arab world. The main focus of the three news channels was the ‘what if’ scenario - what if Obama was elected, how would things change in the region? What if McCain became the president? Iraq’s correspondent stated the following:

“There is not unanimous among Iraqis. Some people blame McCain for all the aftermaths of wars and disputes that occurred during the Republicans’ period and some believe that there are some advantages that Iraqis reaped during same period. Other analysts view Obama as a continuation of Bush’s regime when it comes to the matters of Iraq especially after the deferral of the security agreement till after elections in America. According to them, Obama lately has been vague about the Iraqi matters that he was advocating in the beginning of the campaign; he is now talking about military expert and management that will determine the actual policy with regard to the Iraq” (*Alhurra* midday News 04/11/ 2008, Iraq correspondent).

Still covering the progress of Election Day itself, *Alarabiya* reported from several states in America including Illinois where Obama had voted. The news headline was as follows:

Headline: “The Democrat candidate Barack Obama headed this morning to vote in his hometown Chicago with his daughter Maria; the election that might bring the first American president from African descent to power or the first woman as vice president.” (*Alarabiya* midday News 04/11/ 2008, news report)

The coverage continued from the west coast of the United States to the east coast in the evening time. Virginia, the Republican State since 1964, was again one of the major reporting hubs for the progression of the election. At this stage it was announced that Obama was ahead in five states out of a total of eight major states.

“Virginia was an indecisive state. Therefore, Obama has chosen it as the final destination of his campaign which was ended with a massive festival with over 90,000 attendees” (*Aljazeera evening News 04/11/2008*, news correspondent in Virginia).

“In Florida, as in Virginia, people are queuing to cast their votes. It seems to be a simple and easy procedure that is taking place, with various ethnic groups waiting to vote. It is worth mentioning that people of Florida determined the win of President Bush in 2000” (*Aljazeera evening news 04/11/ 2008*, by Florida correspondent).

From Colorado, the *Aljazeera* correspondent managed to enter a voting centre with a camera and started to explain step by step how the electoral process occurs. By the end of the 4th November 2008, late news bulletin on *Aljazeera* opened with the following title:

Headline: “Just three hours till the end of election process in East Coast States. Obama voted in Illinois and polls confirmed he is ahead; with cut away on Obama saying *I voted*, and McCain voted in one of the churches in Arizona and still continues his campaign.” (*Aljazeera evening News 04/11/ 2008*)

At this stage of the election, the news bulletins on *Aljazeera* were broadcast live from a studio in Washington D.C. in addition to an extensive network of correspondents from all over the United States of America which added a new dimension to its news bulletins. *Alarabiya* relied on its correspondents for coverage and *Alhurra* was based in Springfield, Washington.

The anticipation was heightened as the time for naming president elect approached, and *Aljazeera* voiced this in its news headlines. The following titles are examples of the lead for each news bulletin on *Aljazeera*:

Obama and McCain in election race: eagerly anticipating results (on fire)!

The eagerly awaited master of the White House: change of faces or policies?

Election polls: the distance between reality and fantasy!

Still arguably reporting in favour of the Republicans, *Alhurra* on the 4th of November reported from a polling centre in Ohio, Iraq and Morocco, as well as conducting a studio interview with a former advisor to the Republican Party. The coverage continued comparing the two candidates and how they would handle different issues in the region such as Iraq and Iran's nuclear weapons. Other areas like the Georgia-Russia crisis, NATO, American relations with Europe, Pyongyang nuclear power and the rising power of China were also discussed in detail. The news anchor highlighted the fact that McCain is ahead of his opponent when it comes to international matters. A direct question to the correspondent in Arizona was asked about why American voters do not care about issues of an international nature.

Arizona Correspondent: "American voters now do not care about international agendas. All what matters to them is to get out of the difficult economic situation, and find jobs" (*Alhurra* midday News 04/11/2008, Correspondent).

Alarabiya continued its coverage of the last hours of the election by stating the contrasts in what was yet to come. The introduction to the nightly news bulletin was as follows:

"The campaign -that lasted over a year- is considered the longest in the election history. Who is the coming president? Obama or McCain! If Obama was elected, history will record that America chooses its first president from African descent with ties to Islam; as for McCain it was not expected according to results of national polls [...] the coming hours will hold the keys to the White House that will be handed to the youngest or oldest candidate in American history" (*Alarabiya* late evening News 04/11/ 2008, by newscaster).

Alarabiya tried to recap all aspects of the election campaign in a studio interview with an American editor/journalist, Michael Slackman, the Cairo Bureau chief of the New York Times. The channel reported on the importance of the 2008 American presidential election, the policies of each candidate and their view of Middle East issues. Generally, the election was described as "the first that does not involve a former president and it is

the first time to have a candidate of African descent; who if elected will change the entire American policy.”

There was sort of consensus in the Middle East that Obama if elected was going to be the saviour of the region. Many reasons fostered this belief, one of which was the race issue as being a minority would prompt a sympathetic approach. Another is the fact that the Democratic Party tends to be lenient when dealing with world matters, and to a lesser extent some people thought that being born to a Kenyan Muslim father would mean Obama was affiliated to the religion and Muslims worldwide. These thoughts were discussed on *Alarabiya*:

“The new president has already a package of urgent issues that need to be dealt with, most importantly the American declining economy, troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. We have to remember that president control the tone of the dialogue but the congress and Senate are the ones responsible for financial matters. Obama is planning to talk and negotiate unlike the Republican government, but again when it comes to the allies and support there will not be that much of a noticeable difference when it comes to Middle East” (*Alarabiya* evening News 04/11/2008, studio interview).

On the following day it was revealed that Barack Obama had become the President of the United States of America. *Aljazeera* launched the news under the title ‘*Obama President*’ and a cutaway graphic of the Oval Office was followed by an American flag background with Obama’s profile and the written words ‘*the 44th American President.*’ The footage accompanying the headline was of Obama saying ‘*Change has come to America*’ followed by people celebrating the win. The headline of the news was as follows:

Headline: “Barack Obama is the elected President of the United States promises change and calls it a tough call” (*Aljazeera* midday News 05/11/ 2008).

The news framed the event via multiple themes, a race win, victory and a historical achievement, all highlighted on the basis of Obama’s ethnicity. In the following example *Aljazeera* describes the historical event:

“The Black Democratic candidate Barack Obama has won the American presidential election and become the first president of African origin. Obama announced that his election came as an answer to those who question the values of democracy and fairness in America. On the other hand, McCain declared defeat and called his opponent to congratulate him” (*Aljazeera* midday News 05/11/ 2008, news report).

The historic victory theme was used for the first time in election coverage, mainly because Obama was unlike any previous election candidate; he was the one who has defied the impossible and won to become the first American president of African descent. This theme was used heavily on the day after the election and during the inaugural ceremony. *Aljazeera* used the slogan ‘*Change Has Come to America*’ to start each news story about the election result. ‘*Expectations have been met and America has changed the colour of the president just as it is going to change the way it deals with the world.*’ The news on this day’s reports and the coverage was integrated with history, politician and relations with Arab and other international countries. The following are examples of the reports and news stories broadcast during the day:

“The polls got it right this time and after a long election night, America changes its colour as it promised to change its policies towards the world in the future. *To those – to those who would tear the world down: We will defeat you. To those who seek peace and security: We support you. And to all those who have wondered if America's beacon still burns as bright: Tonight we proved once more that the true strength of our nation comes not from the might of our arms or the scale of our wealth, but from the enduring power of our ideals: democracy, liberty, opportunity and unyielding hope.* The insurmountable number of people who believed in change, in a candidate who had an impossible chance of winning, those who experienced discrimination, couldn’t believe that it is the time for a real change.

It is a historic night indeed. Right after the celebration I called my family in Ethiopia who are still celebrating there as well- one of the celebration attendants

It is a historical moment, a moment of life-time-said one lady

It is genuinely overwhelming; a dream that comes true. What happened today is for the good of America and the entire world- a Black man

The masses that gathered here today believed that their votes have changed the world after eight years term that lost America a lot of its values and resources. Once more after Abraham Lincoln, here is the state of Illinois giving the world a new president in a country that is exhausted by many wars and economic turmoil, that won't miraculously disappear simply by Republicans stepping aside" (*Aljazeera* evening News reports 05/11/ 2008, excerpts with actual speech inserts by president elect).

A historical account of Black Americans and their history was given in a report that was intended to be about Obama's ancestors:

"These days any African American can be appointed in any position, join any university and eat at any restaurant. These rights weren't granted 40 years ago when Martin Luther King came to the centre of attention. King, who fought for civil rights for Black Americans, stated that one day black and white Americans will work hand in hand delivering his 'I have a dream' speech. A Baptist minister, who held a PhD in philosophy and received Nobel Peace prize at the age of 35, he was assassinated in 1968 while supporting a strike by Black sanitary work employees. King's legacy had inspired millions of people to defy the impossible and pursue their dreams and Barack Obama is with no doubt a huge example" (*Alarabiya* evening News 5/11/08).

The coverage on *Aljazeera* continued with President Bush pledging to cooperate with President Elect Obama during the transition period, referring to the election of Obama as a historic intervention and a reason for American pride. The jubilations in Kenya were another story which reported people's celebrations and hopes that this win would affect the country positively and help place Kenya in a better international position.

After announcing Obama as the new president, *Alhurra* interviewed a political expert and asked about his hopes for the Middle East. The interview was conducted between a newscaster in the studios in Springfield and Ammar Hattab, a political columnist in Amman, Jordan:

“People in Middle East are extremely hopeful that Obama will bring change to the region; after all the world disasters caused by Republicans’ policies which affected negatively on America’s image as seen by the nations everywhere. This breath of fresh air that comes with Obama’s appointment will save the United States a lot of effort to rectify what happened. All over the streets in Arab countries, people are celebrating. We look at Obama’s appointment in a positive perspective but we are not expecting much especially that a challenge he has to face internally is up on his priority list right now” (*Alhurra* late evening News 05/11/ 2008, interview via satellite links).

Alarabiya noted that Obama, after being elected and during his victory speech, seemed to be uncomfortable, referring to the fact that change is not an easy task and this could be sensed immediately after his appointment. *Alarabiya* entitled its news after the election of Obama with “Obama in the White House.”

After Obama was named as the 44th President of the United States, *Alarabiya* questioned the validity of the economic plans Obama proposed during the campaign period.

“Nothing can be done at the moment; he will have an influence on the new parliament that will be formed and assembled next year. For now Obama hopes the current congress will end what is known as ‘stimulus package’ to help sustain the jobless Americans” (*Alarabiya* evening News 07/11/08, interview with Hisham Melhem, Arabic Journalist specialized in American Affairs)

The news entitled the election of Obama as victorious in a historic race (*Alarabiya* evening News 5/11/08), and dedicated long hours to the open coverage of the event from around the world along with excerpts from Obama’s speech. ‘*This historical moment is the beginning of a new era for America and the world,*’ (*Alarabiya* evening News 05/11/08, Chicago Correspondent).

After the election of Obama and whilst the other two channels were reporting the victory this brought to the United States and the world, *Alarabiya* focused on the challenges and steps to be taken immediately in order to rectify the current situation. The news was entitled “*Challenges facing Obama as he becomes the 44th President of the United States.*” The policies that are to be implemented on the ground were listed by the

news reader and he was even glorified as opposed to his predecessor, George W. Bush (*Alarabiya* midday News 06/11/08, newscaster).

The main news headline reported the end of the campaign, the confirming of the President Elect and the challenges that face the country: “*Barack Hussein Obama is elected president and celebrations reach Kenya*” (*Alhurra* evening news 05/11/08, newscaster).

The following was also reported:

“All masses that gathered for hours and waited for this moment couldn’t believe that the dream has been reached that easily in no time. The hero is here and the tears in people’s eyes indicate the status of jubilation. Everything is now ready to welcome the 44th president of the United States of America and his small family [...] Obama as he knows well how to inject enthusiastic vibes within people, knows how to make them sympathize *we know there are brave Americans waking up in the deserts of Iraq and the mountains of Afghanistan to risk their lives for us*” (*Alhurra* evening News 05/11/08, news report).

The news title on *Alhurra* featured the historic victory and mentioned the American dream and it being the land of all possibilities:

“The historical victory, Barack Obama is materializing his ancestors’ dream in front of the world today as Barack Hussein Obama is elected president proving that America is all about justice and equality” (*Alhurra* evening news 05/11/2008, newscaster).

Despite the use of the historic victory frame, it was not detected as a dominant frame in the coverage of *Alhurra*. The other two channels, *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera*, reported the victory based on a Black candidate reaching a new milestone in the race for President and justice when it comes to Black Americans. *Alhurra* refrained from reporting on ethnicity as a premise for the employment of this frame. Nevertheless, the narration promoted meanings of democracy, justice and the achieving of the American dream.

The reports on *Aljazeera* continued to feature jubilation among people in America:

“It is a historic night indeed. Right after the celebration I called my family in Ethiopia who are still celebrating there as well- one of the celebration attendants “It is a historical moment, a moment of life-time” said one lady. “It is genuinely overwhelming; a dream that comes true. What happened today is for the good of America and the entire world,” added a Black man” (*Aljazeera* evening news 05/11/2008, street report)

Alarabiya's headline did not include any mention of ethnicity, unlike the other two news channels, and instead reported the event in through a policy frame talking about challenges facing the new president. “Obama dominates. The 44th US President calls for unity to face tough challenges.”

Alhurra continued the coverage adding another dimension to the context by asking about the expectations of European Union countries. The interview was conducted with Khattar Abou Diab, a political analyst in Paris, France:

“What we conclude from this particular globalised election: the American president is in one way or another, the world president. European countries are awaiting a new president who can cooperate with them. In near future I expect Europe to propose a sort of joint effort on files like Afghanistan, Middle East, Russia, economy downturn, Russia and Iran. It is a new beginning and change wave that is sweeping the entire world and not only the US. Obama, if open to European proposals, can re-design the New World Order. There are huge challenges to be tackled and as he said in his speech one term won't be enough to deal with everything” (*Alhurra* evening News 05/11/08, live interview via satellite links).

As expected, immediately after the election of Obama, *Aljazeera* launched a series of talk shows to discuss various aspects of Obama's presidency, Heikal, a reputable political analyst, predicted the following:

“The American administration already has a ready ‘PACKAGE’ for the Middle East. The region that does not and is not willing to negotiate, it is ready and waiting for anybody to come and grab everything. It is a region that is taken for granted and leaders are willing to do anything to please the United States [...] I think the Middle East will be the area where Obama will take immediate

actions on the spot; as it's a less challenging area and the American master plan of action is already set" (*Aljazeera* special edition news show with Heikal, 07/11/08)

Table 5.3 presents the news sources that each news outlet chose to use to report on the developments before and during Election Day. *Alarabiya*, as in the previous two news samples, used extensively the help of Arab political analysts. The coverage on *Alhurra* was mainly via correspondents around the different American States, *Aljazeera* and *Alarabiya* relied less on correspondents. World leaders delivering congratulatory cables made appearances in the news bulletins on *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera*, however, were only minimally seen on *Alhurra*. The presentation of such messages appeared in the form on similar news reports on the news channels which indicate the use of news agencies reports.

Table 5.3 - News Sources as featured on *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera* (3-12 November 2008)

	<i>Alarabiya</i>	<i>Alhurra</i>	<i>Aljazeera</i>
American Political Experts	1	3	1
Arab Political Experts	8	2	4
Correspondents	9	13	10
News Agencies	3	4	5
Locals	2	1	2

5.2.4 Fourth Sample: Inauguration Day - January 2009

On inauguration day, Barack Obama took the oath of office and was sworn in as America's 44th President and the first United States leader from an African descendent. Obama used his inaugural address to vow to begin the work of 'remaking America'. The American leader addressed the challenges facing the US, referring to his term in the White House as a 'new era of responsibility'.

There was open and full coverage of the event on all three channels, starting with *Alarabiya* reporting on the historical inauguration background and how it has evolved over 200 years, followed by an account of the new President and his life. The entire

coverage was entitled “*Black President in The White House: A Historical Event.*” *Alarabiya* relied on a correspondent and a couple of Arabic political figures from Palestine, Egypt, Iraq and London to analyse the context of Obama’s speech.

“Obama is what Black Americans find as a saviour, with high crime rates, illiteracy and unemployment [...] Unlike President Roosevelt, who was elected president and succeed in moving country out of recession; Obama’s biggest challenge beside the economy, is the two draining wars America is leading at the moment” (*Alarabiya* evening News 20/01/2009, Washington correspondent).

“It’s a general speech that did not focus on our region[...] my take is that Arabic media focused on Obama’s middle name – Hussein- as if he is one of prophet Mohammed’s grandsons. Iran does not expect a revolution from Obama.” (*Alarabiya* evening News 20/1/ 2009, live interview with Ali Zadah, Director of Arabic Iranian Research Centre in Washington)

“The whole debate about the religions and peace between nations is not coined by Obama; we have heard this in speeches by Colin Paul and President Clinton [...] there is a more logical perspective to the world now. American Administration understands they are not the only superpower as before 50 years [...] The whole world outlook is so cheerful and optimistic and I do not think it is possible to expect major changes within America or around the world in the near future” (*Alarabiya* evening News 20/1/ 2009, live interview with Hisham Milhem Arabic Journalist specialized in American Affairs).

The excerpts above appeared on *Alarabiya* around the period of the Inaugural Ceremony and revealed a tone of pessimism; Obama’s term does not herald new beginnings in relationships with Middle Eastern or with Islamic nations.

Aljazeera and *Alhurra* took the same position in their coverage as *Alarabiya*, with historical accounts of the inauguration event, a brief report on Obama’s life and political career followed by interviews to shed further light on his speech.

At this stage, as indicated in table 5.4, *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera* interviewed Arabic political experts only and placed an emphasis on the coming plans for the Middle East

region. The rest of the news sources were fairly similar. However, it is noticeable that *Alhurra* interviewed American analysts during the Inaugural Ceremony coverage and no local people, whereas the other two Arabic news channels mixed their coverage with views from ordinary people. *Aljazeera* and *Alarabiya* concentrated on Arab political analysts as opposed to simply the two Arabic commentators of *Alhurra*. Judging by the variety of sources presented on *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera* and the little variation by *Alhurra* from relying mainly on correspondents, one can argue that *Alhurra* is adopting old-school journalistic practices whilst the other two Arab trans-border news channels were keen to explain the event in as much detail as possible.

Table 5.4 - News Sources as featured on *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera* (January, 2009)

	<i>Alarabiya</i>	<i>Alhurra</i>	<i>Aljazeera</i>
American Political Experts	-	2	-
Arab Political Experts	6	2	5
Correspondents	2	2	3
News Agencies ³⁸	2	2	3
Locals	3	-	3

5.3 The Dominant Frames

In the previous chapter a detailed analysis of the types of news-frames used by journalists was set out and it was established that this study would use six of the frame-types available to identify the style and content of the news presentation of the three channels studied, *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera*. In the coding of the election stories, both the headlines and the news introduction, were taken as the basic units of analysis and comprised the dominant frames. Headlines were also included as a study by Gan et al (2005) argued that news introductions and headlines indicate the main frame of the news story and invoke salient picture in the minds of viewers. (Gan *et al.*, 2005).

³⁸ News agencies stories appear as news report (narration and footage) similar on the three news channels.

An overall look at the frames presented within news stories throughout the period of the 2008 American election campaign up until the inaugural ceremony in January 2009 reveals that the most used frame by all three channels was the ‘horse-race’ followed by ‘human interest’ stories. ‘Conflict’ and ‘issue policy’ stories formed the middle rank suggesting a need/desire on the part of the audience to be informed about events on the other side of the globe. ‘Regional issues’ do not feature very highly, perhaps surprisingly given the impact of the American foreign policy on the Middle East, while the ‘historic’ features of the American election seem to have had very little impact on the Arab audience for whom issues such as race and gender in political office are not immediately controversial in their own political sphere. Table 5.5 shows the overall frames frequency as featured on each news channel.

Table 5.5 - Frequency of overall dominant frames as featured on the three news channels³⁹

Frames	<i>Alarabiya</i>	<i>Alhurra</i>	<i>Aljazeera</i>
Horse-race	51%	66%	42%
Human Interest	16%	17%	16%
Conflict	7%	2%	7%
Issue/policy	9%	10%	22%
Regional	14%	5%	9%
Historic Victory	3%	-	4%

In order to answer the question of how far did the coverage reflect the Anglo-American broadcasting style and in what way did it differ in line with the region’s cultural boundaries and interests, each of these frames will be examined in turn drawing on the evidence provided by the analysis of the news presented in the four time periods to reveal the extent to which international/global journalistic influences applied, and the

³⁹ Total number of stories 43, 41, and 43 on *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera* respectively

extent to which the event was interpreted and adapted for regional interest and understanding.

5.3.1 Horse-race

Table 5.5 shows that the general dominant frame for all three channels was the analogy of the horse-race. This agrees with what previous studies have concluded that there is excessive use of the horse-race frame as a way to frame election campaigns (Patterson, 2007; Gan *et al.*, 2005; Cruikshank, 2009). It is worth noting that this frame does not focus only on who is moving ahead or lagging behind in the election race, it also covers a wide range of news developments such as predictions of results and polls, performance in the race, and points of strength among candidates and parties, as well as strategies adopted by individuals and groups.

As a point of comparison, the Pew Research Centre in the United States conducted a large-scale content analysis of American outlets in 2008 and noted that the horse-race frame was employed quite often. In a study of Western European coverage, Vliegenhart *et al.* (2010) observed that broadsheets used the horse-race frame slightly more than tabloids, confirming that the characteristics of news channels/newspapers were a significant variable.

To compare this with the way in which the presidential election was reported on the three channels under examination, *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra*, and *Aljazeera*, illustrations can be drawn from the overview of the campaign samples presented earlier in this chapter. The first example was drawn from the last primary in South Dakota and Minnesota. This news sample included news recordings which started on 1st June 2008 and ran until 10th June 2008. This covered three news segments daily per channel. Each news story on the election was treated as a unit of analysis including the headline, introduction read by the newscaster followed by the news report (whether a live feed accompanied by a correspondent or recorded footage supplied by a news agency) and/or interviews with political experts, politicians or correspondents.

The news media at this time portrayed the Primary as a horse-race using this theme for a title and emphasising the need to keep up with the results and predictions as to who

would be chosen as the presidential candidate for the Democrats. *Alarabiya* chose the label “*The Democratic Race*” and *Aljazeera* continued the analogy with “*The Final Mile: Clinton vs. Obama*”. The exception was *Alhurra*, which has strong American involvement in its financing and direction, and so was obliged to take a more neutral approach preserving the non-committal tone of any American-government owned organization as expected while a domestic election is in progress. *Alhurra* went with the merely factual “*American Presidential Election*” as its headline. It was noted that the tone of the titles also had an impact on the contents of the news bulletins.

In the second sample, taken during the party conventions of August-September 2008, the horse-race analogy was continued when Joe Biden was appointed as Vice Presidential running-mate in the Obama campaign. Biden was described as ‘the old dark horse’ (i.e. outsider) in the coverage of *Alarabiya* that was entitled “*The Race to the White House*”. *Alhurra* in contrast, avoided a racing analogy by again keeping to the bland statement headline “*The Road to the White House*”, thereby endeavouring to maintain an unbiased position. It was noted that coverage on this occasion was similar to the American media coverage and concentrated on discussing internal American problems, possible solutions and promises to fix them.

In the third sample, the news for the days before the election portrayed the two candidates (McCain and Obama) as being in a horse-race. Stories concentrated on the polls and discussed the heated competition between the two candidates in different states. *Alarabiya* for example, featured the two candidates racing to achieve the coveted seat in the White House, discussed the polls and the effort exerted by McCain to minimize the difference in votes.

In the fourth election interval of this study presenting the news of the Inauguration in January 2009, the use of the horse-race frame was noticeably absent as the competitive element of the election had by this time been concluded, suggesting that the choice of frame was directly related to the event and not endemic in the news reporting style in general.

On the face of it, these examples illustrate that the Arab media followed an Anglo-American model in their reporting of the election and it is reasonable to deduce from this that the high incidence of the horse-race frame indicated a global media influence on

Arab news channels in the manner in which they presented election coverage and can be cited as evidence of the globalisation of the Arab media. However, before concluding that this is a prime evidence of media globalisation and indicative of Anglo-American news agencies impact one must state some reservations.

There is an argument that the horse-race frame is inherent in journalism itself when covering American presidential elections. It is an obvious way in which to make an election exciting for the audience and therefore is not necessarily an indicator of cultural imperatives. Gan *et al.*, (2005) suggested that mass media in practice follow prominent examples in news reporting. In other words, when big news corporations highlight a matter the rest of the word news will follow suit and that may lead to the extensive use of a particular frame. It is worth noting that the horse-race frame was not applied to the entire election but only to that part of it which involved competition. In their paper, *Covering the US Presidential Election in Western Europe: A Cross-national Comparison*, Vliegenhart *et al.* (2010) pointed to the concept of a ‘media logic’ “in which the content of the news is determined by the media themselves and in which political actors adapt their performance to the needs and formats of the media” concluding that some level of the horse racing strategy has been adapted in most countries (Vliegenhart *et al.*, 2010).

The inference being that the adoption of a horse-race scenario is convenient journalistic shorthand and not merely a product of cultural or political differences. They also suggest that in covering foreign news events journalists are less constrained by the political context in which they are operating than when reporting in a domestic context and therefore will put more emphasis on the competitive nature of an event like the American presidential election. This might, they surmise, explain why Arabic trans-border news channels exhaustively used the horse-race frame in the coverage of the 2008 American presidential election while the competitive nature of reporting is somehow muted when it comes to local/domestic events. This point is also related to what Massey (2000) concluded in his work on framing, where countries that enjoy lower levels of democracy downplay confrontational political frames when reporting local events.

A second reason for caution is that a fast-moving and widespread story like the American election means that Arab news channels are heavily dependent on news agencies, in this case international news agencies for their information. This could explain why in this case they had a tendency to reproduce similar stories to the rest of news

channels in the world, as Fandy (2007) referred to it when categorised Arab media outlets as news receivers and rather than gatherers. Tables 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4 set out the news sources used and it is clear that news agencies and correspondents predominantly depended on American television and news agencies for their material.

Since the story concerns an American presidential election it is logical that American sources would dominate. When the story is about a Russian presidential election for example one might expect Russian news agency sources to dominate instead. One might argue therefore that the globalising effect of these sources on the Arab media is not as strong as the high use of the horse-race frame imitating a similar style to American television news reporting might lead one to suppose. One explanation for its prevalence might be that it is the fast-moving modern methods of news-gathering and transmission, rather than it stemming from a conscious desire on the part of either the news channels to raise the audience awareness or make them be part of a ‘global village’.

5.3.2 Human Interest Stories

The second most popular method of framing is the ‘human interest story’. The human interest frame brings an individual story or an emotional account to the presentation of an event. This includes private lives of political figures and the effect policies have on normal people’s lives. Usually, these stories are characterized as ‘soft news’ and are considered to be public relations media. This frame includes the private lives of each actor in the news story, aspects such as ethnicity and gender, and stories intended to provoke sympathy. As a point of comparison, Vliegenhart *et al*, (2010) observed in their study that Western European media tabloids tended to prefer this type of framing, indicating that the characteristic style of the news channel is a significant variable.

In the first election interval studied in this research, the last primary; all three channels studied, *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera*, equally featured human interest stories. At this stage *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera* were similar in their coverage whereas *Alhurra* focused more on the management and strategy frame, although *Alhurra* did refer to the relative age of the candidates stating the following:

“The young Senator attacked older McCain; saying that change is hardly a matter of foreign policies and attacks on other nations. In fact it starts from within the country by resolving its crises. Obama reiterated that voting for McCain as president will mean a third term for Bush administration.” (*Alhurra* evening News Headline 04/06/2008)

In this report *Alhurra* was not only hinting at the relative age difference between the two potential leaders but also linking age with the unpopularity of the Bush administration. The news channel also touched upon the fact that Hillary Clinton was the first woman to be nominated for the office of President of the United States and that Barack Obama was the first Black man to be so nominated.

By contrast in the second interval, during the party conventions, *Alarabiya* reiterated the negative tone towards age in its introduction of the Vice Presidential candidate Joe Biden. It launched an extensive report on his professional and personal life including his religion and the reasons behind his appointment.

The introduction of another relative unknown on the international stage evoked further use of the human interest frame when Sarah Palin, Alaska’s Governor was chosen to be the Republican Vice-Presidential candidate. Like Joe Biden she was virtually unknown outside America and international audiences needed to be introduced to her. Note that the human interest elements – her age and personal appearance – preceded the reference to her political experience. Significantly, McCain and Palin were both portrayed as supporters of Arab minorities in the United States as featured in one of *Alarabiya*’s news reports. This support was delivered not in terms of policy but in more personal terms of friendship.

Aljazeera by contrast showed less interest in the human interest frame, perhaps in line with its more serious ‘broadsheet’ credentials, and concentrated on reflecting issues and policies.

In the third election news interval of this study, the day of the election, the focus was on the winning-losing of the ‘horse-race’ and there were fewer human interest stories. Those that appeared focused on Obama’s ethnicity and descent. On the soft side type of news *Aljazeera* reported how the charm of Illinois’s Senator was striking millions around the globe excessively.

On *Alarabiya* the question was asked about how Obama resonated with the general mood of Arabic nations. Paul Salem, Director of the Middle East Centre at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, answered this question in human interest terms, suggesting that Obama, because of his middle name (Hussein), ethnicity and youth would be able to change the perception of America in the Middle East from the arrogant white cowboy to a lenient diplomatic Black man.

Alhurra continued its coverage and concentrated on McCain as a person covering him from the personality frame angle. The news reported how people in Colorado in particular, see him as a veteran, a warrior and a hero who has served 50 years in American politics and wars and who has had real achievements on the ground, unlike others who criticize him solely for being too old to be leading the country (*Alhurra* late evening News 04/11/2008, news report).

During the final sample, Inauguration Day, a heavy emphasis was placed on the ethnicity of the new President and the historic nature of his victory as the first Black man to be elected President of the United States but otherwise coverage concentrated on his inaugural speech and its implications for foreign policy, particularly in the Middle East.

When we look at the incidence of human interest stories on all three channels there is remarkable consistency. Although the incidence of horse-race framing is by far the largest used on all three channels the human interest frame is almost the same on all three, 16 per cent on *Aljazeera* and *Alarabiya* and 17 per cent on *Alhurra*. However, this is more than twice the incidence of personality-led stories found in the American mass media. This may reflect the specific nature of the 2008 presidential election in which several of the candidates were virtually unknown outside the United States before the election and which had a particular human interest angle in the historic nature of the event in bringing Black and female candidates to the nominations for the first time.

With regards to human interest stories it appeared that ideological differences between the channels have no effect with regard to this type of coverage. It might be argued that the use of human interest stories assists a foreign audience to understand the nature of an election in another country or as with the use of the horse-race frame help in adding an interesting angle to the news by including a personal/human account to the news. On the other hand it might be argued that the perception of an election as a horse-

race and a clash of personalities would have a detrimental effect in that the audiences do not need to understand the issues and implications of the election in order to follow its progress. However, human interest stories in this case might be a reflection of cultural differences and curiosity on the part of a region where the notion of a Black man or a woman in a prime position of power would be, if not inconceivable, unusual, hence the particular emphasis on race, religion and gender of the candidates.

5.3.3 Conflict

In their study of cross-national differences in news-framing, Vliegenhart *et al.* (2010) claimed that their results confirmed the findings from research into international news flows that suggests that where news visibility is concerned, the ties between the country in which the event takes place and the country in which the media covering the event are based are important factors when it comes to news framing. They assert that “Both trade relations and being part of a military coalition with the United States [...] led to more coverage of the US elections.” They also conclude that:

“[...] public opinion *vis-à-vis* the incumbent US President also affected the tone of the coverage with especially challenger Obama receiving more positive coverage in countries where opinion was particularly negative about the Bush Presidency.” (Vliegenhart *et al.*, 2010 p. 15)

If this was true of Western European countries one might expect it to be an even more marked feature in the Middle East. However, it is important in this context to take into account the ownership of each of the three channels under consideration. *Alhurra* has strong links to the United States; *Aljazeera* is largely funded by the Qatari Royal Family and *Alarabiya* by the Royal Family of Saudi Arabia. It is necessary therefore to consider the links between Qatar and Saudi Arabia and how this might affect the attitude of the channels to the use of conflict-framing.

Using by way of comparison Vliegenhart *et al.*'s conclusion that news coverage of the American elections is directly related to the level of trade relations and military co-operation between the countries, the trade figures for trade in goods between the United States of America, Qatar and Saudi Arabia in 2008 are set out in table 5.6. The figures

are totals expressed in millions of US dollars. From these figures it can be seen that there are substantial levels of trade between Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United States of America.

Table 5.6 - Trade showing exchange of goods between United States of America and Qatar and Saudi Arabia in 2008⁴⁰

Country	Exports	Imports	Balance
Qatar	2,715.9	484.3	2,231.6
Saudi Arabia	12,484.2	54,747.4	-42,263.2

On this basis it is reasonable to expect that there would be a degree of constraint in the levels of criticism aimed at the United States in the reporting of its domestic affairs. This perhaps explains why given the involvement of the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan, President Bush’s declaration of the ‘war on terrorism’ following the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York on 11 September 2001 and the general air of hostility and suspicion between the United States and the Arab/Muslim world in general, the percentages of stories perceived in terms of a conflict frame is relatively low for all three channels (see table 5.5). Perhaps not surprisingly, on the United States of America – funded channel *Alhurra*, it is exceptionally low at only two per cent, whereas *Aljazeera* and *Alarabiya* both record seven per cent of stories in this frame suggesting they are slightly more critical of American policy. The interview on *Alarabiya* with Hisham Milhem, the Washington-based Arabic news analyst, specifically mentioned the historically strong friendly ties many Arabian Gulf leaders have with the Republicans as a party and their Presidents due to the fact that they have petrol and gas trading relationships (*Alarabiya* 03/06/08, interview with Hisham Milhem).

In the first interval, the last primary, coverage on *Alarabiya* drew attention to concerns about the outcome of the American presidential election in relation to regional conflicts and how changes in the American administration might affect these, notably

⁴⁰ Source US Government statistics at <http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c1580.html> and <http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance.c1570.html>

tackling the issue of American support for Israel. A difference in the ideological slant and ownership of the three channels was clearly evident, as *Alhurra* in reporting on the speeches each candidate delivered before AIPAC highlighted Obama's words about Iran's nuclear weapons threat while on *Aljazeera* and *Alarabiya* the focus was on Israel and American support for that state in the news headlines.

It can be inferred from the above that *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera* adopted a similar frame in covering the AIPAC event, especially when it comes to headlines. However, the content of the news bulletin on *Alarabiya* was primarily about Iranian weapons of mass destruction and nothing about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.⁴¹ In contrast, *Aljazeera* included the American Aid to Israel in the news headline and further discussed it in the news studio interview. *Alhurra* refrained from mentioning Israel in its headline and highlighted the Iran nuclear threat as the main element of Obama's speech.

This example demonstrates the manner in which each news channel used conflict-framing to deliver its news content. For *Aljazeera* it is all about the Arab and Palestinian occupied land and it will not skip a chance to highlight this matter extensively. *Aljazeera* continued to play a role in shaping and restructuring Arab identities with every event that is related to Middle Eastern history and politics (Zayani, 2005, p. 27).⁴² *Alarabiya* did not use the sensational tone *Aljazeera* constantly employs to frame its news when tackling Arab critical issues, but a more balanced and subdued approach towards events. However, the main angle of the story on *Alarabiya* was the debate on Iran nuclear weapons and the threat it may impose on the Middle East region and the rest of the world as presented in the speeches delivered by the three American hopefuls before AIPAC. This focus may arguably demonstrate the ties (diplomatic and economic) between the United States of America and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which is reflected on the media. On the other hand, it could showcase the political tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia which eventually become predictable to have negative portrayal of any news coming from Iran on a channel like *Alarabiya* or any other Saudi news outlet. *Alhurra* is an American

⁴¹ A news headline lasts a maximum of 2 seconds whereas a studio interview reaches four- five minutes (depending on the channel and the length of newscast).

⁴² This ties with the idea discussed earlier in chapter two about the success *Aljazeera* enjoyed over the years was due to framing the injustice imposed by world power such as the United States of America towards Arab political and historical incidents (i.e. Israeli occupation of Palestine, American occupation in Iraq and protecting the Israeli interests in the Middle East). This point was highlighted by Sabry in *Kai Hafez Arab Media Power and Weaknesses* (2008)

television company with a message to convey to Arab audiences, thus it may be expected to present the news in the way that United States officials want it to be delivered; bridging the gap between the nations and trying not to instigate hatred among its audiences by presenting the complete picture. In my opinion this may negatively affect the image and credibility of *Alhurra* channel.

In the third news interval, on Election Day November 4 2008, *Alarabiya* conducted an interview on American's relationships with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries observing:

“Saudi Arabia has strong ties with America especially with the Republican Party and especially the Bush Family and their business [...] there have been changes in the last couple of years due to US-led wars. There is hope now for new beginnings whether the next president is going to be McCain or Obama” (Saleh Almane' lecturer at King Saud University in Riyadh on an interview for *Alarabiya* News 04/11/2008)

Thus it seemed that in terms of reporting the election within a conflict frame the three news channels were all constrained both by the ideological slant of their ownership and the dictates of *realpolitik* which explains the low incidence of stories framed in conflict terms. Here there is arguably a case for asserting that the three channels consciously promoted a particular interpretation of events, one that reflected the different ideological and practical interests of their ownership.

5.3.4 Issue/Policy

This frame featured on *Aljazeera* in a substantial way as the dominant frame and to a lesser extent on *Alarabiya* and *Alhurra*. This theme was generally added as background and supportive information for events. According to the definition given to the function of this frame in the news, it provides background information, reasons and analysis to why certain actions or events are taking place and how candidates are approaching typical issues (Gan *et al.*, 2005)

In the American model stories are built around issues and policy accounted for only eight per cent of stories. Table 5.7 below indicates that the three Arab news channels employed stories built around issue and policy to a much greater extent than their American counterparts; ten per cent for *Alhurra* (where some basic knowledge of the American government might be anticipated given the ideological/funding base of the station) and nine per cent and 22 per cent respectively for *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera*. The higher incidence of issue/policy stories must partly be accounted for by the fact that the American presidential election is a foreign event and therefore would require more explanation for the Middle Eastern audiences than an election taking place within the region. It is essential to note at this point that the frame of issue/policy was detected in news headlines and introductions.

However, if a closer look is taken at the sources that each news channel used to explain and give further in depth information and explanations of actions and outcomes, then *Alarabiya* used 26 experts (six American/20 Arabs) and 20 correspondents; *Aljazeera* 13 analysts (four American/nine Arabs) and 24 correspondents, whilst *Alhurra* employed only four Arab experts compared with 11 America analysts but the largest number of correspondents totalling 27.

Table 5.7 - Total news sources as featured on *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera* during the entire election campaign period⁴³

	<i>Alarabiya</i>	<i>Alhurra</i>	<i>Aljazeera</i>
American Political Experts	6	11	4
Arab Political Experts	20	4	9
Correspondents	20	27	24
News Agencies	12	16	15
Locals	5	1	4

Thus it appears that *Alarabiya* is the station most concerned with explaining and analysing the implications of the American election to its Arab audiences. However,

⁴³ The four news Intervals/periods included in this study through the entire American presidential election campaign period chosen for this study – June 2008, August-September 2008, November 2008 and January 2009.

when the dominant frames exhibited in table 5.5 were examined, while *Alhurra* clearly provided the lowest number of explanatory stories more in line with the US model (ten per cent vs. eight per cent), it is *Aljazeera* that scored most highly in the provision of issue-based stories, scoring 22 per cent against only 9 per cent recorded for *Alarabiya*. Therefore, while it can be argued that *Alarabiya* and *Alhurra* follow the US model of placing a low news value on issue-based stories, *Aljazeera* diverged from the US model by giving such stories a much greater prominence.

In the first news interval the speeches given by the presidential nominees to the AIPAC encouraged all three channels to take an issue-based line. All three headlined Obama's potential foreign policy with regard to the Middle East, citing his intentions towards Iranian nuclear plans and promised support for Israel. The same issues featured in the second sample recording events during the party conventions.

The third election news interval, collected on Election Day, recorded that *Aljazeera* in particular paid attention to policies and included in their coverage a detailed report showing the main internal issues that were of importance to American voters as opposed to the prime focus eight years ago when George Bush launched what was officially called the 'war on terrorism' (*Aljazeera* evening News 03/11/2008).

When covering the Inaugural Ceremony that took place in January 2009, all three news channels provided information with regard to the historical background of the event. *Alhurra* used more American political experts than the other two channels most likely because of the proximity factor and the location of the news channel in the United States of America. In the case of *Aljazeera* channel, and despite having a live news broadcast during the third election period (around Election Day) from Washington D.C., the channel did not focus on extensively interviewing American political analysts but resorted to Arabs commenting on the proceedings based on their expertise in American affairs. It can be inferred that *Alarabiya* depended more on Arab experts to explain the event of American presidential election. However, looking at the Arab expert who appeared the most on the screens of *Alarabiya* as a political analyst specialised in American affair, it was Hisham Melhem who is working as Washington bureau chief for *Alarabiya*. It is hard to identify the political affiliation of the political analysts appearing on Arabic trans-border news televisions when it comes to American policies. However, it is arguably expected to assume that any analyst or commentator knows the agenda of the

channel he works for and therefore would not be tackling any issues that is not relevant to the news station's policy. Because the study does not attempt to reveal any news bias towards specific political party or candidate, it is not crucial to identify the political stances of commentators who appear on screens. However, it is safe to argue that each news channel has a pool of preferred names to interview and present their viewpoints that do not contradict with the general agenda of the newscasts.⁴⁴

Previous researchers have noted how framing of political events gives the media power (Twekbury *et al.*, 2000; Capella and Jamieson, 1997) and this power of framing is emphasised when it is culturally congruent. As Entman (2004) stressed, the powerful effect of mass media framing relies on an effective culturally congruent formula in presenting events. On this basis it might be argued that *Alarabiya* was the most successful in using issue/policy stories, although *Aljazeera* made more use of the frame. Quantitatively the issue/policy frame is used relatively in a substantial manner in the coverage of *Aljazeera*; however, looking at the sources presented in the *Alarabiya* coverage and the questions asked to experts, analysts and locals may give an indication that *Alarabiya* also focused on the issue/policy frame. Both *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera* provided their audiences with as many explanatory frames as possible. The two trans-border news channels did not resort to news agencies in their reporting of the events of the 2008 American presidential election, but understood the variation and differences in knowledge audiences have, and tried to answer all questions and knowledge gaps in their coverage; whether through presenting it as a main introduction in the news bulletins or as interviews and analysis during the news time.

⁴⁴ *Aljazeera* will backlist any political commentator who criticised the state of Qatar and the leader (personal interview with political expert Mamoun Fandy). Fandy used to have a column in the Saudi-owned *Ahsarq Alawsat Newspaper* which allows him to appear on a channel like *Alarabiya*. Heikal (the Egyptian political journalist) will appear on *Aljazeera* screen for instance but because of his continuous attack of the Saudi regime, will not be allowed to appear on *Alarabiya*. On the other hand, *Alhurra* will not allow a live broadcast or a live interview with Palestinian militant groups in Gaza or Hezbollah in Lebanon- the news about it might appear on *Alhurra* but not as a main news story and not as live coverage (personal interview with Ghassan Alhindi news editor and producer at *Alhurra*).

5.3.5 Regional and Local Interest

One of the key questions posed at the beginning of this study was how far trans-border news channels targeting Arab audiences reproduced an Anglo-American model of journalism and to what extent they differed in their approach.

The principal area where one might expect divergence is in the adaptation of news stories and framing to reflect regional and local interests. Emphasising aspects of the presidential campaign that might have an impact in the region such as the AIPAC speeches and the possible shift in American foreign policy that might follow the election of a certain candidate from a different party has already been mentioned in the news overview part of this chapter. However, around the time of Election Day and throughout the continuous coverage of the Inaugural Ceremony in January 2009, the three trans-border news channels relied on discussing various aspects of the new 44th American President relating to the Middle East. Quantitatively, *Alarabiya* was the channel that ranked the highest in employing this frame (14 per cent), with *Aljazeera* using the regional frame much more than *Alhurra* at nine per cent and five per cent respectively.

5.3.6 Historic Victory

Despite the regional interest in the election of a candidate with strong African/Muslim connections as outlined above, historic victory stories were the least popular method of news-framing on all channels. Only four per cent of stories on *Aljazeera* and three per cent on *Alarabiya* used this type of news-framing. The news about the historical win of Obama appeared intensely on *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera*, highlighting the fact that Obama was the first Black American to reach this position. However, *Alhurra* celebrated the event as a historical win but did not highlight the ethnicity aspect of the candidate⁴⁵; instead it focused on values such as equality and the endless possibilities available in the United States. The period of celebration, the historical win and victory did not take long

⁴⁵ Stating that ‘Obama was the first Black person to become United States’ president’ was not mentioned in news headlines on *Alhurra*. However, it was mentioned once in the news story after the Obama’s winning.

in terms of news broadcasts as the channels moved to covering the challenges the new President was facing and how he was going to prioritize his plan of action. The few hours given for this frame on each news channel might be the explanation for the low percentage it received; however, my observations indicated that the two Arab trans-border news stations, *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera* extensively used this frame in their coverage of the election of Obama as the new American President.

5.4 Obama and the Racial Discourse

In this part of the analysis I am considering how Obama as a candidate was discussed and portrayed in the news by the three news channels, together with if there were any noticeable differences in the portrayal of the candidate between the news channels under study. Some celebrated Obama's victory as a racial milestone, claiming it for African Americans past and present; yet another hurdle had been crossed in the continuing struggle for equality. This is evident in the coverage of *Aljazeera* after the announcement of the President and during the Inaugural Ceremony. This emphasis was observed in some news bulletins during these periods, and prompted the employment of the historic victory frame during news analysis.

Other media texts either elided or marginalized racial issues, instead emphasizing diversity, unity and democracy in a general narrative of the campaign news progress as in the case of *Alhurra* news.

The 2008 American presidential election and 2009 Inauguration Ceremony of the American President Barack Obama were widely perceived in public culture as well as media and political scenes as a 'historical moment.' This fact is highlighted in several news interviews during the campaign period.

“Under normal circumstances there was no chance for Obama to become the president of the United States. Electing a Black candidate, or a woman, was not conceivable due to the deep-rooted issues of racism that is underlying everything in American society [...] What is taking place now is extremely utterly exceptional, historic and unexpected[...] We have witnessed the American equivalent of the fall of the Berlin Wall. I said equivalent not a

similar or a twin event. One is the Russian way of doing things and one is by a Hollywood measures using the notion of democracy” (Mohammed Hassanien Heikal; political analyst on *Aljazeera* 06/11/ 2008).

During the different intervals of the campaign there was a focus on the racial aspect of the Democratic candidate Barack Obama by some of the media channels, but nothing as prominent as what was featured on Election Day and in the aftermath. The editorial content was ceremonial, didactic, declaring the historical meaning of the global news event and articulating social values such as unity and democracy.

Alarabiya discussed the possibilities of a Black candidate winning the Democratic race during the last primaries period, when the competition was still between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. In a studio interview the anchor enquired about how feasible it would be for the Democratic Party to nominate a Black candidate for the presidency race.

“I have heard a lot of talks among the Democratic Party’s members declining to nominate Obama; this might be untrue at the end because the party has to unite behind one name” (*Alarabiya* evening News 03/06/08, correspondent).

Contrary to *Alarabiya*, during the period of the last primaries in America, there was no detected race narrative in the *Aljazeera* news sample, and the same was observed during the AIPAC coverage. By the time of Obama’s speech to the Democratic National Convention, the headlines labelled the event as historic, binding this description with the fact that Obama is “the first African descent officially nominated by the Democratic Party to run for presidency” (*Aljazeera* 28/08/08 several news headlines).

There is a similarity between *Alhurra*’s and *Aljazeera*’s coverage during the primaries and national party conventions in terms of racial and ethnicity discourse when reporting on Obama. A similar news title to that of *Aljazeera* could also be seen on *Alhurra* bulletins, “the race to the White House with the first African descent hopeful” (*Alhurra* evening News 26/08/08).

As the days passed and the Democratic National Convention ended, *Alhurra* used the word ‘Black’ in its title to mark the end of the event. The headline reads as follows, “by the end of the fourth day of the Democratic Convention, America writes a new page in

history nominating the first Black politician for the American presidential Election” (*Alhurra* evening News 29/08/08).

Aljazeera featured repeated photographic footage of Obama’s childhood and youth before each news segment about the election campaign development, stating in writing that he was born to a Kenyan father and grew up in the Islamic country Indonesia. The main title of the news featured an image of the White House and the notion of “*The White House, election in a new colour.*” The channel stressed this in a report on the upbringing and origin of the charismatic candidate and how people around the globe were supporting him. The following is a part of the presentation of the candidate on *Aljazeera*:

“The popularity of the Black presidential candidate around the globe is something that no other nominee has enjoyed before. Obama, who is born to a Kenyan dad, has gathered different nations around him. In his dad’s hometown, people are forming football teams in his name; fortune tellers are already announcing his win. In Japan, people wish they could cast their votes in his favour. And in Indonesia, the house her grew up in is becoming a touristic attraction” (*Aljazeera* evening News 03/11/08, news report).

Aljazeera continued broadcasting in an optimistic tone on 3rd and 4th of November 2008 before the name of the President Elect was revealed, and reported the huge difference in votes between the two opponents indicating subtly the historic event in terms of a win for the first Black President of the United States.

During the same period of Election Day, there was no detection of any focus on the race discussion on *Alhurra*. In contrast, *Alarabiya* highlighted the fact that Obama’s presence in this election has prompted millions of Black Americans to practise their democratic right and cast their votes. There was a report reflecting on the political history of what is referred to as the ‘Bradley Factor,’ a racial story featuring the Los Angeles Black Mayor Bradley, who ran for Governor of California in 1982. The polls demonstrated his popularity but the results were disappointing, ending in his defeat and this was explained by analysts as a racial issue (*Alarabiya* midday News 03/11/08, news report).

Hours before the name of the President of the United States was revealed, *Alarabiya* discussed the possibilities of each candidate, McCain and Obama, with the anchor asking specifically about the issue of ethnicity:

“In this election, foreign policy is not what the American voters would care about neither the fact that a Black candidate might become the president. Americans care about taxes, health security, mortgage rates and oil prices. It is all about the economy at this time. In my opinion, the foreign policy is what Joe Biden is assigned to take control of, and it is minor this time when it comes to votes. The issue of race is not what will affect voter’s decision to who should be the president of the country; it can only be beneficial in academic domain but not in reality” (*Alarabiya* evening News 04/ 11/08, interview with Adel Darweesh).

Alarabiya at this stage, hours before the president was named, referred to the election as being historic, based on the fact that the election would either result in the first President of African descent or the first female Vice-President (*Alarabiya* evening News 04/11/08, headline). Arguably there was an emphasis on the racial aspect of the election and the mentioning of the fact that there was a Black candidate and this was something unusual, something later discussed in interviews.

When the name of the President of the United States was announced, news on *Alarabiya* started with an excerpt from Obama’s speech saying “*Change has come to America*” followed by the title ‘*Obama has won making him the first president hailed from African descent.*’ The report following this introduction reiterated the link between the historic victory and the race of the new President. “Expectations and public polls have been proved right; and the United States of America has changed the colour of its president and will change its policies around the world.” The report proceeded with four minutes of interviews with Black people celebrating the moment. African Americans from Chicago to Washington D.C., covered by correspondents in these two cities, were shown crying with happiness tears talking about this moment as a turning one in the history of America (*Aljazeera* midday News 05/11/08, news report).

Aljazeera’s coverage did not overlook the historic aspect of the event, reflecting on the 1968 Democratic Convention that was held in Chicago, the protests that took place

against the Vietnam War and how the years have moved on and the same battlefield has moved to be where Black people of America and the world have witnessed the appointment of a Black American President. The same historic account was presented during the Inauguration Ceremony, when Martin Luther King's speech was mentioned and old people reminisced about the past and their hopes for the future and the unity of Americans under the reign of the new Black President (*Aljazeera* evening News 20/01/09, news report).

The same narrative appeared on *Alarabiya* news and *Alhurra*; both channels mentioned the historic achievement of the 44th President of the US being the first Black citizen to win this position. Unlike *Aljazeera* news there was no use of the contrast in notions of the White House as opposed to the Black American President or the mentioning of the changing American colours. There was a reference to the injustice in American society and prejudice against Black Americans, but the event was seen as a triumph of democratic values and unity within American society on the *Alhurra* channel.

“The President Elect dominates the White House and calls for unity among Americans, acknowledging the difficulties they are facing as a nation [...] this election that witnessed the highest number of participation since 1908, brings Obama as the 44th president of the United States, hoping to achieve the dream of Luther King in defending the civil rights of Black Americans.” (*Alarabiya*, midday News 05/11/08, news report)

Alhurra news did not give any historic reference to Obama winning. It broadcast in a neutral tone with the title of ‘*America votes Obama. Obama ends the eight-year term of Republicans.*’ The major focus of their news narrative was the values of unity, democracy, and the infinite possibilities that are only achievable in the United States of America. The mention of race was subtly immersed within the text when documenting the life of Obama as a child.

“Americans are looking forward to a new fresh ear and Obama with his youth, charisma and notion of change is epitomizing this fact. He became president even though he is a son of a Kenyan immigrant and a mother from Texas. Excerpts from Obama's speech [...] my story is in large an American story that

could never have happened in any other country on earth” (*Alhurra* midday News 05/11/08, news report).

The three news channels were different in their coverage of the racial issue in light of such a remarkable news event as election of the first Black President of the United States. *Aljazeera* featured high coverage of this issue in its news bulletins, studio interviews and correspondents reports. It was also shown heavily in the graphic titles that preceded the election news with highlighting of the contrast in colour between the White House and the Black President, and the referral to his colour in terms of changing future policies. On Election Day the historic moment was emphasized by relating to the fact that there was no chance for someone of African descent to become the president of the United States. The people chosen to appear on the reports during Election Day celebrations and later on Inauguration day were all Black and reiterated their joy as someone with their roots had made it all the way to President of the United States. On *Aljazeera*, the victory of Obama was portrayed as a racial milestone, claiming it as turning over a new page and era in the life of all Americans.

The discourse about ethnicity on *Alarabiya* vacillated between subtle and prominent, although it was not the core of the discussion on Election Day. The reports mentioned the victory as historic but did not follow this with discussions on Obama’s ethnicity to justify this. The overall picture on *Alarabiya* and *Alhurra* was similar: the narrative was generally about American unity as a ‘blending pot’. *Alarabiya* broadcasted a historical reflection on African Americans struggle for rights and existence, a fact that was absent on *Alhurra*. *Alhurra* highlighted words like democracy, dream and infinite possibilities without the mentioning of race or ethnicity. The election on *Alhurra* affirmed the American national culture of unity rather than incorporating themes of social differences and inequality. It can be viewed that both *Alhurra* and *Alarabiya* were more neutral in their coverage of the race discourse, while for *Aljazeera*, sensationalism and the portrayal of the sensitive issue of race featured highly in all its news rhetoric and coverage.

Relating the results of the framing analysis to these findings, this study shows that the use of the historic victory frame in relation to ethnicity was frequently used as the dominant frame on *Aljazeera* and on *Alarabiya* to a less extent. However, this frame was not used on *Alhurra* in terms of colours and ethnicity.

The differences in tackling the ethnicity issue during the different periods of the American presidential election presented in this study is ultimately a reflection of the ideological differences between the three news channels. *Alarabiya* is known for its conservative coverage, although in some occasions it tends to sensationalize the news. This neutrality featured on Election Day and also later in the study. *Alhurra* promoted notions of freedom and achievable dreams, which synchronized with the meaning of the name and the objectives of the channel. Finally, *Aljazeera*, which claims to stand against injustice across the world, tied to portray the victory as a historical achievement and as a result of the progress of human rights.

5.5 Conclusions

The study on framing analysis needs to achieve a conclusion as to whether there is a substantial differences in the frames employed in the news coverage of the 2008 American presidential election and the 2009 Inauguration Ceremony. An attempt was made to compare the findings with similar framing results recorded in American media framing analysis in order to relate to the concept that Williams (2011) suggested, namely that the news media unconsciously promotes one particular interpretation of events amongst its audiences, the Anglo-American model.

We can detect quantitative and qualitative differences in the frames presented on the three news channels. Human interest frames appeared to feature highly as general frame on *Alarabiya* as well as the regional perspective frame. The historic victory frame was not mentioned on *Alhurra* news broadcasts as a dominant frame but appeared within the discourse as one of the overall frames presented in the news. *Aljazeera* celebrated the historic win in its coverage as well as employing the issue/policy frame. These findings suggest a link between journalistic ideology, political agendas and framing. Although the three news channels used the horse-race frame frequently, in tandem with this frame there was a high use of other categories to portray events.

The most highly used frame by all three trans-border channels was the horse-race, just as many previous American and European studies have concluded in their framing analysis of elections. The high use of the horse-race frame in the mass media could be

interpreted as: 1) the horse-race frame explains the nature of the election campaign where a number of candidates are moving ahead or falling behind in the polls which creates excitement in the news context attracting audiences; or 2) following the coverage of international news organization that shape the event in competitive discourse. In other words, media editors follow the lead of other bigger mass media, suggesting that Arab news channels will follow news agencies and international/American news channels in their coverage of the American presidential election. In my opinion, the high usage of the horse-race frame in the news is due to the news sampling period itself. The study concentrated on the election campaign starting from the last primary in June 2008 then the Democratic and Republican National Conventions as well as Election Day. All involved a form of competition between candidates due to the nature of the event itself. The high usage, I interpret, is due to the focus of the sample on intervals that involve polls and competition discourse. I maintain that if the thesis had focused only on Election Day, then the use of the horse-race frame would appear to be similar in numbers to other frames and not the highest.

Stories related to the human interest side of the events appear to be equally presented by all three trans-border channels. There are several accounts of the personal lives of the candidates, Obama and McCain, and the nominated vice presidents, Sarah Palin and Joe Biden, during the period of the Democratic and Republican National Conventions. However, the focus on Obama as a Black candidate and the one depicting youth and change, is what increases the human interest framing of the event. Certainly this frame is related to the racial discourse that was prominent on *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera*, and relatively low on *Alhurra*. The historic victory frame that I created to fit the sequence of news on Election Day and beyond is highly related to Obama and his ethnicity. This frame was noticeably celebrated on *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera* but not on *Alhurra* in the same way.

The study of framing does not tackle bias in news coverage, as I found this latter concept inapplicable in studying Arab transnational media, unlike other American Election studies. However, *Aljazeera* during the months of the election campaign praised Barack Obama and positively portrayed him as the one who would bring new 'colours' to the American White House in several news bulletins. This point corresponds to the finding of Cruikshank (2009) when researching the coverage of the *Aljazeera English*

Channel. He concluded that Obama was positively framed as the one who will start serious change in American relations with the Arab world. My analysis finds that this positive portrayal of Obama was also presented on *Aljazeera* during the months before Obama was elected but this tone turned to pessimism after Election Day when the news on *Aljazeera* started including Arab analysts from different Middle Eastern countries and the possibilities Obama has in terms of his relationship with the region.

A regional dimension to the news was added by both *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera* and to a lesser extent by *Alhurra*. *Alarabiya* seemed to be the highest qualitatively and quantitatively with news stories and discussions with Arab political experts on regional matters under the new American President. The similarities between the two Arabic trans-border news channels *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera* seemed to be apparent in the type of sources the two broadcasters used in terms of numbers of correspondent reports, news agencies and locals. However, there were also differences such as the number of Arab political analysts *Alarabiya* interviewed, 20 as opposed to nine on *Aljazeera* and four in the coverage by *Alhurra*. A high reliance on American political analysts and correspondents was shown by *Alhurra* television and was more than the other two news channels - 11 American experts and 27 occasions of relying on correspondents. In my opinion, *Alhurra*'s coverage of the 2008 American presidential election lacked the understanding of the nature of an Arab audience and the coverage was traditional, relying extensively on correspondents in the US and in Arab countries to answer questions instead of interviewing members of the public or political experts. Because *Alhurra* is based in Washington DC, it was easier to interview American sources than Arabs, and most of the Arab interviews were conducted via satellite link.

The following chapter will analyse the audience's perspective of the 2008 American presidential election, their perception of media credibility and the individual frames they had for the election.

Chapter 6 - AUDIENCE CREDIBILITY FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, the study focused on the type of messages the news media presented during the 2008 American presidential election. The second part of this study will investigate how people understand the media in terms of exposure level, perception of the event and credibility evaluation. To what extent does a segment of the Arab audience, despite being at a distance from the United States, take an interest in this world event and how far is this due to the effects of globalisation? This chapter will investigate the degree of power the media have on audiences by exploring individual frames the sample audience has of the American presidential election. The study looks at the extent to which the audience gives credibility to such trans-border channels and the way in which their individual frames are shaped by the way the news is presented.

6.2 Regional Overview

As a point of comparison the Conference for International Broadcasters Audience Research Services (CIBAR, 2011) has conducted surveys throughout the Arab region where they record that daily television viewership exceeds 75 per cent in most countries with the highest penetration in Morocco (89 per cent) and Kuwait (86 per cent) and the lowest in Jordan (67 per cent). In Kuwait, out of the 7,056 survey respondents 97 per cent were found to either own or have access to satellite television. CIBAR reported that new consumers tended to be sceptical when recognizing the form and content of propaganda and are not inclined to believe claims of objectivity. Instead they seek 'balance' in news reporting. In the UAE, the news station *Aljazeera* claimed an audience of 57 per cent of the viewers for news and 61 per cent of that audience rated *Aljazeera* as the most credible station for delivering the news. The report also stated that wherever they lived, Arabs view *Aljazeera* as being local.

In 2005 the United States of America Accountability Office produced a report including statistics on its Arabic news station *Alhurra*, in which they provided details relating to its estimated audience size and credibility rating; these are set out in table 6.1.

Table 6.1 - BBGs Reported Audience Size and Credibility Estimates for *Alhurra*, Fiscal Year 2005

Country surveyed	Year surveyed	<i>Alhurra</i> Established Audience	Credibility Rate
Algeria	2004	2,466,888	n/a
Bahrain	2005	132,814	86
Djibouti	2003	n/a	n/a
Egypt	2005	2,019,968	92
Iraq	2005	6,860,435	73
Jordan	2005	729,120	68
Kuwait	2005	249,612	72
Lebanon	2005	738,720	79
Morocco	2005	2,679,367	70
Qatar	2004	n/a	n/a
Saudi Arabia	2005	2,204,784	73
Syria	2004	2,661,120	60
Tunisia	2005	676,800	75
UAE	2005	138,510	82
Region wide fiscal year 2005 estimate		21.6 million	73

The above survey results suggested a credibility rating for Saudi Arabia, the target audience, of 73 per cent for *Alhurra*. This figure provided by the American Government in relation to its own-funded Arabic service will be compared with the results from the audience survey carried out for the purposes of this study. *Aljazeera* has produced its own table of statistics (available from the website Aljazeera.net) to illustrate its potential audience across the region, although it is important to note these are potential and not actual audience figures, and these are set out in table 6.2.

Table 6.2 - Aljazeera Viewer Demographics

Country/ Region	Total Population	Penetration	Potential audiences
Algeria	32,818,500	24.0%	5,240,038
Bahrain	667,238	43.7%	151,553
Cyprus	771,657	25.0%	4,821
Egypt	74,718,797	10.0%	4,642,578
Europe	n/a	n/a	4,000,000
Iran	68,278,826	60.0%	289,639
Iraq	24,683,313	47.0%	5,159,615
Israel	6,116,533	47.0%	418,190
Jordan	5,460,265	52.0%	1,783,615
Kuwait	2,183,161	69.17%	871,021
Lebanon	3,727,703	59.3%	1,1,530,901
Libya	5,499,074	55.0%	1,921,610
Morocco	31,689,265	38.2%	8,223,342
Oman	2,807,125	59.0%	717,964
Qatar	817,052	69.12%	170,102
Saudi Arabia	24,293,844	51.23%	6,463,071
Syria	17,585,540	38.0%	3,705,062
Tunisia	9,924,742	23.0%	1,633,037
Turkey	68,109,469	10.0%	495,837
United Arab Emirates (UAE)	2,484,818	52%	378,845
USA	n/a	n/a	1,000,000
West Bank & Gaza Strip	3,512,062	99.0%	1,663,808
Yemen	19,349,881	27.0%	2,723,829
Totals	405,498,865		53,208,177

Alarabiya presented a similar set of viewer demographics, which are set out in table 6.3.

Table 6.3 - *Alarabiya* Viewer Demographics

Country and Global Region	Estimated Households watching	Estimated potential audience
GULF REGION		
Bahrain	75,900	500,680
Iraq	397,000	1,563,000
Saudi Arabia	678,760	5,920,850
Kuwait	240,000	1,072,000
Oman	30,200	141,400
Qatar	70,650	359,250
UAE	91,600	530,200
Yemen (North and South)	89,600	450,800
MEDITERRANEAN		
Algeria	599,000	2,576,000
Cyprus	1,050	4,600
Israel	89,489	357,956
Lebanon	17,038	67,152
Morocco	2,544,500	9,578,000
Tunisia	38,928	161,712
Turkey	17,980	69,920
West Bank and Gaza Strip	650	2,600
Total	4,982,345	23,396,120

(Numbers and data are estimates and are based on Allied Media research, 2007)

There is some additional material available from the BBC, which commissioned the Pan-Arab Research Council (PARC) to conduct qualitative research among current and future opinion-formers to evaluate *BBC Arabic* Television in February and March 2009. A total of 36 in-depth interviews were conducted with opinion formers across six markets: Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia. The BBC was acknowledged to have a long-standing and established history, due to the launch of BBC Arabic Radio in 1938, and has a trustworthy image. Credibility and impartiality were felt to be the most important attributes of a broadcasting station among the participants in the

survey, and empathy and a connection with the Arab cause was one of the least important attributes.

However, there were a number of criticisms which reveal that this is not quite the true picture. Firstly, participants expressed a desire for more country-specific news. They expressed a sense that a foreign owned trans-border news stations did not sufficiently highlight the differences between Arab countries, suggesting a lack of in-depth understanding of the region and its issues. Social issues in particular were not felt to be represented. Secondly, there was a perception that *BBC Arabic* Television was ‘distant’ and not emotionally engaged with Arab viewers. Participants acknowledged that they were predominantly interested in local and national news followed by regional news to keep them up to date with events across the Arab world. International news was primarily followed for the impact it has on the Arab World.

“The world is now led by a great force. We are interested in the news of big countries and our relationship with them, our rank compared to them, how we are benefiting from them, what the benefits are and if they will enhance development in politics and address terrorism cases.” (Saudi Arabian journalist, female BBC 2011, p. 14)

However, the interviewees did feel that trans-border channels like *BBC Arabic* and *Alhurra* gave them access to and insight into other cultures and societies. They also mentioned CNN, FOX, CNBC, France 24 and Russia Today in this context. The BBC report also recorded perceptions of its competitors, including the three channels under study here. *Aljazeera* and *Alarabiya* are regarded as *BBC Arabic*’s main rivals. *Aljazeera* was admired for its wide coverage, its reporters in various locations, the breadth of topics covered and the fact that the news is presented in an appealing way. It was noted that its presenters were “strong in terms of Arabic pronunciation and grammar” and that they covered a range of nationalities, an aspect that was well-liked. This was perceived to assist them in connecting with a wide range of viewers. However, the station was criticized for having a biased stance and an inclination towards certain audiences, being for example, pro the Qatari government, and biased to a particular religious viewpoint. It was felt that its presenters sometimes presented the news in a very personal way and this contributed to the perception that the station suffers from bias. In contrast, some

participants felt that this helped viewers to engage emotionally with the news and expressed more empathy with *Aljazeera's* audience.

Alarabiya was believed to be well-established in the Arab world and was felt to be credible and neutral in its coverage. It was praised for its high levels of interaction with its viewers and emotionally engaging in the way it narrates its news coverage. It is perceived as the 'most Arabic' of the stations, with one participant observing:

“Where would you turn for breaking news? *Alarabiya*, because I'm interested in knowing the effect of news upon us and upon our Arab brothers.” (Saudi Arabia, Academic, Female participant, BBC 2011, p. 41)

Alarabiya, the survey concluded, “interacts well with the Arab society” (BBC 2011, p. 41). It was praised as the 'fastest' channel with the news and participants felt they could trust its coverage and were also pleased with the way it provides in-depth detailed analysis of regional and world news. Both *Aljazeera* and *Alarabiya* were felt to be weaker when it came to news outside of the region, and there was a perceived lack of ability to reach and talk to influential world leaders. Although *Alhurra* was less watched by the participants in the BBC survey outside of Iraq as it was felt to be overly pro-American, it nevertheless did score highly, as did *BBC Arabic Television*, when it came to international news where it was perceived to have good coverage. However, it scored poorly in terms of empathy with participants judging that it represents Arab views in a Western way.

The BBC sample was not a large one but the views expressed will be useful for comparing to the sample obtained from the questionnaire (see Appendix Three) which is concerned specifically with the audience in Saudi Arabia.

It is important to note that, since satellite television is a relatively recent phenomenon in the Middle East region,⁴⁶ penetrating countries where there has been until now very little exposure to terrestrial television compared to the United States and Europe, there is not a great body of statistics such as television ratings to draw on. In Saudi Arabia in particular, the Government emphasis has been on funding television development through

⁴⁶ Relatively recent in the sense that satellite and trans-border channels has been around for twenty years in the Middle East.

advertising revenue which means that the statistical evidence that is available tends to relate to the impact of advertising rather than programming. Studies such as this one are effectively the first in the field.

6.3 Saudi Arabia - Audience Results

The focus of this chapter concerns the concept of media credibility perception, consumption of television news channels, and finally the framing perception of news channels. This concept of audience framing perception is what some researchers refer to as individual frames, which are “mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals’ processing of information” (Entman, 1993, p.53).

The frequency of exposure is also a determining factor in indicating how audiences evaluate the truthfulness and credibility of the medium. Several research studies have indicated that television news was more credible when compared to other media sources (Gaziano and McGrath 1985).

As noted in the methodology chapter, two focus groups were originally conducted in August 2008. The idea behind this research began by studying the 2008 American presidential election and 2009 Inaugural Ceremony as portrayed by a sample of trans-border news channels broadcasting in Arabic. This was then extended to include a sample of the Saudi audience and their perception of the event. The audience perception study examines any possible links between the degree of exposure and the news credibility perception as well as the framing of the different media channels. The analysis of this audience chapter will look firstly at the results of the two focus groups then the questionnaire results from 50 respondents.

6.4 Findings of the Focus Groups

As mentioned earlier, the audience study used two methodological forms; focus groups and a questionnaire. This chapter will start with an overview of the results obtained from the two focus groups. Highlighting the viewing habits of the sample audience, participants were chosen based on their interest in television news, with

television being the main source of world information for the participants, and specifically satellite trans-border news channels. This accounted for 100 per cent of the participants in the first discussion group, and 60 per cent in the second group. Two participants of the second focus group reported television news as being their second source of information. Newspapers were chosen as the first source of world news by two males, one in each group, and the internet was the first choice for news for a female journalist participating in the second focus group. In the second rank of news sources, members of the first focus group relied newspapers - three male participants (those who preferred television to be their first news source), internet and television for another member and radio for the fifth member of the first focus group. For the second mixed gender focus group, two participants (one male, one female) chose newspapers (40 per cent) as their second rank of news source, two (a male university lecturer and a female journalist) chose television (40 per cent), and one female school teacher relied on the internet as her second favourite source of news. Tables 6.4 and 6.5 indicate the preference for news sources.

Table 6.4 – Focus Group 1: news sources (five males)

	Doctor	Business owner	News caster	Public sector	Lawyer
First Source	Television	Television	Television	Newspaper and Television	Television
Second Source	Newspaper	Newspaper	Newspaper	Internet	Radio

Table 6.5 - Focus Group 2: news sources (two males and three females)

	Female School teacher	Male engineer	Female university lecturer	Male university lecturer	Female journalist
First Source	Television	Television	Television	Newspaper	Internet
Second Source	Internet	Newspaper	Newspaper	Television	Television

The level of daily television news exposure varied. The majority of the participants in the two focus groups (80 per cent) are exposed to television news between two to three hours daily.

In terms of trusting the news source, television news ranked the highest (100 per cent) in both focus groups as it is deemed the most current in covering events from where they are occurring and always are documented with live footage which enhances the credibility of the television news as a source of information. When the word 'credibility' was mentioned during the two discussions respondents referred to 'trust' as being a synonymous concept. There was a unanimous response stating the similar meaning of both terms; media credibility and media trust. It is worth noting at this point that the easily accessible medium of television is playing a role in this beside the timely coverage and real footage from the event scene. The fact that most households in Saudi Arabia have a television and satellite receiver makes it easier to tune into television news than to check news sites or newspapers. However, there were also other trusted sources besides television news, such as newspapers - 80 per cent for the first focus group and 20 per cent for the second focus group.

The meaning of credibility as comprehended by participants was in general referred to as being truthful, covering events in a fair way and presenting both sides of a story, and most of the answers revolved around the same premise in one way or another. For example, few participants thought that credibility meant proving that the news coverage was probing, questioning and investigating the true causes of an event.

When a news anchor starts asking questions of a correspondent I feel that the channel is credible. The fact that the news station has a network of correspondents around the world makes it look professional, trustworthy, and respectful of its audiences, one of the participants stated.

A few members of the focus groups thought that credibility as a term is an abstract notion that is hard or even impossible to achieve, as all channels have ideological interests related to the financial support they receive. This viewpoint highlights two elements that have been worked on by media scholars and discussed in the literature review chapter. The link between agendas, interests and credibility has been previously studied and suggests a negative effect on perception of media source as truthful and

credible when audiences are aware of their intentions (Kiouisis, 2001; El-Nawawy, 2006; Ashley et al., 2010).

Other additional meanings given for news credibility were high level of professionalism, similar to what is seen on CNN and other Western media channels, completeness of the stories and a follow-up process, tackling news that is of importance to viewers in the Arab world, e.g. news reflecting the oppression and dictatorship present in the Arab region, and being clear when reporting an event not to mix up reporting with personal opinions and ideologies.

The most trusted and preferred news channel to watch was *Alarabiya* (70 per cent) in both focus groups. This result is not surprising as *Aljazeera* continues to have controversial views with regard to its agenda, loyalty, rumours about ties with Israelis and funding resources, whereas *Alarabiya* is considered to be broadcasting with a milder objective tone, and is financed by Saudi businessmen, a fact that might make this news channel more appealing to viewers in Saudi Arabia. At this stage we can infer from the participants' answers that there is a positive relationship between the high exposure to the news outlet and the degree of trust (credibility) in the content the outlet presents.

In terms of interest in news stories, the focus groups' participants agreed on the importance of knowing about regional events, in heated locations such as Palestine and Iraq, then international news. Interestingly, news about Saudi Arabia did not feature highly in the important news that participants would care to know about, as this is usually state-type news stories where officials meet and greet others, and there is no place for real stories about what goes on in the country. One participant explained it by saying:

“The Saudi media dominance is portrayed in what we see of self-control (editorial) exercised by all media channels not to hustle status quo in Saudi.”

This statement agrees with what Hammond (2008) found regarding the different domestic, regional and international challenges that Saudi Arabia has sought to respond to since the 1990s, by acquiring a considerable role in the pan-Arab media (Al-Rasheed 2008, p. 335). Another way to explain the little interest in news tackling Saudi Arabia could be because the most watched and trusted news channel for this sample is *Alarabiya* (70 per cent) which is not going to be critical of anything domestically happening in the

Kingdom as it is financed by Saudi money. In second rank, news about the American presidential election was of importance to the participants and also business news.

In a brain-storming session, participants were asked to jot down the main features in their opinions that make a good news channel. Objectivity and presenting both sides of a story was the main point noted, having a good network of correspondents and newscasters were also considered important. Being truthful, credible and presenting legitimate sources to convey the message was mentioned by a few participants (60 per cent).

Assessing the performance of media channels by their audience has been studied previously (Abdulla *et al.*, 2002; Ayish, 2004). A general evaluation of Arabic news channels showed that participants thought that Arab trans-border news channels are to a great extent credible when they do not cover issues related to the countries that support the channels financially. They are satisfied with the type of reporting and journalism presented on the news channels available for Arab audiences. However, credibility is a term that cannot be generalised, especially when there are some sensitive matters that news channels cannot afford to annoy countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar. In general, the level of freedom in reporting is found to be satisfactory to the audience in this sample (n=8). This agrees with what Abdulla *et al.* (2002) noted, readers and viewers understand the editing and other forms of editorial screening that occur in newspapers and television newsrooms and consequently judge the partial credibility of the source regarding certain matters (Abdulla *et al.*, 2002).

Reporting on the individual framing participants would give to news channels, *Alarabiya* was considered the voice of neutrality, representing Saudi Arabia's political stance and operating with expensive facilities and a professional crew. *Alhurra* is rarely watched and is not credible as a news source because "it is American way to brainwash Arab minds" said a participant in the focus groups.

This perception of *Alhurra* was based on a few participants of the focus groups and coincides with what el-Nawawy (2006) found for *Alhurra* and *Radio Sawa*. His results showed a low credibility measure for *Alhurra* and an even lower one for the radio station. el-Nawawy concluded that because many Arab media users these days are intensely aware of the American administration's motives in trying to win Arab hearts and minds and to improve its image in the region, audiences have the tendency not to trust news

broadcast on *Radio Sawa* or *Alhurra* (2006, p. 132). The following statements are a few example of how respondents perceived *Alhurra*:

“*Alhurra* is an American propaganda device to fabricate news” remarked one participant.

“There is no need to check what *Alhurra* has to offer when there are plenty of Arab news channels available in the sky to get news and information from” added another respondent.

“There is no reason that I want to watch a channel that was launched after the American occupation of Iraq; naming it *Alhurra* makes it even unbearable to me; how would Americans occupy Iraq and later the Middle East and call their channel *Alhurra*!” another participant commented.

In the last remark, the respondent was referring to the Arabic meaning of the name ‘*Alhurra*’ which means the ‘free one.’ Reading further into the last comment the name of the channel with its meaning, connotation and launch time, all depict the American occupation of lands and minds as well. The graphics and logo that is still used by the channel today shows white horses running freely on a spacious plain, which can be seen as the Arab countries’ freedom at last, with the help/occupation of American troops (Aldawood, 2004)

The individual frame of *Aljazeera* in the minds of the participants of the focus groups is that the channel is the voice of oppressed Palestinians, fighting injustice around the world.

“It can start a war easily if it decided to launch a campaign against or for a certain cause,” a male respondent said.

Another candidate thought *Aljazeera* was only interested in a sensational type of journalism. Some viewers mentioned the lack of professional journalistic practices sometimes exhibited when dealing with some issues and certain countries. The discussions suggested that people are aware of media agendas and they frame the channels accordingly. A personal frame might appear in favour of a media outlet yet

elaborating on the answers produced critical audience views. Participants related the funding aspect directly to media ideology and source credibility.

In the two focus groups participants evaluated the credibility of media news channels as partially due to the fact that at certain events these channels will take the stand of the countries financing their operations, despite their claim to be non-governmental and privately owned channels. In another words, they are cautious as to what they watch and in the back of their minds they relate the news coverage to the affiliation each channel has with the country sponsoring it. Credibility to these participants is a selective process, gauged and judged according to event and the schemas stored in their minds as a general personal frame of the media outlets. This point was clear during the coverage by *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera* of the Syrian strikes that started in January 2011 and escalated into the uprising in March 2011. These two news channels took the stand of their governments, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, attacking the Syrian regime and highlighting the massacres taking place by the Syrian army and rarely supported the Syrian government. After the clear anti Syrian-government stance that these two news channels adopted, a number of well-known Syrian broadcasters resigned from both *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera* to mark their disapproval of such unilateral impartial coverage.

However, the ten Saudi nationals participating in the two focus groups showed a tendency to rely on news broadcasted on *Alarabiya*, labelling it as their 'credible and preferred news channel' despite its avoidance of broadcasting controversial matters about Saudi Arabia. It is worth noting that this might be because of the professional media practices *Alarabiya* adopts, and could also be because they are proud to have a Saudi funded channel with the result that they prefer and trust it more than other Arabic news channels. This could be further investigated in future research.

The American election news was of relative interest to the participants (80 per cent), however two females from second focus group did not show any interest in American election news. This corresponds with what Ayish (2004) noted as a difference in interest between the two genders when it comes to political news on television. However, this interest in American election news was not translated as more time spent (exposure) watching the news. The participants thought that what is being broadcasted on Arabic trans-border news channels about election in the US was sufficient and that when it is timely news, these channels do a good job in covering and analysing the event fully. The

majority showed an interest in the event news, but at the same time there was no increase in time dedicated to watching and following the election news.

The groups were asked to identify points where election news was important to Arabs in general and to Saudis in specific. Mainly the answers addressed the political aspect as regards to the outcome of the 2008 American presidential election which will design the future of the entire world. The two groups agreed unanimously that the Democrats would have a more peaceful agenda towards the Middle East, and this would end the era of the Republicans and George W. Bush in the White House together with all the violent attacks the region had witnessed during Bush's term as American President. There was a tone of hope in the participants' voices while talking about how important the 2008 American presidential election is to countries in the region. Their hope was for the Democrats to win in Congress and at the White House in order to bring stability to the Middle East and even to the US.

In addition to the political viewpoint which everyone in the focus groups agreed upon, some viewers looked at the economical aspect of the event, stating that the whole world economy and peace would be shaped accordingly. Standing in favour of the Democrats, the following statement was made by a university lecturer participating in the discussion:

“Switching roles between the two parties is the way it has been going for ages now in the US. The coming president is going to be a Democrat, taking the responsibility of reviving the ailing American economy after eight years of the ruling of Republicans. This scenario is repeated over and over again. The coming president will be consumed with their internal American financial ordeals that will leave no time to mess about in our region.”

Respondents relied on Arab trans-border television mass media and newspapers to learn about the development of the event, although a small number of participants also mentioned the fact that they discuss it with other relatives and friends living in the US. Two participants preferred watching the election on American news channels such as CNN and Fox news but did not do so frequently.

The concept of the election was fully clear to some of the participants (60 per cent), while the rest were learning through watching the development of this election. Reasons cited for not fully grasping the concept of the presidential election were due to the lack of

similar democratic systems in Arab countries and the fact that the election occurs only once every four years. However, the months of coverage of the American presidential election makes it boring to follow, and the big geographical land mass of the US with different results for every American state makes it hard to comprehend how the electoral process takes place.

The outstanding and notable image (individual frame) participants had in minds about this election campaign was the fact that a Black hopeful was racing to reach the presidential position in the White House (80 per cent). This falls, in my opinion, under the personality frame or what the news framing analysis labels to be the human interest frame. Another prominent individual frame was the horse-race (80 per cent). It can be inferred that these two individual frames are overlapping at this point as the majority of respondents of both focus groups viewed the event as a race, in which at the point of the focus groups (August 2008), was a race between the Democratic candidate, Barak Obama and the Republican candidate, John McCain. Also in this frame was Obama as the first Black hopeful to be in the race. This proves the media effect and influence on individual frames. Looking at the dominant news frames that appear on the news channels in this study, results in chapter five showed that the horse-race and the human interest frame are the ones most used in the news coverage. Participants had the image of a racing campaign from past years and therefore explained the way they see the event based on the factor of the media effect and the influence it has in shaping how we see the worlds (media framing) along with the mental and cognitive reservoir that people allocate in their minds (individual framing).

The election news as it appeared on Arabic news channel was presented as a race between the candidates and this was the perception of almost all the participants of the two focus groups. Obama was the favourite to win among 70 per cent of the sample because he is a young male Democrat with a gentle attitude towards the Middle East region and also because of his Black origins. The fact that Obama's father is believed to be a Muslim did not affect participants' decisions; some did not acknowledge this fact at all. Few participants thought that there was no difference in who will become president. Here is some examples of what participants had to say in this regard.

“I do not believe his dad is Muslim” one participant said.

“He was raised by his Christian grandparents, what does he grew up to know about Islam?” another participant added.

“Being from a Muslim dad does not mean he is going to be a fair man. One look at conditions of Muslims in their countries under Muslim rulers will be enough to prove that religion has nothing to do with fair judgement” participant added.

“This fact is insignificant. How would it make Obama a good president?” asked another candidate.

One additional part in the focus groups that is missing from questionnaire is the viewing of Obama’s speech before AIPAC. The good thoughts about the young Black hopeful, Barack Obama, seemed to have changed after watching his speech presented before the AIPAC. During the discussion participants sounded hopeful about the future if Obama was elected president of the US. In fact, he was the favourite to win by the majority of participants (70 per cent) who noted that his winning would be a change for the better in the Middle East Region:

“We should be hoping for Obama’s win. The fact that this will end Bush’s regime - which during his two terms we witnessed all kind of massacres in the region- and the outgo of Republicans from power and the arrival of Democrats who are more lenient in comparison. These are all optimistic signs for us as Arabs,” said one participant.

However, this optimistic tone turned into disappointment after watching the AIPAC speech that Obama gave. The change in opinion among members of the focus groups was instant, a male newscaster thought that no matter who you bring to fill the chair of the President of the US, from whatever party or t origin, he/ she will always be backing Israel and be unfair to Arabs.

“I am not optimistic after this speech; Obama will support Israel and get them tangible results. The Middle East Region might see some silver lining in the way he and his administration will tackle our problems but this will be for the best interest of Israel- supporting Israel to dominate the region. I even believe

he will be using Iran and its nuclear weapons as a card to threaten Arabs and force them to obey,” a participant added.

Another point was made to counter what had been said earlier regarding the Democrats being more on the softer none-army side of things:

“Who said Democrats are lenient and more understanding? Put aside our hopes as Arabs, Americans do elect Democratic president just to save their ailing economy. But the same agenda of Republican when it comes to military acts will stay as is,” said a lawyer participating in the discussion.

Similar to this point, with an added touch of irony, a university lecturer noted that the differences between Democrats and Republicans are that:

“Democrats will give a carrot and take everything else, referring to the occupation of Iraq and control over oil, whereas Republicans are so greedy they will take everything and not leave even the carrot,” added a participant.

Another interesting interpretation of the speech was made by a female schoolteacher regarding terrorism:

“Obama’s speech meant to rally Israelis and Jewish community around him, just listen to what he said about Jerusalem. When he talks about combating terrorism, he clearly means Arabic Islamic terrorism. Hiekal described him as a black-skinned man with a white heart.”

The news of Obama’s speech before the AIPAC triggered members of the groups to reiterate the power of the Jewish lobby in America:

“There is no exaggeration when we talk about the Jewish control of all facets in the United States. They control media, financial entities, decision makers and international policy. It is a well-known fact that anyone living in America can sense and confirm. Obama at the moment and after becoming president, if he was elected, will always want to serve Jewish interest in America and around the world especially those living in Israel,” said a male engineer participating in the discussion.

6.5 Findings of the Audience Questionnaire

This study is exploratory in nature, and is trying to find out information from a sample made up of 50 participants about their audience habits, perception of an event and the perceived credibility of news channels (See Appendix Three and Chapter Four for methodology). The first group of questions were designed to verify that participants fall within the sampling criteria, which is over 30 years old, university graduates who watch news on television regularly. As a sample of the overall television audience, a 30+ group comprises 30 per cent of the audience of *Aljazeera* and 37 per cent of the audience of *Alarabiya*. *Aljazeera* claims that 29 per cent of its audience is university educated while *Alarabiya* gives a figure of 25 per cent for its audience. No comparable figures are available for *Alhurra*.

6.5.1 News Watching Habits

The first question focused on the total daily time exposed to different news media sources in general (not specifying television at this stage). The average daily exposure ranged between two to four hours. Following this question, respondents were asked to identify the main news source they rely on daily for information and news.

The entire sample (n=50) chose television as their main news source. Some participants (six per cent) also chose radio as their main source and another smaller number (20 per cent) also chose newspapers. Table 6.6 shows the main news sources for the sample in this study. The second source of information indicated by the sample was the internet and mobile text messages. The fact that television is the main source of information and news was not surprising since satellite television broadcasting has increasingly become an integral part of daily information intake for people in the Middle East, and people in Saudi Arabia rely on television for information about the world (Arab Advisory Group, 2007). The low popularity of newspapers may be because print media is

less timely than television with its live news and this is supported by the choice of internet sites and mobile text messages as a second source of news after television.⁴⁷

Regarding the frequency of television news daily exposure, a question was asked about the average number of hours spent watching the news television, and this varied between one hour daily for 38 participants in the sample (76 per cent), and two to four hours of daily news watching for 12 people in the sample (24 per cent). We can compare this with the figures given for *Aljazeera* in their regional survey, which found an average of 3 – 4 hours a day for the older age ranges with an additional hour a day for those aged 15 – 29, suggesting in terms of exposure that Saudi viewers are in line with the regional average.

Table 6.6 - Main news source

	First*	Second
Radio	4%	24%
Television	100%	-
Newspapers	12%	26%
Internet	16%	20%
Word of mouth	-	17.9%
Others	8%	4% mobile text message

*More than one source was chosen in some cases

6.5.2 News Media Reliance

To identify media reliance as an independent variable, two questions were asked in the survey. The first one was to name the main news source participants rely on for information and the second was on the average time spent away from this source without missing it. The findings show that not only do respondents chose television to be their main source of news, when asked about the medium they rely on daily for news, the majority rated television news as the most relied on source of information. With its timely

⁴⁷ Almost all Arabic news channels in the Middle East offer the news text messages service/mobile alerts

edge and live feed reporting television news seem to have won a greater level of trust than other media outlets among respondents. Newspapers and online news websites were ranked as second sources relied on daily for information due to the difficulty in verifying authentic sources on many sites, as well as not having easy access to the internet for most of the participants. Many reported having an annual subscription for a newspaper at home or work which makes it a convenient source of news and one which is usually more reliable and credible than the Internet. Table 6.7 below shows the results generated from this question.

Table 6.7 - Participants' reliance across news media outlets

Source of News	Number of participants	Percentage
Newspapers	10	20
Television	45	90
Internet news sites	7	14
Radio	3	6
Other (gossip)	1	2
Others (blogs)	1	2

Twenty participants thought two-to-three days is the number of days they can go without watching any news on television. Seven participants chose one day, three people four-to-five days and one respondent did not feel any difference when not watching news on television. These figures indicate that there is a positive relationship between the preferred medium and the reliance on it, as television was chosen as the main reliable source of information by the majority of the sample and to a reasonable extent they showed an attachment to this medium.

The type of television all the participants rely on for news information were the trans-border satellite channels (n=50, 100 per cent) choosing this as their preferred and only news television option. This result agrees with the phenomenon of satellite broadcasting that began in the Middle East region in the 1990s.

When watching the news 41 respondents (82 per cent) chose specialized news channels to obtain their information from, whereas seven people (14 per cent) watch it on both, general-interest and specialized news channels. Three participants (6 per cent)

watch the news on a general-interest satellite channels. Table 6.8 gives the preference figures for the type of news channels.

Table 6.8 - Type of channels preferred to watch news on

Type of Channel	Number of Participants	Percentage
General Interest	6	6
Specialized News	41	82
Both	3	14

According to participants their preference for watching specialized news channels are due to the following reasons:

- give accurate information
- full details and comprehensive coverage
- around the clock events with a network of correspondents broadcasting live from the field and political analyses from within the news studio
- provide many viewpoints and perspectives, possess the latest technologies and facilities
- the time period allocated by specialized news channels is adequate for more detail and insight to help better understand events
- the coverage of all angles of an event and the follow up process in the days after the main news
- the exclusive news and interviews these channels strive to present
- the objectivity of these channels and the precise comprehensive information
- the ability to catch up with the news any time of the day
- the availability of professional news channels like *Aljazeera* that compete with other Western models of news.

Participants who did not distinguish in their preference between general interest and specialized news channels or those who rely on general-interest channels for their daily news, reported that the type of broadcast is insignificant as long as they get the news from a trusted media channel, such as the Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC) (the first

Arab trans-border general interest channel). However, the participants who chose to watch news on the general interest channels thought that it was more likely for them to be watching a social show or a drama series followed by the news than to be tuning into the news bulletin on purpose.

Watching times of the news was mainly in the evening between 18:00-21:00 and after 22:00 (42 per cent, n= 21 each category). Another group preferred watching news in the morning between 6:00-9:00 (18 per cent). Table 6.9 lists the time preferences for news watching according to gender.

Table 6.9 - Daily times for watching the news

	Number of Participants	Percentage
Early morning (6-9 am)	9	18
Midday (12:00-15:00)	2	4
Evening (18:00- 21:00)	21	42
Late evening (22:00)	21	42
Other times	7 (no specific time)	14

The proximity factor appears again to be highly significant in the question regarding the most important news to participants. News about Saudi Arabia and Arab region affairs ranked as the first preference, followed by regional then international news. This result differs from the findings obtained earlier from the two discussion groups, where news about Saudi Arabia did not appeal to focus group members because it is usually featured state-style news stories where officials meet and greet others without serious in-depth reporting about problems in the country. Nevertheless, it reflects the criticisms noted in the *BBC Arabic* Television survey as representing perceived shortcomings of Arabic news services in general.

News about Arab affairs and regional issues were of more importance to a higher number of participants in this sample (n= 36, 72 per cent). International news, including news about the America and the election was of interest to 30 participants (60 per cent). Other areas in the news bulletin that were of interest to the sample were medical, weather, science, entertainment, astrology and new inventions.

The next question asked participants to identify what features in their opinions constituted a good news channel. For this open-ended survey question, participants often used the term credibility and the phrase a true reflection of reality, with 43 respondents (86 per cent) mentioning this as an aspect of a good news channel. Objectivity and impartiality meant presenting both sides of a story to the participants, and also presenting different points of view within the same news bulletin (n= 31, 62 per cent). However, employing large network of correspondents to cover news from all parts of the world was a big factor contributing to classifying a good news channel with 47 participants (94 per cent) reporting this aspect. Table 6.10 illustrates the detailed answers.

Table 6.10 - Features of a good news channel

	Number of participants	Percentage
Speedy and extensive coverage	20	40
Objective, unbiased, impartial	31	62
Freedom of speech	2	4
Good quality production and presenting	12	24
Network of correspondents around the world	47	94
Variation in news stories within the bulletin	5	10
Credibility in portraying the truth	43	86

6.5.3 News Media Credibility Perception

As the study's main focus is television news, it was important to ask about credibility perception components as measured using the Gaziano and McGarth scale. Table 6.11 shows the figures relating to television news credibility.

Table 6.11 - Distribution of respondents' perception towards components of television news credibility scale

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Fairness	5	38	4	2	1
Unbiased	1	7	29	5	8
Completeness	3	42	5	-	-
Accuracy	5	32	3	15	4
Respect privacy	10	3	27	7	8
People's interest	1	41	10	2	1
Concern for community	2	28	10	8	2
Factuality	9	33	3	2	3
Trustworthy	7	21	17	3	2
Public interest	2	24	1	10	11
Reporters training	2	31	2	11	-
Source around the world	3	27	14	1	-

The resulting frequency distribution of television shown in table 6.11 revealed that television news is rated high by respondents for fairness (43 respondents, 86 per cent), completeness (n= 45, 90 per cent), people's interest (n= 42, 84 per cent), accuracy (n= 37, 74 per cent) and sources around the world or correspondents (n= 30, 60 per cent). This summation is based on the results of strongly agree and agree categories. For television credibility perception the elements of completeness, fairness, accuracy, focusing on what interest people and having a vast network of correspondents are the main factors comprising credible television.

6.5.4 Credibility Perception vs. Exposure to *Alarabiya, Alhurra* and *Aljazeera*

To measure exposure level/consumption of news, respondents were asked to name the news channel(s) that they rely on for obtained news and how often they watch it. Table 6.12 shows the frequency of channel watching.

Table 6.12 - Exposure level of trans-border news channels

	Very often	Often	Occasionally	Don't watch
<i>Aljazeera</i>	15	29	2	-
<i>Alarabiya</i>	32	16	-	-
<i>Alhurra</i>	-	-	2	14
<i>Alekhbariya</i> (Saudi news channel)	-	18	-	-
Others: Abu Dhabi and Nile News	-	2	-	-

Table 6.12 shows that there is little interest in the *Alhurra* news channel among the participants as there was no mention of *Alhurra* when answering this question. Therefore, a following question was asked about *Alhurra* and how frequently respondents rely on this channel. Only two viewers reported watching it occasionally and 14 do not watch the channel at all. This attitude was later investigated in the questionnaire about the frame they have in mind for *Alhurra* news in which 17 respondents thought “it is deceiving”, “biased” and “aiming to brain wash Arab minds”. Five participants (10 per cent) thought it “objective” and a “professional station adopting the American news model”.

The majority of the sample found *Aljazeera* to be “professional”, “objective”, and to “report with transparency and have a constructive agenda”. A significant number of participants (n= 21, 42 per cent) see it as “the best available option in the region”. In contrast, seven respondents think “it reports with bad intentions”, “sensationalism”, “and it tends to conceal the truth with regard to some events especially when it’s about the country backing it financially, Qatar.”

Alarabiya was perceived as “professional” and “objective” with “fresh innovative content”. Nine participants see *Alarabiya* as “diplomatic”, “cautious in covering some controversial issues”, “and very much watched by the majority of Arabs.” Seven participants note that *Alarabiya* reports a “true account of stories when not covering Saudi internal affairs,” referring to the Saudi money backing the station. A small number of participants (n= 5, 10 per cent) believe that *Alarabiya* is “promoting an American

agenda about reformation in the Middle East”, citing the incident when former president Bush gave an exclusive interview to *Alarabiya* in 2003.

The above opinions and frames about the channels reveal that despite describing news media with words like professionalism, objectivity and innovation, there is a consistent critical tone questioning the agenda and loyalty of the channels. In other words, people are aware of the agendas and affinities each media channel has. This agrees with what Abdulla *et al.* (2002) showed in their work about media credibility when media affiliation was mentioned heavily by sample members revealing that they were aware of what was behind the news being portrayed in a certain way. The work of Ashley, Peopsel and Willis (2010) reiterated the positive link between media awareness of ownership and the increased scepticism among viewers, which is in line with what participants are referring to when discussing the perception they have in mind about the three trans-border news channels in this study.

The most frequently watched (exposed to) news channel was *Alarabiya*, with 48 participants (96 per cent) reporting that they frequently watch this news channel. *Aljazeera* is also watched frequently by 44 participants (88 per cent). It should be noted here that several participants included both channels in their answers. This question was aimed to measure the frequency of exposure to the three news channels in this study. High exposure levels to any channel is represented by the combined answers for ‘very often’ and ‘often’.

As reported above, the exposure level and affinity to *Alarabiya* is higher than *Aljazeera*, taking into account the financial funding and ownership of the channel, the results showed that although there was not a vast difference, *Aljazeera* was watched less often than *Alarabiya*. This is possibly due to the style with which *Aljazeera* broadcasts, using a tone of sensationalism and with an Arab nationalistic inclination. This result is similar to the conclusions reached by members of the focus groups regarding their preferred and most trusted news media where more than half of the participants reported *Alarabiya* as being their most frequently watched new channel.

Credibility means for the channels were as follows: $M= 1.59$, $SD= .43$ for *Alarabiya*, $M= 3.24$, $SD= .44$ for *Alhurra*, and $M= 2.1$, $SD= .80$ for *Aljazeera*. The figures suggest

that *Alarabiya* is the channel that is mostly agreeable on when it comes to measuring the credibility elements as per Gaziano and McGrath Scale followed by *Aljazeera*.

The survey posed about a statement that involved media trust and credibility. The questionnaire asked participants if watching their favourite news channel implies that it is the outlet that they believe and trust the most in almost everything reported. The majority of respondents (n= 37, 74 per cent) agreed with this statement, five (10 per cent) were neutral in their responses and six respondents (12 per cent) did not agree. This result partly (74 per cent) agreed with the findings of Kioussis (2001) who stated that news credibility is influenced by the amount of media use. Audiences will prefer a certain news medium over another because it agrees with the perception of the world in their minds. However, it was further asked the reasons for the negative answer to this statement, respondents referred to the fact that trusting mass media is not a wise thing to do. They would watch the news regularly on a certain channel but that does not mean complete trust. Some mentioned the presenting style of anchors, the high number of correspondents, and ideology of the channel; but trust did not seem to be incorporated within the context of exposure. Looking at numbers we can say that the majority of the sample agreed with the statement.

Moreover, the study went further to investigate statistically the correlation between exposure level and credibility perception. for that purpose a non-parametric Spearman Rho correlation analysis was conducted and showed that there is a significant correlation between the time exposed watching and *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera* and the perception of credibility of these channels ($r_s = .58, p = 0.0$; $r_s = .83, p = 0.0$ for *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera* respectively). On the other hand, there was no significant correlation between credibility perception of *Alhurra* and the time exposed to the channel. This insignificant relationship could be a result of the ignorance on the part of the participants in the sample not watching the channels and therefore the relationship between the two variables was lacking or it could be interpreted as El-Nawawy (2006) found in his study on *Alhurra* that being aware of the intention and agenda of the media source will negatively affect the perception of credibility in the minds of audience and this judgement could be based on nonfactual premises. In other words, audiences are well aware that *Alhurra* is an American media channel targeting Arab audiences and therefore they would expect that America is aiming through this channel to inject false facts and frame reality from an

American perspective. El-Nawawy (2006) and BBC Trust survey (2011) reiterated the fact that such transnational foreign news services like BBC Arabic and Alhurra are scored low on credibility scale when compared to other news channels. There are other competitive Arabic news options nowadays that are professional and more trusted by audiences that people do not feel the need to tune into other foreign news services to know about what is going on in the world.

Based on the level of exposure to the news channels, the questionnaire followed up by asking if the news channel of choice was chosen based on the fact that participants believe in its credibility in reporting; 21 (42 per cent) strongly agreed with the statement, 15 (30 per cent) agreed and 14 participants (28 per cent) replied with a neutral answer. This result supports the findings of Schweiger, who pointed out that credibility becomes an important heuristic for content selection at a time of information overload and also influences the success of the medium among its audience (Schweiger, 2000). These finding also seem to relate to a study by Ayish (2004) which found a positive relationship between exposure level and credibility perceptions.

6.5.5 Arab News Media General Evaluation

Asked whether they trusted news reporting on Arab news media, 41 participants (82 per cent) reported that they partially trusted it while seven participants (14 per cent) confirmed that they had complete trust in it. Reasons cited for partially trusting the media information varied. One thought that even with all the technology and money invested in Arabic news channels, they still lack professionalism and complete autonomy. The same point was mentioned by another male respondent when he said that the investors of these channels have certain agendas that they consider their right to promote through the power of the media. Mentioning investors, another candidate touched on the fact that each news channel available on the media scene today acts as a propaganda device for certain governments, and therefore reporters cannot investigate these governments for the sake of the channel's continued existence.

The issue of news framing appeared as an explanation for the partial lack of trust when a couple of respondents mentioned that certain events are highlighted in a specific way on some television news channel, and other events may be obviously downgraded for

unknown reasons. One participant noted that a report on one news channel will appear completely differently on another news channel especially when it comes to American policies in Iraq and Afghanistan. The same point was made by another participant, who mentioned that he believes the news when the same report and incident is covered similarly on different news channels, but when that does not happen the credibility of one of the channels will be in doubt. Another participant said that channels today in order to escape the bias frame that some analysts and audience accuse them of will mention an event but will place it at the end of the bulletin and without any further details or live correspondents' coverage.

Table 6.13 - Audiences' trust of Arab news channels reports

Level of Trust	Number of participants	Percentage
Trust	7	14
Partially Trust	41	82

Table 6.14 - Reasons for partial audience trust of Arabic news channels

Reason for partial audience trust	Number of participants	Percentage
Government/country sponsorship	29	58
Owners' interest and agendas	33	66
Certain way of framing and downgrading	6	12
No absolute truth, cannot avoid bias	3	6
Different reporting on different channels	8	16

The next set of questions asked about full-truth reality, biased reporting and satisfied information. The sample found Arab news channel to be satisfactory in reporting world events, with the majority of people (n= 45, 90 per cent) feeling satisfied about the news received from Arab media news channels, and only five respondents not (10 per cent). According to participants in this sample, 44 participants (88 per cent) thought that Arab news channels only reveal the partial truth, and only six people (12 per cent) thought that the full truth is shown on these news channels. This reveals a slightly higher level of trust

in Saudi Arabia compared with the claims of credibility given for *Alhurra* (73 per cent) and *Aljazeera* (61 per cent) in the regional studies.

The concept of reporting truth and reality on the news is strongly related to the previous question about how audiences trust what is seen on Arab news channels. The sample partially trusts what they see on the news, and at the same time believe that the media systems do not reveal the full-truth.

6.5.6 News about the American Presidential Election

The questionnaire proceeded to explore the 2008 American presidential election as perceived by the Saudi audience, evaluating the event itself and how the Arab media framed it. A large number of the participants (n=32, 64 per cent) expressed some interest in the news about the American presidential election. Twelve participants (24 per cent) expressed a high interest while six respondents (12 per cent) did not care to follow news of the event as it developed. Six respondents were not interested in news about American election. Table 6.15 shows the figures and percentages

Table 6.15 - Degree of interest among the audience sample in the event of 2008 American Presidential Election

	Number of Participants	Percentage
Yes	12	24
Partially interested	32	64
Not interested	6	12

The majority of the sample (n= 44, 88 per cent) preferred watching election news on Arabic trans-border channels such as MBC, *Aljazeera*, *Abu Dhabi*, LBC, *Nile News*, and *Alarabiya*. The language barrier, easy access, and a better perspective and credibility were cited as the reasons for watching these Arabic news channels. Seven participants (14 per cent) preferred to watch the development of the event on American channels such as CNBC, ABC and CNN. The BBC World Service was watched by 14 participants (28 per cent) as an international news source highly trusted to follow the development of the

presidential election. The BBC World Service was used as an additional international source as it is believed to adopt an objective model of broadcasting and is able to access different views on what is going on in America. Besides television news, participants kept track of the 2008 presidential election developments through newspapers, discussion with friends, internet news sites, and family relatives living in America.

When questioned about the performance of Arabic trans-border news channels in covering the 2008 American presidential election, the majority of the sample thought what was broadcast on the Arabic media is sufficient and satisfying news. The questionnaire survey was conducted during the time of the Democratic and Republican Parties' Conventions in August and September 2008. In addition, respondents mentioned correspondents of major news channels being placed in major American states to cover the progress of the event.

Because *Alhurra* is considered to be an American news channel broadcasting in Arabic to viewers in the region, the questionnaire asked if the American election news was likely to be more comprehensible on this channel. However, 37 respondents (74 per cent) did not agree that *Alhurra* adds more insightful information to the election event, and 27 (54 per cent) of the sample opted for the answer of no reply since they do not watch *Alhurra* news. They expressed the opinion that Arabic news channels were presenting comprehensive coverage of the 2008 American presidential election and the majority of the sample thought it would be enough to watch election news on Arabic media. Being an American news channel makes people question its credibility in the coverage of American events in general due to the political agenda that it has been trying to promote in the Arab world since the Bush administration. *Radio Sawa* and *Alhurra* were introduced as vehicles to achieve that goal.

When asked about the importance of such an event for Arabs in general and to Saudis in specific, more than half of the sample participants thought it important, 21 participants (42 per cent) thought it partially important, and nine thought it not that important. The United States as the superpower that is leading the world, especially the Arab region, was one of the most common answers for this question:

“Policies in the Arab world are governed and directed by America, thus, it is crucial to follow the development of this election and hope for the best outcome” one participant wrote.

The economy and the downturns that the world is going through was another reason cited for the effect of this election on the region. One male respondent wrote:

“America is the world largest economy and we need to know who will be directing the USA markets in the coming eight years.”

Another interesting point of view highlighted the ties between Saudi Arabia and the US in terms of gas and petrol trading, which makes it more important to Saudis than the rest of the Arab world:

“Saudi Arabia has business relationship with Republicans, and if a Democrat is to win this election, it will be interesting to watch how this relationship will be sustained” said a participant.

Another reason given was the war in the region. The incoming president will either choose to stay to occupy Iraq and Afghanistan, or will withdraw from the region. A similar idea was present regarding the world being tired after eight years of Republican rule and the need for a new beginning and hope in the Middle East.

Respondents were asked to highlight in their opinions the special features of the American presidential election in 2008, and a number of answers identified Obama in two different ways. The first was Obama being a participating hopeful in the American election as a man of African descent and the second was Obama as a Muslim candidate in the race. The Islamic reference was made by 14 per cent (n= seven) and being a Black hopeful was more prominent in answers of 26 per cent (n=13). The issues of race and ethnicity were previously discussed as presented in the news analysis in chapter five of this study. In the audience analysis only a few participants (n= 3, six per cent) cited this American election as heralding the end of racism in the biggest country of the world. Another aspect that captured the attention of the sample participants (n= 11, 22 per cent) was the fact that Senator Hillary Clinton was a female running for the presidency. Other replies reflected on the organization of the event, the money spent by each party, the competition between the candidates, time to change the Republican Party that is ruling

America and the world, and how our nation should be learning from the democracy and transparency we are witnessing in this election.

When asked about the perception of the American presidential election as portrayed in the media, 37 respondents view the election as a race between the Republican and Democratic candidates, in turn representing the democracy, freedom and justice that American citizens enjoy. This individual frame was reported by the majority of the sample and indicates a positive relationship between what the media promotes and the images in the minds of the viewers. This finding supports the statement assuming a positive relationship between individual and media frames. In other words, the media play an influential role in telling people how to think about events and people. This is obvious from the percentage of people in the sample who perceived the American presidential election as a race between the candidates of the two competing parties.

The dominant frame in the news coverage of the election obtained from the news analysis study conducted in chapter five was the horse-race frame, which appears frequently in the answers of the participants. This result can be explained in two possible ways, either exemplifying the mass media framing effect that was discussed in several studies as a conceptual building process and scheme classification, or the other explanation might be due to the time the survey was conducted (August and September, 2008) when the Democratic and Republican Parties' Conventions were taking place and were extensively covered by the news media channels. Iyengar (1991) examined the impact of media framing on personal interpretation of news – the work questioned if audiences adopt media frames in their own information processing, and concluded that there was no solid answer. Iyengar provided an important contribution in describing the effects of mass media on cognitive outcomes.

On another note, the preference for a male to rule America received almost equal responses with 21 participants (42 per cent) preferring a male to rule and 20 (40 per cent) being indifferent to gender issues.

The majority of the sample agreed that Obama is the candidate who will change the world for the better, with 66 per cent (n= 33) of respondents agreeing, although nine participants (18 per cent) did not have any hope for change whoever won the presidential election. As Obama was chosen by a substantial number of respondents to be the main

highlight of the 2008 American presidential election and some associated him with Islam, the questionnaire proceeded by asking about whether this fact would make him a favourite for some people in the Islamic world in general and to the sample participants in specific. This statement was partially agreed with by 14 people in the sample (28 per cent), and the majority said that this will not make them feel any different Obama (n= 26, 52 per cent).

Regardless of how powerful the media are in directing the way in which the audience views the reality of an event around the world, there is still a degree of uncertainty about its effect on different people. People are exposed to other short-term and long-term factors that play an important role in shaping reality besides the media within the minds of viewers.

6.6 Conclusions

This chapter on audience media credibility perception is an exploratory attempt to investigate public perceptions of media credibility in general, and to evaluate performance during a major event like the 2008 American presidential election. This part of the thesis attempts to identify how interested a sample audience is in the developments of the 2008 American presidential election event, measure the credibility of television and of the three news channels in the study, as well as comparing credibility perception against exposure level. The additional aim was to highlight any possible relation between media news framing and individual framing participants have for the event.

A general observation results from the data collected from both focus groups and questionnaire respondents and that is that the majority of participants in my sample prefer to watch news on trans-border news channels broadcasting in Arabic. However, they are critical regarding impartiality and objectivity of the coverage of any event citing funding as the main source of this scepticism. The sample in this study is aware of the connection each news channel has to a specific country and the agendas that they follow accordingly. This fact relatively decreases the amount of trust people have in the news these channels present. Even with relatively high ratings of news credibility for *Aljazeera* and *Alarabiya*

there is still criticism of the two channels and the way the news is shaped based on ideology and financial support.

The timely and visual coverage of satellite news television was the first choice among participants in this study, with news text message alerts and the internet as second. When asked about credibility and trust, the majority of the participants in the two focus groups and the questionnaire rated television news as the most credible source of information. With its timely edge and live feed reporting television news seems to have won more trust than other media outlets among respondents. Television as a mass media outlet was rated highly credible on aspects of fairness, completeness, accuracy, people's interest, and employing correspondents all over the world. Online news ranked low in credibility according to the sample of respondents in the questionnaire due to the difficulty in verifying authentic sources on many sites. Print media, due to its timely and visual limitations, trailed television news in both preference and credibility.

For news channels, participants seemed satisfied with Arabic transnational news channels as they are professional, adopt Western model of objective journalism, presenting both sides of the story, employing correspondents all over the world, and are available with news, reports and live political analyses round the clock. The majority of respondents reported being satisfied with Arabic transborder channels to follow the coverage of 2008 American presidential election.

Data obtained in this study supports the literature on media credibility that suggests a positive correlation between the frequency of media use – exposure - and the audience's perception of media credibility. This could mean that people will watch a certain news channel due to a variety of reasons but will always keep a critical mind and question anything that contradicts their own beliefs. The low news credibility of *Alhurra* confirms the findings of Hovland *et al.*, back in 1963 that receivers' awareness of a source's intention to persuade others in a way that would benefit the broadcaster would negatively affect the source's credibility.⁴⁸ Because many Arab media consumers today are intensely aware of the American administration's motives in trying to win Arab hearts and minds and to improve its image in the Arab world, they tend not to trust news broadcasting on *Alhurra*. This note is highlighted heavily in the results of this study as only 4 per cent of

⁴⁸ The same outcome was reached by Ashley *et al.*, (2010) and El-Nawawy (2006).

participants in the survey report watching the channel occasionally and 28 per cent do not watch it at all.

Through this study, participants recognize the importance of America and its policies and economy on the situation in Saudi Arabia and the region. The economy factored highly in responses to the question about whether the American election and its aftermath is an important event to Saudi citizens.

Participants appear to be aware of several media terms used to describe news. For example, in the question that asked respondents to highlight the main characteristics of a good news channel, most of the respondents mentioned the issue of credibility and fair reporting as the main issue in delivering news, and this issue was also prominent during the discussions with the two focus groups. Terms such as unbiased, fairness and impartiality were used to reflect the good quality of news channels.

Another characteristic that was featured frequently was related to production. Participants believe that a good news channel will have a network of correspondents around the world which will enable speedy and extensive news coverage.

It is assumed that because of the socio-economic status of the people participating in this study and their frequent exposure to news through different media outlets, they are more knowledgeable about media terms and good production practices. Someone who is under the age of thirty or with less interest in world news is less likely to look for such qualities in news media outlets.

In this study, television news appear to be the most frequently used media source for information, the most credible, and the most relied on news source. The research anticipated positive relationships between television news credibility, exposure level and reliance. The study proceeded to reveal a positive relationship between level of exposure to *Aljazeera* and *Alarabiya* news channels and the viewers' credibility perception. This result agrees with the findings of Kiouisis (2001) and Ayish (2004) who both reported a relationship between the amount of news exposure and its credibility perception. An audience will prefer one news media over another because it agrees with the perception of the world in their minds.

When discussing the issue of news media trust, a substantial number of participants (83 per cent) reported that they only partially trust Arab media. News media recipients are aware of the agendas and financial affiliation under which the Arab media operate. Audiences today are becoming increasingly media savvy and they are not focusing only on the news delivery but also contemplating what is behind the coverage. The variations of media news outlets with easy access to international news channels have accustomed the Arab audience to question every news story, and not to believe what is said in the media. The study is not suggesting that there is a lack of trust in Arab media, rather there is partial trust with an open mind to negotiate and discuss media practices primarily relating to the agendas resulting from sponsorship.

The American presidential election appears to be of interest to the members of the sample with 64 per cent showing a relative interest in the event. Participants were mainly following the developments on Arabic trans-border news channels, in addition to newspapers, radio, internet sites and discussions with family members living in America. Arabic trans-border channels, to the participants, were adequate news sources to follow the development of the American presidential election due to the extensive coverage and the regional perspective they offer to Arab audiences. There was a unanimous response citing the importance of such an event on Saudi policies and economies. "Policies in the Arab world are governed and directed by America, thus, it is crucial to follow the development of this election and hope for the best outcome" one of the male participants wrote. The economy and the worldwide downturn was another reason cited for the effect of this election on the region, and another male respondent wrote "America is the world largest economy and we need to know who will be directing the USA markets in the coming eight years."

Drawing from the media framing concept, participants reported that their own frame perception of the media coverage is primarily the race between Republican and Democrat candidates. The framing of the event as a horse-race has appeared in a large number of studies on media and election campaigns, and this study reported the substantial use of the horse-race frame as the main dominant frame in the coverage of the election developments. However, as noted earlier, the individual 'race frame' that appeared in the answers of 74 per cent of the sample participants might be prominent due to the time this

survey took place— August and September 2008 - when the two parties were competing against each other during the National Conventions.

Chapter 7 - CONCLUSIONS

From these research findings, several issues have emerged in relation to previous studies in the field of international journalism, media framing and credibility perception. This section presents the issues inferred from the research findings.

The idea of the study stemmed from the notion of globalisation and its effects on audiences. Globalisation is manifested in the current work as the portrayal of a global event, the 2008 American presidential election and the 2009 Inaugural Ceremony that followed, as broadcasted by trans-border channels targeting Arab audiences. The event is analysed through the news prism of three trans-border news channels: *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera*, focusing on the frames that each news channel used to convey the message and discuss this global event developments.

As the introduction stated; the idea of ‘interconnectedness’ between people around the world is perceived through the powerful connection of mass media. The transformation of the world into a condensed globe is allowing individuals to be aware and conscious about other nations, communities, events and places. The effect of globalisation has extended to influence the way journalists perform their work as well. News and information are produced throughout the world media outlets in an Anglo-American style and content. The idea of international journalism is primarily the outcome of globalisation (Williams, 2011).

The influence of Anglo-American practices and values on journalism around the world is back to the fact that the main news agencies are predominantly American and British companies that employ reporters to gather news from around the globe.⁴⁹ These news providing companies are powerful in setting the agendas of international communication on the global scale to the extent that even with the growing number of ‘non-Western’ media outlets, they are generally ‘localising Western media cultural products’ (Thussu 2006, p. 141).

⁴⁹ Anglo-American model in journalism is referred to as Western style in Thussu’s work *International Communication Continuity and Change* (2006). He argues that most of the credible and global news agencies are mainly ‘Western corporations that are major players in all sectors of mass media’ (p. 141).

Williams explained the effect of globalisation on the way international journalism is shaped by the following argument:

There are adherents of modernisation, cultural imperialism and globalisation who in their different ways believe that journalism is becoming increasingly standardised in its practice and values and that international news in the world's media systems is more and more similar [...] and journalists as insatiable consumers of global news increasingly look to these organisations and publications to provide them with the model of how they should understand their role in society and how they should do their job (Williams 2011, p. 41).

The core characteristic of the Anglo-American model in international journalism lies in its credibility that is based on the commercial nature of the news business and the fact that they are independent of any government control. Global news agencies provide “accurate, fast and authoritative news and information to an international audience, something which has been earned over two centuries of journalism” (Thussu 2006, p. 142).⁵⁰ Thussu (2006) referred to the Anglo-American influence on mass media as ‘Western’ which is a term widely used to describe the influence of Europe and the United States of America on cultural products in developing countries. However, I agree with Williams (2011) in using the ‘Anglo-American model’ term when describing the global influence of dominant media conglomerates as ‘Western’ does not always specify the actual influential factors.

The argument of globalisation and the outcome effect on world journalism in the sense that world news is shaped in a similar way by all mass media is one side to look at when analysing the current study. However, there is a different perspective which I built the argument upon provided by Philo and Berry (2004) which assumed different political news coverage stems from different ideologies adopted by news outlets. Therefore, the selection of the three trans-border channels *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera*.

The purpose of the framing analysis in this study was to document differences in coverage between three ideologically different news channels targeting Arab audiences, in the way the global event of the 2008 American presidential election was broadcasted

⁵⁰ The publics in many developing countries refer to the US and European countries as the West. “It is the opposite created by political and social convention” (Armbrust 2000, p. 2)

and framed. The study assumed that the news stories about the 2008 American presidential election might provide consistent frames that delineate particular views and the agenda of each one of the channels in the study. These frames may help people understand the global event. This idea resonated with what Twekbury and associates (2000) suggested that “the single greatest power of media frames is their ability to provide and/or activate information, thereby shaping individual frames” (p. 805).

The study assumed that the three news channels, with completely different ideologies and agendas, will differ substantially in their news coverage of the event in terms of the dominant frames highlighted. This basic assumption of what news in the Arab world has to offer in terms of frames and themes provides insights into the main features of the Arab media and the way they explain world events. It should also be noted that some channels translate news from international agencies like Reuters and the AFP without applying any individual take or input towards the framing, which may cause the news on even ideologically different news channels to sound similar.

A general observation after watching the news on the three news channels, *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera*, was that the election news was similar, arguably almost identical, in both news headlines and content. The differences however were noticeable in the interviews, guests, sources and graphical titles used. This finding agreed with the theory proposed by scholars and termed the ‘news wave’ (Scheufele, 1999). In other words, what Williams (2011) suggested that global mass media these days follow the Anglo – American style in news reporting, to the extent of producing/copying the same content. Nevertheless, the editorial role plays a pivotal role in framing the news provided by news agencies in a format and language that are comprehended by general publics and agreed with the general agenda of the news channel. Having said previously that the news headlines and introductions were arguably in most of the events’ developments similar, the choices of guests and discussions were different. This fact resonates with the premise of framing about the way news editors choose to highlight certain aspects of the story that represent station’s ideology; and news analysts and commentators are part of the framing process, I argue.

The study assumed that in the coverage of the 2008 American presidential election on *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera* would have different dominant news frames. The results suggested that the three ideologically-different news channels shared the same

dominant frame, the horse-race, which was the highest frame in the quantitative analysis. Therefore, having different ideological channels in the study did not consequently mean that the coverage of an event will be different. Analysing the news bulletins over a period of time there is a chance that the dominant frames used for portraying an event will change. This study noted a high employment of the horse-race frame by the three trans-border channels broadcasting in Arabic as this is the most commonly used frame in election campaign coverage by European and American mass media (Patterson 2005). The horse-race frame was also used extensively in Singapore news media as the study of Gan *et al.* (2005) revealed. The result I obtained showed that mass media around the world follow the global trend in covering world news; which is in this case the American model of journalism probably because the event is American so the Arabic news stations resorted to American sources to cover it. This finding corresponds with the way Fandy (2007) described Arab media in terms of news receiver and not generator.⁵¹

Despite what is mentioned above, I detected noticeable quantitative and qualitative differences in other frames presented on the three news channels. The human interest frame appeared to feature more on the *Alarabiya* channel as well as the regional perspective frame. The human interest frame represented anecdotal accounts of parties, personal lives and traits of candidates as well as how individuals or groups are affected by policies. In other words, any story that focused on the person as the main feature. There were times during the election coverage when this frame was used heavily. Examples of these times were after each party's nomination of candidates, when choosing vice presidents, during the final days of the election race in October 2008 and finally after the election of Obama as the 44th President of the United States of America. The human interest frame was reported twice as much as in the American media study reported for comparison purposes. Moreover, this could be due to the political figures appearing in the election campaign that were relatively unknown to people in the Middle East, thus, mass media tried to refer to their personal lives to make audiences relate to them. It is believed that this type of frame will assist foreign audiences to understand the nature of election that is taking place in another country.

⁵¹ I believe this classification is true when it is international news stories. However, many times international media channels covered news via footage obtained from channels such *Aljazeera* and *Alarabiya* when the event is taking place in areas where there is no access to European and American media correspondents. Recent examples were during the Egyptian and Libyan revolutions.

Aljazeera celebrated the historic win frame extensively in its coverage as well as using the issue/policy frame. This finding suggests a link between journalistic ideology, political agenda and framing. Although the three news channels used the horse-race frame frequently, in tandem with this frame there was a high use of other categories to portray events.

When discussing dominant frames, the historic victory on Election Day was noticeable in the coverage of *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera*; but *Alhurra* did not portray the ethnicity factor in news headlines as the main determinate of this historic win. The other two channels reported the victory based on a Black candidate reaching a new milestone in the race for the presidency and justice when it comes to Black Americans. *Alhurra* arguably refrained from reporting the ethnicity subject as a premise for the employment of this frame.

The issue/policy frame appeared dominant on *Aljazeera*, relatively more than the other two channels. This frame focused on how candidates approach specific issues, consequences, reasons and the history of an issue. The issue/policy frame can be noted in a number of news stories on *Alarabiya* and *Alhurra* but not as frequently as *Aljazeera*. Detailed reports on the policies and plans of each candidate were broadcast during the election campaign period and later after the appointment of Obama. The coverage to some extent was similar to the American media coverage in terms of discussing internal American problems and possible plans and promises to fix them. However, in terms of quantity, *Aljazeera* was using issue/policy frame more than the other two channels but *Alarabiya* presented more explanation via interviews with American and Arab political analysts.

Drawing on previous work when studying an international world event in a different habitat, the study includes a regional perspective frame. As Entman (2004) noted, the more congruent a frame is with the schemata that dominates political culture, the more success it will enjoy. Therefore, the study predicted a heavy presentation of the regional frame on Arabic news channels which was largely true. The dominant regional frame was presented on Election Day by *Alarabiya*, *Alhurra* and *Aljazeera* which presented live studio coverage with experts on regional affairs.

For news sources, the analysis revealed that *Alhurra* news relied more often on correspondents as source of news in the form of news reports, unlike *Alarabiya* which relied heavily on Arab political experts, news agencies and correspondents. *Aljazeera* used correspondents and Arab political experts in the studio or in news reports in most of its news on election developments.

News agencies' reports were shown exactly the same on the three news channels with the only difference being the reporter reading them in Arabic, there was no input to the report from a correspondent or any political analyst. The three news channels almost all had the same amount of reports from news agencies.

Alhurra used more American political experts than the other two channels, and *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera* relied on reports with locals in America. It can be inferred that *Alarabiya* added to its news the Arabic perspective that appeals to its audience in terms of political experts, human interest frames and news reports featuring local people as sources.

During the different intervals of the campaign there was a focus on the ethnicity aspect of the candidate Barack Obama by some of the mass media channels, but nothing as prominent as what was featured during Election Day in 2008 and the aftermath. The editorial content was ceremonial and declaring the historical meaning of the global news event and articulating social values such as unity and democracy.

Entman and Rojecki (2000) concluded that a race in news is related to the ideological nature of the news itself, the way in which certain ideas and images emerge in consistent ways across the media and over a period of time. *Alarabiya* discussed the possibilities of a Black candidate winning the Democratic race during the last primary period (June 2008), when the competition was still between Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton. Contrary to *Alarabiya* during the same period, there was no detected ethnicity narrative in *Aljazeera* news sample, and the same was observed during the AIPAC coverage. In fact, *Aljazeera* implicitly portrayed Barak Obama as the Democratic nominee before Hilary Clinton pulled out. By the time of Obama's speech to the Democratic National Convention, the headlines on *Aljazeera* labelled the event as historically binding and linked this description with the fact that Obama is "the first American from African descent officially nominated by the Democratic Party to run for presidency."

Observing the general trend that these channels adopted when reporting the ethnicity discourse, I noticed that ‘Black candidate’ and ‘from an African descent’ were two terms used frequently in the news by the three broadcasts. However, the main difference appeared to be after Election Day when the titles on *Aljazeera* tended to sensationalize the event with historical background about injustice treatment Black Americans experienced for centuries, the change of ‘colour’ coming to the White House that will change America’s colours around the world, the milestone that has been achieved, and the celebrations around the world. These could be detected in the narration of *Alarabiya* and *Aljazeera*; however, *Alhurra* slanted the victory as a reinforcement of justice and equality norms that citizens of the United States of America enjoy.

The three news channels were different in their coverage of the ethnicity issue in light of such a remarkable news event as of the first Black President of the United States of America. *Aljazeera* featured a high coverage of this issue in its news bulletins, studio interviews and correspondents reports. It was also referred to heavily in the graphic titles that preceded the election news, highlighting the contrast in colour between the White House and the Black president, and the referral to colour in terms of changing future policies. On Election Day, the historic moment was emphasized in a way related to the fact that there was no chance for someone from African descent to become the President of the United States. The people chosen to appear on the reports during the Election Day celebrations and later on inauguration day were all Black and reiterated their joy as someone with their roots has made it as the President of the United States.

Moving to the audience part of the thesis, the study attempted to define credibility and the factors that comprise the concept of credibility. This was identified through the concepts of exposure level and reliance. The study also focused on the individual frames of the event (the way a sample of Saudi audience comprehended and pictured the election campaign) and compared it with the dominant frames appearing on Arabic news channels to measure the effect the news media have in shaping the way people think and see the world.

When asking the audience about the image they have in their minds, known as individual frames, of the 2008 American presidential election, the answers agreed with the news media frames. The majority of the respondents viewed the election as a race between the Republican and Democrat candidates. The study attempted to investigate the

link between individual frames and news frames, and this was supported by the results obtained. However, it is worth taking into consideration the time that the audience survey took place, August 2008, when each party announced its official candidate to run for election and at the same time the news all over the world was depicting the event mainly as a horse-race. Other frames emerged such as the ethnicity (considered under personality and human interest frame) and issue/politics among the audience but the majority saw it as a competition between the two competing parties, the Republicans and the Democrats. It can strongly be inferred that the mass media played an influential role, arguably the sole role, in shaping the images in the minds of the respondents. Nevertheless, the time when the study took place with the events covered by the media at that stage could have played a big role in the individual frames noted. I am arguing here that the results might have been different in terms of individual frames if the questionnaire and focus groups had taken place at the end of the entire election campaign after the president had been named. The results of the audience credibility study indicated that there is a positive relationship between perceived media credibility and the level of television news exposure.

Even with the relatively high news credibility perceived in channels like *Aljazeera* and *Alarabiya* there was still criticism of the two channels and the way news is shaped based on their ideology and financial support. One respondent said that “some events are reported in different ways on several Arabic news channels and that affects the credibility of the channels.” Another participant said “the owners of these channels are either elites or governments and in both cases they serve their interests. Thus, portray the world in a way that will support their positions and countries.” These facts prove that even though audiences rely on a media channel for information and news, they tend to be ‘active audience’ and criticise the agendas behind the editorial contents.

Regardless of how powerful the mass media are in directing the way an audience sees the reality of an event around the world, there is still a degree of uncertainty about this effect on different people. People are exposed to other short-term and long-term factors that play an important role in shaping reality along with the media within the minds of people.

In conclusion, this research agreed with Williams’s argument about how globalisation is setting the standards for international journalism and shaping the news similarly on different news media channels. The news appeared to be identical on the three news

broadcasts in headlines and introduction; and was reported in the extensive use of horse-race frame which is similar to the way American media report the election news. Slight quantitative difference appeared in reporting certain frames on certain channels, for example, the issue/policy frame was used more on *Aljazeera* and *Alarabiya* reported more human interest stories. Moreover, differences appeared in studio interviews, guests, sources and analyses which were in compliance with the agenda each channel has especially when discussing regional matters. For instance, when talking about the American support to Israel, the two Arab channels extensively highlighted the issue as a historical trend that will continue to harm the Arab interests no matter who is the person that will be elected as president, while the American channels *Alhurra* resorted to a diplomatic presentation of the AIPAC event. The effect of globalisation on local paradigm or the process of adapting international news to the locals was evident in the use of regional frame by the three news channels which proved the awareness of their audiences' needs and packaging the news in a way compatible with the culture they are targeting. Participants in the Audience credibility perception of news raised the regional issue when discussing the importance of 2008 American election in terms of economy and political consequences. They were aware of the global event and the impact it would bring on their region.

7.1 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Work

Several issues may limit the significance of the findings of this study, firstly, the period studied. I decided to focus on four intervals in the campaign period; June 2008 when the last primary took place, August-September 2008 during the Democrat and Republican Conventions, Election Day in October 2008 and the Inaugural Ceremony in January 2009. This can have both negative and positive sides to it. The study covers a wide time period of the campaign and did not limit the results to few days around Election Day, which produced in-depth results and findings concerning the performance of the Arabic trans-border news channels when covering the 2008 American presidential election campaign. On the negative side, each interval had its own characteristics and coverage perspective which make it harder to generalise the results.

Secondly, the news framing analysis in this study mainly focused on quantitative analysis to produce a base for comparison between the three news channels. For a reader who looks solely at the results in terms of numbers, this could be misleading due to the fact that numbers are not the basis of the final comparison. The study attempted to overcome this weakness by providing a qualitative comparison in the form of framing analysis. However, there are many critical claims about this method and to what extent it is a reliable source for producing results.

Since the gate-keeping process involved framing, to better understand the use of frames in the coverage further research is needed to explore the way news is selected and how frames are created. The current study noted a reliance on news agencies to form the main stories, and similar stories were shown on the three news channels. However, in-depth interviews with editors and journalists might be needed to explore if this is in fact the way news and frames are created.

The main limitation with the audience analysis part of the research was assembling the focus groups for the sake of highlighting news credibility perception. This was overcome by including both focus groups and questionnaires as methods to generate data for the audience credibility perception part of the study. The limited time available was one factor that prompted the combination of research methodologies as was the fact that people were not keen to share their political views publically with people they do not know, i.e. those conducting focus groups for the sake of research.

Another problem that was raised continuously every time I discussed the research was the audience sample. I decided to include a convenient sample of educated Saudi citizens who are interested in television political news. This categorizes the sample under purposive criterion. However, there was no systematic method in collecting participants and that was agreed upon before the beginning of the actual survey. The question about how I gathered the sample was asked repeatedly and my answer appeared to be unconvincing. Therefore, for future research I would rather choose a sample from a certain profession or educational school and use database to pick participants. Another idea is to vary the Arab nationalities participating in the research. A good place to collect such a sample would be Brunel University with all different Arab nationalities as it will be easy to obtain lists of names and sample them according to specific criteria.

The research focused on measuring many variables, general aspects, and the credibility of the general media concept before moving to precise channel exposure and credibility. The framing of television channels in this study as well as framing of the American presidential election campaign event was also investigated. This large survey proved to be both time and thought-consuming and respondents commented on the length of the questionnaire. This should be altered in future studies to focus on only one or two aspects.⁵²

In my opinion framing analysis is a good way to study the news trend in the coverage of elections in general. However, there is a need to concentrate on one main interval of election campaign in order to reach accurate and consistent results that can be used as reference for future studies.

As the framing analysis in this research did not strongly reveal differences in coverage based on ideology, agreeing with the ‘news wave’ trend that mass media channels resort to when reporting international events. I would suggest choosing a regional event in the Middle East to identify different agendas and interests in coverage; for example, the revolution in Syria and the way a sample of Arabic trans-border news channels are framing it.⁵³

Thematic analysis is an alternative method that could be used in studying American presidential election as well as any other international event. Focusing only on themes emerging within the news would add more depth to the analysis and at the same time prevent the generation of misleading results based on the number of frames dominating news stories.

Future research should pay more attention towards social media networks and forums such as Twitter, Facebook and personal blogs as well as news websites. These have proven to be influential in the Middle East and aided in starting uprisings and demonstrations in the past years. A more in-depth investigation of the way these media outlets work and frame events, as well as surveying people’s responses towards them

⁵² The questionnaire pilot study was not as lengthy as the actual questionnaire. I added more questions in a bid to clarify and generate as much data as possible

⁵³ Syrian TV and few Lebanese news channels are providing coverage that is pro-government while the rest of the news in the Middle East are reporting the atrocities of the Syrian regimes.

would give an interesting account and contribute to similar research on the results of the globalisation.

In my opinion, a similar format of research (combining news analysis and audience perception) with an Arab regional event as the focus would be interesting and would generate diverse opinions from viewers as well as different frames among different news channels. It is clearly noticeable how channels operating in the Arabian Gulf and funded by Gulf Royalties like *Aljazeera* and *Alarabiya* are framing their news with regard to events that have taken place over the years in the Middle East, such as the ousting of the Egyptian President, the assassination of the Libyan President and the uprising battles in Syria. Such channels are trying to frame events individually based on the political connections between these channels main founders and the battles taking place in several Arab states. In my opinion, studying such regional events on Arab trans-border channels with opinions and perceptions from Arab audiences will provide an interesting output and enrich the domain of political communication studies.

The audience sample participating in this study might not satisfy the cosmopolitanism criteria that were set by other scholars such as Tomlinson (1999) and Rantanen (2008) but I argue that they are a cosmopolitan audience or citizens of the media globe as unlike their Western counterparts, educated Arabs with high media consumption are more knowledgeable about life beyond boundaries than others and their exposure to the media enhances their status as cosmopolitans or global citizens.

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Appendix 1

Frame Measures

Conflict Frame

- i. Does the news story mention disagreements between Republicans and Democrats?
- ii. Does one party candidate reproach another?
- iii. Does it present two sides to an issue, one advocated by Republicans and the other by Democrats?

- iv. Does it cover the news story as a comparison between specific policies of Republicans and Democrats?

Human Interest Frame

- i. Does it frame an issue by giving anecdotal accounts of the involved people/ parties?
- ii. Does it involve personal descriptions that will provoke feelings of empathy, concern, sympathy, compassion or outrage?
- iii. Does it feature how individuals are directly affected by specific issues or policies?
- iv. Does it go into the private or personal lives of candidates or public officials?

Issue/ policy Frame

- i. Does it present information about how candidate or political party will conduct a specific policy concerning America or the world in general?
- ii. Does it mention the consequences of specific policy on America or the world in general?
- iii. Are there reasons presented to justify the undertaking of specific policy concerning America or the world in general?
- iv. Does it present a historical account of specific policy concerning America or the world in general?

Regional Perspective Frame

- i. Does it provide comments from officials/people of the Arab region?
- ii. Does it mention any impact brought about by a policy on the Arab region?
- iii. Does it compare how a specific policy/issue will be handled by each party if it had happened in the Arab region?
- iv. Does it mention any predictions about what is going to happen in the Middle East after election?

Horse-Race Frame

- i. Does it cover campaign performance as a race?
- ii. Does it mention predictions of the results?
- iii. Does it talk about the financial or administrative strength of party/candidate?
- iv. Does it cover the news from polls perspective?

Historic Victory Frame

- i. Does it frame the event as historic?
- ii. Does it include the celebration and jubilation taking place in America and around the world?
- iii. Does the tone of the news/reporters sound optimistic and anticipating immediate changes?
- iv. Does it mention the beginning of a new era?

Appendix 2

Focus Groups Demographics and Results

The ten participants fit into the upper middle class criteria. The fact that all participants in these two focus groups are university graduate is based on past research conducted by Howard, Rainie and Jones (2001) indicating that media users in general and television in particular are those who are educated. The First group participants were a doctor, a business owner, a lawyer, a news caster, and a public sector employee. The second group composed of two married couples, an engineer

and a school teacher, two university lecturers and a female newspaper journalist.

The tables show the demographics of candidates in the two focus groups:

Table 1: Demographics of focus group 1

Focus Group 1	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
Profession	physician	Businessman	TV newscaster	Public sector worker	lawyer
Age group	36-40	41-45	41-45	45-49	30-35

Table 2: Demographics of focus group 2

Focus group 2	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
Profession	School teacher	Engineer	University lecturer	University lecturer	Journalist
Age group	30-35	41-45	41-45	45-49	36-40
Gender	Female	Male	Female	Male	female

News Consumption Habits

The discussion started off by enquiring about the interest in world news and viewing habits. Participant reported watching the news daily on television, in addition to other media sources. The main source of world information for participants was television news, in specific satellite transborder news channels, with 100 per cent (n=5) for the participants of the first discussion group, and 60 per cent (n= 3) for the second group. However, the remaining two participants of the second focus group reported television news as their second source of information. Newspaper was chosen as the first source of world news by two males, one in each group; and internet was the first choice for news for the female journalist participating in the second focus group. In second rank for the news sources

members of the first focus group relied newspapers; for three male participants (those who prefer television to be the first news source), Internet and television for another member; and radio for the fifth member of the first focus group. For the second co-ed focus group, two participants chose newspapers (40 per cent) that are a male and a female as a second rank news source, two chose televisions (40 per cent) those are a university lecturer male and a journalist female; and one female school teacher relied on the Internet as a second favourite source for news. Tables below indicate the preference in news sources:

Table 3: Focus group (1) news sources

	Doctor	Business owner	News caster	Public sector	Lawyer
First source	Television	Television	Television	Newspaper and television	Television
Second source	Newspaper	Newspaper	Newspaper	Internet	Radio

Table 4: Focus group (2) news sources

	Female School teacher	Male engineer	Female university lecturer	Male university lecturer	Female journalist
First source	Television	Television	television	newspaper	Internet
Second source	Internet	Newspaper	newspaper	television	television

The type of news they watch ranges from a nightly bulletin and a couple of roll-on news briefs a day (n= 4), one evening news bulletin (n=2), one mid-day news

bulletin (n=1) and just roll-on news briefs whenever convenient (n=3). The table explains the type of news segment focus groups' participants watch.

Table 5: Type of news watched by focus groups

	Focus group (1)	Focus group (2)
Evening news bulletin	1	1
Mid-day news bulletin	-	1
bulletin and briefs	3	1
Roll-on news briefs	1	2

The level of daily television news exposure varied. The five male participants in the first focus group reported their exposure between two to three hours daily. The same applies to the two males participants in the second focus group and the female journalist within the same group. However, the other two female participants reported less time of news exposure that in general (one hour for each of the two participants) and 30 minutes for news television daily. Tables below demonstrate the daily level of exposure to media in general and to television in specific. This can be linked to the previous finding about watching news briefs whenever convenient by the three females presented in the second focus group. This can arguably indicate a gender difference in news exposure level; in which women are less interested in detailed news bulletin and political analyses. This point will be further explored when discussing the findings of the actual survey sample.

Table 6: Daily news consumption as per focus group (1)

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
Main news source	Satellite television	Satellite television	Satellite television	Newspaper and television	Satellite television
General news	Two hours	Two-three	Two hours	Two hours 30	Two hours

exposure		hours		minutes	
Television exposure	One hour 30 minutes	Two hours	45 minutes	Two hours	One hour

Table 7: Daily news consumption as per focus group (2)

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
Main news source	Satellite television	Satellite television	Satellite television	Newspaper	Internet
General news exposure	One hour	Two hours	One hour	Three hours	Three hours
Television exposure	30 minutes	one hour	30 minutes	one hour	Two hours

Table 8: Trusted/credible trans-border news channel

	No. participants	Percentage %
<i>Alarabiya</i>	7	70
<i>Alhurra</i>	-	-
<i>Aljazeera</i>	2	20
<i>MBC</i>	1	10

- Total number of participants in two focus groups= 10
- MBC is a general interest channel with 2 daily news bulletins

Appendix 3

Audience Research Questionnaire

Good day,

I would appreciate your kind participation in this questionnaire if you are interested in local and international news TV. The survey focuses on your personal viewpoints regarding the performance of Arab media satellite news channels in addition to some media related definitions and terms. The information provided will be dealt with confidentially and it's for the cause of research and analysis only.

Before starting the questionnaire, can you please answer the following questions?

When talking about news and TV, do you prefer watching news on a general interest channel or on one that is a news channel? Why?

- General Interest
- News channel
- Both

Reason for your choice

What are the times you regularly watch news during the day? You can choose more than one time slot.

- Early morning (6-9 A.M.)
- Mid day (12- 15 P.M.)
- Evening (6-9 P.M.)
- Late evening (after 10 P.M.)
- Other times; specify

Do you prefer watching a whole news bulletin or a brief? Why?

- Brief
- Bulletin
- No difference

Reason

News about which area of the world do you focus on in the news bulletin? Rank please if more than one

- News about my own country
- News about the region
- News about USA
- International news
- Business news
- Sports news
- Others (specify)

What in your opinion makes a good news channel?

What is the media that you TRUST the most and consider credible?

- Daily Newspapers
- TV news
- Internet
- Radio
- Others (please specify)

On a scale from 1-5(1= the lowest and 5= the highest) rate the following news sources in terms of:-

	Television news	Internet	Newspaper/radio
Fairness			
Bias			
Completeness			
Accuracy			
Respect of privacy			
People's interest			
Concern of community			

Separation of fact and opinion			
Trust			
Concern of public interest			
Factual with sources around the world			
Level of training and professionalism			

Which of the followings that you frequently watch?

	Very often	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Don't watch
Alarabiya					
Alhurra					
Aljazeera					
Others please name					

On a scale from 1-5(1= the lowest and 5= the highest) rate the following news channels in terms of:-

	Alarabiya	Alhurra	Aljazeera
Fairness			
Bias			
Completeness			
Accuracy			
Respect of privacy			
People's interest			
Concern of community			
Separation of fact and opinion			
Trust			
Concern of public interest			
Factual with sources around the world			
Level of training and professionalism			

In your own words, how would you describe /frame/ view the following channels:-

Aljazeera
Alarabiya
Alhurra

What do you think of the following statement: "I watch religiously (chosen by participant as his/her often watched news channel), because I believe (almost) everything it reports."

-Strongly agree
-Agree

- Neutral
- Don't agree
- Strongly disagree

Do you trust Arab news channels in all what they report?

- Yes
- Somehow
- No. Why?

Do you find Arab news channels informative and satisfying when reporting on world news?

- Yes
 - Partially
 - No
- WHY?

What do you think of the following statement; "No matter how objective and professional news channel is, it can't avoid being biased."

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Don't agree
- Strongly disagree

In your opinion, is what we see in Arab news channels is the full truth or there are some sides are hidden?

- The truth
- Partial truth
- There is no such thing

Do you think Arab news channels show the important information that you want to know about US presidential election?

- Yes
- Partially
- No
- I don't care

Do you think you'll comprehend the concept of American presidential election and its progress in a better way of you watch the news on Alhurra channel (financed by US and broadcasting in Arabic to minimize the gap between the nations)?

- Yes
- Somehow
- No
- I don't have an opinion as I have never watched Alhurra before

Do you feel Arab news channels covering American election and progress in an adequate comprehensive way?

- Very much
- Yes it is

- Neutral
- Inadequate
- Inadequate at all

Are you interested in news regarding American presidential election on TV?

- Yes
- Some how
- No

Do you prefer to know about the progress of American presidential election through American, foreigner or Arab news channel?

- American (name it)
- International (name it)
- Arabic (name it)

Are there other sources you rely on to get to know about the American presidential election?

- Yes
- Partially
- No

Is the coverage of the campaign on Arab satellite news channels adequate and give you the full picture you need to know

- Yes
- Partially yes
- No – I depend on other sources

How can you describe the election process in words based on what you have seen so far on Arabic news channels?

In your opinion is such an event important to Arab viewers in general and to Saudis in particular?

- Yes
 - Some how
 - No
- Explain

Do you feel that you understand the concept of presidential election fully?

- Yes
- Some how
- No

Can you name the candidates competing in the US presidential race?

What was so special about the 2008 American presidential race in your opinion?

In few words describe the current election as you have been following it on the media....

Although Senator Hillary Clinton is out of the presidential race now, would you feel comfortable with the idea of a woman ruling the U.S.A?

- Yes I am ok with it
- Partially ok
- No I won't feel comfortable
- I don't care

In your opinion who is the candidate who will work for the best of the world?

Does being in a way related to Islam make Obama more appealing to you- do you prefer him as a president for that reason?

- Yes I do
- I partially do
- No connection between the two issues. Please elaborate.....

Personal Information

Age

- 30 years or under
- 30- 35
- 36-40
- 41-45
- 45-49
- 50 or above

Occupation

Education

- Less than a bachelor's
- Bachelor's
- Graduate degree

Income

- Less than SR 3000 monthly
- More than 3500
- More than 10000

Gender

- Male
- female

Date

Any comments you'd like to add

Thank you

