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Narrative of Power and Protest: A Comparative Content Analysis of Al Jazeera and BBC Coverage of the 2024 Bangladesh Uprising

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Abstract

This research article examines how Al Jazeera and BBC built competing documentary narratives about the 2024 uprising in Bangladesh, which is less explored as compared to other news frames. The study followed the comparative qualitative content analysis method and was guided by the framing theory and agenda-setting theory. Al Jazeera's 185 segments, and BBC's 138 segments were coded using a unit of analysis based on the segment and a five dimension coding matrix for comparison. The two documentaries held the Hasina government responsible for lethal state violence, but present an account of protesters and victims in a sympathetic light, but in terms of narrative construction Al Jazeera constructs the investigative-exposure model, centered on the exclusive cover-up narrative frame, while the BBC constructs the chronological-chain-of-command accountability model, centered on the citizen smartphone narrative frame.

Keywords: *July Uprising; Documentary Journalism; Media Framing; Agenda-setting*

INTRODUCTION

The 2024 Uprising in Bangladesh was a significant event in the nation's recent political history, shifting the nature of protests from the initial focus on issues to a broader struggle for state power, democratic legitimacy, and public accountability. Domestic monitoring placed the death toll at 819, while a subsequent United Nations assessment estimated that the national death toll was up to 1,400, suggesting early estimates were understated in terms of the death toll (Islam & Faisal, 2026). It was accompanied by curfews, mass arrests, internet shutdowns and coordinated disinformation campaigns (Rahaman et al., 2026) but ultimately led to the resignation of the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and the establishment of an interim government. As the insurrection spread beyond its internal dimension, it became an internationally mediated situation that led to the formulation of a number of competing narratives regarding what had happened, who was responsible, and how the state violence and resistance were to be interpreted.

Political crises are always reported selectively, with emphasis and omissions, and therefore always influences what the public thinks of the legitimacy, blame, and victimhood (Entman, 1993). Framing theory indicates that the manner in which an issue is presented influences the interpretation of causes, responsibilities and moral judgments of audiences; while the agenda-setting theory exhibits as to how media influences the nature of people's thinking not only on an issue, but also on which issues, actors and developments that are salient to public consciousness (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In documentary journalism, which gives producers more time to weave a narrative about political events based on narration, archival footage, interviews and editing, these dynamics are especially relevant (Li, 2022).

Two documentaries, both made internationally, dealt with the July uprising of 2024, one made by Al Jazeera Investigates, and the other made by BBC World Service Documentaries. Both address the same political crisis, but

come from broadcasters that have very different editorial traditions, funding models and geopolitical positions. The framing of news, political communication and approaches to comparing the domestic with foreign press coverage have been the main focus of existing scholarship on the uprising, and the narrative mechanics of long-form documentary journalism (tone, selection of the sources, emphasis on visuals, narrative sequencing) have been given relatively little attention. This is important because documentaries are not just a record, but also a powerful text of interpretation, and BBC and Al Jazeera are two of the most influential international broadcasters globally, having a unique power in shaping the global understanding of the crisis (Morgan, 2022).

This study will fill that gap by using comparative qualitative content analysis on the two documentaries, to analyze how each one has created the narrative of the uprising, how each one represents important actors (government, protesters, and victims), and how each one uses tone, framing, source selection, visual representation, and narrative style. The analysis is based on three research questions:

1. How do Al Jazeera and the BBC build the narrative of the uprising in Bangladesh in their documentaries in 2024?

2. In each documentary how is the government, the protesters, and victims represented?

3.What are the differences between the two texts in terms of tone, framing, source selection, visual representation and narrative style?

The study will aim to tackle these issues in a way that is not typical of studies related to framing and agenda setting in news media. It will add new comparative data from Al Jazeera and BBC news coverage beyond the Middle East settings where they are most frequently studied.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The 2024 Bangladesh Uprising in Context

The movement started as an anti-discrimination movement, led by students in June 2024 against the a quota policy that would require over 50% of government jobs to be filled by specific groups such as descendants of people who took part in the 1971 Liberation War (Islam & Faisal, 2026). The government's sharp response, including curfews, mass arrests, internet shutdowns and lethal violence exacerbated the situation. Significant disinformation on digital platforms has been reported throughout the crisis (Rahaman et al., 2026) and by August 2024 the movement had expanded to become a non-cooperation movement, which compelled the resignation of Hasina and the formation of an interim government under Prof. Muhammad Yunus. The history of contested state violence, human rights abuses and contested legitimacy is the terrain that Al Jazeera and the BBC built their competing documentary histories on.

Framing Theory in Political and Crisis Reporting

In building his framework, Entman (1993) provided a simple definition of framing as “the selection and salience of certain aspects of perceived reality in ways that encourage a certain problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation.” Framing is particularly important in the context of protest and crisis reporting because it can affect audience perceptions of legitimacy, blame and victimhood by emphasizing some elements of a story over others. An examination of the media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by Al Jazeera and the BBC found that the two major broadcasters systematically employ different frames to the same events, such as the Al Jazeera focus on Palestinian civilian suffering and resistance and the BBC focus on state aligned frames in some contexts (Constructing Conflict, 2023). Similarly, Abdelraouf (2025) discovered that Al Jazeera English and CNN drew distinctive frames of pro-Palestinian campus protests, based on the ideological stance of each outlet. Documentary journalism, unlike other text genres, is a text genre that uses narration, editing, sequencing, visual emphasis, as well as language, which makes it an especially rich site for framing analysis, extending the earlier analysis by Goffman (1974) on frame analysis of audiovisual texts.

Agenda-Setting Theory and Media Salience

According to the agenda-setting theory, the media do not define audiences' attitudes toward an issue, but do influence what the audience thinks about, since they decide which issues, actors and events will be considered for a prolonged period of time (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In documentary journalism the mechanism of agenda-setting involves the selection and sequencing of the scenes, the length of time given to specific testimonies and the focus given to specific types of evidence. Previous studies on the uprising in Bangladesh have also shown that

salience is constructed differently across different media institutions, based on the institutional interests and the audience of different media institutions (Yadawa, 2025), which points to the fact that Al Jazeera and the BBC would likely have produced different salience hierarchies around the same crisis.

Institutional Profiles of Al Jazeera and the BBC

By founding an organization with government support from Qatar in 1996, Al Jazeera has been demonstrated to be a media outlet that not only has financial ties and Qatari state backing, but has also been able to shape its editorial approach to promoting the voices of the Global South in its reporting, especially on the subject of state repression (Barkho, 2019). Al Jazeera Investigates, its investigative unit, has established a reputation for providing long-form investigations that go against official government narratives (Abdelraouf, 2025). A publicly funded broadcaster, under the auspices of the Royal Charter, the BBC is legally bound to adhere to its editorial guidelines, which outline its commitment to impartiality and freedom from government interference (BBC, 2022). But in practice, the BBC's news reporting on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is found to reflect rather more the Israeli and Western governments' perspectives than Palestinian civilian perspectives (Constructing Conflict, 2023). The following divergent institutional profiles offer important background information in order to understand the differences in the narratives found in this study.

Documentary Journalism, Visual Storytelling, and Political Representation

Documentary journalism combines the elements of journalism and film, giving producers far greater flexibility in creating an extended interpretive work with narration, interviews, archival footage, and visual editing (Li, 2022). A review of systematic evidence over the past decades shows that visual frames can independently generate audience emotions and cognition, even from documents that do not show the same facts of state violence against civilians (Geise & Xu, 2024). The selection of sources is also significant; in protester and victim-oriented documentaries, there are different distributions of the narrative in authoritative voices, while in documentaries with a spread of voices from the government, experts, and eye-witnesss, the distribution of the narrative is different. (Barkho, 2019). For the July Uprising, it has also been found that viewers react differently to the visual and verbal frames of the crisis of the uprising on digital platforms (Prama et al., 2025), thus stressing the importance of analyzing the document in both registers, verbal and visual.

Comparative Media Analysis of Al Jazeera and the BBC

Some large-scale comparative studies have been conducted on the way in which Al Jazeera and the BBC handle joint international events. In the 2008–2009 Gaza War, Zghoul (2022) found that Al Jazeera focused more on Palestinian civilian casualties than the BBC, which used official sources and information more often. The same findings and trends were observed in the 2023 war coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict, which were extended (Constructing Conflict, 2023); and Shahzad et al. (2023) confirmed and added to the pattern that each outlet had its own unique narrative priorities, defined by its geopolitical and organizational interests, when covering the Israel-Palestine conflict. Analogous differences have been found in media reporting of pro-Palestinian campus demonstrations (Abdelraouf, 2025) and have been verified by a re-analysis of the protest paradigm using statistical analysis of protest coverage across outlets. Collectively, this literature validates and makes valuable the use of comparative framing analysis for analyzing Al Jazeera and BBC texts, but it has been used predominantly with news articles and bulletins and predominantly with Middle East crises and almost never with South Asian political events like the Bangladesh uprising and rarely with long-form documentary journalism.

Research Gap and the Present Study

While the framing theory, agenda-setting theory, and comparative media analysis are widely accepted theories in the study of political communication, they have seldom been used to study documentary journalism and no previous study has focused on Al Jazeera and the BBC's creation of competing documentary accounts of the 2024 July Uprising. The gap is highly relevant as documentary journalism has a unique storytelling style of developing the scene, investigative sourcing, visual montage and sustained narration that makes for more complex and sometimes divergent representations of political events than traditional news reporting does. The present study fills this gap by systematically and theoretically using a qualitative content analysis approach to the two Al Jazeera and BBC documentaries, thus bringing comparative analysis of Al Jazeera and BBC into an under-theorized documentary genre and a non-Middle Eastern political crisis.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach and Design

This study used a qualitative interpretivist approach, which means that the two documentaries were viewed as cultural and political products of institutional production processes and the conventions of the documentary style of editing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Qualitative content analysis (QCA) was chosen as the main method of analysis because the research questions are not related to the frequency of variables of interest and because the initial coding categories were generated from framing theory (Entman, 1993) and agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and then further refined through the careful reading of the documentary texts (Schreier, 2012). In order to analyze data from each documentary, the study employed a comparative case design, where each documentary was treated as a bounded case and analyzed in-depth within cases and then systematically compared.

Sampling, Data, and Unit of Analysis

The two documentaries were selected by purposive sampling from among six documentaries on Bangladesh's political event. “The documentaries, 36 Days in July: Sheikh Hasina's Secret Orders Revealed (Al Jazeera Investigates)” released on July 24, 2025 and “The Battle for Bangladesh: Fall of Sheikh Hasina (BBC World Service Documentaries)” on July 8, 2025, . Both texts were chosen because they reported on the same crisis, and broadcast by major international television stations. Both are long-form documentary texts as opposed to short news texts, and both can be found on the Internet via official broadcaster websites. In line with the qualitative research goals and themes, analytic depth was emphasized upon over sample size, as per expectations of qualitative studies .

A unity was defined as a scene (72%) or a segment, which is a coherent, audiovisual unit with a theme, event, actor, or argument, and marked by a change in the visual information, the narration, the subject of an interview, or theme. The selection of this unit is based on the fact that in a documentary film, meaning is imparted by narration, visuals, sound and editing together as opposed to narration alone (Geise & Xu, 2024). Empirical segment boundaries were identified for each documentary, using structured, repeated viewing in place of a predetermined structure.

Sampling, Data, and Unit of Analysis

The data collection was conducted in four steps. During the familiarization phase, each documentary was watched in its entirety without coding to obtain an overall impression of the structure, tone and thematic focus of each documentary (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A second viewing of the full documentary was done in the segmentation phase, and the documentary was segmented into distinct segments, each with a descriptive label with an approximate time stamp. The coding stage included a third structured viewing, which involved filling out a coding matrix for each segment on five analytical dimensions: tone (emotional register of the segment), framing (problem definition, causal attribution, moral evaluation, and remedy, based on Entman's (1993) four functions), source selection (the voices included and how they are represented), visual representation (camera work, archival footage, and depicted content), and narrative style (structural and rhetorical technique). The coded data of both the documentaries were compared, and thematic patterns and cross-case themes were identified in the thematic categorization stage, similar to the steps used in Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis.

Data analysis was carried out by within-case analysis of each documentary, systematic cross-case comparison across five analytical dimensions, and theoretical interpretation based on the theory of framing, agenda-setting theory and institutional profiles of the two broadcasters.

Trustworthiness, Reflexivity, and Ethics

The criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were used for trustworthiness. These were supplemented by repeated viewing, a theory-based coding matrix, and referential adequacy in the form of direct textual evidence for each analytic claim in order to ensure credibility. A description of the analysis procedure supported transferability, and a documented and transparent four-stage procedure supported dependability. In order to address confirmability, researcher reflexivity was maintained over the course of the study (Finlay, 2002) and an auditable coding trail was followed. As the study involved no human subject, no formal ethical approval was needed, the documentaries were interpreted faithfully, quotations given in context, and all materials were attributed according to APA (7th edition) conventions.

Methodological Limitations

There are a few methodological limitations. Findings are limited to two documentary texts, and do not reflect the documentary output of either organization as a whole. Because of the interpretive nature of the coding, a different analyst might arrive at a similar, but not necessarily the same, interpretation of the same text(s) (Krippendorff, 2019). The study only looked at the texts as they were publicly broadcasted, rather than their reception by audiences, newsroom production processes, or producer intent, and did not have any access to the newsroom's internal decision-making. Such limitations are discussed more in the limitations section.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results for this section were based on the coded data (185 Al Jazeera segments; 138 BBC segments), presented according to the three research questions.



Figure 1. Al Jazeera Coded Data



Figure 2. BBC Coded Data

Research Question 1: Narrative Construction

Al Jazeera's 36 Days in July contains a forensic investigative-exposure narrative. The documentary's opening scene sets the tone with the narrator reading "Al Jazeera reveals the secret orders of a ruthless Prime Minister." The verb "reveals" situates Al Jazeera as an uncoverer of an institutional cover-up, and the evaluative adjective makes immediate evaluation in keeping with Entman's (1993) framing functions. The investigative approach is maintained with a progressive-revelation format that develops the case against the Hasina government with the presentation of new, exclusive evidence such as intercepted phone calls, leaked documents or confidential testimony in each successive chapter. The segments coded Critical (55/185, 29.7%) are part of a thematic cluster that includes State Violence (16/185, 8.6%), Command Responsibility (13/185, 7.0%) and Cover-Up (11/185, 5.9%), which together make up the documentary's narrative backbone.

BBC's The Battle for Bangladesh by contrast starts without any narration, and instead begins with footage on Miraz's smartphone recorded from the protest. Miraz was a protester later killed during the events depicted. This decision acknowledges citizen evidence and puts the human experience in front of the first words. Instead of the 36-day national timeline adopted by Al Jazeera, the documentary is geographically and temporally limited to the Jatrabari district of Dhaka on August 5, 2024. The narrator explicitly states the investigative objective as to establish who was responsible, and the documentary builds a clear chain-of-command with Asaduzzaman Khan at the helm of the police, and Sheikh Hasina at the peak of that command. The documentary has a forensic-procedural feel, because it has a chronological date-sequence structure, with on-screen date-sequence title cards for each

important date. While it has the same accountability finding as Al Jazeera, its critical tone is more widely dispersed (16 of 138 segments; 11.6%) than Al Jazeera's, which shows a higher concentration.

Table 1. Comparative Overview of Dominant Narrative Frameworks
Note: Segment counts and percentages are derived from full coding analysis of both documentary texts.

Dimension	Al Jazeera: 36 Days in July	BBC: The Battle for Bangladesh
Narrative type	Forensic investigative exposure	Chain-of-command accountability reconstruction
Primary structure	Progressive revelation of exclusive evidence	Chronological date-sequence reconstruction
Geographic scope	National (multiple locations; 36 days)	Local (Jatrabari, Dhaka; focused on 5 August)
Dominant tone	Critical (55 segments, 29.7%)	Critical (16 segments, 11.6%), more distributed
Top frames	State Violence; Human Cost; Command Responsibility	State Violence; Command Responsibility; Regime Collapse
Distinctive frame	Cover-Up (11 segments, 5.9%)	Chain of Command / Top-Level Accountability
Opening device	Narrator declaration of investigative purpose	Victim's silent self-recorded footage

Research Question 2 – Representation of Key Actors

Government and Sheikh Hasina



Figure 3. Al Jazeera presents Hasina's intercepted phone call with on-screen authentication label confirming forensic digital verification

Both documentaries feature intercepted call recordings of Hasina personally ordering lethal force with the words, "Now they will use lethal weapons. Shoot wherever you find them". Each footage authenticated through institutional verification language, 'forensic digital analysis' (Al Jazeera) and 'BBC Eye' verification' (BBC), which pre-empts audience doubt about authenticity. On Al Jazeera, Hasina is placed in a Command Responsibility frame (13 segments, 7%) bolstered by the Chief Prosecutor who explicitly refers to her rule as treating "the country as her monarchy" (10 segments, 5.4%), which links her political identity to causal explanation in Entman's (1993) sense. The Awami League's denial appears only at the end of the documentary, after 48 minutes of evidence, which makes the denial seem implausible. The BBC embodies the same idea of responsibility in the same way, but in a more diffusive manner. Officers are "constrained" by other officers in a hierarchy that explicitly points to the Home Minister and Hasina. Anonymous police testimony is also included, We operate under a chain of command. There"is no option to go beyond orders".

Protesters

Al Jazeera represents protesters as 'morally legitimate' and 'collectively determined', mostly by student organiser Abu Shadik (8 segments, 4.3%) whose testimony connects Hasina's incendiary 'Razakar' rhetoric to the

radicalisation of the student movement, while at the same time attaching causal responsibility to Hasina and which very much happens to be an accusation that the protest was reactive, and not instigated. The BBC's foreground stories include the student coordinator, Rasel Mahmud (5 segments, 3.6%) and Bijoy Ahamed Talukdar (7 segments, 5.1%), whose portrayal of protester amnesty for police personnel while the latter continued to respond with violence sets up a non-violent and moral legitimacy frame that implicitly makes police more culpable when the narrator states “police continue to respond with violence.”

Victims

Al Jazeera's constructs student Abu Sayed is its symbolic centre and focal point, and its testimony of his shooting is used in a Martyrdom frame (7 segments) and a Human Cost frame (16 segments), with family testimony forming the documentary's forensic evidence to support its Cover-Up frame. The BBC uses its victim narrative to focus on the man named Miraz, who features in 13.8% of all the coded BBC segments, more than any other man, with his own smartphone footage depicting his final moments, and Sawon Al Mahamud's testimony (19 segments) offering the viewer a personal and intimate account of loss, rather than forensic evidence.

Table 2. Comparison of Key Actor Representation Across Both Documentaries

Actor Group	Al Jazeera Dominant Frames	BBC Dominant Frames
Government / Hasina	Command Responsibility (13 seg); Cover-Up (11 seg); Authoritarian Framing (3 seg)	Command Responsibility (2 seg); Chain of Command (2 seg); Top-Level Accountability (2 seg)
Protesters	Protest Legitimacy (5 seg); Collective Anger (3 seg); Collective Mobilization (2 seg)	Nonviolent/Moral Legitimacy (1 seg); Bijoy Talukdar (7 seg, 5.1%); Rasel Mahmud (5 seg, 3.6%)
Victims	Martyrdom (7 seg); Human Cost (16 seg); Grieving tone (16 seg)	Martyrdom (2 seg); Human Cost (2 seg); Martyr-Witness Narrative (1 seg); Sawon Al Mahamud (19 seg, 13.8%)

Note: Segment counts are totals from the full coding analysis; percentages refer to the proportion of total coded segments in each documentary.

Research Question 3: Comparison of the Five Analytical Dimensions

Tone

Al Jazeera has a strong prosecutorial tone with Critical coding (29.7%), then Explanatory (10.3%), Grieving (8.6%) and Authoritarian (5.9%). The tonal profile of the BBC is more spread out with Critical tone (11.6%) slightly outnumbering Investigative tone (6.5%) and Defensive tone (6.5%) and Dramatic tone (5.8%) and the mix of tones has a more even balance of procedural, factual and emotional.

Table 3. Tonal Profiles: Selected Tones in Each Documentary

Tone	AJ Segments (%)	BBC Segments (%)
Critical	55 (29.7%)	16 (11.6%)
Explanatory	19 (10.3%)	5 (3.6%)
Grieving	16 (8.6%)	3 (2.2%)
Defensive	14 (7.6%)	9 (6.5%)
Investigative	13 (7.0%)	9 (6.5%)
Authoritarian	11 (5.9%)	2 (1.4%)
Dramatic	6 (3.2%)	8 (5.8%)

Note: AJ n = 185; BBC n = 138. Percentages calculated as a proportion of total segments in each documentary

Framing, Source Selection, and Visual Representation

The two documentaries share in their problem definition (state-directed lethal violence) and causal attribution (the Hasina government) and both appear to use the frames of State Violence and Command Responsibility most frequently. They differ, however, with regard to sub-frame density and specificity. The State Violence frame (presented by Al Jazeera; 16 segments; 8.6%) relies on eyewitness accounts, phone recordings, medical testimony and intercepted police radio communications, while the unique contribution by the BBC is a Chain-of-Command Accountability cluster, based on the official police station communications reporting 2,444 rounds fired on August 5. There is no equivalent of Al Jazeera's Cover-Up frame (11 segments, 5.9%) in the BBC's coding, reflecting the differing investigative access and priorities between the two productions.

Source selection shows a parallel divergence. The documentary voice is the most common source type in both texts (35.1% in Al Jazeera; 45.7% in the BBC), but Al Jazeera adds many other expert and institutional voices to help reinforce its central claims circumstantially: a Chief Prosecutor (5.4%), forensic doctor (3.2%), intelligence sources (2.2%), and a student journalist (4.3%). The BBC focuses, by contrast, on sourcing in the form of close

first-hand accounts, which in this instance comes from just 19 segments (13.8%) from Sawon Al Mahamud. An institutionally thinner evidentiary base, in other words, but a more personal one.

Al Jazeera uses authenticated surveillance footage, leaked government information and repeated motifs in the images—the vandalized Gonobhaban Residence and uprising graffiti erasing Hasina as a demon—as agenda-setting devices, visualizing public moral condemnation. The BBC's most unique visual evidence comes from Miraz's personal smartphone footage, which offers first-person visual evidence that is not captured by any professional camera crew, in addition to official police records on screen. Contrastive approaches to visual strategy are representative of the respective documentary's overall evidentiary approach, which is institutional documentation for Al Jazeera, citizen testimony for the BBC.

Narrative Style

Al Jazeera's style is that of a revelatory narrative, with an investigative case-based story structure, the use of strongly evaluative language of the narrator (e.g., 'ruthless Prime Minister'), a recurring martyrdom arc around Abu Sayed's image and testimony, and a postscript of official denials after the case has been built. The BBC style uses date-sequence structuring as well as a more controlled and factual style (such as using precise numbers like 2,444 without adjectives to evaluate, but rather to inform; police fire a total of 2,444 live rounds) to give a reconstruction-oriented narrative, which also reaches a similar moral conclusion, albeit by a more measured institutional voice.

Cross-Documentary Synthesis

All the comparative findings presented are summarized in Table 4. In general, both documentaries agree on the problem that is to be addressed and the casualty that is to be blamed: state violence by the Hasina-led government against civilian protesters. Both documentaries agree on the problem to be addressed and the causality to be blamed, namely state violence directed by the Hasina-led government against civilian protesters. However, they differ significantly in their moral register, evidentiary strategy, and salience structure. A total of 11 out of 185 segments (5.9%) highlight the single most analytically significant difference between the two news products, namely their exclusive feature on Cover-Up, where Al Jazeera gives a space to expose the criminal nature of the institutions it examines, and the BBC's chain-of-command reconstruction attempts to avoid such a space.

Table 4. Consolidated Comparative Summary of All Five Analytical Dimensions

Dimension	Al Jazeera: 36 Days in July	BBC: The Battle for Bangladesh
Tone	Critical dominant (29.7%); Grieving (8.6%); Authoritarian (5.9%)	More even distribution; Critical (11.6%); Investigative and Defensive (6.5% each); Dramatic (5.8%)
Framing	State Violence + Human Cost (16 seg each); Command Responsibility (13); Cover-Up (11, unique to AJ)	State Violence (4); Command Responsibility, Regime Collapse, Official Self-Justification (3 each); Chain of Command (2)
Source selection	Expert-diverse: Chief Prosecutor (10), student journalist (8), family witnesses (9), forensic doctor (6)	Witness-centered: Sawon/Miraz's friend (19, 13.8%); Bijoy (7); narrator-heavy (45.7%)
Visual representation	Phone-recording evidence; government documents; Gonobhaban B-roll; martyrdom graffiti motifs	Citizen smartphone footage (Miraz); official police records; Jatrabari reconstruction imagery
Narrative style	Investigative revelation; evaluative narrator language; martyrdom arc; right-of-reply as postscript	Chronological date-sequence; measured factual register; chain-of-command mapping; integrated official voices

Note: AJ = Al Jazeera. All segment counts derived from the full coding analysis. AJ n = 185; BBC n = 138

Discussion

The results indicate that Al Jazeera and the BBC produced two different structural documentary accounts of the same political crisis, although the two media sources shared some, but not all, verified evidence. Al Jazeera's forensic investigative-exposure account has a progressive disclosure of exclusive content to build a case against the Hasina-led government; BBC's witness-evidence account has a chronological reconstruction and a clear mapping of the chain of command to build institutional accountability. This separation reinforces the general thesis that documentary journalism is not a neutral reporting of political events, but rather an active interpretation of it, based on editorial decision, investigative access, and institutional orientation (Li, 2022). There is a difference in the scope and geographical coverage of Al Jazeera's documentaries compared to the BBC's, which presents a salience differential (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), respectively further dimensions of the same crisis and with different conclusions as to what should be understood by the worst aspect of the crisis.

In terms of the representation of actors, both documentaries hold Hasina's government responsible for the lethal violence, and in both cases, the violence is backed up by the intercepted phone conversations of the protesters, who are portrayed as having both narrative and emotional depth as victims. But Al Jazeera's characterization of Hasina as a quasi-criminal figure, bolstered by a legal mind (the Chief Prosecutor), contrasts emphatically with the BBC's portrayal, which focuses mainly on her as the head of an institutional command chain in which other actors like anonymous police officers are also free to a certain degree. The difference suggests that Al Jazeera's framing emphasizes personal criminality while the BBC's emphasizes systemic institutional failure, which can be traced to Al Jazeera's known advocacy framing and the more institutionalized source strategy of the BBC (Zghoul, 2022).

The comparison of analytical dimensions confirms a consistent pattern, which is related to each broadcaster's institutional identity. Al Jazeera's notably higher share of Critical-toned segments (29.7% compared to 11.6%) aligns with the more evaluative voice of the narrator, whereas the BBC's more widely spread-toned distribution is aligned with its stated commitment to impartiality as it arrives at definitive accountability conclusions, as was also the case in Constructing Conflict (2023) in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in BBC. The most theoretically important individual discovery is the existence of Al Jazeera's exclusive Cover-Up frame, one that is not found in the coding of the BBC, and which turns the documentary into a document of institutional criminality.

Theoretical Implications

These findings build on Entman's (1993) framing theory in three ways. First, they argue that the framing model, which is a model of language, can be applied to documentary texts, but that the four functions of framing—problem framing, cause framing, moral framing, and remedy framing—are performed in documentary texts with the help of narration, testimony, visual evidence and sequencing, rather than language alone. They argue that framing analysis of documentary texts must account for the full audiovisual document and not just its verbal component. Second, the study reveals that a single event can be consistently presented at a macro level (state violence, Hasina's responsibility) but not at a micro level, since the sub-frame level may yield several different types of frames (such as Al Jazeera's Cover-Up frame, Official Denial frame, and Impunity frame versus the BBC's Chain of Command frame or Official Self-Justification frame), which imply that the analysis of complex documentary texts should separate the macro frame from the micro frame. Third, investigative access is also a limitation on the availability of the frames, for Al Jazeera's Cover-Up frame was only possible because the investigative team secured some documentary evidence that the BBC team did not have or use. This suggests that documentary framing is not solely a product of editorial and /or ideological perspectives as most framing studies would have it, but also of the resources employed by the documentary producing organization in studying the documentary. This means that framing is not just a function of editorial or ideological perspectives but also of the resources the documentary producing organization has at its disposal for the investigation of the documentary.

The results also further the agenda-setting theory, which has so far been limited to the importance of allocating screen time to the documentary, the sequence of evidence, the introduction of on-screen textual cues, and the use of recurring visual cues (Al Jazeera's graffiti portrait by Abu Sayed, Miraz's self-recorded footage for the BBC). The different salience each broadcaster gave to the Cover-Up storyline, which was a main part of the Al Jazeera coverage yet a nonexistent element in the BBC's, suggests that long-form documentary journalism can carry multiple, concurrent layers of salience that the form of agenda-setting theory, which typically focused on news bulletins, did not foresee.

Situating Findings Within Comparative Media Literature

Broadly, the findings were in line with previous comparative studies which found that Al Jazeera generally adopts advocacy-driven frame and a more activist and victim-centred sourcing, whereas the BBC generally applies a more balanced institutional sourcing and neutral language (Zghoul, 2022). Meanwhile, the results combine to complicate this literature in three ways. The BBC documentary is not just a 'neutral' or 'balanced' reporting, it has clear and explicit accountability conclusions about Hasina's responsibility through its chain-of-command analysis, as Constructing Conflict (2023) has highlighted, BBC impartiality does not mean that it cannot draw clear and explicit accountability conclusions about the responsibility of the state in the case of violence, and caution against simplistic views about the BBC being uniformly 'state-aligned' or 'politically cautious'. Second, the fact that Miraz's own smartphone footage was central to the BBC documentary, as evidence, suggests that citizen journalism is an emerging and largely unstudied source-selection category in comparative research. Third, the study suggests that the differences between Al Jazeera and the BBC in this instance are more about the range and depth of investigative work and access to evidence than about their philosophical stance on issues of culpability, legitimacy

and victimization, as both broadcasters reach similar moral judgments regarding these aspects, but employ very different investigative and narrative approaches.

Practical Implications

The results of this research reinforce the point for documentary producers and journalists in situations of political crises, that the choices they make with regard to tone, the choice of sources, the framing of issues, the visual emphasis and the narrative structure are not just stylistic decisions, but political ones that affect the understanding of the audience with regard to responsibility, legitimacy, and victimhood. Producers should therefore be mindful of editorial choices, like the order in which official denials are presented, where institutional sources are sourced over eyewitness, and the way that citizen-recorded footage is framed, and how this choice of sourcing influences the interpretive frame that is ultimately offered to audiences. The study also demonstrates the unique power of the long-form documentary piece to hold political players accountable that cannot be easily matched by short-form news reporting with limited time and space.

Two credible international broadcasters produced vastly different representations of the same crisis, in terms of thematic emphasis, tone and evidentiary approach. This finding should be important for media literacy education and for the critical consumption of media more generally because it calls into question the notion that a documentary is a record of events. This is especially true of viewers in the Global South, such as Bangladesh, who see foreign reportage of an internal crisis as a public record for the world, but also as a reflection of the editorial practices of outsiders.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis is confined to two documentary texts, and cannot be viewed as representative of the wider body of Al Jazeera or BBC documentary practice. Conclusions are drawn with regard to these two texts rather than drawn as a conclusion about a wider institutional pattern. Second, in the qualitative content analysis, there is a built-in element of interpretive judgment, in the sense that the segment-level coding is systematic and theoretically well informed, but is not a measurement, but rather one coherent analytic reading (Krippendorff, 2019). Third, the study focuses exclusively on the texts as broadcast, and does not take into account audience reception, it does not describe how the different audience members actually interpreted and responded to the different documentary texts. Fourth, the study was not conducted in the production process, in editorial discussions or in the newsroom decision-making, which means that arguments about the relationship between institutional identity and framing must be inferential rather than directly supported. Fifth, the analysis fails to take into account the Bangladeshi domestic media coverage of the same crisis, which would have been a valuable comparison, international and domestic representation of the same crisis.

Future Research

This analysis could be extended in various ways in future research. If it is possible to compare the two documentaries with Bangladeshi domestic news coverage, it would be very useful to place international framing in the context of other local media. This text-centred analysis would be complemented by audience reception research into the understanding and response of Bangladeshi, South Asian, Arab and Western audiences to the framing choices identified here. A five dimension coding matrix created in this study can also be used in documentary work on other political crises to see if the patterns found in this study can be replicated and extrapolated beyond the scope of the Bangladesh situation, especially the distinction between investigative and chain of command accountability. Based on Miraz's self-recorded video being crucial to the evidence strategy pursued by BBC, further research might be conducted that theorizes more systematically about how and whether citizen-captured video from smartphones is authenticated, incorporated and framed by professional documentary organizations. Finally, research on the production side, which would include interviews with documentary producers and access to editorial materials, would help to test, not only to infer, the proposed institutional identity and framing choice relationship in this study.

CONCLUSION

Using a systematic qualitative content analysis, this study looked at 185 and 138 coded segments from Al Jazeera and the BBC, respectively, in the context of framing theory and agenda-setting theory to understand how these media organizations constructed documentary narratives of the 2024 Bangladesh uprising. Analysis reveals that the two broadcasters have created parallel but significantly different accounts of the same political crisis. Al Jazeera's 36 Days in July is a forensic, investigative-exposure journalism narrative in which the Critical voice is

dominant, the source base is expert diverse, and the frame is Cover-Up, which constructs the crisis as institutional criminality. The Battle for Bangladesh by BBC creates a chain of command responsible narration, with evidence recorded by the citizens, a date-sequence structure and a more measured evaluative register. Both films, however, agree on blaming the Hasina-led government for its state brutality while giving protests and victims a moral and emotional legitimacy.

The study illustrates the analytical value of the framing theory and agenda-setting theory when they are applied to long-form documentary journalism, in this case, with a multimodal, sequential, extended version of the narrative. It also adds new comparative material to the debate regarding the BBC and Al Jazeera coverage that has so far been largely confined to Middle Eastern issues, and dispels the notion that the BBC is invariably neutral. As the results of this study indicate, and as this work demonstrates, documentary journalism is not a mere reflection of political crisis, but an active field of meaning making that can have real consequences for the construction of global understandings of how to reckon with accountability, legitimacy, and victimhood.

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