Global Media Framing on Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine the global broadcast media's coverage and framing of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). For this purpose, four global media, namely British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Cable News Network (CNN), Aljazeera English (AJE), and China Global Television Network (CGTN) were selected purposively based on the North-South perspective. The study employed content analysis as its research design and archival data were collected from each of the sample media's websites by using the fitting search engine of keywords. Accordingly, a total of 189 stories that fulfill the inclusion criteria were identified. To analyze the data, descriptive and thematic analyses were used. The result of the study revealed that CGTN and AJE gave more coverage to GERD than BBC and CNN. The result showed that, unlike the "North-South" dichotomy, both BBC and AJE represented GERD in a conflict frame. CNN framed the dam positively using the positive reference of assertions that favor the dam project sympathetically. The finding indicated that CGTN mainly framed GERD in a prognostic manner, which focused on the possible solutions to the current impasse on the dam between the concerned states. Government officials were identified as the most common sources of stories in all four target media. The study concluded that GERD was primarily framed as a source of conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt. Finally, the study suggested that more studies are needed on related projects across the Nile River region to better understand the role of the global media.

Keywords: GERD; Global media; Media framing; Nile River; Story sources

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1. Introduction

The Nile River is the longest international river basin in the world even if the volume of water it carries per annum is small (estimated at around 84 BCM) compared to the rest Trans-boundary Rivers of the world (Zeleke, 2010). River Nile is known for its more contestation than genuine cooperation in using the shared water resources among riparian states. The absence of a basin-wide agreement and an all-inclusive regime (legal framework) on the utilization of the Nile River is still creating a problem among riparian states. Egypt and Sudan have harnessed the river for over a century (Abraham, 1997). Thus far, this Egyptian "regional dominance and historical disregard for other riparian states" (Foulds, 2002: 21) have been backed up by the 1929 accord between the United Kingdom and Egypt and the 1959 agreement between Egypt and Sudan on the full utilization of the Nile River waters (Naess, 2015). The 1929 treaty in Article 4(II) and the 1959 treaty in Article 5(1) have put a precondition on the side of the upstream riparian states by stating that they had to consult Egypt and Sudan over any Nile water-related development schemes. For instance, Article 4(II) of the 1929 treaty, in part, reads: "Except with the prior consent of the Egyptian Government, no irrigation works shall be undertaken nor electric generators installed along the Nile and its branches or on the lakes from which they flow…."

Although Ethiopia contributes around 86 percent of the total annual flow of the Nile River waters, it was neither invited nor included in the 1929 and 1959 Nile water negotiations and treaties. Against this exclusion, in 1957 the country officially expressed its opposition to the treaties and described them as non-effective as far as it is not part of the agreements (Arsano, 2007).

The river's upstream states including Ethiopia have continuously been seeking to come up with another fair agreement that incorporates the interests and rights of all the riparian states of which the Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) is a promising one as it aims at founding the Nile River Basin Commission (Zeleke, 2010). The key tenet of the CFA is an equitable utilization of the Nile River waters. And, despite the allegations over the "stalling tactics" of this endeavor for more than two decades by lower riparian states, especially Egypt (Arsano, 2007), it seems it is almost on the right track to succeed; because, the Entebbe Agreement has already been signed by six countries out of eleven to date. The signatory countries are Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, and Burundi. The Entebbe Agreement would help upstream states to harness the river without the prior consent of Egypt and Sudan (Shay, 2017) since the supposed "veto power" of the latter over the former is the "most critical obstacle" for upstream states to use their water resources. Taking the 'legal and institutional framework' of the CFA into account, Tawfik (2016: 73) viewed the common stand of most upstream states on the CFA as "a significant transformation in Nile hydro-politics. … [This is because] of the framework agreement sent a clear message downstream that the dominant order shaped by historical agreements was coming to an end."

Despite this historicity and challenge for upstream states of the Nile River, Ethiopia has begun constructing GERD in 2011, even without consulting the issue with downstream states. The GERD (previously known as Border Dam, the 'X' project, Millennium Dam) is under construction by Ethiopia on the Blue Nile (*Abbay*) River in the Benishangul-Gumuz National Regional State, Metekel zone Guba district. It has a height of 145 meters, 74 BCM of water reservoir capacity, and it will generate around 6000 MW [slashed to 5150MW in 2019] of electric power when completed (Woldegebriel, 2015). The exact installing capacity of the dam seems elusive as the Ethiopian government officials have stated various figures across time: 5250MW (2011), 6000MW (2016), 6450MW (2017), and 5150MW (2019).

The construction of GERD has faced critical opposition from Egypt and, to a lesser extent, Sudan as well. For instance, as Naess (2015: 46) states: "The Egyptian opposition to GERD is founded in a near-universal denunciation of the project as harmful and dangerous to Sudan, Egypt and the basin at large." In contrast, Ethiopia rejected the claims of Egypt as irrational; instead, it argues that the dam will be beneficial not only to Ethiopia but also to the downstream states of Egypt and Sudan. Considering the dam's potential impact on the existing hydro-politics of the Nile Basin region,

Gebreluel (2014: 25) has substantiated the project as a tool for "ending Africa's oldest geopolitical rivalry."

Apart from the dam's benefit or detrimental assessment controversies, it is imperative to investigate the media's framing of whether they viewed the dam as a catalyst for better cooperation or conflict among riparian states, particularly between Ethiopia and Egypt. Today, as we are living in the era of globalization, media can play decisive roles in disseminating news and current information throughout the world. As purveyors of international news and information, global media could have an immense influence in shaping their audiences and governments' perceptions of the different regions of the world (Street, 2001). In this regard, to understand media messages one needs to be aware of the "politics" of media practice because facts sometimes can be distorted for political advantage (Greenfield, 2002).

To assess how the global media outlets represent GERD, framing theory lends itself well. Media framing plays a vital role in reinforcing people to admit one meaning over another (Entman, 1993). Media make people "conscious or unconscious framing judgments in deciding what to say, guided by frames… that organize their belief systems" (Entman, 1993: 52). Not only media people and their organizations manipulate an issue through framing, but also those forces that have a vested interest in that issue can do the same. In this regard, Chu (2015) observed that news sources have had a potent influence in determining the central message of media outputs even to a "greater extent" than the journalists themselves do. Moy, Tewksbury, and Rinke (2016) identified three influential forces that can shape the process of media frame of issues. These forces are culture and social norms, organizational pressures and constraints, and frame advocates (sources of news).

The way western media framed Africa dominates negative stories such as conflicts, crises-oriented, disasters, drought, famine, political scandal, stereotypes, and corruption (Onyedike, 2000; Sobowale, 2002; McPhail, 2010; Gagliardone, 2013). However, Nothias (2018) argued that this time western media framing of Africa is not as pervasive as the "assumed" claims by the existing literature because they are a bit exaggerated.

On the part of the southern media, there are different viewpoints. About Aljazeera English, "which promises to mark a radical change by offering a version of non-Western or Southern take on the news" (Painter, 2008: 6) there are supporting and opposing arguments on the media's neutrality and framing practices of Southern issues (Sakr, 2007; Abdul-Mageed and Herring, 2008). CGTN is another media established with the aim of the "South" perspective and has been "hailed as a new voice of Africa" (Yanqiu, 2014: 4). However, Gagliardone (2013) asserted that while there was a stated desire for CGTN to use positive reporting in telling the African story, domestic African controversial political stories are likely to be ignored by Chinese media.

Media can play either constructive or destructive roles; thereby, their coverage of the Nile River-related stories and how those stories are delivered could have an impact. This delivered information could play a crucial role in molding the understanding of their audiences, their respective national governments, and the regimes of Nile riparian states about the utilization of the Nile River. This understanding, in turn, will influence the policies of their home countries towards Nile River co-riparian countries. However, research that reveals the contribution of mass media in the hydro-politics of the Nile region is absent.

The inequitable utilization of the Nile River basin has been studied much from the power relations view (hydro-politics) of riparian states, particularly between the upper riparian and lower riparian states (Elhance, 1999; Cascão and Zeitoun, 2010; Menga, 2016). However, the role of mass media as an apparatus of hegemony either in sustaining the existing Egyptian "hydro-hegemonic position" of the river water resources, or in encouraging non-hegemonic riparian states for counter hydro-hegemonic movements is not known. Let alone the recently initiated Ethiopian dam, studies on the global media's coverage and framing of the hydro-politics of the Nile River at large are untouched. Indeed, media framing of political, economic, and developmental issues can differ from country to country and political system to political system (Sakr, 2007). Therefore, a study on how the global

media frames national development initiatives that affect more states like the GERD needs inquiry. Thus, the current study aims to fill this knowledge gap. To this end, this study has the following specific objectives:

1. To identify the major themes of the stories in the coverage of the GERD on the sample global media.
2. To examine the main frame types used by the target global media in their coverage of the GERD project.
3. To distinguish the tone of the sample media used for the GERD project.
4. To identify the dominant story sources attributed and manner of sourcing in the coverage of the GERD project on the target global media.

2. Research Methods

2.1. Design of the study

This study employed content analysis as a research design. As Berelson (1952: 18) asserted, content analysis is "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication." The manifest content of communication could be anything spoken (and recorded), written, published, broadcasted, presented as a graphic or on film, or digitized. Moreover, content analysis as a research technique is also useful "for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2004: 18). In this study, the method of content analysis involved both manifest and latent aspects of data.

2.2. Data Collection Method

This study used archival data sources from the sample media to gather the necessary data. Collecting archival data from sources may sometimes require permission, but most of the time archival data can be attained from public sources freely (Vogt, Gardner, and Haeffele, 2012). Fortunately, the archival data of the sampled media are openly available to everyone, so data were gathered at ease from each media's websites by using the fitting search engine of keywords. While collecting the relevant stories about the GERD project that have been broadcasted and/or made available online on the target media's respective websites, the researchers employed an appropriate search engine by using keywords such as GERD, Millennium dam, and Ethiopia. First, all stories which had mentioned the GERD project explicitly were gathered from the respective webpage of each media (https://www.bbc.co.uk for BBC, https://www.cnn.com for CNN, https://www.aljazeera.com for AJE, and https://africa.cgtn.com and https://cgtn.com for CGTN). Then, the researchers went through the contents of all the collected stories, and thus the stories that mainly talk about the dam in any of their headline, lead, body, and conclusion (inclusion criteria) were selected for further coding and analysis whereas those stories that did not mainly emphasize on the Ethiopian dam or when they simply mention it in passing (exclusion criteria) had been excluded from the sampling unit.

Based on the above-mentioned data collection procedures, a total of 227 stories were identified that mentioned the GERD within the specified time framework of this study. Out of a total of 227 stories, 36 stories were from BBC, 18 stories were from CNN, 63 stories were from AJE, and 110 stories were from CGTN. Following an extensive story theme identification and data screening processes, a total of 189 stories (31 stories of BBC, 14 stories of CNN, 50 stories of AJE, and 94 stories of CGTN) meeting the inclusion criteria were identified. In other words, a total of 38 stories were excluded from the target sample size because GERD is not the major theme of those stories or it was simply mentioned in passing.

After collecting the required data and checking their relevance and completeness, the data coding process was followed. Two data coders who have MA degrees in journalism and communication were chosen. After giving them basic training by the principal researcher on how they ought to code the collected data, they organized the raw data into predetermined analytical categories, which were

drawn from the research objectives and theoretical foundations of the study. Therefore, each collected story was coded manually by coders.

2.3. Intercoder Reliability
To test out the level of consistency of the intercoder reliability between the two coders, 20 percent of the total stories were coded and crosschecked to ensure the reliability coefficient by using Holsti's (1969) formula:

$$Reliability = \frac{2M}{(N1 + N2)}$$

Where, M represents the aggregate number of coding decisions upon which the two coders agreed; while, N1 and N2 represent the total number of coding decisions made by coders one and two, respectively. Accordingly, the degree of inter-coder reliability of this study was found as 95 percent.

2.4. Study Population and Sampling Techniques
Media selection: BBC, CNN, Aljazeera English (AJE), and CGTN media outlets were selected for this study deliberately among those around a dozen giant global media houses. The researchers' rationale for choosing these media on purpose includes: BBC and CNN represent the Western media's dominant status quo in international news flows; Aljazeera English situates in the Middle East represents the Arab world and the "South" and, CGTN on behalf of Eastern media and the "South" perspective; as the issue of the GERD is from Africa; while, the four target media are from other continents so that it does not mean national news for them.

   Time frame: The time frame for the analysis of the stories of the selected media outlets covered more than nine years from the day the GERD project officially launched on March 30, 2011, to July 31, 2020, when Ethiopia took advantage of the heavy rain season has begun filling up the reservoir in July 2020.

   Sample size: According to Gunter (2002: 221), "[i]n some instances, the universe may be small enough to be analysed in its entirety." Hence, acknowledging the above assumption as sensible in this study, the researchers considered all the GERD-related stories (census method) announced or posted on each media's website within the prescribed time frame.

2.5. Unit of Analysis
In studying a content analysis of media outlets regarding a given issue, determining the unit of analysis is crucial. For this study, the units of analysis could be the news stories, programs, and documentaries reported about the GERD project. Where necessary, analysis of story items in this study has included pictorial/image aspects.

2.6. Analytical Categories
To analyze the contents of the chosen media outlets coding sheet and coding guide were developed together with their clear operational definitions to categorize and code the frequency of coverage, theme, tone, frame, source of the story, and manner of sourcing used in reporting about the GERD project.

2.7. Data Analysis Procedures
The process of data analysis of the study mainly incorporated collecting and organizing the data from the sample media's websites (text/audio-visual outputs). The collected data were also further checked for their accuracy and completeness. Besides, the audio-visual data were transcribed into text form. Then, the data coding process was done by two coders; and thus, they coded the raw data into the prearranged analytical categories. Finally, the coded data were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive analysis, and when necessary quotations were also used to enrich the findings of the study.

In presenting the findings of the collected data, the study utilized charts, frequencies, and percentages. Following the preliminary data descriptions, the researchers proceed to analyze, interpret and compare the results of this study.

3. Results and Discussions

Following the selection and identification of the target sample size that is a total of 189 stories and additional endeavors of checking their accuracy and completeness, those selected raw stories were further coded and analyzed into the four analytical categories were chosen for this study and their respective findings have been presented as follows.

3.1. Theme of Story Used by the Target Media

Regarding the theme of stories, the result of the study revealed some similarities and differences among the sampled media. Of all the GERD-related stories on BBC, that is 31 (100%) stories in total, diplomacy has been found as a central theme for 20 (64.52%) stories. The diplomatic theme focused on bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral negotiations held on GERD among concerned parties. Next to diplomacy, development has got 7 (22.58%) stories out of a total of 31 (100%) stories. Development was found as a predominant theme of those almost all CNN stories which dealt with the GERD project. This is because out of a total of 14 (100%) stories, those 11 (78.57%) stories have associated the primary theme of the dam with development. The development theme was associated with stories that primarily conceived the GERD as a stimulus for the overall economic growth of Ethiopia. For AJE, diplomacy has been considered the most dominant theme as out of a total of 50 (100%) GERD-related stories, diplomacy was found as a key theme for 40 (80%) stories.
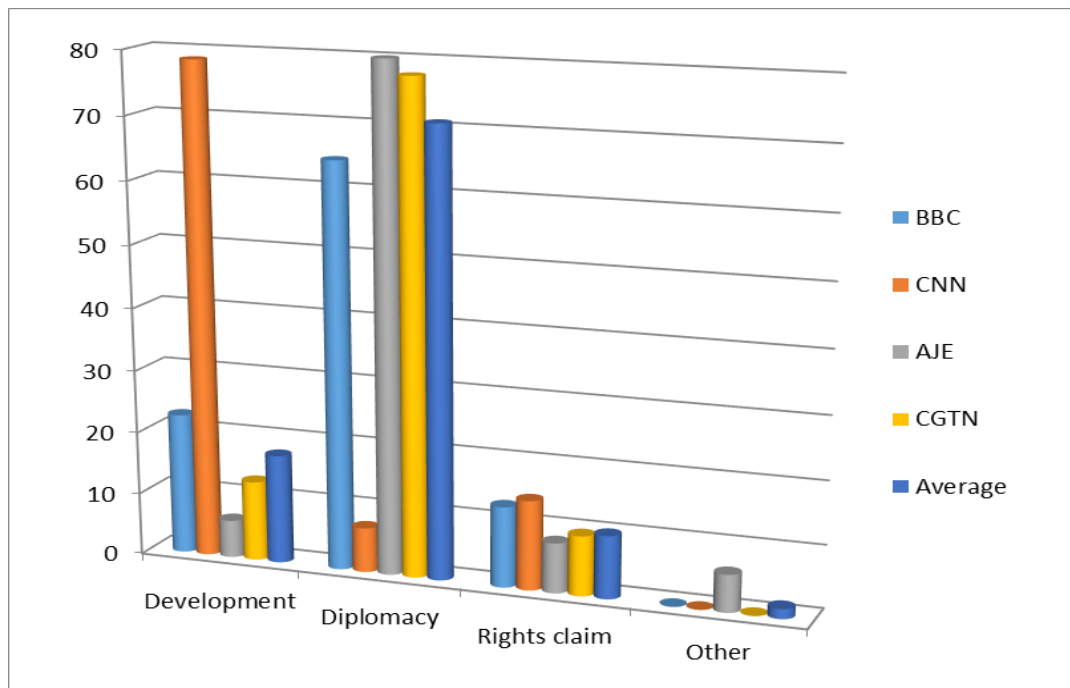

Figure 1: Percentage of theme distribution across the four target media

Similar to BBC and AJE, CGTN's predominant theme was diplomacy. CGTN has reported 94 stories about GERD. Of these stories, diplomacy has been found as the main theme because 73(77.66%) stories primarily echoed diplomatic endeavors (See Figure 1).

   Comparatively speaking and based on the size of coverage, CGTN has given the highest number of coverage to the GERD project which is 94 stories out of a total of 189 stories. Next to CGTN, AJE has also covered the project with a total (number) of 50 stories. On the other hand, BBC and CNN

have reported fewer stories about the dam, which accounted for 31 and 14 stories, respectively. This result shows that representatives of the "South" media (AJE and CGTN) have given more media coverage to the GERD project, which is primarily the concern of Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan. In contrast, those representatives of the "North" media (BBC and CNN) paid less coverage to GERD. This finding agrees with the conclusion made by Gagliardone (2013) in which he pointed out that despite some improvements on the side of the western media in their coverage of Africa, still, they do not consider, to the extent it deserves, the economic, social, and political developments of the continent.

Of the aggregate number of 189 (100%) stories, which were cumulatively reported by all the four target media about GERD, diplomacy was found as the most common theme; and it accounted for 134 (70.90%) stories. Specifically, diplomacy has been found as a major theme in most of the stories of BBC, AJE, and CGTN. However, development has been identified as a primary theme for CNN. Indeed, development was found as the second common theme that accounted for 33 (17.46%) stories.

The following excerpts show some of the diplomatic themes:

> At this point, it is hard to imagine what else Egypt could possibly do today other than acquiesce and do as much damage limitation as possible…. with the filling a reality the Egyptian government has tried to put a brave face on things [as] Egypt remained committed to the current diplomatic process (BBC, July 29, 2020).
>
> Ethiopia gains more support from Sudan over the construction [of] Grand Renaissance Dam…. Sudan's support for the construction of the Grand Renaissance Dam is one of the most important diplomatic and political victories the nation has got since the beginning of the controversial dam's construction (CGTN, Apr 5, 2017).

Here are some excerpts of the development themes:

> ➢ GERD is "like an ATM [automated teller machine] of hard currency for Ethiopia" (CNN, June 8, 2012).
> ➢ "The dam will allow Ethiopia not only to satisfy its domestic needs in electric power but also to become a major exporter of electricity to regions as far away as South Africa and Western Europe" (AJE, Nov 28, 2017).
> ➢ "Expected to be completed with entirely domestic funds, GERD has been billed as a landmark project signaling Ethiopia's renaissance" (CGTN, Aug 31, 2017).

3.2. Tone of Story Used by the Target Media

Concerning the tone (judgment) of stories, almost similar trends were observed in all the target media while they were reporting about GERD. Especially, BBC, AJE, and CGTN had mainly covered the dam in a neutral tone (See Figure 2). This is because out of a total of 31 (100%) stories that were reported about GERD by BBC, 24 (77.42%) stories have been reported in a neutral tone. A story was assumed neutral in tone when it depicted the dam both favorably and unfavorably in a balanced manner, or when it demonstrates no specific judgment of the dam either favorably or unfavorably. Similar to BBC, AJE has reported its 39 (78%) stories in a neutral tone out of a total of 50 (100%) stories. CGTN, on its part, has predominantly reported the dam in a neutral tone as it has reported 72 (76.59%) stories in a neutral tone out of a total of 94 (100%) stories.

On the other hand, CNN has covered GERD primarily in a positive tone as its 7 (50%) stories out of a total of 14 (100%) stories have reported the dam in a positive tone. The term positive tone refers to a situation when a story represented the dam in favorable assertions. The second major tone for CNN was labeled as a neutral tone, which accounted for 6 (42.86%) stories.
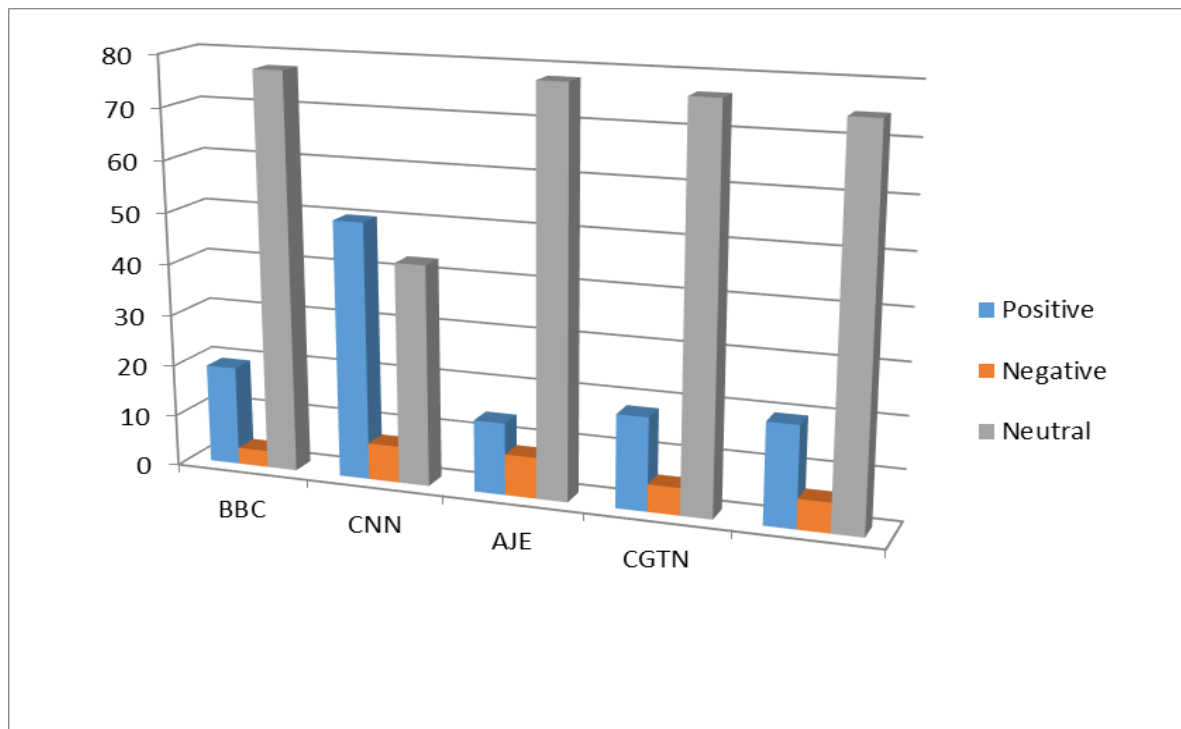
Figure 2: Percentage of tone distribution across the four target media

Generally, out of the total number of 189 (100%) stories, 141 (74.60 percent) stories have been categorized as neutral in tone, of which AJE, BBC, and CGTN have contributed almost similar share (See Figure 2). The second-ranked tone was considered 'positive,' which accounted for 37 (19.58 percent) stories on average. As GERD is a contentious issue, especially between Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan, the way BBC, AJE, and CGTN reported their stories in a neutral tone reveals their objectivity and fairness – major principles of journalistic practice. Unlike the rest, CNN covered the dam positively just by 50 percent of its stories. This result showed CNN's inclination toward the interests of Ethiopia than the downstream states of Egypt and Sudan.

Here are some excerpts of the neutral tone of stories about GERD:

Ethiopia has started a dam project that will solve the country's desperate electricity problem. However, the Great Renaissance Dam has raised concerns in other Nile countries, particularly in Egypt, which is concerned about the dam's possible impact on the flow of the river (AJE, July 20, 2013).

There are reports that civil servants have been forced to contribute one month's salary towards the project. These are accusations the [Ethiopian] government denies (CNN, June 8, 2012).

Here are some excerpts of the positive tone of stories on GERD:

As the name, Renaissance suggests, this dam is supposed to revive Ethiopia's economy. It will provide electricity to millions of Ethiopians. And that's big because right now … about 75 million people do not have access to regular electricity. (AJE, Jan 26, 2020)

GERD is a means of national pride and a source of hope to defeat poverty among Ethiopians (CGTN, Aug 25, 2015).

The Grand Renaissance Dam marks a major leap forward for a country that spent parts of the last century ravaged by war and famine. The mega-dam is likely to spur economic growth further (CNN, Nov 8, 2013).

Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam will drive Ethiopia's ambitious plans for an industrial revolution. [It is] one of the biggest projects of its type anywhere in the world quite extraordinary (BBC, Feb 20, 2018).

3.3. Type of Frame Used by the Target Media

Concerning the frame types employed by each global media in covering the GERD project, the findings of the study indicate some differences and similarities. It is also cognizant that conflict and prognostic frames were identified as the most commonly used frames by those target media in their

coverage of the contested project. For BBC, the conflict frame has been identified as a major frame type and it accounted for 15 (48.39%) stories out of a total of 31 (100%) stories. Next to the conflict frame, the prognostic frame was found as the second widely employed frame type, which accounted for 10 (32.26%) stories.

Excerpts of conflict frames:
- ✓ "Ethiopia and Egypt at loggerheads over Africa's largest hydroelectric dam" (BBC, Oct 9, 2019)
- ✓ "Egypt-Ethiopia tensions over new dam rise again" (AJE, Nov 28, 2017)
- ✓ "Ethiopia's mega-dam spat could lead to a regional crisis" (CGTN, Jan 18, 2018)

The economic consequences frame was found as a dominant frame type that was supported by 6(42.86%) stories out of the total number of 14(100%) stories on CNN. Conflict and mutual benefit frames also received an almost equivalent number of stories, which accounted for 4(28.57%) stories and 3(21.43%) stories, respectively.

Concerning AJE, similar to BBC, the conflict frame has been used as a predominant frame type and it accounted for 30 (60%) stories out of a total of 50 (100%) stories. The prognostic frame was employed as a second dominant frame that attracted 13 (26%) stories.
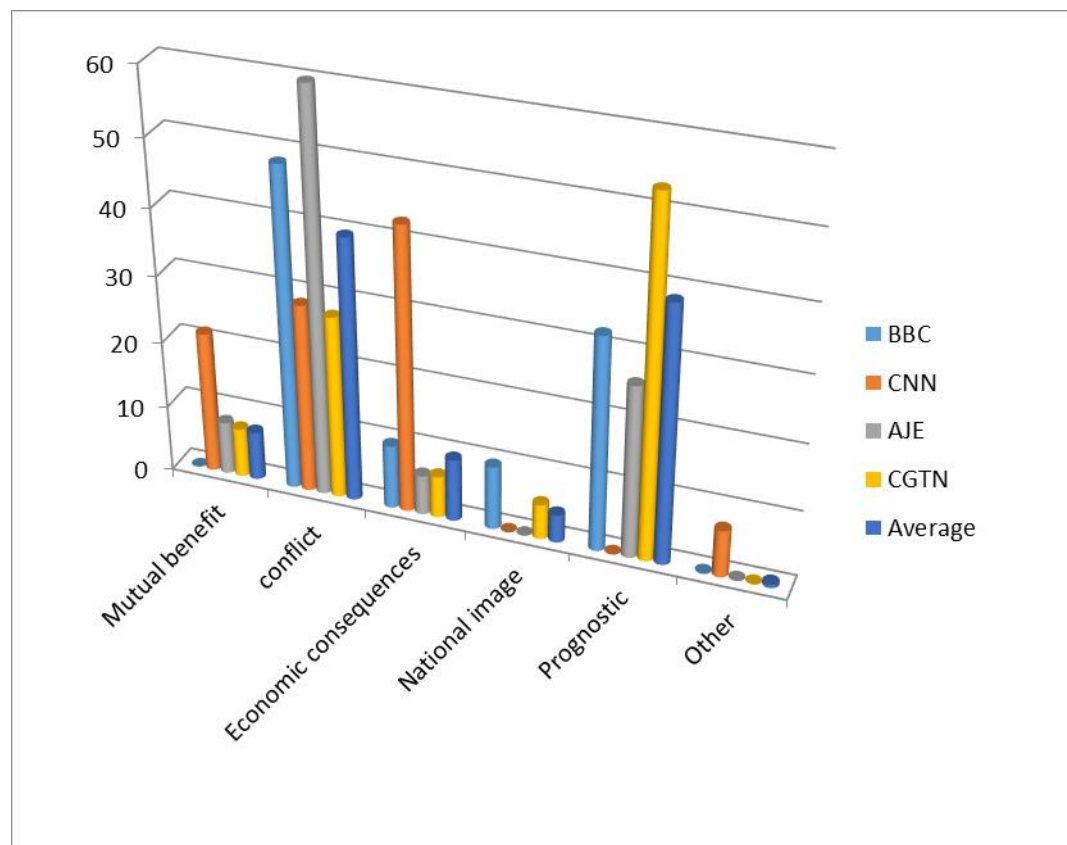

Figure 3: Percentage of frame distribution across the four target media

More than half of the stories of CGTN that are 50 (53.19%) stories have framed the GERD project in a prognostic manner out of the total number of 94 (100%) stories. The conflict frame has attained the second most sizeable number of stories which accounted for 26 (27.66%) stories.

As can be seen from Figure 3, both BBC and AJE's utmost frame types were identified as conflict frames, which accounted for 48.39 percent and 60 percent, respectively. This finding may reveal that these two media houses have primarily framed the GERD project as a source of conflict between Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan. On average, out of a total of 189 (100%) stories covered by all the four media in focus, the conflict frame ranked as the most commonly employed frame type, which

accounted for 75 (39.68%) stories; followed by the prognostic frame which on its part gained 73 (38.62%) stories.

The result of the study - the way BBC framed GERD in a conflict frame - corroborated the previous study findings (Sobowale, 2002; McPhail, 2010) in which they concluded that western media's representation of Africa is crisis-oriented. In contrast, CNN's framing of GERD indicates contradicting results against the findings of the existing studies. Because unlike the claims made by Sobowale (2002) and McPhail (2010), CNN framed the dam positively by citing its immense economic potential, especially for Ethiopia.

The results concerning how representatives of the "South" media (AJE and CGTN) framed GERD were also varied. AJE's dominant frame of the dam as a source of conflict between Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan is similar to that of BBC's framing. Thus, the result revealed that, unlike the "North-South" dichotomy, both BBC and AJE represented the GERD project in a related way – conflict frame – a dominant view of the existing literature on how the "North" media framed African issues. And now also includes the "South" media as in the AJE's case in this study. This finding regarding AJE's representation of the GERD agrees with Sakr's (2007) conclusion for which he claimed that despite the channel's initial promises to offer a "non-Western" stance on issues of the "South" practically a way this media framed concerns of the "South" was not different from that of the "North" media.

On the other hand, the finding indicated that CGTN mainly framed the GERD in a prognostic manner meant that CGTN has paid more attention to its stories in suggesting possible solutions to thwart the simmering relations between Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan over the GERD. Such representation of an issue (i.e., GERD) from Africa seems compatible with China's "soft power" policy and its "South" mindset as it was thought that "South" problems should be solved by Southerners themselves through close cooperation in all matters including media (Gagliardone, 2013).

3.4. Type of Source and Manner of Sourcing of the Story Used by the Target Media

Unlike the other categories mentioned above, the total number of sources for BBC, CNN, AJE, and CGTN are 219, 56, 431, and 430, respectively. It has happened as most of the stories had attributed to more than one source while reporting a story. The mean number of sources attributed per story for each media was computed as follows: 7.06(BBC), 4(CNN), 8.62(AJE), and 4.57(CGTN). This result shows a considerable difference among the sample media and specifically AJE and BBC employed a higher number of sources per story than the others. Attributing more sources per story, as Tiffen *et al*. (2013) claimed, indicates the media's endeavor to verifying on what is said and give more chance to diverse views in that story.

Regarding the types of story sources, government officials were found as the most common sources of news stories in all the four target media (See Figure 4). Specifically regarding BBC, a total of 219 (100%) sources have been attributed; of which 120 (54.79%) sources were found as government officials. Next to government officials, experts/individuals have been cited as the second most number of sources, which accounted for 46 (21%) sources.

For the 14 (100%) news stories covered by CNN on GERD, a total of 56(100%) sources were attributed. And it was found that government officials consisted of the highest number which accounted for 17 (30.36%) sources. Both experts/individuals and institutions have been attributed by 12 (21.43%) sources each out of a total of 56 (100%) sources. Similarly, AJE has also employed government officials as its dominant sources of stories, and it accounted for 226 (52.44%) sources from those an aggregate number of 431 (100%) sources. Expert/individual sources were ranked second, which accounted for 116 (26.91%) sources. CGTN's utmost source of news information was also found as government officials. This is because out of a total of 430 (100%) sources attributed in all those its GERD related stories, 294 (68.37%) sources were identified as government officials; this figure constituted the highest number even in comparison to the other three media (BBC, CNN, and

AJE) in focus (See Figure 4). Moreover, a news agency has been attributed as the second most common source of news information by CGTN, which accounted for 57 (13.26%) sources.

On average, out of the total number of 1136 (100%) sources, which were attributed by the news stories of the four target media in focus collectively, 657 (57.83%) sources have been identified as government officials, and this result indicated that government officials were serving as the predominant source of information. Experts/individuals also served as the second major source of news information, which accounted for 192 (16.90%) sources.
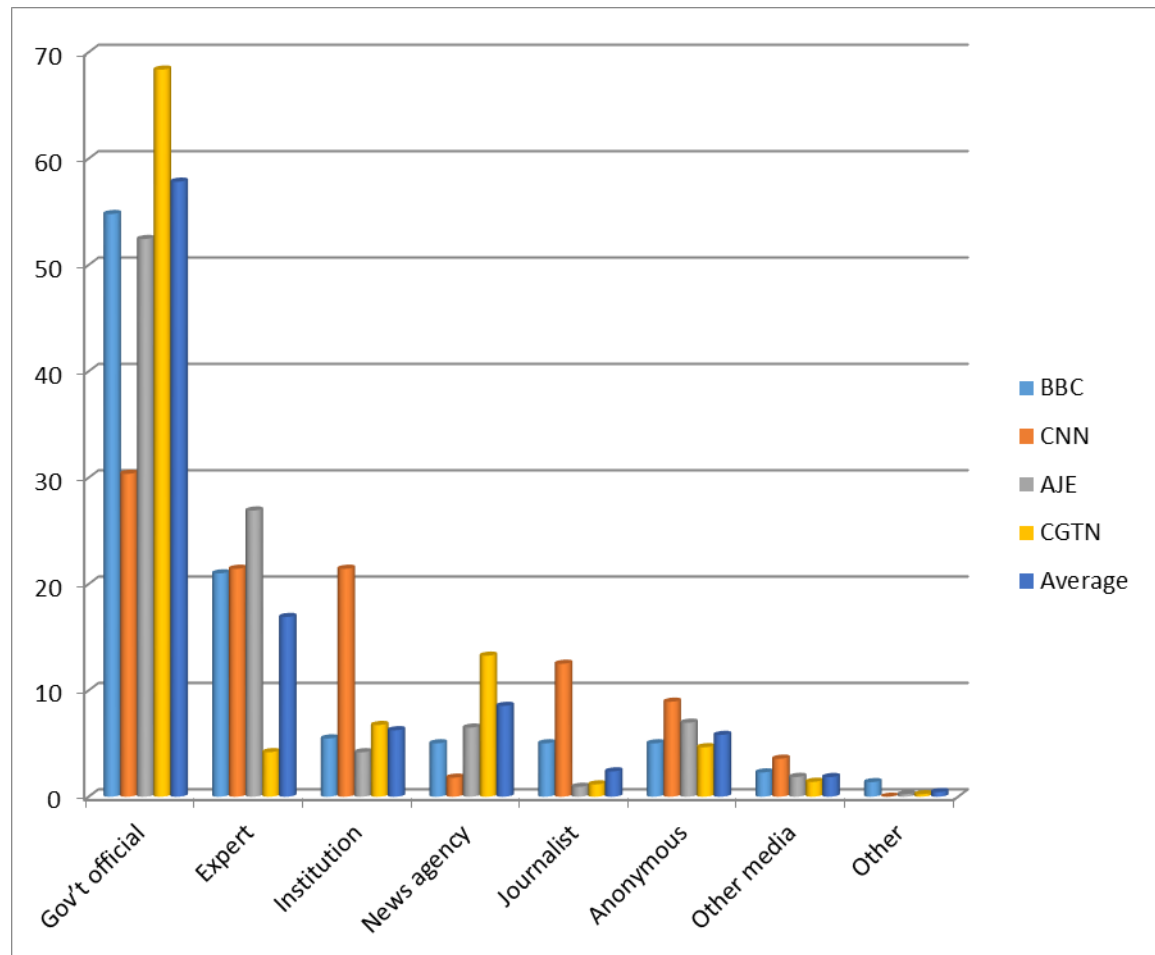

Figure 4: Percentage of source distribution across the four target media

Therefore, the result of the study indicated that government official sources were mainly employed higher than individuals/experts, news agencies, institutions, or any other category used in this study. This result, in turn, vindicates earlier research findings that claim government officials primarily served as pivotal sources of news, especially for those mainstream media because they are considered more authoritative or privileged sources (Eldridge, 1993; Graber, 2002; Tiffen *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, for this specific study, as the tenacious stalemate among the concerned countries on GERD is more political than technical, that could be another reason for the sampled media to attribute a sizable number of government officials in their GERD-related stories.

Identifying the major sources of stories is one thing. But, it might be even more crucial to know the sources' nationality, appropriateness, and how the sources were attributed meant direct, indirect, or integrated (when sources are cited both directly and indirectly) ways of sourcing. And this assumption seems to sound because the subject matter of this study (i.e., GERD project) is considered a national interest for those three Eastern Nile riparian countries namely Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt; so the

background of those who serve as a source of information for the target media may have the chance, in one way or the other, to influence the content (frame and tone) of the target media's news stories.

In light of this assertion, when we look at the nationality of those news sources (government officials and experts) that were attributed by BBC, some clear trends are observed. To differentiate the nationality of each source of a government official, four categories were prescribed namely Ethiopian government official, Egyptian government official, Sudanese government official, and other countries' government officials. As per this category, the result of the study revealed that out of the total number of government officials that is 120 (100%) sources attributed by BBC, Ethiopian government officials were cited most which accounted for 56 (46.67%) sources and followed by Egyptian government officials that also accounted for 54 (45%) sources. On the other hand, BBC has attributed only 7 (5.83%) government official sources from the Sudanese part whilst the remaining 3 (2.5%) government official sources were cited from the category of other countries though, of course, all these three officials were from the US.

Regarding the manner of sourcing of those government officials, BBC has employed somewhat a similar way of citing that is the media had reported most of the sources of its stories in an indirect (paraphrasing) manner. Specifically, from those 56 (100%) Ethiopian government officials who were quoted by BBC, 29 of them have been attributed indirectly while 15 of them in an integrated manner (this category applies when a source has been cited both directly and indirectly in a given news story); the remaining 12 government official sources were attributed directly (direct quote or sound-bite). In a similar vein, out of the total number of 54 (100%) Egyptian government officials who have been attributed by BBC, 32 officials were cited in an indirect mode of sourcing. Whilst 12 government officials have been quoted directly, 10 other officials were also attributed in an integrated manner. Moreover, BBC has attributed 5 Sudanese government officials in an indirect way of sourcing; while, the rest 2 government officials were quoted directly out of the total number of 7 (100%) Sudanese government officials. It is also understood that those very few (actually they are three in number) "other" countries' government officials who were attributed by the news stories of BBC have been cited in almost a similar manner of sourcing with the above-mentioned ones. This is true; because, out of a total of 3 (100%) other countries' government officials who have been attributed by BBC, 2 of them were cited indirectly while the remaining one government official was quoted directly.

The distribution of those experts/individuals who were attributed by BBC was also classified based on their nationality (background) into four categories namely Ethiopian experts or individuals, Egyptian experts or individuals, Sudanese experts or individuals, and other countries' experts or individuals. Accordingly, the result of the study has shown out of the total number of 46 (100%) experts who have been attributed by BBC, nearly half of them were represented from Ethiopia which accounted for 20 (43.49%) experts. Moreover, Egyptian, Sudanese, and other countries' experts were ranked as the second, third, and fourth levels of experts, which accounted for 12 (26.09%) experts, 10 (21.74%) experts, and 4 (8.70%) experts, respectively. This result indicated that BBC has given more chances (or priority) to Ethiopian experts or individuals than any other country's experts/individuals in incorporating their ideas and views over the stories it covered regarding the GERD project. The motive of BBC for giving more chances to Ethiopian experts might be associated with the fact that GERD is being built in Ethiopia since 2011 and thus their sizable number may be taken for granted as proper. But, equally, if we notice this figure from those lower riparian countries (Egypt and Sudan) perspectives, BBC's selection of experts/individuals can be assumed as less appropriate.

Concerning the manner of sourcing of these experts/individuals, BBC has applied a similar way of attributing like the manner it followed in citing those government officials as mentioned above – using more of an indirect or paraphrasing mode of sourcing, especially for Ethiopian and Egyptian experts or individuals. This can easily be vindicated by looking at the following study findings: from those a total of 20 (100%) Ethiopian experts/individuals who were attributed in the overall stories of BBC, 11 experts/individuals were attributed in an indirect (paraphrasing) manner; another 6 experts or individuals have been quoted directly while the remaining 3 experts were cited in an integrated

manner of sourcing. Similarly, from a total of 12 (100%) Egyptian experts/individuals, 7 (just more than half of the sum) experts/individuals have been cited indirectly. In addition to this, 4 experts/individuals were quoted directly whilst 3 other experts have been also attributed in an integrated manner. On the other hand, out of a total of 10 (100%) Sudanese experts/individuals who have been attributed by BBC, 4 experts/individuals were cited in an integrative style of sourcing; 3 experts/individuals were attributed directly, and equally another 3 experts/individuals have been also attributed indirectly. The manner of sourcing of those 4 other countries' experts/individuals who have been attributed by BBC seemed similar to the way of sourcing applied for those Sudanese experts or individuals. Out of the total number of 4 (100%) experts/individuals who were attributed by the media in focus, 2 experts/individuals have been cited in an integrated manner. Moreover, one expert was quoted directly and another one has been also cited indirectly.

For CNN, from the total of 17 (100%) government official sources attributed to its GERD-related stories, Ethiopian government officials seized the highest number, which accounted for 12 (70.59%) sources. A small number of Egyptian government officials also cited as sources of news information accounted for 4 (23.53%). Sudan has gotten only one government official to voice concerning GERD.

Seven out of 12 Ethiopian government officials were cited indirectly. Three other officials were also attributed in an integrated way whereas the remaining two government officials were quoted directly. On the other hand, three Egyptian government officials were quoted directly, while the rest one cited indirectly. Concerning Sudan, CNN attributed a single government official who was cited indirectly.

When looking at the manner of sourcing of those government officials, contrasting results have been observed. This seems true, particularly if we compare CNN's mode of attribution between Ethiopian and Sudanese government officials on the one hand, and Egyptian government officials on the other. While most of the Ethiopian government officials (58 percent) were attributed in an indirect (paraphrasing) manner, almost all Egyptian government officials (75 percent) have been quoted directly (sound-bite). Moreover, the single Sudanese government official was attributed indirectly. Here, one could claim that those sources who have gotten the chance to deliver their actual assertions directly (especially those Egyptian government officials) would have more opportunity to induce and explain their causes, motives, and interests to the intended audiences of CNN and other concerned bodies as well. This is because their message had the chance to reach the audience without much editing. However, those government officials whose statements were reported indirectly may not have an equal chance of getting their messages to reach the audience of CNN as their actual assertions may lose their original intent and context whether consciously or not.

Concerning the experts or individuals attributed as sources of news information by CNN, it became evident that the media has given more chances to other countries' experts/individuals than Ethiopian, Egyptian, or Sudanese experts. Because from the total of 12(100%) experts/individuals cited by CNN, the nationality of those 6 (50%) experts were identified as citizens of other countries (here in this study, the term "other countries" stands for any country other than Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt). On the other hand, 4 (33.33%) Ethiopian experts or individuals were attributed, while 2 (16.67%) Egyptian experts were also attributed to the stories on CNN. This result may hint at CNN's curiosity if the media did it for the sake of detachment and keeping a more balanced view; because, its selection of sources predominantly focused on those experts or individuals who do not have a vested interest in GERD.

Regarding CNN's sourcing across the nationality of experts or individuals, a similar trend has become discernible. The highest numbers of expert/individual sources were attributed in an integrated way. Specifically, from those 6 (100%) experts who fall under the category of other countries, 4 experts/individuals were attributed in an integrated manner. Similarly, from the total of four Ethiopian experts/individuals, three have been attributed in an integrated way. Two Egyptian experts also attributed in an integrated manner.

Considering the nationality of the officials attributed by AJE, Ethiopian government officials constituted the highest number, 87(38.50%), and those Egyptian officials comprised almost similar

numbers, which accounted for 83 (36.73%). In contrast, Sudanese officials attain an average number of 40 (17.70%) sources, and the category of other countries' officials was attributed least, which was represented by 16 (7.08%) sources. AJE has followed an almost similar trajectory on how to cite those officials because except for the other countries' government officials, the sizeable number of Ethiopian, Egyptian and Sudanese officials were attributed indirectly, which accounted for 45, 46, and 22 respectively. By the same token, 29 officials from Ethiopia, 25 officials from Egypt, and 12 officials from Sudan have been quoted directly. Again, 13 Ethiopian officials, 12 Egyptian officials, and 6 Sudanese officials were attributed in an integrated manner. But, AJE has employed a different manner of sourcing for other countries' officials because out of a total of 16 (100%) officials, 10 officials were quoted directly, and 5 other officials were, of course, cited indirectly. In giving more direct sourcing, AJE has shown more trust in third-party officials than the officials of the concerned states regarding the GERD.

Regarding the nationality of those experts or ordinary citizens whose voices are included in the stories of AJE, apparent differences were observed among the four categories. Of those, a total of 116 (100%) experts/individuals attributed by AJE, other countries' experts/individuals comprised the highest number, which accounted for 39 (33.62%), and then followed by Egyptian experts or ordinary citizens that also amounted to 36 (31.03%). On the other hand, the frequency of attribution for Sudanese and Ethiopian experts/individuals was found to be the least accounted for 23 (19.83%), and 18 (15.52%), respectively. Comparatively speaking, it is not clear why AJE has given more voice to Ethiopian officials; while, it has also attributed the least number of Ethiopian experts or individuals. But, regarding Egypt, in both cases, those official and expert sources of stories from Egypt have gotten the second rank, so there is not that much discrepancy like that of Ethiopia.

Unlike the sizeable difference seen in the frequency of experts/individuals among the four categories, AJE has employed a similar trend of attribution in all four categories; because, the majority of sources in each category were attributed directly. Specifically, out of a total of 18 Ethiopian experts/individuals who have been attributed by AJE, 10 of them were quoted directly. And 5 other sources were credited indirectly while the remaining 3 sources were attributed in an integrated manner. Similarly, from those, a total of 36 Egyptian experts or individuals, 30 of them were quoted directly. About those Sudanese sources, out of a total of 23 experts/individuals, 17 sources have been attributed directly whilst four sources were cited indirectly. Moreover, those experts/individuals who have been attributed to other countries were also predominantly quoted directly, which accounted for 35 out of the total number of 39 sources.

It is noteworthy to mention a crucial finding regarding how AJE attributes government officials and citizens (experts and ordinary individuals). Apart from those other countries' officials who might be presumed as neutral ones, AJE has attributed most of the government officials of Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan to an indirect manner. On the contrary, however, those experts or individuals in all four categories were mainly attributed directly to the same media. This result may show how skeptical AJE is towards the information attained from officials, while equally the result also revealed that AJE has more trust in experts/individuals, and that is why it attributed them predominantly to a direct manner of sourcing. This result supports the conclusion made by Carlson (2011), who claimed that the tendency of media to use a direct attribution aims at getting audience credibility by showing their detachment from the stories they covered.

Regarding the nationality of the officials attributed by CGTN, the study revealed that Egyptian officials comprised the highest number, which accounted for 129 (43.88%). Ethiopian officials were found as the second most widely attributed ones, specifically amounting to 124 (42.18%). On the contrary, the number of Sudanese and other countries' government officials who have been credited as story sources was found too few.

CGTN, similar to BBC and AJE, has attributed most of the officials indirectly. Specifically, of those 124 (100%) Ethiopian officials, 91 were attributed indirectly, 18 were quoted directly, while the rest 15 have been cited in an integrated manner. In a similar vein, of those 129 (100%) Egyptian officials,

90 of them have been credited indirectly. Besides, 25 were attributed in an integrated way, while the remaining 14 were quoted directly. Again, out of a total of 33 (100%) Sudanese officials, roughly half of them (16 sources) were attributed indirectly, 11 were cited directly, and 6 others were attributed in an integrated manner. On the other hand, from those 8 (100%) other countries' officials who have been attributed by CGTN, 5 were attributed directly (verbatim). And the rest 3 were credited indirectly. Generally, the above result showed that CGTN had attributed most of those government officials indirectly and this practice may indicate that the target media was fairly attempting not to be a mere window for those officials who presumably have a vested interest in the GERD.

Unlike AJE (116) and BBC (46), the number of experts/ordinary individuals who have been attributed as sources of stories by CGTN was found fewer as they are 18 in total; but of course, they are higher than the sum of those experts/individuals who were attributed by CNN which are 12 altogether. Regarding the nationality of those experts/individuals that have been attributed by CGTN, 9 (50%) of them were identified as Egyptian citizens. The second-highest number of sources was Ethiopians comprising 6 (33.33%). On the contrary, the number of experts/individuals who were attributed by the same media both from other countries and Sudan were found minimal.

Apart from the frequency of sources, it was also crucial to examine the manner of sourcing how a given story source was attributed by the target media. In this regard, the study found out that from a total of 18 (100%) expert or ordinary citizens who were attributed by CGTN, 10 of them have been quoted directly on average, whilst the remaining 8 citizens were cited indirectly. Specifically, from those 6 Ethiopian experts/individuals, 3 of them were quoted directly, and the other 3 have been attributed indirectly. Similarly, out of a total of 9 Egyptian experts/individuals, 5 were quoted directly while the rest 4 were cited indirectly.

Last but not least, it seems more important to make a comparison among the four target media regarding some of the major types of sources employed for this study. In light of this, the news agency was found as a key source of information that was mainly employed by CGTN, AJE, and BBC. CGTN has attributed its 57 story sources to nine different news agencies. These are Reuters (33), Xinhua (12), AP (11), All Africa (4), Anadolu (4), AFP (3), MENA (3), EPA (1), and East Africa (1). As indicated in parentheses alongside each news agency, CGTN has attributed Reuters 33 times as its utmost source of news information in those 26 GERD-related stories out of a total of 94 stories. And this is followed by Xinhua and AP, which have been attributed 12 and 11 times respectively by CGTN. This result shows that Reuters was the most dominant news agency attributed by CGTN. Next to CGTN, AJE has attributed its 28 story sources from five different news agency sources, namely Reuters (22), AFP (10), AP (6), EPA (4), and SUNA (1). The numbers in parentheses have shown the total number of times that each news agency was attributed. This finding indicated, similar to CGTN, AJE cited Reuters 22 times, which is the highest figure in comparison to the rest four news agencies. On the other hand, BBC has attributed 11 news agency sources whilst CNN cited only a single source of a news agency that is Reuters. Regarding the news agencies attributed by BBC, Reuters (5), AFP (3), AP (1), Bloomberg (1), and MENA (1) were cited in the stories of BBC, and the numbers in parentheses indicated that Reuters was attributed most. All in all, this finding revealed that Reuters was the widespread news agency attributed by all the target media.

Another crucial type of story source that has been incorporated in this specific study is called anonymous. The mean number of anonymous sources attributed per story for each media was computed as: For BBC 0.4 (11 anonymous sources divided by 31 stories), for CNN 0.4 (5 anonymous sources divided by 14 stories), for AJE 0.6 (30 anonymous sources divided by 50 stories), and for CGTN 0.2 (20 anonymous sources divided by 94 stories). This result reveals that of all the target media of this study AJE has employed the highest number of anonymous sources per story which was 0.6 on average. On the other hand, the result of the study also indicated that CGTN cited the least number of anonymous sources (0.2) per story and this might associate with this media's strict principle of restricting itself from using unwarranted anonymous sources, which are mostly linked with incompetent journalistic practices and at times could undermine the media's credibility

(Boeyink, 1990). Some of the common anonymous source indicator terms (unspecified references) employed by the four target media of this study include *politicians*, *experts*, *observers*, *diplomats*, *analysts*, *officials*, *sources*, *studies*, *economists*, and *reports*.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1. Conclusions

This study aimed to examine how the sampled global broadcast media covered and framed the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile River. The result of the study revealed that both CGTN and AJE - representatives of the "South" media - have given more coverage to the GERD project than BBC and CNN - representatives of the "North" media.

Concerning the tone of stories, the study found that nearly 95 percent of the aggregate stories have portrayed the dam either neutrally or positively. The construction of GERD is a contentious issue, especially between Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan, the way BBC, AJE, and CGTN reported their stories primarily in a neutral tone may reveal their objectivity and fairness – major principles of journalistic practice. On the other hand, CNN covered the dam favorably just by 50 percent of its stories, and this shows that it was inclined toward the interests of Ethiopia more than the downstream states of Egypt and Sudan.

The "North-South" dichotomy seems fit for BBC and CGTN in their respective framing of GERD. Because BBC represented GERD in a conflict frame consistent with the dominant view of the existing literature on how the "North" media framed African issues. CGTN's framing of the dam focused on the way out (prognostic frame) meant on how to solve the current impasse between the concerned states. This frame type seemed attuned with China's "soft power" policy and its "South" mindset. Despite AJE's promises to play a constructive role on issues of the "South", concerns of the South on GERD in this study was not different from that of the dominant view of the "North" media. Thus, this result indicates that, unlike the "North-South" dichotomy, both BBC and AJE represented GERD in a related way – conflict frame. The finding of the study also shows unlike the claims made on the western media's representation of African issues are conflict-oriented; CNN framed the dam positively by citing its immense economic potential, especially for Ethiopia.

The study has also found that government officials - commonly believed as more authoritative or privileged sources in the literature - primarily served as dominant sources of news stories in all the target media. In this regard, officials have continued to sustain their dominant place as focal sources of information in the mainstream media.

4.2. Recommendations

As this study was limited to the content analysis (unobtrusive research method) aspects of the media coverage and their framing of the GERD project, future studies should focus on investigating the intentions and ideologies of the related content producers of each media through an in-depth interview. Future researchers should investigate how the influential global newspapers and magazines represent GERD. Moreover, more studies are also needed on other developmental projects across the Nile River region or other trans-boundary rivers; because, it could be significant to compare those potential findings with the results of this particular study. Studying the political and social issues of the Nile Region's coverage by the global media would also help to examine the overall role of the media in the Nile Basin region.

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