



From State Monopoly to Battlefield: A Historical Analysis of Media, Power, and Conflict in Libya (1952–Present)

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of Libyan media from a state-controlled system to a weaponized landscape in the post-2011 period reflects the broader transformation of political power in the country, yet existing scholarship has largely failed to provide a comprehensive historical analysis connecting media development to dynamics of state control, conflict, and external intervention. This study aims to analyze how political power and social conflict have shaped the evolution of media in Libya from independence in 1952 to the present. Employing a qualitative historical-analytical approach with thematic analysis of academic literature, historical documents, and media reports, the study traces media transformation across three political eras: the Monarchy, the Gaddafi regime, and the post-2011 period. The findings reveal that Libyan media evolved from a state-controlled instrument under authoritarian rule to a fragmented and weaponized environment where various TV channels serve as propaganda tools for warring factions, as evidenced by 1,070 documented ethical violations across 12 channels. The study concludes that media in Libya have never been autonomous but have always mirrored the power structures underlying them, and that sustainable media reform requires the establishment of independent regulatory bodies, protection of journalists, and integration with broader political stabilization efforts.

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Introduction

The relationship between media technologies and society remains a central concern in communication studies. While media technologies are often seen as possessing emancipatory potential, expanding access to information and enabling public participation (Castells, 2009; Benkler, 2006), critical scholarship emphasizes that such potential is never automatically realized. Media technologies are always embedded within structures of power, economic interests, and socio-cultural contexts (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Fuchs, 2020). Technologies are not neutral; their meanings and functions are continuously negotiated through social practices (Silverstone, 1999; Couldry, 2012). This becomes particularly evident when media technologies are imported from



different contexts, bringing cultural assumptions and values that may not align with local social and political orders (Carey, 1989; Appadurai, 1996). The adoption of technology is therefore not a mechanical transfer but a complex process of cultural negotiation (Madianou & Miller, 2013; Hjarvard, 2013). Libya offers a compelling illustration of this complexity, where media development has been consistently shaped by political power and structural constraints. Since independence in 1952, Libya has faced significant challenges, high illiteracy, limited resources, lack of trained personnel, and difficult geography. Under these conditions, media development was never neutral but always mediated by power and ideological interests (Richter, 2021; Mattes, 1986).

Existing scholarship on Libyan media, while valuable, has approached the subject in a fragmented manner, focusing on specific periods without offering a comprehensive historical analysis that connects media development to broader dynamics of power and conflict. Three tendencies can be identified in the literature. First, studies examining how radio, television, and the internet have influenced communication patterns in Libya (Omer, 2009; Kebresh, 2016). Omer (2009) discusses how the government's attempt to filter foreign satellite broadcasts ultimately failed due to technological developments. While valuable, these studies do not deeply analyze how political power has shaped media structures. Second, studies analyzing how media have been used to spread hate speech, propaganda, and disinformation in Libya's conflicts (Wollenberg & Pack, 2013; Wollenberg & Richter, 2020; Gohar, 2019). These demonstrate that media have become "weapons" in conflict, but they tend to be descriptive and synchronic, lacking historical depth. Third, studies mapping press freedom, journalist safety, and media regulation in post-2011 Libya (El-Issawi, 2013; Reporters Without Borders, 2024; Zaptia, 2015, 2021). These are often policy-oriented and lack historical perspective on structural roots. Consequently, no study has comprehensively traced the evolution of Libyan media from independence to the post-2011 period using a historical-analytical approach connecting media to power, state control, and armed conflict. This gap is significant given Libya's unique trajectory, from a newly independent state, through authoritarian rule, to a fragmented conflict-ridden polity (Richter, 2021; Wollenberg & Richter, 2020).

This study aims to address these gaps by analyzing how political power and social conflict have shaped the evolution of media in Libya from independence to the present. Three research questions are formulated. The first addresses the structural evolution of Libyan media across three political eras: "How has the media structure in Libya evolved from the Monarchy era (1952–1969), through the Gaddafi era (1969–2011), to the post-2011 period, particularly

in relation to state control, media as an instrument of power, and technological change?" This question traces the transformation of media from a relatively loose instrument of state control under the monarchy, to a totalitarian propaganda tool under Gaddafi, and finally to a fragmented information battlefield post-2011 (Richter, 2021; Mattes, 1986; Elfotaysi, 1996). The second focuses on media and conflict: "How have socio-political conflicts in Libya influenced the role of media, particularly in the post-2011 period where media became weaponized by warring factions?" Drawing on peace journalism and war journalism frameworks (Galtung, 1964; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005) and the concept of weaponization of information (Bhandari, 2024; Kane, 2019), this question examines how media have become integral to conflict. The third addresses external factors: "How have international sanctions, global technological developments, and foreign intervention post-2011 influenced media development and the state's capacity to control information?" This analyzes how UN sanctions hindered technology imports, how satellite channels weakened state monopoly, and how foreign intervention shaped media fragmentation (Zaptia, 2015; El-Issawi, 2013). Answers to these questions will provide comprehensive understanding of media evolution in Libya, contributing to policy and theoretical debates on media in conflict-affected states.

This study is grounded in the argument that the misalignment between Libya's media system and its societal characteristics stems from the fundamental divergence between political power interests and the public's need for free and professional information. The dominance of power interests over media function, whether by authoritarian states or warring factions, has been the determining factor in Libya's media evolution. This argument rests on five premises. First, media in Libya have always been subordinated to power interests. Under the monarchy, radio and television remained under state control and dependent on foreign expertise (Elfotaysi, 1996). Under Gaddafi, media became a centralized instrument of propaganda, as stated in the Green Book: "The press is a means of expression for society; it is not a means of expression for private individuals" (Gaddafi, 1975). Post-2011, media became fragmented and weaponized by warring factions (Alasowed, 2023; Reporters Without Borders, 2024). Second, media technologies have often threatened social cohesion when controlled by political interests, centralizing power under Gaddafi and deepening polarization post-2011 (Wollenberg & Richter, 2020). Third, healthy media development requires infrastructural readiness, human resources, equipment, regulation, and political climate, all of which Libya has lacked, particularly during UN sanctions and post-2011 chaos (El-Issawi, 2013; Wollenberg & Richter, 2020). Fourth, media require stable governance to ensure diversity and freedom, conditions absent in

post-2011 Libya ([Reporters Without Borders, 2024](#); [Zaptia, 2015, 2021](#)). Fifth, successful media development requires comprehensive social engineering. As Baio, former head of General Press Corporations, admitted: “I am sure that establishing a new state media system in Libya is impossible. The staff and abilities are so poor” ([El-Issawi, 2013](#)). Without such reform, media in Libya will remain a contested space rather than a force for transparency and accountability. Ultimately, the evolution of Libyan media from “state monopoly” to “battlefield” reflects the transformation of power in Libya itself, from a centralized authoritarian state to a fragmented conflict-ridden polity. Media in Libya has never been autonomous but has always mirrored the power structures underlying it.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative historical-analytical approach to examine the evolution of Libyan media across three distinct political eras: the Monarchy (1952–1969), the Gaddafi era (1969–2011), and the post-2011 period. This approach is chosen because it enables an in-depth, critical examination of existing scholarship, allowing for the interpretive understanding of complex historical and political phenomena ([Creswell & Poth, 2018](#)). As a form of document-based inquiry, this methodology facilitates the synthesis of diverse academic sources to construct a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding media-state relations in Libya. The qualitative approach emphasizes the subjective and interpretive dimensions of data, allowing the researcher to identify meanings, values, and socio-political contexts contained in scholarly works and historical documents (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This approach also enables an emic understanding of the phenomenon, capturing how media development has been experienced and understood within Libya’s specific political and cultural contexts.

Data collection was executed through systematic documentation of a wide array of credible sources. The research corpus includes peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, historical documents, policy reports, media archives, and publications by international organizations such as Reporters Without Borders (RSF). Sources were selected purposively based on their relevance, academic credibility, and contribution to understanding Libyan media development ([Snyder, 2019](#)). The literature search was conducted across multiple academic databases, including Scopus, Google Scholar, and JSTOR, using keywords such as “Libyan media history,” “Gaddafi media,” “Libya conflict media,” and “Libya press freedom.” The search was limited to publications from 1952 to 2025 to ensure comprehensive historical coverage, with foundational

theoretical works included regardless of publication date due to their theoretical significance. Inclusion criteria for source selection included: (1) sources focusing on Libyan media specifically; (2) sources discussing Libyan political history relevant to media development; (3) peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and reports from reputable institutions; and (4) sources published in English or Arabic. Exclusion criteria included: (1) sources discussing media generally without a Libya focus; (2) non-academic sources without editorial oversight; and (3) sources with incomplete bibliographic information.

The study adopts a periodization framework that divides Libyan media history into three eras, allowing for systematic comparison across different political contexts. Data analysis employed thematic analysis through three main stages (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, data reduction involved selecting literature based on its focus on state control, conflict, and media function. Second, data display organized findings into key theoretical categories including state monopoly, fragmentation, and weaponization. Third, conclusion drawing involved critical analysis of how political power and social conflict shaped media evolution. To ensure validity and reliability, the study applied source triangulation, comparing information from various types of sources, and theoretical triangulation, integrating multiple theoretical frameworks including Authoritarian Media Theory (Siebert et al., 1956), Political Parallelism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), and Weaponization of Information (Bhandari, 2024; Kane, 2019). This methodological approach enables the study not merely to compile historical narratives but to critically interpret and synthesize scholarly perspectives on Libyan media evolution.

Table 1
Data Analysis Procedures

Stage	Analytical Process	Application in This Study
1. Data Reduction	Literature selection and coding	Selecting literature based on focus on (1) state control, (2) conflict dynamics, and (3) media function in Libya
2. Data Display	Theme development and organization	Organizing findings into three theoretical categories: (1) State Monopoly (Monarchy & Gaddafi eras); (2) Fragmentation (Post-2011); (3) Weaponization (Post-2011 conflict)
3. Conclusion Drawing	Critical interpretation and synthesis	Analyzing how political power and social conflict shaped media evolution across three eras: Monarchy (1952–1969) → Gaddafi (1969–2011) → Post-2011 (2011–present)
Trustworthiness	Source and theoretical triangulation	(1) Source Triangulation: Comparing information from journal articles, books, historical documents, and media reports; (2) Theoretical Triangulation: Integrating Authoritarian Media Theory (Siebert et al., 1956), Political Parallelism

		(Hallin & Mancini, 2004), and Weaponization of Information (Bhandari, 2024; Kane, 2019)
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Source: Developed by the author based on Braun & Clarke (2006), Creswell & Poth (2018), and Snyder (2019).

The table above summarizes the three main stages of thematic analysis employed in this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Stage One (Data Reduction) involves selecting literature relevant to three key areas: state control, conflict, and media function in Libya. Stage Two (Data Display) organizes findings into three theoretical categories that reflect Libya's media evolution: State Monopoly (Monarchy and Gaddafi eras), Fragmentation (post-2011 era), and Weaponization (post-2011 conflict). Stage Three (Conclusion Drawing) involves critical analysis to examine how political power and social conflict shaped Libya's media evolution across three eras. Triangulation is applied to ensure the validity and reliability of findings through cross-referencing across sources and across theoretical perspectives.

The Evolution of Libyan Media Structure Across Three Political Eras

The structural transformation of Libyan media across its three distinct political eras offers a compelling lens through which to understand the broader evolution of state power in the country. Each period, the monarchy, the Gaddafi regime, and the post-2011 era, exhibits distinct characteristics in media ownership, regulation, function, and technological capacity, reflecting the shifting nature of political authority itself. This historical trajectory demonstrates how media structures have consistently mirrored the underlying power dynamics of the state, from a centralized authoritarian model to a fragmented and conflict-ridden landscape. The monarchy era marks the foundational period of contemporary Libyan media, characterized by the establishment of national media institutions despite formidable structural challenges. Upon independence in 1951, Libya faced high illiteracy rates, limited financial resources, and a severe shortage of trained personnel, conditions that significantly constrained media development (F.S., 1959). The primary medium of communication during this era was radio, which proved especially effective given the country's vast geographic expanse and dispersed population. Libya was among the first Arab countries to establish its own media infrastructure, with the first Libyan radio station established in 1957 and national television broadcasting commencing on December 24, 1968 (Elfotaysi, 1996).

The development of Libyan media during this period was heavily reliant on foreign expertise and technology (Elfotaysi, 1996). British and American air

bases played a crucial role, with the Americans establishing a television channel at the Wheelus Air Base in Tripoli as early as 1956. According to [Elfotaysi \(1996\)](#), Libyan television initially operated with British and American broadcasting equipment and relied on British, Italian, and American technicians, as well as Iraqi and Egyptian experts. This dependency reflected Libya's position as a newly independent nation with limited domestic capacity, yet it also laid the groundwork for a media system that was technically functional if not ideologically independent. The monarchy era also witnessed the establishment of media legislation, including Royal Decree No. 11 of 1959, which initially granted regional governments authority to establish newspapers, though this was later amended in 1962 to centralize media control ([Mattes, 1986](#)). While radio and television remained monopolized by the government, print media enjoyed a relatively wider margin of freedom, with a diverse range of newspapers providing Libyan readers with some choice during this period ([Mattes, 1986](#)).

The 1969 revolution marked a dramatic rupture in Libya's media trajectory, as the new regime under Muammar Gaddafi systematically transformed media from a state-controlled utility into a centralized instrument of ideological propaganda. By the early 1970s, radio and television became primary vehicles for Gaddafi's lengthy speeches, broadcast live across the country ([Richter, 2021](#)). Private newspapers were systematically driven out of the market starting in February 1970, as state advertisements were withdrawn from their pages, and all foreign-language media outlets were forced to close following the evacuation of American and British bases and the expulsion of Italian settlers ([Richter, 2021](#)). The ideological framework for this transformation was explicitly articulated in the *Green Book* ([Gaddafi, 1975](#)), which stated: "The press is a means of expression for society; it is not a means of expression for private individuals or corporate bodies... A newspaper owned by any individual expresses only their point of view." This doctrine justified the complete nationalization of the press, with media becoming primarily an ideological tool for mobilization, managed by state institutions ([Richter, 2021](#)). The regime established multiple layers of media apparatus, including the Libyan Jamahiriya General Broadcasting Corporation, the Libyan News Agency (JANA), and the Revolutionary Committee Movement (RCM), which managed revolutionary media outlets such as the Voice of the Arab World Radio and Al-Zahf Al-Akhdar ([Qannous et al., 2005](#)).

However, the Gaddafi era also witnessed significant challenges to state control, particularly through the impact of international sanctions and technological change. UN sanctions imposed in 1993 following the Lockerbie bombing severely retarded media development by hindering the import of information technology and training ([El-Issawi, 2013](#); [Wollenberg & Richter,](#)

2020). The sanctions, combined with the rise of satellite television, particularly Al Jazeera, gradually eroded the state's monopoly over information. As [Wollenberg and Richter \(2020\)](#) note, Libyan media became detached from the fast technological developments that took place in the 1990s, leaving it lagging behind regional counterparts. Attempted reforms, such as the Al-Ghad media project spearheaded by Saif al-Islam Gaddafi in the 2000s, offered glimpses of a more open media environment but ultimately failed due to opposition from conservative elements within the regime, with all Al-Ghad outlets either closed or merged into state media by 2010 ([El-Issawi, 2013](#)). This era thus illustrates both the capacity of authoritarian states to instrumentalize media and the structural vulnerabilities that emerge when state control is challenged by external technological forces.

The 2011 revolution and the fall of the Gaddafi regime precipitated a radical transformation of Libya's media landscape, characterized by an explosion in the number of media outlets accompanied by the collapse of regulatory frameworks and the fragmentation of media along political and factional lines. Within months of the regime's fall, the number of media outlets mushroomed dramatically, with [Wollenberg and Pack \(2013\)](#) documenting that by 2012, there were 200 radio stations and 200 newspapers operating in Libya. However, this proliferation was driven primarily by quantity rather than quality; as Baio, the former head of General Press Corporations, admitted, establishing an effective new media system in Libya was "impossible" due to poor infrastructure and a profound lack of professional journalism ([El-Issawi, 2013](#)). The fragmentation of the media landscape reflected the broader political fragmentation of the country. Since 2014, Libya has been effectively divided between competing authorities in the east and west, and media outlets have aligned themselves accordingly ([Alasowed, 2023](#)). According to [Reporters Without Borders \(2024\)](#), Libya has become a "true information black hole," with most media outlets and reporters having fled the country, and those who remain forced to work under the protection of one of the warring factions. Traditional media, having taken sides in the conflict, can no longer play their role of ensuring free, independent, and balanced reporting ([Reporters Without Borders, 2024](#)). The legal vacuum has exacerbated this situation, as no regulatory agency or framework law guarantees access to information, media pluralism, or transparency ([Reporters Without Borders, 2024](#)). The only law currently in force concerning press regulation is Law No. 76 of 1972 from the Gaddafi era, which is woefully inadequate for the digital age.

The weaponization of media in the post-2011 period represents the most extreme manifestation of this fragmentation. The Libyan Center for Freedom of Media documented more than 488 violations against journalists between 2014

and 2024, including physical assaults, kidnappings, and killings ([Reporters Without Borders, 2024](#)). Various TV channels have become overt propaganda tools for competing factions: Libya Al-Hadath serves as the voice of Khalifa Haftar's forces in the east, while channels like Tanasuh and Al-Nabaa have been accused of spreading hate speech and inciting violence on behalf of Islamist factions ([Alasowed, 2023](#); [Gohar, 2019](#)). As [Reporters Without Borders \(2024\)](#) notes, journalists are "often forced to align with the partisanship of the media outlets they work for, leading to mass disinformation." This environment of impunity and polarization has effectively eliminated media independence, leaving journalists caught between the threat of violence and the pressure to conform to factional narratives. The evolution of Libyan media from "state monopoly" to "battlefield" thus mirrors the broader transformation of Libyan power itself, from a centralized authoritarian state to a fragmented, conflict-ridden polity where media has become both instrument and victim of ongoing conflict.

Media, Conflict, and the Weaponization of Information in Post-2011 Libya

The post-2011 period in Libya represents a dramatic transformation in the relationship between media and conflict, as the country's media landscape shifted from a state-controlled system under Gaddafi to a fragmented and weaponized environment where media became active participants in armed conflict rather than passive observers. This transformation reflects broader patterns observed in civil wars worldwide, where media are increasingly used as instruments of warfare to mobilize support, spread propaganda, and demoralize opponents. In Libya, this weaponization of information has taken particularly extreme forms, with various TV channels becoming overt propaganda tools for competing factions, spreading hate speech, inciting violence, and deepening polarization. This section analyzes how Libya's post-2011 conflict transformed media from information providers into weapons of war, using the frameworks of peace journalism and war journalism ([Galtung, 1964](#); [Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005](#)) and the concept of weaponization of information ([Bhandari, 2024](#); [Kane, 2019](#)). The analysis demonstrates that Libya's media have almost exclusively adopted the "war journalism" approach, which perceives conflict as a zero-sum battle, thereby exacerbating violence and obstructing reconciliation efforts.

The theoretical framework of peace journalism and war journalism, developed by Johan [Galtung \(1964\)](#) and elaborated by [Lynch and McGoldrick \(2005\)](#), provides a powerful analytical lens for understanding how Libyan media have contributed to the escalation of conflict. Galtung distinguishes between two approaches to reporting conflict: the "low road" or war journalism, and the "high

road” or peace journalism. According to [Galtung and Fischer \(2013\)](#), the low road approach “sees conflict as a battle, a sports arena, or a gladiator circus. The parties, usually reduced to two, are combatants in a struggle to impose their goals. The reporting model follows a military command structure. The zero-sum perspective draws upon sports reporting, where ‘winning is not everything, it is the only thing.’” In contrast, the high road represents peace journalism, which “focuses on conflict transformation” and seeks to give voice to all parties, promote empathy and understanding, and highlight peace initiatives ([Galtung & Fischer, 2013](#); [Fong, 2009](#)). In post-2011 Libya, media have overwhelmingly adopted the war journalism approach, with each channel aligning itself with one side of the conflict and framing issues in starkly polarized terms. This adoption reflects not merely editorial choice but the broader political fragmentation of the country, where media outlets have become propaganda arms of their respective factions rather than platforms for public debate. As [Fong \(2009\)](#) explains, war journalism “plays up conflict as an arena where participants are grouped starkly into two opposing sides (‘them vs. us’) in a zero-sum game.” The extent of media weaponization in Libya is empirically documented through systematic analysis conducted by the Libyan Center for Freedom of Media (2017), which examined more than 420 hours of various TV programs across 12 Libyan TV channels. The analysis revealed 1,070 different violations of ethical and journalistic principles, including incitement to violence, hate speech, and other professional misconduct ([Atbigheh, 2020](#)). This staggering number demonstrates that media in Libya have actively contributed to the escalation of violence and the deepening of social divisions. Among the most egregious examples is *Al-Tanasuh TV*, a religious channel owned by Sadek Al-Ghariani, who is still accepted by some in western Libya as the country’s grand mufti ([Zaptia, 2015](#)).

According to [Gohar \(2019\)](#), *Al-Tanasuh TV* adopted an extreme and inciteful tone, explicitly calling for the killing of military personnel and their supporters. This channel, along with *Al-Nabaa*, was added to the terrorist list compiled by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt due to its role in spreading hate speech and inciting violence ([Zaptia, 2015](#)). Similarly, *Libya Febrayer TV*, established to counter the Libyan Army’s movement against the capital in 2019, was used as a propaganda tool to spread hate speech and incitement against the military. According to [Alasowed \(2023\)](#), this channel is part of Prime Minister Dbeibeh’s media empire and played a significant role in disseminating hate speech. On the opposing side, channels such as *Libya Al-Hadath* and *Al-Massar* supported the military and the parliament in the east, with *Al-Massar* run by Mahmoud El-Ferjani, closely associated with Khalifa Haftar

(Alasowed, 2023). These channels have been accused of spreading pro-Haftar propaganda and demonizing opponents.

The pattern of violations documented is consistent with the concept of “weaponization of information” developed by Bhandari (2024), who defines weaponization as “the deliberate use of information as a powerful tool to achieve specific goals, which includes misinformation, propaganda, and cyber warfare aimed at distorting reality and undermining information systems.” Similarly, Kane (2019) describes weaponization as a form of “cognitive hacking,” where information is deliberately deployed to “bring about a change in beliefs and attitudes and promote behavior that serves the attacker’s purpose.” In Libya, this weaponization has taken the form of hate speech designed to dehumanize opponents, misinformation aimed at delegitimizing rival factions, and propaganda intended to mobilize supporters and demoralize enemies. The weaponization of media has created what Reporters Without Borders (2024) describes as a “true information black hole,” where most media outlets and reporters have fled the country, and those who remain are forced to work under the protection of one of the warring factions. This environment has effectively eliminated media independence, leaving journalists caught between the threat of violence and the pressure to conform to factional narratives. The erosion of professional journalism is evident in several dimensions: the lack of any regulatory agency or framework law guarantees access to information, respects media pluralism, or ensures journalists’ safety (Reporters Without Borders, 2024). The only law currently in force is Law No. 76 of 1972 from the Gaddafi era, which is woefully inadequate for the digital age. Reporters Without Borders documented more than 488 violations against journalists between 2014 and 2024, including physical assaults, kidnappings, and killings, and those who remain are “often forced to align with the partisanship of the media outlets they work for, leading to mass disinformation” (Reporters Without Borders, 2024).

Traditional media, having taken sides in the conflict, can no longer play their role of ensuring free, independent, and balanced reporting (Reporters Without Borders, 2024). This failure is particularly significant in the context of peace journalism, which, as Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) explain, is rooted in the free will of journalists to make deliberate choices: “When editors and reporters make choices, of what to report and how to report it, they create opportunities for society at large to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict.” In Libya, however, such choices are largely absent, as journalists have very limited space for independent decision-making in civil war contexts. The consequences are profound. As Reno (2011, cited in Richmond & Visoka, 2022) argues, the roots of violent conflicts emerge when multiple factors converge,

including “the availability of arms; unemployment; the abuse of ethnicity; exclusion; weak states and state collapse; historical factors; and natural resource wealth.” In Libya, media have become an additional factor fueling conflict. Without significant reform, including the establishment of independent regulatory bodies, the protection of journalists, and the development of professional journalism standards, Libya’s media will likely remain a weaponized space that perpetuates conflict rather than a force for peace, reconciliation, and accountability.

External Factors Shaping Libya’s Media Landscape: Sanctions, Technology, and Foreign Intervention

Libya’s media landscape has been shaped not only by internal dynamics but also by a series of external factors that have fundamentally transformed the structure, function, and control of media in the country. Three major external factors, international sanctions, global technological developments, and foreign intervention, have progressively weakened the state’s capacity to control information flows and created a fragmented media ecosystem vulnerable to external influence. This section examines how these three factors are interconnected in shaping Libya’s media landscape from the Gaddafi era through the post-2011 period.

The United Nations sanctions imposed on Libya in 1993 following the Pan Am 103 bombing over Lockerbie had a devastating impact on Libyan media development. The sanctions effectively hindered the import of information technology, broadcasting equipment, and journalist training, resulting in Libyan media lagging far behind its regional counterparts ([El-Issawi, 2013, p. 13](#); [Wollenberg & Richter, 2020](#)). As [Wollenberg and Richter \(2020\)](#) noted, “In 1993, media development was severely retarded by the sanctions that the United Nations had imposed on Libya. They strongly affected the import of information technology such as computers. Newspapers suffered from a shortage of paper, and television and radio became detached from the fast technological and professional developments that took place in the 1990s.” The impact of these sanctions was both extensive and multidimensional.

Technically, Libya lost access to modern broadcasting equipment and telecommunications infrastructure that was rapidly developing in neighboring countries. Professionally, Libyan journalists could not access international training or participate in regional professional networks, further deepening the competence gap with their counterparts in Egypt, Tunisia, or the Gulf states. However, more significantly, the sanctions had an unintended consequence: the vacuum created by Libya’s media underdevelopment opened space for foreign

satellite channels, particularly Al Jazeera, to dominate Libyan audiences. As [El-Issawi \(2013\)](#) argued, “The space created by the sanctions inadvertently allowed Al Jazeera to gain dominance as the preferred channel for Libyan audiences.” This phenomenon marked the beginning of the erosion of state control over information, as Libyans increasingly sought news and information from foreign sources not subject to Gaddafi regime censorship. Thus, sanctions intended to punish the Gaddafi regime had the unintended consequence of accelerating the erosion of the state’s information monopoly and familiarizing the Libyan public with alternative news sources independent of government control.

Global technological developments, particularly the rise of satellite broadcasting in the 1990s, followed by the internet and social media in the 2000s, have fundamentally transformed Libya’s media ecosystem and weakened the state’s capacity to control information flows. The Libyan government recognized the threat posed by foreign satellite broadcasts and attempted to limit them by establishing an intermediary company designed to act as a filter, receiving foreign television channels and rebroadcasting them to the public ([Omer, 2009](#)). However, this approach ultimately proved ineffective and was abandoned due to rapid technological developments and increasing public reliance on online platforms ([Omer, 2009](#)). The failure of this filtering effort reflects the broader structural challenges facing authoritarian regimes in the digital age. Satellite broadcasting technology, with its reach across national borders, is inherently difficult to control through national censorship mechanisms.

Meanwhile, the internet and social media offered Libyans new spaces to access information from diverse sources and participate in public discourse beyond state surveillance ([Omer, 2009](#)). From the mid-2000s onward, the Libyan public increasingly depended on the internet and social media as primary sources of news and information, generating new patterns of media production and consumption fundamentally different from previous eras ([Omer, 2009](#)). These technological changes had profound political implications. Digital platforms became critical catalysts for political mobilization that culminated in the 2011 revolution, with social media functioning as an alternative space for political expression, protest coordination, and the dissemination of information not censored by the regime ([Wollenberg & Pack, 2013](#)). Thus, global technological developments permanently transformed the relationship between the state, media, and citizens in Libya, creating an information ecosystem far more complex and difficult for any authority to control. Foreign intervention in the post-2011 period has played a central role in shaping Libya’s fragmented media landscape, with various regional powers using media as instruments to compete for influence in Libya. This phenomenon began in the early stages of the

revolution, when Qatar took a leading role by establishing the *Libya Al-Ahrar* channel on March 30, 2011, broadcasting from Doha as a new platform for the rebels and the National Transitional Council (NTC) (Gohar, 2019; Wollenberg & Pack, 2013). This channel became a mouthpiece for anti-Gaddafi forces and played a crucial role in shaping the revolution's narrative for both Libyan and international audiences. Following the fall of the Gaddafi regime, foreign intervention in Libyan media grew deeper and more complex. According to Alasowed (2023), various Libyan TV channels reflect deep political divisions, with each channel affiliated with specific regional powers or domestic factions.

Qatar continued to support channels affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, including *Al-Nabaa* and *Tanasuh*, which have been accused of spreading hate speech and inciting violence (Zaptia, 2015; Gohar, 2019). Conversely, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt supported channels backing Khalifa Haftar and the Libyan National Army, such as *Libya Al-Hadath* and *Al-Massar* (Alasowed, 2023). Turkey also became involved through its support for channels affiliated with the internationally recognized government in Tripoli (Gohar, 2019). This phenomenon illustrates how Libyan media have become a proxy battlefield for regional powers. As Zaptia (2015) noted, two Libyan Islamist TV stations, *Tanasuh* and *Al-Nabaa*, were added to the terrorist list compiled by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt due to Qatari support for these organizations. These foreign interventions have had devastating consequences for media professionalism and independence in Libya. Rather than functioning as platforms for balanced information and constructive public debate, Libyan media have become propaganda instruments that deepen polarization and exacerbate conflict. As Reporters Without Borders (2024) observed, traditional media, having taken sides in the conflict, can no longer play their role of ensuring free, independent, and balanced reporting. Thus, Libya's post-2011 media landscape cannot be understood without considering the regional geopolitical dimension, where media have become instruments in the struggle for influence among foreign powers, Qatar, the UAE, Egypt, and Turkey, each supporting different domestic factions through funding, training, and technical support for affiliated media channels.

Theorizing Libya's Media Evolution: Authoritarian Media Theory, Political Parallelism, and the Weaponization of Information

The evolution of Libyan media from a state-controlled system under the monarchy and Gaddafi to a fragmented and weaponized landscape in the post-2011 period presents a compelling case for theoretical integration. While each era exhibits distinct characteristics, understanding the full trajectory requires a

multi-theoretical approach that captures both the continuity and rupture in Libya's media development. This section integrates three complementary theoretical frameworks, Authoritarian Media Theory (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956), Political Parallelism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), and the Weaponization of Information (Bhandari, 2024; Kane, 2019) combined with Peace/War Journalism (Galtung, 1964; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005), to provide a comprehensive analytical model for understanding Libya's media evolution.

By integrating these frameworks, this section demonstrates that Libya's media trajectory, from "state monopoly" to "battlefield", can be understood as a transition from a classical authoritarian media system to a fragmented and weaponized media environment, where the collapse of state control created space for political and foreign actors to exploit media as instruments of conflict. Authoritarian Media Theory, as developed by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956) in their seminal work *Four Theories of the Press*, provides the foundational framework for understanding media-state relations during Libya's monarchy and Gaddafi eras. This theory posits that in authoritarian systems, media are subordinate to state power, serving as instruments of government control, propaganda, and social mobilization rather than as independent watchdogs or platforms for public debate. The theory identifies several key characteristics: media ownership is concentrated in state hands, content is subject to strict censorship and regulation, and media function primarily to legitimize state authority and disseminate official ideology (Siebert et al., 1956).

In Libya, these characteristics were clearly evident during both the monarchy and Gaddafi periods. Under the monarchy (1952–1969), radio and television were entirely state-controlled, with print media enjoying only limited freedom (Mattes, 1986; Elfotaysi, 1996). The regime established national media institutions, including the Libyan News Agency in 1964, and maintained tight control over broadcasting, even as print media experienced some diversity (Mattes, 1986). However, it was during the Gaddafi era (1969–2011) that authoritarian media control reached its zenith, with media becoming a centralized instrument of ideological propaganda. Following the 1969 revolution, private newspapers were systematically eliminated from the market, foreign-language media were forced to close, and the press was completely nationalized (Richter, 2021).

The ideological framework for this transformation was explicitly articulated in the *Green Book* (Gaddafi, 1975), which stated: "The press is a means of expression for society; it is not a means of expression for private individuals or corporate bodies... A newspaper owned by any individual expresses only their point of view." This doctrine justified the complete subordination of media to

state interests, with media becoming primarily an ideological tool for mobilization, managed by state institutions (Richter, 2021). The regime established multiple layers of media apparatus, including the Libyan Jamahiriya General Broadcasting Corporation, the Libyan News Agency (JANA), and the Revolutionary Committee Movement (RCM), which managed revolutionary media outlets such as the Voice of the Arab World Radio and Al-Zahf Al-Akhdar (Qannous et al., 2005). The regime also invested heavily in media, with the media budget increasing from 1.5 million Libyan dinars before 1969 to 10.8 million dinars in 1987, representing a 600% increase (Qannous et al., 2005). This investment reflected the regime's recognition of media as a crucial instrument of political control and ideological dissemination.

However, Authoritarian Media Theory alone cannot fully account for the complexities of Libya's media evolution, particularly the post-2011 period. The theory assumes a stable state structure capable of maintaining control over media, but in Libya, the collapse of the Gaddafi regime in 2011 led to the fragmentation of state authority and the proliferation of media outlets beyond state control. As Wollenberg and Richter (2020) argue, the post-2011 period represents a condition of "post-authoritarian media chaos," where the absence of effective state regulation and the emergence of multiple competing authorities created a radically different media environment. This condition requires additional theoretical frameworks to capture the dynamics of fragmentation and conflict that characterize Libya's contemporary media landscape. The concept of Political Parallelism, as developed by Hallin and Mancini (2004) in their comparative analysis of media systems, provides a crucial analytical framework for understanding the relationship between media and political fragmentation in post-2011 Libya. Hallin and Mancini (2004) define political parallelism as "the degree to which the structure and performance of the media system parallel the structure of the political system," encompassing dimensions such as media-party affiliations, political orientation of media content, and the role of media in political mobilization.

In Libya, political parallelism has reached an extreme form in the post-2011 period, where the fragmentation of the political system into competing authorities has been mirrored by a corresponding fragmentation of the media landscape (Wollenberg & Richter, 2020; Alasowed, 2023). The extreme political parallelism in Libya is evident in the clear alignment of media outlets with specific political and military factions. Since 2014, Libya has been effectively divided between competing authorities in the east and west, and media outlets have aligned themselves accordingly (Alasowed, 2023; Gohar, 2019). Various TV channels have become overt propaganda tools for competing factions: *Libya Al-*

Hadath serves as the voice of Khalifa Haftar's forces in the east, while channels like *Al-Tanasuh* and *Al-Nabaa* spread hate speech and incited violence on behalf of Islamist factions (Alasowed, 2023; Gohar, 2019; Zaptia, 2015). *Libya Febrayer* TV, established to counter the Libyan Army's movement against the capital in 2019, became part of Prime Minister Dbeibeh's media empire and played a significant role in disseminating hate speech and incitement against the military (). The parliament also established its own channel, *Libya Al-Mostakbal*, further demonstrating how media have become integral to the political and military conflict (Alasowed, 2023; Gohar, 2019).

The table below presents a comprehensive comparison of Libya's media evolution across three distinct political eras, identifying key characteristics in each era and the most appropriate theoretical framework for analyzing each period. This table allows readers to systematically observe how media structure, function, regulation, and journalism quality transformed alongside political power shifts in Libya, and how different theoretical frameworks are needed to understand each stage of this evolution.

Table 1

Libya's Media Evolution Across Eras and Theoretical Frameworks

Aspect	Monarchy (1952-1969)	Gaddafi (1969-2011)	Post-2011
Media Ownership	State-controlled radio/TV; limited private print	Complete state monopoly; press nationalization	Fragmented: state, private, faction-affiliated
Regulation	Royal Decree No. 11 (1959); amended 1962	Law No. 76 (1972); Green Book doctrine	Legal vacuum; Law No. 76 still in force but inadequate
Media Function	State-building; limited public information	Ideological propaganda; personality cult; mobilization	Propaganda; weaponization; conflict instrument
Political Parallelism	Moderate; limited party alignment	Extreme; complete alignment with regime	Extreme; alignment with competing factions
Journalism Quality	Limited professionalism; foreign dependency	Instrumentalized; sanctioned; professional decline	Weaponized; violations; dangerous environment
Press Freedom	Limited; print media had some freedom	Very limited; no private press	Dangerous; polarized; no protection for journalists
Theoretical Framework	Authoritarian Media Theory	Authoritarian Media Theory	Political Parallelism + Weaponization + War Journalism

Source: Compiled from various sources (Elfotaysi, 1996; Mattes, 1986; Richter, 2021; Gaddafi, 1975; Wollenberg & Richter, 2020; Alasowed, 2023; Gohar, 2019; Reporters Without Borders, 2024)

The table above clearly demonstrates that Libya's media evolution cannot be understood through a single theoretical framework. During the Monarchy and Gaddafi eras, Authoritarian Media Theory provides an adequate explanation of how media were placed under state control and used as instruments of power. However, in the post-2011 era, when the state collapsed and power fragmented, the Authoritarian Media Theory framework becomes insufficient. Two additional frameworks, Political Parallelism and Weaponization of Information/War Journalism, are needed to explain how media not only reflect political fragmentation but also actively become weapons in conflict. The table also shows that despite dramatic changes in media ownership and regulation, there is continuity in the instrumentalization of media for power interests, the difference is that power is now fragmented among many actors rather than centralized in a single authoritarian state. Thus, this table reinforces the central argument that Libya's media evolution reflects the transformation of power itself: from a centralized authoritarian state to a fragmented conflict-ridden polity.

The concepts of Weaponization of Information and Peace/War Journalism provide complementary frameworks for understanding how media in Libya have become active participants in conflict rather than passive observers. The concept of weaponization of information, as developed by [Bhandari \(2024\)](#) and [Kane \(2019\)](#), describes the deliberate use of information to achieve strategic goals, including propaganda, disinformation, and psychological warfare. [Bhandari \(2024\)](#) defines weaponization as "the deliberate use of information as a powerful tool to achieve specific goals, which includes misinformation, propaganda, and cyber warfare aimed at distorting reality and undermining information systems." Similarly, [Kane \(2019\)](#) describes weaponization as a form of "cognitive hacking," where information is deliberately deployed to "bring about a change in beliefs and attitudes and promote behavior that serves the attacker's purpose." In Libya, this weaponization has taken the form of hate speech designed to dehumanize opponents, misinformation aimed at delegitimizing rival factions, and propaganda intended to mobilize supporters and demoralize enemies.

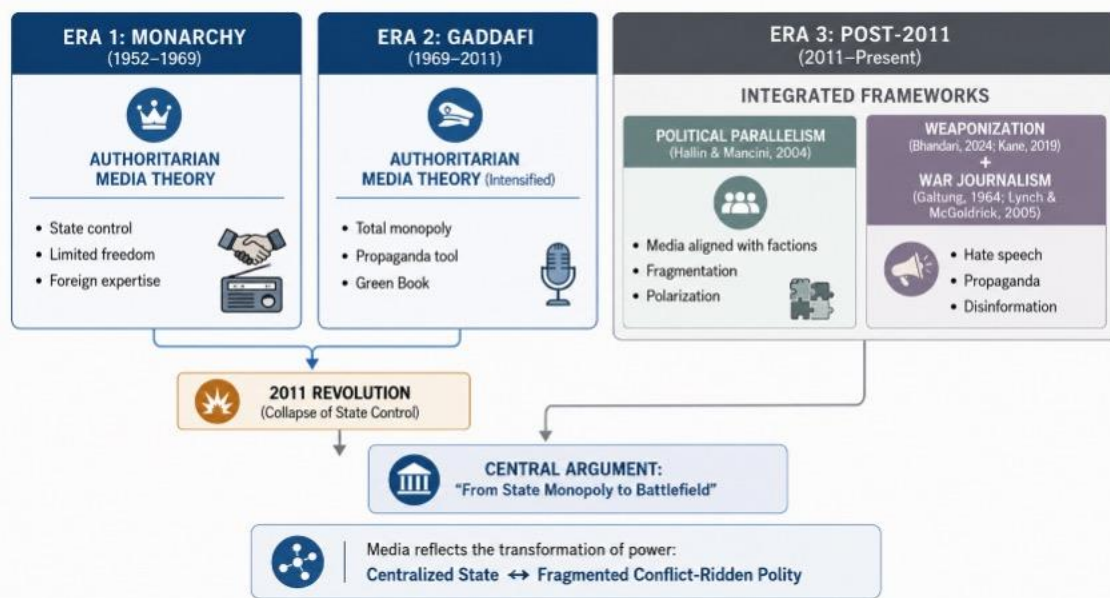
The Libyan Center for Freedom of Media's analysis documented 1,070 violations across 12 TV channels ([Atbiga, 2020](#)), providing empirical evidence of weaponization. The Peace/War Journalism framework, developed by [Johan Galtung \(1964\)](#) and elaborated by [Lynch and McGoldrick \(2005\)](#), provides an analytical lens for understanding how journalistic practices can either exacerbate or mitigate conflict. Galtung distinguishes between two approaches to reporting conflict: the "low road" or war journalism, and the "high road" or peace journalism ([Galtung & Fischer, 2013](#)). War journalism perceives conflict as a zero-

sum battle between two opposing sides and focuses on visible effects of war, while peace journalism focuses on conflict transformation and seeks to give voice to all parties, promote empathy and understanding, and highlight peace initiatives (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005; Fong, 2009). In Libya, media have overwhelmingly adopted war journalism, framing issues in starkly polarized terms and contributing to the escalation of violence.

The figure below presents a simple integrated theoretical model illustrating Libya's media evolution from the Monarchy era to the post-2011 period, showing how three theoretical frameworks, Authoritarian Media Theory, Political Parallelism, and Weaponization of Information/Peace-War Journalism, complement each other in explaining Libya's media transformation from "state monopoly" to "battlefield." This model visually demonstrates that Libya's media evolution is not linear but marked by a dramatic discontinuity in 2011, when the collapse of the authoritarian state created space for media fragmentation and weaponization. The model also shows how media in each era reflected the underlying power structures: from a centralized state in the Monarchy and Gaddafi eras to a fragmented state in the post-2011 era.

Figure 1

Simple Theoretical Model of Libya's Media Evolution



Source: Developed by the author based on the integration of theoretical frameworks from Siebert et al. (1956), Hallin & Mancini (2004), Bhandari (2024), Kane (2019), Galtung (1964), and Lynch & McGoldrick (2005).

The simple theoretical model above visually summarizes the central argument of the entire analysis: that Libya's media evolution, from "state monopoly" to

“battlefield”, reflects the transformation of power itself. In the Monarchy and Gaddafi eras, media were under centralized state control, and Authoritarian Media Theory provides the most appropriate framework for analyzing media-state relations. In the post-2011 era, the collapse of the authoritarian state created space for fragmentation and weaponization of media, requiring additional theoretical frameworks, Political Parallelism to explain media alignment with warring factions, and Weaponization of Information along with War Journalism to explain how media actively became instruments of conflict. This model also shows that despite the dramatic change in 2011, there is continuity in the instrumentalization of media for power interests, what changed is the structure of power itself, from centralized to fragmented. Thus, this model not only explains the Libyan case but also offers an analytical framework applicable to other states experiencing state collapse and civil war, where media often become both victims and perpetrators of conflict simultaneously.

The integration of Authoritarian Media Theory, Political Parallelism, and Weaponization of Information/Peace-War Journalism provides a comprehensive analytical model for understanding Libya’s media evolution. This model captures the transition from a unified authoritarian system to a fragmented and weaponized media environment, demonstrating how the collapse of state control created space for political and foreign actors to exploit media as instruments of conflict. The model suggests that media in conflict-affected states cannot be understood through single theoretical lenses but require integrated approaches that account for both structural conditions (authoritarian legacies, political fragmentation) and agency (deliberate weaponization of information). The Libyan case also highlights the importance of understanding the relationship between media and state collapse, suggesting that the fragmentation of media systems may reflect broader patterns of state failure. For post-conflict reconstruction, the model implies that media reform must be integrated with broader political stabilization efforts, including the establishment of independent regulatory bodies and the protection of journalists. Ultimately, the evolution of Libyan media demonstrates that the transformation of power, from centralized authoritarian state to fragmented conflict-ridden polity, is mirrored in the transformation of media, making media both a reflection of and a participant in the broader dynamics of conflict and change.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the evolution of Libyan media from a state-controlled system to a fragmented and weaponized landscape reflects the broader transformation of political power in the country. Across three distinct eras, the

Monarchy (1952–1969), the Gaddafi regime (1969–2011), and the post-2011 period, media structures have consistently mirrored the underlying power dynamics of the state. The monarchy established foundational media institutions despite severe structural constraints, while the Gaddafi era witnessed the complete subordination of media to ideological propaganda and state control. The post-2011 period, however, marked a dramatic rupture, characterized by an explosion in the number of media outlets accompanied by the collapse of regulatory frameworks and the fragmentation of media along political and factional lines. The study reveals that state control does not eliminate media agency but instead reshapes it into complex forms of adaptation and resistance. In the post-2011 context, media have become active participants in conflict rather than neutral observers, functioning as weapons of war through hate speech, propaganda, and disinformation.

The weaponization of media has created a “true information black hole,” where journalists are forced to align with factional narratives, leading to mass disinformation and the erosion of professional journalism. External factors, international sanctions, global technological developments, and foreign intervention, have further weakened the state’s capacity to control information flows and deepened media fragmentation. This study contributes to the literature by integrating Authoritarian Media Theory, Political Parallelism, and Weaponization of Information to provide a comprehensive analytical model for understanding media in conflict-affected states. The findings have practical implications for policymakers, media practitioners, and international organizations. Without significant reform, including the establishment of independent regulatory bodies, the protection of journalists, and the development of professional journalism standards, Libya’s media will remain a contested space shaped by competing interests rather than a force for transparency, accountability, and social cohesion. Future research should examine digital media’s growing influence and conduct comparative studies with other conflict-affected Arab states.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Ethical Approval

This study is a literature review based exclusively on secondary data from published academic journals, official reports, and policy documents. It does not involve primary data collection from human subjects, animals, or any form of direct intervention. Therefore, ethical approval was not required for this research.

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