

2015

# Is quality all the same? A comparative study of print and television coverage of the Syrian conflict

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**Is quality all the same? A comparative study of print and television  
coverage of the Syrian conflict**

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Journalism and Mass Communication

Program of Study Committee:  
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Ames, Iowa

2015

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
Timeline of Syrian Conflict	7
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW	10
Framing	12
Technology in Foreign News	16
Variations Across Mediums	19
Overall Trends in Foreign News	22
Defining Quality Journalism	23
Research Questions	26
CHAPTER 3. METHODS	35
Population and Sample	35
Operationalization of the Variables	39
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS	44
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	56
Limitations	70
REFERENCES	72
APPENDIX A. CODING INSTRUCTIONS	81
APPENDIX B. CODE BOOK	84

**ABSTRACT**

How does foreign news quality vary across different mediums in the United States? Using the Syrian crisis as a case study, this content analysis study found that while there are many similarities between print and television coverage of the event there were also key differences. When looking at quality differences in foreign news reporting between the two mediums, newspapers display more of the hallmarks of quality journalism. Newspapers were more likely to present hard news framed thematically. They also have a higher number of total sources and are more likely to use responsibility and conflict frames. Newspapers were also more likely to seek out sources other than the expected officials. These results add further evidence to the notion that newspapers, especially the elite publications, engage in more serious, fact-based reporting than television outlets when it comes to foreign news events.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODCUTION

Foreign news has a direct impact on how Americans perceive the world. Although we have increasing connections to the rest of the world through technology, these interactions are still mediated. The majority of Americans do not experience the rest of the world directly. In essence, we still rely on the media to help us create what Walter Lippmann called the “picture in our heads.” As he stated in *Public Opinion*, “The real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance” (Lippmann, 1922, p. 16). Studies have shown that “exposure to international news increases knowledge” and changes how people perceive foreigners (Martin-Kratzer & Thorson, 2010, p. 160).

Even with the advent of technology that Lippmann could not have foreseen, the media are still a part of how we construct our perceptions of the rest of the world. “News is a part of the every day lives of most people. It penetrates our living places, our workspaces, and can be accessed in almost every imaginable social space” (Clausen, 2003, p. 21). This is especially true in the area of foreign news as it occurs in locations far removed from our daily lives. The development of communication technologies is aiding the construction the viewing audience’s reality. “Developments in communication technologies, one of the fastest changing technology sectors, have had impacts on the mode of production, the mode of delivery, and the mode of reception of international news” (Sreberny & Paterson, 2004, p. 9). Images and videos are transmitted faster than ever and live feeds are commonplace from events around the world.

Scholars and reporters alike observe that, despite increased globalization through technology and an increased interest on part of the viewing audience after the events of September 11, 2001, the presence of foreign news is shrinking.

“Neither journalists nor scholars could have imagined how interest in international journalism would mushroom after the events of September 11, 2001...yet much recent research on international news comes to the same...conclusion – that international news coverage is inadequate” (Streberny & Paterson, 2004, p. 4).

As a recent article in *The Atlantic* states, “there is a widespread belief that coverage of foreign news in recent years has been significantly diminished as newspapers, news magazines, and broadcast networks have reduced and in some cases eliminated altogether their bureaus abroad” (Osnos, 2012). This decrease in resources abroad can be tied to costs, with a foreign newspaper bureau requiring a \$200,000 to \$30,000 investment to remain operational (Carroll, 2007).

Many experts and reporters lament the decrease in foreign news stories in United States media. Utley (1997) discusses the shrinking amount of foreign news on television. John Hughes, a reporter with the *Christian Science Monitor*, observed, “It is ironic in this era of globalization, as international affairs rise to the top of the agenda, that some media companies are forsaking the responsibility to inform readers, listeners, and viewers of what is happening in the world, and analyze what it means” (Hughes, 2007).

This evidence, however, of a decrease is more than anecdotal. In general, according to the 2013 *State of the Media* study published by the Pew Research Center, both revenue and audiences are dwindling for news outlets, and because of

this, organizations have dramatically reduced staff and coverage (Enda & Mitchell, 2013). This extends even more so to foreign news, which is more expensive to produce than local and national news. There is evidence of a declining presence of foreign news in the U.S. media landscape and a decrease in funds devoted by U.S. media to covering international news. According to recent Pew Research Center study, international news is losing ground in terms of coverage at a faster rate than other topic areas. “Roughly two-thirds of newsroom executives said the space devoted to foreign news in their newspaper had dropped over the past three years. Nearly half say they have reduced the resources devoted to covering the topic—also the highest percentage recording a drop” (“The Changing Newsroom,” 2008).

Additionally, a recent review of the amount of foreign news stories in American newspapers by the American Journalism Review found that in the past 25 years, foreign news in daily newspapers have fallen 53 percent (Kumar, 2011). The study also found that stories today are less likely to be staff-produced and are shorter than stories in dailies 25 years ago. Foreign news stories are also now also slightly less likely to appear on the front page.

Along with quantity, there is also a concern among media professionals about the decline in the quality of foreign news. Christopher Harper, a former bureau chief for ABC News, recently wrote an article titled “For ‘World News,’ a Distressing Decline in Standards.” In this article he stated, “ABC’s *World News*, once a leader in innovative journalism and international news, has become a program that provides predictable coverage, with only a few reporters apparently leaving the



office to cover stories” (Harper, 2013). Scholars also observe the general decline in the quality of foreign news (Hamilton & Lawrence, 2010).

Due to the high costs of maintaining foreign bureaus abroad, there has been a trend towards what some scholars call “parachute journalism.” Instead of living in a location, learning the culture, language, and people, there is a tendency to send reporters from the home base to cover events as they unfold. The criticism of this method is that correspondents, “end up in places they have never seen before, with no knowledge of the language, the customs, or the background to the story they are covering. As a result they concentrate on violence and other sensational events, not on causes and consequences. News organizations save money, but at the cost of the adequately informing their readers, viewers, and listeners” (Erickson & Hamilton, 2007, p.132).

These changes lead to the question of the effect of declining international news coverage received by the American public. Does the decreased presence of American journalists in other countries and the decreased resources devoted to international news lead to a lower quantity and quality of foreign news in American media?

A potential decline in the quality of foreign news has obvious effects on consumers of the news. Lower quality journalism, manifested through less original, less in-depth stories, has the potential to be less informative to the consumer. These consumers are also more likely to leave a news outlet if they feel the quality of reporting has declined (Enda & Mitchell, 2013) compared with if they felt the quantity of the stories had decreased. For people who left a news outlet, “fully 61%

of them said stories were less complete than they had been versus just 24% who complained there were too few stories (Enda & Mitchell, 2013).

With regards to quantity of foreign news, there is an ongoing debate about whether audiences care more about issues because media cover those issues extensively or whether the news tend to cover issues according to public demand. If the former is the case, then it can be argued that a decline in foreign news coverage will lead to a populace that is less engaged and less interested in what is going on around the world. Already, almost two-thirds of the population says international news gets enough coverage in the U.S. media (Purchell, Rainie, Mitchell, Rosenstiel, & Olmstead, 2010). In 2012, the two most popular foreign news stories saw only three out of 10 Americans following each story closely. Important international stories such as European debt crisis and the Syrian Civil War had much lower followings, with 17 percent and 12 percent respectively (“Interest in Foreign News Declines,” 2012).

The public being less engaged in what is going on around the world has many potential implications. According to Thomas Friedman in *The World is Flat*, globalization has caused the world to shrink from medium in the time from the 1800s to the 2000s to tiny in the time from the 2000s to 2006 – the time of the book’s publication. This world is increasingly connected in areas ranging from economics to foreign policy. This connection requires people to be informed of world events in order to be good global citizens. Knowledge of foreign events also should warrant attention by Americans for selfish reasons – namely that, because of

globalization, events occurring in other countries are more likely to ripple around the globe and impact us directly.

Another reason foreign news quality and quantity is important is due to the fact that media have the potential to impact public policy through the setting of foreign policy. As summarized in the CNN effect theory, the more the American public is aware of events through images that are conveyed almost instantaneously from around the world, the more likely they are to require action by their leaders (Strobel, 1996). This gives foreign news correspondents and media outlets a great deal of responsibility and potential power. If anything, the increasing presence of the Internet has increased this access to information in real-time.

The amount of coverage given to foreign news events varies over time, depending on many factors, including what is happening domestically and what else is going on in the world. This is especially true in the United States during presidential election years, when foreign news stories are only half likely to be the lead in news broadcasts (Hess, 1996).

In 2010, two of the top 10 news stories, the earthquake in Haiti and the war in Afghanistan, were international. In 2011, when there was an increase in international events of interest to the American public with five of the 10 biggest stories of the year, the unrest in the Middle East, the Japan earthquake and tsunami, the Osama Bin Laden Killing, the war in Afghanistan, and the European economy, coming from international stories (Jurkowitz, Rosenstiel, & Mitchell, 2012). The trend was down again in 2012, when, out of the top ten news stories of the year

according to the public interest, only one, the attack on the consulate in Libya, was an international issue (“Election, tragedies dominate top stories of 2012,” 2012).

Maintaining quality of content is beneficial for media outlets themselves. There is evidence that international news stories can draw viewers. In the State of the Media 2012, Pew researchers found viewers were more likely to tune into a news channel when it is focused on international events, such as CNN reaping the benefits of covering the uprising in the Middle East (Pew, 2012).

The purpose of this study is to determine whether certain types of media, namely television and newspapers, handle the challenges of reporting foreign news more adeptly. To achieve this, foreign news stories about the ongoing Syrian conflict over a two-year period were examined for quality and quantity. As measures of quality, the study examines variables such as sourcing and framing. The Syrian crisis was chosen because it covers a span of years, allowing for a larger sample and an ability to analyze the situation over a period of time. Moreover, while most countries are rarely covered by this country’s media (Hess, 1996), the possibility of U.S. intervention in the Syrian conflict all but ensured its coverage by the U.S. media.

#### *Timeline of the Syrian Conflict*

According to *The Washington Post’s* timeline (Kaphle, 2014), the first major protests came on the heels of the Arab Spring in March 2011 and by May, the Assad regime was responding with a military crackdown to dispel the anti-regime protests. In April, the United States tightened sanctions on the country. The first major crackdown, resulting in hundreds of deaths, came in July 2011 in the city of

Hama and by August 2011, President Obama was calling on Assad to step down. The situation continued to deteriorate and the Arab League suspended Syria's membership in November (Kaphle, 2014).

In February 2012, the U.S. shut down its embassy in Damascus, while Russia and China still blocked the U.N. draft resolution condemning Syria's actions. In April, the U.N. brokered a cease-fire. However, rebel forces maintained the Assad regime was continuing to murder civilians and attack rebel strongholds. Escalating violence led the U.N. to suspend its mission by June 2012. In August 2012, U.N. accused Syria of war crimes for a massacre of more than 100 civilians, many children, in Houla in May.

By April 2013, Britain and France informed the U.N. that there is credible evidence that Assad's regime had used chemical weapons against rebel forces, with U.S. officials reaching this same conclusion in June 2013. With this determination, President Obama authorized direct U.S. military support to the rebels. The Syrian government was again accused of using chemical weapons, this time in a Damascus suburb in August of 2013; U.S. intelligence and U.N. weapons inspectors concluded the attack killed almost 1,500 people. Although President Obama weighed a limited military strike that would deter Syria from future use of chemical weapons (Kaphle, 2014), he called on Congress to vote on the use of military force. Before that vote took place, Russia negotiated a deal to give Syria the opportunity to give up its chemical weapons, a process that is ongoing and overseen by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Fighting, however, continues. The Syrian

government has sought a delay for exporting its chemical weapons arsenal and is reluctant to destroy its 12 facilities that produced the weapons (Gladstone, 2014).

As of January 2014, BBC News estimates that more than 100,00 people have died in the conflict (Robbins, 2014). According to the same article, the United Nations says more than half of Syria's population is in urgent need of aid.

The Syrian conflict stands out among Arab Spring uprisings due to the division that has marked opposition to Assad's regime. "Islamists and jihadist fighters took advantage of this power vacuum, enabling President Assad to portray himself as the last hope for stability" (Robbins, 2014). World powers' responses have also varied, contributing to the complexity of the situation.

This is a study of how newspapers in the U.S. covered the crisis. Therefore, the time period under examination started in April 2011, when the U.S. levied its first sanctions against the regime, and ended September 2013, after the probability of U.S. military involvement in the country had greatly decreased due to the deal brokered by Russia.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

High standards of journalism are vitally important to our society. Journalists hold “the largest and most important institutions accountable” (Abramson, 2010, p. 39) and analyze the actions of the most powerful groups in our society (Bennett, 2012). This idea of the media as watchdogs and informers goes back decades. American journalist Walter Lippmann said in the 1920s the press should be “like a beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another out of the darkness into vision (1922, p. 229). Media impact is especially important in the case of foreign news because the stories are farther removed. As far back as the 1950s, it was observed in a study by the International Press Institute, “the importance of foreign news not merely as ‘news’ but as information upon which the people of free countries base certain vital decisions” (The Flow of News, 1953, p. 3). Therefore, it is important to determine whether these normative goals and subsequent quality standards are being met in foreign news reporting.

What role should the media have in keeping citizens informed of world events? With the advent of technology, we now inherently have more access to the world and its events than ever before. The world is smaller. “As the world has been drawn closer together in the physical realm, political schisms at any point have taken on importance all around the globe. Foreign news is less ‘foreign’ in its influence on peoples lives” (The Flow of News, 1953, p. 7). This statement was written in the 1950s, and the world has “shrunk” an exceptional amount since that time. As Burman (2009) argues, more than at any other point in history, it is imperative to understand other cultures in order to understand our own culture.

According to many scholars, the media have a normative duty to provide the public with information that they *need* to know to be better world citizens and understand other cultures (Burman, 2009; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). Burman (2009) takes this argument one step farther, with the idea that the news media, foreign reporting in particular, should answer the question of why with regards to world events.

The first study about international news flows funded by UNESCO in 1978 showed news flowing from the powerful, developed Northern hemisphere, to the less powerful and less developed Southern hemisphere (Clausen, 2003). Previous research has shown that international news flows in ways that reflect economic and political relations, as well as geographical proximity and cultural likeness (McQuail 2010). “Transnational information flow is a reflection and a constituent of the larger global system, which in turn is latently structured by the world’s politics, economy, and culture” (Hu, 2003, p. 9).

Thousands of “news-worthy” events happen around the world each day. Obviously the media in the U.S. do not cover all these situations. How are those decisions made on what makes news? According to McQuail (2010), “we need or want to know about those parts of the world with which we trade or with whom we are friendly or unfriendly” (p. 262). Countries also want to be aware of the happenings in powerful nations that can affect them.

This dichotomy oftentimes leads to a “quantitative imbalance in news flow, with the Third World receiving far more materials about the First World than vice-versa” (Streberny & Paterson, 2004, p. 7).



There is a tendency, called indexing, for “mainstream news organizations to index or adjust the range of viewpoints in a story to the dominant viewpoints in a story to the dominant viewpoints of those in political institutions who are perceived to have enough power to affect the outcome of the situation” (Bennett, 2003, p. 15). Bennett explains that this results from journalists’ efforts to be fair, balanced, and objective. This effort prevents them from interpreting or analyzing, rather they “channel views of reality through external sources, and the safest sources are those who have the power to shape political outcomes” (Bennett, 2003, p. 15). According to Bennett, this means the accounts presented by media do not vary greatly, and for example while papers like *The New York Times* may have more stories and more in-depth reporting on a certain subject than the *USA Today*, both generally present the official view.

In an indexing study pertaining to international news and technology, researchers observed that, “technologies potentially free reporters to go directly to serious events such as ethnic wars, terrorist attacks, or sites of humanitarian suffering, and transmit high quality images and original interpretive narratives” (Livingston & Bennett, 2003, p. 364).

### *Framing*

There is extensive research on the subject of framing in the media (e.g. Iyengar, 1991; Entman, 1991 & 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1987; de Vreese, 2005). It is an integral part of the news process. “Newsmakers, as managers of complex information, have to be particularly good at determining the meaning of an event.

They have to make sense of it, judge its character and significance and be able to process it instantly” (Clausen, 2003, p. 25).

One of the classic definitions for framing often used by scholars is: “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described,” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). He describes framing as having four functions: defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and suggestion solutions. Iyengar (1991) takes a more nuanced approach to what is encompassed by framing, stating: “the concept of framing refers to subtle alterations in the statement or presentation of...problems” (p. 11). Reese (2001) observes that frames are active and powerful because they provide a meaningful structure to information; they are “more than the simple inclusion or exclusion of information” (p. 11). Reese also adds to the definition of framing by adding a time element, stating that frames are “socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the world” (p. 11).

Framing shares linkages with other mass media theories. There are similarities, for instance, between framing and agenda-setting theories. “Framing analysis shares with agenda-setting research a focus on the relationship between public policy issues in the news and public perceptions of these issues (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 93). However the main difference lies in that agenda-setting deals with how what the media covers becomes more important to the public, while framing deals with how these issues are presented to the public – what aspects are

stressed by the media. The frames chosen by journalists help build the agenda for the public.

Framing can be studied both in terms of media effects – how the media covers news events, and in terms of audience effects - how the audience perceives, organizes, and interprets certain events and issues (deVreese, Peter, & Semetko, p. 107). The two paradigms for studying framing are connected; media frames lead to audience frames – media frames have profound effects on the audience, oftentimes without them even realizing it (Tankard, 2001; Lang & Lang, 1983).

Framing goes beyond taking a side on an issue, it addresses the intricacies of covering complex, real-world events with many different actors, motives, and viewpoints. It “recognizes the ability of a text – or media presentation – to define a situation, to define the issues, and to set the terms of the debate...it reflects the richness of media discourse and the subtle differences that are possible when a specific topic is presented in different ways,” (Tankard, 2001, p. 96).

A media frame, as defined by Gamson and Modigliani (1987) is “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events...the essence of the issue” (p. 143). Frames chosen by the media are important because they influence public perception of news events (Entman, 1991).

Frames have multiple locations, in the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture (Entman, 1993). Framing consists of how decisions are made in the newsroom based on journalistic practices and external factors, and also “the interaction between media frames and individuals’ prior knowledge and predispositions (de Vreese, 2005, p. 52). Many aspects of a story affect the frame,

including how the story is initiated, sources used in the story, and the tone employed by the story.

As noted by de Vreese (2005), frames can affect individuals and society at-large. At the individual level, frames can change the way people perceive and understand a news event. At the societal level, certain frames can affect processes such as “political socialization, decision-making, and collective actions,” (p. 52).

Framing of international news has unique aspects. From the vantage point of news production, frames are chosen and built based on the routines, practices, and professional norms of the journalists who are crafting the story (Gitlin, 1980). These routines are often culture- and country-specific. Frames are “principles of selection, emphasis and presentations composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters (Gitlin, 1980, p. 6).

According to Clausen (2003), when news producers are framing an international news event, they must do so in a way that makes sense to their viewers at a local level, a process called ‘domestication.’ “International news production is aimed at political and social agents in a national context” (Clausen, 2003, p. 81).

A 2002 study by Cooper discusses the interaction between media and social movements.

Media framing, among other things, identifies problems and their causes, and evaluates possible remedies. Rather than constituting a neutral arena, media framing often lends more support to certain actors and discourses than to others. Official and social movement discourses may find varying levels of support from media framing, and this in turn may influence the outcome of framing contests – the battle for the ‘hearts and minds’ of the broader public (p. 38).

The author concludes that to be successful, movements must influence public perception, and, as discussed previously, media frames can influence this public perception. Therefore, the author argues, when the media frame and the framing of the movement are aligned; the movement prospers, while if media frames and the movement's frames are at odds, the movement is hindered. It matters not just if the media cover a movement, but how. Previous studies (Gamson, 1985, 1992; Graber, 1989, Kahneman, 1984) confirm this idea that, in general, how the media shapes an issue influences how the audience understands the issue and what the audience sees as the reality of the situation.

According to Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), identifying frames for analysis can take an inductive or deductive approach. Inductive frames begin with "loosely defined preconceptions" and allow the content to drive the framing categories (p. 94). The drawbacks with this way of going about developing frames are that it is time-intensive and hard to replicate. Framing can also be deductive, a method which uses pre-defined frames that occur often in the news. The method is easy to replicate and allows for large samples to be analyzed. It also can determine differences in framing between media like newspapers and television.

### *Technology in Foreign News*

The development of communication technologies is aiding the construction the viewing audience's reality. "Developments in communication technologies, one of the fastest changing technology sectors, have had impacts on the mode of production, the mode of delivery, and the mode of reception of international news"

(Sreberny & Paterson, 2004, p. 9). Images and videos are transmitted faster than ever before.

“Eliminating the distance between information and its audience is the greatest gift of media technology” (Neuman, 1996, p. 268). Producing international news has changed dramatically in the past few decades, and at a much faster rate than ever before. “From the invention of the printing press to the advent of the telegraph lie three centuries in which diplomats and journalists grew accustomed to their new roles. Only a decade separates the dawning of satellite television and the promise of digital information, ten years in which to absorb the requirements of real-time television and prepare for the changes unleashed by the Internet” (Neuman, 1996, p. 7). Since Neuman made that observation in 1996, technological capability has expanded to become a near-constant presence in the lives of millions around the world.

Now, with live reporting, “the public gets very brief but very intense images of strange places and often violent events” before the cameras and journalists move on to the next crisis (Hess, 1996, p. 28). But does this speed of transmission “force journalists to operate beyond their capacity to process information?” (Hess, 1996, p. 62). Is this affecting the quality of news that reaches the viewer? This speed can come at the cost of accuracy and can put pressure on reporters to be able to immediately make sense of and explain a situation, leading to bias (Hess, 1996).

According to Robert D. Barr of the Associated Press, television technology distances the TV journalist from what is going on. On major breaking news, Ted Koppel has commented, 'There is literally no time for the reporter to report the story. He or she is bound to the transmission point, while producers and camera crews go out and gather raw material.' And ABC's Don Kladstrup noted, 'Live remote units tie reporters to the technology instead of the story' (Hess, 1996, p. 65).

While technology has eased some of the burdens for journalists, covering a war zone is still extremely difficult. In their search to present an accurate picture of the conflict, journalists have to contend with the logistics of traveling in battle-worn areas and accessing the appropriate sources in dangerous environments (Dimitrova, 2005). The changing nature of warfare has also increased the dangers for journalists – guerrilla warfare has replaced positional warfare (Hess, 1996) This leads to less predictability for journalists covering war-torn regions.

Making international news, however, still has many of the limitations present before this advent of technology. The main characteristic defining foreign news reporting is more difficult than reporting for local, state and national stories (Abramson, 2010, Lacy et al., 1989).

As Dan Rather observed in a speech at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, "Foreign coverage is the most expensive. It requires the most space and the most time because you're dealing with complicated situations which you have to explain a lot" (1990).

Technological advances may not always be an automatic benefit to journalists. A 1992 study by Taylor found that, even in the early 1990s, in a time before the immediacy in sharing world events like happens today could have even

been imagined, CNN viewers would rather journalists wait to find out all the fact about a conflict before reporting. This is oftentimes not the case in today's media environment with reporters now sharing information with their viewers almost the moment they learn it themselves (Hess, 1996).

### *Variations Across Mediums*

Different mediums like television and newspapers vary in how they cover new stories, and what new stories they chose to cover.

Therefore it is important to examine these mediums separately in order to compare quality of foreign news coverage.

Despite fragmenting media use, Americans still predominantly get their news from the television (Olmstead, Jurkowitz, Mitchell, & Enda, 2013). Seventy-three percent of Americans get their news from national television news outlets on a daily basis (The news platforms people use on a typical day, 2010). When turning to television, more Americans, 71 percent and 65 percent respectively, turn to local and broadcast news. The 38 percent who watch cable news, however, are much more likely to be engaged and use the platform more intensively, spending almost twice as much time watching. Even those who are heavy watchers of local and broadcast news still spend more time watching cable news than those platforms (Olmstead et al., 2013)

The State of the News Media 2012 report by Pew Research Center found that in 2011, CNN devoted 34 percent of airtime to international stories, while FoxNews gave 20 percent and MSNBC 14 percent to international matters (Pew, 2012). CNN



also maintains a much stronger presence abroad than the other cable networks (Martin-Kratzer & Thorson, 2010).

The network news channels' – ABC, CBS, and NBC – coverage of international events and U.S. foreign policy is roughly the same but NBC and CBS are slightly higher, with approximately 25 percent and 26 percent dedicated to these categories, while ABC devotes 20 percent of its airtime to international topics (A year in the news interactive, 2011). The three network news channels also cover international news stories similarly. Although there are occasional differences in how the three networks cover an international topic, “there are more similarities than differences among the networks... This sameness should not come as a surprise. The three networks have similar resources and the same constraints of time, money, and personnel” (Hess, 1996, p. 29-30). Although CNN's coverage is more extensive, Rosenstiel (1992) found that that network too was covering stories in about the same way as the broadcast channels.

Most media outlets, television networks included, are for-profit businesses that need to maintain positive revenues. For-profit media must sell the attention of its viewers to advertisers in order to survive (Bennett, 2012). These companies are must balance the needs of the audience and advertisers, which can affect content. Television news broadcasts also must strive to hold the attention of viewers, who always have the option of changing the channel during the broadcast. “This freedom to switch midstream accounts in part for the apparent showiness and shrillness of much television news” (Lewis, 1984, p. 6).

When it comes to newspapers, although there have been reductions in staff among many papers, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* still offer “a wide-ranging, well-staffed daily report, employing the most talented writers, columnists and editors and a growing corps of younger new media specialists” (Newspapers stabilizing, but still threatened, 2013). Newspaper circulation actually increased from 2012 to 2014 by 3 percent daily and 1.6 percent on Sundays (Key indicators in media & news, 2014).

With many readers are turning to online platforms, newspapers are still popular. Half of Americans still read a local newspaper daily, while 17 percent read national newspapers (The news platforms people use on a typical day, 2010).

With regards to international news, large newspapers devoted 33.5 percent of space to foreign affairs and foreign news (A year in the news interactive, 2011).

Newspapers function differently than television. There are inherent differences between print and video and each medium has its own strengths and weaknesses. There are cues and subtleties present on television that do not translate the page. “The printed word becomes meaningful to the reader only when the reader connects his private mind-picture to the intent of the writer. The reader surveys the words, translates them into mental pictures, and then creates his meanings out of that. Television simplifies the process. The picture is there on the screen” (Lewis, 1984, p. 4).

While there are advantages to this simplified process unique to television, newspapers hold the upper hand in other areas. A newspaper can be re-referenced and re-read as many times as necessary to grasp the meaning of an article, while

television only has one chance to have its information make an impression on the viewer (Lewis, 1984).

Newspapers lack the pressure to live stream and immediately update that is present in television, especially cable news. This relates back to the 1992 study by Taylor stating people are more concerned with accuracy than immediacy.

### *Overall Trends in Foreign News*

Research shows there is a declining presence of foreign news correspondents abroad. An American Journalism Review Census, for example, published in late 2010 found that US newspapers employ far fewer foreign correspondents than the previous census performed in 2003 (Foreign correspondents: Who covers what?, 2011).

In addition to declining presence abroad, news outlets must make decisions on what stories, out of the many news worthy events happening around the world each day, to include. Whether it is a news broadcast or a newspaper edition, news outlets have limited space in the content they produce. Gatekeeping theory is the process by which news organizations make these decisions – how it is decided which news stories are covered, and which ones are not (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). A function of gatekeeping is the necessity for journalists and editors to make decisions on which stories to include in their media. This process happens before framing, the story is chosen (gatekeeping) and then constructed (framing).

With television, cable news channels have 24 hours each day to fill with news stories, while an evening broadcast only has a half an hour and a newspaper only

produces one edition each day. Will this need to fill the space of the medium affect the number of news stories each day?

How much is enough international news? The amount of foreign news, quantified as any story that mentions a foreign country, varies over time. After World War II, broadcast evening news devoted between 20 and 40 percent of its airtime to foreign news. This increased during the Vietnam War, when this percentage surpassed half of the broadcast. After the U.S. withdrew from Vietnam, coverage again declined until the hostage situation at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran (Hess, 1996). “The peaks and valleys of international news coverage reflect the happenstance of foreign crises superimposed on the domestic landscape” (Hess, 1996, p. 9). The amount of international news will vary greatly depending on what is happening domestically.

### *Defining Quality Journalism*

Although there is much discussion about the lowered state of quality in the news, few studies have clarified what quality journalism actually looks like. Although a previous study (Cozma, 2010) has examined foreign news quality at two points in history, there has not been a comprehensive study of the quality of media’s foreign news coverage in the present time.

A 2000 study by the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism analyzed quality in newscasts, and found that if quality journalism is practiced by the metrics developed by the center – which included source expertise, number of sources, topic range, and story focus – stations are four times more likely to gain or hold ratings than lose them (Time of peril for TV news: What is quality?,

2000). Although this study was of local news stories, it is reasonable that this logic could be applied to foreign news reporting as well.

The most extensive study about the quality of foreign news correspondence was a 2010 study in *Journalism Studies* which looks at quality of foreign news stories by analyzing: length, quantity and range of sources, originality of reporting, whether events were planned or unplanned and what kind of foreign news was covered (Cozma, 2010). This study compared foreign news reporting of two news outlets during two periods of history, CBS radio during the 'golden age' of foreign news reporting (1940-1942) and NPR radio during the Iraq War (2004-2006). The framework of the study will provide significant direction for this study.

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) outlined the elements of quality journalism, which include keeping the news comprehensive and proportional by devoting enough space to stories and covering a diversity of topics. This study will seek to quantify these elements by looking at (1a, 1b) story frequency, (2) story length, (3a, 3b) storywriter and dateline, (4a, 4b) diversity of sourcing, (5) story initiation, (6) story news type, (7) overall story framing, and (8) individuals frames in the story.

Originally tone was to be included in the analysis. When covering wars, media are often closely tied to the official perspectives (Hallin, 1986) and this choice of framing of the story affects the tone. Different than bias, tone in framing goes beyond the "for or against", it allows for more in-depth cognitive analysis (Tankard, 2001). "Framing supplies the interpretive background by which the story is judged" (Graber, 1989, p. 7).

Although reporters pride themselves on objectivity, not all articles or news segment are neutral. With regards to the Syrian conflict, it is possible that some articles will take a tone that is pro-rebel or pro-Syrian government. Journalists, according to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007), should make their aim objectivity of method- in gathering facts and news writing. This “relates to the gathering of information, not the style of presentation” (p. 84). Objectivity, Kovach and Rosenstiel say, is not a fundamental element of journalism. News should be true, not necessarily impartial (2007, p. 116). They present a quote from William Safire, a former Nixon political aide and Pulitzer-prize winning journalists:

Do you need to present both sides to be partial? Clearly no. Don't be afraid to call somebody a 'terrorist' who strikes fear into a populace by deliberately killing civilians. That killer is not a 'militant' or an 'activist,' which are suitable terms for political demonstrators... Playing it straight does not mean striking a balance of space or time. When one side of a controversy makes news – issues a survey or holds an event – it's not the reporter's job to dig up the people who will shoot it down and given them equal attention. (2007, p. 118).

Kovach and Rosenstiel also include a quote C.P. Scott, a former editor of *The Manchester (Great Britain) Guardian*, stating that journalists gather the facts and then draw a conclusion.

Drawing this conclusion involves framing on the part of journalists. “When opinion is divided – both within and among countries – the media also face challenges in deciding to what extent they should report about divisions in public opinion and let these divisions be reflected in the coverage of the war” (Dimitrova, 2005, p. 400).

In the end, tone was not included in the analysis. Preliminary testing showed that almost all stories in the 6 news outlets were neutral, and therefore there was not enough variance present.

There is evidence as discussed above that international news stories can draw viewers. When comparing different types of mediums in the U.S., it is important to first determine how much they covered the Syrian crisis. Many scholars measure salience as attention paid to an issue, through both the number of stories and the space dedicated to a story (e.g. Benton & Frazier, 1976; Golan & Wanta, 2001; Dearing & Rogers, 1996). In 2012, according to a Pew Research measure of interest in news stories, the percentage of Americans following the crisis in Syria never surpassed 20 percent. In early December 2012, half of Americans said they were paying little or no attention to Syria (Elections, tragedies dominate top stories of 2012). Is this because the U.S. media did not provide enough coverage to the conflict?

According to the Tyndall Report cited by Utley (1997), “total foreign coverage on network nightly news programs has declined precipitously, from 3,733 minutes in 1989 to 1,838 minutes in 1996 at ABC, the leader, and from 3,351 minutes to 1,175 minutes at third-place NBC” (p. 2). In 2013, there were only 2685 total minutes dedicated to international news on all three network evening news

broadcasts (Tyndall Report, 2013). This leads to the following research two questions:

*RQ1a: How does frequency of the Syrian conflict coverage vary across mediums?*

If, as noted above, U.S. media are more likely to cover foreign events that have an impact on this country, how does news coverage vary over time, given changing U.S. involvement or the probability of U.S. military action? How does what else is going on in the country, for example a national election, affect what makes it into the news? To capture, that the following research question asks,

*RQ1b: How does frequency vary over the course of the conflict?*

In order to provide the context to tell adequately tell a story – especially a story that is far removed from the lives of readers – it is necessary to devote ample space in an article or broadcast. This is influenced both by the organizational decisions, how much space is available in a newscast, and the perceived requirements of the audience (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). “With news organizations convinced that ever-shortening attention spans require ever-shorter stories, it is difficult for a reporter to get the space and time necessary to tell a story right” (Kovach & Rosenstiel, p. 190). According to a Pew Research Center Project for Excellence in Journalism study referenced by Kovach and Rosentiel, very short stories tend to lose audience attention, while longer stories gain audiences (p. 190). A recent Pew Research Center State of the Media study found that at the largest circulation papers in the country, papers like *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Los Angeles Times*, 64 percent, or a majority of articles, are



more than 1,000 words (State of the media, 2004). The average news package on broadcast news lasted 142 seconds in 2012 (Jurkowitz, Hitlin, Mitchell, Santhanam, Adams, Anderson & Vogt, 2013). If the average newscaster reads about around 160 words per minute, this is a word count of around 375 words per broadcast news segment. Cable news segments are slightly longer, an average 217 seconds (Cable Content Analysis, 2004), or around 575 words. This leads to the second research question:

*RQ2: How does story length vary across mediums?*

By studying the frames employed in a story, it might inform the principles of organization that lead to the selection and definition of news events (Tuchman, 1972). As discussed above, Gitlin (1980) argues that frames are often a product of the journalists writing the story. Their social context and professional norms will influence which frames are chosen when presenting an international situation to an audience. Therefore, it will impact a news story if its writer is a U.S. national/staff writer for a U.S. paper or, in this case, a Syrian national or freelancer from a country other than the U.S.

A 2003 study by Lowery et al., found that organizational factors affecting international news content included the resources a news outlet had to devote to international news.

Traditionally, there has been a focus on news outlets having “boots on the ground” all over the world. However, a 2008 study of *the New York Times* found that correspondents frequently did not report information they themselves had gathered (Cozma et al., 2008). A Kumar study (2011) found that stories are now less likely to

be staff-produced than in prior years. This would make sense, given that the advent of communication technologies has changed the way information is gathered and stories are produced (Sreberny & Paterson, 2004). There is decidedly a shift in the use of user-supplied content among prominent media outlets (Golan, Johnson, & Wanta, 2010). Does this change the necessity to have reporters stationed all over the world, given that information can be sent to them?

While technology has eased some of the burdens for journalists, covering a war zone is still extremely difficult. In their search to present an accurate picture of the conflict, journalists have to contend with the logistics of traveling in battle-worn areas and accessing the appropriate sources in dangerous.

Technology may not always be an automatic benefit to journalists. A 1992 Taylor study found that, in a time before the immediacy of today in sharing world events could have even been imagined, CNN viewers would rather journalists wait to find out all the fact about a conflict before reporting.

The Columbia Journalism Review recently noted a rise in demand for freelance reporters in Syria (Pendry, 2013). Western journalists were targets of kidnapping in Syria as they covered the conflict. According to a recent Time article, more than 30 journalists had been kidnapped or disappeared in Syria, with more than 50 confirmed killed, a number that the article calls unprecedented (Karam, 2013). How does this situation affect who is writing these news stories? Does it make news organizations less likely to send their own staff into the conflict? According to the Columbia Journalism Review, "Today's news editors rely on freelancers more than ever because they have too few staff reporters, and those that

are still employed may be reluctant to risk their lives. For these reasons, Syria is sometimes called the “freelancer’s war.” These observations are interesting, considering that this is conflict to statements by many British newspapers, for example, that said they would not use stories from freelancers (Pendry, 2013).

*RQ 3: How do storywriters vary across different mediums?*

In a 2000 Pew Research Excellence in Journalism study, a group of scholars and researchers developed a metric to determine what is a “good” newscast. Some of the main determinants of quality were number of sources, source expertise, and viewpoints expressed. Other scholars also agree that source diversity has a substantial impact on how news stories are framed, how the public perceives news stories and media credibility (Cozma, 2010, Christians et al., 2009; Hansen, 1991; Kurpius, 2002).

Allan (2004) suggests that American news consumers will seek out outlets that present diverse, and not just U.S.-centric, perspectives on a conflict.

Bennett (2012) observed, gatekeeping determines, “whose voices and what messages get into the news” (p. 20). Bennett goes on to note that in an ideal journalism world, journalists would seek out the best sources – the ones that could provide the most accurate and perceptive information and context about an event. In reality, however, a variety of factors including access, time and resources can prevent journalists from reaching these ideal sources. These restrictions and limitations will obviously vary for different mediums. It would be helpful to first determine how sourcing practices are different for different outlets.

As discussed previously with indexing, there is a tendency among reporters to turn to official sources and the official view. When covering wars, media are often found to be closely tied to the official perspectives (Hallin, 1986). Political figures account for 25 to 60 percent of all players in international news (Clausen, 2003). In their study of how technology is affecting international news reporting, Livingston and Bennett (2003) found that although technology like videophones and social media is allowing for more event-driven reporting, resulting from spontaneous happenings, is more common, there is still the tendency to turn to official sources. This practice of indexing relates back to framing. Sources help determine the frame of a story (Wanta, 1997, Entman, 1993, McQuail, 1992). Using too few or frequenting the same sources can be dangerous with international news because it be distorting by presents a simplified version of a complex situation (Mann, 1999).

This leads to the fourth research question:

*RQ 4a: How does total number of sources vary across different mediums?*

*RQ4b: How does type of source vary across different mediums?*

Routine news generally dominates news content (Cozma, 2009; Lawrence, 2000; Boorstin, 1977; Molotch & Lester, 1974). These institutionally driven news stories are appealing to journalists because they are coordinated with officials, who are potential sources, while accidental news stories that occur as a result of events are called “event-driven” news (Livingston & Bennett, 2003). Chang et al. (1987) calls these context-oriented and event-oriented new stories. There is also the possibility of reporter-driven news that involve original newsgathering and are not

canned or prepackaged by interest groups (p. 672). Event and journalist-driven news stories are “typically more diverse than institutionally driven news.

They range beyond the routine news beats and draw on a variety of sources and perspectives” (Cozma, 2010, p. 672).

*RQ 5: How does story initiation vary across mediums?*

News stories can also vary along the lines of hard versus soft news. The economic pressures news outlets face have forced them to begin producing more “soft” news (Scott & Gobetz, 1992; Bennett, 2012). Soft news, as defined by Scott and Gobetz (1992) are stories that entertain more than inform by focusing on human interest and non-policy issues. These authors called this shift one from news people need to know to any events out of the ordinary (p. 406). While this shift to soft news can be detrimental if it fails to inform and make sense of their world, it also can, according to Baum (2003), provide a draw for audiences when it comes to foreign policy reporting. Baum notes that if international events are covered as soft news, the public is more attentive to them. Therefore, a balance of hard and soft news is ideal.

*RQ 6: How does type of news story vary across mediums?*

Frames can be thematic or episodic. Thematic news frames focus not just on snapshots of concrete instances but general conditions and long-term implications of the issue, while episodic frames focus on events and persons, removing issues from their wider context (Iyengar, 1991, p. 14). Journalists have the ability to set frames as personal and dramatic, as opposed to focusing on the “more complex underlying political realities” (Bennett, 2012, p. 42). Bennett refers to event-

oriented news as episodic news, which “parachutes the journalist and audience into the middle of an already developed situation” while thematic themes, “looks beyond the immediate human drama to explore the origins of the problem and the larger social, economic, or political contexts in which the immediate news story has developed (p. 44). This is important, Bennett argues because when news is episodic, it does not allow the viewer to place the story in the larger world context, and to learn and generalize. According to Iyengar (1991), framing helps determine responsibility: both who created the problem and who has the responsibility of solving the problem. Thematic news reports increasing “attributions of responsibility to government and society,” while “episodic reports had the opposite effect,” (p. 3). Episodic is more common than thematic, especially in television reporting (Iyengar, 1991).

*RQ 7: How does episodic versus thematic framing vary across mediums?*

Frames can be classified into many different categories. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) argue that there should be a reliable set of content indicators to use when studying framing. The generic frames Semetko and Valkenburg found to be most common in the news are: conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality, and responsibility.

The conflict frame has been discussed extensively by scholars (Patterson, 1993; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997) and describes the situation as one side versus another. MacDougall (1982) argues that there is “no single other element of reader interest that is present more frequently. Americans, it must be, like a good fight and

consider life as a whole to be a struggle" (p. 119). Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) note that conflict is often used to capture audience interest.

The human-interest frame, according to Price, Tewksbury, and Power (1997) focuses on the personal stories of the individuals affected by issues or events. This is an often-employed strategy, and it is widely assumed that audiences are "naturally interested in learning about other people" (p. 483).

The economic consequences frame emphasizes the financial effect a situation will have on individuals, groups, institutions, regions, or countries (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). The morality frame puts the issue in term of "religious tenets or moral prescriptions" (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 96). According to Neuman, Just, and Crigler, (1992) this frame is difficult to navigate, and is often used indirectly, because of standards of journalism that avoid judgment. The responsibility frame is another that Semetko and Valkenburg found to be often employed by media. "It presents an issue or problem in such a way as to attribute responsibility for its cause or solution to either government or to an individual or group" (p. 96). "When opinion is divided – both within and among countries – the media also face challenges in deciding to what extent they should report about divisions in public opinion and let these divisions be reflected in the coverage of the war" (Dimitrova, 2005, p. 400).

Keeping these definitions in mind and the prevalence of conflict framing in previous news coverage, the final research question asks,

*RQ8: How did frames vary across mediums? (conflict/human interest/economic consequences/morality/responsibility)*

### CHAPTER 3. METHODS

In order to answer the research questions listed above, a content analysis of television outlets and newspapers was conducted.

#### *Population and Sample*

To investigate foreign news stories produced by American media about Syria, a content analysis was performed of news stories in different media outlets.

According to Berelson (1952), content analysis can be defined as “a research technique for the systematic, objective, and quantitative description of the manifest content in communication” (p. 18).

Although there are a variety of definitions for foreign or international news, this study will use a definition put forth by Larson (1984), which states that, “any news story that mentions a country other than the United States, regardless of its thematic content or dateline is considered an international news story” (p. 36). This study is particularly concerned with all stories that address the Syrian conflict.

A cross sectional study was performed, as the representative sample comes from a specific point in time – from April 2011, when the U.S. levied its first sanctions against Syria, to September 2013, when the UN Security Council agreed on a resolution requiring Syria to give up its chemical weapons.

The population of the study is foreign news stories about Syria, as defined conceptually above. The sample consists of news stories about the conflict from the network of NBC and the cable television news outlet of CNN. For the network news channel NBC, the program “*NBC Nightly News*” was sampled. According to the NBC website, the “*NBC Nightly News’ with Brian Williams*” provides reports and analysis



of the day's most newsworthy national and international events" (About Us). As stated previously, the three network channels cover international news stories in the same way and at the same rate. The CNN program picked for analysis was "*The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer*," as, according to the CNN website, this program covers breaking news, politics and extraordinary reports from around the world. The show description states that Blitzer covers the latest political news and international events. These specific shows are sampled because a central aim of their news, given the show descriptions, is international news.

It would be incongruous to compare only network news evening news programs to newspapers. "Measurements that rely exclusively on the network evening news can imply a false comparison between the totality of coverage of international news on television and in newspapers or other media. These programs are the equivalent of newspapers' front pages...Cable television adds greatly to the availability of international news" (Hess, 1996, p. 7-8). This is why the cable news network of CNN is included in the study, to more accurately compare the mediums.

For newspapers, stories in *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *USA Today* were used. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* were chosen as they are considered to be elite publications. *The New York Times* is considered to be a tone-setter for the rest of the national and the "informal newspaper of record for the United States" (Shoesmaker & Cohen, 2006, p. 311). *The USA Today*, although called a "quasi-tabloid" by some scholars (Sreberny & Paterson, 2004) is unique in that it aims for a more national audience and appeals to popular national taste

(Gladney, 1992; King 1990). All three are also in the top ten of circulation in the United States, with *The USA Today* at the 2<sup>nd</sup> spot on circulation list with more than 1.7 in total circulation as of 2012. *The New York Times* is 3<sup>rd</sup> on the list with a circulation of over 1.6 million and a Sunday circulation of over 2 million and *The Washington Post* 8<sup>th</sup> on the top ten list with a weekday circulation of almost 500,000 and a weekend circulation of around 675,000. These numbers include digital editions (Associated Press, 2012).

All of the necessary news transcripts from NBC, CNN, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA Today* are available through LexisNexis Academic. News transcripts were chosen over audio and video because of the ease of studying and coding written content and because quality of visuals is not a factor under scrutiny.

The search term to find stories on LexisNexis was simply "Syria." Other, more specific, search terms were tested, such as "Syria AND conflict," "Syria AND Civil War," and "Syria AND Assad" were found to be too exclusive of applicable stories. When developing the sample, if the article was not clearly about the conflict in Syria, the article was skipped and the next article in the population was chosen.

When building the sample for the NBC's Nightly News and CNN's The Situation Room, it was discovered that LexisNexis provides the transcripts for the entire programs for each day. Therefore, the individual broadcasts were read to discover the main segments of the program that were related to Syria.

For television segments on NBC and CNN, the teasers at the beginning of a broadcast were not included in the evaluation, only the actually segment discussing

Syria. In a 2006 study by Shoemaker and Cohen, the entire news broadcast was analyzed and these teasers and intros were included as separate items. Therefore, this study does not include these summaries in the news segment. When determining transitions between each segment, key words were looked for to indicate a break. These phrases included, “up next,” “moving ahead,” “thank you for that report,” “coming up next,” and “now for some breaking news,” “when we come back,” “let’s shift gears,” and “we’ll be right back.” Commercial breaks were also indications of segment transitions.

If the program discussed Syria at one point and then later on in the broadcast, only one segment was used. This was done in order to mirror the newspaper evaluation, as only one article was used from a newspaper edition, even if more than one article about Syria was included in that day’s newspaper edition.

The unit of analysis will be an individual news story. This means, each news story, identified by a change in topic or commercial break, for the television news, and individual news article for newspapers.

“At its most basic level, sampling means selecting a group of content units to analyze (Rife, Lacy, & Fico, 2008). This study will use a systematic random research sample by medium in order to get an adequate representation from each medium across the two-and-a-half year span under examination. Systematic sampling involves choosing every *n*th story from the population (Rife, Lacy & Fico, 2008). Systematic sampling is an appropriate method when the total population is available to sample from, which it is in the case of this study. According to Stempel’s

study in 1952, a simple random sample of media is not adequate, given the cyclic nature of media content.

For television, every 10<sup>th</sup> story from NBC Nightly News and every 12<sup>th</sup> story from CNN's The Situation Room was used to create a sample size of 53 and 64 stories, respectively. If the  $n^{th}$  story was not adequate for inclusion in the sample, for example its main topic was not Syria, the next story in line was chosen, until an appropriate story was found. For the medium television, this construction of the sample resulted in 117 television news segments. The sample of newspapers came from the seven days a week that newspapers are published. For *The New York Times*, every 60<sup>th</sup> story was selected, resulting in 62 stories, for *The Washington Post*, every 60<sup>th</sup> story was selected for 57 stories, and for the *USA Today*, every 12<sup>th</sup> story was examined, resulting in 55 total stories. The final sample size for newspaper stories was 174, for a total N equal to 281 articles.

#### *Operationalization of the Variables*

While the independent variables are the medium (TV vs. print) or period of time, depending on each research question, the dependent variables are measures of journalism quality, as operationalized below.

For Research Question 1a, the dependent variable is foreign news story frequency, defined by the number of news stories in each news program/edition.

In Research Question 1b, the dependent variable is also Syrian news story frequency; however, this research question looks at how this frequency varies over the course of the conflict. In order to test this question, the conflict is broken into five distinct time periods using the timeline provided by *The Washington Post*. The

first time period (T1) is from April 2011, when the U.S. tightened sanctions on the country, until August 2011, when President Obama called on Assad to step down from power. The second time period is from September 2011 until February 2012 when the U.S. shut down its embassy in Damascus. The third time period (T3) is from March 2012 until August 2012, when the United Nations accused the Assad regime of war crimes. The fourth time period (T4) is from September 2012 until June 2013, when the U.S. announced there was credible and sufficient evidence that the regime had chemical weapons on its own population. The last time period, (T5) is from this point until September 2013, when Russia negotiated a deal to give Syria the opportunity to give up its chemical weapons.



Figure 1: Time periods of Syrian conflicts

Although the time periods are unequal in duration, and vary in length from approximately three months to 10 months, they are based on major developments in the U.S. and international response to the crisis, when it might be expected to see

increases or decreases in the amount of coverage given to the conflict by the U.S. media.

The second research question dependent variable is story length, defined by the number of words in a story/news segment.

The dependent variable for the third research question is how the originality of reporting in stories is measured. Information used in reporting can be gathered in one of four ways: it can be clipped from other media outlets, observed by the reporter, the result of active newsgathering and interviewing of diverse sources, or not known (Cozma, 2009, p. 43).

In the fourth research question, the dependent variable is sourcing, which is defined by who contributes to a news story and can be measured by examining both the total number of sources and the types of sources. Types of sources can be President Obama, U.S. officials, international officials, Syrian officials, Syrian citizens, rebels/dissidents/activists, UN officials, non-governmental organizations/interest groups, scholars/experts, journalists/other media, documents, anonymous, or other.

For the fifth research question, the dependent variable is story initiation – namely whether the story is institutionally driven, event-driven or reporter-driven. Using the rubric utilized by Cozma (2009), institutionally driven stories are staged and intentional – the results of planned events such as press conferences. Event-driven stories are defined as unexpected stories that are spontaneous and caused by others (outside the reporter), while reporter-driven stories are initiated by journalists and the result of the reporter’s investigation, analysis and observation” (Cozma, 2009, p. 117).

In the final research question, the dependent variable is type of news story – hard versus soft. This variable is operationalized using Scott and Gobetz’s (1992) definitions which state that hard news is any story that focuses on issues of ongoing policy consideration, factual accounting of current public events, or social issues and controversies that concern members of the audience. Soft news is any story that focuses on a human-interest topic, feature or non-policy issue (p. 408).

The codebook for evaluating these variables is attached in Appendix A.

To test for intercoder reliability, a second coder was enlisted to code a almost 12 percent of the sample, or 24 stories. The statistical test of Krippendorff’s Alpha was used to test intercoder reliability, as this is an “all purpose reliability measure” (Wimmer, Dominick, 2011, p. 174). After analyzing the results, a standard of Krippendorff’s Alpha of coefficients above .60, was met for byline, dateline, story initiation, and hard/soft news. For sourcing, this standard was also met for total number of sources, and the individual sources: Obama, US officials, Syrian rebels, Syrian citizens, Syrian officials, UN officials, other international officials, scholars/experts, journalists, anonymous, documents, and others. Intercoder reliability for two sourcing categories, U.S. citizens and NGOs, were only met with the standard of percent agreement. U.S. citizens had a percent agreement of 95.83 but a Krippendorff’s Alpha of 0 and NGOs had a percent agreement of 91.67, but a Krippendorff’s Alpha of .47. This discrepancy can most likely be explained by the lack of variance in the both samples. For U.S. citizens, there was only one use of this source in the entire sample. For NGOS, there were only three uses found by coder one and two uses for coder two. When looking at the variable of framing, the frames

of responsibility (assigning blame or culpability about the conflict), human interest (provide a human example or portrayal of how individuals/groups are affected), conflict (describing disagreements and winners/losers) and economic consequences (financial losses or gains, costs of conflict) met the standard of Krippendorff's Alpha. Morality (social prescriptions or moral message) with a percent agreement of 88.89, had a Krippendorff's Alpha of .44 – again this can most likely be explained by the lack of variance as there were very few examples of the use of morality frames.



## CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

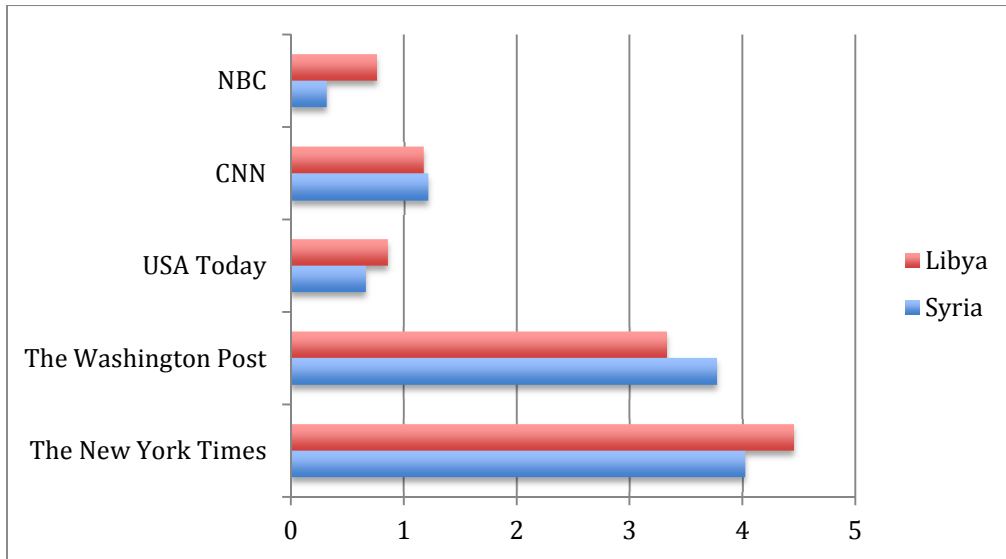
RQ1a asked how frequency of stories about Syria varied between print and television news outlets. In order to answer this question, the number of stories about the Syrian crisis was compared with another international crisis with implications for the U.S. – the Libyan civil war. This international news topic was selected mainly because, like the Syrian civil war, it unfolded over a period of time, it was not a singular event. The story was also listed as one of the top 10 stories of 2011 (“Interest in foreign news declines,” 2012). This was also a conflict where the question of U.S. involvement was weighed, including diplomatic intervention, sanctions, and force. The majority of this conflict unfolded in 2011, from February when major protests began to October, when the U.N. Security Council voted to end military operations. (Libya civil war fast facts, 2014).

The search term “Libya” was used in LexisNexis to determine the entire population of news stories and the results were: The New York Times ran 1,631 stories about Libya, The Washington Post published 1215, the USA Today 309, CNN’s *The Situation Room* was 305, and NBC’s *Nightly News* was 272.

After the total number of stories for each news outlet was calculated, an average number of stories per day was computed. This was done by taking the total number of stories and dividing it by the total number of days in question, taking in account whether the outlet publishes or broadcast seven days a week or five days a week.

As is shown in Graph 1, the average number of stories each day about the Syrian conflict and the Libyan conflict are similar, with one exception – NBC news

had half as many average daily stories about the Syrian conflict than about the Libyan conflict.

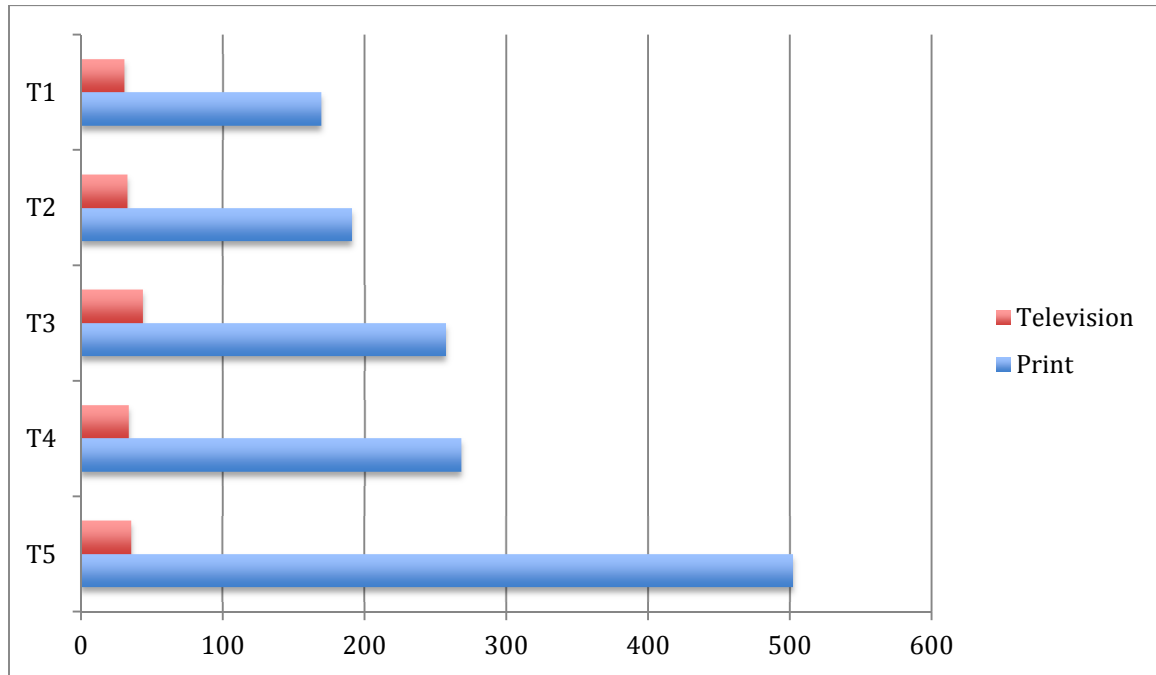


**Graph 1**  
**Comparison of mean number of daily stories about Syrian and Libyan conflicts**

The data would suggest that the Syrian conflict received a similar amount of coverage to other conflicts of the same nature. When comparing newspapers to television, the raw numbers of stories per day are much higher for newspapers, excluding the *USA Today*. *The New York Times* had an average of four stories per day, and *The Washington Post* had 3.75, while the *USA Today* averaged less than a story per day. In the test of quality, the *USA Today* bore more similarities with CNN and NBC, who average 1.2 and .3 stories respectively.

The second part of the first research question, RQ1b, asked whether coverage varied over the course of the conflict, particularly in light of U.S. involvement or the possibility of U.S. involvement. In order to control for the unequal duration of the time periods, which range from three months to ten months, the average number of stories per month was calculated. For example, in T1, there were 845 print stories

over five months, for an average per month of 169 stories, while in T2, there were 1146 stories over six months for an average of 191 stories per month. It was discovered that newspaper coverage increased over time, while television coverage stayed approximately the same.



**Graph 2**  
**Mean number of stories T1-T5**

The second research question asks how story length varies between print and television media. Using an independent samples t-test, it was found that the average length of print news stories about Syria was 739 words. For television programs, the average word count was about 785. An independent-samples t-test shows a p value of .564, therefore indicating that there is not a significant difference between the word count for stories in newspapers and the word count for stories on television.

**Table 1.**  
**Independent-Samples t-Test. Differences in story length in newspapers and television stories about Syria**

	Medium		t
	Print M (SD)	Television M (SD)	
Word Count	739.99 (307.91)	785.69 (954.55)	-0.578
N	168	113	

p = .564. Means indicate average length of stories.

The first portion of the third research question, RQ3a, looks at whether there is a difference between the bylines of newspapers and television. Analysis – a crosstabulation with Pearson Chi-Square and Bonferroni correction (as shown in Table 2) - found that there is a statistically significant difference between the bylines of newspaper articles and television broadcasts, with print media significantly more likely to use a wire service than television, while television is more likely to rely on their own staff for reporting.

Unless otherwise noted, bylines only including a name were coded as staff writer/correspondent.

**Table 2.**  
**Crosstabulation with Pearson Chi-Square. Differences between bylines in newspaper and television stories about Syria**

	Medium	
	Print	Television
Staff writer/correspondent	<b>130 (77.4%)</b>	<b>112 (99.1%)</b>
Wire service	<b>34 (20.2%)</b>	<b>1 (.9%)</b>
Other	4 (2.4%)	0 (0%)

$X^2 = 26.7, p < .001.$

Bolded pairs have a statistically significant difference between them.

RQ3b seeks to ascertain if there is a difference in the datelines for stories produced by newspapers versus stories produced by television. A crosstabulation with Pearson Chi-Square with Bonferroni correction analysis (Table 3) shows that there is a statistically significant difference, with a significance value of less than .001, in the locations that newspaper reporters and television correspondents report from. The significant differences lie in reporting from Syria, with newspapers datelines at 8.3 percent and television at 16.8 percent of datelines; the United States with newspapers at 4.8 percent and television at 15 percent, and multiple countries, with newspapers at 10.1 percent and television at .9 percent. Television is more likely to have correspondents filing their stories from Syria and the United States, while newspapers are more likely to file their stories with reporters contributing from multiple countries.

A few notes about coding datelines - *The Washington Post* either listed the wire service, like the Associated Press in the byline, or it listed an AP writer, and it

had Associated Press at the bottom of the article. The *USA Today* either listed Associated Press in the byline, or had Associated Press at the bottom of the article as a contributor. If the story listed Associated Press as a contributing reporter, and a staff writer was also listed, this story was coded as other, as this category included mixed bylines.

If the dateline was not clear, it was coded as unknown. Almost all of the print “unknowns” came from the *USA Today*, because the datelines were not given. For television, the reporter did not say verbally where they were reporting from, and the newscaster did not make it clear. If it is not noted in the transcript where the report is coming from, the story is coded as dateline unknown.

**Table 3.**  
**Crosstabulation with Pearson Chi-Square. Differences between datelines in newspaper and television stories about Syria**

	Medium	
	Print	Television
Syria	<b>14 (8.3%)</b>	<b>19 (16.8%)</b>
Other Middle Eastern country	64 (38.1%)	37 (32.7%)
United States	<b>8 (4.8%)</b>	<b>17 (15%)</b>
Multiple countries	<b>17 (10.1%)</b>	<b>1 (.9%)</b>
Other	14 (8.3%)	6 (5.3%)
Unknown	51 (30.4%)	33 (29.2%)

$X^2 = 22.6, p < .001.$

Bolded pairs have a statistically significant difference between them

The fourth research questions addresses sourcing, looking both at the total number and the types of sources. The first part of this question addresses which has a higher number of total sources, newspapers or television news programs? Results of an independent samples t-test (Table 4) show that newspaper articles cite significantly more total sources, a mean of 7.95 per story, than television segments, with 4.6 sources, and a probability of less than .001 percent.

**Table 4.**  
**Independent samples T-Test of difference between newspapers and television in the total number of sources**

	Medium		t
	Print M (SD)	Television M (SD)	
Total sources	7.95 (3.66)	4.6 (3.71)	-7.47***

\*\*\*p < .001, Means indicate average number of sources.

The second portion of this research question, RQ4b, looks at the types of sources and uses a crosstabulation with Pearson Chi-Square and Bonferroni correction. This analysis does not address how many times a specific source was quoted, rather it shows whether a source was present in the story or not; if the source was present, a value of 1 was assigned, and if not, a value of 0 was assigned. The most likely sources to be quoted in newspaper articles were Syrian rebels, dissidents, and activists. As Table 5 indicates, about two-thirds (62.5 percent) of print stories cited this type of source. Next were Syrian officials at 48.2 percent and other international officials at 45.2 percent. The most frequently cited source for television segments at 44.2 percent, were U.S. officials, then Syrian officials at 33.6

percent. The least likely sources to be quoted by newspapers were U.S. citizens at 1.2 percent, while the least frequent sources for television were documents at 1.8 percent. The use of sources for the two mediums that were statistically significant were U.S. citizens, Syrian officials, Rebels, U.N. officials, other international officials, interest groups and non-governmental organizations, scholars and experts, journalists and other media, documents, and anonymous. In all cases except U.S. citizens (which television was more likely to use as a source), newspapers used all sources more frequently than television.

A few notes about the coding methods. Anonymous was coded only if the story explicitly stated that the source was anonymous. If the source was just unidentified, it was coded in its distinct category. For example, “a rebel fighter said” or “an Aleppo resident said,” would be coded as rebel/dissident/activist and Syrian resident.

The rebels/dissidents/activists category included anyone referred to as fighting or working against the Assad regime. This included opposition fighters, activists living outside Syria, and anti-government protestors.

Syrian officials were coded if the story used President Assad, other Syrian officials, the Syrian minister to the United Nations, or the Syrian Arab News Agency, SANA, as it is a state-run television station.

Documents were cited as sources if the article directly referenced a written document, such as a report published by a human rights group.



**Table 5.**  
**Crosstabulation with Pearson Chi-Square. Differences in number of stories that cite each type of source**

	Medium		X <sup>2</sup>
	Print	Television	
Obama	32 (19%)	23 (20.4%)	.073
Other US official	71 (42.3%)	50 (44.2%)	.109
US Citizen	<b>2 (1.2%)</b>	<b>8 (7.1%)</b>	<b>6.83**</b>
Syrian official	<b>81 (48.2%)</b>	<b>38 (33.6%)</b>	<b>5.89*</b>
Rebels/dissidents/activists	<b>105 (62.5%)</b>	<b>52 (6%)</b>	<b>7.44***</b>
Syrian citizens	49 (29.2%)	28 (24.8%)	.654
UN officials	<b>60 (35.7%)</b>	<b>15 (13.3%)</b>	<b>.17.39***</b>
Other international officials	<b>76 (45.2%)</b>	<b>26 (23%)</b>	<b>14.44***</b>
Interest groups/NGOs	<b>39 (23.2%)</b>	<b>11 (9.7%)</b>	<b>8.39**</b>
Scholars/experts	<b>54 (32.1%)</b>	<b>22 (19.5%)</b>	<b>5.5*</b>
Journalists/other media	<b>45 (26.8%)</b>	<b>16 (14.2%)</b>	<b>6.34*</b>
Documents	<b>18 (10.7%)</b>	<b>2 (1.8%)</b>	<b>8.18**</b>
Anonymous	<b>41 (24.4%)</b>	<b>9 (8%)</b>	<b>12.48***</b>
Other	19 (11.3%)	16 (14.2%)	.503

\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01 \*\*\*p < .001

Bolded pairs have a statistically significant difference between them.

The fifth research question addresses story initiation. This question asks whether the news stories were based on planned and routine events or not. The analysis, a crosstabulation using Pearson Chi-Square and Bonferroni correction, shows that both newspapers at 73.2 percent and television reports at 93 percent are more likely to cover unplanned events. While it appears that print stories cover more staged/routine events, the difference between the two mediums, although approaching it, are not significant, with a p value of .077 (Table 6).

**Table 6.**  
**Crosstabulation with Pearson Chi-Square. Differences story initiation**

	Medium	
	Print	Television
Planned event	45 (26.8%)	20 (17.7%)
Unplanned event	123(73.2%)	93 (82.3%)

$X^2 = 3.14, p = .077$  (approaches significance)

Research question 6 determines the whether print or television is more likely to have news stories that are hard or soft news. Using crosstabulation with Pearson Chi-Square and Bonferroni correction, it was found that newspapers were, at 75.3%, significantly more likely to report hard news than television, at 51.3 percent (Table 7). Television had more soft news stories, 48.7 percent, while newspapers had just 24.7 percent soft news.

Some of the longer stories contained both hard and soft news, making them harder to classify. In these cases, the predominant type of news used in the story was chosen.

**Table 7.**  
**Crosstabulation with Pearson Chi-Square. Differences in story news type**

	Medium	
	Print	Television
Hard news	<b>125(75.3%)</b>	<b>58 (51.3%)</b>
Soft news	<b>41 (24.7%)</b>	<b>55 (48.7%)</b>

$X^2=17.12, p < .001$ .

Bolded subsets have a statistically significant difference between them.

RQ7 examines whether the overall frame of the news stories is episodic or thematic. After crosstabulation using Pearson Chi-Square and Bonferroni correction, newspaper stories, at 81.5 percent, were found to be more likely to be

thematic than television segments at 65.5 percent. This difference is statistically significant, as indicated in Table 8.

**Table 8.**  
**Crosstabulation with Pearson Chi-Square. Differences overall story frame**

	Medium	
	Print	Television
Thematic	<b>137(81.5%)</b>	<b>74 (65.5%)</b>
Episodic	<b>31 (18.5%)</b>	<b>39 (34.5%)</b>

$X^2 = 9.32, p = .002$ , bolded subsets have a statistically significant difference between them

The final research question uses an independent samples t-test to address framing. This analysis, through an independent samples t-test, showed that for both mediums, conflict was the most dominant frame with a mean of .53 and .44 for newspapers and television, respectively. These numbers are on a scale of 0 to 1. Although both mediums were most likely to use conflict frames, newspapers still employed this frame far more frequently than TV at a statistically significant rate (Table 9). Responsibility frames were a close second, with a mean of .49 for newspapers and .37 for television. The difference between the mediums for this frame was also statistically significant. Human-interest frames, .31 for both newspapers and television were also used with regularity at an equal rate for both mediums. Morality and economic consequences frames were used sporadically. Morality means were .16 for newspapers and .10 for television. This difference was statistically significant. Economic consequences frames were used most infrequently, with a mean of .05 for print and .04 for television.

**Table 9.**  
**Independent Samples T-Test. Mean scores of frames in print and television news**

	Medium		t
	Print	Television	
Responsibility	<b>0.49</b>	<b>0.37</b>	<b>3.8***</b>
Human Interest	0.31	0.31	.149
Conflict	<b>0.53</b>	<b>.044</b>	<b>2.95**</b>
Morality	<b>0.16</b>	<b>0.10</b>	<b>2.42**</b>
Economic Consequences	0.05	0.04	.545

\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01 \*\*\*p < .001

## CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Understanding how the news media cover world events is vital, especially given that media shape Americans' viewpoints and impressions of the rest of the world. Due in part to the horrific nature of the conflict and the hundreds of thousands of people affected, and due in part to the possibility of a U.S. response or involvement in the crisis, the Syrian civil war has been a fixture in the U.S. media for several years. This sustained presence over time makes it an ideal international event for analysis.

As discussed earlier, many scholars measure salience as attention paid to an issue, by both number of stories and space dedicated to the story (e.g. Benton & Frazier, 1976; Golan & Wanta, 2001; Dearing & Rogers, 1996).

Newsrooms and producers must make decisions about what to include in a newspaper edition or television segment. Due to space and time constraints not everything that has news value can be included in the news. When it comes to foreign news, this means that not every conflict happening around the world can receive equal – or any – attention. However, “journalists give high news value to events that have significant impact but whose outcomes are in doubt” (Gulati, Just, & Crigler, 2008, p. 240). The Syrian conflict, which is still not resolved at the conclusion of this study, falls into this category.

While it would be informative to know about how coverage the Syrian crisis compares with the overall newshole in print news and television news, this is difficult to quantify. Although the Pew Research Center's Year in the News 2011

stated that Middle East unrest accounted for 9.8 percent of the 2011 newshole, this was not country or conflict specific (A year in the news interactive 2011, 2012).

Therefore, to get at least a sense of frequency of coverage for the Syrian crisis, it was compared to another crisis in the Middle East, the Libyan conflict. The similarities between these two conflicts, such as that both unfolded over many months and had the possibility of U.S. involvement, made them ideal for comparison. A comparison of these two conflicts showed they were covered similarly by both print and television media outlets. The only outlier was NBC's *Nightly News*, which had half as many average daily stories about Syria than about Libya. These results imply that the Syrian crisis was given similar coverage by both mediums when compared to other conflicts of a similar nature. The results also show that print media far outweigh TV news organizations in their coverage of foreign news events. That can be problematic, considering that for the majority of the U.S. population, television news is still the main source of information. If a news consumer relied on NBC versus, say, The New York Times for his news diet, he would be exposed to twelve times more news stories about the Syrian conflict, a discrepancy bound to shape his views and knowledge about the events.

In order to really get at the heart of the frequency question, it would be interesting to compare the percentage of stories about the Syrian conflict out of the total number of new stories for the period under examination.

Major events and occurrences in the United States – like elections, mass shootings, or natural disasters – can oftentimes supersede coverage of events from around the world. For example, in the fall of 2012 there were national presidential

elections, an event that frequently dominates the news cycle and people's attention. In 2011, when uncertainty about the economy was on Americans' minds, this was the top news story, with 20 percent of all news devoted to this topic (Jurkowitz, Rosenstiel, & Mitchell, 2012). Newspaper coverage of the Syrian crisis did not seem to be highly affected by other events in the United States or around the world, reflecting the potential involvement by the United States. The amount of stories about the crisis steadily increased as the conflict progressed and escalated, despite what else was going on in the world. For television, coverage stayed about the same, with the highest amount of coverage coming from March 2012 to August 2012, when the United Nations accused the Assad regime of war crimes.

Surprisingly, the average word count for stories in newspapers and television programs was not significantly different. In fact, television had slightly longer stories. Previous analysis has shown that elite newspaper articles are more than 1,000 words (State of the media, 2004) while television segments are significantly shorter.

Some potential causes of this surprising result is the difference in the *USA Today* compared with other elite newspapers, and the inherent nature of television broadcast.

Although the *USA Today* has a high circulation, many consider it to be more a tabloid than a serious newspaper (Sreberny & Paterson, 2004). The story length for this paper was considerably shorter than *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. The average length of the *USA Today* stories examined for this study was 543 words. It is important to note, however, when this outlier was controlled for, and

analysis was run excluding the *USA Today*, the difference in length of newspapers articles and television segments was still not significantly different.

Another factor that could be affecting word count comparisons between television and newspapers is the inherent characteristics of television versus newspapers. Television is a visual medium, but to have an apples-to-apples comparison with newspapers, it is helpful to have a hard word count for the segments. In 2013, for example, NBC's *Nightly News* devoted 84 minutes to coverage of the Syrian crisis (Top 20 news stories of 2013, 2014), but how does this airtime compare with the length of newspaper articles? This is the justification for using word counts for both mediums.

In a television, there is inevitably more "fluff" and emphasis on the journalists themselves (Gualit, Just, Crigler, 2008; Hofsetter, 1976; Patterson & McClure, 1976). There are intros and exits from commercial breaks and between segments; set-ups and introductions for interviews; and banter between reporters. All of these characteristics of the medium add words to the segment that do not have informational value for the consumer, while newspapers maximize each word to build the story and inform the reader.

The longer segments on television might also be attributed to "parachute journalism," the tendency to drop a correspondent into a conflict (Erickson & Hamilton, 2007). When television networks spend the resources to place their valuable star-journalists in or near a conflict, the network tends to feature those star-journalists prominently in its broadcasts in order to justify the investment of



sending them into the conflict. As airtime is limited, this comes at the expense of other stories.

Overwhelmingly, stories were written and filed by staff writers and correspondents for the news outlets. Over 75 percent of stories in print were by staff writers, and 99 percent of stories on television were from correspondents.

The remaining stories from print came from wire services. *The USA Today* and *The Washington Post* were most likely to include agency copy. The stories came specifically from The Associated Press, with only a handful from Reuters. While *The New York Times* quoted The Associated Press as source, it did not give the wire service credit as a contributing reporter.

This result was surprising, given that Syria has been called the freelancer's war. Is this lack of freelance reporting due to the widely reported ban (Pendry, 2013) on the use of freelance writers by media organizations? The finding may also be a measure of the importance assigned by the media under scrutiny to the events in Syria. These organizations invested in their own staff to cover an event with potentially far-reaching impact in the region and beyond.

For stories that did not use wire reports instead of staff writers, an interesting question to consider is whether the wire services were using freelance writers to contribute to their stories.

Related to bylines are datelines – where the story is filed or reported from. Most newspapers have the dateline clearly noted at the beginning of stories and television reports would oftentimes tell where reporter was located. For instance, the story would note NBC chief foreign affairs correspondent Andrea Mitchell was

reporting from the NBC Washington newsroom or that a CNN correspondent was reporting live from Lebanon, at the border with Syria. However, sometimes it is not noted in the transcript where the report is coming from, and in those cases the story is coded as dateline unknown.

Given the difficulty for reporters to access Syria, it was expected that there would not be a majority of stories with a Syrian dateline. For example, a CNN story in May 2013 stated that CNN had the only western journalists in the country at that time.

The Syrian government banned journalists from entering Syria, so it was very difficult to report from there or to verify reports coming out of the country. One CNN story stated, "And it's the most important story in the world nobody is able to cover pretty much because of the media blackout imposed by the government, because it's virtually impossible for journalists to travel there."

Television reporters were more likely to gain access to Syria and file their reports from there than were newspaper reporters. Only 8 percent of newspaper reports had a Syria byline, while almost 17 percent of television stories were from Syria.

There were, however, many stories filed from other Middle Eastern countries such as Turkey or Lebanon. In the television segments, it was oftentimes noted that these reporters were stationed just across the border from Syria, and were therefore still close to the conflict and interacting with Syrians, many of whom were crossing the borders into these two countries as refugees. Television and print outlets filed stories from other Middle Eastern countries at almost the same rate.

European countries and anywhere outside Syria, the Middle East, or the U.S. were coded as other. These were mostly European datelines, for example: London, Geneva, or Moscow. There was not a significant difference between print and television on the use of other datelines.

Other possible datelines included the United States and multiple countries. Television reports were significantly more likely to report from the U.S., while newspaper reports were more likely to include contributions from multiple locations, for example: London and Lebanon, Brussels and New York, or Syria and Lebanon.

It has been established that Syria was a very dangerous assignment for journalists, and it seems that given the results of the datelines and bylines, many reporters reported from outside the war zone.

While newspapers and television segments are roughly the same length, newspapers had significantly more sources. Many of the television segments were interviews, so although the story may be the same length as a newspaper article, there is a lot more sourcing from the same person, resulting in fewer total sources.

President Obama was only a source in around 20 percent of stories for each outlet. For this conflict at least, other types of officials were more prominently used as sources. Other U.S. officials, including General Colin Powell, Ambassador Susan Rice, various Senators and Congressman, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, Secretary of State John Kerry, and state department officials, were a more likely source than the administration. More than 40 percent of stories in both print and television used these officials for content and quotes.

Other international officials were also popular sources. Examples of these sources include Lebanese officials, Russian President Putin, and Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan.

United Nations sources included Kofi Annan, Ban Ki Moon, U.N. observers, and the U.N. Human Rights Commission. Syrian officials were oftentimes President Assad, Syria's foreign minister, SANA – the state run television station, or the Syrian ambassador to the U.N. Examples of interest groups and non-governmental organizations were Doctors Without Borders, Red Cross, and unnamed humanitarian groups. Sources categorized as other included Iraqi citizens and Jordanian volunteers in a Syrian refugee camp.

Newspapers cited anonymous sources in almost 25 percent of its stories, while television only cited anonymous sources in 8 percent of its segments. Many of the anonymous sources were Syrian residents or rebel fighters who feared for their safety, or officials who were not authorized to speak on the record. Given the nature of the conflict, and reports that the Assad regime used the media to target anyone speaking out against it, it is surprising that the number of anonymous quotes is not higher.

There were overall trends in sourcing. With regards to types of sources used by the two mediums, newspapers were significantly more likely to quote Syrian rebels; Syrian officials; U.N. officials; other international officials; interest groups and NGOs; scholars and experts; journalists and other media; documents; and anonymous sources. So newspapers had higher instances of sourcing in nine of the

fourteen categories. This result is consistent with the fact that newspapers had a much higher diversity of sources in each story.

The only category in which television had a higher source count was U.S. citizens. This finding indicates that television stories about Syria had a more U.S.-centric focus. One of the CNN *The Situation Room* stories, for example, was about a town hall meeting held by Senator John McCain where the issue of U.S. intervention in Syria came up and McCain's constituents were quoted.

Newspapers were much more likely to use rebels as a source than television. Syrian officials came next in frequency for newspapers, implying that newspapers were going directly to the perpetrators of the conflict.

Comparing these results to what might be expected with the prevalence of indexing in the media – the tendency for reporters to turn to official sources first – offers a point of differentiation for newspapers and television. As stated above, newspapers were significantly more likely to use Syrian rebels as a source. They were also more likely to quote other unofficial groups like interest groups and experts. One unofficial source utilized frequently by both mediums was Syrian citizens.

Although past studies have shown that routine events generally dominate news content (Cozma, 2009; Lawrence, 2000; Boorstin, 1977; Molotch & Lester, 1974), this did not hold true in the Syrian crisis. Both television and print media were significantly more likely to base their stories on unplanned occurrences, reporting from events such as battles and protests, and providing updates from shelled Syrian towns and refugee camps. While there were stories based on G-8

summits, U.N. meetings, and trips abroad by U.S. Secretaries of State, these accounted for only 27 percent of newspaper articles, and 18 percent of television stories.

Television was actually slightly more likely to base stories on unplanned events, though only at a level approaching significance.

This could be a result of the nature of the Syrian conflict. Events occurring during the uprising were oftentimes not planned. Skirmishes and interactions between the Assad government forces and rebel forces happened quickly. The secretive nature of the Assad regime, and the restricted access for journalists, also does not lend itself to planned meetings and press conferences. Many of the articles that were based on planned or routine events were actually meetings among international officials or U.S. officials, for example a meeting between Senate leaders and President Obama or a meeting between President Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu.

Some of the reporting was also based on reactions by the international community and the United States to events that were unfolding in Syria. Many of these planned events were determining and planning a course of action to respond to Syria. Examples of these included meetings between U.S. and Russian officials, an Arab League meeting to vote on Syrian sanctions and votes at the United Nations.

Examples of event-driven news articles included fighting between rebel and Assad forces, a story about the response of the International Red Cross in Syria, and a story about how groups loyal to Assad were hacking U.S. websites. Journalist-driven news stories, which are included in the unplanned category, include a story

about Syrian refugees reaching Italy by boat, a story about how Syrian citizens in Damascus are responding to the fighting, and a story on the effect on Lebanese citizens to the influx of Syrian refugees.

Event and journalist-driven news stories are often more diverse than institutionally driven news because they “range beyond the routine news beats and draw on a variety of sources and perspectives” (Cozma, 2010, p. 672). This tendency to report on unplanned events helps explain the large diversity of sources found in both print and television news.

While hard news is used to provide important information to readers and viewers, soft news is used to draw them in and keep their attention. Therefore, a balance of hard and soft news is ideal (Baum, 2003).

Newspaper articles were much more likely to be hard news than television reports. While television segments were pretty evenly balanced, with 51 percent hard news and 49 percent soft news, newspapers reports were 75 percent hard news and only 25 percent soft news.

Many of the stories contained both hard and soft news. For example, an NBC news segment aired when the U.S. was debating whether to take military action against Syria had policy considerations from Washington, and a report from Damascus sharing the “human face” of fighting in Syria. These stories, according to Baum, achieved the balance that makes it most likely for the public to engage in the coverage of the conflict.

Iyengar (1991) found that episodic frames are more prevalent in the news, especially in television reporting. The 2000 study by Semetko and Valkenburg

echoed this finding. In this study, the opposite was found. Both newspapers and television outlets were more likely to, at 82 and 66 percent respectively, to present stories in a thematic way. Stories about the Syrian conflict more frequently than not provided background context and information to the story being told.

While previous scholars (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) have found responsibility to be the most-used frame by media, the conflict frame was by far the most utilized frame in stories about the Syrian conflict. This is not surprising given that it was coverage of a civil war. CNN's *The Situation Room*, for instance, began most segments about Syria with an update on the actual conflict – battles that were being fought and the number of casualties reported.

Not only did many stories utilize the general conflict frame, they also presented both sides of the story – rebels would blame government for deadly attacks against protesters, and the government would say they were defending the Syrian people against terrorists. Another example is a discussion of how Russia and the U.S. differ in their thoughts on how to handle the conflict. Russia wanted to provide support to Assad, and U.S. wanted to provide aid to rebels. Yet another example was stories about the differences among leaders in the U.S., for example the Obama administration and Senator John McCain, on whether to provide weapons to the rebels in their fight against Assad.

Although reporters used the conflict frame to draw viewers' interest, they also fulfilled a social responsibility, or normative imperative, to provide a wider context of the news story.



Responsibility was another prevalent frame for both mediums. This frame was often utilized to attribute responsibility for the Syrian conflict, most often to the Assad regime. For example, in one *The New York Times* article, United States officials blamed Assad regime for using chemical weapons against its citizens. On the international front, the responsibility frame frequently was utilized to discuss who had responsibility to help alleviate the conflict and what this effort for resolution should look like. There was often an urgent tone to these messages, for example, that “pressure is mounting on the U.S. to take some sort of military action.”

Human-interest frames were present in a third of both television and newspaper stories. There was some expectation that this number could be higher, given the profound effect this conflict has had on hundreds of thousands of Syrian residents. The human-interest stories that were included, however, were oftentimes accompanied by more “hard” news such as policy discussions and attributions of responsibility.

It is surprising that there were not more economic consequence and morality frames given the nature of the conflict. Although the actions of Assad against his own people were discussed at length, there was not often a moral judgment assigned or a moral evaluation made by the reporters or sources. This most likely would have changed had editorial columns been included in the sample. With regards to economic consequences, more of these frames were expected, given that sanctions were one of the tools used by the international community to put pressure on the Assad government to step down.

Print and television did differ in the use of individual frames. Newspapers were significantly more likely to utilize conflict, responsibility, and morality frames. The use of human interest and economic consequences frames by the two outlets were comparable.

Newspapers also had a higher overall frame count. Although a similar length to newspaper articles, television uses some of this word count not for framing the conflict, but for banter between newscasters and correspondents and also setting up and transitioning between stories. This could account for the discrepancy in the number of frames between the two mediums.

### *Conclusion*

There are several overall takeaways from this study of U.S. media's coverage of the Syrian conflict.

Newspapers were more likely to present hard news framed thematically. They also have a higher number of total sources and are more likely to use responsibility and conflict frames. Newspapers were also more likely to seek out sources other than the expected officials. These results add further evidence to the notion that newspapers, especially the elite publications, engage in more serious, fact-based reporting than television outlets. These findings imply that when comparing quality, newspapers come out on top. This is especially true when only examining the elite newspapers of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. The *USA Today* is consistently an outlier in categories such as frequency and word count, adding credence to the argument to exclude the publication from the category of elite newspapers.

While there are an increasing number of choices on where consumers can get their news, many news consumers still turn to the traditional mediums of newspapers and television. Therefore, it is important to understand how these mediums are covering such important world events as the Syrian crisis. Elite newspapers and television outlets also set the tone and agenda for many of the newer, less traditional media so it is imperative to continue to understand how they cover world events. This study found, like some previous studies, that while there are some similarities between the mediums, newspapers display more hallmarks of quality journalism. Despite this finding of newspapers leading the way in quality journalism, television was not far behind, which is a surprising and encouraging finding given that many Americans turn to the television for news.

Media outlets must balance between normative expectations and economic reality. A high level of quality is useless without an audience. This study indicates that members of the media seek to balance these obligations and objectives in their reporting.

#### *Limitations*

One drawback of this cross-sectional study is the difficulty to generalize about the international news situation as a whole. “Because communication occurs on an ongoing and regular basis, it is difficult to understand the forces shaping content and the effects of content without examining content at various times” (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2008).

Another way to improve this study would be to compare word counts. Out of a given news broadcast, or newspaper edition, what proportion of space or time is

devoted to foreign news. This could be done by looking at word counts of foreign news stories versus the overall word count of the broadcast or paper.

The U.S. also had a vested interest in this conflict, as there were ongoing discussions of further U.S. involvement. This could mean that the media were missing other conflicts and international issues occurring around the world at this time because of their focus on Syria. Therefore, this study would be greatly enhanced by replication during a different conflict or time period to see if the results are similar. Perhaps this conflict should be one where the U.S. does not have a personal stake.

Additionally, future studies could include a larger selection of news outlets, including radio, online news, or news agencies. Increasing the sample size of the study would allow for more concrete generalizations about foreign news coverage.

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## APPENDIX A: CODING INSTRUCTIONS

1. Coder Name: Simply write first name
2. Story Number: Record the story number from the top of each story
3. Story date: DD/MM/YY
4. News Outlet
  - 1 for *The New York Times*
  - 2 for *The Washington Post*
  - 3 for *USA Today*
  - 4 for CNN's *The Situation Room*
  - 5 for NBC's *Nightly News*
5. Story length: Write the word count from the top of newspaper articles. For television shows, once the segment under examination is determined, use the word count function in Microsoft Word to determine the word count.
6. Story writer/story origination
 

Looking at the byline, is the writer:

  - 1 for staff writer/news correspondent
  - 2 for freelance/citizen
  - 3 for a wire service (AP, Reuters, etc)
  - 4 for other (mixed,none)

Looking at the dateline, is the story from:

  - 1 for Syria
  - 2 for other Middle Eastern country
  - 3 for United States
  - 4 for multiple (specific in notes)
  - 5 for other
  - 6 for unknown
7. Total number of sources: Count the total number of sources in the story. Sources will have a piece of information or a quote attributed to them. Keywords are: "said," "shared," "according to," etc.
- 8: Types of sources (place a 1 beside source if that source is present in the news story):
  1. Obama \_\_\_\_
  2. Other U.S. officials \_\_\_\_\_
  3. U.S. citizens \_\_\_\_\_

4. Syrian officials \_\_\_\_\_
5. Rebels/dissidents \_\_\_\_\_
6. Syrian citizens (non-rebels) \_\_\_\_\_
7. U.N. officials \_\_\_\_\_
8. Other (international) officials \_\_\_\_\_
9. Interest groups, non-governmental organizations \_\_\_\_\_
10. Scholars, experts \_\_\_\_\_
11. Journalists, pundits, other media (excluding SANA) \_\_\_\_\_
12. Anonymous \_\_\_\_\_
13. Documents \_\_\_\_\_
14. Other (specify in notes) \_\_\_\_\_

9. Based on planned/routine events?

1. Yes. Story reports routine institutional proceedings (pseudo-events): anticipated, administratively managed, and coordinated events. These include press conferences, hearings, court cases, negotiations, speeches, meetings between officials.
2. No. Story reports activities that are, at least at their initial occurrence, spontaneous and not managed by officials within institutional settings (such as violent acts, natural disasters, or accidents).

10. Framing of news story

1. Episodic frame: the story covers a specific event or particular case (story focuses on a one person/group of people or one particular event)
2. Thematic frame: the story is placed in the context of conflict, at least some background information and overview of conflict is provided (can include episodic frames, but also places these events in a broader context)

11. Individual frames employed at the story level (place a 1 beside each applicable frame, stories can have the presence of more than one frame, mark all that apply and total the number for that frame)

- a. Attribution of responsibility – number can be 0 to 5
  - Does the story suggest that some level of gov't has the ability to alleviate the problem?
  - Does the story suggest that some level of the government is responsible for the issue/problem?
  - Does the story suggest solution(s) to the problem/issue?
  - Does the story suggest that an individual or group is responsible for the issue/problem?

- Does the story suggest the problem requires urgent action?

b. Human Interest – number can be 0 to 4

- Does the story provide a human example or 'human face' on the issue?
- Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy/caring, sympathy, or compassion?
- Does the story emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?
- Does the story go into the private or personal lives of the actors?

c. Conflict – number can be 0 to 4

- Does the story reflect disagreement between parties/individuals/groups/countries?
- Does one party/individual/group/country reproach another?
- Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the same problem or issue?
- Does the story refer to winners and losers?

d. Morality – number can be 0 to 3

- Does the story contain any moral message?
- Does the story make reference to morality, God, and other religious tenets?
- Does the story offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?

e. Economic – number can be 0 to 3

- Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?
- Is there a mention of the costs/degree of expense involved?
- Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or pursuing a course of action?

12. Overall, what is the news type of the story?

1. Hard News – story focuses on issues of ongoing policy consideration, factual accounting of current public events, or social issues and controversies that concern members of the audience.
2. Soft News – story focuses on human interest topics or non-policy issues

13. Notes section – use for any interesting/unusual observations



**APPENDIX B: CODE BOOK**

1. Coder Name:

2. Story Number:

3. Story date: DD/MM/YY

4. News Outlet

1. NBC
2. CNN
3. PBS
3. The New York Times
4. The Washington Post
5. USA Today

5. Story length: word count

6. Story writer/story origination

Looking at the byline, is the writer:

- 1 Staff writer/correspondent
- 2 Freelance/citizen
- 3 Wire (AP, Reuters, etc)
- 4 Other (mixed,none)

Looking at the dateline, is the story from:

- 1 Syria
- 2 Other Middle Eastern country
- 3 United States
- 4 Multiple (specific in notes)
- 5 Other
- 6 Unknown

7. Total number of sources:

8: Types of sources (place a 1 beside each appropriate source):

1. Obama \_\_\_\_
2. Other U.S. officials \_\_\_\_\_
3. U.S. citizens \_\_\_\_\_
4. Syrian officials \_\_\_\_\_
5. Rebels/dissidents \_\_\_\_\_
6. Syrian citizens (non-rebels) \_\_\_\_\_
7. U.N. officials \_\_\_\_

8. Other (international) officials \_\_\_\_\_
  9. Interest groups, non-governmental organizations \_\_\_\_\_
  10. Scholars, experts \_\_\_\_\_
  11. Journalists, pundits, other media (excluding SANA) \_\_\_\_\_
  12. Anonymous \_\_\_\_\_
  13. Documents \_\_\_\_\_
  14. Other (specify in notes) \_\_\_\_\_
9. Based on planned/routine events?
1. Yes
  2. No
10. Framing of news story
1. Episodic frame
  2. Thematic frame
11. Individual frames employed by story
- a. Attribution of responsibility
  - b. Human Interest
  - c. Conflict
  - d. Morality
  - e. Economic
12. Overall, what is the news type of the story?
1. Hard News
  2. Soft News
13. Notes section