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#### Implications of Issue Saliency in the Online News of the 2011 Somali Famine

Sharafa Dauda & Bahiyah Omar

#### Abstract

*This article explores how major news media and news agencies assigned importance to aspects of the 2011 humanitarian disaster in Somalia. What were the sources that dominated their coverage, and what was the relationship between the sources and the assignment of saliency? These issues were investigated through content analyses of online news from Al Jazeera English, Cable News Network International, Pan African News Agency and Reuters. The researchers found different levels of emphasis on news framing functions. The two news agencies, Panapress and Reuters, used similar news framing functions. This suggests that Reuters extended its function of being a news purveyor for news media to a definer of news content for an alternative news agency in a developing nation. Furthermore, the pattern of assigning saliency to functions in news framing revealed that because the 2011 famine in Somalia was a humanitarian disaster with catastrophic consequences, the assignment of greater saliency to suggestions and to consequences may have been intended to mitigate the disaster itself and prompt urgent action. The distinctions and similarities in assigning functions to news frames may not be unconnected to the functions of ideological structures, editorial policies and in-house style. The study also found a significant relationship between news framing functions and news sources suggesting that news sources played a significant role in assigning saliency to the reportage of the humanitarian crisis of the 2011 famine in Somalia.*

**Keywords:** *Horn of Africa, news framing function, humanitarian disaster*

#### I. Introduction

“Globally, information flow is defined by what and how news agencies report breaking news” (McPhail, 2010, p. 174). This perceived influence of news agencies is inherent in, for example, how “Reuters and Associated Press (AP) control vast television news report and global Internet interests”(McPhail, 2010, p. 274). At some point, Reuters was “the single largest supplier of news, delivering services to subscribers across the globe” (Musa, 1990, p. 326). Thus, in recognition of the influence of wire services, several countries and regional

alliances established local news agencies. One such news agency, the *Pan African News Agency (Panapress)*, was established to promote Africa's regional interests (*Panapress*, n.d.) and "free Africa from its dependency on western transnational news agencies" (Kumar & Biernatzki, n.d.). However, despite *Panapress'* mandate to provide alternative narrative to that of western news agencies, Martin and Musa (1987) assert that it "remains linked to *Reuters*, which initially helped in its establishment alongside various other alternative news agencies across Africa, Asia and the Caribbean" (p. 14). In fact, they argue that *Panapress* simply augments, rather than challenge, transnational news agencies' narratives. Nonetheless, Chang (1998) asserts that "structural disparity of national status is considered an important factor in shaping the content, direction, and volume of traffic of news, entertainment, and information from country to country, especially between developed and developing nations" (p. 529).

International news media are likewise influential because it was found that issues raised by the *Cable News Network International (CNNI)*, for instance, "often become major public policy issues for the United States government" (McPhail, 2010, p. 256). *AlJazeera* has similar influence over Middle Eastern governments and their allies and on the international politics affecting Arab countries (Pintak, 2010) because they "present Arab perspectives that are contrary to *CNNI's*" (McPhail, 2010, p. 245). They also challenge Arab world narratives by global western media (Miles, 2005). Therefore, if people's worldview is mediated by what the mass media cover, or not cover, and the world is defined in large part by what and how wire-services cover breaking news (McPhail, 2010); then, it can be argued that the perception of the audience may be influenced by the functions assigned to frames in news about events from one part of the world to another by transnational and alternative news agencies as well as international news media from different climes. Thus, Gitlin (1980) notes that the media bring a manufactured public world into private space within which people find themselves

increasingly reliant on the media for concepts, images of heroes, guiding information, emotional charges, recognition of public values, symbols in general, and even for language.

Evidences abound about how western media have been covering Africa (McPhail, 2010; Nyabola, 2014; Pate, 2007; Sobowale, 2002). In addition, political analysts like Nyabola (2014) argue that the reason why western media keep getting Africa wrong in its coverage is because western news outlets place too much premium on information given by western reporters. She adds that such casual descriptors inadvertently disregard the lived experiences of thousands of literate, experienced African writers, journalists and informants, and this creates a hierarchy of racially-inclined knowledge. In addition, she notes that events or situations are analyzed to either reify or undermine pre-existing assumptions in history books, other African literature or the phenomenon at hand. Further, when a foreign journalist enters a space in which s/he speaks the formal language but only understands the informal, a great deal will be lost in translation. This, she concludes, is prevalent with readings of a polyglot nation using a colonial language. It is necessarily an act of interpretation, and Western coverage of African situation is always going to suffer from this process, wherein it creates a selection bias and necessitates a process of translation within which the nuance of coded, non-verbal communication will be lost.

In addition, “coverage of Africa has been largely negative” (McPhail, 2010, p. 274; Pate, 2007, p. 468; Sobowale, 2002, p. 107). Instead of emphasizing the ugly, negative, conflictual and the disastrous in Africa, Sobowale (2002) argues that “news on Africa by Western countries should be about Africa’s needs (i.e. confronting illiteracy problems, fighting poverty, disease and ignorance, human rights conditions, economic, political realities, etc).”

In view of the above, this study investigated the news salience assigned by major news media and news agencies to Somalia’s worst famine, as declared by the United Nations (UN) on July 20, 2011. According to Iyengar (1994), “the manner in which a problem is framed

provides a contextual cue profoundly influencing decision-making because framing employs subtle alterations in the statement or presentation of judgment and choice problems” (p. 11). Entman (1993) adds that because “frames highlight smaller portions of information about the item that is a subject of a communication, such bits of information are more noticeable, meaningful or memorable to the audience” (p. 53). It is our contention that if the coverage of the Somali famine assigned more prominence to a particular news framing function (e.g. focusing on causes rather than consequences or recommendations), stakeholders’ attention would invariably be shifted away from the reality and from how to end the famine. By implication, this could lead to the neglect of over 3.7million vulnerable people. It could also result in animosity among the stakeholders wanting to find blame for the disaster, thereby generating further hostilities. In addition, Martin and Musa (1987) assert that *Panapress*, which is an alternative news agency, remains linked to *Reuters*, which initially helped to establish it. Thus, instead of challenging the dominant narrative of *Reuters*, as a transnational news agency, *Panapress* will augment its narratives. This was also an aspect investigated in this study.

## **II. Literature Review**

### *A. News and Global News Processing*

News involves the gathering, processing and distribution of information that affects people or that is of interest to the largest audience (Musburger, 2007, p. 93). News can be pleasant or unpleasant. Although people generally welcome good news, Musburger (2007) observes that bad news attracts the greatest interest. The 2011 Somali famine –with the threats of death on an estimated 13 million people across the Horn of Africa (WFP, 2011) in Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Uganda and parts of Sudan –became international news.

Print, broadcast or new media involved in the process of sourcing, gate keeping and the dissemination of messages are usually guided by journalistic ethical codes (i.e. editorial independence, truth, factuality, fairness, public interest and public good). Thus, they are integral to this process. Dijk (1988), however, notes that in the international scene, “news is influenced by the constraints of the news media coverage, their dependence on news agencies for content, and the influence of writers and correspondents.” Therefore, public interests can easily be compromised in dangerous regions such as Somalia, which is notorious for the deaths of journalists. With the understandable reluctance of journalists to travel to such regions, global media are often forced to depend on international news agencies and news media whose outreach, geographical coverage, economic interests, capacity and capability have formed a part of an unending feedback loop (Paterson, 1997) for sourcing and circulating news of a conflict-ridden and politically unstable entity like Somalia. News agencies, therefore, set the agenda for international news because they are central to the newsworthiness and homogeneous nature of foreign news selection through markers of urgency, length, frequency of coverage and repetition of the same story (Dijk, 1988; Paterson, 2006).

However, considering that Martin and Musa (1987), earlier quoted, argue that *Panapress*, which is mandated to provide alternative narrative to western news agencies, remains linked to *Reuters* which initially helped in its establishment alongside various other alternative news agencies across Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, then there is the need to (in)validate that assertion in today’s news flow dynamics of a humanitarian disaster in a developing region.

#### *B. News Framing and News Framing Functions*

Public opinion depends on media information, and audiences are likely to interpret news items based on the treatment assigned to the content, according to Norris, deVreese and Boomgaarden (as cited in Lecheler & deVreese, 2010). This is because media information

simplifies the process of organizing, typifying and categorizing the pre-existing frames used for interpreting situations or communications. This explains why early theorists of framing such as Ervin Goffman visualized frames as strips of activities, a social organization of experience and an approach to explain the social life situation of human societies. Their argument is that life is experienced as strips of activities, and these strips litter the world in one of two ways: *keying* or *fabrication*. Goffman (1986) explains that keying is the process of using a set of conventions to transform a given activity into something patterned on the activity, but that is seen by the participants to be something quite else; while fabrication is the intentional effort of one or more individuals to manage activity so that a party of one or more others will be induced to have a false belief about what it is that is going on. Thus, either way, keying or fabrication makes social activity vulnerable to transformation in a system of reference. This social system of reference which is theoretically called *framing* represents, according to Lecheler, deVreese, and Slothuus (2009), patterns of interpretation that are used to classify information and process it efficiently. It stresses certain aspects of reality while pushing other aspects into the background through its selective function. Entman (1993) describes framing as a consistent process of selection and salience because to frame is to select certain aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text which may perform more than one function or none. Gitlin (1980) sees framing “as a persistent pattern of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse” (p.7). What all these definitions emphasize is that framing is a process of assigning importance to some aspects of an issue over another, which may or may not have varying implications.

Adams and Schreiber (1978) maintain that news framing takes place during the production process in news content and in the effects of the content on the audience (as cited in Norris, 1995). Semetko and Valkenburg (2000, 2006) argue too that news can be generic

or specific, but generic news frames are used to attribute responsibility, conflict, human interest, economic consequences and morality. However, this study argues that specific-issue news framing of the coverage of the 2011 humanitarian disaster in Somalia is likely to be determined by the function it serves. Several studies (Dafrizal, Ibrahim, & Ahmad, 2011; David, Atun, Fille, & Monterola, 2011; Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2008; Entman, 1993, 2007, 2010) found that news framing functions include defining problems, diagnosing causes, moral judgments, and suggesting remedies, while Chu and Hamidah (2010) found that news framing functions predict consequences too.

In defining a problem, what a causal agent is doing is determined (Entman, 1993), but how the problem is defined invariably entails some statement about its origins (Kent, n.d.) and the clarification of key facts related to it (Zhou & Moy, 2007). In diagnosing causes, factors, reasons or forces that create the problem are identified (Chu & Hamidah, 2010). This includes, but is not only, the most obvious but also the more subtle forces underlying the problem (Entman, 1993; Zhou & Moy, 2007). The moral judgment news framing function evaluates the causal agents and their effects (Entman, 1993) to judge the parties implicated in the problem (Zhou & Moy, 2007) and emphasize creating awareness of its likely effects (Chu & Hamidah, 2010). The suggestion of remedies news framing function proposes ways to resolve the problem (Entman, 1993) and explores the possible results of such proposals (Chu & Hamidah, 2010; Zhou & Moy, 2007). The consequence news framing function highlights the impact or the effects of the problem. This can come in the form of attempts to predict probable outcomes including how the problem [in this case famine] might hinder sustainable development (Chu & Hamidah, 2010).

The 2011 Somali famine received global attention because it demanded an urgent humanitarian response in order to overcome the massive food and hunger crisis. Gettleman (2011) notes that at that time 3.7 million people were at risk of hunger, starvation, and death

in Somalia. By the end of the famine, an estimated 258,000 famine-related deaths were recorded (FAO/FSNAU & FEWS-NET, 2013). This famine resulted from years of persistent drought, conflict, restricted humanitarian access, and rapidly rising global food prices (Maxwell & Fitzpatrick, 2012; WFP, 2012) and could have been avoided if early warning signs, made public months before, had been heeded (Esipisu, 2011). Presumably, international news media and news agencies found the scenario newsworthy due to the journalistic practice of assigning newsworthiness to issues of human interest. McPhail (2010) notes that international communication and new technologies have a profound effect on news institutions and audiences almost everywhere. Therefore, global awareness and the perception of a humanitarian disaster in a developing country, like Somalia, depend on the global flow of information, and this is dependent on the interests of the news agencies and news media.

It is pertinent to note that Howe and Devereux (as cited in Rubin, 2014) suggest that a famine needs to be diagnosed for academic evaluation and the practical application of the findings, for political accountability, and for response coordination. They argue that diagnosing the causes of a problem produces measurements for hypotheses testing that constitute prerequisites for quantitative initiatives such as examining the socioeconomic conditions under which famines exist. Diagnosing causes of a problem also practically institutes an efficient capacity to provide relief and handle such humanitarian catastrophe. Similarly, since a famine is not simply caused by a shortage of food and water, but by the range of social and political factors earlier enumerated, diagnosing causes can engender political accountability and more thoughtful responses.

Devereux, Gelsdorf and Dawe (2012) add that there are wider implications for the assignment of salience to humanitarian disasters. For example, assigning salience to diagnosing a famine can result in its eventual declaration, which in turn contributes to

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increased media penetration of it, government pledges of support, and both local and international charitable contributions.

In view of the preceding discourses, it is particularly interesting to explore the salience assigned by news agencies (i.e. *Reuters* and *Panapress*) and news media (i.e. *Al Jazeera English* [AJE] and *CNNI*) to the famine in Somalia. It is also important to establish whether or not the earlier noted assertion that *Panapress* simply augments, rather than challenges transnational news agencies' narratives, is still valid. Hence, what news framing function (i.e. problem definition, diagnosing causes, moral judgment, suggesting remedies and predicting consequences) did *AJE*, *CNNI*, *Panapress* and *Reuters* use to assign salience to the 2011 famine in Somalia? Will *Panapress* simply augment or challenge *Reuters*' narratives?

### *C. News Sponsors and News Sources*

News is sponsored and shaped by a multitude of social actors, including politicians, organizations and social movements according to Gamson and Modigliani (as cited in Carragee & Roefs, 2004, p. 216). Manning (2001) notes that established interests or groups close to government will almost always succeed in shaping news agendas and the interpretive frameworks constructed by journalists because they are positioned at the top of a hierarchy of credibility. Journalists are likely to take their framework for understanding events as a starting point for their reporting due to their power, legitimacy and credibility as disinterested or objective experts. However, "news sources' ability to dominate news discourse depends on complex factors, including economic and cultural resources and knowledge of journalistic practices, the latter of which resonates from broader political values" (Carragee & Roefs, 2004, p. 215). Therefore, "there is a struggle to control news flow by news sources" (Manning, 2001, p. 202) to effectively influence the interpretive framework.

Undoubtedly, news sources can be news makers, but this is not necessarily always true because the journalistic principle of assigning value judgments to news and the individual

ideology of news organizations determines what makes news. Nonetheless, journalists often require an attribution of statements to sources to ensure the credibility of their information. Some journalists go the extra mile to engage in what Manning (2001) calls “journalistic strategic rituals” (p. 21), which allows them to work with news sources to construct news reports, whereby one party’s version of reality is balanced by a competing account within the news text to defend the objectivity of the report. This is investigative journalism accommodating multiple news sources to observe the principle of journalism to balance stories (e.g. objectivity and fairness).

It is noteworthy, however, that sources also make news sometimes. They function as conduits of information to the objective journalist. However, despite claims of objectivity, research suggests “systematic biases exist in the selection of sources by journalists” (Soley, 1992, p. 17). These sources, from among which journalists select, are diverse. McPhail (2010) opines that news agencies constitute sources of news to news media. Soley (1992) observes that “other news sources include criminals and victims, government officials, candidates for office, military leaders, terrorists and hostages, foreign dignitaries, and leaders of advocacy organizations. These serve as news sources because they represent specific viewpoints on a piece of news and are generally classified as either official or unofficial news sources” (p. 2). However, news sources can also be classified as primary or secondary sources. The former defines the essential aspects of an event, issue, or situation and articulates the key aspects of the event. The latter, secondary sources, comprises ordinary people and their emotional or moral reactions to the event or situation. These sources enable journalists to frame a story in a particular way (Schneider, 2011).

In cases where informed views and analysis or interpretations are needed, experts might also serve as primary sources and give their opinions. However, in a study of news sourcing in the online news of a humanitarian disaster, Dauda and Omar (2015) found that both

*Panapress*, an alternative transnational news agency, and *Reuters*, a Western mainstream news agency, depended mostly on advocacy/humanitarian groups as news sources. Meanwhile, in another study on how the 2003 Iraqi War was reported, Dimitrova and Connolly-Ahern (2007) found that government and military officials were the most frequently utilized sources. There were also no discernible differences across news organizations -- from the *New York Times* to *Al Ahram* -- with respect to their use of sources, all relying heavily on government sources. *The Guardian*, however, relied on government sources only in one-third of its reporting, while *Al Jazeera* relied on government sources for 63.5 percent of its reporting. Whereas Arab news sites relied heavily on journalists as sources, coalition media seldom cited journalistic sources. Instead, they relied on a mix of sources (i.e. government representative, military personnel, journalist, and terrorist group members).

This study, therefore, investigated news sources and their relationship to the assignment of salience to particular news framing functions in the coverage of the 2011 Somali famine using the research questions below because according to Schneider (2011), news sources enable journalists to frame the story in a particular way. More so, the preponderance of any one type of source can potentially affect how the media frames news (Liebler & Bendix, 1996). Thus, who were the news sources used in the coverage of the 2011 Somali famine by *AJE*, *CNNI*, *Panapress* and *Reuters*? What was the relationship between the news sources and the news framing functions used in their coverage?

### **III. Methodology**

One hundred and fifty-one online news stories on the Somali famine in the archives of *AJE*, *CNNI*, *Panapress* and *Reuters* were analyzed. These comprised all the news stories reported before and after the famine between January 2011 and August 2012. The units of

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analysis were headlines/sub-headlines, leads, sub-leads, pull quotes, photographs, photo captions and narratives in body text (cf. Tankard, 2001).

Data were collected from the archives of the individual websites of *Panapress*, *Reuters*, *AJE* and *CNNI* between December 2012 and January 2013. The search phrase “Somali famine” was used for locating the relevant material. News items within the period and scope of the study were selected from the search results where both key words appear in the headline or title, lead, sub-lead, first three paragraphs of the story, or first three photographs in the case of photo story. The stipulated search date covers a twenty months period starting from January 2011 and ending in August 2012. This was to cater for the pre- and post-famine declaration as well as the period during the famine. To prevent duplication of news items, the exact file names were saved as originally archived by the respective news agencies and news media. News from the *Panapress* was sourced using the same procedure. However, the search results of news items of the 2011 Somali famine reported by *Panapress* could not be accessed directly from their website because of the requirement for wire service subscription. Despite a series of official enquiries by phone, email and completion of the *Panapress* online customer subscription form, there was still no response. Eventually, the news items were accessed using the *Google* database, which supposedly subscribes to the *Panapress* news wire services. This was successfully carried out by copying the headline and/or lead of the news on the 2011 Somali famine from the search results returned from the archives and pasting it in the Google search engine. The search response returned the hyperlink to the particular news item and was subsequently accessed, clicked and saved. This procedure was repeated for each of the news items found.

Purposive sampling was used to select news organizations based on their capacity to generate rapid routine news reports, focus on neglected and dangerous regions like Somalia, credibility to influence global decision-making and global reach to diverse audiences. Census

sampling technique was used to ensure all elements in the population were collected. It also catered for news scarcity in reporting the 2011 Somali famine.

Coding and measurement was conducted using a codebook, and matrices were used to quantify and summarize the data for statistical analysis. Dichotomous values were recorded as responses based on predefined concepts of news framing functions which were operationalized using 15 predetermined questions developed from existing literature (Chu & Hamidah, 2010; Entman, 1993; Kent, n.d.; Zhou & Moy, 2007). News sources were similarly coded using dichotomous values. The questions explored the presence/absence of news framing functions using Tankard's units of analysis mentioned above. News sources were operationalized based on existing literature evidence (Schneider, 2011; Soley, 1992). The news framing function and news sources' coding sheet are attached in appendix 2. The news framing function indicators were deduced by dividing the aggregate number of the positive dichotomous value recorded by the total number of expected outcomes. The results gave rise to an ordinal scale with values ranging from 0 to 1 representing the cumulative news framing function indicator. These figures were subsequently converted into categorical variables and condensed into three categories indicating the degree that news framing functions were employed: low ( $\leq .50$ ), average (.51 – .67) and high (.68+). Reliability of measurements was ascertained by pre-coding a 10 percent random sample to reflect the ratio of coder agreed-upon decisions against the total number of unitizing decisions using the intercoder reliability of  $\geq .70$ . Intercoder reliability testing involved one of the authors and a second coder using the codebook as a guide. The process was repeatedly revised using the coding instrument. The Krippendorff's alpha (KALPHA) macro was used to measure inter-coder agreement (Hayes, 2013; Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). The Krippendorff's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) test for intercoder reliability yielded statistically acceptable results (.732 [presence] and .862 [absence] respectively).

The data were first explored to establish if normality assumptions (where sig,  $p > .05$ ) was violated. The result, attached as Appendix, shows some violations. Several non-parametric statistical tests were utilized. These tests included the Kruskal-Wallis test to ascertain differences in using news framing functions and news sources, the Mann-Whitney U test to discern the most significant differences in the use of news framing functions, and the Chi-square (test for independence) to explore the relationship between news organizations and the use of news framing functions and the relationship between news sources and use of news framing functions.

#### IV. The Results

##### A. Coverage

A total of 151 news items were reported in the period under study by the news organizations as shown in Table 1 below. *Reuters* reported 54 news items (35.80 %) of the total coverage, *CNNI* reported 53 news items (35.10%), *Panapress* reported 28 (18.54 %), while *AJE* reported 16 news items (10.60 %) of the entire 2011 Somalia famine news. The coverage appeared across six content categories as shown in Table 2. Most of the news items, 113 (74.83%), appeared as straight (hard) news.

**Table 1**

##### *Percentage of Coverage*

	Frequency	Percentage
AJE	16	10.60
CNNI	53	35.10
Panapress	28	18.54
Reuters	54	35.80
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>n = 151</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 2**

##### *Distribution of News Items according to News Content Categories*

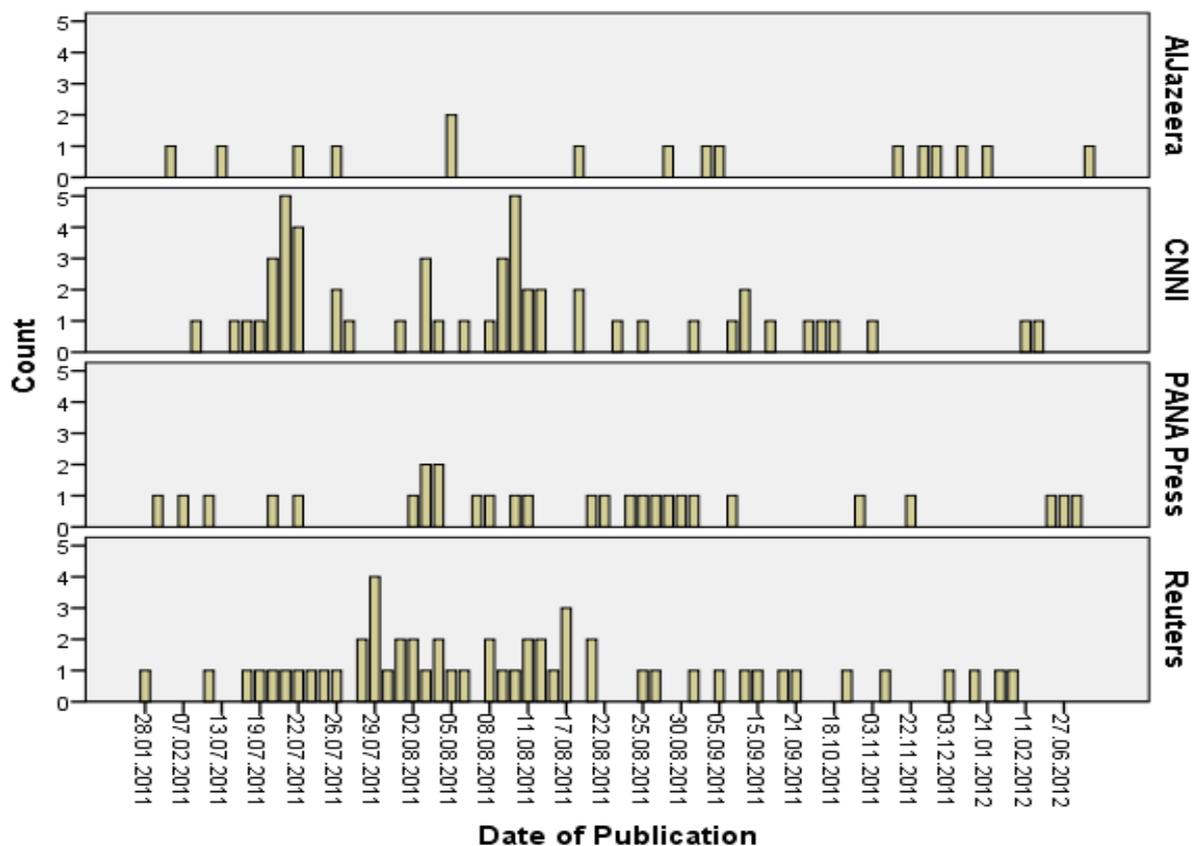
	AJE	CNNI	Panapress	Reuters	TOTAL
Analysis	0.66% (1)	1.99% (3)	0.00% (0)	0.66% (1)	3.31% (5)
Features	2.65% (4)	7.95% (12)	0.00% (0)	1.99% (3)	12.6% (19)

Opinion	1.32% (2)	6.62% (10)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	7.94% (12)
Photo Story	0.66% (1)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.66% (1)
Press Release	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.66% (1)	0.66% (1)
Straight News	5.30% (8)	18.54%(28)	18.54%(28)	32.45%(49)	74.83% (113)
<b>TOTAL (n)</b>	<b>10.6% (16)</b>	<b>35.1% (53)</b>	<b>18.54% (28)</b>	<b>35.8% (54)</b>	<b>100% (151)</b>

\*Note: Values in parentheses are number of stories

*B. Frequency of Coverage*

The news organizations in this study collectively neglected the 2011 Somali famine until after declaration by the UN, despite several months of earlier warnings. This implies a collective failure to discharge their surveillance and social responsibility functions. This is an irony, considering that the news coverage of a famine, supposedly Somalia’s worst in over two decades, itself experienced a ‘famine’ of coverage by major news media and news agencies. This is evident in the disparity between the coverage before, during and after the famine declaration as portrayed in Figure 1. The famine was reported only once by *Reuters* and twice by *Panapress* in January 2011. The famine was not reported again by any news organisation until July that year after the famine had been declared by the UN. Thereafter,



there were five stories, each by *CNNI* on July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2011 and on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Subsequently, the coverage declined dramatically.

**Figure 1. Daily news reports before and after the 2011 Somali famine declaration**

This neglect of the 2011 Somali famine until it was declared a humanitarian disaster by the UN is consistent with a previous finding concerning global TV news media's reserved coverage of Somalia and its famine during its civil war (Ogundimu & Fair, 1997). The question must then be asked: was the 'famine of news' in online news media a demonstration that global news media considered Somalia's tragic disaster unworthy of prominence as a periphery nation in the global economic, political and information flow systems? This is considered in the context of findings by Himelboim, Chang, and McCreery (2010) that news organizations exploit the Internet to reinforce traditional practices and power structures in international relations. Consequently, if the study population were evaluated in terms of the discharge of their surveillance and social responsibility functions, then it ought to be concluded that they failed to discharge any such functions in advance of the UN raising the alarm.

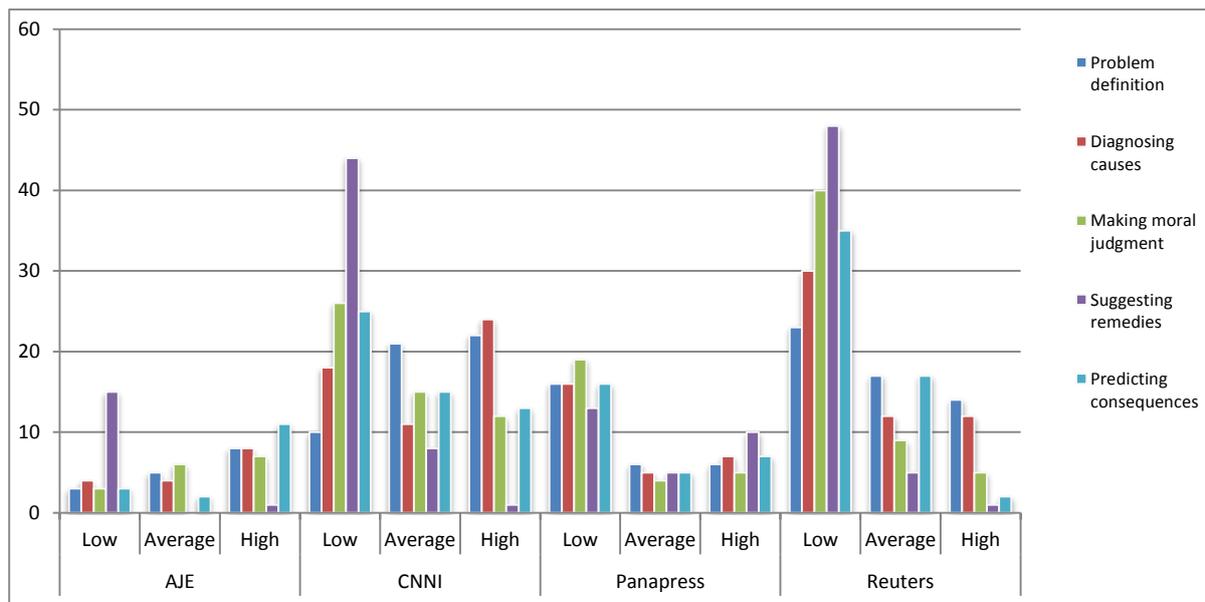
*C. Use of News Framing Functions*

Table 3 below shows measurement of central tendency. It shows that the mean, median and mode scores for "problem definition" were the most used, most centralized and most frequent. It also displays the median score for "suggesting remedies", which is at least half that of other news framing functions. However, Table 3 contradicts the bar chart shown in Figure 2 by demonstrating that "suggesting remedies" was the most used news framing function. This contradiction occurred because the remedies were suggested with low level scores while "problem definition" and other framing functions appeared with high-average scores. These results suggest that while remedies might have been suggested the most, they

were not significant. The news organizations failed to prioritize them or make them apparent. Such frames will likely pass unnoticed by the target audience.

**Table 3**  
*Measurement of Central Tendency*

	<b>Problem Definition</b>	<b>Diagnosing Causes</b>	<b>Moral Judgment</b>	<b>Suggesting Remedies</b>	<b>Predicting Consequences</b>
Mean	.611	.588	.493	.281	.490
Median	.611	.583	.476	.214	.500
Mode	.670	.500	.670	.000	.250



*Figure 2. Use of news framing functions by AJE, CNNI, Panapress and Reuters*

The results show that both *AJE* and *CNNI* emphasized the 2011 Somali famine in problem definition and diagnosing causes by using high level visible frame functions. In contrast, *Panapress* and *Reuters* did not highlight the famine as a problem and neither did they diagnose causes. Similarly, neither *CNNI*, *Panapress* nor *Reuters* considered making moral judgments a priority, as evidenced by the low scores in the use of the moral judgment news framing function. *CNNI* was the most likely to use the predicting consequences framing

function, while all news organizations suggested more remedies, as shown in Figure 2, in their coverage of the 2011 Somali famine. However, the low level scores for suggesting remedies would indicate that few news organizations made this framing function salient. There were significant differences in the use of all news framing functions as revealed by the Kruskal-Wallis test, where  $p$  is  $< .05$ . The Mann-Whitney U test also revealed significant statistical differences between *AJE* and *CNNI* in making moral judgment ( $p = .028$ ) and predicting consequences ( $p = .004$ ). *AJE* and *Panapress* differed significantly in using all five news framing functions: problem definition ( $p = .013$ ), diagnosing causes ( $p = .040$ ), moral judgment ( $p = .004$ ), suggesting remedies ( $p = .003$ ) and predicting consequences ( $p = .005$ ). Although *AJE* and *Reuters* differed in problem definition ( $p = 0.43$ ), diagnosing causes ( $p = .018$ ), moral judgment ( $p = .000$ ) and predicting consequences ( $p = .000$ ), *CNNI* and *Panapress* differed only in problem definition ( $p = .003$ ), diagnosing causes ( $p = .039$ ) and suggesting remedies ( $p = .000$ ). Likewise, *CNNI* and *Reuters* differed in problem definition ( $p = .012$ ), diagnosing causes ( $p = .009$ ), moral judgment ( $p = .007$ ) and predicting consequences ( $p = .015$ ). *Panapress* and *Reuters* differed only in suggesting remedies ( $p = .000$ ). Refer to Tables 4 and 5 below.

**Table 4*****Kruskal-Wallis Test***

News Framing Function	$x^2$	$p$	News Organization	N	Mean Rank
Problem Definition	14.237	.003	<i>AJE</i>	16	95.91
			<i>CNNI</i>	53	88.75
			<i>Panapress</i>	28	62.21
			<i>Reuters</i>	54	64.73
				<b>151</b>	
Diagnosing Causes	9.314	.025	<i>AJE</i>	16	93.75
			<i>CNNI</i>	53	85.58
			<i>Panapress</i>	28	67.48
			<i>Reuters</i>	54	65.75
				<b>151</b>	
Moral Judgment	17.902	.000	<i>AJE</i>	16	112.72
			<i>CNNI</i>	53	81.05

			<i>Panapress</i>	28	72.98
			<i>Reuters</i>	54	61.73
				<b>151</b>	
Suggesting Remedies	31.748	.000*	<i>AJE</i>	16	61.19
			<i>CNNI</i>	53	71.20
			<i>Panapress</i>	28	*117.13
			<i>Reuters</i>	54	*63.78
				<b>151</b>	
Predicting Consequences	23.422	.000	<i>AJE</i>	16	117.88
			<i>CNNI</i>	53	79.56
			<i>Panapress</i>	28	78.36
			<i>Reuters</i>	54	58.88
				<b>151</b>	

Note.  $\chi^2$  = chi-square, p= significance [ $<.05$ ]

\**Panapress* and *Reuters* differed significantly only in suggesting remedies



There were statistically significant differences in the Kruskal-Wallis test for the use of news sources. The differences were in using news agencies ( $p = .000$ ) and experts ( $p = .003$ ) only. Mean rank scores for news agencies was highest for *AJE* (mean rank = 118.19), while famine victims recorded the lowest mean rank score for *Panapress* as shown in Table 6.

**Table 6*****Kruskal-Wallis Test for News Sources***

News Sources	$\chi^2$	p	News Organization	N	Mean Rank
News Agency(ies)	89.761	.000	<i>AJE</i>	16	118.19
			<i>CNNI</i>	53	71.00
			<i>Panapress</i>	28	71.00
			<i>Reuters</i>	54	71.00
Famine Victims	6.867	.076	<i>AJE</i>	16	82.88
			<i>CNNI</i>	53	78.25
			<i>Panapress</i>	28	64.00
			<i>Reuters</i>	54	77.98
Somali Govt.	5.185	.159	<i>AJE</i>	16	78.44
			<i>CNNI</i>	53	74.70
			<i>Panapress</i>	28	69.00
			<i>Reuters</i>	54	80.19
Insurgents/ Militants	1.770	.622	<i>AJE</i>	16	77.72
			<i>CNNI</i>	53	77.27
			<i>Panapress</i>	28	73.00
			<i>Reuters</i>	54	75.80
Foreign Dignitaries/Leaders	1.407	.704	<i>AJE</i>	16	67.16
			<i>CNNI</i>	53	78.64
			<i>Panapress</i>	28	74.57
			<i>Reuters</i>	54	76.77
Advocacy/Humanitarian Orgs.	2.087	.555	<i>AJE</i>	16	71.69
			<i>CNNI</i>	53	71.51
			<i>Panapress</i>	28	81.13
			<i>Reuters</i>	54	79.03
Expert	13.810	.003	<i>AJE</i>	16	76.44
			<i>CNNI</i>	53	85.52
			<i>Panapress</i>	28	67.00
			<i>Reuters</i>	54	71.19
Other News Sources	7.281	.063	<i>AJE</i>	16	70.50
			<i>CNNI</i>	53	73.35
			<i>Panapress</i>	28	73.20
			<i>Reuters</i>	54	81.69

Note.  $\chi^2$  = chi-square, p = significance [where  $p < .05$ ]

*D. The Relationship between the News Sources and Assignment of Salience*

In Table 7 below, the Chi-Square test found evidence of a significant association between news agencies and predicting consequences ( $\chi^2 = 21.471$ ,  $p = .000$ ), between famine victims and suggesting remedies ( $\chi^2 = 7.372$ ,  $DF = 2$ ,  $p = .025$ ), and between Somali government and predicting consequences ( $\chi^2 = 8.200$ ,  $p = .017$ ). There was also a significant association between foreign dignitaries/leaders and problem definition ( $\chi^2 = 6.111$ ,  $p = .047$ ) and diagnosing causes ( $\chi^2 = 10.105$ ,  $p = .006$ ), and between experts and problem definition ( $\chi^2 = 6.342$ ,  $p = .042$ ) and making moral judgment ( $\chi^2 = 7.819$ ,  $p = .020$ ).

**Table 7**

*Chi-Square Test for News Sources and Use of News Framing Functions*

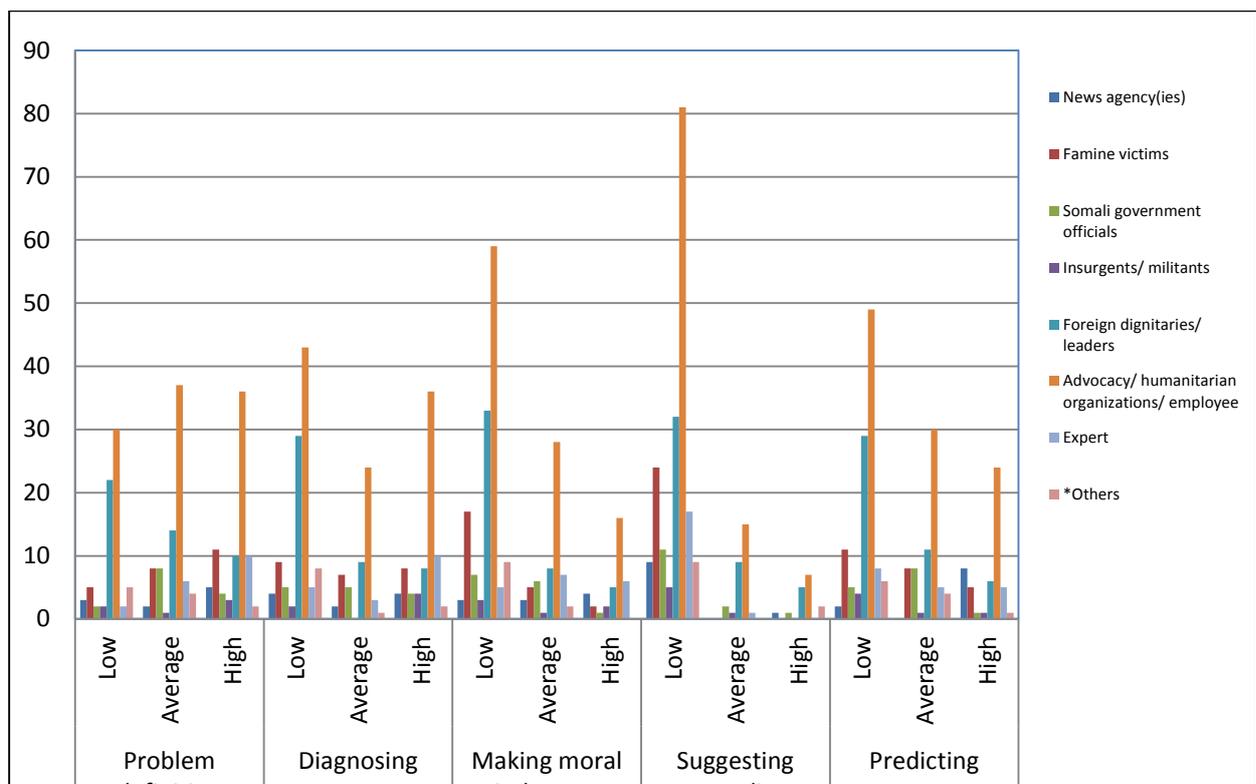
	Problem Definition for 3 Levels		Diagnosing Causes for 3 Levels		Moral Judgment for 3 Levels		Suggesting Remedies for 3 Levels		Predicting Consequences for 3 Levels	
	$\chi^2$	p	$\chi^2$	p	$\chi^2$	p	$\chi^2$	p	$\chi^2$	p
News Agency(ies)	1.495	.474	.190	.909	4.147	.126	1.450	.484	21.471	.000
Famine Victims	2.935	.231	1.218	.544	2.564	.277	7.372	.025	.865	.649
Somali Government	4.815	.090	1.957	.376	4.186	.123	.113	.945	8.200	.017
Insurgents/Militants	1.020	.600	3.516	.172	.818	.664	.668	.716	.526	.769
Foreign Dignitaries/Leaders	6.111	.047	10.105	.006	5.222	.073	4.452	.108	3.898	.142
Advocacy/Humanitarian Organizations	4.188	.123	1.590	.452	5.465	.065	3.164	.206	3.070	.215
Expert	6.342	.042	4.419	.110	7.819	.020	3.031	.220	.600	.741
Others	1.273	.529	3.695	.158	3.506	.173	2.685	.261	1.406	.495

Note.  $\chi^2$  = chi-square, p = sig. [ $\leq .05$ ]

Humanitarian organizations were the most relied upon news source during the coverage of the Somali famine. However, like the use of news framing functions by the news organizations, the overall relationship between using news sources and news framing function across all levels, as depicted in Figure 3 below, also appeared mostly within low-average level scores, except in problem definition. Consequently, while humanitarian

organizations constituted the most used news source, they were not salient in assigning prominence to news framing functions. The appearance of most news framing functions with low-level scores, depicting non-prominence, resulted from how the news media and news agencies failed to strategically prioritize aspects of the famine across the news elements (i.e. headline/sub-headline, lead, sub-lead, pull quote, photograph, photo caption and narratives in body text).

Overall, the results suggest that *AJE*, *CNNI*, *Panapress* and *Reuters* all differed significantly in using all news framing functions except in suggesting remedies. This would indicate similarities in their assignment of news functions to news framing. Given that the 2011 famine in Somalia was a truly catastrophic humanitarian disaster, assigning salience to mitigate the problem suggests that media organizations were upon the declaration of the famine by the UN, in fact, discharging their core functions of surveillance and education.



**Figure 3. Clustered bar chart for the influence of news sources on the use of news framing functions at 3 levels**

## V. Discussion

The results indicate significant differences in the use of news framing functions by news media and news agencies, and since news is the primary output of these organizations, assessing their editorial policies and ideological affiliations may explain the differences in the assignment of prominence to particular news framing functions. Considering that *AJE's* coverage predicted consequences, it may have sought to empathize with its 'constituency' by raising an alarm for the emerging humanitarian disaster since its editorial policy aims to give a voice to the voiceless in underreported regions. *CNNI's* promotion of the famine as a problem may be connected to its long established influence on the US government domestic and foreign policy. According to McPhail (2010), whatever *CNNI* chooses to focus on becomes a significant public policy issue for the US government, its allies, and heads of UN member nations.

The dominant narrative that was being churned out by the media organizations and packaged as news was that the famine was caused by a multitude of natural and man-made factors. In other words, no matter how much relief or financial aid were provided, these man-made factors would continue to perpetuate famine conditions unless a concerted effort was made to resolve these lingering problems. As there were no significant differences between *Panapress* and *Reuters* in their use of news framing functions (except in 'suggesting remedies'), the same narrative from *Reuters* was also being heard from *Panapress*. This is significant because it corroborates existing evidence in the literature that despite being established to challenge the dominance and biased news coverage of Africa by transnational western news agencies, such as *Reuters*, *Panapress* an alternative news agency, "remained linked to *Reuters*, which help establish it" (Martin & Musa, 1987), and continued to supplement its news with the assistance of *Reuters*.

Another interesting result to consider is that the Kruskal-Wallis test for ascertaining most significant differences in the use of framing functions by the news organizations, demonstrated that *Reuters*, arguably the most powerful news agency in the world, assigned salience to diagnosing causes. Interestingly, Howe and Devereux in Rubin (2014) suggest that a famine needs to be diagnosed for academic evaluation and the practical application of findings, for political accountability, and for response coordination. They argue that diagnosing the causes of a problem produces measurements for hypotheses testing that constitute prerequisites for quantitative initiatives such as examining the socioeconomic conditions under which famines exist. Diagnosing causes of a problem also practically institutes an efficient capacity to provide relief and handle such humanitarian catastrophe. Similarly, since a famine is not simply caused by a shortage of food and water, but by the range of social and political factors earlier enumerated, diagnosing causes can engender political accountability and more thoughtful responses.

In relation to the preceding arguments, Devereux *et al.* (2012) maintain that there are wider implications for the assignment of salience to humanitarian disasters. For example, assigning salience to diagnosing a famine can result in the eventual declaration of the famine, which in turn contributes to increased media penetration of the famine, government pledges of support, and both local and international charitable contributions. This is reflected in how the declaration of the Somali famine by the UN in July 2011 caused funding donations to aid agencies to skyrocket overnight. The present study corroborates this whereof it was found out that while the media reported only isolated food crises in the Horn of Africa before the declaration, media interest in the famine swelled following the UN's recognition of unfolding catastrophe.

In relation to the findings that show duplication of news framing functions between a regional and transnational news agency (i.e. *Panapress* and *Reuters*), in assigning salience to

news framing functions in covering the 2011 famine in Somalia, the long established problems of international news flow continues to linger. This is within the arguments of imbalance in information flow, which developing countries have long blamed on the heavily biased news narratives of western transnational news agencies. Kumar and Biernatzki (n.d.) note that this was what led to an alliance of regional governments in the 1960s, with assistance from the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), and led to the establishment of numerous regional and national news agencies, including *Panapress* to better represent local and regional interests.

Similarly, we found a significant relationship between five news sources (i.e. news agencies, victims of famine, Somali government, foreign dignitaries/leaders and experts) and the use of news framing functions. The sources, news agencies and Somali government tended to be associated most strongly with predicting consequences. Whereas famine victims were influential in suggesting remedies, foreign dignitaries were influential in both problem definition and diagnosing causes, while experts were influential in problem definition and making moral judgments.

The preponderance of any one type of source can potentially affect how the media frames news (Liebler & Bendix, 1996). Therefore, news agencies may have predicted consequences based on prior knowledge of the conditions in Somalia and of the gravity of its consequences. Such prior knowledge may have evolved out of their array of sources and privileged information. The Somali government, faced with the glaring reality of the existing and impending catastrophic disaster, may have sought global support by predicting consequences in order to rescue millions of its own people from the famine. Meanwhile, the famine victims themselves are best positioned to know their conditions and identify their most immediate needs; hence, they might be adept at suggesting solutions.

The humanitarian organizations comprised the most relied upon news source across all news framing functions, but within low-average levels except in problem definition. This suggests that the “thematically reinforcing clusters of facts” to frequently suggest more remedies, by a powerful and influential actor in the global political circles, may probably have been used to “guide the receiver’s thinking and conclusion” (Entman, 1993, p. 52) in characteristically defining the 2011 Somali famine as a catastrophic disaster requiring urgent solutions. Since problem definition scores appear within the average to high range, the problems of the famine will be more visible than those in the low to average range, thereby guiding the audience’s thinking in the direction of problem-solution.

Nonetheless, given that humanitarian organizations were the most used news sources, followed by foreign dignitaries/leaders, then the argument by Carragee and Roefs (2004) that news sources influence on news depends on the sponsor’s economic and cultural resources and their knowledge of journalistic practices becomes important. Humanitarian organizations on the ground in Somalia, led by the UN and associated agencies, have access to a network of donor agencies and UN members, and they can manipulate these resources to influence for action. This would explain why humanitarian organizations were the most relied upon news source because the news source sought out news organizations. Similarly, the foreign dignitaries/ leaders provided financial or relief aid to the humanitarian organizations for much the same reason; that is, to exert influence over media reporting. Furthermore, defining the famine as a humanitarian disaster, while true, was an action that was ultimately intended to stir-up emotions and motivate action. In addition, since neither the famine victims nor the Somali government had any real influence on determining news framing functions, defining the famine as a humanitarian disaster may have afforded them an ounce of political and economic leverage as they are now regarded as ‘the needy.’

Besides, journalism involves the distribution of information affecting people or the information of interest to its largest audience (Musburger, 2007, p. 93). That being the case, the under-utilization of famine victims and the Somali government as news sources, by both *Panapress* and *Reuters*, contradicts the above assertion. Recalling that Somalia is among the most dangerous places on earth for journalists to operate, and considering that *Panapress* was established by African governments to promote African interests, the regional news agency could have used its network of contacts among member states to leverage access to news sources such as famine victims, the Somali government, the insurgents and experts. Ironically, *Panapress* did not attribute any of its news to any of these four sources.

## **VI. Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research**

This study found significant differences in the use of news framing functions in the online news of international news media and transnational/regional news agencies with regard to reporting the 2011 Somali famine. Our analysis confirmed that the two news agencies, *Panapress* and *Reuters*, used similar functions to frame their news, and that *Reuters* extended its function of being a news purveyor for news media to a definer of news content for an alternative news agency from a developing nation. This contributes to the understanding of the pattern with which salience is assigned to functions in news framing by establishing that because the 2011 famine in Somalia was a humanitarian disaster with such catastrophic consequences, the assignment of greater salience to suggestions and to consequences was intended to mitigate the disaster itself and prompt urgent action. The distinctions and similarities in assigning functions to news frames suggest the influence of ideological structures, editorial policies and in-house style. These differences and similarities may find explanation in the assertions by Goffman (1986) on how news frames produce meaning and organize experiences based on broader structural and ideological processes involving both journalists and their news organizations.

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In view of these results, therefore, we suggest that another area of future research, perhaps, would be to investigate how content and gate-keeping processes can be combined to understand how and why decisions regarding the use of particular news framing functions were reached by the editorial team. This may provide a broader understanding of the framing of humanitarian issues in particular. The suggestion also takes into consideration observations by Fenton (2010) that news is what journalists make of it, and it is dependent on a range of, economic, social, political and technological factors as well as ones pertaining to the working environment.

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## Appendix

### *Tests of Normality for Distribution of News Framing Functions*

News Framing Function	News Organization	Kolmogorov-Smirnov		
		Statistic	df	Sig. (p)
Problem Definition	AJE	.193	16	.113
	CNNI	.095	53	.200
	<b>*Panapress</b>	<b>.184</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>.016</b>
	Reuters	.089	54	.200
Diagnosing Causes	AJE	.154	16	.200
	CNNI	.084	53	.200
	Panapress	.151	28	.103
	<b>*Reuters</b>	<b>.161</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>.001</b>
Moral Judgment	AJE	.156	16	.200
	CNNI	.083	53	.200
	Panapress	.143	28	.147
	<b>*Reuters</b>	<b>.121</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>.046</b>
Suggesting Remedies	<b>*AJE</b>	<b>.239</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>.015</b>
	<b>*CNNI</b>	<b>.178</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>.000</b>
	Panapress	.139	28	.176
	<b>*Reuters</b>	<b>.167</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>.001</b>

\*Note: Highlighted items violated normality assumptions where  $p > .05$