War on the Web

The Immediate News Framing of Gulf War II

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This study examined the immediate coverage of the 2003 Iraq War on the home pages of 246 international news Web sites. The results show that most of these online publications provided coverage and made Gulf War II their top story only hours after the war began. However, foreign news sites framed the war differently than U.S. sites. Domestic news sites focused more heavily on the military conflict, human interest, and media self-coverage while the responsibility frame was more common for international sites. Also, online news coverage in countries officially supporting the war was more positive than in the countries opposing the war. The implications of these differences are discussed, and examples to illustrate the differences are offered.

Keywords: *online news coverage; global news; framing of conflict; international media flow; war coverage; war in Iraq*

The Iraq War was the first major military conflict during which Internet news played a major role. This study examined a large sample of online news sites from around the world and compared how American and international online media responded to the announcement of President Bush that the United States was launching military action against Iraq. The article focuses on the immediate coverage of the online publications—the first few hours after the announcement—and content analyzes their home pages for the amount, type, and framing of the coverage they provided.

Waiting for War

As a part of a new "preemptive strike" defense strategy in the beginning of 2003, the Bush administration turned attention to Iraq, which had been repeat-

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edly, although without direct proof, tied to global terrorism organizations and labeled a part of the "axis of evil" (Raspberry 2003). The international community had also expressed its concern about Iraq at various points in time, including through the passage of United Nations Resolution 1441. The resolution, which was passed on November 8, 2002, voiced the UN's concern that Iraq was hiding illegal weapons of mass destruction, was developing long-range missiles, and could be considered a threat to international peace and security. As a result, the resolution insisted that Iraq produce official documents proving the country's arsenal of weapons of mass destruction had been destroyed, as the United Nations had previously mandated. Indeed, the strong language in the resolution went so far as to assert that if Iraq did not comply, Iraq would again face an international war.

The stage for Gulf War II was set as the United States began a military buildup in Kuwait, a country with shared borders with Iraq, and began negotiating the use of airspace in nearby Turkey. On March 17, 2003, President George W. Bush gave Saddam Hussein an ultimatum: to give up power and leave Iraq, otherwise the country would be invaded. Saddam had forty-eight hours to comply. Since he did not leave Iraq, the "coalition of the willing" attacked the country on March 19, 2003 (Balz and Allen 2003). This marked the beginning of the forty-nine-day war. At 10:19 p.m. EST, President Bush addressed the nation, saying, "At this hour, American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger. On my orders, coalition forces have begun striking selected targets of military importance to undermine Saddam Hussein's ability to wage war" (Bush 2003).

The world media would later report that the war began earlier than expected because United States Central Command wanted to seize a "target of opportunity," which contained intelligence of Hussein's whereabouts (Gellman and Priest 2003). Yet most of the leading international media responded almost immediately with substantial coverage of the Bush announcement. The initial framing of the attack in the immediate Internet news coverage is the focus of this article.

Theoretical Background

While many differences exist in the ways media organizations operate in various societies (Merrill 1983), they also typically follow similar journalistic values and routines (Martin and Chaudhary 1983). Furthermore, the mass media can be seen as a part of a broader national system. Thus, the media are, by default, influenced by the political, economic, and social constraints of the broader systems in which they exist (de Beer and Merrill 2004).

Globalization of News

Given the acknowledged tie between media and the government of the state which spawns it, there is no universal expectation that news media in different countries will cover a major news event in the same way. In fact, Gurevitch et al. (1991) argue that global media still must maintain culturally specific orientations in their coverage in order to reach local audiences. Functionalist approaches to studying media behavior posit that the media in any country are inextricably linked to their external political and economic environments:

> The media are both a product and also a reflection of the history of their own society and have played a part in it. Despite the similarities of mass media institutions across societies, the media are by origin, practice and convention very much *national* institutions and respond to domestic political and social pressures and to the expectation of their audiences. They reflect, express and sometimes actively serve the "national interest," as determined by other, more powerful actors and institutions. (McQuail 1994: 121)

In general, it is likely that national news media are in tune with the national government regarding their policy stance on international events. This tends to be true for both independent and government-owned media outlets (McQuail 1994). Never is the umbilical cord between media and government more tightly connected than in times of crisis (Topoushian 2002). As Williams (2003: 177) notes in regard to the 9/11 events, "Journalists quickly abandoned all pretense of objectivity and became the uncritical mouthpiece of the US state." Similarly, Peer and Chestnut (1995) found that, in the debate leading up to the first Gulf Crisis in 1990 and 1991, both television and newspapers were supportive of the U.S. president's actions, but television's demand for narrative drama and storytelling resulted in less critical coverage than the newspapers.

This phenomenon is referred to as "domestication" of news—translating the news for the local audience and framing it in ways targeted to the given culture. Examining Danish and Japanese news, Clausen (forthcoming) identified three ways in which domestication was achieved: by using different actors, different themes, and different communication strategies. Clausen also argues that "processes of globalisation through international news mediation cause neither total homogenisation nor total heterogenisation of world-views." This is supported by a Pew study of world opinion about the 2003 Iraq War conducted after the end of military combat (Pew Charitable Trusts 2003).

In one of the first content analyses to examine international news coverage, de Sola Pool (1952) reported substantial similarities in coverage of the "elite press" in five countries, including the United States and Russia. Other scholars have noted that news coverage should be similar due to similar journalistic routines and newsworthiness values consistent across the world (Martin and Chaudhary 1983).

In a study of the coverage of the first Gulf War, however, Kaid et al. (1993) found that there were substantial differences in themes chosen by five leading international newspapers from France, Germany, Great Britain, Japan, and the United States. They also found that the papers tended to focus on different actors and settings, thus localizing the event and making the war a "national" story. Other studies have also suggested that there are differences in the coverage of foreign news by the world press (Gaunt 1990; Gerbner and Marvanyi 1977). Even though there is no absolute consensus in the literature, we expect to find variations in the coverage of the Iraq War, not only because of the domestication of news phenomenon, but because the Iraq War was quite controversial politically around the globe.

In the global news cycle today, the agenda-setting function of American media has become evident (Horvit 2003; Thussu 2002). Major news agencies such as the Associated Press have also become some of the dominant news providers around the world, especially in regard to international news (Horvit 2003). Thussu (2002), among others, argues that since Gulf War I the U.S. military has begun a new era of news management and "public diplomacy." The author also posits that world news is dominated by Western news agencies with the following three at the top: the Associated Press (United States), Reuters (United Kingdom), and Agence France Press (France).

One way in which the impact of national politics on news media coverage can be observed is by examining the framing of the Iraq War. Examining the coverage of major conflicts such as military interventions is important not only because it affects national public opinion toward the conflict, but also because it has a direct impact on policy making (Dissanayake 1984). One of the major influences of the media in this regard stems from its framing function.

News Framing

Political communication research has shown that the media tell us what the issues of the day are and focus the public's agenda on specific events (McCombs et al. 1997; Wanta 1997). According to framing theory, the media also play an important role in framing public issues and events by making certain aspects more salient than others while putting a specific news angle or "spin" on these elements (Entman 1991, 1993; Gitlin 1980; Iyengar 1991; Shoemaker and Reese 1996; Tuchman 1978). Framing theory posits that media transfer the salience of specific attributes to issues or events. Despite the large number of framing studies, however, there are still gaps in what we know about framing (see, for example, Jha-Nambiar 2002).

Gamson and Modigliani (1987: 43) define framing as "the central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events." According to Entman (1993: 52), to frame means "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text." Tankard (1997)

summarizes that, in news media coverage, framing stems from a process of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration by the news organization. For instance, in a case of war, the media can select to focus on the destruction of war as opposed to freedom from tyranny, can frame the event as an invasion versus attack, can emphasize the victims versus invaders, and can highlight a positive versus negative attitude toward the war.

Tuchman (1978) considers media's framing ability to organize everyday reality as their most important task. Gitlin (1980) argues that media frames organize the world both for journalists who report it and for consumers who rely on their reports. Different factors influence how journalists frame issues, including social norms and organizational pressures. As Jha-Nambiar (2002) notes, media frames reflect the beliefs of the public at large and are a result of a multitude of factors. Individual schemas of reporters and editors as well as journalistic practices and routines, cultural values and broader sociopolitical forces shape the selection of media frames (Jha-Nambiar 2002; Shoemaker and Reese 1996).

Iyengar (1991) distinguishes between two types of frames: episodic and thematic. Episodic frames are references to isolated news events without providing broader context—"only a passing parade of specific events" (p. 140). Thematic frames, on the other hand, provide broader societal context to issues and events and thus present more complete pictures and collective evidence. Episodic and thematic frames have different effects on the audience, according to Iyengar. Episodic frames tend to put responsibility on specific groups or individuals whereas thematic frames attribute responsibility to societal/political forces. Iyengar also notes that the use of frames changes over time, with episodic frames being dominant in the news when an issue first surfaces. Over time, coverage becomes more thematic or topical in focus. In other words, there is a tendency for breaking news reports to be episodic in nature. Such reports have been found to be less meaningful to the reader (Neuman et al. 1992).

Li et al. (2002) analyzed the first eight hours of the coverage of September 11 on the main U.S. television networks. They included the following frames: politics, economy, crime, environment, safety, human interest, religious, and disaster frame. Their content analysis revealed that the dominant frames changed over time during the different stages of media coverage.

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) content analyzed the framing of European politics in both print and TV news. They found that the responsibility frame dominated the coverage. The second most commonly occurring frame was the conflict frame. They also found that the human interest frame was present more often in television news as opposed to print. Kamhawi's (2002) study of the coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict found that the dominant frame in the coverage was the conflict frame, followed by the laying blame/responsibility frame. The conflict frame has been categorized as episodic as opposed to the

responsibility frame, which falls into the thematic frame category. In one of the few cross-national framing studies, de Vreese et al. (2001) also found emphasis on conflict in the framing of economic and political news in television coverage in four Western European nations.

Studies of the coverage of the 1991 Gulf War also provide useful findings that inform this research (Nideffer 1995; Thrall 2000; Topoushian 2002). The American media coverage was often criticized for the tendency toward self-glorification, neglect for the destruction of war, and the call to rally around the flag (Kanjirathinkal and Hickey 1992; Kelman 1995). Other research found a definite positive bias toward U.S. military actions in the CNN coverage of the first Gulf War (Kaid et al. 1994).

The German company Media Tenor (2003) conducted one of the few early studies comparing the coverage of the 2003 Gulf War in different countries (the Czech Republic, Germany, Great Britain, South Africa, and the United States). Their analysis of TV news showed that there were significant differences in the war coverage among these five countries. For example, the BBC often reported problems with journalists' working conditions whereas American TV did not raise that issue. The study also observed that American TV news rarely if ever showed visuals of dead or wounded soldiers from the Allied forces but tended to mention such casualties verbally. The opposite was true for dead, wounded, or missing Iraqis (Media Tenor 2003). The heavier presence of pictures of Iraqi casualties on American TV news suggests that framing was achieved not only verbally but also visually.

Clearly, framing can be done in text and in pictures. Messaris and Abraham (2001), for instance, investigated how African Americans were represented in television news. The researchers found evidence of "subtle racism" largely due to the selection of the types of photographic images of African Americans, the settings of these photographs, and the "racial cues" provided within news stories. The authors note that "pictorial framing is worthy of investigation not only because images are capable of conveying unverbalized meanings, but also because awareness of those meanings may be particularly elusive" (p. 225).

Another frame that has emerged in media coverage of political affairs has been the media "self-referential" or metacoverage frame, the tendency of the media to insert itself into the story as more than a reporter of the action, but as a player/actor who influences the process or unfolding of events. This frame has been most widely studied in political campaign news coverage (Esser and D'Angelo 2003; Kerbel 1999; Lichter and Noyes 1995) and has been labeled "media narcissism" by Kaid (Lichter et al. 1999). Little research has addressed this frame of media coverage in conflict or war situations. However, in their study of Gulf War I, Kaid and colleagues (1994) found that CNN used its technology advantage to make itself a player in the war story.

The Internet as an Information Source

In 2003 when Gulf War II began, there was a new channel for the dissemination of information about the war, a channel that could provide more speed and immediacy. Because of its recent growth as a news source, researchers do not yet know how well findings about news globalization and framing will apply to the Web. Use of the Internet for information seeking was widely reported before the initiation of the Gulf War II conflict. During the past decade, researchers have documented a rise in Internet use to fulfill political information and news-gathering functions for the public (Lupia and Baird 2003). This was indeed the case during the Iraq War. The size of "the online news audience has jumped dramatically beginning in the period just before the war began on March 19," according to a survey conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2003: 3). The same study indicates that 77 percent of U.S. Internet users reported using the Internet in connection with the war. The poll also shows that more than half of the American online population—an impressive 56 percent—visited a Web site specifically to get news or other information about the war in Iraq. The fact that the Internet can be more than just an information source was confirmed by the finding that one in five American users used the Web to *shape* their views about the Iraq War (Pew Internet and American Life Project 2003).

Researchers have examined how people use the Internet to gather information (Flanagin and Metzger 2001) and how newspapers use the Internet to disseminate news (Dibean and Garrison 2001). There are studies on the effectiveness and use of online newspapers (Li 2001) and television news Web sites (Chan-Olmsted and Park 2000). Others review the work of journalists (Deuze 1998), the use of the Internet for information gathering (Garrison 2000), Web coverage of national news events (Dimitrova et al. 2003), as well as online staffing and reporting (Singer 2001). Research findings suggest that people use the Internet to further their existing interests. In the case of a major conflict such as war, many people are likely to turn to the online news environment in addition to traditional media.

The Web is an attractive news source due to its ability to offer limitless information without bogging down the reader. Many news articles contain hyperlinks throughout the text that makes particular words "hot" in that the user can click on them to receive even more information about that particular topic (Dimitrova et al. 2003). Kovarick (2002) argues that an important advantage of the Web is that it allows readers to get more in-depth information about an issue. Another purported advantage of online news is that control of information is in the hands of the user, who can choose to navigate through various news articles to inform his or her own interests or agenda. Certainly, Web editors control what is linked to in any given article on their site, but the user is not forced to consume the links or be exposed to information within; thus, the user is in charge of her or his own journey (Eveland and Dunwoody 2001; Peng et al. 1999).

The addition of so many different types and sources of information is touted by some observers as providing diversity of viewpoints more readily than traditional media. Williams (2003) suggests that this advantage of Internet coverage of war and conflict opens the door to a more critical examination of governmental actions.

The timeliness of online news is another of the most obvious advantages, but Web publications offer other advantages as well. As Paul (1995) notes, online publications can provide more context to a story as well as quick access to source documents and expert opinions. E-mail links and synchronous computer-mediated forums are a few ways in which the Web augments news coverage. Variety in terms of level of sophistication across online papers—adding multimedia and interactivity features—also enhance the experience of the online reader (Kiousis 2002). Even though studies on learning from highly interactive sites have shown mixed results, most research suggests that users prefer Web sites that contain more multimedia and interactive elements (Coyle and Thorson 2001; Pew Internet and American Life Project 2003). One of the goals of this research was to explore whether the international Web sites incorporated Web-specific elements to augment their immediate coverage of the war in Iraq.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

Combining the expectations from prior research on globalization of the news cycle, framing, and the evolution of online media elements suggested a series of research questions and hypotheses that guided this study:

> *Hypothesis 1:* Online news Web sites published in countries officially supporting the 2003 Iraq War will have more positive coverage of the event than those opposing the war.
> *Hypothesis 2:* There will be differences in the framing of the event between the U.S. and international newspapers.
> *Hypothesis 3:* There will be more episodic than thematic frames present in the initial coverage of the event.
> *Research Question 1:* What were the characteristics of international online news sites in the aftermath of the president's war announcement?
> *Research Question 2:* How much Web-specific coverage related to the event did the online news publications offer?

Method

The study employed quantitative content analysis methodology to answer the above hypotheses and research questions.

Sample and Unit of Analysis

The sample of international Web news sites chosen was based on three criteria: (1) national reputation of the news publications, (2) audience reach, and (3) online availability. We collected Web sites meeting these criteria in the hours immediately after President Bush's speech, a total sample of 246 news Web sites from 48 countries, spanning all continents (see Appendix A). The sample included sites of online newspapers as well as TV stations and radio news stations. Some of the news Web sites we examined are listed below: *Ahram* (Egypt), *Aksam* (Turkey), BBC News (United Kingdom), *China Daily* (China), *Clarin* (Argentina), CNN (United States), *El Pais* (Spain), *Izvestia* (Russia), *La Stampa* (Italy), *Le Monde* (France), *Khaleej Times* (United Arab Emirates), *The London Times* (United Kingdom), *Mainichi Daily News* (Japan), *La Nacion* (Costa Rica), *The Pakistan Frontier Post* (Pakistan), and *The Star* (Malasya).

The unit of analysis in this study was the home page of each online news site, also referred to as index page or entry page. This is the most common method used in analyzing online news content (see, for example, Li 2001). The home pages of the sample news sites were downloaded and saved to be available for later content analysis. All sample news sites were pulled from the Internet immediately after the announcement made by President Bush.[1] The reason for focusing only on the immediate coverage was that initial framing of an event influences the later coverage.

Coding Categories

The study was designed to capture the occurrence of predefined frames. The frames were included based on previous research on news frames by Li et al. (2002), Kamhawi (2002), and Semetko and Valkenburg (2000).

Each home page was coded for a number of variables. Those variables relevant to the present study were country of origin of the Web publication, number of stories about the Iraq War, story source, tone of coverage, reasons cited for war, use of moral terms, dominant photo, and presence/absence of textual frames. For example, tone was defined as positive if the coverage of the initial bombing/attack of Iraq included positive references toward the U.S. position on the war. Antiwar references indicated negative coverage. A neutral or mixed tone category was also included to capture coverage that was neither supportive of the war nor opposing the war. The code book also incorporated categories designed to capture specific online content, such as number of hyperlinks, multimedia and interactive elements (e.g., online polls, chat rooms, or bulletin boards). The complete code sheet and code book are available from the authors upon request.

Coding Process

The international Web sites were downloaded and consecutively saved by three trained researchers immediately after President Bush made the war

announcement. Thus, the complete home pages (including links and images) were preserved for later analysis. Trained student coders fluent in the respective languages coded the home pages of the sample news Web sites. Recognizing the challenges presented in multilanguage content analysis (Peter and Lauf 2002), special care was taken to find coders with proficiency in both English and the respective language of the news site. The average intercoder reliability across all categories (based on a sample of items in English, the common language of all coders) was satisfactory at +.88, using Holsti's formula.[2] Differences among the coders were reconciled at the training session.

Results

Our findings indicate that, despite time differences and ideological leanings, Web newspapers from most countries around the globe responded quickly to the increasing crisis in Iraq. Of the total number of news sites in our sample, only 74 or 30 percent did not have any war coverage immediately following the attack. For example, a Jordanian Web site (http://Star.Arabia.com) focused on the country's own political situation with a lead story about royal court reshuffles while a news site out of Afghanistan (http://www.afga.com) focused on U.S. troops' raids within their country. However, in the first few hours after the announcement was made, Iraq became the lead story in the majority of the Web publications examined in this study. Almost 90 percent of the 172 news sites that provided immediate coverage also had a war story as their lead story.

There was some variation in the sources, issues, and amount of initial coverage on each Web site. Some incorporated more pictures, hyperlinks, and online stories than others. The majority of the war stories, however, did not have clearly attributed sources. Therefore, it is difficult to determine the influence of the major international news agencies such as the Associated Press and Reuters on the immediate Web coverage of the Iraq War.

Effects of Support for War on Coverage

One indication of the difference between the coalition members and non-members was whether they had a story about the attack on their home pages. There was a statistically significant difference in the number of stories they provided: there were more Web stories in the coalition member countries' online media—74 percent—versus only 59 percent among the countries that had not joined the "coalition of the willing" (chi-square $= 5.46$, $df = 1$, $p = .03$). It is interesting to note that thirty-three U.S. Web sites had no story about the war on their front page. In other words, 23 percent of the American Web sites in this study did not offer immediate war coverage. The *Albuquerque Tribune*, the *Ames Tribune, Cape Code Times*, the *New Jersey Star Ledger*, and *Portland Press Herald* were among those that did not provide any immediate coverage, although the major

U.S. online news outlets covered the event extensively. Other countries whose Web sites did not have stories about the war in the first four hours included Cambodia; Nepal; Poland; the Philippines; Thailand; and interestingly, several countries in the Middle East, including Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, and Oman.

To test Hypothesis 1, which posits that Web coverage in countries officially supporting the Iraq War would be more positive than that of countries not supporting the war, the 246 Web sites were divided into two groups. The group of countries supporting the war included Bulgaria, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Italy, Poland, South Korea, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States.[3] As expected, countries in support of the war had more favorable coverage in contrast to those opposing the war. Tone of coverage included three categories: positive, negative, and neutral/mixed tone category. Chi-square comparisons show that, on average, the media coverage in countries officially supporting the Iraq War was more positive than in those not supporting the Iraq War (chi-square $= 11.41$, $df = 3$, $p = .01$). More than 33 percent of the coverage in countries not supporting the war was negative as opposed to only 15 percent in countries officially supporting the war. An example of negative coverage is ArabicNews.com, which denounced Bush's speech and stressed his "responsibility before God." On the other hand, online media from coalition member countries offered more positive coverage—26 percent of the home pages, in contrast to only 8 percent of nonmembers' online media, which were positive in tone. The sample news sites from coalition member countries also tended to have more neutral and mixed-tone coverage of the war. In addition to more positive content on the home pages, prowar countries media were less likely to use negative moral terms such as "monstrous" or "horrible" in reference to the war.

Differences in Framing

We included six predefined frames used in previous studies: military conflict frame: (emphasis is on the military conflict/action), human interest frame (emphasis is on the human participants in the event), diagnostic frame (emphasis is on the reasons for the event), responsibility frame (emphasis is on the party/person responsible for the event), media self-referential frame (emphasis is on the media, the journalists themselves), and prognostic frame (emphasis is on the prognosis, the outcome of the event). Each home page was coded for the presence of these frames.

Our findings indicate that U.S. and international news Web sites framed the Iraq War differently in this defining early coverage (see Table 1). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was also supported. Of the six frames examined in this study, statistically significant differences were found across four frames. The two frames that did not differ significantly between the international and U.S. online sites—the diagnostic and prognostic frame—were not very common in the early coverage overall. Chi-square comparisons also show that U.S. Web sites tended to focus

Table 1

Frames across U.S. and international Web sites (in percentages)

Frame	Present across All News Web Sites	U.S. Web Sites	International Web Sites
Military conflict*	96	99	91
Human interest*	74	82	61
Diagnostic frame	33	35	30
Media self-reference*	22	29	11
Responsibility frame*	22	15	34
Prognostic frame	17	15	22

Note: N = 172.

*Statistically significant differences between international and U.S. news Web sites at the .01 level, using chi-square comparisons.

more on the military conflict and human interest aspects of the war whereas foreign media were significantly more concerned with responsibility issues in the initial Web coverage. The media self-referential frame was also more likely to occur among the U.S. news sites.

The results also show statistically significant differences in the way the war was described in this initial coverage: U.S. news Web sites were more likely to refer to the event as an "attack" or a "strike" (88 percent) compared with the foreign sites (77 percent), and less likely to refer to it as "military action" (18 percent) compared with the foreign sites (38 percent). Much of the initial coverage did not attribute blame for the attack; the majority of the sites (both domestic and foreign) that did attribute blame, however, placed the blame on the United States and not on the "coalition of the willing." There were also significant differences in the reasons given for the war between U.S. and international news sites. U.S. media cited more often freedom for the Iraqi people as justification for the war, which was rarely mentioned in foreign sites. Indeed, freeing the Iraqi people was a recurring theme for the U.S. online news media. Both domestic and foreign Web sites cited regime change/removal of Saddam and weapons of mass destruction among the reasons to go to war.

The final hypothesis predicted that episodic frames would be more common than thematic frames in the initial coverage of the event. Indeed, the dominant frames in our study were the two episodic frames of military conflict (96 percent) and human interest (74 percent), confirming Hypothesis 3. Again, such episodic frames fail to provide broader context to the event. The third most common frame across all Web sites was the diagnostic frame (33 percent), which discussed the reasons that led to the war (see Table 1). Next were the media self-referential frame (22 percent) and the responsibility frame (22 percent). The least common frame in the early coverage was the prognostic frame (17

percent). In other words, coverage about the consequences of the war was infrequent. This is not surprising considering this was the beginning stage of the conflict.

Characteristics of Immediate Online Coverage of the Iraq War

The first research question asked about the characteristics of the online news sites' homepages in the aftermath of President Bush's war announcement. Even though many online stories were unattributed, the Associated Press was often used as a source for both photos and stories. The number of major war stories on a site ranged from one to forty-one across the sample news publications. Brief stories of a few sentences were also common. The most common photo was one showing troops or military equipment (such as aircraft or artillery), which was observed in 24 percent of the sites, followed by a photo of bombing of Baghdad (19 percent), and a photo of an Iraqi city (5 percent). The leading French newspaper, *Le Monde* (http://www.lemonde.fr/), for instance, used a picture of a peaceful city at dusk as its major visual element in the immediate coverage.

In terms of justification for the war, most online media cited removal of Saddam as the main reason (54 percent), followed by the claim of weapons of mass destruction (30 percent), and freedom for the Iraqi people (22 percent). Four of the news sites mentioned U.S. aspirations for world dominance as a reason for the war. Most common in the overall online coverage was the mention of countries directly involved in the decision to go to war: Great Britain (20 percent), Kuwait (18 percent), France (14 percent), Turkey (11 percent), Russia (7 percent), and Germany (6 percent). The United States was mentioned in virtually all home pages (97 percent).

The 2003 Iraq War provided opportunities for some media organizations to offer unique voices. In addition to the later stories about "bloggers," some online media invited their own journalists to keep diaries and publish them online. For example, *The Guardian* (http://Guardian.co.uk) out of Great Britain offered a Web log in this initial coverage of the war.

The second research question focused on Web-specific content in the online coverage of the Iraq War. First we looked at the number of photographs the online news publications offered. The majority of the Web sites in our sample had only one picture related to the Iraq War (58 percent) and about one-fifth had two photos (18 percent) per home page. The lack of visuals could be partially due to the immediacy of the event. In terms of interactive and multimedia elements, the results show that 62 percent of the sites did not have any interactive options, 72 percent had no video or audio features. Thus, Web specific content was generally infrequent.

Of course, the Web sites of TV stations were more likely to offer video and audio content. CNN.com, for example, offered a number of multimedia links as early as 10:36 p.m. EST., including a video of the war announcement, an audio

slideshow, and a video of military families. ABCNews.com provided live video coverage of the coalition's initial air strikes and bombing of Baghdad. CBS also quickly offered video coverage titled "The Final Countdown."

In terms of interactive features, we observed some interesting examples. The Canadian *Globe and Mail* (http://www.globeandmail.com) offered a poll about the war, asking its online readers how long they believed the war would last. FOXNews.com also offered a link to polls about the military conflict.

The number of hyperlinks ranged from one to sixty-eight per homepage. Many sites had at least half a dozen to a dozen links available for the users. This indicates that online journalists were ready to provide earlier stories about the conflict or other related coverage. Just fifteen minutes after Bush's TV appearance, the *New York Times on the Web* provided its readers with extended coverage of the event, including stories on Turkish airspace and military planners, an interactive map of Iraq, and to-the-minute updates on latest developments on the attack. However, more than 75 percent of the hyperlinks in the sample were internal links, consistent with previous online news studies. It was common to see a direct link to the Associated Press wire on some Web sites.

Discussion

War on the Web

We were interested in exploring what kind of differences exist in coverage of the initial attack in Iraq—both between countries who were supporting the war and those who were not, and between the U.S. online news media and the foreign Web publications. The results summarized above do indeed show some interesting differences. First, it seems clear from the finding of more positive news coverage in coalition members' news sites that national media are influenced by the overall political environment in which they exist. This seems to be the case even for online publications, which in theory can target a global audience. Differences in the tone of coverage do not by any means suggest direct censorship of the media. Rather, they support general arguments that mass media are inextricably linked to the broader sociopolitical environment in which they operate and that they reflect the position of dominant national actors and institutions (de Beer and Merrill 2004; Topoushian 2002). The differences identified in this study show support for McQuail's (1994: 175) proposition that "mass media institutions are still overwhelmingly national in character, although the international flow of mass communication is large and growing in volume."

Another interesting difference that emerged from the results of this study was the difference in framing of the 2003 Iraq War between the American and international online media. Most noteworthy here is the lack of discussion of responsibility issues across the U.S. Web publications. In contrast, international media were much more likely to discuss and analyze issues such as blame and responsi-

bility for the war. U.S. news sites focused more heavily on the details of military action and the "nitty gritty" of the attack, talking about the equipment used, number of soldiers and aircraft, military strategy, and preparation. Stories about soldiers' families, life on the road to war, and other human interest stories were also more common for U.S. news sites compared to international online publications. For instance, the *Indianapolis Star* (http://www.indystar.com) had a memorable photo and an online story about relatives praying at church for their family members serving in the Persian Gulf.

Journalists covering themselves and the way mass media function on a daily basis was a common frame for many U.S. news sites and less common for the foreign sites. U.S. journalists were more likely to cover media-related issues in the immediate coverage of the war, indicating a greater preoccupation with their own roles as players in the war. The U.S. online news media were conscious of and anxious to ascribe themselves an important role in the unfolding conflict and drama. As Brown (2003: 87) suggests, "The way in which the mass media represent the conflict is part of the conflict." This could be due to the "embedded journalism" phenomenon observed in Gulf War II as well as to the relatively large number of American journalists in the Middle East area at the time.

Despite the differences in framing, one thing seems clear: almost all major media outlets around the world immediately responded to the start of the Iraq War and quickly updated their online coverage. However, the reader needs to be reminded to generalize the findings of this study with caution: we examined only the first night of war coverage. Thus, it is possible that the differences discussed above could disappear—or become even stronger—over time.

More episodic frames were expected in this early coverage of the 2003 Iraq War, as earlier research has suggested that this is the general tendency in coverage of breaking news (Iyengar 1991). Our study shows support for this expectation, with two episodic frames—military conflict and human interest frame—clearly dominating. However, future researchers should investigate if thematic frames become more common as the war progresses. A lack of understanding of the broader social forces shaping the conflict in Iraq may result if that is not the case and the media continue to focus on episodic elements, thus failing to present "the big picture."

Worth noting also is the fact that even online media are not able to resist becoming part of the news, rather than being content to report or convey it. Throughout this large sample representing countries around the globe, more than one-fifth (22 percent) of the Web sites reported on the role of the media in the conflict. This was particularly true in the United States, where the percentage reached almost one-third (29 percent). Even in the heat of an initial attack, as the bombs began to rain down on Iraq, the media wanted to be sure that the public did not forget how important the media themselves were to this conflict.

The analysis of the unique characteristics of Web site information continues to reveal disappointing results for those who have conjectured about the tremendous new opportunities the Web affords for interactivity and multimedia representations. As others have observed, the Web offers a venue and a format where newspapers and other print media can compete with their radio and television counterparts by providing the same opportunities for audio and visual storytelling. Yet in the early hours of the Gulf War II conflict, the Web sites of newspapers were still less likely than their television competitors to provide multimedia information that could heighten immediacy for their audiences.

Differences in Coverage May Influence Public Opinion

A survey of global attitudes included questions about the coalition's involvement in Iraq soon after the end of the war and revealed clear divisions among the publics in different countries (Pew Charitable Trusts 2003). For example, many countries in the Arab world and elsewhere blamed the United States and its allies for the number of civilian casualties in Iraq (91 percent in Morocco, 88 percent in Turkey, 79 percent in Brazil, and 74 percent in France) as opposed to only 14 percent in the United States and 26 percent in Israel. Even among the Coalition of the Willing, the survey showed some doubt that the attack on Iraq was justified. The majority of the Spanish population expressed regret about the decision to go to war (62 percent said the country made the wrong decisions), with 37 percent of Australians feeling the same way. The differences in world opinion about the war could be largely due to differences in the local news coverage of the war. In the United States, a study by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (2003) found that American media did a poor job of explaining the Iraq War to the American public, leading to sustained misperceptions of the event. For example, a large portion of the U.S. population believed that weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq, that Saddam had significant ties with al-Qaeda, and that world opinion was mostly in support of the war. These misperceptions warrant further investigation of the domestic media coverage of Gulf War II.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the content analysis focused only on the immediate coverage of the war in Iraq. Future research should follow the online news coverage over time—during the war and perhaps in the aftermath of the war—to determine the dominant frames and how they changed during that period. Using quantitative content analysis of news frames clearly relies on manifest content and thus ignores latent clues. In addition, it is a challenge for researchers to infer meaning based on "objective" characteristics of the coverage such as tone and terminology.

Conclusion

This study offered valuable insights about the immediate Web coverage of the 2003 Iraq War across a substantial number of international news sites. Consistent with framing theory, episodic frames were more common than thematic frames in the immediate war coverage. Also, different frames were dominant among the U.S. online news media compared with their foreign counterparts. Countries officially in favor of the war tended to portray it in more positive terms in their news media, at least in the initial coverage. Finally, this study adds new, theoretically important findings about the dominance of episodic frames and the persistence of metacommunication in news coverage, demonstrating that even online media are not satisfied with reporting unfolding events. The differences among the online publications show that even in the age of globalization, national media exhibit a range of differences—both in framing and objective characteristics of the coverage.

Appendix A

Countries by Time Zone ($n = 48$)

Country	Number of Hours Away from GMT	Country	Number of Hours Away from GMT
Albania	1	Italy	1
Algeria	1	Japan	9
Argentina	−3	Jordan	2
Australia	10	Malaysia	7
Bahrain	3	Mexico	−6
Belgium	2	Nepal	5.5
Brazil	−3	New Zealand	12
Bulgaria	3	Oman	3
Cambodia	7	Pakistan	5
Canada	−4; −5	Paraguay	−3
China	8	Peru	−5
Columbia	−5	Poland	1
Costa Rica	−5	Portugal	0
Cuba	−5	Russia	3; 4
Denmark	1	South Africa	2
Dominican Republic	−5	Spain	1
Egypt	2	Switzerland	1
El Salvador	−6	Thailand	7
France	2	The Philippines	8
Germany	1	United Kingdom	0
India	5.5	United States	−5; −6; −7; −8
Iran	3.5	United Arab Emirates	4
Ireland	0	Venezuela	−4
Israel	3		

Appendix B

Members of the Coalition of the Willing

Afghanistan, Albania, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Palau, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Rwanda, Singapore, Slovakia, Solomon Islands, South Korea, Spain, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom, Uzbekistan.

Source: BBC online, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/2870487.stm.
Note: As of March 21, 2003.

Notes

1. The Bush announcement was made at 10:19 p.m., Eastern Standard Time, on March 19, 2003. However, there were substantial differences in time zones both nationally and internationally. A list of countries in our sample categorized by time zone is presented in Appendix A.
2. Holsti's intercoder reliability (IR) formula was used as follows: IR $= 2M/(N_1 + N_2)$, where M equals the number of agreements between the coders, N_1 is the total number of coding decisions made by coder 1, and N_2 is the total number of coding decisions made by coder 2.
3. For a complete list of coalition member states, see Appendix B.

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