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Reality Television Frames, Pro-U.S. Frames, and Episodes in the First 31 days of Iraq War News Coverage

Michael Todd

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

mdtodd@siu.edu

1640 Logan Dr. #9

Carbondale, IL 62901

www.massmediaworld.com

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Abstract: The first 31 days of Iraq war news coverage was similar to reality television episodes in that the majority of the coverage contained the five elements of reality television. Significant amounts of pro-U.S. and episodic media frames were also present in the coverage. The episodic frames minimize the viewer's feelings of obligation or social responsibility to consider and discuss the elements of war the pro-U.S. frames are not showing. The presence of the reality frames support claims that the war was presented to viewers as entertainment.
Key words: Iraq, Framing, War, News, Reality

On May 1, 2003, President Bush announced from the deck of the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln that "major combat operations in Iraq have ended," just 43 days after the "shock and awe" segment of the war had started (Sanger, 2003; Stanley, 2003). From the very beginning of the war, public relations expert Victoria Clarke headed up the Pentagon's media operation, including the embedding of more than 500 journalists with U.S. military units and the "shock and awe" campaign, that was "a victory of TV's show business instincts over news" (Rich, 2003).

During the first 72-hours of the invasion, "with its triumphal story line bereft of gore and starring

enthusiastic embedees," scholars claim journalists showed an alarming lack of judgment in their reporting, which focused on embeds, technology, and patriotism (Rich, 2003; Griscom, 2003). Journalists who dared show even slight skepticism, such as Peter Jennings when he openly expressed doubt about Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's comments on the "humanity" of U.S. weaponry, were castigated by their cohorts for "America-bashing, pessimism and antiwar agitation" (Rich, 2003).

In retrospect, several news organizations including the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* publicly "second-guessed" their war coverage (Steinberg, 2004).   The *Times* editorial staff admitted their coverage was not sufficiently "rigorous" and ran stories with information that was "controversial" and that they now consider "questionable" (The Times and Iraq, 2004). Journalists in the United Kingdom have called television-news-war coverage with its amplification of human interest stories like "the bravery of one soldier" and "the suffering of a bereaved family" akin to reality television (Harding & Nicholson, 2003).

"War: the reality series" is not as unrealistic as some might think given a recent contract between the Department of Defense and television producer Bertram Van Munster. Van Munster, the producer of CBS's *The Amazing Race* and ABC's *Profiles From the Front Line,* has been contracted to chronicle the lives of soldiers in the Iraq War and said he may try and create his own reality series out of the footage (Eggerton, 2003). In addition, news programmers such as CBS's News President Andrew Heyward recognize the popularity and financial potential of reality television and are making changes to their news programs to make them more like reality television (Bednarski, 2004).

Using framing theory, this paper examines whether television news media covered the Iraq war in a manner similar to reality television and how the coverage treated the U.S. military. The

objective was achieved through a content analysis of televised Iraq war news coverage. The goal of the study is to determine if early coverage of the Iraq war was similar to reality television programming. To achieve this goal, the amounts of reality elements contained in randomly selected portions of early Iraq war coverage will be measured.

Reality Television

In order to analyze journalists' claims that television-news-war coverage is similar to reality television, a standard for what reality television is must be examined. Reality television is typically thought of to include shows such as *Survivor, Big Brother, The Apprentice, Making the Band, Fear Factor, Joe Millionaire, The Amazing Race* and *Temptation Island* to name a few (Nabi, Biely, Morgan, & Stitt, 2003). The popularity of shows like *Survivor* is evidenced with their high-viewer ratings; *Survivor* garnered an average of 22.2 million viewers per show during the 2005 season and was rated fifth in viewership for CBS, which was the number one watched station for viewers between the ages of 18 and 49 (Aurthur, 2005). Although reality remains a popular genre, few studies clearly define what reality shows are and there is currently no clearly defined industry standard for the genre (Nabi, et al. 2003).

In an attempt to demystify the reality-television show and provide a clear starting point of analysis for such shows, Nabi, Biely, Morgan and Stitt (2003) analyzed a variety of shows that seemed most representative of the reality show genre and formulated a clear definition of reality-based television. Reality-based television programs are "programs that film real people as they live out events (contrived or otherwise) in their lives, as these events occur," (Nabi, et al. 2003). Reality-show programming consists of several elements: 1)"people portraying themselves, i.e., not actors or public figures performing roles," 2) "filmed at least in part in their living or working environment rather than on a set,"3) "without a script", 4) "with events placed in a

narrative context", and 5) "for the primary purpose of viewer entertainment" (Nabi, et al. 2003).

Nabi, Biely, Morgan and Stitt's definition excludes programs that fall under other genres such as

"news programming, talk shows, and documentaries," as well as "re-enactments" such as

America's Most Wanted, *Unsolved Mysteries*, and *Rescue: 911*; and "simple video clips not

placed in a narrative context" in programs like *America's Funniest Home Videos* (2003).

The five-part definition includes a wide variety of programs with differing characteristics. For

instance, reality shows such as *Cops*, a virtual "ride-along" for the viewer in which the

environment and story line appear completely uncontrived, would be included in this definition

along with the vastly different *Survivor*, with its game show characteristics, plot twists and

dramatic tribal councils (Nabi, et al. 2003). Nabi, Biely, Morgan and Stitt tested their definition

to see how well it represented television-media consumers' idea of reality television and

discovered that a definition for this type of programming "is coalescing in the public

consciousness but is not yet secured" (2003). In other words, viewers may know a reality

television program when they see one but they likely can not clearly explain what reality

television is.

After surveying television viewers for their interpretations of what constitutes reality television

and comparing the results to their five-part definition, they found the viewer definition of the

genre includes programs that "are not seen as particularly real," but are seen as more real than

fictionalized accounts of dramatized life-events (Nabi, et al. 2003). Their results show the

reality-television genre is considered more realistic than situation comedies and soap operas, but

less realistic than talk shows or news magazine programs (Nabi, et al. 2003).

Using the reality-television viewer's responses as a guide, Nabi and her colleagues determined

that including situation comedies and soap operas or talk shows and news magazine programs in

their definition would be overly inclusive (2003). However, they also determined their definition

of reality programs to be "particularly conservative" (Nabi, et al. 2003). Despite these definition

quandaries, Nabi and her colleagues determined their definition, although conservative, to be

adequate for use in analysis of the genre (2003).

At first consideration, the Nabi and colleagues definition seems problematic for use in this study,

i.e., for application to televised news. After closer analysis, there is sufficient reason to believe

the definition is a good fit.

First, the five-part definition includes as its fifth element that a reality show is "for the primary

purpose of viewer entertainment" (Nabi, et al. 2003). The general definition Nabi and

colleagues use for the term "entertainment" is the "general cognitive assessment of enjoyment"

(2003). They elaborate on this definition by suggesting that viewers enjoy reality shows

"because of their unique elements," which they expound as the elements of "real people and [the]

unscripted nature" of the genre (2003). Given this definition of enjoyment, one could say

viewers "enjoy" television-news-war coverage as it does consist of real people in unscripted

situations (Nabi, et al. 2003). Thus, the fifth element could read: for the primary purpose of

viewing unique elements such as unscripted real people.Second, Nabi, et al. (2003) acknowledge

that theirs is a conservative definition. A more inclusive definition could include news

programming, for example changing the fifth element to read: for the primary purpose of

creating compelling viewing.

Third, the elements of "shock and awe," embedded-journalists, and advanced technology that

made early Iraq war television-news coverage unique in the eyes of seasoned journalists such as

Walter Cronkite, Dan Rather, Peter Jennings and Peter Arnett suggests that this televised-news-

war coverage indeed was not typical of televised news (Sanger, 2003; Stanley, 2003; Steinberg

2004; The Times and Iraq, 2004; Rich, 2003; Griscom, 2003; Harding & Nicholson, 2003). In addition, self admonitions of poor journalistic judgment from the previously mentioned journalists as well as the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* further supports the supposition that early Iraq-war coverage indeed was unique (Sanger, 2003; Stanley, 2003; Steinberg 2004; The Times and Iraq, 2004; Rich, 2003; Griscom, 2003; Harding & Nicholson, 2003). Thus, it was not similar to news magazine programs that were excluded in the Nabi, et al. definition (2003).

Therefore, news coverage of at least the first 31-days of the Iraq War fits the definition of reality television because it has all the characteristics (including the two versions of the modified fifth element) of reality television as identified by Nabi, et al. (2003).

Iraqi War Coverage

Early Iraq-war coverage is characterized as the best public relations coverage the pentagon has received in decades (Andersen, 2006). One scholar even went as far as giving early Iraq war coverage the dubious title of "militainment" citing the early coverage's "on-going narrative sequencing and real-time reporting" that "succeeded in transforming war coverage of Iraq into visual entertainment" (Andersen, 2006). Andersen (2006) added that there were really two wars being waged in early coverage, the actual war in Iraq, and the "battle for favorable public opinion [which] employed a new set of highly persuasive visual and rhetorical styles firmly established in commercial/entertainment television" (2006).

As previously mentioned, the embedded coverage was the creation of the Assistant Defense Secretary Victoria Clarke (Rich, 2003). The brilliance of Clarke's plan resides in the fact that the journalists, in hopes of gaining the highly sought embed positions with the military, were less likely to criticize the Pentagon because it was that very organization granting them their coveted

positions (Rich, 2003; Griscom, 2003; Andersen, 2006). According to Andersen (2006), it was this system of quid pro quo reporting which led to positive war coverage. The system was so effective that positive war coverage started before the war itself started (Andersen, 2006). Andersen (2006) claims the Pentagon's use of new technologies, media formats and proven marketing strategies, as well as modeling coverage after the reality television genre combined to create "militainment." It is this very claim that this study analyzes. Specifically, this study is an endeavor to measure which reality television elements were present in early Iraq war coverage.

Framing Theory

A media frame is defined by Tankard as "the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration," (Griffin, 2000, pg. 366). In other words, when journalists write stories, they choose what details about a particular event to include, exclude, emphasize and minimize based on what aspects of the event they determine are most important (Griffin, 2000, pg. 366). All of these elements together frame the event, meaning the elements give the event context for the media consumer (Price & Tewksbury, 1997). Price and Tewksbury (1997) point out a particular event is not framed just by the journalists; it is also framed by how the editors choose to represent the event through elements like segment length and placement in the news program's story order.

Media-frame analysis examines how the journalists and editors represent an event which gives the event meaning in the minds of media consumers (Kosicki, 1993). Price and Tewksbury (1997) explain that the choices journalists and editors make in reporting and representing events, i.e., the frame they give an event, will influence how the consumer interprets that event and thereby the consumer's opinion about the important issues for that event.

Iyengar (1991) defines two broad approaches to media framing. The first is episodic and the second is thematic. Episodic-media frames provide narrow day-to day coverage that personalizes issues into disconnected events and provides little to no context, while thematic-media frames present an event in a broader view with "some appropriate context, i.e., historical, geographical, or otherwise" (Iyengar, 1996). For example, episodic coverage would focus more on individual exemplars like embeds, technology and individual soldiers or units than on contextual issues (Iyengar 1993). Thematic coverage provides context to the issue; it provides background information that fleshes out the issue for the viewer, i.e., a history of U.S. involvement with a country and how that affects the current relationship between the two countries (Iyengar 1993). Through his research, Iyengar has shown that television coverage of an issue is more likely to be an episodic-media frame than a thematic-media frame because of, among other things, "the visual nature of the medium which places a premium on individual exemplars" (Iyengar, 1996).

In Iyengar and Simon's study of public opinion during the Persian Gulf War, they found that prime-time news broadcasts by ABC News was "heavily episodic and event-oriented" (1993). Iyengar even referred to each day's coverage as an "'episode' in the developing confrontation between the United States (and its allies) and Iraq" (1993). More recent research analyzing embedded-media coverage during the early stages of the Iraq War supports Iyengar's theory that the coverage is more likely to be presented in an episodic-media frame with little context (Pfau, Haigh, Gettle, Donnelly, Scott, Warr, & Wittenberg, 2004).

The presentation of the Iraq War in episodic-media frames concurs with the supposition that the television-news-war coverage represented the war as a prolonged episode of reality television. According to Trasciatti (2003), the type of frame used by the media affects the public's response

to the issues presented in that frame. Audience members tend to remain uninvolved with issues presented in episodic frames, i.e., frames that present an issue "in terms of a single event or individual," (Trasciatti, 2003, p. 417). The audience is inclined to think that social responsibility for problems presented in episodic newscasts is placed on the individual or the event presented in the newscast and therefore remains uninvolved (Trasciatti, 2003; Iyengar, 1991). On the other hand, thematic frames, i.e., frames that present an issue in a social or historical context, encourage social action in audience members because they see the problem "as having a social cause" and therefore support social solutions (Trasciatti, 2003, p. 417; Iyengar, 1991).

Frames do not only present information in episodes or themes; they can also present information in a negative or positive light (Pfau, et al., 2004). By omitting certain aspects of an issue, a frame can become positive or negative towards that issue. A pro-U.S. frame would represent the U.S. military as a heroic force liberating Iraqi civilians. Pro-U.S. frames would indicate the U.S. soldiers are achieving success, or will achieve success. In the case of Iraq war coverage, the press's self-admonitions of creating coverage rampant with patriotic and nationalist themes is highly suggestive that the coverage was presented in pro-U.S. frames (Sanger, 2003; Stanley, 2003; Steinberg 2004; The Times and Iraq, 2004; Rich, 2003; Griscom, 2003; Harding & Nicholson, 2003).

Furthermore, Pfau and his colleagues determined that embedded coverage "was more favorable in overall tone toward the military and in depiction of individual troops" than non-embedded coverage (Pfau, et al. 2004, p. 74). This concurs with what several members of the print and television news-media claim, which is that their performance during the "major combat operations" of the war focused on the embedded reporters, the war technology and pro-United States sentiment and was indicative of poor news judgment (Rich, 2003; Griscom, 2003).

Hypotheses

Research analyzing embedded-media coverage during the early stages of the Iraq War supports Iyengar's theory that the coverage is more likely to be presented in an episodic-media frame with little context (Pfau, Haigh, Gettle, Donnelly, Scott, Warr, & Wittenberg, 2004; Iyengar 1996). Similar research found that embedded coverage "was more favorable in overall tone toward the military and in depiction of individual troops" (Pfau, et al. 2004). The presentation of the Iraq War in episodic-media frames concurs with the supposition that television-news-war coverage represented the war as reality television.

Andersen's (2006), Rich's (2003) and Griscom's (2003) accusations that early Iraq war coverage was treated as a public relations event used to entertain the masses further supports this supposition.

The objective of this paper is to use framing theory to examine claims that television-news media like CNN covered the Iraq war similar to a reality-television series and to examine claims that the coverage was pro-U.S. and episodic.

H1a: The majority of the first 31 days of Iraq War television-news coverage contained coverage of people who were portraying themselves, i.e., not acting.

H1b: The majority of the first 31 days of Iraq War television-news coverage contained coverage that was filmed at least in part in the living/working environment of those fighting in and reporting on the war.

H1c: The majority of the first 31 days of Iraq War television-news coverage contained coverage that was filmed without a script.

H1d: The majority of the first 31 days of Iraq War television-news coverage contained event coverage that was narrated.

H1e: The majority of the first 31 days of Iraq War television-news coverage contained coverage that was for the primary purpose of showing viewers unique elements of the war, i.e., aspects of the war the typical viewer would otherwise not be familiar.

H2: A greater percentage of the first 31 days of Iraq War television-news coverage was presented in pro-U.S frames than anti-U.S. frames.

H3: The majority of the first 31 days of Iraq War television-news coverage was presented in episodic frames.

Method

A content analysis of CNN Iraq-war news coverage was conducted in the first half of May 2005. The population consisted of 24-hour live coverage broadcasts by CNN during the first 31 days of the war. The coverage began on March 19, 2003 and ended on April 18, 2003. The population was stratified into days of the week and a constructed week was randomly selected from the stratified population using SPSS. The sample consisted of footage broadcast from 7 to 7:30 pm EST for the following days in 2003: Sunday, March 23; Monday, April 7; Tuesday, March 25; Wednesday, April 2; Thursday, March 20; Friday, March 28; and Saturday, April 12.

The coding sheet consisted of 52 questions concerning various aspects of the war coverage. Specifically, the goal of the coding protocol and coding sheet was to measure the amount of reality television elements, pro-U.S. frames, and episodic frames contained in the sample. A master's student from the University of Alberta coded the sample. The coder was familiarized with the content of the sample and instructed in three sessions concerning the method by which the footage would be coded. The sessions were conducted once at the beginning of coding, once after the first 30-minute broadcast was coded, and again after the fourth 30-minute broadcast was

coded.

Segments

The 30-minute broadcasts were split into segments, defined as changes in control of the broadcast and changes in story focus (i.e., the beginning of a new story). A segment started when there was a clear shift in story focus, and/or there was a change in who was reporting (i.e., a switch from anchor to embed or vice versa). The completion of a segment was indicated by the beginning of a new segment.

The Five Elements of Reality Television

The five elements in the definition of reality television were measured using variables that focused on interviewers and interviewees. Examples of interviewers are: anchors, unilaterals, embeds, and moderators. Examples of interviewees are: unilaterals, embeds, soldiers, and civilians. For each segment, the coder was instructed to indicate who the interviewer and interviewee(s) were. Reality elements in each segment were measured for each interviewer and interviewee.

For the variable *portrayed themselves*, the coder was asked to indicate whether the people in the newscast, including the anchors and embeds, were portraying themselves or were acting. The example provided to the coder concerned the host of the *Survivor* series, Jeff Probst. Jeff Probst portrayed himself when hosting *Survivor*. However in the movie Face of a Stranger (Perkins, 1999), he plays a character named Kevin Leeds and therefore is acting, i.e., playing a role.

For the variable *filmed in living/working environment*, the coder was asked to indicate whether the segment was filmed at least in part in the interviewer's living or working environment rather than on a set.

For the variable *unscripted*, the coder was asked to indicate whether the interviewers or

interviewees were clearly reading from a script. The example of scripting provided to the coder was of actors in a sitcom. The coder was instructed that reading from a script could be indicated by an individual's eyes moving as he or she reads the script or by the presence of the script itself. In addition, a change in the tone and cadence of an individual's voice could indicate a change from unscripted to scripted portions in segments.

For the variable *narrative context*, the coder was asked to indicate whether someone in the segment was explaining what was occurring in the segment either directly to the viewer or to someone else. The person providing the narration did not have to be visible.

For the variable *unique*, the coder was asked to indicate whether the primary purpose of the segment seemed to show and/or explain to viewers aspects of the Iraq War with which viewers, as a whole, would not normally be familiar.

Frames

The coder was instructed to indicate what amounts of certain frames were present in the coverage. The frames the coder was asked to evaluate concerned U.S. soldiers, Saddam Hussein, Saddam Hussein's soldiers, Insurgents and Iraqi civilians.

Questions concerning U.S. soldiers evaluated the presence of the following frames: positive/negative, cowardly/valiant, villain/hero, unsuccessful/successful, oppressing/liberating, maiming/protecting, inappropriate/appropriate, trustworthy/untrustworthy, deceptive/candid, acceptable/unacceptable, and foolish/wise. Questions concerning Saddam Hussein, Saddam Hussein's soldiers, Iraqi insurgents, and Iraqi civilians evaluated only the presence of negative or positive frames for each. In each question, the coder was asked to indicate which frame was present, or if there was an equal amount of each frame, or if there was no tone of coverage for that frame.

The coder was instructed to indicate whether the segment was presented in thematic frames, half episodic and half thematic frames, or episodic frames.

Specifically, the coder evaluated whether the segment concentrated on contextual issues such as history or geography, or whether the coverage focused on day-to-day activities of embeds, technology, and individual U.S. soldiers and units. The coder also evaluated whether the narration in the segment presented a historical or geographical context.

Data Screening, Reliability and Analysis

The author recoded 7-minutes (3.3%) of the sample at three points during the coding process: during the first 30-minute broadcast, during the fourth 30-minute broadcast, and during the seventh 30-minute broadcast. The total recoded footage was 21-minutes (10%) of the sample. The recoded data was compared to the original coding on a question-by-question basis. Any instances in which the original coding did not agree with the recoding were marked. To calculate intercoder reliability, the number of agreeing responses (370) was divided by the total number of recoded responses (416). Intercoder reliability was 89%.

Results

Segment Description

In total, 84 segments were coded. The interviewers were split about half-and-half between anchors (46.3%) and unilaterals (51.2%) and the interviewees, if present, were predominantly unilaterals (22%). Pro-U.S. frames were found in 38 (45.2%) segments. Episodic frames were found in 81 (96.4%) segments.

The Fve Elements of Reality Television in Iraq War Footage

Of the 84 interviewers, all of them portrayed themselves in Iraq war footage, 41 (48.8%) were filmed in their living or working environment rather than completely on a set and 77 (91.7%)

appeared unscripted. Of the 30 interviewees, 30 (100%) portrayed themselves, 23 (76.6%) were filmed in their living or working environment rather than completely on a set, and 28 (93.3%) were unscripted. Of the 84 segments, 84 (100%) were narrated, and 84 (100%) appeared to be for the viewing of unique elements the viewer would otherwise not be familiar with.

Frames in Iraq War Coverage

The majority of the U.S. frames were not present in the segments or were present in only a small percentage of the segments ($< 10\%$). To simplify the interpretation of the U.S. frames present in the coverage, all of the U.S. frames were collapsed into pro-U.S., anti-U.S., half pro and half anti, and no tone of coverage.

Segments with only pro-U.S. frames were counted as pro-U.S. Pro and anti-U.S. frames were allowed to cancel each other out, i.e., if a segment had one pro-U.S. frame and one anti-U.S. frame, then the segment was considered neutral. A segment with a mix of pro and anti-U.S. frames was either pro or anti depending on which frame was present in the majority.

Of the 84 segments, 38 (45.2%) were presented in pro-U.S. frames, 22 (26.2%) had no tone of coverage, 10 (11.9%) had both pro-U.S. and anti-U.S. frames, and 14 (16.7%) were presented in anti-U.S. frames.

It is interesting to note that about 20% of the segments were negative toward Saddam Hussein and his soldiers. Although the hypotheses do not directly address how Saddam Hussein and his soldiers were represented to the viewer it does give insight to the overall slant in reporting.

Of the 84 segments, 81 (96.4%) were episodic and 3 (3.6%) were thematic.

Testing Hypotheses

H1a: The majority of the first 31 days of Iraq War television-news coverage contained coverage of people who were portraying themselves, i.e., not acting.

Analysis of the reality television element *portraying themselves* in the first 31 days of Iraq war coverage reveals that the majority of interviewers portrayed themselves (100%) (Table 1). Analysis of the reality television element *portraying themselves* in the first 31 days of Iraq war coverage reveals that the majority of interviewees portrayed themselves (100%) (Table 2). Combining the analyses reveals that 114 (100%) segments contained people who were portraying themselves (Table 3). H1a is supported.

Table 1

Frequency of Reality Elements for Interviewer

Variable	N Observed	% of Total Segments
Portraying themselves	84	100%
Filmed in living/working environment	41	48.8%
Unscripted	77	91.7%
Narrative context	84	100%
Unique	84	100%

Table 2

Frequency of Reality Elements for Interviewees

Variable	N Observed	% of Total Segments with Interviewees
Portraying themselves	30	100%
Filmed in living/working environment	23	76.6%
Unscripted	28	93.3%
Narrative context	30	100%
Unique	30	100%

Table 3

 Frequency of Reality Elements for Interviewer and Interviewees

Variable	N Observed	% of Combined Segments
Portraying themselves	114	100%
Filmed in living/working environment	64	56.1%
Unscripted	105	92.1%
Narrative context	114	100%
Unique	114	100%

H1b: The majority of the first 31 days of Iraq War television-news coverage contained coverage that was filmed at least in part in the living/working environment of those fighting in and reporting on the war.

Analysis of the reality element *filmed in living/working environment* in the first 31 days of Iraq war coverage reveals that the majority of interviewers were not filmed in their living/working environment (48.8%) (Table 1).   Analysis of the reality element *filmed in living/working environment* in the first 31 days of war coverage reveals that the majority of interviewees were filmed in their living/working environment (76.6%) (Table 2). Combining the analyses reveals that 64 (56.1%) segments contained people who were living or working on a set (Table 3). H1b is supported.

H1c: The majority of the first 31 days of Iraq War television-news coverage contained coverage that was filmed without a script.

Analysis of the reality element *unscripted* in the first 31 days of Iraq war coverage reveals that the majority of interviewers were filmed without a script (91.7%) (Table 1). Analysis of the

reality element *unscripted* in the first 31 days of Iraq war coverage reveals that the majority of interviewees were filmed without a script (93.3%) (Table 2). Combining the analyses reveals that 105 (92.1%) segments contained people who were unscripted (Table 3). H1c is supported.

H1d: The majority of the first 31 days of Iraq War television-news coverage contained event coverage that was narrated.

Analysis of the reality television element *narrative context* in the first 31 days of Iraq war coverage revealed the majority of segments with interviewers were narrated (100%) (Table 1). Analysis of the reality television element *narrative context* in the first 31 days of Iraq war coverage revealed that the majority of segments with interviewees were narrated (100%) (Table 2). Combining the analyses reveals that 114 (100%) of the segments were narrated (Table 3). H1d is supported.

H1e: The majority of the first 31 days of Iraq War television-news coverage contained coverage that was for the primary purpose of showing viewers unique elements of the war, i.e., aspects of the war the typical viewer would otherwise not be familiar.

Analysis of the reality television element *unique* in the first 31 days of Iraq war coverage revealed that the majority of segments with interviewers were unique viewing (100%) (Table 1). Analysis of the reality television element *unique* in the first 31 days of Iraq war coverage revealed that the majority of segments with interviewees were unique viewing (100%) (Table 2). Combining the analyses reveals that 114 (100%) of the segments were unique viewing (Table 3). H1e is supported.

H2: A greater percentage of the first 31 days of Iraq War television-news coverage was

presented in pro-U.S frames than anti-U.S. frames.

Analysis of the U.S. frames in the first 31 days of Iraq war coverage revealed that a plurality of

segments exists and the greatest percentage of those segments were pro-U.S. (45.2%) (Table 4).

H2 is supported.

Table 4

Frequency of Pro-U.S., Half pro-U.S. and Half anti-U.S., and Anti-U.S. Frames

Variable	N Observed	% of Total # of Segments
Pro-U.S.	38	45.2%
Half pro-U.S. and half anti-U.S.	10	11.9%
Anti-U.S.	14	16.7%
No tone of coverage	22	26.2%

H3: The majority of the first 31 days of Iraq War television-news coverage was presented in

episodic frames.

Analysis of episodic and thematic frames in the first 31 days of Iraq war coverage revealed that

the majority of segments were presented in episodic frames (96.4%) (Table 5). H3 is supported.

Table 5

Frequency of Episodic Versus Thematic Frames

Variable	N Observed	% of Total # of Segments
Episodic	81	96.4%
Thematic	3	3.6

Discussion

Using framing theory, this paper analyzes claims that television-news media, like CNN,

covered the Iraq war similar to a reality-television series, and examines claims that the coverage was pro-U.S. and episodic. Results show the coverage did emulate a reality television show, the coverage was episodic, and the presence of U.S. frames was mixed.

Reality-show programming consists of five elements: 1) "people portraying themselves, i.e., not actors or public figures performing roles," 2) "filmed at least in part in their living or working environment rather than on a set,"3) "without a script", 4) "with events placed in a narrative context" (Nabi, et al. 2003), 5) for the primary purpose of viewing unique elements such as unscripted real people. All of the five reality elements were present in the majority of the segments. The elements, portraying themselves, narrative context, and unique were present in all of the segments. The element unscripted was present in more than 9 out of 10 segments. The element, filmed in living/working environment, was present in just more than half of the segments. The results support Andersen's (2006) position that the coverage was modeled after the reality television genre. In addition, Andersen's (2006) accusations of the news networks use of persuasive commercial and entertainment styles to win public opinion may be accurate. Indeed perhaps early Iraq war coverage was the birth of the "militainment" genre (Andersen, 2006).

The lackluster showing of the second element was most likely caused by measuring the coverage in segments rather than footage. In many cases, when a segment is controlled by an anchor a majority of the footage may have been devoted to an embed or unilateral. Since more than 7 out of 10 segments with embeds and unilaterals were filmed in their living or working environment the percentage of newscasts filmed in the living or working environment may be more than this study shows. Further analysis of the amount of time devoted to anchors or their interviewees should be undertaken.

A plurality of the first 31 days of Iraq war coverage was pro-U.S. and almost all of the coverage was episodic. Of the four tone possibilities, pro-U.S., half-and-half, anti-U.S., or no tone, the largest portion of segments exhibited a pro-U.S. bias. Ostensibly, a fair and balanced news network would have no tone of coverage or equal amounts of pro-U.S. and anti-U.S. coverage (Itule & Anderson, 2003). In early Iraq war coverage, just under half of the coverage was pro-U.S. (Table 4). This suggests just under half the coverage should also be anti-U.S. with a small percentage exhibiting half-and-half or no tone of coverage. This is not the case as less than 2 out of 10 segments were anti-U.S. In other words, more than half of the segments that should have been anti-U.S. were not.

These findings are not surprising as prior research indicated this was a logical assumption. Pfau and his colleagues (2004) previously determined embedded coverage "was more favorable in overall tone toward the military and in depiction of individual troops" than non-embedded coverage. Pfau and his colleagues (2004) also determined embedded coverage was more likely to be presented in an episodic-media frame. Indeed not only prior research indicated these frames would be present in the coverage but several reporters themselves proclaimed their performance during the early stages of the war focused on the embedded reporters, the war technology and pro-United States sentiment (Rich, 2003; Griscom, 2003).

What is the effect of war coverage presented to viewers in pro-U.S. reality episodes? Indications are the viewers will not consider a war presented in episodic frames as a social issue, but rather one that is the responsibility of those shown in the newscasts of the war, i.e., the military, the U.S. administration, and the Iraqis (Trasciatti, 2003; Iyengar, 1991). In essence, the episodic frames minimize the viewer's feelings of obligation or social responsibility to consider and discuss the elements of war the pro-U.S. frames are not showing (Trasciatti, 2003). The pro-U.S.

frames, in this case, were highly patriotic and nationalistic, and lacked representation of the gory realities of warfare (Sanger, 2003; Stanley, 2003; Steinberg 2004; The Times and Iraq, 2004; Rich, 2003; Griscom, 2003; Harding & Nicholson, 2003). This combination of pro-U.S. and episodic coverage minimizes discussion of the aspects of death and suffering inherent in all warfare (Trasciatti, 2003; Pfau, et al., 2004). Finally, the reality frames of the coverage allow viewers to find entertainment, or at least compelling viewing, in the war coverage and a sense that what they are seeing is real yet unreal much like an episode of their favorite reality show.

Limitations

The most troubling aspect of the study was the overemphasis on negative treatment of a story. While the subject of a story can be negative, neutral, or positive for the United States, the treatment can independently be negative, neutral, or positive for the United States. Because there was too much emphasis on story treatment, some segments may have been coded as neutral when they indeed had a subject matter that was directional.

The most troubling reality element to measure was the unscripted element. Clear indications of when reporters are following a script are difficult to find. However, when measuring these elements it is important to take into account the unscripted nature of reality television shows, or at least the appearance of the unscripted nature of reality television shows. Reality shows may be scripted or unscripted to various extents and yet still fit the definition provided by Nabi et al. (2003). As long as the viewer does not perceive the show as scripted it can fit the definition.

The ultimate limitation to this study is whether or not the viewers actually comprehend the presence of these frames in war coverage. As previously established, viewers are not mindless slaves to the frames they are presented with. Viewers use their own experiences, preconceived notions, and understandings to frame what they watch on television. In order to determine the

possible influence frames in early Iraq-war coverage had on viewers, the viewers must be asked about the frames they saw in the coverage. An appropriate methodology would include a survey of television viewers who watched Iraq war coverage during the first 31-days of the Iraq war.

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