

FRAMING THE LEBANESE PROTESTS BY MTV LEBANON AND OTV BETWEEN JANUARY 2020 AND JUNE 2020

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the coverage patterns of the media outlets OTV and MTV of the 2019-2020 Lebanese protests. Qualitative content analysis of MTV prime time news videos and OTV news articles was used to identify both media outlets' standpoints. Findings showed that the coverage patterns of MTV Lebanon and OTV Lebanon differ according to their ideological hues. In their coverage of the protests', MTV deviated from the protest paradigm as they supported the protests' cause, while OTV tended to adhere more to the protest paradigm in their coverage.

Keywords: Media Coverage, Coverage Patterns, Lebanon, Protest Paradigm, MTV Lebanon, OTV Lebanon, Framing Theory, Protest, News, Content Analysis

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that so much chaos and catastrophes have been surfacing in different countries around the world, one of those countries that, bleeding for over a year now being Lebanon. The Lebanese Cabinet proposed new tax policies on October 17th, 2019, to resolve the financial recession (Maalouf, 2020). In reaction, thousands of unarmed civilians across Lebanon took to the streets, calling for their civil and human rights, transparency, an end to bribery, and the retirement of all elected leaders (Maalouf, 2020). For the second time after the launch of the protests, street pressure culminated in the government's dismissal (Maalouf, 2020). Protests have been mostly nonviolent around Lebanon. Nevertheless, the

military and government troops' reaction has plummeted across regions and periods (Maalouf, 2020). At times, government security forces used unreasonable force towards activists and refused to defend them against hostile counter-protesters (rubber bullet guns and tear gas) (Page & Majzoub, 2020). The global downturn and ineffective fiscal policies are disrupting people's access to food and medical care and have forced more families into deprivation (Page & Majzoub, 2020). Above all, an explosion took place on August 4th of 2020, which killed not less than 190 people, injured, and harmed more than 6,500, and left almost 300,000 people with destroyed homes and no place to live, which infuriated citizens even more, to stand up for their rights (Maalouf, 2020).

"Shallow, superficial, politically motivated" are adjectives used among both Lebanese men and women to characterize the international media's depiction of the current demonstrations against the region's ruling elite (Ahmad, 2020). From the beginning, a lot of Lebanese people claim that the protests are misinterpreted because of the unsuccessful effort by the telecommunications minister to impose a regular \$0.20 charge for WhatsApp users and other internet-calling applications by tweeting "armchair pundits" and parts of the international media as a "WhatsApp Revolt" (Ahmad, 2020). It wasn't just social media remarks that many Lebanese considered fundamentally unacceptable (Ahmad, 2020). Time magazine once released a picture captioned, "Tension had simmered for months, but on Thursday, protesters learned about the government's plan to tax Whatsapp calls. As the streets swelled, the Associated Press adds, that plan was withdrawn" (Ahmad, 2020). The Instagram post caused many Lebanese people overseas to be furious and reported it for feeding into historical protest news biases (Ahmad, 2020). Another media shaker was when The New York Times held an opinion article with the sub-headline being "The Middle East could use a decent country. One million Lebanese protesters are demanding one" (Ahmad, 2020). On social networks, the reference to "decent country" got massive backlash from Lebanese and even Arabs in general, causing the newspaper to amend the sub-headline (Ahmad, 2020). A protestor who was asked questions by Arab news says that "They're not taking this revolution seriously. They are not covering it as they should. They are only looking at the negative part of the revolution, but they're not focusing on the serious people and the real message out of this revolution" (Ahmad, 2020).

In Lebanon, people often look up to their religious leaders and are very opinionated about their political views. The religious leaders are viewed as people with such high power who can influence each segment of the Lebanese people, and in fact, they represent them (Henley, 2016). Despite intensive and prolonged public protests, demonstrators have not been able to achieve their goals of deposing the current sectarian leaders as sectarian divisions are ingrained in the fabric of the society that is nearly impossible to erase by simple public demand. OTV is pro-government and glamorizes Lebanon and its authority as a united nation integrating a specific ideology into its audience's minds (Akerman, 2010). However,

this paper will be analyzing the content it establishes and how the free patriotic movement launches it. On the other hand, MTV Lebanon is pro-protest, producing active news outputs going against the Lebanese government and its president in particular ("MTV Lebanon," 2020). After shaming and criticizing the president's authority, MTV Lebanon was banned from entering the presidential palace to collect news about the government's reshaping after the protests ("MTV Lebanon," 2020). The following resulted in the news channel filing a lawsuit against the president and eventually winning it ("MTV Lebanon," 2020).

Purpose of the Study

In Lebanon, different media broadcasts produce outputs tailored specifically to shape people's ideologies and beliefs. The purpose of our research report is to shed light on how the different media news outlets in Lebanon used their channels to cover the protests. Moreover, this paper will compare and contrast the two news outlets 'OTV' and 'MTV'.

Research Questions

Main Research Question:

- How did MTV Lebanon cover the Lebanese protests?
- How did OTV Lebanon cover the Lebanese protests?
- Was the coverage and ownership of both news outlets influenced and driven by their ideologies?

Theoretical Framework

This research used the Framing theory and the protest paradigm to aid in analyzing the coverage of the 2020 Lebanese protests by MTV and OTV. The framing theory is the contextualization of certain content in the media created to structure the viewer's opinion. This content changes how the viewer interprets the news given depending on the context and events (Epperson, 2019.) Furthermore, the Protest paradigm is the inclination of media broadcasters to portray a social protest as threatening, violent, and ineffective. However, as new social media platforms emerged, less biased, more distinct, and contrasting broadcasters depicting protests have surfaced. The Lebanese channels OTV and MTV Lebanon showcased how both sectors dispersed their ideologies with their news reports.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study evaluates the media news coverage in Lebanon in addition to discussing how OTV and MTV reported the Lebanese protests of January 2020 to June 2020. To begin with, the

reviewing of various other studies was conducted to collect aiding material relating to this content analysis, and understand where the gap falls. For that, this literature review highlights studies that correlate with this paper, and discusses similar topics including media news coverage of protests, narratives, attitudes of audience, and the protest paradigm.

The research conducted by Siyasat Arabiya (2020) aimed to display the trends of the general opinion of the public in regards to the recent Lebanese protests. It pinpointed two primary ideas to illustrate the Lebanese community's understanding of the Lebanese protests. The first idea discussed the general opinion of the Lebanese public of the protests and identified the factors of Lebanese opposition or support of the protest, as well as the degree of citizens advocacy towards the protests. The second idea examined the attitudes of the Lebanese people through interaction with the protests by either engaging in the protests or providing support or aid to the protestors. This research used data and inputs of the Arab index 2019/2020 during February and March 2020. Data has proved that about 5% of the Lebanese citizens who supported the protest from the beginning have shifted their initial view and developed a feeling of hostility towards the protest, defined as a "swinging attitude." The paper concluded that the reason is by virtue of the Lebanese parties who have performed a campaign against demonstration and attempted to persuade their followers into believing in an external hands' involvement in the protests to induce the citizens against the government and country as a whole. The research aids this study in its understanding of the attitudes of the public towards the protests, which this study plans to discuss further. The gap lies in its lack of using MTV and OTVs' news coverage in the paper, which this paper aims to analyze.

The study "Framing Arab Spring Conflict: A Visual Analysis of Coverage on Five Transnational Arab News Channels," published in 2014 by Bruce, conducts a quantitative content analysis on five transnational news channels, Al Jazeera, BBC Arabic, Alhurra, Al Arabiya, and Al Jazeera English, through the framing theory, to analyze any differences between the five networks in covering the Arab Spring. The comparative study focused on comparing their visual frames in covering the unstable civil events in Tunisia, Algeria, Yemen, Egypt, Libya, and Syria during the Arab Spring between December 2010 to June 2011. The method included collecting three different newscasts of the network during the time frames, including 1,951 shots. Using the framing theory, the content analysis was interpreted on two levels: the individual network and through a "two-dimensional taxonomy of western and liberal commercials of pan-Arab stations." After multiple statistical and intricate analysis, the study found that there were unforeseen similarities in the networks' adoption to the human interest frame and identified main differences in the adherence to the political framework, with Al hurra prevailing the other networks. The study concluded that while some

similarities are found within the networks' visual frames, differences lie as well. The paper aids this study in its application and examination of the content and its usage of the frames. It also supports this report's analysis of the news coverage of MTV and OTV through its multiple frames, including the political ones. The difference lies in the networks analyzed, as this study compares two different networks and analyzes its coverage of the Lebanese protests.

Dabbous' 2014 paper aimed to study and recognize how the media television stations handled not being subjective in their beginning news-editorial when it came to the elections of 2009. In a blended type (TV news-editorial), to what degree could they possibly be unbiased that, by nature, also allowed them to display devotional, group-specific views on a huge and polarized national event. The research used content analysis, which revealed the results of uncertainty and intertextuality. That helped them hide their subjectivity when it came to who they support and keep their editorial objective. The research helps this study by explaining the coverage patterns that the media outlets have in Lebanon and how reliable they are when it comes to the objectivity of their output. Nonetheless, this study aims to cover specific media outlets' portrayal of protests, MTV and OTV in particular, in which the specified research does not contain.

Fawaz's 2013 paper aimed to investigate how the media convey their message regarding the social and political divisions in Lebanon. Moreover, because the media in Lebanon is sectarianized, the research studied how they operate. The method used was television content analysis, and many news channels were analyzed, such as; Future TV, LBCI, Al-Manar TV, and OTV. The paper also looked at the Lebanese press to look at how the media generally runs in Lebanon. Furthermore, the findings show that each news channel portrayed their output in support towards their authorized representatives. Therefore, the Lebanese media landscape represents a dynamic socio-political climate, where local and international influences collide. The media's plural and consociative nature reflects those of the political system, ensuring that each major group is reflected and has a media outlet. This mechanism had ensured the distribution of forces between the dominance of the sectors and protected the media from government possession. Media experts, however, have also been put beneath the control of their governmental and divisive owners, which expresses concern about their real liberty. The paper helps our study in its content analysis of the news coverage of multiple Lebanese platforms on protests, similar to this study, the difference being that this paper differentiates between MTV and OTV's coverage of the 2019 protests.

Jarrar and Akter's "Framing The Egyptian Uprising By Pan Arab News Networks: Tracing The Protest Paradigm In Al-Jazeera And Al-Arabiya's Coverage Of Egyptian Protests," published in 2018, examined and compared the adoption and usage of news websites of Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, as Pan-Arabian media platforms, to the protest paradigm through their news coverage of the Egyptian protests between 2013 and 2014. The comparative study also aimed to identify the shift in the protest paradigm through interpreting the news outlets in four weeks of coverage on their news websites. The study used the stratified sampling method to collect data around the media reporting within four weeks in each network. It also used specific thematic frames to support the coding of the news coverage. These frames included injustice, sympathy, delegitimizing, accountability, spectacle, and conceptualization to identify whether they adhered to the paradigm, all of which were placed in a statistical table. The findings discovered that while both news adopted the protest paradigm, Al Jazeera started earlier than Al Arabiya but reduced its adoption towards the end; on the other hand, Al Arabiya began adhering within the second week but failed to do so the first. The study concluded that it was probably due to the different perspectives each network had on the conflicts, considering that both were government-controlled and astonished by how either network could avoid any presentation of "political influence." The study aids in providing support to the methods of interpreting news coverage through the protest paradigm frames, similar to this study, the difference being that the report analyzes different news platforms (MTV and OTV), considering a separate conflict with a more recent time frame.

Jiménez-Martínez "The Instrumental Mediated Visibility of Violence: The 2013 Protests in Brazil and the Limitations of the Protest Paradigm," published in June 2020, aimed to analyze how protests are viewed when broadcasted on the news. It discussed how these news outlets have a protest paradigm approach in their reports that marginalize rallies by pinpointing the negatives. The method evaluated the 2013 Brazil protests news coverage and conducted 43 interviews with open-ended questions to stimulate answers. The findings showed that violence and the marginalization of how these protests are portrayed should not be treated as a distraction from the protests' actual nature. This violence displayed in the news coverage is being exploited to spread a message or even question the conflict. The study above helps by showing how the media, which leans towards the government, is distracting its audience from the actual context of the protest and taking away its real message by showing only the violent parts. This research undertakes the events in Lebanon, including media analysis in the country, conveying a better idea of how the MENA media news outlets might not have accurately represented the protests.

Lee extended the protest paradigm variable through looking into the news coverage of protests on media, specifically tackling Hong Kong's protest portrayal in his article "Triggering the Protest Paradigm: Examining Factors Affecting News Coverage of Protests." The 2014 study aimed to prove that the protest paradigm is more visible in multiple factors, including protests with radical tactics, when targets respond to the protests, in conservative political newspapers, and when political arguments are expressed in the protests. The methods applied in the study included collecting data from sampling news coverage and reports of the protests through four different news publishers: Apple, Oriental, MP, and STD between 2001 and 2012 in Hong Kong. The study used multiple indicators and coders to interpret further the news reports, including identifying protest words used in the reports, the visual representation of the protests on either of the platforms and categorizing the sources relayed in the news. Additionally, the report also surveyed the public's opinion on the news coverage to add to their study. After statistically organizing their data, the study found that the protest paradigm's various features were more likely to be conveyed in the news if the protests involved radical tactics. The article also relayed that STD's conservative news platform adopted more to the protest paradigm than the pre-democratic platform Apple, with differences placed particularly in their political protests coverage. It concluded that the protest paradigm's news coverage became relatively less negative between 2001 and 2012 in Hong Kong. In addition, it stated that while protests have become more common in the city, the news media have not become desensitized regarding the protests. The article supports this study in its analysis of the news coverage, using the protest paradigm and multiple coders and indicators. The only difference lies in its coverage of Hong Kong's media outlets, as this study analyzes the Lebanese news portrayal of protests.

McLeod and Detenber's 2016 research displayed the framing impact of prevailing television news coverage on radical protests. Participants were divided based on their status quo, which is defined as the social and political condition of an onlooker, and were shown different stories of a radical protest. It was confirmed that the status quo had a rampant impact on the general views of the audience, which induced more criticism and reluctance towards the protesters, as well as less inclination to side with them and more faith in the police. The status quo had an immense influence on the success of an uprising, the public's support, and the likeliness to identify the protests as worthy of news coverage. It was concluded that the status quo is deemed to have a drastic impact on protesters' audience's subjectiveness. This research paves discussion on how Lebanese sectarianism affects the public opinion of the protests, which supports this comparative. However, the study does not dive into the Lebanese media coverage on protests, which this content analysis aims to do. In addition, this concludes that some sectors are more likely to be inclined towards the government based on their status quo.

The research conducted by Nassar in 2020, "A Socio-Pragmatic Study of the Lebanese Uprising Slogans," examined how the certain usage of words changed the context of messages used in the Lebanese protests. The study method included collecting samples of slogans from different media platforms such as social media and TV channels such as Al Jazeera and LBC. The findings showed that there were nine socio-pragmatic functions that portrayed Lebanon's situation; conveying criticism was at the top while voicing despair was at the bottom. This research displays and proves how the media outlets in Lebanon shape their output and use specific features and words to change the context of the stories and issues going on in Lebanon. This study of "Framing the Lebanese protests by MTV Lebanon and OTV between January 2020 and June 2020" includes video news outlets rather than relying on word choice of news reports, which will help visualize a better idea of how media outlets shape the story.

Vafeiadis, Han, and Shen's study aimed to examine the effects of visuals and narratives in news coverage of conflicts on the individuals who read and watch them. Vafeiadis, Han, & Shen's paper also looked into the audience's attitudes that view these issues on the news, including its effect on the individuals' transportation, identification, and sympathy. The article proceeded to conduct an online consented experiment where participants were randomly separated into four different conditions. Each was given narrative and non-narrative news coverage, some including visuals other none, regarding the conflict of the "health and environmental implications of GMO agriculture in Latin America." The participants then answered a questionnaire on the attitudes they perceived from the news they observed. The paper concluded that narrative messages had a crucial impact on the individual's sympathy, transportation, and narratives, which can change a reader's attitude towards the topic portrayed. It also found that the visuals' placement conveyed more attitudes towards the conflict, in addition to having a direct impact on the individual's "information-seeking" intentions. The report concluded that recognizing the significant effects of visuals and narratives in news coverage on the community can help better journalists and media outlets' content and understand how to attract audiences. The article's analysis of the narratives and visuals in news coverage can support this study's recognition of the Lebanese's sympathy and emotions when watching MTV and OTV. The study's gap includes its experimental methods and the type of news coverage used, and this content analysis interprets the news itself and focuses on the Lebanese protests.

Overall, the researches above all studied the effects of media consumption and certain media outlets' approach. It has been concluded that certain media outlets may display a tone of objectivity. Moreover, they studied the coverage patterns of the Lebanese media

news outlets and how they sculpt their output in a way to influence their audience with their perspective. This study is narrowed down into two news channels, specifically MTV Lebanon and OTV, which makes results more specific and gives a better and clearer outlook on how the media runs in the country.

METHODOLOGY

This paper sampled primary data from both MTV and OTV's news coverage. The news reports were analyzed using a qualitative content analysis method as explained in the following sections.

Sampling method and data analysis

The sampling method used in this comparative analysis is the simple random sampling method. This includes data collection from both MTV and OTV television reports on the Lebanese protests in the timeframe between January 2020 and March 2020. 24 reports were analyzed as shown in the table below:

Table 1: The sample

	News Item		Date of publication	Date of publication
Months	MTV	OTV	MTV: Prime Time News of the following dates	OTV: The Introduction of the Evening News Reports of the following dates
January	2	2	-January 2nd 2020 -January 31st 2020	-Thursday 30 January 2020 -Sunday 19 January 2020
February	2	2	-February 4th 2020 -February 22nd 2020	-Thursday 13 February 2020 - Sunday 09 February 2020

March	2	2	-March 2nd 2020 -March 7th 2020	-Sunday 08 March 2020 -Monday 30 March 2020
April	2	2	-April 11th 2020 -April 13th 2020	-Monday April 27 2020 -April 28, 2020
May	2	2	-May 4th 2020 -May 31st 2020	-Saturday 09 May 2020 -Thursday 14th May 2020
June	2	2	-June 14th 2020 -June 26th 2020	-Saturday 06 June 2020 -Friday 26th June 2020
Total:	24 news reports		—	—

Method of data analysis

This comparative study used qualitative content analysis procedures that focus on a set of thematic codes for frames, derived from the literature on the coverage of social movements as shown in the table below:

Table 2 : Coding Categories

Frame Labels	Attributes and Specifications
Sympathy	• Do the news reports on OTV and MTV Lebanon support protesters' cause? • Does the news report provoke sympathy or compassion for protesters?
Delegitimizing	• Do the news reports trivialize protesters' cause? • Do the news reports portray protesters' actions as irrational?
Contextual	• Do the news reports stem from certain ideologies? • Does the overall tone of the contextualization portray a positive image of protesters?
Spectacle	• Does the news report depict protesters' negative emotions? • Do the news reports emphasize potential threats and negative consequences of protesters?

Injustice	• Do the news reports attribute the cause of the problem to the government? • Do the news reports provide evaluations about what is fair for protesters?
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FINDINGS

As a result of the sectarianized media outlets in Lebanon, each channel provided different views on the protests and presented them in a distinctive approach to tailor the audience's perspective. For instance, in the two media news channels analyzed above, MTV Lebanon and OTV Lebanon, MTV proved to be pro-protesters while OTV pro-government. This was demonstrated through specific word choices, statements, and phrases in their news reports. A prominent news report for MTV was a coverage on January 02, 2020: "الواضح والتناقض بشيء تشبهه لا الحكومة ان الى بوضوح يشير الى شركاء مطابخ من يتسرب ما كل والفاضح And the clear and blatant contradiction, all that leaked from the partners' kitchen clearly indicates that the government will not meet the needs of the people." In this statement, the government is blamed for not meeting the need of the Lebanese people. On the other hand, an OTV news article of March 08, 2020, demonstrated support of the government: "أن الواضح من البعض، الى به يذهب الذي التهويل عكس الى"، Contrary to the exaggeration that some turn to, it is clear that the government rejects any harm to the free economy." Additionally, one thing to identify is that OTV glorified the Lebanese president in their news reports; furthermore, it presented the leader as noble, gracious, and considerate in regards to the people. This glorification can be explained with reference to ownership as one of the filters of media content as OTV was founded in 2007 by Roy Hachem, the son-in-law of Lebanese President Michel Aoun and current chairman of the station. An example of that can be present in the article published on Sunday, March 08, 2020: "ميشال العماد الرئيس عهد الحالي، العهد أما"، مواجهة عهد انه له يسجل ان التاريخ يمكن فلا السهام، نحوه صوبت ومهما عون، أو اتخذ أو التردد أو النعمة يأسس ممارسة عوض لحملها، لوجه وجهها المزمنة المشكلات As for the current era, the era of President General Michel Aoun, and no matter what was pointed at him, history can only record for him that it is the era of confronting problems in order to solve them, instead of practicing the ostrich policy (hiding), indecision, weakness, or fleeing away". A noticeable pattern of glorification in OTV articles proves the article of Siyasat Arabiya, where it discusses the manner of swinging attitude of

the viewers, in which the government manipulates the audience to change the perception of the protests. In addition, a study conducted by Mcleod and Detenber, *Framing Effects of Television News Coverage of Social Protest*, confers the effects of the status quo on the protest and can be used to clarify the swinging attitude of 5% percent of the Lebanese people who stopped believing and supporting the protests. This illustrates the tendency of a few audiences of OTV to be impacted by what is presented to them. Moreover, OTV portrayed the government as providing protection and relief for the protesters and as an authority that meets the people's needs and demands. On the contrary, MTV remarkably maintained a hostile and critical approach towards the government. MTV has depicted a positive perception of the protestors, in addition to acquiring immense support with regards to their cause. "الوقت إضاعة على الحكومة إصرار لماذا، الحناجر اعلى في لبنان يمين يصرخ." "The Lebanese are screaming in the top of the throats, why is the government insisting on wasting time and pushing a famine and sabotaging the economy?" In fact, MTV Lebanon showed 100% sympathy towards the protesters in their reports. In contrast, OTV Lebanon only showed 50% of sympathy towards the protesters. This indicates the difference between the two news channels and how each media outlet's ideologies in Lebanon affect how they present and deliver the news. For instance, OTV Lebanon has only 50% of contextuality, as it shaped the government as a force that is with the people, and 50% of OTV articles presented delegitimization in their news reports, where they portrayed an aggressive side of the protests. The article published by OTV on April 28, 2020, serves as an example for that "تعاذوا عن لأب أعمال عنل شغب" "وال تخريب، ال شغب، الأعمال عن لأب تعاذا" "to refrain from riots, vandalism, and attacks on public and private property." On the other hand, MTV Lebanon has 91.6% of contextuality and 0% of delegitimization, in which OTV provided absolute support for the Lebanese protesters. Nonetheless, OTV negatively portrayed the protests through demonstrating the protesters' actions in an unreasonable approach. This is correlated with Jarrar and Akter's research that was conducted in 2018, "Framing The Egyptian Uprising By Pan Arab News Networks: Tracing The Protest Paradigm In Al-Jazeera And Al-Arabiya's Coverage Of Egyptian Protests From June 2013 To June 2014." In the findings of that research, it was found that Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya both adhered to the protest paradigms in their coverage of the protests. However, the adherence to the paradigm shifted in light of the ideological hues of both the networks. This is what OTV is attempting to achieve by providing criticism towards the protests and positively portraying the government while displaying the threats of the protests; thus, OTV demonstrated 41.6% of the spectacle frame in their news articles. On the other hand, MTV Lebanon has 0% of spectacle in their news reports and continues to present the protestors' aim in a positive, constructive manner. The analysis results are similar to Fawaz's research in 2013, "The Role of The Media in a Precarious Plural Democracy: The Case of Lebanon." In Fawaz's research, he concluded that each news channel in Lebanon

conveys its message to support their representatives of their sectarianized divisions. The research aids the findings that the analysis of this research revealed as both had proven how each news channel in Lebanon tailors the news with respect to their ideologies.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the purpose of the research was to analyze MTV Lebanon and OTV Lebanon's coverage of Lebanon's 2020 protests. Findings of the news reports' content analysis demonstrated that While OTV adhered to the protest paradigm in their coverage of the protests, MTV did not. This can be explained in light of ideological inclinations and ownership as two main filters of media content. Further research could be conducted about the status quo in the MENA region and its relation to the way media news channels depict and cover their news. Moreover, further study should be conducted about each and every news channel in Lebanon to measure their reliability and credibility. In addition, an audience study could be conducted to examine how the people in Lebanon react to these news channels and to what extent they believe in them.

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