

TRUST AND MORAL WITNESSING IN AL JAZEERA'S COVERAGE OF THE GAZA CONFLICT (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. Methodological refinements address concerns regarding construct validity by clearly delineating the operationalization of frame categories and acknowledging the distinction between audience engagement metrics and the theoretical concept of trust. Findings indicate that 67% of articles employed a predominant emphasis on Palestinian civilian experiences, with strong correlations between this editorial tone and measures of audience engagement. 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 a form of moral authority rooted in proximity and shared vulnerability. 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 contributes an integrated analytical model for examining solidarity-based journalism, demonstrating how credibility is constructed through embodied risk and empathetic framing, while rigorously addressing inherent methodological limitations pertaining to single-outlet analysis and the interpretative nature of framing categories.

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. Its contribution lies not in the application of established theories to a new dataset, but in the methodological synthesis and critical examination of how a major non-Western media institution operationalizes concepts of witnessing and trust within a highly polarized informational ecosystem.

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 specific linguistic features, narrative structures, and sourcing practices are deployed to build epistemic resonance with its audience? Third, how does the network’s institutional positioning and the embodied practice of its journalists shape perceptions of its moral authority, distinct from claims of neutrality?

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. This study seeks to advance this theoretical conversation by empirically testing the relationship between discursive strategies—operationalized through quantifiable linguistic patterns—and the cultivation of journalistic authority in a high-risk environment.

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. To address methodological critiques, the study incorporates robustness checks, explicitly defines the construction and validation of its key metrics, and acknowledges the limitations of inferring trust from engagement data.

The study contributes to understanding media in conflict zones through: an empirical documentation of the linguistic and narrative architecture Al Jazeera employed to report on the Gaza conflict, providing a detailed case study of institutional framing under duress. It integrates quantitative and qualitative methods to offer a multi-layered analysis of media framing and moral authority, moving beyond descriptive counts to interpret the discursive function of lexical choices. The research documents the concrete practices through which journalists in high-risk environments establish epistemic credibility, focusing on the interplay between physical presence and narrative construction. It analyzes associations between the density of empathy-related language and measurable audience engagement, while critically examining the assumptions underlying such correlations. Finally, it proposes a nuanced framework for evaluating the ethics and efficacy of solidarity-based journalism in asymmetric conflicts, distinguishing between advocacy and witnessing.

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. This study builds upon but also diverges from prior comparative framing analyses by conducting a deep, single-outlet examination that pairs macro-level quantitative patterns with micro-level discursive analysis. This allows for a more granular understanding of how framing is consistently enacted through language over an extended period, rather than snapshot comparisons across outlets.

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. Our analysis extends this work by systematically quantifying these narrative priorities across a much larger corpus and linking them to theoretical constructs of witnessing. Furthermore, we explicitly address the methodological challenge of categorizing frames in a conflict where the terminology itself is contested, providing a transparent rationale for our coding scheme.

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. A key distinction underpinning this study is between *epistemic trust*—the credibility accorded to a knowledge source—and *moral authority*—the ethical standing granted to a witness. While interrelated, the former relates more to perceptions of accuracy and reliability, and the latter to legitimacy and the right to narrate suffering. Al Jazeera's strategy, as we analyze it, often seeks to build the latter as a foundation for the former.

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. It is crucial to note that this positioning inherently involves a standpoint; the network does not claim neutrality but rather a commitment to foregrounding perspectives it perceives as marginalized in global media flows. Our analysis therefore

assesses how trust and authority are constructed *from within* this committed journalistic paradigm, not against an abstract ideal of objectivity.

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. This study posits that Al Jazeera's coverage can be interpreted as a deliberate intervention into this epistemic economy, aiming to correct a perceived credibility deficit by amplifying Palestinian voices and embodying the risks of the occupation.

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. The design was selected to mitigate the limitations of either approach in isolation: quantitative analysis alone cannot capture the nuance of narrative construction, while qualitative analysis alone risks lacking representativeness. Their concurrent application allows findings from one method to inform and interrogate findings from the other.

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. The web scraping protocol utilized the Python libraries 'BeautifulSoup' and 'requests', targeting the main news archive search results for the terms "Gaza" and "Israel Palestine." Duplicate articles and non-news content (e.g., opinion pieces clearly labeled as such) were filtered out. The final dataset and the collection script are available in a supplementary repository to ensure reproducibility. Table 1 reflects the distribution; the entry for June 2024 shows zero articles because the data collection concluded in early June, capturing articles published up to May 31, 2024.

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%

4.3 QUANTITATIVE MEASURES AND PROCEDURES

Quantitative analysis employed several measures to characterize media coverage patterns. Tone classification categorized articles as *Palestinian civilian focus*, *neutral/multiperspectival*, or *institutional/Israeli official focus* based on systematic coding of lexical choices and framing devices, following established quantitative content analysis approaches in communication research (Riffe et al., 1998; 2014). This re-labeling of categories moves away from the value-laden terms "pro-Palestinian" and "Israeli frame" to more descriptive labels based on primary narrative emphasis. An article was coded as *Palestinian civilian focus* if its headline and lead paragraphs centered on the experiences, casualties, or statements of Palestinian civilians, NGOs, or local officials in Gaza/West Bank, using lexicon from a predefined "empathy and casualty" dictionary (e.g., "children," "family," "bombing," "besieged"). The *institutional/Israeli official focus* category applied to articles where the primary actors and sources were Israeli government or military officials, or where the narrative framework adopted official Israeli terminology (e.g., "operation," "response to terrorism"). The *neutral/multiperspectival* category was reserved for articles that presented claims from both sides with equivalent prominence or focused on international diplomatic efforts without foregrounding either side's civilian narrative. Bias scores were calculated using a dictionary-based approach that assessed word frequency distributions across established lexicons for conflict reporting. The bias score (ranging 0-1) was operationalized as the normalized ratio of terms from the "Palestinian civilian experience" lexicon to the total count of all conflict-related terms in the article. This provides a continuous measure of lexical emphasis rather than a binary classification. 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 public engagement metrics (social media shares and comments on the article page) as a proxy for audience resonance, normalized on a 1–5 scale. We explicitly note that this is a measure of *audience engagement*, not a direct or validated measure of epistemic trust. Its use is based on the assumption that content perceived as credible and compelling within Al Jazeera's audience ecosystem is more likely to be engaged with, though we acknowledge this correlation is not causal and may reflect echo chamber effects.

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. To ensure rigor, two trained coders independently applied the final coding framework to a stratified random sample of 15% of the articles (n=512). Inter-coder reliability was calculated using Cohen's kappa, yielding scores of 0.82 for theme identification and 0.79 for source type classification, indicating substantial agreement. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus.

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. For example, "embodied risk" was coded when articles included phrases like "our correspondent, under fire," "reporting from a bombed neighborhood," or direct references to the deaths of Al Jazeera staff or their family members. "Authenticity markers" included the use of direct quotation of named civilians, embedding of raw audio/video footage, and meta-discursive statements about verification challenges.

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. For instance, a high quantitative bias score (lexical emphasis on Palestinian experience) in a given month was examined alongside the qualitative prevalence of "embodied risk" narratives during that same period to see if intensity of coverage correlated with specific modes of witnessing.

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. Furthermore, to address potential confounding in correlation analyses, we conducted robustness checks using alternative variable constructions. For example, the correlation between tone and engagement was re-calculated after controlling for article length and time of publication, and remained statistically significant (partial $r = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$).

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. Given the traumatic content, the coding team had access to counseling resources. The authors declare no direct funding from or conflict of interest with Al Jazeera Media Network or the Qatari government. The term "conflict" is used in the title and throughout as a descriptive term encompassing the period of intense violence, without prejudging its legal characterizations.

4.10 LIMITATIONS

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study focuses exclusively on Al Jazeera coverage, limiting comparative insights with other media outlets. While this allows for depth, it prevents claims about the uniqueness of Al Jazeera's strategies; future work should incorporate a comparative design. The quantitative measures for tone and bias, while systematically applied, involve inherent simplifications of complex discursive phenomena. The dictionary-based approach, though transparent, may not capture sarcasm, irony, or contextual nuance. The analysis relies on published content rather than audience reception data, which restricts claims about actual trust formation among viewers. The use of engagement metrics as a proxy for trust is a significant limitation, as it conflates resonance within an existing audience with the broader construct of epistemic credibility. Future research could address these limitations through comparative analysis and audience studies. Additionally, the study does not analyze visual content (images, videos), which are a crucial component of witnessing.

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 emphasis on Palestinian civilian experiences, 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. Articles with a Palestinian civilian focus appeared in 67.0% of articles, while neutral and institutional/Israeli official focus categories accounted for 23.8% and 9.2% respectively. The mean bias score for Palestinian civilian focus articles (0.82) was substantially higher than for neutral (0.51) or institutional/Israeli official focus articles (0.34), indicating systematic framing differences across categories. The 95% confidence interval for the mean bias score in the Palestinian civilian focus category was [0.81, 0.83], confirming the stability of this measure.

Table 2: Frame Distribution Across Articles

Primary Narrative Frame	Count	Percentage	Mean Bias Score	SD
Palestinian Civilian Focus	2,287	67.0	0.82	0.12
Neutral/Multiperspectival	812	23.8	0.51	0.09
Institutional/Israeli Official Focus	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. A Pearson correlation between the number of daily conflict-related fatalities (data from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) and the daily article count yielded a coefficient of $r = 0.45$ ($p < 0.01$), suggesting coverage volume was partially responsive to the intensity of violence, though other factors like access and news cycles also played a role.

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 engagement scores (4.7/5), while official statements received lower scores (3.8/5), suggesting that within Al Jazeera's digital ecosystem, content foregrounding direct testimony garnered more audience

Table 3: Monthly Distribution of Articles and Frame Emphasis

Month	Article Count	Mean Lexical Bias Score	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

interaction. A Chi-square test of independence showed a significant association between source type and narrative frame ($\chi^2(6, N=3412) = 428.5, p < .001$), with eyewitness sources disproportionately appearing in Palestinian civilian focus articles.

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

Table 5: Source Type and Audience Engagement Scores

Source Type	n	Mean Engagement (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

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 lexical bias score and engagement ($r=0.72, p<0.001$), and between bias score and empathy lexicon density ($r=0.65, p<0.001$). The empathy lexicon density was calculated as the proportion of words in an article belonging to a predefined set of 120 terms related to family, childhood, domesticity, and bodily vulnerability. The high correlation with bias score confirms that the framing emphasis was lexically enacted through this specific vocabulary.

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. A representative example is the frequent meta-journalistic discourse surrounding the killing of Al Jazeera journalist Wael Al-Dahdouh’s family. Coverage of this event was not just a news item but

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

Table 7: Correlation Analysis (Pearson's r)

Variable Pair	r	p
Lexical Bias Score vs Engagement	0.72	< 0.001
Bias Score vs Empathy Lexicon Density	0.65	< 0.001

a performative act of witnessing that fused the personal loss of the journalist with the collective Palestinian experience, explicitly positioning the network as both narrator and victim within the story.

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. However, these findings must be interpreted within the acknowledged methodological constraints, particularly the use of engagement as a proxy and the lack of a comparative control group.

The correlation between a Palestinian civilian narrative focus and perceived audience engagement suggests that Al Jazeera's positioning as a witness to civilian suffering cultivated resonance among its audience. 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. Yet, this correlation does not establish that such framing builds trust with skeptical or oppositional audiences; it likely reinforces the credibility of the outlet for those already predisposed to its perspective. The high engagement scores for eyewitness content may reflect an audience preference for visceral, immediate testimony, which is a different phenomenon from the slow-building, rational assessment characteristic of epistemic trust.

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 a Palestinian civilian focus 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. From a methodological standpoint, the high correlation between bias score and empathy lexicon density ($r=0.65$) validates our operationalization of the primary frame through measurable linguistic features. This quantitative grounding strengthens the qualitative interpretation of these terms as deliberate tools for humanization.

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. This finding must be contextualized within the broader media landscape. Comparative studies suggest Western outlets like BBC or CNN often lead with official Israeli sources for "balance," potentially creating a systemic credibility deficit for Palestinian accounts. Al Jazeera's sourcing strategy can thus be seen as a corrective to this asymmetry, building authority by addressing an epistemic gap, even if it simultaneously introduces a different asymmetry.

The temporal consistency in lexical emphasis 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 a recognizable brand of reporting 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 slight decrease in mean bias score in later months (Table 3) could reflect a shift towards more diplomatic coverage as ceasefire talks gained prominence, demonstrating a degree of narrative adaptability within the overarching frame.

The correlation between editorial 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 audience loyalty 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. However, the circularity critique is valid: we are measuring the resonance of a frame within the audience that chooses Al Jazeera, which likely shares its broad perspective. This does not measure the frame's power to convince neutral or hostile audiences. Future research must disentangle reinforcement from persuasion.

Researcher positionality and the study's terminology warrant explicit discussion. The authors approach this topic from a media studies perspective, prioritizing the analysis of discourse and narrative construction over legal or historical adjudication of the conflict. The choice of the term "Gaza Conflict" in the title is a descriptive, scholarly convention meant to denote the period and location of violent hostilities, not to make a legal judgment. The original term "genocide" carried a specific legal charge that, while present in public discourse, introduced a premise that could predetermine the analysis of media framing. Our revised framing allows the analysis to focus on how Al Jazeera itself constructs narratives, including any such legal characterizations within its reporting, rather than embedding a conclusion in the study's own architecture.

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. The ethical trade-off, however, lies in the potential erosion of perceived neutrality, which may limit the outlet's reach and influence across polarized informational divides.

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 journalistic authority 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 most significant limitation remains the conceptual leap from audience engagement metrics to trust. While we have clarified this as a measure of resonance, future studies should employ surveys, experiments, or comparative reception analysis to directly measure trust formation.

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 a form of moral authority and audience allegiance 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. The study ultimately illustrates that in asymmetric conflicts, the journalistic pursuit of "balance" is itself a contested framing decision, and outlets like Al Jazeera build their credibility on an alternative foundation: solidarity, proximity, and the consistent centering of the marginalized voice.

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 moral authority and audience engagement 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 study clarifies that this model of authority construction is specific to a solidarity-based journalistic paradigm and is effective in reinforcing credibility within a sympathetic audience ecosystem.

The mixed-methods approach contributes to the empirical study of media framing by integrating quantitative patterns with qualitative insights into how narrative authority is constructed in conflict reporting. This methodology provides a framework for systematically analyzing 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 distinct 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 to move beyond engagement proxies. 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. Specifically, we recommend: 1) A production-side study interviewing Al Jazeera editors on their framing decisions; 2) A controlled experiment testing how different framing strategies (e.g., empathy vs. legalistic) affect trust perceptions among diverse audience segments; and 3) A comparative computational analysis of the lexical choices of Al Jazeera, BBC, and CNN over the same period to quantify framing differences.

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. By transparently addressing its methodological boundaries, this study aims to provide

a foundation for more nuanced, comparative, and audience-focused research on one of the most critically important functions of journalism: bearing witness.

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