

# TRUST AND MORAL WITNESSING IN AL JAZEERA'S COVERAGE OF THE PALESTINIAN GENOCIDE (2023–2024)

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the construction of trust and moral authority in Al Jazeera's coverage of the 2023–2024 Gaza conflict through analysis of 3,412 articles published between October 2023 and June 2024. The research addresses media's role in shaping perceptions of humanitarian crises within contexts of competing narratives and information warfare. The complexity arises from geopolitical constraints, algorithmic visibility challenges, and polarized audience reception of Israeli and Palestinian narratives. Using a concurrent mixed-methods approach combining quantitative tone analytics with qualitative thematic coding, this study reveals how linguistic choices and source selection contribute to epistemic trust and moral witnessing. Findings indicate that 67% of articles employed pro-Palestinian framing, with strong correlations between tone and perceived trustworthiness. The frequent use of empathy-related lexicon including terms like “children,” “home,” and “family,” alongside eyewitness accounts from journalists sharing risks with their subjects, cultivated moral authority. This positioning transforms media testimony into ethical witnessing that challenges dominant state narratives. Analytic credibility was ensured through methodological triangulation, cross-verifying quantitative patterns with qualitative themes while adhering to established frameworks of critical discourse analysis and media ethics. The study demonstrates how solidarity-based journalism constructs credibility through embodied risk and empathetic framing, offering insights for media ethics in conflict reporting.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The 2023–2024 Gaza conflict generated substantial international attention to media representations of Palestinian experiences. During this period, competing narratives about the nature of the violence emerged, with media outlets adopting positions that reflected broader geopolitical alignments. Al Jazeera's coverage became a significant source of information for audiences seeking perspectives from within the conflict zone, situating the network at the intersection of journalism, politics, and humanitarian discourse. This study examines how media institutions construct credibility and moral authority during periods of intense conflict and information warfare.

The complexity of media representation in the Palestinian context stems from historical, institutional, and international dimensions. Historical narratives spanning decades influence how events are interpreted and reported. Information flows are shaped by social systems both within and outside Palestine, with digital platforms and traditional media operating under distinct regulatory and political pressures. International frameworks for human rights and humanitarian law provide contested ground for evaluating competing claims, creating an environment where establishing trust in media reporting presents particular challenges.

This research investigates how Al Jazeera constructed trust and moral authority in its coverage of the 2023–2024 Gaza conflict through analysis of 3,412 articles published between October 2023 and June 2024. The study addresses three research questions informed by theories of epistemic trust (Fricker, 2007) and moral witnessing (Margalit, 2002; Zelizer, 2021). First, how does Al Jazeera establish credibility and authenticity in reporting Palestinian experiences? Second, which linguistic

and narrative strategies contribute to building epistemic trust with audiences? Third, how does institutional framing shape perceptions of moral authority and empathy in conflict reporting?

The theoretical framework integrates concepts from media studies, ethics, and discourse analysis. Epistemic trust theory (Fricker, 2007) provides a lens for understanding how knowledge claims are evaluated, particularly in contexts where power imbalances affect whose testimony is considered credible. Moral witnessing (Margalit, 2002) examines how media can serve as ethical intermediaries, transforming personal testimony into collective memory. These frameworks are complemented by research on media witnessing (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2009) and conflict reporting (Pantti, 2022), which explore how journalists mediate experiences of violence for distant audiences.

A concurrent mixed-methods approach combines quantitative analysis of tone and bias patterns with qualitative thematic coding of narrative strategies. This methodology follows established practices in media research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Flick, 2014) and enables triangulation between statistical trends and discursive patterns. The dataset includes all articles published by Al Jazeera on the Gaza conflict during the specified period, with variables encompassing publication date, headline, tone classification, bias score, regional focus, and source type. Analytical procedures incorporate descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013) of linguistic features and framing devices.

The study contributes to understanding media in conflict zones through:

- Empirical evidence of how linguistic choices and source selection build trust in war reporting
- Integration of quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze media framing and moral authority
- Documentation of how journalists establish epistemic credibility in high-risk environments
- Analysis of relationships between empathy-related language and audience engagement
- A framework for evaluating solidarity-based journalism in asymmetric conflicts

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews literature on media framing and conflict reporting. Section 3 provides context for the Palestinian media landscape and Al Jazeera’s institutional position. Section 4 details the mixed-methods approach and analytical procedures. Section 5 presents quantitative findings and qualitative insights. Section 6 interprets these findings in relation to theoretical frameworks, and Section 7 outlines implications for media ethics and future research. The study offers insights for humanitarian communication, media literacy education, and cross-cultural understanding of conflict reporting practices.

## 2 RELATED WORK

Research on media influence in conflict zones has examined how news coverage shapes international responses to humanitarian crises. Gilboa (2005) proposed the “CNN effect” theory, suggesting that real-time media coverage can pressure governments to intervene in humanitarian emergencies. This framework helps contextualize how media institutions like Al Jazeera might influence global perceptions and policy responses during the Gaza conflict.

Building on this foundation, research on media framing in conflict zones has examined how news organizations construct narratives about violence and suffering. Previous research has developed theoretical frameworks for understanding media and political conflict, arguing that media coverage reflects power relations between competing actors. This perspective helps explain how media institutions like Al Jazeera navigate complex geopolitical terrain while reporting on asymmetric conflicts. Research on framing effects has demonstrated how media frames shape audience interpretations and policy preferences (Scheufele, 1999). Research on media framing in asymmetric conflicts has documented how news organizations from different geopolitical positions employ distinct narrative strategies when assigning responsibility for violence. Additional research has demonstrated how media framing in the Israeli-Palestinian context reflects broader geopolitical alignments and institutional positions.

Recent comparative analyses of media coverage in the Gaza conflict provide important context for understanding institutional framing differences. Previous research has examined CNN and Al Jazeera’s coverage of the 2023 humanitarian crisis, finding that Al Jazeera prioritized first-hand

accounts from Gaza and emotionally charged narratives highlighting civilian suffering, while CNN emphasized government statements and diplomatic actions. This comparative approach reveals how institutional positions and target audiences shape framing strategies in conflict reporting.

### 3 BACKGROUND

Media representation of Palestinian experiences operates within a complex historical and political context. Coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been shaped by decades of occupation, displacement, and competing national narratives. Al Jazeera's position as a Qatar-based news network with substantial reach in Arabic-speaking and global audiences places it at an intersection of regional perspectives and international journalism standards. The network's coverage decisions and framing strategies must be understood within this institutional and geopolitical framework.

Theoretical frameworks from media studies and critical theory provide lenses for analyzing media representation in conflict zones. Framing theory (Entman, 1993) examines how media select and emphasize certain aspects of reality while excluding others, shaping audience perceptions of events. Critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013) offers tools for understanding how language use in media texts reflects and reproduces power relations. These approaches are complemented by theories of media witnessing (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2009), which explore how journalists mediate distant suffering for global audiences, and concepts of moral authority (Margalit, 2002) that examine ethical dimensions of testimony in contexts of violence.

Al Jazeera's institutional identity has evolved since its founding in 1996, positioning itself as an alternative to Western media dominance in Middle Eastern coverage. The network's editorial policies and reporting practices reflect its Qatari funding while maintaining journalistic independence on certain issues. During the 2023–2024 Gaza conflict, Al Jazeera maintained a continuous presence in the territory despite risks to its journalists. This operational commitment shapes the network's credibility claims and moral positioning in conflict reporting.

The information environment surrounding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is characterized by multiple constraints. Journalists operate under military restrictions, internet blackouts, and physical dangers that affect news gathering and verification processes. Digital platforms introduce additional complexities through content moderation policies and algorithmic amplification that may privilege certain narratives. These conditions create an ecosystem where establishing factual accuracy and building audience trust requires particular strategies and institutional resources.

Epistemic considerations in conflict reporting involve questions of whose knowledge is validated and whose testimony is considered credible. Fricker (2007) identifies how power imbalances can create systematic credibility deficits for marginalized groups. In the Palestinian context, these dynamics manifest in debates about whose suffering is recognized as grievable (Butler, 2009) and whose accounts of violence are treated as authoritative. Media institutions play a role in either reinforcing or challenging these epistemic hierarchies through their sourcing practices and framing choices.

The methodological orientation of this study draws from mixed-methods approaches in media research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) that combine quantitative analysis of content patterns with qualitative examination of narrative strategies. This integrated approach allows for triangulation between statistical trends in media coverage and interpretation of how trust and moral authority are constructed through journalistic practices. The background conditions outlined here inform both the research design and the interpretation of findings regarding Al Jazeera's coverage of the Gaza conflict.

### 4 METHOD

#### 4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs a concurrent mixed-methods design integrating quantitative content analysis with qualitative thematic analysis. The approach follows established practices in media research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) that emphasize triangulation between numerical patterns and interpretive insights. The quantitative component examines tone distributions, bias scores, and lexical frequencies, while the qualitative component explores narrative strategies and framing devices that construct trust and

moral authority. This integrated design addresses the complex nature of media representation in conflict zones by capturing both statistical trends and discursive patterns.

#### 4.2 DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLING

The dataset comprises 3,412 articles published by Al Jazeera between October 2023 and June 2024 focusing on the Gaza conflict. Articles were collected through systematic sampling of Al Jazeera's online archives using web scraping techniques that captured headline text, publication dates, and article content. Inclusion criteria required articles to address events in Gaza, the West Bank, or related diplomatic developments. The sampling frame ensured representation across the nine-month period, with articles selected proportionally from each month to account for temporal variations in coverage intensity.

#### 4.3 QUANTITATIVE MEASURES AND PROCEDURES

Quantitative analysis employed several measures to characterize media coverage patterns. Tone classification categorized articles as pro-Palestinian, neutral, or Israeli frame based on systematic coding of lexical choices and framing devices, following established quantitative content analysis approaches in communication research (Riffe et al., 1998; 2014). Bias scores were calculated using a dictionary-based approach that assessed word frequency distributions across established lexicons for conflict reporting. Regional focus was determined through geographic mentions in article text, while source type classification identified whether information originated from eyewitness accounts, official statements, NGO reports, or foreign analysts. Trust scores were derived from engagement metrics including social media shares and comments, normalized on a 1–5 scale.

Table 1: Data Collection Timeline and Sample Distribution

Month	Article Count	Percentage
October 2023	486	14.2%
November 2023	652	19.1%
December 2023	512	15.0%
January 2024	405	11.9%
February 2024	387	11.3%
March 2024	404	11.8%
April 2024	300	8.8%
May 2024	266	7.8%
June 2024	0	0.0%

#### 4.4 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

Qualitative analysis followed established practices in critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013) and thematic coding (Flick, 2014). The analytic process began with open coding of article content to identify recurring themes related to trust construction and moral authority. Initial codes included empathy lexicon usage, journalist positioning, source attribution patterns, and narrative framing strategies. These codes were refined through multiple iterations to develop a coding framework that captured the relationship between linguistic choices and credibility construction. NVivo software facilitated systematic coding and theme development.

#### 4.5 THEMATIC CODING FRAMEWORK

The coding framework incorporated categories derived from theories of epistemic trust (Fricker, 2007) and moral witnessing (Margalit, 2002). Primary themes included embodied risk, defined as journalists sharing physical danger with their subjects; empathy lexicon, focusing on terms related to family, home, and childhood; institutional framing, examining how Al Jazeera positioned itself relative to state narratives; and authenticity markers, identifying strategies that enhanced perceived credibility of reported information. Each theme was operationalized through specific linguistic and narrative indicators.

#### 4.6 TRIANGULATION PROCEDURES

Methodological triangulation integrated quantitative and qualitative findings through systematic comparison of statistical patterns with thematic insights. This involved cross-referencing tone classification results with empathy lexicon density, examining correlations between source type and trust scores, and comparing monthly coverage trends with shifts in narrative framing. Triangulation followed established mixed-methods procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) that emphasize convergence between different data types to enhance analytic validity.

#### 4.7 TRUSTWORTHINESS MEASURES

Several procedures ensured the trustworthiness of findings. Analyst triangulation involved multiple coders independently applying the coding framework to subsets of articles, with inter-coder reliability measured through Cohen's kappa coefficients. Reflexive journaling documented analytic decisions and potential biases throughout the research process. Peer debriefing sessions with media studies scholars provided external validation of interpretive frameworks. Methodological transparency was maintained through detailed documentation of coding procedures.

#### 4.8 ANALYTIC PROCESS

The analytic process unfolded in three phases. The initial phase involved descriptive statistical analysis of the complete dataset to identify broad patterns in tone distribution, regional focus, and temporal trends. The second phase employed qualitative coding of a stratified random sample of 500 articles to develop and refine thematic categories. The final phase integrated quantitative and qualitative findings through systematic comparison and interpretation, examining how statistical patterns related to discursive strategies for constructing trust and moral authority.

#### 4.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research adhered to ethical standards for media content analysis. All data were publicly available and handled in accordance with digital humanities research guidelines. No personal identifiers were collected or analyzed beyond what was already publicly accessible. The study maintained critical distance from the media organization while acknowledging the sensitive nature of conflict reporting. Research procedures respected the dignity of individuals and communities represented in the media coverage.

#### 4.10 LIMITATIONS

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study focuses exclusively on Al Jazeera coverage, limiting comparative insights with other media outlets. The quantitative measures for tone and bias, while systematically applied, involve inherent simplifications of complex discursive phenomena. The analysis relies on published content rather than audience reception data, which restricts claims about actual trust formation among viewers. Future research could address these limitations through comparative analysis and audience studies.

### 5 RESULTS

The analysis of 3,412 Al Jazeera articles published between October 2023 and June 2024 reveals systematic patterns in how the network constructed trust and moral authority through its coverage of the Gaza conflict. Quantitative findings demonstrate consistent pro-Palestinian framing, while qualitative analysis identifies specific linguistic and narrative strategies that cultivated epistemic trust and moral witnessing.

#### 5.1 TONE DISTRIBUTION AND BIAS PATTERNS

Table 2 presents the distribution of tone categories across the dataset. Pro-Palestinian framing appeared in 67.0% of articles, while neutral and Israeli frame categories accounted for 23.8% and 9.2% respectively. The mean bias score for pro-Palestinian articles (0.82) was substantially higher

than for neutral (0.51) or Israeli frame articles (0.34), indicating systematic framing differences across categories.

Table 2: Tone Distribution Across Articles

Tone Category	Count	Percentage	Mean Bias Score	SD
Pro-Palestinian	2,287	67.0	0.82	0.12
Neutral	812	23.8	0.51	0.09
Israeli Frame	313	9.2	0.34	0.07

## 5.2 TEMPORAL TRENDS IN COVERAGE

Table 3 shows monthly coverage patterns from October 2023 through May 2024. The highest article count occurred in November 2023 (652 articles), coinciding with the most intense period of conflict. Mean tone scores remained consistently above 0.73 throughout the period, indicating stable editorial positioning despite fluctuations in coverage intensity.

Table 3: Monthly Distribution of Articles

Month	Article Count	Mean Tone	SD
October 2023	486	0.78	0.13
November 2023	652	0.81	0.11
December 2023	512	0.83	0.10
January 2024	405	0.77	0.14
February 2024	387	0.80	0.12
March 2024	404	0.79	0.15
April 2024	300	0.76	0.13
May 2024	266	0.73	0.16

## 5.3 REGIONAL FOCUS AND SOURCE SELECTION

Table 4 indicates that Gaza received the most extensive coverage (63.8% of articles), followed by the West Bank (21.1%). Table 5 reveals that eyewitness sources achieved the highest mean trust scores (4.7/5), while official statements received lower scores (3.8/5), suggesting audience preference for direct testimony over institutional accounts.

Table 4: Regional Focus of Coverage

Region	Count	Percentage
Gaza	2,176	63.8
West Bank	721	21.1
Israel	290	8.5
Diaspora	225	6.6

## 5.4 LEXICAL ANALYSIS AND ENGAGEMENT PATTERNS

Table 6 shows the most frequent words in the corpus, with “children” appearing 4,810 times, followed by “home” (3,992) and “bombing” (3,407). The prominence of family-related terms and civilian-focused language reflects the empathy lexicon identified in qualitative analysis. Table 7 demonstrates strong positive correlations between tone and trust ( $r=0.72$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and between bias score and empathy lexicon density ( $r=0.65$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

Table 5: Source Type and Trust Scores

Source Type	n	Mean Trust (1–5)	SD
Eyewitness	982	4.7	0.4
Official Statement	671	3.8	0.7
NGO Report	548	4.3	0.6
Foreign Analyst	315	3.5	0.8

Table 6: Lexical Frequency (Top 10 Words)

Rank	Word	Frequency
1	children	4,810
2	home	3,992
3	bombing	3,407
4	aid	3,226
5	hospital	3,205
6	family	2,981
7	journalist	2,754
8	hope	2,431
9	resistance	2,212
10	truth	2,005

## 5.5 QUALITATIVE THEMES

Thematic analysis revealed four primary patterns in how Al Jazeera constructed trust and moral authority. Embodied risk emerged through journalists sharing physical danger with their subjects, enhancing authenticity claims. Empathy lexicon usage, particularly terms related to family and childhood, created emotional resonance with audiences. Institutional framing consistently prioritized civilian perspectives over state narratives. Authenticity markers included direct quotations, live reporting from conflict zones, and emphasis on eyewitness testimony. These strategies collectively transformed media coverage into ethical witnessing that challenged dominant information frameworks.

## 6 DISCUSSION

This study examined how Al Jazeera constructed trust and moral authority in its coverage of the 2023–2024 Gaza conflict through analysis of 3,412 articles. The findings address three research questions concerning credibility construction, linguistic strategies for building epistemic trust, and institutional framing of moral authority. The evidence reveals systematic patterns in how journalistic practices mediate Palestinian experiences during periods of intense violence and information warfare.

The correlation between pro-Palestinian framing and perceived trustworthiness suggests that Al Jazeera’s positioning as a witness to civilian suffering cultivated epistemic trust among audiences. This finding aligns with theories of epistemic justice (Fricker, 2007) that emphasize how marginalized voices gain credibility through consistent representation. The network’s operational commitment to maintaining a presence in Gaza despite risks to journalists created conditions for embodied risk that enhanced authenticity claims. Journalists sharing physical danger with their subjects transformed media testimony into moral witnessing (Margalit, 2002), where reporting became an ethical practice rather than merely informational.

The use of empathy-related lexicon, particularly terms like “children,” “home,” and “family,” served as linguistic markers that constructed emotional resonance with audiences. This lexical pattern corresponds with theories of media witnessing (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2009) that examine how language mediates distant suffering for global publics. The frequency of these terms across articles employing pro-Palestinian framing suggests a narrative strategy to humanize conflict impacts beyond geopolitical analysis. This approach challenges what Butler (2009) identifies as frames that determine which lives are considered grievable in public discourse.

Table 7: Correlation Analysis

Variable	r	p
Tone vs Trust	0.72	< 0.001
Bias Score vs Empathy Lexicon Density	0.65	< 0.001

Al Jazeera's institutional framing prioritized civilian perspectives over state narratives, cultivating moral authority through what Zelizer (2021) describes as journalism's capacity to bear witness to human dignity. The network's positioning as an ethical mediator is evident in source selection patterns that favored eyewitness accounts and NGO reports over official statements. This sourcing practice created epistemic trust through proximity to lived experiences rather than institutional authority.

The temporal consistency in tone across the nine-month period indicates institutional commitment to a coherent editorial stance rather than reactive positioning to daily events. This consistency contributed to building epistemic trust through predictable framing that audiences could rely upon for particular perspectives on the conflict. The stability in coverage patterns suggests that Al Jazeera's moral authority derived partly from this reliability, even as specific events and narratives evolved throughout the conflict duration.

The correlation between tone and social media engagement metrics indicates that Al Jazeera's framing strategies resonated with audience expectations for solidarity-based journalism in asymmetric conflicts. This finding contributes to understanding how media institutions build trust in contexts where traditional notions of objectivity are contested. The network's approach aligns with emerging frameworks for conflict reporting that acknowledge the ethical dimensions of bearing witness to human rights violations and humanitarian crises.

Researcher positionality in interpreting these findings acknowledges the sensitivity of analyzing media representation in contexts of human suffering. The analytic process maintained critical distance while recognizing the ethical responsibility in handling content that documents violence and displacement. Methodological triangulation and peer debriefing provided safeguards against interpretive biases that could either amplify or minimize the significance of observed patterns in coverage.

The findings have implications for media ethics in conflict reporting, particularly regarding the relationship between journalistic practices and epistemic justice. Al Jazeera's approach demonstrates how media institutions can challenge credibility deficits faced by marginalized communities through consistent amplification of lived experiences. This has significance for humanitarian communication by showing how empathetic framing can make distant suffering comprehensible while maintaining dignity in representation.

Educational implications include developing media literacy frameworks that help audiences critically engage with conflict reporting while recognizing how linguistic choices and source selection construct particular versions of reality. The study provides empirical basis for understanding how trust is built through specific journalistic practices rather than abstract claims to objectivity or neutrality.

Policy implications relate to documentation practices in contexts of human rights violations, where media testimony can contribute to historical accountability processes. The systematic patterns observed in Al Jazeera's coverage suggest that consistent framing of civilian experiences creates archival records that challenge dominant state narratives. This has relevance for transitional justice mechanisms that rely on public documentation of violence and suffering.

The study's limitations include its focus on a single media outlet, which prevents comparative analysis of how different institutions construct trust in conflict reporting. Future research could examine how Al Jazeera's approaches compare with other regional and international media outlets covering the same events. Additionally, the analysis of published content rather than production processes or audience reception leaves questions about intentionality and impact that warrant further investigation.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods provided complementary insights into how trust and moral authority are constructed through both measurable patterns and discursive strategies. This methodological approach offers a model for future media studies that seek to bridge empirical analysis with theoretical interpretation of journalistic practices in conflict zones.



The findings contribute to scholarship on media and conflict by demonstrating how specific linguistic, narrative, and institutional practices build epistemic trust in contexts where traditional authority structures are contested. This has broader relevance for understanding how media institutions navigate complex ethical terrain while maintaining audience credibility during periods of political polarization and information warfare.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

This study examined how Al Jazeera constructed trust and moral authority in its coverage of the 2023–2024 Gaza conflict through analysis of 3,412 articles. The findings demonstrate that epistemic trust emerged from embodied risk, where journalists shared physical danger with their subjects, and from consistent use of empathy-related lexicon that humanized civilian experiences. The network's institutional framing prioritized civilian perspectives over state narratives, cultivating moral authority through proximity to lived realities. These practices transformed media testimony into ethical witnessing that challenged dominant information frameworks during periods of conflict and polarization.

The mixed-methods approach contributes to ethical documentation by integrating quantitative patterns with qualitative insights into how trust is constructed in conflict reporting. This methodology provides a framework for preserving Palestinian narratives while maintaining analytic rigor. The study's findings have relevance for media ethics education, suggesting that credibility in asymmetric conflicts may derive from solidarity-based practices rather than traditional notions of objectivity. Policy implications include the role of media testimony in historical accountability processes and humanitarian response mechanisms.

Future research should expand to comparative analysis of multiple media outlets covering the same conflict events, examining how different institutional positions shape trust construction across cultural contexts. Additional studies could investigate audience reception of empathy-based framing through surveys and focus groups. Research could explore how media representations influence humanitarian aid distribution and medical response priorities. Cross-cultural studies might examine how linguistic and narrative strategies for building trust vary across different conflict zones and historical contexts.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods in this study offers a model for future media research that seeks to bridge empirical analysis with theoretical interpretation. This approach can be applied to other contexts where media institutions navigate complex ethical terrain while maintaining audience credibility. The findings contribute to understanding how journalistic practices can either challenge or reinforce epistemic hierarchies in contexts of political polarization and information warfare.

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