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# **Approaching Revolution in the Middle East and the Current Media Landscape**

**Social Media- and News Agency Material in reporting  
of the Arab Spring and War in Syria.**

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## ABSTRACT

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The Arab spring has been called a social media revolution and social media have been given large importance and significant space in both academic discussions and analysis in the media.

The main focus of this study was to examine whether social media have impacted the news reporting of the conflicts. A sample of articles from four different newspapers was examined, taken randomly from all relevant articles published on the newspapers websites between December 2010 and December 2013. A part of that sample was checked for news agency cable reliance and the entire sample were checked for material from social media. Three newspapers were found to rely heavily on news agency material. The New York Times was the exception, having only 4 percent of articles being based on news agency material. Social media material and quotes were found and were used in the reporting in different ways, but only in 4 percent of articles. It was mainly used as a way to get protester commentary.

Two of the included newspapers were China Daily and the New York Times. The differences between the respective reporting in these newspapers were also examined in yet another subsample consisting of 100 articles from each newspaper. Several differences between the reporting were found, with China Daily for example presenting a framing more in favour of the government of Syria than the New York Times.

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Keywords: Arab spring, Syria, social media, source usage, framing, agenda setting, web 2.0, Facebook, Twitter, online news

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## **2 Background and purpose**

*This chapter gives a quick overview of the conflicts, my motivations for doing the study, why I believe my study has scientific relevance. It also outlines several research questions by which the problem was approached.*

### **2.1 The conflicts**

In December 2010 the self-immolation of a Tunisian man in protest of poor living conditions caused severe riots in the Tunisian capital. The riots and protest lead to the ousting of president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali who had been ruling the country since 1987. In the wake of the Tunisian protests and their success, similar protest began in Egypt which also had a long-time ruler who had been in power since 1981: President Hosni Mubarak. He resigned on the 11th of February 2011, leaving power in the hands of a military council.

On the 15th of February protest spread to neighbouring Libya; a country that had been ruled by Colonel Muammar Gaddafi since he had led a revolution there in 1969. Gaddafi did not give up his power willingly, however, but following a civil war and NATO-enforced no-fly-zone he was forcefully ousted in October 2011.

Protests continued to spread through the Middle East, affecting most countries in the region. Nationwide protests in Syria started in March 2011. After several massacres on demonstrators and violent clashes, President Bashar Al-Assad stated that the country had entered a state of “real” civil war in June 2012. At the date of the completion of this thesis, January 2014, the conflict remains unsolved with president Bashar al-Assad remaining in power.

In August 2013 chemical weapons were first allegedly used in the conflict (which was later confirmed by UN observers), causing several civilian casualties and international outrage.

## 2.2 Scientific relevance and purpose

Studies on the presentation of news events in journalistic reporting have been carried out for a long time using different theoretical frameworks. This, however, does not mean that more research does not need to be carried out since the media landscape is currently changing rapidly.

It is my opinion that these conflicts are very interesting from a media studies perspective, for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the source material used by journalists have for long been seen by researchers as an important part of the composition of news and a potential source of news bias. Research has shown that an often dominating source of news materials have been governmental and that journalists often rely on a rather narrow set of sources - see for example Reese, Grant & Danielian (1994), Alexseev & Bennett (1995) or Yang (2003). With a changing communication landscape this is no longer necessarily the case, as the availability of local sources increases and local reporters get greater abilities to reach a wider audience through, for example, the internet and social media. Eric Auchard, editorial innovation director for Reuters, argues that Twitter even has come so far as to become one of the most important forums for breaking news. (Auchard, 2013). The Tunisian revolution of 2010 and the Egyptian revolution of 2011 were both called 'The Twitter Revolutions' and 'Revolution 2.0' by some commentators in the mainstream media, for example Sutter (2011). Twitter were even by some given credit for making the revolutions possible. A survey carried out at the Dubai School of Governance showed that a majority of Egyptians and Tunisians found that social media had been an important tool in organizing protests, and that most protest events organized on Facebook actually took place. (Mourtada & Fadi, 2011)

To the best of my knowledge there has not been any comprehensive studies on media reporting of the Arab spring and the subsequent war in Syria. There have been several commentaries and columns written by scholars but I have not been able to find any larger, comprehensive studies especially not any examining the social media and internet aspect in the news reporting. The few studies that I have been able to find appear to focus mainly on how social media have been used in organizing protests or for personal communication between protesters - see for example Bruns, Highfield and Burgess (2013). This study does not examine other aspects. There has also been at least one survey made that study how Tunisian locals view that their revolution has been called a social media revolution in the west. (Esseghaier, 2013). Being a survey it only shows opinions, however, and cannot be used to say anything about how the conflict has been framed and presented in the news reporting.

I think this shortage of studies is enough reason to carry out further research to examine whether social media news reporting and the usage of social media sources has changed news reporting in a case where social media has been given prominent significance in the discourse. After reading a couple of articles I noticed that several different articles in different newspapers were practically the same due to being based on the same news agency cable. I was concerning myself with which material the articles were based on, and the fact that a large portion of articles were identical means that news agencies seemed to be given large power to determine how the reporting were to be framed. Thus, I also decided to investigate how many of the articles were based on news agency material, and if they were, on which agencies.

Focus has been on the online reporting of four different newspapers based in different locations. The newspapers that have been studied are Asharq Al-Awsat (Based in London but owned by a member of the royal family of Saudi Arabia and mainly distributed in the Arabic speaking world, in Arabic/English), New York Times (American, Independent, in English), Dagens Nyheter (Swedish, Independent, in Swedish) and China Daily (Chinese, nominally state owned, in English).

### **2.3 Research questions**

**The problem is approached in four ways, formulated here as research questions:**

How many of the articles concerning the conflicts from four different newspaper web sites are based on news agency material and how has such material been used?

Has social media sources, information etc. been used in the news reporting in any of the four newspapers, and if yes, how has it been used?

Is there a discernable difference between the reporting in China Daily and the New York Times, considering Chinese and American political stances?

What does my findings tell me about the current media landscape?

## 3 Theory

*This chapter attempts to give an overview of the current research available on the subject. It outlines the theoretical frameworks, models and concepts that were deemed relevant and that are discussed in relation to the material. A sample of similar studies done earlier is also presented.*

### 3.1 Theoretical frameworks

There is a huge amount of different ways to study news reporting and its effects. Several theoretical and practical frameworks exist and how they are constructed differs largely depending on which epistemological<sup>1</sup> theoretical framework they are based on. Social constructionism is a theoretical framework that is based on the idea that an understanding of reality is not created by a person on his own, but instead in conjunction with other people, media, society as a whole etc. It is a common view in the social and humanistic sciences. (Dilthey & Betanzos, 1988) From social constructionism several interesting ways to look at media and media effects have emerged.

Generally speaking there are three concepts or theories that are common when studying media effects. One such theory is agenda-setting. It has its roots in a study done by Maxwell McCombs & Donald Shaw in the 1960's. They asked a sample of local voters which political issues they thought were the most important and compared their answers with which issues media had given the most attention. They found a strong correlation and came to the conclusion that the way media sets the agenda affects which issues people think are important (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). From this study agenda-setting as a theory of the processes of media effects has emerged. However, agenda-setting only covers one aspect of the effects of news reporting. The original agenda-setting study shows little more than that the agenda-setting of political issues indeed **does** affect the social reality of the public, but it offers little insight into how. If one aspect of news reporting can affect the social reality of the public it is relatively safe to assume that it could also affect the public in other ways. Thus, a more comprehensive theory is required as a complementation. Framing theory is one such theory.

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<sup>1</sup>Epistemology: philosophy concerning the question of what knowledge is and how it is formed, "theory of knowledge" (Dilthey & Betanzos, 1988)

The theoretical concept of “framing” is defined by one of the scientist who has done a lot of work defining the concept, Robert M. Entman, as:

“[...] [selecting] some aspects of a perceived reality and [making] them salient.”

(Entman, 1993, p52)

In other words framing is the act of selecting a part of reality and giving it extra attention or giving attention to certain connections between different parts of reality that promotes them being interpreted in a certain way. Framing can be done in different ways: newspapers could, for example, decide to focus on one particular aspect of a conflict/problem or decide to focus on one side of a conflict. It is important to note that it does not have to be done intentionally. Entman also states that full “frames” fulfils four distinct functions: they define what the ‘problem’ is, they analyse the cause, they make a moral judgment and they recommend a solution. News coverage often fill all of these recognizable functions. (Entman, 2007)

Entman states that if you are to study framing you have to look for patterns. A story that is framed in a certain way does not have any meaning on its own, but we can look for a pattern of systematically framing of certain stories in a certain way. (Entman, 2007)

Framing affects the audience or ‘receiver’ by selecting and making salient those parts of reality that has an effect on the audience (either emotionally or cognitively). This is called priming, and a frame that fills this function is called a ‘prime.’ (Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1996). Primings is an independent concept on its own with roots in cognitive psychology. Basically it implies that one thought activates another thought. If we were to relate priming to framing and agenda-setting we could say that if news reporting has focused on mainly terrorism frames in the reporting of, say, Iraq, audience members thinking about Iraq would ‘activate’ thoughts of terrorism.

Priming is sometimes studied on its own, and all these concepts can be used by themselves but they can also be used in conjunction with each other.

### **3.2 Different concepts or an evolution?**

Entman has claimed that agenda-setting can be studied as a part of framing, since agenda-setting can be seen as the first of the four functions of priming: problem-defining. (Entman, 2007). There is in fact an ongoing discussion amongst scholars on how researchers should treat the differences between agenda setting and framing, and whether or not they should be treated as being parts of one larger model. McCombs (2004), for example, has argued that framing is a merely an evolution of agenda-setting and labelled framing a form of “second-level agenda setting”, where the attitude of the public is changed by media making some aspects of an issue more salient.

In contrast, some scholars insist there is indeed an important difference between agenda setting and framing.

“Agenda setting [sic] looks on story selection as a determinant of public perceptions of issue importance and, indirectly through priming, evaluations of political leaders. Framing focuses not on which topics or issues are selected for coverage by the news media, but instead on the particular ways those issues are presented.” (Price, Tewksbury & Powers, 1997, p. 184)

Price, Tewksbury and Powers (1997) make the distinction between accessibility and applicability effects which they say is important to make. They argue that agenda-setting works by making issues more accessible to people, while framing, they say, refer to a connection between issues that an audience accepts is connected after being exposed to them.

The scholarly debate has still not been resolved and will not be solved here so I will not dwell further on the subject, but it is important to note that there is an ongoing discussion.

### **3.3 Source usage within the theoretical frameworks**

My intention was to study the sources used in news, and this raises the question of how source usage is related to the theoretical frameworks. There are different themes in agenda-setting theory concerning different dependencies and links. The approach mentioned above being the classical one – public agenda setting - there is also policy agenda setting, or “agenda building”. Studying “Agenda building” involves - rather than examining the processes involved in media influence on the public - examining the processes involved in the selection of which agenda that gets presented in news reporting. (Kosicki, 1993) Seeing, as mentioned above, news sources has long been seen as an im-

portant part in how journalists choose which news are presented and how, this makes source usage an integral part of agenda building.

Similarly, scholars involved with framing theory have worked with identifying the processes that influence which frames get primed and have coined the term “frame building” to explain them. (Scheufele, 1999) Thus, regardless of whether you are a proponent of agenda-setting or framing source usage can be, according to scholars, seen as part of both frameworks and can be approached in a more or less identical way.

### **3.4 Web 2.0 and media convergence culture**

Framing and agenda-setting are both rather old theoretical concepts. As mentioned there is however a new media landscape, and neither framing- nor agenda-setting theory relate very much to this fact. There is however an emergence of theories explaining the connections and effects of the new media landscape and the increased availability of all types of media online. Most relevant here is perhaps the Web 2.0 discourse and convergence culture.

Web 2.0 is more or less a pseudo-scientific term, having been popularized by Tim O’Reilly who is not a scientist but rather a technology-consultant. Nevertheless the term is often used to describe “a new version of the web”, where instead of users being receivers of information they are encouraged to create it, making the web a platform for public participation. (TechTerms.com, 2008)

More scientific is the theoretical concept of convergence and convergence culture. Convergence is a technological term which describes the tendency of different telecommunication technologies, media, etc. to move to a single network. A somewhat simplified example is the internet, which now offers television broadcasts, radio broadcast, telephone services, written news and a number of other services previously available through different technologies and networks. Convergence culture is a theoretical concept which attempts to explain how this convergence of media technology affects media culture, media consumers and media producers. (Jenkins & Deuze, 2008)

Henry Jenkins and Mark Deuze, American scholars, argue that convergence culture is rapidly destabilizing the ways corporate media try to predict and control the way we consume media.

“Consumers are now demanding the right to participate and this becomes another destabilizing force that threatens consolidation, standardization, and rationalization. Whatever we do with our media – what we read, watch, listen to, participate in, create, or use – pushes well beyond what is predicted, produced, or programmed by corporate media organizations.”

(Jenkins & Deuze, 2008, p9)

The most important notions of convergence culture for this study is - I feel - the fact that new media and access by average people to content-distribution networks appears to alter the way we have to look at the entire media culture, and this includes the way news are produced. The current situation has been termed a “hybrid media ecology”, where more or less everyone with access to the web has the power to produce and distribute content. (Yochai, 2006)

### **3.5 Relevant studies**

As mentioned earlier, a number of studies of the framing of particular conflicts and events have been done. Jin Yang (2003), for example, did an analysis of American and Chinese media reporting of NATO bombings during the Kosovo War. The Kosovo War study has been chosen and is relevant and interesting here because the Kosovo conflict shares certain traits with the Arab Spring and the conflicts in Syria. Generally these conflicts started as uprisings that escalated to (more or less) full-scale civil war, with rebel forces at least initially, receiving moral and/or practical support from the west. In the Kosovo case this support included heavy armed support and airstrikes from NATO.

Yang analysed a number of variables, dividing articles after their general subject (refugees, ethnic cleansing etc.) He then examined how many articles that treated the different subjects and how they were worded. He found that Chinese media, for example, in principle completely lacked articles dealing with the subject ‘ethnic cleansing’, while American media had several such articles. He also compared how the articles were written and found that Chinese media often used terms such as “brutal bombings” while American media often focused on “humanistic aid”. He also analysed sources used and found that all studied media outlets relied mainly on sources connected to their respective national governments. He found that American media used more local sources than Chinese, but nevertheless most of the sources they used were from within the American government. (Yang, 2003)

Another earlier study that examined the usage of sources in news reporting was done by Stephen Reese, August Grant and Lucig Danielian (1994) who studied source usage in American TV news-shows. They made similar findings to Yang, and summarized them with:

‘By relying on a common and often narrow network of sources [...] the news media contribute to [a] systematic convergence on the conventional wisdom, the largely unquestioned consensus views held by journalists, power-holders and many audience members’ (Reese, Grant, & Danielian, 1994, p85)

Another study on a relevant conflict is a study by Seow Ting Lee, Crispin C. Maslog and Hun Shik Kim (2006). One part of their study focused on the framing of the Iraq War in eight newspapers from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Philippines. They found that articles written by local correspondents more often focused on peacekeeping and similar “peace”-aspects than stories based on foreign news agency sources. This reinforces the hypothesis that the availability of local sources could impact the framing of a conflict.

The situation with a number of articles based wholly on news agency material gives relevance to the question of how sources are used by news agencies. A study by Beverly Horvit (2006) examined source usage in cables relating to the US-Iraq war of 2003. Cables were examined from AP, AFP, Reuters, Xinhua (the official Chinese state agency), IPS (a Latin-American news agency) and ITAR-TASS (a Russian news agency) and she found that:

“US official sources were cited most frequently by all agencies except IPS and ITAR-TASS, which showed a nationalistic bias in its sourcing. Neither the western news agencies nor Xinhua’s sourcing patterns were nationalistic, and their coverage was more balanced than IPS and ITAR-TASS. However, the non-western news agencies presented significantly more non-western viewpoints in their coverage of the pre-war debate.” (Horvit, 2006, p. 427)

Lastly, studies on social media in news reporting are harder to come by. One study by Haewoon Kwak, Changhyun Lee, Hosung Park and Sue Moon (2010) examined the entire Twitter site examining 106 million tweets and over 4000 topics. They found that over 85 percent of topics in tweets were headline news. There is to my knowledge, however, no study examining how social media material and statements have been used in the “classic” news reporting.

## 4 Method

*This chapter outlines the methodology of the study. Population composition, sample sizes and other material-related choices are motivated. Reliability and validity is discussed in the “methodology discussion” subchapter.*

This study used quantitative content analysis since, as mentioned earlier, according to Entman (2007) studying framing requires the study of frequency. It is probably possible to examine agenda-setting and framing with qualitative content analysis but this does not seem to be common practice - of all studies I have read practically all have had a quantitative approach or a mainly quantitative approach with some qualitative aspects. For these two reasons quantitative content analysis were chosen.

The study was divided into three parts with different sample sizes, all based on the same population. News agency usage was studied in a subsample of 270 articles. A comparison between China Daily and the New York Times was performed on a 200 article subsample. Social media references, however, was examined in the entire sample. This chapter further outlines how the population and subsamples was obtained.

### 4.1 Choice of newspapers

The choice of which news outlets to study was strategic. Each were chosen according to a number of criteria. As mentioned earlier studies have shown that news reporting tends to rely on sources supporting the view of the government of the country in which the news outlet is based. (Alexseev & Bennett, 1995, Reese et al, 1994 or Yang 2003) This naturally affects news reporting and thus geographic location is relevant in selecting which news outlets to study since different governments view the conflict in a different lights and the potential impact this has on reporting in their respective countries is interesting to study. Several countries were selected for the study. Sweden was selected due to being my native country and a small country that is not that often studied. China and the United States were selected, being two of the world’s most populated nations (thus having lasting relevance from that reason alone) but also due to being countries which often finds themselves being ideological opposites. There is also an interesting situation where one nation prides itself largely on its safeguarding of the freedom of expression and one nation utilizing more governmental control in regards to its news media.

Lastly, I wanted a newspaper from a local Middle Eastern country. However, in selecting a middle-eastern country several factors had to be considered. For one, I required a newspaper that is available in English and online. This disqualifies most local Arabic newspapers since most does not have an online presence nor are available in English. Thus, one of the larger pan Arabic newspapers had to be selected. The chosen papers were Asharq Al-Awsat, New York Times, Dagens Nyheter and China Daily. These newspapers are detailed below:

**Asharq Al-Awsat (nominally state-owned)** is a popular Arabic language newspaper, with a circulation of 240 000. It is NOT the leading Arab language newspaper by circulation with for example Al-Ahram, which is an Egyptian daily print newspaper owned largely by the Egyptian state, having a far larger circulation of 900.000. Numbers according to Allied Media Corp which is an international advertising agency that handles advertising in, amongst others, Arab language newspapers (Allied Media Corp). Al-Ahram could not be used in this study, however, since they have an insufficient article database on their website. For that reason Asharq Al-Awsat has been selected instead, being one of the largest Arab language daily print newspapers and having a good database available in English online. Asharq Al-Awsat is owned by a member of the Saudi royal family and, while based in London and not technically “state owned”, this fact needs to be mentioned. (Allied Media Corp)

**New York Times (independent)** is an American daily print newspaper. It is the largest daily newspaper by circulation in the United States. It had a print circulation of 2.2 million in March 2013, according to the Alliance for Audited Media, which is a non-profit umbrella organization for advertisers. (Alliance for Audited Media). At an organizational level, New York Times is independent from political parties, being owned by a stock company which in turn is owned by different capital investment groups. (NASDAQ, 2013)

**Dagens Nyheter (independent)** is Sweden’s largest daily print newspaper, with a 2012 circulation of nearly 290,000 according to leading Swedish media analysis and advertising agency TS. (TS, 2013) At an organizational level, DN is independent from political parties, being owned largely by Swedish private media group Bonnier (DN).

**China Daily (nominally state-owned)** is not a leading newspaper in China by circulation with a circulation around merely 500,000 compared with leading newspaper Reference News who has a circulation of over 3.5 million or the official main state newspaper People’s Daily with a circulation of over 2.5 million. (Numbers quoted from Chinese media library organization Meihua, translated by

the Delegation of German Industry & Commerce in China (Delegation of German Industry & Commerce)) Despite their size, neither Reference News nor People's Daily are available in English and online and thus China Daily appears to be the best viable choice. China daily is not entirely state-owned but receives large subsidies from the Chinese state and is broadly understood as mostly presenting official ruling party policies. (Chinoy, 1999)

## **4.2 Population, sample size and selection**

When deciding sample size for content analysis it is sometimes hard to choose a number that is not completely arbitrary. There has however been research carried out on which sampling methods are best suited for the matter at hand. Stephen Lacy, Kay Robinson and Daniel Riffe (1995), for example, examined the best way to efficiently sample weekly newspapers for content analysis. They found that they could sample one issue from each month to effectively predict the content of the entire year. This method was further tested by Daniel Riffe, Stephen Lacy and Michael Drager (1996) who confirmed that a random issue of a daily newspaper from each month best appeared to represent the content of an entire year. Printed news are however different from online news. Xiaopeng Wang and Daniel Riffe (2010) examined whether the sampling method could also be used for internet news sites, and found no evidence that would point to the contrary. For that reason, that sampling method was used.

Following the logic that examining one random day per month would accurately represents the content of the entire year samples were taken from one random day per month. Taking into account that the conflicts had, at writing, been going on for roughly 36 months (December 2010 to Dec. 2013) this left 36 days from this period to be sampled. These days were randomly selected using [www.random.org](http://www.random.org), a website that randomized different kinds of data using atmospheric noise. It has been used in several peer-reviewed scientific studies, which are listed at their website.

All articles published on each day containing any the keywords "Syria, Tunisia, Egypt or Libya" were located. They were found by using the database search tools available on each newspaper's website.

A total of 559 relevant articles were found to have been published on the 36 days randomly selected from the time period December 2010 to December 2013. Of these, 97 were published in Asharq Al-Awsat, 139 in Dagens Nyheter, 159 in NY Times and 165 in China Daily.

### **4.3 Material selection and coding**

Material was collected differently for each part of the study. It is easiest to split the entire study into one part per research question, which has been done below. News agency reliance and categorization was investigated in different subsamples.

#### **4.3.1 News agency reliance**

To find out how news agency material had been used articles needed to be classified by which news agencies, if any, were referenced in the by-line. I ultimately decided to not go through all 559 articles due to time restraints, instead focusing on a subsample consisting of 50 percent of the original 559 articles. However, since there was an uneven number of articles from different newspapers I had to maintain proportions to not skew the balance. Since 97 articles had been published in Asharq Al-Awsat, I examined 50 percent of these, i.e. 49 (rounded from 48.5). 139 articles had been published in Dagens Nyheter, so 70 articles were examined from Dagens Nyheter (rounded from 69.5). Similarly, 80 articles were examined from the New York Times and 83 from China Daily. This left me with a total subsample of 282 articles. Some articles were sorted out for being irrelevant or just a picture page, and the final sample size ended up being 270 articles. All articles were randomly selected, again using random.org.

#### **4.3.2 Social media/internet references**

Another important aspect of the study is how social media and web material have been used in the news reporting. To get an as comprehensive view as possible this was analysed in the entire original 559 article sample using word-searching software.

The software went through the entire population for references to Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, 'online', 'web', Qzone<sup>2</sup>, Sina Weibo<sup>3</sup>, 'blog', and 'blogger'.

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<sup>2</sup> Popular Chinese social media site

<sup>3</sup> Another popular Chinese social media site

These keywords were selected since I felt they would capture most – if not all – online references. Qzone and Sina Weibo – large Chinese social media sites – were included because I felt that since I was investigating Chinese media I had to include these sites, since Facebook and Twitter are blocked in China. Together Sina Weibo and Qzone had, according to 2013 statistics, almost 1.2 billion users. (Tech In Asia, 2013) Facebook and Twitter has closer to two billion users according to 2014 statistics. (Statistic Brain, 2014)

### **4.3.3 Categorization**

Since I wanted to find out whether or not there was any difference between the reporting in New York Times and China Daily I needed some way to classify articles in these newspapers. This was done by classifying the articles into predefined categories, and then comparing how many of each category that had been published in each newspaper. I felt that seeing which type of news they decided to publish would give me an overview on how they decided to frame the conflicts, and this seems to be standard procedure when doing quantitative content analysis, having been done in countless studies I have come across and having been mentioned in several textbooks - see for example Riffe, Lacy, & Fico (2005)

I did not want to concern myself with how many articles had been published in total with this part of the sample, since I felt it would not add anything to the data. Therefore another subsample of 100 articles in China Daily and another 100 in the New York Times were randomly selected. Several categories were selected and summarized into a code book mostly focusing on the different types of articles I thought beforehand could have been used to influence the reporting.

I ended up with several categories, listed below. The choices of categories are motivated and examples of articles from each category is given in the coding scheme which can be found as an appendix.

The categories used were **Civilian casualties, Islam/Islamism, Government concessions/changes, Chemical weapons, Country sending aid to rebels', Damage from NATO bombings, People stating support for Assad, Civilian casualties, Islam/Islamism, Government concessions/changes, Stating Russian position, Stating Chinese position, Stating Western position, Stating all positions and Stating Syrian government position**

I had several hypotheses before classifying articles. I hypothesized that China Daily would have more articles from the categories Stating Syrian regime position, People stating support for Assad, Islam/Islamism, Damage from NATO bombings, Stating Russian position, Stating Chinese position, Government concessions/changes and the New York Times having more articles from Stating Western position, Chemical weapons, Rebel need of equipment and Civilian Damage.

## **4.4 Methodology discussion**

### **4.4.1 Differences between Syria and the rest of the conflicts?**

I realize the war in Syria and the other conflicts falling under the umbrella term “Arab Spring” is somewhat different. There are scholarly differences between an insurgency, a revolution and a civil war but I am not conversant in these distinctions, with them falling more within the scope of political science. The distinctions I found were in my opinion somewhat vague. In one case, the main difference set between civil war and insurgency was a certain number of deaths or troops involved (Singer, 1972). I felt that these differences did not affect the study I was going to make, a choice which could be debatable but that I nevertheless stand for.

### **4.4.2 Intercoder reliability**

The fact that there only was being one author presented a problem for certain portions of the data, most prominently the coding of articles by category. Being done by me alone, the coding of the category would become highly dependent on my interpretation and this would greatly reduce the significance of my data, greatly limiting any conclusions I could make. However, an associate was asked to code the articles using the same code book so that intercoder-reliability could be calculated using Klaus Krippendorff's Alpha. Krippendorff's Alpha is a measurement of how much several coders agree with each other. (Krippendorff, 2013) If there is a high agreement, one can be more certain that the coding has been done in a way that is statistically significant. According to Krippendorff, data should be discarded completely when its calculated agreement is less than 0,667. (Krippendorff, 2013) Krippendorff's alpha between the two different categorisations was calculated using a Krippendorff's alpha macro for SPSS available, at writing, from <http://www.afhayes.com/spss-sas-and-mplus-macros-and-code.html>. The resulting number was calculated to ~0,79.

Pearson's chi-squared was also calculated and is presented with the data; if you look at Table 3 you will find the formula  $\chi(1) = 32,088$ ,  $d.f = 16$ ,  $p = 0.01$  at the bottom. These numbers are the results of a chi-squared calculation. Pearson's chi-squared is used to test actual, observed results with results that would be expected if there were no differences at all between categories (in this case between newspapers) (Corder & Foreman, 2009) The interesting value here is the p-value; 0.01. This would be interpreted as the differences between variables having a one percent chance of being due to chance. The critical level is five percent, i.e. if a calculated p-value is greater than 0.05 the chance is seen as being too high that differences are due to chance. Since the calculated p-value here is showing a one percent chance of differences between variables being due to chance this is not a problem, and we can with some certainty conclude that there does indeed seem to be statistically significant differences between the newspapers. The calculation was done using the built in chi-squared functionality of SPSS.

I do not believe the lack of other coders affect any data other than categorization, since it does not involve interpretation. Either an article is based on a news agency cable or it is not, and either an article contains a reference to online media or it does not. Alpha or Chi-squared was not calculated for the little amount of coding performed on the social media results, since the amount of data was so small it is more or less statistically insignificant regardless.

#### **4.4.3 Validity and reliability**

There are however other possible sources of error. For one, there is a possibility that not all articles were included in the original sample, since they were manually located using websites' search and database tools using keywords. Although I feel that I got at least a large percentage by using broad keywords, I have no way of knowing for sure. The actual implication this has on my findings, however, should be small and insignificant considering that I do not use the total number of articles to draw conclusions.

I also noticed – too late in the process for it to be undone – that I had made an unfortunate mistake while getting the articles that was to constitute my sample. In one case, there had been articles taken from the same day more than once which means that out of 36 months at least one is not represented. I don't think this has a huge impact on the generalizable results, since it has largely been done

correctly and the loss of reliability from this relatively minor mistake should not, generally, be a problem. It should however be noted.

Social media references were found in the source material by using computer software to search all the articles, since the sample was 559. There is always the possibility of some occurrences not being picked up, but I cannot see any reason why this should have happened in any significant way. Facebook, Twitter etc. have the advantage of being names and as such they do not have different word forms and thus searching for them should include every occurrence, regardless of grammatical use. I did not use case-sensitive searching. Blog was searched for using the word 'blog' instead of using the names of different blogging platforms, since the word 'blog' simply are how blogs are most often, in my opinion, referred to.

Purely technically, there should not be any sources of error since computed word-searching is a simple procedure. I had grabbed every article as a pdf and used the "find-in-files" functionality of Adobe Reader to basically check every article, word for word, and match them against my keywords. I would claim that there is no risk that the software would miss anything, making this method more reliable than searching manually. Adobe Reader is commercial and highly professional software. The only way references could be missed in my opinion was if they somehow were not picked up by my keywords, but I feel that my keywords were so general that this should not be the case.

## 5 Results

*This chapter presents and summarizes the findings of my research.*

### 5.1 News agency reliance in numbers

**Table 1: Reliance on news agency material per newspaper (270 article subsample)**

Articles based on	Newspaper			
	DN	NY Times	China Daily	Al-Awsat
No agency	25% (17)	96% (68)	7% (6)	14% (7)
AP	0% (0)	3% (2)	1% (1)	22% (11)
AFP	0% (0)	0% (0)	1% (1)	18% (9)
Reuters	0% (0)	1% (1)	4% (3)	45% (22)
TT	45% (21)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Xinhua	0% (0)	0% (0)	51% (41)	0% (0)
Unspecified agencies*	0% (0)	0% (0)	24% (19)	0% (0)
Mixed agencies**	30% (21)	0% (0)	12% (10)	0% (0)
<b>Total (n = 270)</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>49</b>

\*In China Daily the individual agencies are in many cases not named, with these articles instead just having the word “Agencies” in the by-line.

\*\* In DN and China Daily more than one agency is sometimes referenced. For example, several DN articles reference TT + AP. Several China Daily articles reference, for example, Xinhua + Reuters. All articles with these mixed references fall within ‘Mixed agencies’.

The included agencies are all that were referenced in the sample. TT is an independent (Swedish) agency. Xinhua is the official Chinese state agency. AFP, AP and Reuters are the three largest independent news agencies in the world.

As can be seen in the table above, there was an overwhelming reliance on news agency material by all newspapers, except one – New York Times, having 96 percent of articles with no reference to news agencies in the by-line, or in other words having four percent of articles based on news agency material. It is followed by Dagens Nyheter, which has 75 percent of their articles based on news agencies, Asharq Al-Awsat with 86 percent and China Daily with 93 percent.

## 5.2 News agency usage

The articles published on the websites of the newspapers that are based on news agency cables appears to be in many cases identical with the original cables published by the news agencies. For example, article “Syrian town deserted, burnt after clashes” published by Asharq Al-Awsat is word-by-word identical with the original cable by Reuters, also available online. Even the headline is identical to the original cable headline. Similarly, the China Daily article “Calm in Cairo after day of protests” is also identical with the cable it is based on, and a quick search online reveals it has been published in the same form on several other news sites. The same appears to be true in several of DN’s articles. For example, the article “Våld hindrar observatörer i Syrien”, based on a TT cable, has also been published by other Swedish newspaper Svenska Dagbladet with an identical headline and with identical body text.

Due to the large percentage of articles in China Daily, Asharq Al-Awsat and DN based on news agency materials, I assume that in their cases many different types of articles are based on news agency materials. However, in the NY Times articles based on news agency material were mostly shorter briefs. For example the article “Syria: Diplomatic pressure mounts” - based on an AP cable - is just a few paragraphs long. Interestingly, it does not seem to use the original cable headline. I could not find any other results online for “Syria: Diplomatic pressure mounts”. Searching for a paragraph from the article, however, reveals that it has been published with other headlines, such as “US derides Syria for blaming terrorist” (Yahoo News), which begins word-by-word exactly like the NY Times article, but is more than three times as long. Similarly, the article “Egypt: Train Crash Kills 19 Conscripts, **Leading to Antigovernment Protests**” also based on AP material is also only a couple of paragraphs long. Note however the part of the headline marked here in bold. Interestingly enough, the same event has been written about on several other online news outlets with the headers ““Egypt train crash kills 19, injures more than 100” (FOX News), “At least 19 dead, more than 100 injured in Egypt train derailment” (Russia Today) and so forth. Neither of these two articles mentions any protests, but both the FOX article and the Russia Today article is based on AP material, which means we have one event, three articles based on material from the same agency but only one article that mentions anti-governmental protests.

### 5.3 Social media references

559 articles were searched for social media and internet references using computer word-processing software. There were not particularly many references, however, as can be seen in the following table:

**Table 2: Articles containing references to any keyword per newspaper (559 article sample)**

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Articles mentioning any keyword (in % of total sample)</b>
NY Times	9 (1.6%)
Asharq Al-Awsat	5 (0.9 %)
China Daily	5 (0.9 %)
DN	2 (0.4 %)
<b>Total articles (n = 559)</b>	<b>21 (4%)</b>

In total, any of the previously specified keywords were only mentioned in merely four percent of articles, or in 21 articles.

In the articles where social media was referenced, it was used in the following ways:

**Table 3: Usages of social media material**

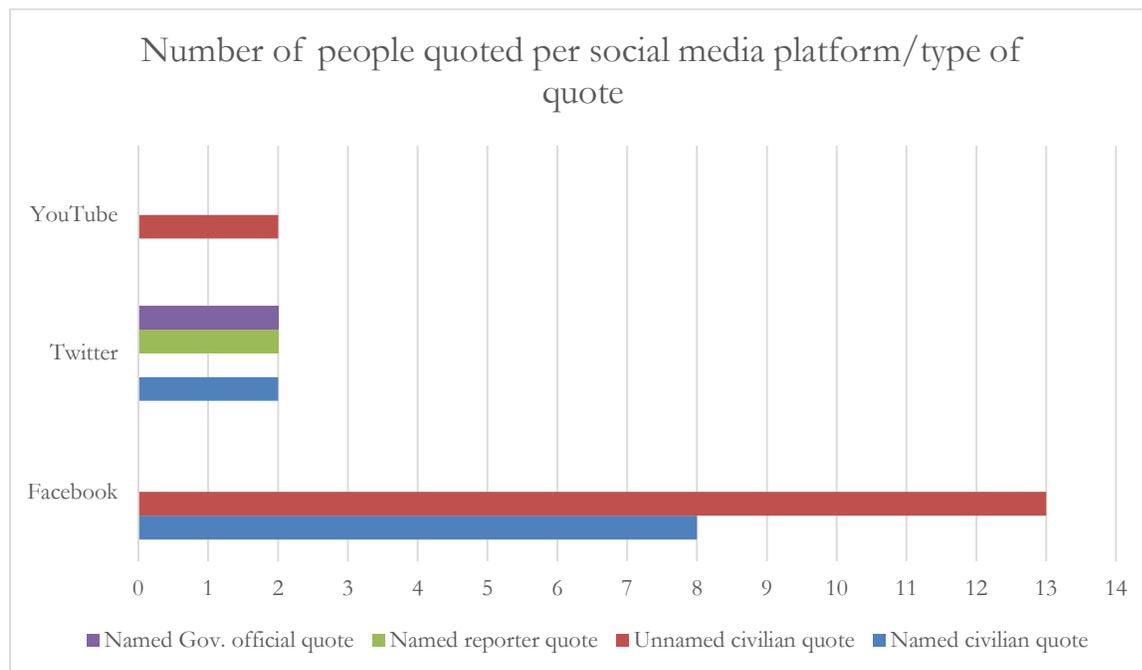
<b>Usage</b>	<b>Number of article(s) where usage appears</b>
Named and unnamed quotes/calls for protests from protesters/civilians	9
Mentions protestor Facebook group, state number of “likes”	4
General mentions that social media sites are restricted in country	3
Mentions YouTube video	2
Reporter statements posted on Twitter	2
Official government statements posted on Twitter	2
Quotes resignation statement from defector posted online	1
Mentions online petition and list number of signatures	1

Note: The number of articles here is greater than the total number of articles with social media references since more than one usage can appear in one article.

**Table 4: Number of articles mentioning each social media platform per newspaper**

	Asharq Al-Awsat	DN	NY Times	China Daily	All newspapers
Twitter	1	1	7	2	11
Facebook	3	0	4	3	9
YouTube	0	0	2	1	3
Blog(s)	1	0	0	0	1
Qzone	0	0	0	0	0
Sina Weibo	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>24</b>

As the table shows, Twitter and Facebook were the most mentioned social media sites. There was one article mentioning blogs, and three mentioning YouTube. There were no mention of Qzone or Sina Weibo at all.



**Figure 1: Number of people quoted per social media platform/type of quote**

A number of people were quoted in the articles. I’ve made an distinction between named quotes (i.e. everyone quoted with full name, such as “Karam al-Arabi” who is/was a member of a revolution Facebook group and who has been quoted in one article) and unnamed quotes (i.e. everyone quoted as “one Facebook group member” or similar). Reporters are also quoted from Twitter on two cases, they are quoted with full name in both cases. Two government officials were quoted – also from

Twitter - also both with full name. (One of them is for example British foreign secretary William Hague and he is quoted as such.)

## 5.4 Category and choice of news

As stated differences between China Daily and New York Times were examined, being the ones I deemed most likely to have notable differences.

100 articles from each newspaper was coded by categories mentioned in the methodology chapter.

**Table 5: Number of articles per category and newspaper (200 article subsample)**

Category	New York Times	China Daily	Total (n = 200)
Civilian casualties	5	7	12
Rebel success	4	4	8
Islam/Islamism	6	3	9
Government concessions	0	4	4
Chemical gas	5	1	6
Countries aiding rebels	2	1	3
Rebel need of equipment	2	0	2
Civilian damage from NATO bombings	0	3	3
Stating Russian. position	3	4	7
Stating Chinese position	1	8	9
Stating western position	6	9	15
Stating several positions	1	1	2
Stating Syrian gov. position	0	3	3
People stating support for Assad	0	2	2
Other	65	50	115
	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>200</b>

$$\chi(1) = 32,088, d.f = 16, p = 0.01. \alpha (2 \text{ coders}) = 0,79^4$$

Categories that are not represented in the table are those categories into which no articles were coded, and thus were not found to be represented in the sample.

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<sup>4</sup> For an explanation of these numbers, see methodology discussion in 'Method' chapter.

China Daily did have more articles stating Syrian Government Position.

China Daily also had more article concerning civilian damage from NATO bombings, with for example one China Daily article mentioning damage done to the Democratic People's Republic of Korean (North Korea) embassy by NATO bombings. China Daily also had more articles with people stating support for Assad. These articles had headlines like "Syrians hold festival in support of president" and "Iran's new president terms Syria as 'brother' country".

Articles concerning Islam and Islamist topics appeared six times in the New York Times and three in China Daily, which was not in line with my hypothesis. New York Times did have more articles concerning chemical weapons, with five articles in total and China Daily merely having one, titled "Assad agrees to hand over chemical weapons". They also did have more articles concerning rebel need of equipment, with 2 articles - "Inferior Arms Hobble Rebels in Libya War", and "Old, Homemade or Modified Weapons Used by Libyan Rebels" - versus none in China Daily. The New York Times did however NOT have more articles concerning civilian damage, with China Daily having five and they having four.

China Daily had more articles stating a western government position than the New York Times, for example in the China Daily article "Obama vows to explore Russian offer on Syria". Russian views were presented relatively evenly, with three such articles in New York Times and four in China Daily. One example of such an article is the China Daily article "Russia won't recognize Libyan rebels".

## 6 Discussion

### 6.1 Summary & Conclusions

*In the beginning of research I posed four different research questions. In this chapter I return to the questions and summarize the main points of my findings. One research question is answered per sub-chapter, and the main points are summarized in the first paragraphs of each chapters.*

### 6.2 News agency usage

**How many of the articles concerning the conflicts from four different newspaper web sites are based on news agency material and how has such material been used?**

There was a huge reliance on news agency material by all newspapers except the NY Times, which had only four percent of articles based on news agency material. Many articles based on news agency material were in fact unedited news agency cables which indicates that news agency reliance in many cases leaves the framing of news in the hands of the news agency. In some cases, however, news agency cables were edited in a way that could change the way they frame an event. Thus I would argue that it still appears that the individual newspapers could frame news even when relying on news agency material, by for example changing headlines and choosing which cables to publish.

One spontaneous hypothesis I had is that differences in the plain number of articles relying on agency material between the New York Times and the other newspapers could be due to the New York Times and the others utilizing their websites differently (and allocating different resources to them). On several manually checked New York Times articles online there is a statement saying that the particular article has been published in the print version. Such information does not exist on any of other newspapers and thus it's impossible to assume that the news published online and in the print versions of the other newspapers are the same. There are studies that has shown that the difference between print and online news is not significant. In one study, for example, the articles were found to be content-wise exactly the same 96 percent of the time (Smith, 2005). If this is indeed true it would mean that this does not explain the differences between newspapers, and something else must be the cause. Resources available to each newspaper could be one reason, with New York Times having – one would assume – more reporters available to produce original content than, for example, DN with DN being forced to use more news agency material to keep up with the global

news flow. TT has a partnership with other agencies, which means that TT cables could very well be based on, for example, AP cables. (TT, 2014)

I would argue that heavy reliance on news agency material would imply that the framing of the content of the text is largely (although nowhere near entirely) in the hands of the news agencies rather than in the hands of the individual newspapers. This implies that comparing content between individual newspapers becomes less relevant since newspapers themselves do not actually produce news, they merely pass it forward.

If we return to the quote summarizing the findings of Reese et al (1994, p85):

‘By relying on a common and often narrow network of sources [...] the news media contribute to [a] systematic convergence on the conventional wisdom, the largely unquestioned consensus views held by journalists, power-holders and many audience members’

This statement still appears to hold true nearly 20 years later - although it has perhaps been given another dimension. As my findings show, three out of four studied newspapers indeed relied on a narrow set of sources (news agencies), which, in turn, relies on sources of its own. It should be noted that I have no numbers for news agency usage earlier and do not know whether or not this has been occurring to the same extent previously. It could be hypothesized, though, that online news in its more rapid nature requires newspapers to rely more on news agency cables if they cannot provide news as fast as is required by readers.

When studying source usage/framing, and considering the reliance on news agency material, what really becomes interesting is the source usage by the news agencies themselves and which news agencies are used, since they are the ones in many cases actually producing the news. Take for example China Daily in my 270 article sample with a news agency reliance of 93 percent. 50 percent of the articles based on news agency material were based on Xinhua cables and the rest were based on other western news agencies. According to Horvit’s (2006) study mentioned earlier Xinhua previously have relied to a large extent on US official sources. These two facts combined show an enormous dominance of the west in international news.

I would however – in contrast to Horvit’s findings - argue that Xinhua frames the reporting in way favouring the Chinese position when there is more of a Chinese government stake in a conflict, which my comparison between China Daily and New York Times indicated. This would explain the

differences between our findings. The sources used by the cables in the reporting of such a conflict would have to be studied more extensively for that hypothesis to be tested, however, so it remains largely untested.

### **6.3 Social media in news reporting**

**Has social media sources, information etc. been used in the news reporting in any of the four newspapers, and if yes, how has it been used?**

Social media sources has indeed been used in the reporting but in a small number of articles (4 percent of articles, or 21 of 559). When it has been used it appears to mainly have been used as a tool to gather opinion, not facts. There is a great availability of news material on social media, but I feel that social media sources is not currently viewed by media organization as having enough credibility to be used publically as a source in international news reporting, which is understandable.

When social media material was used for hard facts those facts all came from official government Twitter accounts. This was only done two times in the sample material. Generally speaking social media material was used only as a source of civilian commentary, which is very much in line with the convergence culture concept and Web 2.0 since the discussions there have all been about audience participation. In several articles social media material appears to have been used to give a “personal touch” – a personal opinion - to an article when, one would assume, talking to civilians and people affected were difficult. It is also often used to show popular support. A revolutionary Facebook group with a large number of likes has this number of likes listed in a news article, which gives a sense that there is large popular support for a movement, for example.

Perhaps the reason for a low amount of social media fact usage is actually stated in one of the articles, namely “Syrian city under siege as UN urges action”. In the article it is stated that social media information is “an important source of information” but that it is “impossible to independently verify claims making it an unreliable news source”. It is also possible that social media facts are used as an unstated source, not stated due to the fact that it is associated with an unreliable stigma. It is impossible in many articles to know where a statement from a person has been taken from and it is often not specified, so no conclusions can be made.

The fact that New York Times had nearly twice as many social media references than any other news outlet is somewhat interesting. Perhaps there is some connection to them not relying that much on news agency material, since the case could be made that social media sources is a way to easily get material for news without having as many journalists on the ground. Writing an article about a Facebook group takes minimal research, resources and effort. The basis for this hypothesis is however incidental, at best.

Also, the fact that a few persons has been quoted from Facebook with full name can be discussed from a moral perspective. Such quoting appeared in articles published in both China Daily and the New York Times. I feel this could be problematic, since posting a dissenting opinion on Facebook and subsequently having it becoming international news is, when you are living in a repressive regime, not something that always would be in your best interest.

There has been a ruling by the UK Press Complaints Commission<sup>5</sup> that ruled that Tweet's are not private and are free to publish in news, with or without name. (Baskerville v. Daily Mail, 2011) The fact that there has at all been such a ruling does, in contrast to my findings, indicate that there is growing amount of social media material used in news reporting.

I would like to return to what Jenkins & Deuze said about the convergence culture.

“Consumers are now demanding the right to participate and this becomes another destabilizing force that threatens consolidation, standardization, and rationalization. Whatever we do with our media – what we read, watch, listen to, participate in, create, or use – pushes well beyond what is predicted, produced, or programmed by corporate media organizations.”

(Jenkins & Deuze, 2008, p9)

I would argue that my findings actually confirm this notion, even though the number of social media references are not that many. Because there *is* a large availability of sources on social media and news are spreading like wildfire within Facebook groups and on Twitter. Institutionally, however, news media are reluctant to include this data in their news reporting for understandable concerns about validity and also, perhaps, due to a bit of pride and sense of responsibility. Perhaps, however, their powers are diminishing due to a new media landscape. I think that if I had studied entertainment

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<sup>5</sup> A British organization that oversees and administers the British press' self-regulation.

news or some other field of news that is not scrutinized as much as international news I would find that social media and internet sources is used more frequently.

There has always been civilian commentary in news reporting, but the fact that this commentary now also can come from social media indicates that everything we do converges around the internet, and can converge on the internet – if the media institutions allows it to. News organizations still have the power to frame news as they wish, yes. The question is, perhaps, merely how long they can keep their power.

#### **6.4 Differences between New York Times and China Daily**

**Is there a discernable difference between the reporting in China Daily and the New York Times, considering Chinese and American political stances?**

There was several predictable differences between the reporting in China Daily and the NY Times, with China Daily for example having more articles stating, in different ways, support for the government of Assad and very few articles about the chemical weapons use. It appears, however, like there is more balance in the reporting in China Daily on the “rest” of the Arab spring than in the reporting on Syria, which I feel indicates that reporting in their case is more balanced when the Chinese government has less of an interest or political stake in an event.

As I mentioned in the methodology chapter I had several hypothesizes before classifying articles. If we look at the results, we see that several hypothesizes appear to be correct and that China Daily for example appears to have given more space to the Syrian government in their reporting, and has more articles where Syrian people get to express support for Assad, with “Syrians hold festival in support for president” being one interesting example. It is hard to imagine that articles appearing in the NY Times. Also, China Daily had only one article about chemical weapons in the sample, and that was an article that focused on Assad’s compliance with diplomatic pressure. (Article “Assad agrees to hand over chemical weapons”). The articles in China Daily explaining civilian damage from NATO bombings is also interesting. The fact that China Daily receives heavy subsidies from the Chinese ruling party and has in earlier research shown to be present news in line with official party policies (Chinoy, 1999) means that this is unsurprising findings and I feel I have no reasons to doubt my data.

The number of articles stating different government's position were the one category that behaved less predictable. The fact that China Daily had more articles stating western positions than New York Times is interesting. A quick overview of these articles however shows that nearly all (7 of 9) of these concern Libya and western government positions on these. This is interesting, because it would seem to indicate that the reporting in China Daily presents a Chinese-dominated framing more often when dealing with the government of Assad than when dealing with the government of Gadhafi, which supports the reasoning I presented earlier.

Nevertheless, the fact which cannot be ignored is that there were indeed differences. The fact that the individual newspapers appear to be performing an agenda-setting with news agencies having the power to perform their own agenda-setting shows an, I think, complex hierarchy of international news which makes news bias hard to study (and presumably equally hard for the audience to notice). The situation is further complicated by the fact that it is impossible to know when news agency material is used as-is, and when it has been edited. It is my opinion that it appears as it would be extremely easily to fabricate news, considering it is very hard to verify sources and the actuality of news agency material and how it has been used. We have as little power to verify what we read in a newspaper as we have to verify a Facebook post.

## **6.5 The current media landscape and future research**

### **What does my findings tell me about the current media landscape?**

I believe my findings offer several insights into the current media landscape, especially about power balance. Who has the power to set the agenda and build the framing? My findings indicate that in international news the power is mostly in the hands of news agencies, but also in the hands of individual newspapers if they so choose and have the resources (New York Times being the prime example of this). There also seems to be an increased power in the hands of the average person. Yochai (2006) talks about a "hybrid media ecology", where more or less everyone with access to the web has the power to produce and distribute content. I very much believe this to be true; the challenge is getting people to listen. Or, to put it in a metaphor: with everyone screaming, the one with the loudest voices reaches the most people. International news agencies have this reach more than anyone due to their traditional position, and thus they are still the biggest players. I find it impossible to discuss the situation without connecting to gatekeeping. Without introducing too much of another theoretical concept this late, gatekeeping is basically the notion that information goes through

several “gates” where it is filtered by different gate-keepers before reaching the public. (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

The news agencies can – and as my findings show they sometimes do - include the opinions of people from social media if they choose. The material is there, they have just chosen to deem it as unreliable. The problem with “peer-to-peer” news that there is too much data on the internet and we, as consumers, need someone (a “gatekeeper”) to sort it for us and for now that function is filled mainly, it appears, by international news agencies. There are problems with this situation as well since I believe the international news machine has become so large now that it is near impossible to get an insight into it. We wouldn’t trust “news” someone posts on their Facebook wall but we trust the cable by Reuters – the cable is more reliable, of course – but we have as little power to verify the Reuters cable as we have to verify the status update. And once one newspaper or agency publishes something, others often follow. There are interesting cases where social media rumours have become international news, most recently in the case of Jong Song-Thaek, Kim Jong-Un’s uncle, who was reported by several large newspapers as having been fed to dogs. This later turned out to have been a rumour started at a Chinese social media site. (Arkin, 2014).

The availability of news media on the internet makes it harder for media organizations to frame news as they please, as well. The China Daily framing of the Syrian War and Arab Spring – which was found to differ from the New York Times one - can easily be put in question by a reader who simply checks another news source. The fact that the Chinese Government restricts the internet is, from that perspective, understandable.

We have all these scholars examining the entire media landscape in different ways, utilizing different theoretical frameworks and drawing different conclusions. The problem, I would argue, is that media convergence has led to a situation where a larger effort is needed to look at the bigger picture. The media hierarchy is so complex and evolution is happening so fast scientists do not seem to have a good picture of how it operates. I think little attention should be given to individual newspapers when studying international news discourse, since such a large amount of power is in the hands of the news agencies. Focusing on them is, I would argue, more important.

It would also be interesting to study social media usage in other fields of news, especially in news which are not expected to focus as much on news agency material. Newspapers with less resources than the AFP, AP and the other big players but that nevertheless produce, for example, their nation-

al news by themselves might have more social media material. This too would be interesting to study.

I also think there is huge gains to be had from focusing more on computer-based content analysis, considering the cost benefits and huge amount of material that can be gone through with minimal effort and In my opinion minimal losses to scientific validity.

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## 8 Appendix

### 8.1 Categories used for coding of China Daily and New York Times articles

**Civilian casualties** This category included every article which mainly focused on civilian damages and casualties. One example is the New York Times article “Dozens Killed as Explosions Hit Syrian University”. This category was added because I hypothesized that one way to make the case for intervention would be to focus on civilian suffering and the need to help them.

**Islam/Islamism** Included every article focusing on Islam and labelling rebels as Islamists rather than rebels, for example China Daily article “Egypt's Islamists vow new protests”. This category was added because I hypothesized that one way to discredit the rebels and making the case for not helping them and intervening would be to focus more or less on the radical groups and Islamists versus not using this label.

**Government concessions/changes** This category included every article focusing on government concessions, for example announcements that elections would be held or that a minister had been fired. An example is the China Daily article “Syria's president allows multi-party system”. This was added because I hypothesized that one way to make the case for not intervening would be focusing on articles that showed that the governments being protested against are giving concessions and democratizing without military pressure from the outside.

**Chemical weapons** This included every article at all concerning the use of chemical weapons in the conflict, speculation and evidence etc. One example is the NY Times article “Forensic Details in U.N. Report Point to Assad's Use of Gas”. This was added because I hypothesized that China Daily, with China being a strong supporter of Assad, would have fewer articles concerning the use of chemical weapons than the New York Times.

**Country sending aid to rebels** This was not initially included, but was added because I found several such articles. An example from the sample is the NY Times article “France and Italy Will Also Send Advisers to Libya Rebels”

**Damage from NATO bombings** This category was not initially included, but was included after I found that China Daily actually had a few articles focusing on civilian damage from NATO-enforcement of the no-fly zone. This needed to be measured. One such article, for example, had the headline “DPRK embassy in Tripoli damaged by NATO raid”. (China Daily)

**People stating support for Assad** Included every article concerning someone stating support for Assad. One example from the sample is the China Daily article “Syrians hold festival in support of president” or the China Daily article “Iran's new president terms Syria as 'brother' country”

**Other** Every article that did not fall into any of the other predefined categories was placed here.

**Rebel success/government failure** This category included every article which mainly focused on rebel advances and successes in combat. The China Daily articles with headlines “Rebels seize Tripoli, inch toward victory” and “Rebels: Gadhafi forces pushed back from Misrata”, for example, fits into this category.

**Government success/rebel failure** This category then, in contrast to the one above, included every article which mainly focused on government successes in combat. It was added for balance. No such articles were found in the sample, however, so no example can be provided.

**Rebel need of equipment** Including every article focusing on a rebel lack of equipment. One example is the NY Times article “Inferior Arms Hobble Rebels in Libya War”, which states the rebel lack of weaponry.

These three above categories are related. They were all added since I hypothesized that one way the case for intervention would be to focus on the fact that rebels are failing and are needing help, and vice versa.

<b>Stating Russian position</b>	This category contains every article which mainly is based on Russian statements and largely presents a Russian view, for example the China Daily article “Russia won't recognize Libyan rebels”.
<b>Stating Chinese position</b>	Same as above, but instead presenting a largely Chinese view. Example: “China to recognize NTC when conditions are 'ripe” (China Daily)
<b>Stating Western position</b>	Same as above, but instead presenting a largely Western view. Example: “U.S. and Allies Weigh Options for No-Fly Zone Over Libya” (NY Times)
<b>Stating all positions</b>	Same as above, but based on statements from Western AND Russian or Chinese statements and views. Example: “U.S. and Russia Far Apart on Eve of Talks Over Syria” (NY Times)
<b>Stating Syrian government position</b>	This category included every article based on Syrian government sources and presenting a Syrian government view. One example is the China Daily article “Syria stresses commitment to US-Russian deal” which focuses mainly on Syrian government statements.

These four categories were added due to the fact that it is very relevant to examine how many articles stating the different government’s position on the conflicts were stated by the different newspapers.