

Conspiracy Theory in Discussions of the Coronavirus Pandemic in the Gulf Region

Rasha Salameh

Abstract—In light of the tense relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran, this research paper sheds some light on Saudi-owned television network, Al-Arabiya's reporting of the Coronavirus in the Gulf region. Particularly because most of the cases in the beginning were coming from Iran, some programs of this Saudi channel embraced a conspiracy theory. Hate speech has been used in the talking and discussions about the topic. The results of these discussions will be detailed in this paper in percentages with regard to the research sample, which includes five programs on the Al-Arabiya channel: 'DNA', 'Marraya' (Mirrors), 'Panorama', 'Tafaolcom' (Your Interaction) and 'Diplomatic Street', in the period between January 19, that is, the date of the first case in Iran, and April 10, 2020. The research shows the use of a conspiracy theory in the programs, in addition to some professional violations. The surveyed sample also shows that the matter receded due to the Arab Gulf states' preoccupation with the successively increasing cases that have appeared there since the start of the pandemic. The results indicate that hate speech was present in the sample at a rate of 98.1%, and that most of the programs that dealt with the Iranian issue under the Coronavirus pandemic on Al Arabiya used the conspiracy theory at a rate of 75.5%.

Keywords—Al-Arabiya, Iran, COVID-19, hate speech, conspiracy theory, politicization of the pandemic.

I. INTRODUCTION

REAL media plays an important and fundamental role in many events, especially in times of crisis, as it is keen to address issues of concern to societies, and to handle them in accordance with professional and ethical standards. It does so in the service of public opinion and individuals in societies on the one hand, and in service to the truth on the other, so that it is always in the front in addressing the various crises these societies face [30], [24].

There is no doubt that the media has become the most important tool for crisis management in our contemporary world. It is obvious that the responsibility of the media in facing crises has gained a high priority within the interests of the concerned authorities and institutions, especially in our current time when the impact of crises is not limited to a country or region, but affects the whole world, as in the case of the renewed Coronavirus, from which no country is safe anymore [4].

The sudden emergence and wide outbreak of the Coronavirus, and the accelerating rate of its casualties, prompted the media to assume its responsibility, just as doctors do. Indeed, the media plays a great role in these difficult circumstances which the whole world is going through. The

importance of its role stems from alerting societies to the seriousness of the stage and the truth about what is happening, in addition to conveying the true number of casualties, even if this may cause a state of panic and anxiety. This is especially important and will reflect positively in the future. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak around the world, the media, represented by satellite channels, especially news channels, has worked on transmitting news, tracking the course of the virus, its spread, its causes, the seriousness of its threat and how to confront it, in addition to transmitting news from the countries where the virus has spread, and the plans that governments seek to implement or impose to control the situation [15], [13].

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Agenda Setting Theory

The Agenda Setting Theory is concerned with studying the reciprocal relationship between the media and the masses in determining the priorities of political, economic and social issues of interest to society. This theory assumes that the media cannot cover all the issues that occur in society, but rather chooses to bring attention to some of the topics that are heavily focused on and attempts to control their nature and content [33].

Definitions of this theory have been numerous, McQuail [4] defines it as an ongoing competition between topics and issues for the attention of both the media and the political elite. Hassouna [20] defines the theory as the process of recreating the surrounding events in a new form, arranged in the news medium in accordance with the editorial policy of the institution, with the aim of convincing the public and changing its attitudes in accordance with the ideological orientations of that institution.

Hassouna [20] links Frame Analysis Theory to that of agenda-setting, citing opinions that perceive framing as an extension of agenda setting, which the term Second-level Agenda Setting refers to.

Fawzi [17] has shown that the theory of the agenda is based on the reciprocal relationship between the media and the public which is exposed to it by prioritizing issues of interest to society and shaping public opinion. The theory assumes that the media select some topics to focus on and control the nature of their content to gradually provoke the public, so that they realize, think, and worry about them, to represent them according to their relative importance, more than those topics that do not attract the media.

Rasha Salameh is with the Ramon Llull University Technology, Barcelona, Spain (e-mail: rsalameh1984@gmail.com).

Agenda theory is defined as: "The process in which the media highlights certain issues as important and deserve the response of the government and the public, by drawing their attention to those issues, so that they become a priority within their agenda. Thus, an individual who relies on a media outlet and is exposed to it will adapt it according to the importance attributed to the issues and topics covered by this medium, in a manner consistent with the direction of its presentation, and the size of the attention accorded to those issues in that medium" [9].

The agenda-setting theory is a rephrasing of the surrounding events in a new template whose importance is arranged in the media outlet in accordance with the editorial policy of the media institution, aiming at persuading the public and changing its attitudes in line with the ideological orientations of that medium [26].

This theory is based on the fact that the media succeed efficiently in introducing people to what they believe because they have a great influence on directing the public's attention towards caring about certain issues or events. Not only does the public know about these issues from the media, but they also know the order of their importance. There is a strong positive correlation between the importance of the topic in the media and its importance to the public [25].

B. Use of Conspiracy Theory in the Media (Politicization of the Virus)

During the crisis of the Coronavirus pandemic, conspiracy theory has been strongly present in media discussions. At times it was linked to fabricated and false news, and at other times it was linked to previous viruses that had appeared and were promoted as biological warfare, as was the case during the plague, Spanish flu, AIDS and Ebola [28].

There are media materials that used another term for conspiracy theory, which is "politicizing the virus", that is, giving the matter a political dimension, such as what has been reported in the Russian media, which pointed the finger of accusation towards America as responsible for spreading the Coronavirus. The US State Department's response was that fake Russian accounts on social media platforms publish this news about US involvement in spreading the virus, which led to a Russian denial of the existence of the aforementioned intent of distortion [16].

Other media materials tried to explain why the Coronavirus is a fertile field for such propositions. Among such explanations is the fact that the topic has, from a health point of view, created a state of panic and fear. In addition, the concerned parties may call for more scrutiny and query regarding who the beneficiary of all that is. And finally, there is the issue of transparency, or lack of transparency, of some countries in declaring the reality of the virus, the losses it has caused, and so on [29].

Media reports stated that the conspiracy theory during the Coronavirus pandemic has become an arena for media exchanges between countries, recalling the Russian and US sides in particular [3]. Some media reports delved deep into their evaluation of the impact of the conspiracy theory that is being promoted in the media and through social media

platforms, regarding the parties that believe that the virus was China-made, while others believe that the US made it. Moreover, some accusations even affect internal parties as in the USA, which sees that one political party benefits from COVID-19 in its political competition with the other, based on a lengthy review of media materials, tweets, and posts that fueled the conspiracy theory in media discussions about COVID-19 [19].

Gulf media also used this theory, albeit implicitly, to explain the large number of casualties coming from Iran to Gulf countries. This approach at times lacked balance, i.e., they did not present views of the two parties mentioned in the article. Some presented suppositions as if they were credible results, even titles such as "Iran exported terrorism to us, and today it exports us Corona" [6], where the article proceeds towards perpetuating hate speech.

In its turn, the Al-Arabiya channel pointed out on its Facebook page that an Iranian clergyman talked about the conspiracy theory behind the spread of the Coronavirus, and that the virus was a US creation "to extinguish the candle of his country," as he put it. This channel's website, which touched on the conspiracy theory that Iranian officials were talking about in the Coronavirus case, is the same channel, as the following research will show, that has been led by the conspiracy theory at some times in its dealings with Iran under the Coronavirus through the television programs that will be analyzed, and when it aired Bahrain's accusations of Iran regarding what is called "Internationally prohibited biological aggression," without giving space in the article for presenting the Iranian point of view. Rather, there was a complete designation of space in favor of the Bahraini accusations that were presented since the title of the article was written.

There is an article reviewing the Gulf regimes' accusations of Iran as a major player in spreading the Coronavirus in the Gulf countries. Saudi Arabia, for example, accused Iran on March 10 of spreading Coronavirus, calling it irresponsible because it did not stamp the passports of the Saudis who visited it, which in turn undermines the efforts to contain the pandemic, especially since most of the cases in Saudi Arabia are concentrated in the Shiite region of Qatif, which was later isolated [7].

Bahrain had the same accusation against Iran, which talked about Iran not stamping the passports of its visitors, accusing it of launching biological aggression. Bahraini Minister of Interior, Sheikh Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, tweeted that the above behavior is internationally criminal. This is because Iran's allowing the pandemic to exit its borders involves a biological aggression as it endangers the lives and safety of others [7], [8].

C. Hate Speech

Any discourse that spreads hatred based on color, race, or sect, any incitement to disputes and conflicts, or any incitement to deny and marginalize the other, spread discord, and accuse the other of treason and corruption fall under the umbrella definition of hate speech [2], [18].

Cherian George, from Ethical Journalism Network, defines hate speech as any discourse that demonizes a recognizable

group — a race, religious community, or sexual minority — and consequently triggers harm to members of that group. When leveled against minorities who are too weak to counter it in the marketplace of ideas, hate speech requires careful handling, even according to free speech advocates. Nevertheless, definitions become vague as discussions on hate speech often lose focus. Therefore, we find legitimate concerns being translated into unjustified censorship.

We have to distinguish between the following examples:

- Incitement to cause harm such as negative discrimination and violence.
- Expressions that hurt a community's feelings, e.g., by insulting beliefs.
- Criticism of politicians and other powerful parties and exposing them to contempt.

According to Al-Rubaie [11], hate speech stems from many reasons. These include the negative image of the other, fear of competition, perceiving the other as the enemy, public norms, education, specific readings of history — as many people remain confined within past events, media and absence of information — as many views are upheld based on absence of information and preconceptions.

There are two reasons behind hate speech as Maabarra [23] notes:

1. The media is manipulated and employed by politicians and their proxies to fulfill their personal agendas.
2. Journalists' poor understanding of the potential impact of negative words and images that encourage hate and trigger violence may be one of the reasons behind hate speech.

Specific individuals or groups usually shape, nurture, and direct hate speech against other individuals, groups, or minorities who are different from the dominant majority in respects such as ethnicity, language, or religion, often for political reasons. Hate messages find fertile soil in social, economic, or political problems or divisions in society [14], [5].

D. Previous Studies

Al Arabiya is one of the most important Arab TV news channels, and it broadcasts from the Media City in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. This channel is interested in political, sports, and economic news, aiming to present different perspectives to millions of viewers in the region. The channel is criticized for its submission to the policies of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, while its administrators believe that the channel is completely free when choosing the editorial formulas for its news, and that no one has the power to create or control news [16].

Al-Mousa [10] concluded that the news coverage of the Coronavirus pandemic on some satellite channels including Al-Arabiya, revealed the extent of the contemporary media's interest in the health aspect of society, and its eligibility to top the media agenda. The pandemic that swept the whole world also swept the media and forced it to change its agendas when they saw how the Coronavirus inflicted losses on governments, institutions, economies and individuals. News and reports began to pour in without a sustainable communication strategy based on a deep awareness of the importance of effective health

communication that prevents pandemic outbreaks and the occurrence of devastating epidemics. They are extensive coverage suitable for a transient crisis that will quickly disappear, and everything will return to normal.

Aghaie [1] concluded that Al-Arabiya is an important component of the outstretched Saudi Arabian media empire in the Arab world and beyond, which includes a wide range of outlets and networks such as the London-based Arabic daily Al-Hayat and Al-Sharq al-Awsat, the daily English Arab News newspaper in Jeddah, Elaph portal in London, the Rotana Group owned by the Saudi businessman Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal, in addition to the MBC Group in Dubai, which owns the largest holdings in the Arab News Network. Consequently, the topics and issues this empire covers or raises will be directed in line with Saudi policies.

A [32] study entitled "A Comparative study of 5 International TV News Channels" showed that Al Arabiya is keen to serve its audience with the latest economic and market news. This is evident in the large volume of this news and in the shift in program planning which devotes the second half of the central midday news bulletin to market analysis. The channel also closely monitors the Saudi political and social arena.

The results of the study conducted by Johnson, Fahmy and Thomas [22] showed that Al Arabiya enjoyed high credibility among Arab viewers, as it ranked third following Al Jazeera and Abu Dhabi TV in their coverage of Arab and regional news, and that Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya enjoy equal credibility.

Finally, Al-Saggaf's study [12] showed that Al Arabiya's website is a platform owned and managed by Saudis, and that it is linked to the Saudi government. Therefore, it faces criticism regarding its credibility and its bias in publishing anything that is compatible with Saudi policy. However, in a region characterized by internet censorship, limited freedom of expression, and governments controlling local media, Al Arabiya website, through its attached notes, provides Internet users with a means for discussing politics with each other and for expressing their opinions regarding what is happening in their countries or other countries.

III. STUDY PROBLEM

In light of the political conflict between Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states on the one hand, and Iran on the other, the controversy pertaining to the performance of media outlets that are affiliated with the Gulf regimes is foregrounded. Al-Arabiya, for example, which is affiliated with the Saudi regime, was found through the study sample to be subservient to the Saudi agenda. It did not uphold the professional standards required for objectivity and distancing from hate speech and conspiracy theory in dealing with a global health pandemic for which no decision yet has been made with conclusive results about its origin, and whether or not it was part of a biological warfare. Therefore, the researcher considers here the necessity of scrutinizing the performance of Al Arabiya channel regarding the Coronavirus crisis in the Gulf countries, in light of the large number of cases coming from Iran, and whether this point was being exploited for the purpose of serving the official

Saudi and Gulf policy.

IV. STUDY HYPOTHESES

The study is based on three hypotheses, based on the data referred to in the section on previous studies, namely:

- There are professional violations in Al Arabiya TV programs' handling of Iran during the COVID-19 crisis. The channel is affiliated with the Saudi regime which considers Iran an enemy.
- Conspiracy theory is being used by Al Arabiya programs in its handling of Iran during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Hate speech is being used against Iran in Al Arabiya's handling of the COVID-19 crisis in the Gulf.

V. STUDY QUESTIONS

- Were there professional violations in Al Arabiya's coverage during the Coronavirus crisis, particularly with regard to Iran?
- Did Al-Arabiya create hate speech against Iran during the Coronavirus crisis?
- Did Al-Arabiya use conspiracy theory (politicization of the pandemic) in its dealings with Iran during the Coronavirus crisis?

VI. METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

A. Methodology

The study adopted the content analysis approach, which aims at following methodological steps that lead to an analytical reading of each text or content, in accordance with a set of stages that help to reach the results and achieve the objectives of the study [31], [27]. Hassouna [21] believes that content analysis is a method or a tool used by the researcher among other methods and tools, within the framework of an integrated approach, which is the inventory approach in media studies. This approach is appropriate to the nature and objectives of the current study.

B. The Sample

The sample examines the content of five programs shown on "Al Arabiya" channel, namely "DNA", the "Panorama", "Maraya" (Mirrors), "Tafalkom" (Your Interaction), and "Diplomatic Street", during the period between February 19, 2020 until April 10, 2020. That is, starting from the first day of recording Coronavirus victims in Iran.

C. Data Collection Tools

The research relies on several methods for its data collection, including:

Previous studies, references, and available resources on Al Arabiya and the Iranian affairs on this channel, in addition to references that talk about the use of conspiracy theory in the media, hate speech, and media framing analysis.

The monitoring guide which deals with the aforementioned sample and which was subject to arbitration by a number of media professors, was then subject to statistical analysis in order to come up with the results.

VII. DATA ANALYSIS

After monitoring the programs of Al Arabiya channel that dealt with the Iranian issue during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, the researcher analyzed the content of these programs according to the limitations of the monitoring guide that was prepared in accordance with the objectives of the study.

The results were as follows:

Results of the First Question: Were There Professional Violations in Al Arabiya Channel's Coverage of Iranian Affairs during the Coronavirus Crisis?

A. Programs

TABLE I
PROGRAMS THAT DEALT WITH THE IRANIAN ISSUE DURING THE
CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Program	Frequency	Percentage
DNA Program	45	27.8%
Panorama Program	47	29.0%
Maraya (Mirrors) Program	24	14.8%
Al Share Al Deplomaci (Diplomatic Street Program)	2	1.2%
Tfaalkom (Your Interaction) Program	44	27.2%
Total	162	100%

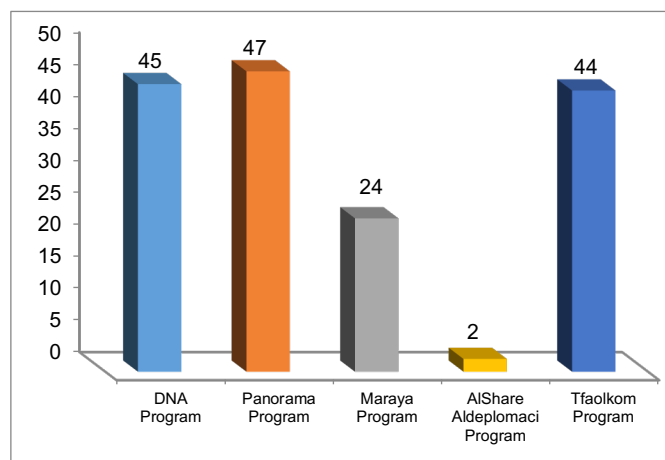


Fig. 1 Programs that dealt with Iranian affairs under the Corona pandemic

It is noticed from the data in Table I that the Panorama program is the most comprehensive program covering Iranian affairs during the study period during the Coronavirus pandemic by 29.0% of the sampled programs, followed by the DNA program at a rate of 27.8%, Tafaalkom with a rate of 27.2%, Maraya program at a rate of 14.8%, and finally, the Al Share Al Deplomaci program with a rate of 1.2%.

B. Coverage Size

TABLE II
AL ARABIYA PROGRAMS COVERAGE OF IRANIAN AFFAIRS DURING THE
CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Coverage	Frequency	Percentage
There is no coverage	53	32.7%
There is coverage	109	67.3%
Total	162	100%

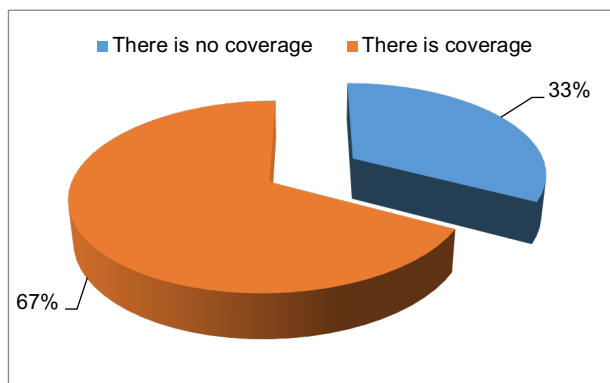


Fig. 2 Program coverage of Iranian affairs on Al Arabiya channel

It is noticed from the data in Table II that 67.3% of Al-Arabiya sampled programs covered the Iranian issue during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Through Tables I and II, it can be said that the coverage of Iranian affairs during the Coronavirus pandemic reached 67.3% of the total programs that were selected within the analysis categories, a high percentage meaning that the volume of coverage was high. This indicates that Al Arabiya has an interest in Iranian issues, regardless of the type and direction of this interest.

C. Methods Used by the Presenter

TABLE III
THE METHODS USED BY THE PRESENTER IN THE PROGRAMS DEALING WITH IRAN ON AL-ARABIYA CHANNEL

Methods	Frequency	Percentage
Propaganda methods	40	75.5%
Discussion methods	4	7.5%
Analytical methods	00	00
Informative methods	3	5.7%
Mixed	6	11.3
Total	53	100%

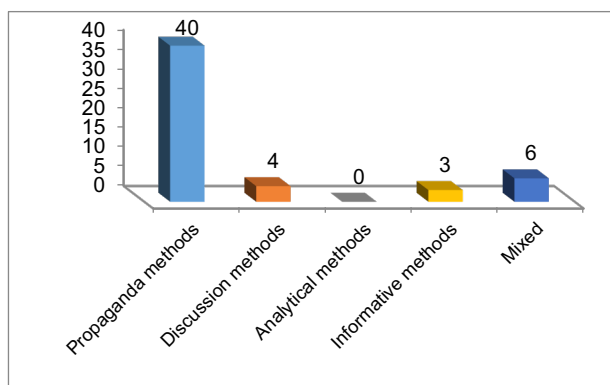


Fig. 3 The methods used by the broadcaster in the programs dealing with Iran

Data in Table III indicate that the researcher monitored a total of 53 recurrences of the methods used by the broadcaster in the sample programs of the study which dealt with the Iranian issue during the Coronavirus pandemic. These are divided into propaganda methods, discussion methods, analytical methods, news methods, and mixed methods.

Table III shows that the most common methods used by the broadcaster related to Iranian affairs on Al Arabiya were the propaganda methods, as they accounted for 75.5% of the total methods, followed by mixed methods at 11.3%, discussion methods at a rate of 7.5%, and lastly, news methods at 5.7%.

D. Supporting Materials Category

TABLE IV
THE NATURE OF THE SUPPORTING MATERIALS IN THE PROGRAMS THAT DEALT WITH THE IRANIAN ISSUE ON AL ARABIYA CHANNEL DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Job titles	Frequency	Percentage
News	00	00
Video	00	00
Animation	2	3.8%
Still image	00	00
Video-Taped News Report	00	00
Field report	1	1.9%
Recorded report	00	00
Interview	00	00
Witnesses	00	00
Maps	00	00
Infographic	2	3.8%
Mixed	47	88.7%
Sound effects	00	00
Promo	1	1.9
Total	53	100%

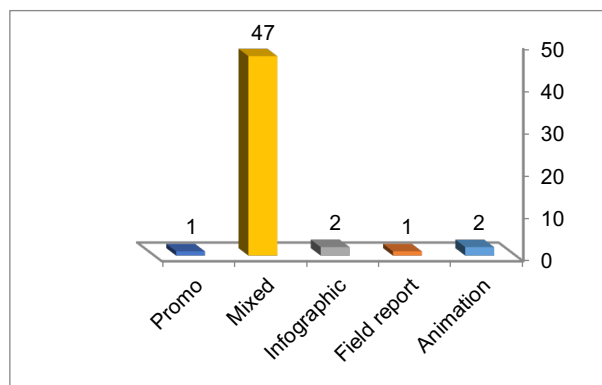


Fig. 4 The nature of the supporting materials in the talk shows

Table IV data indicate that most of the programs that dealt with the Iranian issue on Al Arabiya during the Coronavirus pandemic used a mixture of supporting materials, reaching 88.7%, and some programs used Animation at a rate of 3.8%. Some of them were infographics by the same rate 3.8%, while others are news reports and promos, at a rate of 1.9%.

E. Presenter's Objectivity

TABLE V
THE OBJECTIVITY OF THE BROADCASTER OF THE PROGRAMS DEALING WITH THE IRANIAN ISSUE ON AL-ARABIYA CHANNEL DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Broadcaster Objectivity	Frequency	Percentage
Objective	8	15.1%
Subjective	45	84.9%
Total	53	100%

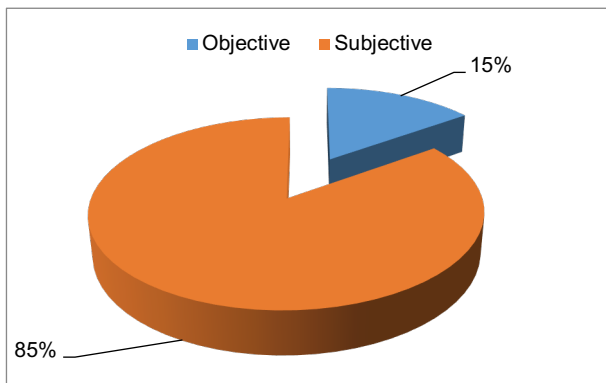


Fig. 5 The objectivity of the presenter of the programs on Al Arabiya

It is noted in Table V that most presenters were not objective in their programs that dealt with the Iranian issue during the Coronavirus pandemic on Al-Arabiya channel, as 84.9% of these presenters were not objective, and only 15.1% could be considered objective in their presentation.

F. The Professional Direction of the Program

TABLE VI
THE DIRECTION OF PROGRAMS THAT DEALT WITH THE IRANIAN ISSUE ON AL-ARABIYA CHANNEL DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Direction of the program	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	7	13.2%
Negative	46	86.8%
Total	53	100%

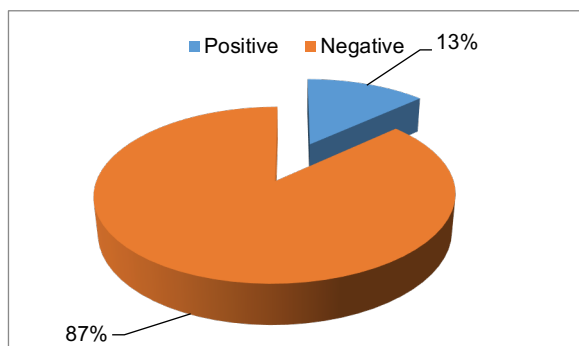


Fig. 6 The professional direction of the programs on Al Arabiya channel

It is noticed from Table VI that most of the directions of the programs that dealt with the Iranian issue during the Coronavirus pandemic on Al Arabiya were negative, at a rate of 86.8%, while 13.2% of these programs had positive attitudes.

G. Types of Persuasions

It is clear from Table VII that most of the persuasions in the programs presented on Al-Arabiya channel, which dealt with the Iranian issue, were of political type, as this type of persuasion represented 59.6%. It is followed by the mixed persuasion at 17.3% and by the pragmatic ones with a rate of 5.8%. As for the remaining religious, emotional, scientific and humanitarian persuasions, each recorded a rate of 3.8%. The researcher did not note any legal persuasions in the analysis of the content of the programs in the study sample.

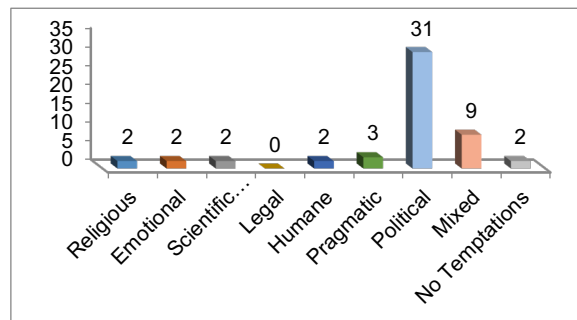


Fig. 7 Types of persuasions in programs on Al Arabiya channel

TABLE VII
TYPES OF PERSUASIONS IN THE PROGRAMS THAT DEALT WITH THE IRANIAN ISSUE ON AL ARABIYA DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Temptations	Frequency	Percentage
Religious	2	3.8%
Emotional	2	3.8%
Scientific knowledge	2	3.8%
Legal	00	00
Humane	2	3.8%
Pragmatic	3	5.8%
Political	31	59.6%
Mixed	9	17.3%
No Temptations	2	3.8%
Total	53	100%

Results of the Second Question: Did Al Arabiya Create Hate Speech against Iran during the Coronavirus Crisis?

TABLE VIII
HATE SPEECH IN PROGRAMS THAT DEALT WITH IRANIAN AFFAIRS ON AL ARABIYA CHANNEL DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Hate speech	Frequency	Percentage
Emotional mobilization	16	30.8%
Incitement	4	7.7%
Insults	7	13.5%
Libel and slander	12	23.1%
Stigma	1	1.9%
Profiling	4	7.7%
Accusation	8	15.4%
None	1	1.9%
Total	53	100%

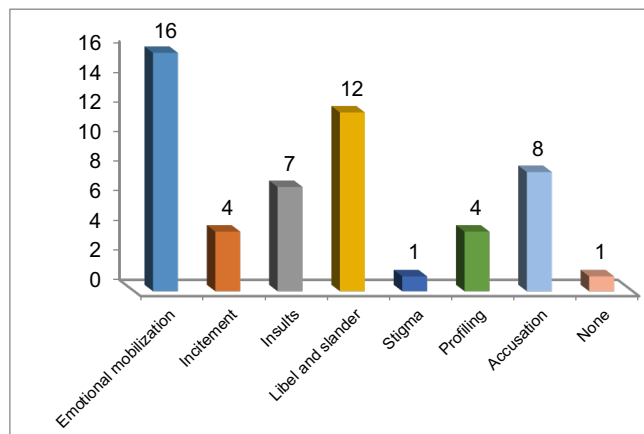


Fig. 8 Hate speech in Al Arabiya Channel's programs on Iran

It is noticed from Table VIII that hate speech is present in programs that dealt with the Iranian issue broadcast on the Al-Arabiya channel during the Coronavirus pandemic, with a percentage of 98.1%. The most used methods are mobilization at 30.8%, libel and slander at 23.1%, and accusation at 15.4%.

The Results of the Third Question: Did Al Arabiya Use the Conspiracy Theory (Politicization of the Epidemic) in Its Dealings with Iran during the Coronavirus Crisis?

TABLE IX
THE EXTENT TO WHICH PROGRAMS DEALING WITH THE IRANIAN ISSUE ON THE AL ARABIYA CHANNEL USED CONSPIRACY THEORY DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Conspiracy theory	Frequency	Percentage
There is no conspiracy theory	13	24.5%
There is a conspiracy theory	40	75.5%
Total	53	100%



Fig. 9 The extent to which programs dealing with the Iranian issue on Al Arabiya channel used conspiracy theory during the Coronavirus pandemic

It is noted from Table IX that most of the programs that dealt with the Iranian issue during the Corona pandemic on the Al Arabiya network used conspiracy theory at a rate of 75.5%, while 24.5% of these programs did not use conspiracy theory in their narrative.

VIII. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The agenda theory proved applicable to the studied sample through several factors that will be mentioned in the following points, the most prominent of which are the intensification of coverage, the attempt to create influence through language, editorials, keynotes and supporting materials, avoiding objectivity to serve the point of view that suits the channel's policy and orientations as a channel affiliated with the Saudi regime, predominance of the negative orientation when it comes to talking about the extent of the channel's professionalism during the time period covered by the sample, working hard for directing the audience in the path the channel commits to. This was evident in violations of professionalism that were mostly related to lack of objectivity, the use of propaganda methods and emotional persuasions, creating hate speech and politicizing the pandemic as well. This was absolutely compatible with the Saudi political mood towards Iran.

The following are the most important findings of the study:

1. There are many programs that dealt with Iran on the Al-Arabiya TV channel during the Coronavirus pandemic, and one of the most popular of these is Panorama. The coverage of Iranian affairs in this program was as high as 67.3%.
2. The most common methods used by the presenter related to Iranian affairs on Al Arabiya were propaganda methods. They reached 75.5% of all methods.
3. Most of the programs that dealt with Iranian affairs on the Al-Arabiya channel during the Coronavirus pandemic used a mixture of supporting materials, reaching 88.7%.
4. Most of the presenters were not objective in their programs that dealt with the Iranian issue during the Coronavirus pandemic on Al-Arabiya channel, as they constituted 84.9%.
5. Most of the attitudes of the programs that dealt with the Iranian issue during the Corona pandemic on Al-Arabiya channel were negative, at a rate of 86.8%.
6. Most of the persuasion types in the programs presented on Al Arabiya channel which dealt with the Iranian issue, were of political persuasion, as this type of persuasion represented 59.6%.
7. It is noticed that hate speech is present in those programs that dealt with the Iranian issue on Al-Arabiya channel during the Coronavirus pandemic, with a percentage of 98.1%, most of which is mobilization at 30.8%, libel and slander at 23.1%, and accusation at 15.4%.
8. Most of the programs that dealt with Iran during the Coronavirus pandemic broadcast on Al Arabiya channel used conspiracy theory, with a percentage of 75.5%.

The above outcomes show the validity of the three hypotheses on which the research was based, namely the presence of violations of professionalism in dealing with the Iranian issue on the Al Arabiya network during the studied period, the presence of hate speech as well, and the politicization of the pandemic and the tendency to use conspiracy theory in discussing the issue during the mentioned time period.

REFERENCES

- [1] Aghaie Joobani, H. (2014). Al-Arabiya: "The Saudi Voice" in the Arab World. Asian politics & policy-volume 6.
- [2] Ahmed, A. and Al-Shayazami, M. (2018). Media of the Gulf Crisis: Hate Speech, Doha Center for Media Freedom, Doha, Qatar.
- [3] Al Arab Newspaper (2020). Corona feeds the conspiracy theory in the Russian media. (<https://bit.ly/3ezILSh>). Date of Access (23/8/2020).
- [4] Al-Haddad, Yusef Jumaa (2020). The Role of the Media in Facing the Crises Coronavirus as a Model, Shield of the Nation Magazine, United Arab Emirates.
- [5] Alian, Omar. (2015). The language of political news correspondents in Al-Arabiya channel: semantic study, unpublished master's thesis, Deanship of Postgraduate Studies, Al-Azhar University, Gaza, Palestine.
- [6] Alkhereiji, M. (2020). GCC officials blast Iran for coronavirus spread. The Arab Weekly, [<https://theArabweekly.com/gcc-officials-blast-iran-coronavirus-spread>]. Date of access (15/08/2020).
- [7] Al-Majid, Osama (2020). Iran exported terrorism to us, and today it exports Corona. Al-Bilad newspaper (<https://albiladpress.com/news/2020/4153/columns/629487.html>). Date of Access (11/08/2020).
- [8] Al-Mansour, A. (2018). Arab newspapers cover Trump's decision, "Jerusalem is the capital of Israel." Journal of Gaza University, (12) 22, 68-76.

- [9] Al-Mazahra, Manal (2012). *Communication Theories*. 1st. edition. Amman: Dar Al Masirah for Publishing, Distribution and Printing.
- [10] Al-Mousa, Muhammad (2020). *Determinants of Satellite News Coverage of the Corona Pandemic in the Era of Digitization*. Media Studies, Al Jazeera Studies Center.
- [11] Al-Rubaie, Biraq Hussain. (2019). *The role of social media in building hate speech, the international conference on hate speech and its impact on community coexistence and regional and international peace*, Salahuddin University, Erbil, Iraq.
- [12] Al-Saggaf, Yeslam. (2008). *Electronic media and the Arab public sphere: Al-Arabiya website as an example*. School of Computing and Mathematics, Charles Sturt University, Australia.
- [13] Alskaji, Omar Ahmed. (2018). *Analyzing the content of scientific programs in children's Arabic satellite channels and investigating their effects as an informal context in learning science*. PhD thesis, University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan.
- [14] Bielsko, H. & Biata, A. (2015), *Model of effective fight against hate speech Report on combating hate speech on the internet*, The Bielsko Artistic Association "Grodzki Theatre".
- [15] Dalati, Yaman (2020). *Media in Pandemic Time. How did the Arab and international media respond to the Corona crisis?* (<https://www.noonpost.com/content/36549>), Date of Access (25/07/2020).
- [16] Elias, S. (2020). *The politicization of the virus: Corona revives conspiracy theories in Russia*. Al-Araby Al-Jadeed newspaper, (<https://bit.ly/361LT5h>). Date of Access (27/07/2020).
- [17] Fawzi, Mohammed (2017). *The role of television in prioritizing political issues among the Bahraini public*. Bahrain Institute for Political Development, (2) 9, 1-172. <https://www.alarabiya.net/>
- [18] George, Cherian. *Hate Speech A Dilemma for Journalists the World Over*, Ethical Journalism Network (<https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/resources/publications/ethics-in-the-news/hate-speech>) entry date (5/11/2020).
- [19] Gogarty, K. & Hagle, C. (2020). *A guide to right-wing media reactions and conspiracy theories surrounding coronavirus*, <https://www.mediamatters.org/coronavirus-covid-19/guide-right-wing-media-coronavirus-reactions-and-conspiracy-theories>. Date of access (26/08/2020).
- [20] Hassouna, Nisreen (2015). *Content Analysis: Its Concept, Determinants and Uses*. Algeria: Osama House for Publishing and Distribution.
- [21] Hassouna, Nisreen. (2018). "Theories of Media and Communication." Alukah Network (www.alukah.net).
- [22] Johnson, J., Fahmy, S., Thomas, A. (2010). *Who wins the hearts and minds of the Arab audience? Examining how Arab viewers judge the credibility of Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, Al Hurra, and the local Arab stations*, International Communication Research Journal.
- [23] Maabara, Tamara. (2019). *Five ethical standards in the face of hate speech*, Akeed website (https://akeed.jo/ar/post/2056/_5_) entry date (5/11/2020).
- [24] McQuail, D. (2000). *Mass Communication Theory*. 4th edition, Sage Publications, London, UK.
- [25] Michael J. (2011). *Agenda-Setting Theory and the Role of the Media in Shaping Public Opinion for the Iraq War*. A research paper in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, (University of Central Missouri: Department of Communication, April, 2011).
- [26] Nasr, Wissam (2003). *Agenda of the interests of the websites of the authorities concerned with Egyptian women affairs - a comparative study*." Egyptian Journal of Public Opinion Research, 9 (2), Cairo University, Egypt.
- [27] Neuendorf, Kimberly A. (2002). *The Content Analysis Guidebook*. London, Sage Publications.
- [28] Niring, K. (2020). *Corona, AIDS and the plague: diseases of conspiracy theories!* (<https://bit.ly/3mK936Q>). Date of Access (25/07/2020).
- [29] Radnitz, S. (2020). *Why conspiracy theories spread faster than coronavirus?* The Guardian (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/03/coronavirus-conspiracy-theories-virus-social-media#maincontent>) Date of access (22/08/2020).
- [30] Shalaby, Mona (2020). *The Role of the Media in Confronting Corona*. Elaph Newsletter (<https://elaph.com/Web/opinion/2020/04/1288686.html>). Date of access (9/22/2020).
- [31] Shorfa, Elias (2015). *Data Analysis and Qualitative Reading: A Content Analysis Method*. University of Skikda Journal (4) 3• 122-131.
- [32] Tantawi, O. (2008). *The Dialectics of Power in a Global Media Scene A Comparative Study of Five International Television News Channels CNN, al Arabiya, al Jazeera, BBC, and al Jazeera English*, Master thesis, The American University in Cairo, Egypt.
- [33] Vane, J. & Kalvas, Frantisek. (2013). *The Agenda Setting Effect of Focusing Events: A Case Study of the Church Restitutions Issue*. University of West Bohemia Journal, (45) 3, 291-292.