

[From Verification to Virality: How Al Jazeera's New Media Shaped Public Opinion during The Gaza War]

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Abstract:

In this paper, the authors examine the impact of Al Jazeera's digital ecosystem on public opinion during the Gaza war, drawing on 15 in-depth semi-structured interviews with media professionals and conflict-journalism experts, analysed through thematic coding in ATLAS.ti. The research identifies six fundamental mechanisms that shape how audiences perceived the online platforms of Al Jazeera: speed and immediacy, interactive engagement, credibility and verification cues, emotional framing, youth reach and language differentiation between Arabic-and English-language content. Instead of viewing digital influence as a linear process, the results suggest a complex process whereby digital affordances, i.e., live streaming, short-form video, and virality, are triggered by emotional responses and credibility evaluations, which combine to form perceived opinion change. The analysis also reveals that the Arabic-language coverage increases regional resonance and affective identification, whereas the English-language content enhances transnational visibility and agenda pressure. The study contributes to the framing, affective publics, and networked public sphere literature by translating expert insights into a coherent conceptual model and feasible hypotheses for future quantitative research. The results indicate that digital conflict journalism operates through specific, discernible channels rather than diffuse, undifferentiated media effects.

Keywords: Al Jazeera; Gaza war; Digital journalism; Digital affordances; Verification and credibility; Emotional framing; Affective publics; Networked publics; Qualitative interviews; Opinion formation.

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1. Introduction

Digital platforms are increasingly central to the mediation of armed conflicts, with news organizations competing not only over accuracy but also over speed, visibility, and emotional resonance (Christensen and Khalil, 2023). The Gaza war represents a particularly significant example of a digitally mediated conflict, characterized by intense global attention, polarized narratives, and the rapid circulation of visual and textual content across social media networks (Miladi and Miladi, 2023). Within this environment, the formation of public opinion is shaped not solely by traditional broadcast journalism but by complex digital ecosystems that combine professional reporting with platform affordances such as virality, live streaming, and algorithmic amplification (Swastiningsih, Aziz, and Dharta, 2024). Understanding how these ecosystems influence perceptions during conflict has therefore become a central concern in contemporary media and communication research.

Al Jazeera occupies a distinctive position within this evolving media landscape. As a transnational news organization operating in both Arabic and English, it engages diverse regional and global audiences while navigating different political, cultural, and linguistic contexts (Al Balushi, 2024). Over the past decade, the network has increasingly adopted digital-first strategies, expanding its presence across websites and social media platforms including X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, and integrating live reporting, short-form video, and interactive formats into its coverage (Khalil, 2023). During the Gaza war, these platforms became key sites for the circulation of images, testimonies, and interpretations of events at unprecedented speed (Arafat and Cooper, 2025). This transformation raises important questions about how Al Jazeera's new media practices reshape audience engagement and influence public opinion beyond the scope of traditional television broadcasting (Chahbane and Chahbane, 2024).

Research Problem

Despite the growing body of scholarship on digital conflict reporting, important gaps remain. Existing studies have explored media framing, affective publics, and the role of networked communication in shaping political discourse, yet fewer works have examined how journalists and media professionals themselves interpret the mechanisms through which digital platforms influence audience perceptions during ongoing conflict. In particular, limited attention has been paid to how verification practices, emotional framing, linguistic differentiation, and youth-oriented engagement strategies intersect within a single digital news ecosystem. The study's central research question is: How do media professionals conceptualize the mechanisms through which Al Jazeera's digital practices during the Gaza war shape audience engagement, credibility perceptions, emotional response, and perceived opinion formation?

To address this question, the study draws on 15 semi-structured interviews with media professionals and conflict-journalism experts, analyzed through thematic coding, to identify the key mechanisms linking Al Jazeera's digital practices to perceived opinion formation during the war. Section 2 reviews scholarship on digital conflict reporting, affective publics, and credibility/verification. Section 3 outlines the interview design and coding procedure. Sections 4–5 present findings and discuss implications for models of opinion formation in digitally mediated conflicts

Study Hypotheses

Given the exploratory and qualitative nature of this study, it is guided primarily by a central research question rather than statistically testable hypotheses. It however does it based on the analytical anticipation that media practitioners view digital affordances, especially immediacy, interactivity and visual intensity as increasing emotional involvement and influencing credibility ratings, which consequently affect perceived opinion formation when in conflict.

Study Objectives

The research paper seeks to find out how the conceptualization of the connection between digital reporting activities by Al Jazeera and the opinion construction by audience is understood during the Gaza war. In particular, it aims to determine some of these important mechanisms as verification strategies, emotional framing, linguistic distinction between Arabic and English platforms, and youth-aimed digital engagement methods. The research also intends on formulating a thematic model which elucidates how such mechanisms interact in a digitally mediated conflict space.

Significance of the Study

This study is important to the field of media and communication research because it provides a prediction of the professional stance in controversies regarding digital conflict reporting (Durani et al., 2024). The study facilitates theoretical discourses about the use of affective publics and digital opinion-forming through the analysis of the ways in which journalists interpret the impact of platform affordances, emotional narratives, and credibility practices. It is also useful in comprehending transnational journalism practices in the extreme war setting and is insightful to the media practitioners, scholars and policymakers interested in the ethical and social consequences of digital coverage of war.

Study Limitations

Various limitations are associated with this study. To begin with, it is based on a fairly limited sample of 15 semi-structured interviews, which does not allow statistical extrapolation (Subedi, 2023).. Second, the results are based on professional opinion as opposed to actual measures of the audience opinion change. Third, the attention paid to the Al Jazeera and the situation of the war in Gaza might restrict the generalization of the results to other media outlets or crises. Lastly, thematic interpretation, as in all qualitative research, can be subjective to certain extent of the researcher in spite of systematic coding operations.

Terms and Definitions

In this work, digital platforms refer to the online news sites and social networks that can be used to spread the information with high speed and interactivity (Ren et al., 2024). The term digital conflict reporting refers to journalistic activities that are carried out and dispatched by online and social media platforms in the event of armed conflict (Christensen, & Khalil, 2023). Affective publics refers to networked publics brought together by the expression of mutual emotions in a digital environment (Gherlone, 2025). Perceived opinion formation is the perceptions of media professionals on how the

audience develops or changes their perception towards mediated conflict coverage (Okechukwu, 2023). Verification practices refer to the journalistic procedures to legitimize visual and written information prior to publication (Khan et al., 2023).

2. Literature Review

The role of media in shaping public opinion during conflict has long been recognized, particularly in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Classical media-effects traditions such as agenda-setting (McCombs and Shaw, 1972) and framing theory (Entman, 1993) argue that media influence operates through both the prioritization of issues and the interpretive structures through which audiences understand events. Earlier theorists including Lippmann (1922) and Dewey (1927) emphasized the mediating role of communication systems in constructing public realities, suggesting that audiences interpret political events through images and narratives provided by the media. In contemporary warfare, these dynamics are intensified by the expansion of digital platforms, which enable the rapid dissemination of visual and textual information in near real time (Hoskins and Shchelin, 2023; Durani et al., 2024).

Al Jazeera represents a prominent example of how regional news organizations have transformed under conditions of digital convergence (Chahbane and Chahbane, 2024). Scholarship suggests that the network does not merely report events but frequently presents counter-narratives to dominant Western media frames (El-Nawawy and Powers, 2009). Digital affordances such as live streaming and interactive social media engagement further amplify this counter-hegemonic positioning by allowing audiences to encounter conflict narratives without relying solely on traditional editorial gatekeeping (Fowler-Watt and Allan, 2023). The concept of the “Al Jazeera Effect” highlights the capacity of transnational media networks to shape global political discourse by influencing public opinion in real time (Seib, 2008).

A growing body of research emphasizes the emotional dimensions of digitally mediated conflict communication. Papacharissi’s (2015) notion of affective publics describes how emotional reactions shared across digital platforms can organize collective attention and political engagement. Empirical studies show that exposure to conflict imagery online can intensify empathy, anger, and moral judgment, thereby shaping political attitudes and interpretations of responsibility (Gonzalez-Bailon, Banchs and Kaltenbrunner, 2010; Huddy, Feldman and Cassese, 2007). At the same time, scholars caution that algorithmic amplification and emotionally charged framing may contribute to polarization and selective interpretation of events (Bakir and McStay, 2023).

Questions of verification and credibility have become central to debates on digital conflict journalism. Higgins (2021) highlights the growing importance of open-source intelligence and real-time verification practices, while Westlund and Ghersetti (2022) argue that immersive verification techniques enhance perceived trustworthiness in crisis reporting. Institutional initiatives such as Al Jazeera’s monitoring of journalistic practices in Gaza demonstrate efforts to maintain ethical standards amid pressures for immediacy and virality (Al Jazeera Media Institute, 2025). These practices align with the concept of networked witnessing, whereby audiences participate in validating and interpreting events through digital interaction (Mortensen, 2021).

Comparative research further highlights the distinctive editorial positioning of Al Jazeera relative to Western media organizations. Abu-Fadil (2021) notes divergent consumption patterns

between regional and Western audiences, with Al Jazeera often framing events through localized historical contexts. Similarly, Alajmi (2025) finds that while Western outlets frequently emphasize military strategy and geopolitical analysis, Al Jazeera foregrounds humanitarian narratives and civilian experiences, reinforcing what Chouliaraki (2021) describes as the mediated spectatorship of suffering. Regional media, therefore, may function as counter-hegemonic actors that challenge dominant global information hierarchies (Powers and Russell, 2020).

Digital conflict communication also intersects with participatory political engagement. The theory of connective action suggests that networked platforms enable decentralized forms of political expression and mobilization (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013). Recent studies demonstrate how platforms such as Telegram, Reddit, and Twitter have facilitated both information exchange and emotional expression during the Israel–Hamas conflict (Polanunu, 2025; Freelon, McIlwain and Clark, 2022; Wojcieszak et al., 2023). These participatory dynamics contribute to the emergence of a multidimensional networked public sphere that often operates beyond traditional editorial structures (Lynch and Freelon, 2020).

Ethical tensions remain a persistent concern in digital war reporting. Scholars such as Hutson (2022) and Nash (2023) argue that journalists must constantly negotiate between engagement-driven storytelling, advocacy pressures, and professional norms of neutrality. The rapid circulation of emotionally charged content complicates established ethical frameworks, requiring new strategies for transparency, verification, and accountability (Jamil, 2023). Institutional responses by organizations such as Al Jazeera illustrate attempts to balance credibility with the demands of digital immediacy.

Taken together, the literature identifies several interrelated themes that inform the present study: the transformation of conflict reporting through digital affordances, the rise of affective and networked publics, and the growing importance of credibility and verification in an accelerated media environment. Al Jazeera provides a particularly relevant case through which to examine these dynamics, as its multilingual and multiplatform coverage illustrates how digital journalism can shape both regional resonance and global visibility in politically contested conflicts. These theoretical insights provide the foundation for analyzing how media practices, audience engagement, and interpretive frameworks interact in shaping perceptions of the Gaza war.

2.1 Conceptual Framework – Media Influence on Public Opinion in Conflict Contexts

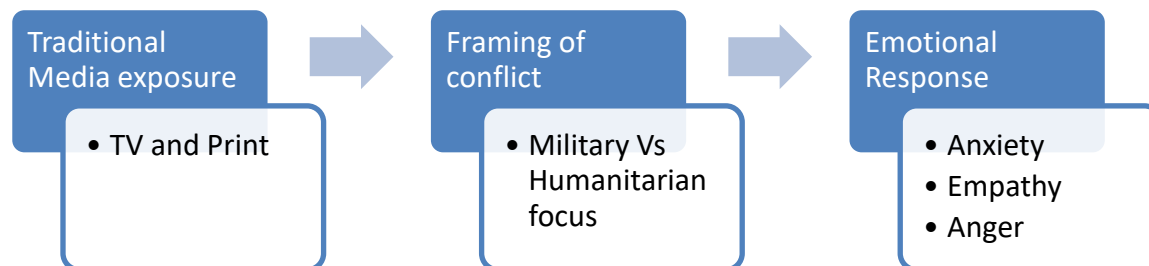


Figure 1. Baseline media-influence pathway in conflict contexts.

As shown in Figure 1, the framework illustrates a basic pathway in conflict contexts in which media exposure shapes the framing of the conflict, which in turn elicits emotional responses. Building on this baseline pathway, the present study focuses specifically on Al Jazeera's digital ecosystem during the Gaza war and examines how speed and immediacy, interactive engagement, credibility and verification cues, emotional framing, youth reach, and language differentiation between Arabic- and English-language content combine to shape perceived opinion formation.

3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used to examine expert interpretations of Al Jazeera's digital media practices during the Gaza war. The research design used in this study is qualitative and is situated within a constructivist paradigm, where participants and researchers co-construct meaning (Schwandt, 2014). The main aim was to understand how professionals perceived media influence, bias, and digital media involvement in conflict coverage, with particular emphasis on Al Jazeera's reporting during the Gaza war. Qualitative inquiry was chosen due to its ability to capture subtle interpretations, complex judgments, and interpretive decision-making that can hardly be quantified, especially within a highly politicized and sensitive media landscape (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

3.1 Participant Selection and Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 media professionals who had experience in journalism, editorial management, and digital media, which is appropriate for in-depth qualitative inquiry focused on expert perspectives. Purposive selection of participants was employed to ensure representation across international, regional, and digital platforms, allowing diversity in institutional affiliation, professional roles, and years of experience. The interviews were conducted in Arabic to enable respondents to express themselves freely and to minimize language barriers. They were later translated into English prior to analysis in order to preserve accuracy and analytical coherence.

The interviews were structured around major themes including media bias, the impact of political and economic pressures, audience engagement, the transformation of new media, and coverage of the Gaza conflict, following an open-ended interview protocol. Sessions lasted between 45 and 75 minutes, which provided sufficient time to explore emerging topics while maintaining comparability across participants. The semi-structured design ensured both consistency and flexibility, allowing participants to expand upon their experiences and reflections.

3.2 Data Preparation and Segmentation

All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and divided into sentence-level quotations, which were treated as the unit of analysis. This level of granularity allowed precise coding and facilitated tracing meaning back to specific prompts and participant contexts. All transcripts and coding outputs were stored in ATLAS.ti, which provided secure and version-controlled data storage. To preserve confidentiality, all participants were anonymized, and identifying information was removed prior to coding and reporting.

3.3 Coding and Analysis

A by-question coding strategy was employed, where each interview question was assigned its own code set. This approach enabled targeted comparison between participants and maintained thematic alignment with the research questions (Bhalla et al., 2023). Coding was conducted through an iterative open and axial process, beginning with open coding to identify discrete ideas and patterns, followed by grouping these into higher-level themes without overlap. The resulting thematic structure reflected not only dominant patterns but also minority viewpoints, capturing the diversity of professional experiences.

To enhance rigor and transparency, the study maintained detailed audit trails, including coding memos, decision logs, and versioned codebooks, which documented analytical decisions and supported the trustworthiness of the findings (Biddix and Bourke, 2025). A frequency threshold was applied such that only codes supported by two or more quotations were reported, ensuring that findings represented shared perceptions rather than isolated statements. Analytical interpretation combined quantitative elements, such as code frequency, with qualitative close reading of quotations, preserving the connection between participant meaning and the interview prompts that generated them.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitivity of the Gaza conflict and potential professional risks, stringent ethical standards were applied. Participants provided informed consent, agreeing to recording, translation, and anonymized reporting (Yusof et al., 2022). Data were stored securely and were accessible only to the research team. Participants were informed that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without consequences. Psychological and safety considerations were also addressed, particularly when discussing political pressures, digital platform targeting, and editorial constraints. Procedures were designed to minimize harm by offering debriefing opportunities and allowing sensitive issues to be discussed anonymously.

3.5 Methodological Alignment with the Conceptual Framework

The study design aligns directly with the constructivist paradigm by examining how media professionals interpret bias, audience engagement, and digital affordances during conflict reporting (Bibi, Khan, and Shabir, 2022). Through a complex coding strategy combined with interpretive triangulation across participants and themes, the analysis connects professional perceptions to broader theoretical concepts such as agenda-setting, framing, and media influence. The qualitative findings also inform subsequent variable operationalization and survey construction in Paper 2, ensuring continuity between exploratory insights and later hypothesis testing.

Overall, the methodological approach emphasizes credibility, transparency, and ethical integrity, generating in-depth, context-driven data that illuminate processes of media influence and digital transformation within high-stakes conflict settings. By foregrounding expert perspectives and conducting systematic analytical interpretation, the study provides a detailed understanding of Al Jazeera's Gaza coverage and the broader professional and digital environment in which it operates.

4. Findings and Analysis

The thematic analysis of the fifteen expert interviews produced six central themes reflecting media bias, digital transformation, audience engagement, and conflict reporting. These themes were developed through iterative coding in ATLAS.ti, combining frequency analysis with close reading of participant quotations. Verbatim quotations (2–3 per theme) are used to support each theme, demonstrating both convergence and credible minority perspectives.

4.1 Media Bias: Structural and Contextual Drivers

Participants described bias as a structural and widespread feature of media coverage rather than a rare anomaly. Bias was contextualized as visible in the choice of angles, framing, and thematic emphasis, often shaped by ownership structures, political affiliations, and funding sources. One expert noted: "Outlets are influenced by environment, ownership, management orientations, audience nature. This does not necessarily hide truth; sometimes it is a choice of angle." Another emphasized a more severe manifestation of bias: "Coverage can invert facts via repeated lies or misinformation, especially when political funding is involved."

Ownership and funding were identified as key factors influencing bias, with both political and commercial pressures affecting editorial autonomy. Another factor highlighted by participants was the mediating role of audience expectations, which influenced tone and content packaging: "Outlets are influenced by audience nature... does not prioritize clicks except insofar as they serve editorial aims." Structural bias was also linked to national politics and host-country positions, particularly in high-salience contexts such as the Gaza war. One respondent explained: "National policies and host-state positions significantly affect editorial policies, especially on sensitive issues." Taken together, these accounts portray bias as a structural condition tied to ownership, funding, and national politics, providing the backdrop against which digital mechanisms of influence operate in the conceptual model.

4.2 Media Influence and Public Opinion

The interviews suggested a dual and reciprocal relationship between media and public opinion, where media simultaneously reflects and shapes audience perspectives. Participants noted that during routine news cycles, media often follows prevailing public sentiment, whereas during crises it tends to set agendas and construct dominant narratives. As one participant stated: “Media does not operate in a single direction; it interacts with public opinion in a reciprocal relationship.” Another explained the intensified shaping role during conflict: “In times of crisis such as wars, the media’s role in shaping public opinion becomes more prominent than merely reflecting it.” Agenda-setting, framing, campaign amplification, and alignment with official discourses were identified as key mechanisms of influence, while responsiveness was achieved through monitoring audience feedback, social media indicators, and patterns of audience segmentation.

4.3 Political Pressures and Editorial Constraints

Analysts highlighted that both external and internal political pressures systematically influence editorial processes. Common effects included tone moderation, selective emphasis, timing adjustments, and self-censorship. One respondent described language adjustments as a response to external constraints: “I am sometimes advised to use a softer phrase instead of a stronger one.”

Others referred to broader editorial modulation: “Daily discussions lead to decisions being changed or adjustments to how news is presented.” Safety concerns also emerged as a critical moderating factor, with journalists making operational choices to protect personal and team security: “The main risk is not always legal; it is the safety of journalists and field teams.” These pressures illustrate the interdependence between professional judgment, institutional guidelines, and structural constraints in shaping news coverage.

4.4 Digital Media Transformation

Another major theme was the redefinition of the role of digital media in journalism. According to participants, three key shifts emerged: co-production with audiences, increased speed and interactivity, and platform-driven storytelling formats. One participant explained: “Every citizen with a mobile phone became a journalist, which forced journalists to change their work methods.”

The role of journalists has shifted toward curation, verification, contextualization, and audience engagement, supported by analytical tools and cross-platform workflows: “Verification becomes the core craft... context and explanation move center stage through timelines, FAQs, and short explainers.” Digital media was characterized as both a supportive and disruptive force. Digital analytics were described as influencing content placement, pacing, and editorial prioritization, while simultaneously creating new ethical and operational challenges. These observations position digital affordances such as speed, co-production, and verification as core components of the model through which Al Jazeera’s new media contribute to perceived opinion change.

4.5 Coverage of the Gaza War

Participants largely agreed that Al Jazeera's coverage of the Gaza war was extensive, field-oriented, and analytical, with a clear editorial perspective that highlighted the humanitarian suffering of Palestinians. One participant stated: "It combined live reporting with broader analytical contexts and delivered in-depth analyses by political and diplomatic experts." Another emphasized the emotional and narrative dimensions: "Coverage succeeded in conveying the humanitarian picture directly, showing civilian victims and destruction."

Western outlets were often contrasted as focusing more on security narratives and political framing, reflecting differences in access, editorial positioning, and audience expectations. Although some participants perceived a marginal pro-Palestinian bias, professionals emphasized that credibility rested primarily on professional rigor, verification practices, and sustained field presence.

4.6 Digital Influence on Audience Perception

Digital media platforms were widely viewed as more influential than traditional television in shaping opinion during the Gaza conflict. Experts highlighted affordances such as reach, speed, interactivity, and shareability. As one participant noted: "Digital impact was broader than traditional TV; it enabled moment-by-moment following, participation, and re-sharing." Arabic-language content was described as mobilizing regional audiences, while English-language platforms amplified transnational visibility and influence: "The English platform played a similar role on foreign and Western public opinion, creating social pressure."

Interactive features, short-form videos, live streams, and infographics facilitated rapid content diffusion, while the complementary use of television maintained analytical depth for legacy audiences. Taken together, this theme directly informs the model's pathways linking platform affordances, emotional responses, and perceived shifts in public opinion.

The findings indicate that media bias, political and commercial pressures, audience engagement, and digital media affordances intersect to shape both editorial judgment and audience perception. The case of Al Jazeera's Gaza coverage demonstrates how field-based reporting, ethical verification, and strategic digital deployment can enhance influence while operating within structural and operational constraints. These observations provide a foundation for the quantitative modeling, where mechanisms identified by experts are translated into measurable constructs.

5. Discussion

This article aimed to describe how the digital media ecosystem of Al Jazeera influenced the way audiences perceived the Gaza war by examining expert interpretations of its practices, affordances, and perceived impacts. The results indicate that opinion formation in contemporary conflicts is not driven solely by exposure, but rather by a combination of platform affordances, credibility cues, affective framing, and networked engagement. In doing so, the research builds on existing literature on digital conflict reporting by offering a comprehensive, expert-based conceptual framework that connects media practices with perceptual and attitudinal outcomes.

First, the prominence of speed and virality supports recent research suggesting that conflict communication is shifting toward a logic of real-time flow rather than delayed verification cycles (Chouliaraki, 2021; Zelizer, 2022). Experts consistently noted that Al Jazeera was able to shape attention through its capacity to distribute short-form videos, live updates, and visually engaging content, thereby capturing audience focus during decisive moments of the Gaza war. This finding contributes to scholarship on the acceleration of digital journalism and the role of immediacy as a signal of credibility, particularly in humanitarian crises (Waisbord, 2020; Usher, 2023). In contrast to traditional agenda-setting models, where issue salience develops over time, the findings suggest a shift toward micro-agenda setting, in which viral moments organize public discourse in transient but powerful ways.

Second, the role of credibility and verification cues challenges assumptions that speed necessarily leads to distrust. Analysts emphasized that institutional credibility, visible sourcing, and Al Jazeera's local presence helped counter skepticism, even when content circulated rapidly online. This aligns with recent work on performative credibility, where trust is constructed through symbolic indicators such as live footage, expert correspondents, and sustained narrative framing rather than formal verification alone (Carlson, 2017; Kohring and Matthes, 2023). Importantly, participants distinguished between perceived authority and objective truth, noting that coherence, moral clarity, and immediacy often carry greater weight in shaping opinion during conflict situations.

Third, emotional framing emerged as a primary mechanism linking exposure to perceived opinion change. Professionals described Al Jazeera's coverage as emphasizing civilian suffering, ethical urgency, and injustice, which evoked compassion, anger, and solidarity. This observation strongly supports affective theories of political communication, which argue that emotions are not peripheral but integral to political judgment, particularly in wartime contexts (Papacharissi, 2015; Huddy et al., 2023). Expert accounts suggest that emotional activation not only increased attention but also facilitated interpretive alignment, making audiences more receptive to specific narratives of responsibility and legitimacy.

Fourth, the study highlights the role of youth-oriented digital outreach in expanding Al Jazeera's influence. Experts observed that younger audiences increasingly relied on social media platforms rather than television to access information about Gaza, supporting claims of generational media bifurcation (Newman et al., 2024; Hurley, 2025). These findings reinforce theories of networked publics, which propose that political meaning is increasingly produced through peer sharing, remixing, and algorithmic amplification rather than traditional institutional gatekeeping (Boyd, 2014; Bennett and Segerberg, 2013). Notably, participants emphasized that youth engagement was active rather than passive, with commenting, sharing, and hashtag activism functioning as mechanisms through which opinion formation became socially embedded.

One of the novel contributions of this research is the distinction between Arabic- and English-language platforms. Experts consistently noted that Arabic content carried stronger emotional resonance and regional identification, whereas English content was perceived as enhancing transnational visibility and reputational pressure. This finding contributes to scholarship on multilingual media systems by demonstrating how language operates as a strategic variable in conflict communication, shaping not only audience reach but also forms of influence (Powers, 2018; Thussu, 2022). Arabic messaging reinforced collective identity and moral positioning, while English messaging targeted global elites, journalists, and policymakers, thereby expanding symbolic power beyond regional audiences.

Finally, integrating these themes within a single conceptual model allows the study to move beyond descriptive accounts of media bias or influence. The findings suggest that Al Jazeera's influence during the Gaza war operates as a chain process involving digital affordances, emotional framing, credibility cues, audience engagement, and linguistic strategy, each contributing to the scope of perceived influence. The proposed model complements and extends existing frameworks of framing and networked publics by explicitly linking media practices to perceived opinion change rather than assuming influence as an implicit outcome.

These conclusions also have direct implications for related quantitative research. Themes identified in this qualitative study are translated into measurable constructs, including digital exposure, engagement behaviors, perceived credibility, emotional impact, and opinion change, which can be systematically tested to evaluate the strength and distribution of these mechanisms across audiences. Taken together, the two articles offer a more nuanced understanding of how global news organizations shape public opinion within digitally mediated conflicts.

6. Conclusion

In this work, the impact of the digital media ecosystem at Al Jazeera on shaping public opinion during the Gaza war has been examined through the analysis of expert interpretations of its practices, affordances, and perceived implications. Moving beyond traditional discussions of media bias or agenda-setting influence, the findings demonstrate that influence in digitally mediated conflicts emerges from a combination of speed, credibility, emotional framing, and networked engagement. Together, these mechanisms form a process-based model of opinion formation that more accurately reflects the realities of contemporary conflict communication.

Based on the qualitative evidence, Al Jazeera's capacity for rapid dissemination and circulation positioned it as a focal point during critical moments of the conflict. Notably, speed did not operate in isolation. Experts emphasized that institutional reputation, visible sourcing, and continuous live coverage sustained credibility, allowing audiences to perceive fast-moving content as reliable rather than speculative. This challenges assumptions that immediacy necessarily undermines journalistic authority and instead highlights how credibility is increasingly shaped by platform-specific cues in digital environments.

Emotional framing emerged as one of the most significant drivers of perceptual change. By emphasizing humanitarian suffering and moral urgency, Al Jazeera's coverage mobilized affective responses that influenced how audiences interpreted responsibility, legitimacy, and injustice. These affective processes were further reinforced through digital engagement practices such as sharing, commenting, and networked discussion, particularly among youth audiences. As a result, opinion formation appeared not as an isolated cognitive process but as a socially embedded phenomenon unfolding within networked publics.

Another key contribution of this study lies in identifying language as a strategic dimension of media influence. Experts consistently distinguished between the regional resonance created by Arabic-language content and the transnational visibility generated through English-language platforms. This dual approach enabled Al Jazeera to cultivate emotional identification among regional audiences while simultaneously exerting symbolic pressure within global public and elite spheres. In doing so, the study

extends existing theories of framing and networked publics by illustrating how linguistic segmentation shapes both the scope and depth of media influence in conflict contexts. These findings provide a qualitative foundation for future quantitative testing of the proposed pathways—linking digital affordances, credibility cues, emotional framing, engagement, and language differentiation—to assess how strongly they shape perceived opinion change across audience groups.

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