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Content Analysis of Media Coverage on Gaza and Ukraine Conflicts

A B S T R A C T

This article investigates the framing, and narrative strategies employed by BBC, and CNN in their coverage of the Gaza and Ukraine conflicts, focusing on terminology, tone, and framing. Based on a qualitative content analysis of 12 articles, published between October 2023, and October 2024, the research uncovers, significant disparities in how these conflicts are portrayed. While Ukrainian fighters, are consistently framed as "defenders" engaged in a justifiable struggle for sovereignty, Palestinian fighters, are often described using mixed or negative terminology, highlighting their association with violence or humanitarian crises. Coverage of Gaza, emphasizes large-scale civilian victimization, and humanitarian crises, with critical framing of Israeli military actions. In contrast, Ukraine coverage highlights resilience, and legitimate defense against Russian aggression, with detailed casualty reporting and an emphasis on geopolitical threats. These findings, reveal inherent double standards, and geopolitical biases in Western media coverage, offering critical insights for journalists, and policymakers seeking to foster balanced, and ethical reporting of international conflicts.

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تحليل المحتوى لتغطية وسائل الإعلام لصراعات غزة وأوكرانيا

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المستخلص

يحقق هذا المقال في طرق التغطية الإعلامية والاستراتيجيات السردية التي تعتمد عليها شبكتا BBC و CNN في تغطيتهما لصراعات غزة وأوكرانيا، مع التركيز على المصطلحات، والنبرة، والإطار السردى. استناداً إلى تحليل نوعي لمحتوى 12 مقالاً نُشرت بين أكتوبر 2023 وأكتوبر 2024، يكشف البحث عن تباينات كبيرة في كيفية تصوير هذه الصراعات. يتم تأطير المقاتلين الأوكرانيين باستمرار على أنهم "مدافعون" يخوضون نضالاً مشروعاً من أجل السيادة، في حين يُشار إلى المقاتلين الفلسطينيين غالباً باستخدام مصطلحات مختلطة أو سلبية، مع التركيز على ارتباطهم بالعنف أو الأزمات الإنسانية. تُبرز تغطية غزة الضحايا المدنيين على نطاق واسع والأزمات الإنسانية، مع انتقاد للإجراءات العسكرية الإسرائيلية. وفي المقابل، تُركز تغطية أوكرانيا على الصمود والدفاع المشروع ضد العدوان الروسي، مع تقارير مفصلة عن الضحايا وتأكيد التهديدات الجيوسياسية. تكشف هذه النتائج عن معايير مزدوجة متأصلة وتحامل جيوسياسي في تغطية وسائل الإعلام الغربية؛ مما يقدم رؤية نقدية للصحفيين وصانعي السياسات الذين يسعون لتعزيز تقارير دولية متوازنة وأخلاقية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تأطير وسائل الإعلام، تغطية الصراعات، صراع غزة، صراع أوكرانيا، تغطية BBC، تغطية CNN.

1. Introduction

In today's world, conflicts are not limited to battlefields; they also unfold in the media, where narratives influence public opinion and international policy. This article explores how media outlets, particularly CNN and BBC, have portrayed two major contemporary conflicts: the Gaza war of 2023 and the ongoing war in Ukraine.

The Gaza war, which began on October 7, 2023, with a surprise attack by Hamas on Israel, has brought renewed attention to the Palestinian issue in the Middle East (Hokayem, 2023). This conflict has resulted in devastating humanitarian consequences, including thousands of Palestinian deaths and widespread displacement (Neimark, Bigger, Otu-Larbi, & Larbi, 2024). The war has been defined by a systematic attack on Gaza's healthcare infrastructure (Arawi, 2024), and has highlighted vulnerabilities in Israel's security and political leadership (Hokayem, 2023). While Israel may succeed in dismantling Hamas's military capabilities, it is unlikely to eliminate its social and political influence (Hokayem, 2023). The war carries significant regional implications, advancing Iran's strategic interests and potentially undermining Israel's efforts to normalize relations with Arab states (Hokayem, 2023). The conflict also has significant environmental consequences, with carbon emissions from war activities and subsequent reconstruction estimated to reach millions of tonnes of CO₂ equivalent (Hokayem, 2023). These environmental impacts, combined with the human toll, are often influenced and magnified by media narratives.

Media coverage, plays a crucial role in shaping public perception, and policy responses to international conflicts. Research, shows that framing techniques, including language choice and coverage depth, significantly influence how conflicts are understood, and empathized with (Evans, 2010). The media often reflects dominant discourses, frames news along official lines, and may dehumanize or demonize certain actors (Joseph, 2014). Coverage, tends to be influenced more by journalistic practices, and national factors than by actual events, leading to potential decontextualization of foreign news (Seceleanu, 2019) (Lafta, 2022). While media, can serve as watchdogs, they frequently act as uncritical megaphones for political rhetoric during wartime (Aday, 2019). The public, relies heavily on media for information about conflicts, placing a significant burden on journalists to provide accurate, and comprehensive coverage. However, the effects of media coverage on public attitudes, and support for war remain contested, particularly in the digital age (Aday, 2019).

This complexity, is further compounded by the concept of double standards, in media reporting, which is evident in the framing, and coverage of different conflicts. Research, shows that such framing significantly influences public perception, and policy-making regarding foreign conflicts (Evans, 2010). Studies, have highlighted inconsistencies in reporting similar events, such as the disparate coverage of army sieges in Palestinian refugee camps (Evans, 2010). Media, tend to focus on violence and conflict-driven events, rather than underlying processes, often applying ethnocentric bias, and event-oriented reporting (Baden & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2018). This approach, can potentially escalate conflicts, and hinder peace-building efforts. The traditional, paradigm of conflict reporting has been criticized for its inadequacy in addressing complex issues

(Hussain, 2010). To better, understand media-conflict interactions, researchers propose moving beyond the "CNN effect", concept and adopting a multilevel framework that captures the contemporary hybrid media environment, and its impact on conflicts from local to global scales (Gilboa, Jumbert, Miklian, & Robinson, 2016).

Despite, the extensive coverage of both conflicts, few studies have undertaken a comparative analysis of how Western media narratives differ in framing these crises, revealing potential biases, and double standards. This study, aims to analyze the disparities in language, tone, and framing used by CNN, and BBC to uncover underlying biases, and their implications for public perception and policy.

2. Geopolitical Biases in Media Framing

Geopolitical biases, in media framing refer to the ways in which media narratives are influenced by political contexts, geographical proximity, and ideological leanings. These biases, shape public perception, and discourse around international events, often reflecting the interests of specific political entities, or cultural norms (Jan & Barclay, 2024). For example, geopolitical narratives frequently utilize gendered frameworks to justify military interventions, or withdrawals, as seen in Afghanistan. Women's rights are often used to justify foreign actions but can ultimately undermine them (True & Akbari, 2024).

Geopolitical context heavily shapes media narratives, especially in conflicts like those in Ukraine and Gaza. Outlets like CNN and BBC often align their coverage with Western strategic interests. For example, the BBC frequently describes Ukrainian fighters as "defenders," highlighting resilience and sovereignty, consistent with the Western stance against Russian aggression (Obaidullah & Shaikh, 2024) (Parmelee, Roman, & Beasley, 2024). The Global Conflict Reality (GCR) narrative frames the Ukraine war as a critical international crisis, calling for Western intervention to prevent escalation (Cap, 2023). Moral framing further reinforces this perspective by invoking victimhood and promoting Ukraine as a morally just cause against Russian aggression (Parmelee et al., 2024).

Palestinian fighters are often labeled as "militants" or "terrorists," reflecting narratives aligned with Israeli security interests. This coverage prioritizes security over humanitarian concerns, framing the Gaza conflict to support Western geopolitical stances (Liu, 2024).

Media framing shapes public perception and directly impacts foreign policy decisions. For instance, during the Crimea crisis, selective reporting was used to sway public opinion and justify specific policy actions [17]. The portrayal of conflicts often involves "othering," which legitimizes violence against perceived adversaries (Sirhan & Sirhan, 2021) (Lafta/ Hassan 2022). This selective reporting, marginalizes the voices of affected populations, as seen in the Gaza conflict, where Western media, narratives tend to overshadow local perspectives, and reflect geopolitical alliances (Assalia, 2024).

Furthermore, geopolitical biases manifest in specific ways that impact public perception and policymaking:

- **Selective Reporting:** Media, often highlights particular narratives, leading to biased public perceptions of conflicts.

- **Stereotyping:** The reinforcement of, stereotypes legitimizes one side's actions while demonizing the other, which affects public empathy, and support.
- **Justification of Actions:** Governments, leverage media narratives to justify foreign policy decisions, such as military interventions, or support for specific nations.
- **Public Support:** Framing, states as unitary actors increases public support, for coercive policies, as demonstrated in U.S. foreign policy discussions (Altier & Kane, 2023).
- **Transnational Image Management:** Countries, manipulate their national images through media to garner international support for policy outcomes, although the effectiveness varies by issue (K et al., 2021).

To ensure fair, and accurate representations of international conflicts, journalists must, adopt standardized, and neutral terminology while avoiding alignment with geopolitical agendas. Ethical reporting, can not only foster informed public discourse, but also contribute to peacebuilding efforts by challenging stereotypes, and amplifying marginalized voices.

3. Research Questions:

This study, aims to analyze the disparities in language, tone, and framing used by CNN, and BBC to uncover underlying biases, and their implications for public perception and policy. To address this, the research focuses on the following questions:

1. How does the language used to describe Palestinian fighters differ from the language used to describe Ukrainian fighters?
2. What are the recurring themes or narratives present in the coverage of the Gaza conflict?
3. Are there differences in how casualties and humanitarian crises are reported?

4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative content analysis approach to examine media narratives in CNN and BBC coverage of the Gaza and Ukraine conflicts. Content analysis is ideal for systematically exploring textual data to uncover patterns in terminology, tone, and framing. This method combines deductive and inductive strategies, utilizing pre-established categories while allowing for the emergence of new themes.

Rationale for Selecting CNN and BBC: CNN and BBC were chosen as case studies due to their global reach, influence, and reputations as leading international news organizations. These outlets, represent distinct journalistic traditions, and operational contexts, making them valuable for comparative analysis. CNN, as a prominent U.S.-based news network, CNN's coverage often reflects Western geopolitical interests, and American perspectives on international conflicts. Its significant, global audience ensures that its framing of conflicts, has a substantial impact on public opinion, and policy discourses worldwide. BBC: as a British public broadcaster, the BBC operates under a

mandate to provide impartial and balanced reporting. However, its historical ties to British foreign policy and cultural contexts may influence its narratives. The BBC's extensive coverage of global events provides a comprehensive dataset for analyzing international conflicts as shown in Figure 1.

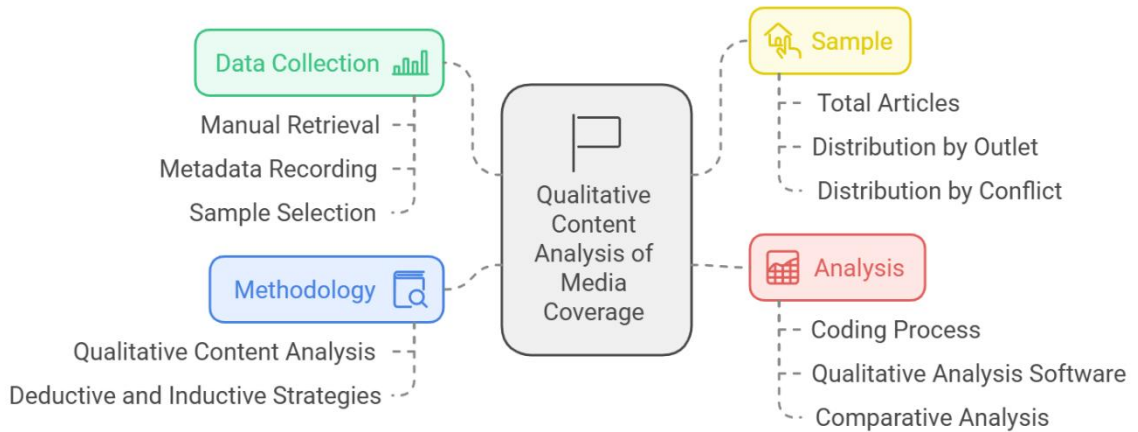


Figure 1: Methodology Description

By examining both outlets, this study aims to highlight how variations in media ownership, funding models, and editorial practices shape the framing of similar conflicts. This comparative approach also enables the identification of potential biases and double standards, contributing to a broader understanding of media influence in global conflict reporting.

Data will be sourced from CNN and BBC websites, focusing on articles published during the period of October 2023 to October 2024. A total of 12 articles will be analyzed—six from CNN and six from BBC, with three articles per conflict for each outlet. Articles will be selected based on their relevance to the conflicts, prominence as top headlines, and representation of both perspectives within the conflicts (e.g., Palestinian and Israeli, Ukrainian and Russian). Articles explicitly discussing conflicts will be prioritized to ensure relevance. Data collection will involve retrieving articles manually from the official websites of CNN and BBC, recording publication metadata such as headline, date, and author. The sample includes a balanced selection of six articles on Gaza and six on Ukraine, equally split between CNN and BBC. This ensures a comparative approach across outlets and conflicts. The relatively small sample size is appropriate for qualitative analysis, allowing for an in-depth examination of each article.

Each article will be coded manually, applying the analytical framework. The study will examine the frequency and context of specific terms, overall sentiment, and framing of narratives. Qualitative analysis software (e.g., NVivo, Napkin.ai) may be used to ensure systematic coding and consistency. A comparative analysis will assess differences in coverage between Gaza and Ukraine and between CNN and BBC. For example, the study

will explore how language differs in describing Palestinian versus Ukrainian fighters and whether tone or framing shifts between the conflicts, as illustrated in Figure 2.

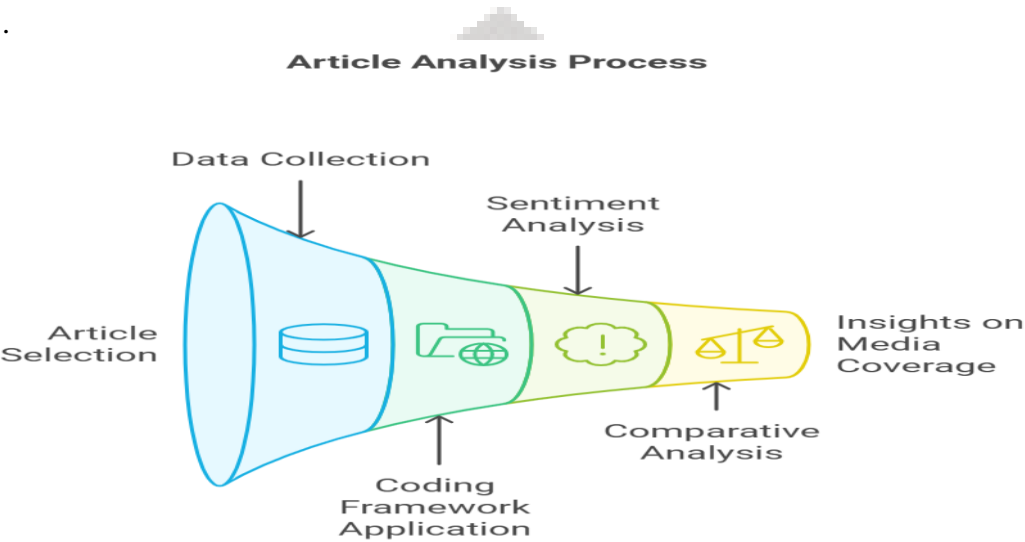


Figure 2: Article Analysis Process

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Combined Findings: How BBC Covers the Gaza and Ukraine Conflicts summary of BBC Coverage

The BBC’s coverage of the Gaza and Ukraine conflicts reveals significant differences in terminology, tone, and framing. The following table consolidates these aspects for both conflicts:

Table 1. Summary of BBC Coverage

Aspect	Gaza Conflict	Ukraine Conflict
Terminology	Mixed terms such as "fighters," "terrorists," and "resistance groups" for Palestinian actors.	Positive terms like "defenders," "soldiers," and "elite troops" for Ukrainian forces.
	Neutral/formal terms like "IDF" and "troops" for Israeli forces.	Negative terms, like "aggressors", and "invaders" for Russian forces.
Tone	Sympathetic toward Palestinian civilians but critical of Israeli military actions.	Positive, or neutral for Ukrainian forces, and sympathetic to civilians; consistently negative for Russian actions.

	Neutral to negative, toward Palestinian fighters.
Humanitarian Crisis	Gaza's infrastructure described as devastated, with impacts on health, education, and economic conditions. Example: "The war has set Gaza back 69 years."
Framing	Victimization of Palestinian civilians, emphasizing displacement and humanitarian crises. Victimization of Ukrainian civilians, focusing on destruction, and resilience.
	Legitimacy of, Palestinian resistance tied to oppression; criticism of Israeli tactics, for excessiveness. Ukrainian actions framed as legitimate defense; Russian actions condemned.

As shown in **Table. 1**, the language, used to describe Palestinian fighters is mixed, often linking them to, violence or civilian harm. In contrast, Ukrainian fighters are framed as, heroic defenders of sovereignty. Similarly, the tone of coverage, toward Palestinian civilians is sympathetic, but the coverage of Israeli forces is critical, highlighting human rights violations. Ukrainian civilians, are depicted as resilient victims, and Russian actions are universally condemned. These differences, reflect geopolitical, and cultural narratives influencing BBC's, reporting.

5.2 Recurring Themes in Gaza Coverage

Recurring themes as shown in Table 2, in the BBC’s, coverage of the Gaza conflict emphasize humanitarian crises, and criticism of Israeli military tactics. The following, table highlights the primary themes:

Table 2. Primary themes

Theme	Details/Examples
Civilian Victimization	Focus on mass displacement, destruction of homes, and severe humanitarian crises. Example: "Over 70,000 residents fled Gaza City."
Criticism of Israeli Tactics	Israeli actions, such as strip-searching civilians, detentions, and indiscriminate bombings, are heavily scrutinized. Example: "The IDF’s strip-searching of civilians... has drawn widespread condemnation."

Humanitarian Crisis	Gaza's infrastructure described as devastated, with impacts on health, education, and economic conditions. Example: "The war has set Gaza back 69 years."
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The BBC emphasizes civilian suffering and the humanitarian toll of the Gaza conflict, often portraying Palestinians as victims of disproportionate military action.

5.3 Differences in Casualty Reporting and Humanitarian Crises

BBC, coverage differs in how casualties, and humanitarian crises are reported for Gaza, and Ukraine. These differences are summarized below:

Table 3. Differences in Casualty Reporting and Humanitarian Crises

Aspect	Gaza Conflict	Ukraine Conflict
Casualty Reporting	Emphasis on large-scale loss of life, often framed with emotional stories and global outrage. Example: "Over 42,000 Palestinians killed in Gaza."	Casualties reported with precise numbers and descriptions of incidents. Example: "30 civilians killed due to Russian drone attacks."
Humanitarian Crisis	Catastrophic impact, with displaced populations and lack of essential resources. Example: "500,000 Palestinians face catastrophic hunger."	Focus on disruptions to civilian lives, emphasizing resilience. Example: "Reports of butterfly mines in civilian areas further endanger Ukrainians."

As shown in Table 3, the BBC's, Gaza coverage highlights the humanitarian toll, and scale of loss, while Ukraine coverage, emphasizes detailed casualty reporting, and resilience in the face of aggression.

5.4 Combined Findings: How CNN Covers the Gaza and Ukraine Conflicts

CNN's coverage parallels BBC's reporting but with distinct differences in terminology, tone, and framing:

Table 4. CNN Covers the Gaza and Ukraine Conflicts

Aspect	Gaza Conflict	Ukraine Conflict
Terminology	Mixed terms: "fighters," "civilians," "resistance," and "terrorists" for Palestinian actors.	Positive terms: "defenders," "troops," and "soldiers" for Ukrainian forces.
Tone	Sympathetic toward Palestinian civilians; critical of Israeli military actions.	Positive to neutral for Ukrainian forces; consistently negative toward Russian actions.
Framing	Victimization: Emphasis on Palestinian suffering and humanitarian crises.	Victimization: Focus on civilian suffering, resilience, and destruction.

Legitimacy: Palestinian resistance linked to historical oppression. Israeli actions criticized.	Legitimacy: Ukrainian actions framed as necessary defense; Russian actions condemned as aggressive.
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The findings highlight notable disparities in how BBC and CNN frame the Gaza and Ukraine conflicts, revealing the impact of geopolitical biases on media narratives. Both outlets use specific terminology and tone to shape public perception, aligning their coverage with broader political and cultural contexts. Coverage of the Gaza conflict highlights civilian suffering and critiques Israeli military actions. Fighters are labeled ambiguously as "militants," "terrorists," or "resistance groups," while reports emphasize civilian casualties and the broader humanitarian toll. Coverage of the Ukraine conflict highlights resilience and defense against external aggression. Ukrainian forces are labeled as "defenders," "soldiers," or "elite troops," reinforcing their legitimacy and heroism. Casualties are detailed with precision and emotional accounts, emphasizing strategic challenges and civilian resilience. These findings highlight the media's role in shaping conflict narratives, reflecting and reinforcing geopolitical biases. Ethical journalism requires balanced reporting and neutral language to avoid stereotypes. Promoting media literacy and critical engagement is essential for informed public discourse and fair conflict representation as shown in Table 4.

Table 5. Recurring Themes in Gaza and Ukraine Coverage

Aspect	Gaza Conflict	Ukraine Conflict
Civilian Victimization	Focus on mass displacement, destruction of homes, and severe humanitarian crises.	Highlighted disruption to civilian lives, emphasizing resilience and strategic defense against aggression.
Criticism of Military Actions	Israeli military tactics, including bombings, strip searches, and detentions, criticized as disproportionate.	Russian military actions condemned as acts of aggression and violations of international norms.
Humanitarian Crisis	Severe shortages of food, water, and medical aid, with infrastructure described as devastated.	Emphasis on disrupted livelihoods and the threat to sovereignty due to Russian aggression.

Table 6. Differences in Casualty Reporting and Humanitarian Crises

Aspect	Gaza Conflict	Ukraine Conflict
Casualty Reporting	Emphasis on large-scale casualties with statistical	Casualties reported with detailed incidents,

	overviews and emotional narratives, humanizing suffering.	focusing on the impact of missile strikes and regional destruction.
Humanitarian Crisis	Catastrophic impact, highlighting mass displacement and poverty as the dominant narrative.	Focused on resilience and strategic challenges posed by Russian military actions.

These findings highlight stark contrasts in how CNN and BBC frame the Gaza and Ukraine conflicts. Gaza is portrayed as a humanitarian tragedy focusing on civilian suffering, while Ukraine is framed as a narrative of resilience and justified defense. These disparities underscore the influence of geopolitical biases in media framing and the need for consistent, ethical conflict reporting standards as shown in Table 6.

5.5 Findings and Their Contributions to Existing Literature

This study uncovers notable differences in how CNN and BBC frame the Gaza and Ukraine conflicts, highlighting variations in language, tone, and framing. The findings summarized in the table below enhance and expand existing media studies research:

Table 7. Findings and Their Contributions to Existing Literature

Finding	Contribution to Existing Literature	New Insights or Confirmations
Differences in language framing of Palestinian vs. Ukrainian fighters	Confirms earlier findings on media's use of positive framing for politically aligned conflicts (Evans, 2010; Joseph, 2014).	Highlights the stark contrast between "heroic defenders" (Ukraine) vs. "ambiguous fighters" (Gaza), revealing geopolitical influences.
Recurring themes of victimization and humanitarian crisis	Supports studies on media's focus on civilian suffering in conflict zones (Baden & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2018).	Shows a stronger emotional emphasis in Gaza coverage compared to Ukraine, reflecting biases in tone and narrative depth.
Double standards in media framing across conflicts	Expands Gilboa et al.'s (2016) multilevel framework by demonstrating how biases persist in hybrid media ecosystems.	Provides a comparative view of framing variations within the same outlets, challenging assumptions about uniform editorial bias.
Reporting of casualties and humanitarian crises	Reinforces Aday's (2019) claim that reporting is politicized, shaped by audience sympathies.	Emphasizes the greater use of detailed casualty reporting for Ukraine vs. generalized reporting for Gaza.

Implications for Journalism and Policy

These findings, reveal the critical role of media in constructing narratives around international conflicts. The selective, use of language, tone, and framing aligns coverage with geopolitical priorities, reinforcing cultural biases and influencing public perception. This phenomenon, has been widely documented, as media often reflect dominant political discourses, while shaping public attitudes through framing strategies (Tenenboim-Weinblatt & Baden, 2021). This, has far-reaching implications for journalism, and policy.

For journalists, these results underscore the importance of adopting standardized, and neutral terminology to ensure ethical reporting. Research highlights that biased language and tone can perpetuate stereotypes, and reinforce systemic inequalities, undermining fair representation (Joseph, 2014; Aday, 2019). A more consistent, and balanced approach to conflict reporting, can mitigate the risk of perpetuating geopolitical agendas, while fostering a more equitable portrayal of all parties involved in a conflict.

For policymakers, the findings highlight the need to recognize how media framing influences, public opinion, and policy decisions. Research shows that framing effects can heavily influence public perceptions and policy responses during crises (Gilboa et al., 2016; Hussain, 2010). Media literacy programs can help audiences critically assess conflict reporting, mitigating the impact of biased narratives on policymaking. These efforts are vital for fostering an informed public, advancing conflict resolution, and promoting ethical media practices.

6. Conclusion:

The analysis of CNN and BBC coverage reveals significant disparities in framing the Gaza and Ukraine conflicts, shaped by geopolitical and cultural biases. Ukrainian fighters are portrayed as "defenders," highlighting heroism and sovereignty, while Palestinian fighters are labeled as "militants" or "terrorists," often linked to violence and humanitarian crises.

Coverage of Gaza centers on civilian suffering, highlighting displacement, infrastructure destruction, and humanitarian crises, with emotional narratives emphasizing casualties, poverty, and resource shortages while criticizing Israeli military actions. In contrast, Ukraine coverage focuses on resilience, showcasing civilian and military efforts to defend sovereignty against aggression.

These findings show how media framing shapes narratives aligned with geopolitical priorities. Ukraine is presented as a story of heroism and justified defense, while Gaza is portrayed as a humanitarian tragedy marked by disproportionate force. These disparities highlight the need for ethical reporting and consistent standards in conflict coverage. Future research should examine more media outlets and conflicts to further understand media bias and its impact on public perception and policymaking.

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