Politics, Terrorism and the News Media:
A Case Study of Saudi Arabia (2006-2007)

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Bournemouth University for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Bournemouth University
2011-2012
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ABSTRACT

With the enormous development of communications and the transmission of national news to all parts of the world in seconds, it has become important to consider the treatment of national crises in the media and the challenges that may be encountered in the production of news during such crises. This is especially important in relation to the transnational problem of terrorism. This study chooses to examine the ways in which the Saudi Arabian national media have treated terrorism news between the period 2006-2007, given the complex position of Saudi Arabia in relation to Islamist terrorism.

Therefore, it will focus its theoretical part on examining the political, economic, ideological and social factors that may affect the shaping of news production, and on terrorism news in particular. Then, it will move on to studying the different theories of news framing, and the framing of terrorism news. Then, the empirical part will be focused on content analysis of different news-related stories of terrorism, taken from different Saudi sources, based on Iyengar's theory of news coverage, as well as our own set of categories in order to reveal a deeper explanation of news coverage of terrorism in the Saudi media.

This importance of this study comes from the fact that very few studies have focused on examining the performance of the Saudi news media in the rise of terrorism. We hope that this study can help Arab Gulf media in testing and improving the performance of their news media coverage, especially now that incidents like terrorism and the Arab Spring have shown wide public discontent towards the efficiency of news coverage during such events. We also hope that the results of the empirical part can help in shaping a new policy that provides a better vision and framework for news production, as most of the media organisations in this part of the world are state-owned and their methods of news production have arguably not reflected public needs.
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PREFACE

News media is major part of media studies in the Western world. In times of national crises, researchers work to help news producers in making information valuable and helpful to the audience. Obviously, people want information. They turn to news sources to know what is happening and information help them understand what might happen. In fact, there is a paucity in news media research in the Middle East. We need to understand the ways in which the Arab news media frame national crises news so that it can affect the audience understanding and interpretation of issues. With the escalation of terrorism and other unprecedented issues that create a serious national threat, we come to the point that this part of the world confronts a real challenge in the ways that news media operate.

Saudi Arabia and its war against terrorism is an example. Therefore, we will have the opportunity to look at the historical, economic, social and psychological aspects that may affect the production of terrorism news. We should explore the reasons behind the formation of the terrorist groups, their ideology and their relationship to the system. Additionally, we will examine the ways in which the Saudi news media deals with terrorism news and the way in which media itself is being used by the terrorist groups.

In fact, it will not be easy to delve deep into the Saudi system, organisations and society. It will be hard to analyse any media content, and also hard to survey the thoughts of people in a closed polity such as Saudi Arabia, but we will try to have this study completed as far as practicable. To this end, we hope to draw from this research is that the combined effects of journalistic, economic, organisational, and, most importantly, political pressures that news organisations experience, have an effect on the content of the news; and that the audience's understanding to such news can differ from what the government aim to disseminate to its audience.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of my Ph.D. thesis has been a long journey. It’s true that “Life is what happens” when you are completing your dissertation. Life doesn’t stand still, nor wait until you are finished and have time to manage it. Much as happened and changed in the time I’ve been involved with this project. I have gone through a lot, as I had to move places, have a surgical operation and computers crashing. All these challenges gave me the motive to double my efforts and work as much as possible.

In fact, completion of this doctoral dissertation was not possible without the support of several people. I owe a debt of gratitude to Professor Barry Richards, Director of Centre for Public Communication Research, for his valuable guidance, scholarly inputs and consistent encouragement I received throughout the research work. Working with Professor Richards has been intellectually challenging and a rewarding experience. I thank Professor Marie Gillespie, for her academic support. She has been very helpful, encouraging and supportive, and I express my gratitude to her. I am very thankful to Dr. Chindu Sreedharan, Faculty member, for his kind support and help at various phases of this research. Thanks to Drs. Tom Watson, Hugh Chignell, Richard Berger for serving as members of my transfer committee. Whether or not they realise it, each has made a lasting impact on me. It has been a pleasure learning from all of them, and I am grateful for their fine remarks on the early chapters of this thesis.

This study would not have been possible without the assistance of key individuals in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Bournemouth University. Thanks to Mr. David Bradshaw for supporting parts of this thesis with his journalistic expertise. Since my first days at Bournemouth University, I could always count on Jan Lewis for offering me the right support and encouragement. Also, my fellow students in the Media School were very helpful. Thanks to Ruqaya, for serving as a coder, and as a supporter whenever I needed so.
Finally, thanks to my family for a lifetime of support and encouragement. I deeply miss my mother Shaikha, who passed away ten years ago. I really wanted her to share this joy with me. In fact, none of this would have been possible without the unconditional love and support of my best friend Nouf. I made it, and things only get better from here.