

International comparison of TV news coverage of Iraq

Media Tenor presents TV news analysis at ICA's international conference

Dresden/Bonn. A new study by Media Tenor, the Bonn media research institute, shows how strongly the TV news coverage of events in Iraq in different countries is influenced by the political climate in those countries. The study, entitled "Framing the War on Terror and Iraq: A Cross-National Perspective," will be presented to academics and communications experts from around the world on June 19, 2006, in Dresden, at the annual conference of the International Communication Association (ICA). For the study, which was created in cooperation with Emory University (Atlanta, GA), Media Tenor analyzed the TV news coverage of the war in Iraq in March and April of 2003 in Germany, Great Britain, the U.S., the Czech Republic, South Africa and on Qatar's Al Jazeera.

The study will be presented by Media Tenor's Dr. Christian Kolmer and Prof. Holli Semetko, Emory University, who is also a member of Media Tenor's academic advisory board. The two researchers focused particularly on the thematic structure of the news coverage at the beginning of the war. During the first week of the war, military action was at the center of the coverage in the media in all analyzed countries, particularly in the U.S. and in Great Britain. Compared to U.S. TV news, the Arab-language news channel Al Jazeera and the German Satellite channel Deutsche Welle featured almost twice as much information on the political background of the war. "The analysis of the coverage during the first week of the war shows that there is a connection between the dominant issues in the coverage and whether or not a country's media had embedded journalists," says Dr. Christian Kolmer. For instance, on German TV news, which had no journalists embedded with troops, there was more coverage of the role of journalists in the war, with a share of 7% of all reports, than on U.S. TV news, which did use embedded journalists, with a share of only 2.3% of all reports.

In U.S. TV news, which showed the political elite of the country to be relatively unified in regard to the war, the tone of coverage of the Iraqis was the most negative among all analyzed countries during the first two weeks of the war. "The results suggest that, in times of war or crisis, media coverage tends to toe the government's line," Kolmer says.

The International Communication Association unites more than 3,500 communications scientists from 65 countries. The studies that will be presented at the conferences have been evaluated by a panel of experts. Only a select number of authors are invited to give a presentation at the annual ICA conference, which this year takes place in Dresden, Germany. Media Tenor's researchers have been among the presenters at the conference for several years now.

The analysis was based on the main evening news broadcasts from the following media, between March 20 and April 16, 2003: Great Britain - BBC and ITN (early and late evening news); USA - ABC, NBC and CBS; Czech Republic - CTV; South Africa - SABC and e-tv; Qatar - Al Jazeera; Germany - ARD Tagesschau and Tagesthemen, ZDF heute and heute journal, RTL aktuell, Deutsche Welle (English and German). Basis of the analysis: 54,223 statements and 33,429 pictures.

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