



An Al-Jazeera Effect in the US? A Review of the Evidence

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Abstract

Some scholars argue that following 9/11 Al Jazeera has promoted an Arab perspective of events in the US by exporting its news materials to the US news market. The study examines the validity of the argument through a review of the literature on the issue during three successive periods of US-Al Jazeera interactions: (a) Al Jazeera Arabic's re-presentation in US mainstream media following 9/11, specifically during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (b) Al Jazeera English television channel's attempts to enter the US market since 2006 and (c) the reception of Al Jazeera America in the US, where the paper also adds an original analysis of Al Jazeera America's Twitter followers profiles. Together, these analyses provides strong counterevidence to the argument that Al-Jazeera was able to promote an Arab perspective of events in the US as the US administration, media and public resisted its entry to the US market.

Keywords: Al Jazeera; Qatar; Counter-public; Intercultural communication; United States; Twitter

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Citation: Samuel-Azran T. An Al-Jazeera Effect in the US? A Review of the Evidence. Global Media Journal 2017, 15:29.

Received: September 03, 2017; **Accepted:** September 21, 2017; **Published:** September 30, 2017

Introduction

In the last decade and a half, the Al Jazeera media network has made tremendous efforts to penetrate the US market, in what has possibly been the most ambitious attempt in history by a non-Western media network to broadcast to the heart of the world's leading Western power. Qatari-sponsored Al Jazeera's attempts to enter the US market were largely in response to growing interest in images from the battle zones of the Middle East and the Arab world following 9/11. Al Jazeera's efforts to implant itself in the US market as a legitimate and credible news source can be divided into three phases that correspond to the successive launch of various Al Jazeera media network platforms targeting US audiences. The first phase started after 9/11, when Al Jazeera Arabic signed content exchange agreements with leading US news stations that sought the use of its exclusive images from the Afghani battle zone and its exclusive videos featuring Al-Qaeda's leaders. The launch of Al Jazeera English television channel in November 2006 indicates the beginning of the second phase, designed to reach English-speaking television viewers, and finally, the launch of Al Jazeera America in August 2013 represents the third and most recent attempt to target US audiences specifically by creating the look and feel of a local US channel.

In light of Al Jazeera's export of its news materials to the US, various voices over the years have argued that dissemination of the channel's news materials in the West promotes the advent of an Arab perspective to the US. Volkmer [1] argues that the global spread of Al Jazeera's images during the war in Afghanistan constitutes the birth of "...a new dimension in the global news flow, which not only refines domestic and foreign news in national journalism in times of crisis but also the news angle of transnational networks, such as CNN." [2]. El-Kikhia and Iskandar [3] posit that Al Jazeera footage forced the Arab perspective on the Bush Administration. The titles of several works, such as Al-Jazeera: The Story Of The Network That Is Rattling Governments And Redefining Modern Journalism [3] and The Role of New Arab Satellite Channels in Fostering Intercultural Dialogue: Can Al Jazeera English Bridge the Gap? [4], further testify to the popularity of the notion that Al Jazeera promotes an Arab perspective in the US. Finally and importantly, in their comprehensive evaluation of the Al Jazeera effect in the West, Powers and El-Nawawy [5,6] found that a greater amount of AJE-viewing correlated with decreased dogmatic views.

While most of these studies examined the Al Jazeera effect during a particular episode, such as the use of exclusive Al Jazeera

images from the battlefield in Afghanistan [1,2,7] the launch of Al Jazeera English or the Arab Spring [8], and thus often offer anecdotal findings, this paper aims to encompass the majority of studies on Al-Jazeera presence in the US since 9/11 using a comprehensive analysis of the literature on Al Jazeera interplay with the US during the three phases mentioned above, as well as a study of Al-Jazeera America Twitter profile followers (in light of the scarce literature on Al Jazeera America) with the aim to reach a more inclusive conclusion regarding the overall evidence regarding whether Al Jazeera's activities in the last 15 years was about to promote an Arab perspective in the US.

The analysis, thus, is divided into three periods, each focusing on past evaluations of a specific Al Jazeera platform that also represents a particular phase in Al Jazeera's development and efforts to target the US using a variety of platforms and incarnations. The study begins with an analysis of the re-presentation of Al Jazeera Arabic's news material during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001-3, then moves to document the attempts by Al Jazeera English TV channel to gain distribution on US cable and satellite audiences around since its November 2006 launch and finally, it examines the reception of Al Jazeera America, specifically via evaluation of the profile and activity patterns of Al Jazeera America Twitter followers.

Phase I: The Resonance of Al Jazeera Arabic in the US after 9/11

The Al Jazeera media network rose to fame in the West following the 9/11 attacks, specifically when, on October 7, 2001, Al Jazeera Arabic gained exclusive access to Osama bin Laden's video and audio recordings, the first of a series of tapes featuring bin Laden and Al-Qaeda leaders to which Al Jazeera had exclusive access. In addition to airing the first bin Laden tapes, which Western stations widely re-broadcasted, Al Jazeera was also the source of exclusive images from the Afghanistan war, secured by its exclusive access to Kandahar and Kabul. Like the bin Laden tapes, these images appeared on the main Western networks with an "Al Jazeera exclusive" mark. In many respects, then, the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks marks Al Jazeera's entry to the center of the global news scene.

Accordingly, the early responses to the advent of Al-Jazeera news maetrial to the West welcomed the new perspective and predicted a rosy future for the Qatari station as an influencer on Western public opinion. Ingrid Volkmer argued that Al-Jazeera's rise to global fame erodes 'national (or local) public spheres' worldwide and has the potential to lead towards the emergence of a 'global public sphere' [1]. Similarly, in an article published in Columbia Journalism Review, Journalist Rick Zednik argued that the global spread of Al-Jazeera's reports can affect public opinion in the receiving countries [9]. El-Nawawy and Iskandar [3] published a highly cited book on Al-Jazeera- Al-jazeera: The Story of the Network That Is Rattling Governments and Redefining Modern Journalism – which further introduced the Qatari station to Western audiences and decision-makers and claimed for a revolutionary effect for the channel on Western public discourse. Next, Jasperson and El-Kikhia's [2] were among the

first to examined empirically the role Al-Jazeera's news material played in building the governance, military and humanitarian media frames in the reporting of U.S. news networks, using CNN as a case study. Jasperson and El-Kikhia argued, based on their qualitative analysis, that Al-Jazeera gave a new perspective to U.S. media reporting, which was not evident in former conflicts. Their empirical research, however, suffers from several methodical flaws. Most notably, it used CNN as a case study representative of the major U.S. news networks, while CNN was the only network that signed an exclusive content-exchange agreement with Al-Jazeera during the War in Afghanistan, thus making deduction on the general interplay between Al-Jazeera and US stations less viable.

Indeed, Samuel-Azran's Analysis of the re-presentation of Al Jazeera Arabic's material on the five major networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX and CNN) at the peak of the war in Afghanistan strongly contradicts their findings and indicates that Al Jazeera's news images were mostly ignored and Al Jazeera played a limited role in the US coverage of the war. His analysis found that although Al Jazeera aired daily images of dead and injured Afghans during the war in Afghanistan, the US networks merely used of Al Jazeera's footage of civilian casualties. According to Samuel-Azran, a possible explanation of US media's self-censorship of Al Jazeera's images is the demonization of the channel during the war by the George W. Bush administration. Specifically, US Defense Secretary Rumsfeld argued that Al Jazeera had fabricated images of Muslim casualties, casting a long shadow over the channel's credibility. In an interview on NBC Evening News on October 28, 2001, Rumsfeld described Al Jazeera's coverage as "propagandistic and inflammatory," claiming that Al Jazeera fakes images, and that "...when a bomb goes down, they grab some children and some women and pretend that the bomb hit the women and the children." A similar conclusion regarding the stereotypical and distant nature of the re-presentation of images from Al-Jazeera emanates from Wessler and Adolphsen (2008) analysis of the re-presentation of Al-Jazeera's images on Western stations during the 2003 War in Iraq, which revealed that it was characterized by Western stations distancing themselves from the source and "warning" their audiences that these Al-Jazeera images represent the Arab perspective of events only and not necessarily the truth.

Later analyses continued to cast doubt on the advent of Al-Jazeera as a bearer of the Arab perspective in the US. Zaharna [10] argued that Al-Jazeera and the US relationship resembles a dance of intercultural miscommunication as it is accompanied by systematic cultural clashes leading to high suspicion towards the Qatari station. In addition, Zayani [11] raised serious concerns regarding Al-Jazeera's motivations, suggesting that it serves as a public diplomacy tool for Qatar, a contention that was established empirically a few years later in Samuel-Azran, adding to the tension and suspicion towards Al-Jazeera.

In light of Al-Jazeera's managers' frustration regarding the ability of Al-Jazeera Arabic to gain fair re-presentation in the US via led the Al Jazeera media network executives' decision to launch Al Jazeera English.net on February 16, 2003, the eve of the war in

Iraq with the aim of reaching US audiences without mediation. However, Samuel-Azran's analysis showed that Al Jazeera English.net clout in the US online realm is minor and reaches little resonance of US0-based website. Accordingly, it is not surprising that the Al Jazeera Media network decided to launch Al Jazeera English TV channel in November 2006 with the aim to gain direct access to US television viewers, as described in more detail below.

Phase II: Al Jazeera English TV Channel Launched and Blocked

On November 15, 2006, the Al Jazeera network launched Al Jazeera's first 24/7 television news channel in English. This significant step furthered their objective to advance from the category of regional ethnic media providers in the Middle East to that of major international news networks, and the network became the world's first English-language news channel to have its headquarters in the Middle East. Al Jazeera English strategically focused on appealing to three target groups:

(1) Viewers in developing countries who seek exposure to non-Western perspectives of global news events that substitute for or complementing BBC World News and CNN. AJE did not position itself as an Arab network that broadcasts in English, but rather as a channel with a "global" identity, claiming in its public material that it covered regions that were under-reported by prominent Western media such as CNN International and BBC;

(2) Second- and third-generation Arab and Muslim immigrants in English-speaking countries, who prefer the English language but wanted to watch the news from an Arab perspective; and

(3) Westerners who are familiar with the channel and want to hear the news directly from the channel itself rather than from local channels that are merely re-presenting Al Jazeera materials.

Importantly, Al Jazeera implemented a proactive penetration strategy from day one. For example, it chose to station Al Jazeera English in four key cities: Doha, London, Washington, DC and Kuala Lumpur. The initial choice of stationing one of their broadcast headquarters in the US capital, with over 150 staff members and 4 hours of daily broadcasts from Washington during prime time, was clearly intended to appeal to the US market, acknowledge this market's global significance, and stress Al Jazeera English's focus on appealing to this market. A further move to gain credibility in the US is also evident in AJE's recruitment strategy of capitalizing on the reputations of well-known TV figures in the West, including Dave Marash (formerly with ABC), David Frost (formerly with BBC) and Riz Khan (formerly with CNN).

Optimistically, academic evaluations identified that Al-Jazeera English presents in its stories a good balance between Western and non-Western regions, thus providing a great mix for the Western viewers interested in better understanding the non-Western regions like Africa, which have little coverage on Western stations [12,13]. According to Figenschou [14], Al Jazeera English focus on suffering of the other and transmitting it to the West is blessed since it could radiate Arab civilians' sufferings. Painter also noted that Al-Jazeera English represents a genuine

and blessed attempt to counter the traditional Western news hegemony with information flowing from the non-Western perspective to the West. In addition, some analyses identified that several Western outlets welcomed the advent of the new English-speaking Qatari-originated station. According to King and Zayani [15], who conducted a global analysis of the coverage of Al-Jazeera English materials in world newspapers found that Al Jazeera English gained a lot more positive coverage than its Arabic counterpart as newspapers associated it less with terrorism in comparison to Al-Jazeera Arabic and more as a globally-oriented news station.

In stark contrast, many other US news outlets expressed fierce resistance to Al Jazeera English erupted as soon as the channel announced its launch. On November 16, 2006, one day after its official launch, US stations questioned the values of the channel after AJE's Riz Khan said live that "he is not the one to judge" whether Hezbollah and Hamas are terrorist organizations. Considering that both Hamas and Hezbollah are officially classified as terrorist organizations by the US (Hamas is also considered a terrorist organization by Canada, the European Union, Israel, Japan, Australia and the United Kingdom; Hezbollah is on the terrorist list of six Western countries), Khan's comment was considered a highly provocative statement in the eyes of US commentators. Another hostile welcome for the new channel came from Fox News, which portrayed the launch of Al Jazeera English as a joke:

Hume: Finally tonight, the new English-language Al Jazeera network is not being carried on a single major American cable or satellite TV provider, but you can take my word for it, it will soon be a huge hit here. With promos like this, they can't miss.(begin Fox News Channel-produced video clip).

Announcer: Coming soon to the United States, it's the Al Jazeera network for America. The leader for news, sports, and quality entertainment in the Middle East is now available in the land of the great Satan. Check out exciting dramas and hilarious sitcoms. Shows like I Love Uzi, Kurd Your Enthusiasm, 30 Rocks, Dancing with the Shiites, Extreme Makeover: Cave Edition, Saddam Squarepants, My Name is Oil, and, of course, everybody Hates Israel.

The Al Jazeera network for America - call your Zionist-controlled cable company today. Samuel-Azran's analysis of Al Jazeera English's efforts to penetrate the US market reveals that such critical sentiment and welcome affected Al Jazeera English's efforts to find distributors in the US was mostly blocked by US cable and satellite carriers, acting under some pressure from American conservatives. Thus, although the channel was originally reported as being on the verge of signing a distribution contract with Comcast, the largest US cable provider, to carry the channel on the Detroit cable system where 200,000-300,000 of the 1.8 million Arabs living in the US live are located), Comcast reportedly backed out of the negotiations only days before Al Jazeera English's launch. Comcast's decision was a major blow for Al Jazeera for two reasons: First, it meant that no major carrier would distribute its broadcasts on its launch day; second, Comcast is the number one cable carrier in other Arab

centers in America, and its withdrawal set a precedent against carrying Al Jazeera in other strategic regions. After the Comcast announcement, Nigel Parsons, the founding managing director of Al Jazeera English, stated his belief that the decision was the result of political pressure. Al Jazeera English's negotiations with the other major cable carriers-Cox Communications and Time Warner-in subsequent months also failed.

Accordingly, when AJE was launched in November 2006, only two small cable carriers agreed to carry it-Burlington TV (BT) in Vermont and Buckeye in Toledo, Ohio. Buckeye's decision to carry the channel was based on the large Arab population living in Toledo. With Burlington Telecom, a city-chartered and privately financed cable company in Vermont, the decision was based more on the progressive nature of the city of Burlington than on the nature of Al Jazeera, and was related to efforts to challenge the monopoly of Adelphia, acquired in 2006 by Time Warner and Comcast, shortly before AJE was launched. While Burlington Telecom in Vermont and Buckeye in Ohio were both positioned in small cities with negligible distribution, their decision to carry Al Jazeera English elicited criticism and threats from pressure groups. Considering their peripheral standing, the degree of pressure placed on these two small cable carriers to stop offering Al Jazeera English, by both the public as well as by lobbyist groups, particularly the conservative group Accuracy in Media [16].

Due to AJE's increasingly problematic image in the US, AJE also struggled with the issue of credibility with US advertisers. To overcome its rocky start, AJE hired a high-profile Manhattan-based PR agency to enhance its status and promote its brand name. Brown Lloyd James (BLJ) was hired to monitor anti-Al Jazeera English messages 24/7 on television, newspapers and the web, and to respond instantly to any negative commentary about the channel. Additionally, BLJ launched an "I want Al Jazeera English" campaign, which included a website dedicated to debunking "myths" about the Al Jazeera brand. It presented Al Jazeera as a network that adheres to a strict code of ethics, emphasizing that it does not show beheadings, and that, despite it being "Arab-sourced," even Israelis consume some of their news from Al Jazeera. They further stressed the last point, highlighting that Al Jazeera conducted more interviews with Israeli officials than either CNN or BBC. In efforts to dispel another alleged myth that by broadcasting unedited videos from bin Laden and Al-Qaeda members, the channel treats them as credible figures and potentially allows them to send hidden messages to their followers, BLJ stressed that Al Jazeera only shows a fraction of the videos, which, they insist, are newsworthy material. By dispelling these alleged myths, BLJ sought to achieve the site's ultimate goal: to encourage Americans to proactively support the distribution of AJE by writing to their local cable and satellite providers and asking them to carry the channel, and to encourage US advertisers to advertise on the channel.

However, these efforts mostly failed, as the cost-benefit ratio seemed too low for US advertisers who were extremely fearful of potentially antagonizing US consumers. An article in December 2007 in the business magazine *Fast Company* revealed that US

advertisers were not likely to buy any airtime on AJE. Reporter Linda Tischler asked the major commercial buying companies - OMD, Starcom, MediaVest, MindShare, and Carat — about their intentions to buy ads on Al Jazeera English. They all reportedly "refused to respond or politely declined to comment." One account executive who agreed to be quoted only if remained an anonymous, reportedly stated, "Politically, this is a nightmare. Never in a billion years would I bring this to our client." The magazine further quoted Marketing guru Ernest Lupinacci, formerly CEO of the ad agency Anomaly, who explained why US companies will never advertise on Al Jazeera English: "If you're a marketer, your worst nightmare is to wake up and read a headline on the Drudge Report: 'U.S. Widgets to Buy Airtime on Al Jazeera' [17].

Davis' [18] study of the reasons behind Al Jazeera English's faltering in the US and Canadian markets identified that the US administration negative comments against Al-Jazeera as an enemy source trickled down and affected public interests groups and non-commercial mechanisms to thwart Al-Jazeera's distribution in the US. This anti-Al-Jazeera spirit allegedly affected major advertisers such as Yahoo! And America Online who decided to retract ad campaigns on the network. Finally, on the ground as well, US citizens grasped the anti-Al-Jazeera sentiment message and hackers perceived Al-Jazeera as a legitimate target and thus hacked its website, redirecting traffic to porn sites.

The US failure of Al Jazeera English was further explained by a study of US citizens' perception of gaining messages from Al-Jazeera which revealed possible racial and cultural bias. Youmans and Brown [8] studied the reception of Al Jazeera in American society during what some thought was Al Jazeera English's "greatest moment" in the US, the coverage of the Arab Spring. In their experiment, 177 US participants representing a sample of the US population were randomized into one of three groups: viewers of an AJE clip, viewers of a CNN International (CNNI) clip, and a control group. Participants in the AJE and CNNI groups viewed a news story that originally had aired on AJE about the Taliban and its position on peace talks with the government in Kabul. As part of the experiment, for the CNNI group, AJE markings were removed and replaced with CNNI branding. Those in the control group did not watch a video. Participants were then asked to rate AJE and CNNI in terms of bias and trustworthiness, and about their intentions to watch AJE and CNN. Participants were also asked various questions about their attitudes toward AJE and CNNI, such as, "If your local cable company was considering carrying Al Jazeera English/CNN International, would you have a preference or try to influence its decision?" The findings of the experiment clearly showed that even during the so-called "AJE moment," substantial prejudice against AJE persisted among the American public, as the average respondent gave more credit to CNNI for an AJE-produced news clip edited to look like it had been produced by CNNI than the credit attributed to AJE for the same clip. Not surprisingly, prejudice against AJE was highly correlated with conservative political ideology and anti-Arab sentiments. However, as noted, the bias was found in average participants, and not only conservative participants, which indicates that the bias against Al Jazeera in the US is rooted in religious and cultural

differences. These results point to the limits of Al Jazeera's potential as a soft power tool in the US, explaining why the billions that Qatar poured into accessing the US media realm were unsuccessful in penetrating through cultural, religious and national biases.

In light of all the above mentioned hurdles, eventually, AJE transferred its Washington, DC offices to Doha on January 28, 2011, clearly signaling defeat after the countless failed attempts to penetrate the US television market. However, in 2013 it returned, making its most bold initiative to reach specifically US audiences in the form of Al Jazeera America.

The Third and Last Attempt: Al Jazeera America

Following its unsuccessful attempt to gain wide access for Al Jazeera English in the US via cable and satellite, the Al Jazeera media network looked for a new approach. On January 2, 2013, Al Jazeera purchased Current TV for \$500 million and subsequently closed down its operations and set up Al Jazeera America in its place. According to Los Angeles Times writer Joe Flint, acquisition of Current TV represented Al Jazeera America's attempt to gain access to over 50 million viewers over the heads of the cable satellite providers who originally declined to give it access.

Accordingly, Al Jazeera announced its intention to reorganize its overall broadcast structure in English, with Al Jazeera English broadcasting globally while Al Jazeera America would broadcast exclusively to the American audience, providing both domestic and international news to US viewers. Launched on August 20, 2013, the Al Jazeera America channel (AJAM) established headquarters in NYC and employed a team of close to 800 journalists and staff. It also opened twelve bureaus in major US cities as well as three broadcast centers, making it the news organization with the largest news-gathering capabilities in the US. Along with its goal of becoming an integral part of the American landscape, AJAM focused its hopes on challenging the major US news networks such as CNN, Fox News and MSNBC.

Although AJAM inherited Current TV's existing distribution deals, not all distributors were on board with this acquisition—Time Warner Cable, the largest pay-TV provider in Los Angeles, chose to drop Current TV at the news of its sale to the Al Jazeera. According to The Huffington Post, the reason given for this decision was that it had not consented to the acquisition, which triggered accusations of political cowardice directed at Time Warner [19]. The Al Jazeera network also filed a lawsuit against AT&T after it decided to remove AJAM from U-Verse—the AT&T brand of telecommunications services in 22 states of the US—the night before the launch, reducing the launch's reach by around 5 million U-Verse customers. Ultimately, at its launch, Al Jazeera America premiered in about 45 million homes. On June 27, 2014, AT&T and U-Verse added AJAM to its offering as part of a settlement of the AJAM lawsuit. Similarly, on October 24, 2013, Time Warner Cable and Al Jazeera America announced that they had reached an agreement and were bringing Al Jazeera America to Time Warner Cable. The deal brought AJAM broadcasts to

New York, Los Angeles, Dallas, and other major markets, creating a substantial increase in viewership reach that raised the total number of homes in the US with access to the channel to 55 million.

Since the beginning, however, there were very strong indications that AJAM is unlikely to become a commercial success. Since its inception, AJAM has been broadcasting exclusive American content from twelve bureaus across the US. Although this is an impressive feat, the channel attracted an average of only 17,000 prime-time viewers in its first year of operation. When AJAM began reporting in late 2014 about Gaza, ISIS, and the racial events in Ferguson, Missouri, where a Black, unarmed 18-year-old was killed by a White police officer, viewership rose by 50%, although AJAM's prime-time viewership average was still less than 5% of CNN's, which has 600,000 viewers in comparison to AJAM's 25,000; Fox News has 1.87 million loyal viewers [20].

Considering Al Jazeera's image and viewership, US advertisers unsurprisingly avoided launching advertising campaigns on AJAM. According to Ad Age magazine, of the 153 advertisers that used to buy advertising time on Al Gore's Current TV, only a few national brands bought time on AJAM when it was first launched, among the few companies that had advertised on Current TV and decided to continue advertising on AJAM were Gillette and Thermo Spas. AJAM managed to attract several other advertisers, but often they, too, decided to withdraw their advertisements.

Originally, the limited advertising shown on the channel was portrayed by AJAM as a strategic move during its "trial period," with CEO Ehab Al Shihabi attributing it to AJAM's desire to present unbiased, fact-based journalism without the clutter of advertising by aiming to reduce the commercial load to about 6 minutes an hour, compared to 15 minutes per hour at competitive networks. However, assessing AJAM's advertising situation one year after its launch, Business Insider stated that there were no signs of change in advertisers' initial beliefs that the network had little to offer them, with the result that few major brands advertised on the station.

Importantly, in comparison to these commercial failures AJAM has had impressive successes in the content department, and won several Peabody awards, including two for its flagship investigative show *Fault Lines*, and others for documentaries on cholera in Haiti and on a deadly factory fire in Bangladesh. A Huffington Post article recognized AJAM for its unique contributions to the news market: "Though it remains controversial for many, its reporting from the Middle East during and after the Arab Spring gave it a vastly increased profile — and a new credibility — inside the US" [19].

However, as these prizes failed to win viewers or advertisers for the network, AJAM started to cut back on expenses and lay off staff (between 60 and 100 staff members) in 2014, one year after its launch, leading to the ultimate closure of Al Jazeera America in April 2016.

Since there are not enough studies so far to illuminate both the reasons for its failure and address whether it reached US mainstream audiences, as it originally hoped, this paper

includes a social network analysis to identify the profile of Al Jazeera America followers with the hope to illuminate their news following and activity patterns. The social network analysis was originally conducted to understand the US news consumers who consume their news from Al Jazeera America but in light of I-Jazeera America's closure soon after the analysis was conducted it will be used to try to under post-mortem the reasons for its fiasco. The social network analysis study uses data from Twitter (an internet platform through which users connect and communicate with each other and which is highly popular among news consumers) to reconstruct the network of Al Jazeera America followers and identify the other news sources to which these followers are exposed. AS noted, it was conducted on March 21, 2015, one year before the final closure of Al Jazeera America and 18 months after its launch, the data of Al Jazeera America's 290,102 Twitter followers was collected and downloaded. We examined the news following habits of Al-Jazeera America Twitter following to understand whether they represent mostly liberals or, alternatively, from all walks of the political spectrum. The media outlets the users in our sample follow were compared with Groseclose and Milyo's [21] analysis of US media network's political sentiment in which ideology scores of 20 US media outlets were computer; thus, for example, Fox News was high on the conservative scale and MSNBC high on the liberal scale. The political sentiment score was decided by counting the times that a particular media outlet cites various think tanks and policy groups, and then comparing this number

with the times that members of Congress cite the same groups. Their ideology score ranges from 0 (indicating a conservative outlook) to 1 (indicating a liberal outlook). As indicated in **Figure 1**, 167,348 (58%) of Al Jazeera America followers follow at least one additional news outlet from our list. **Table 1** presents the outlets in an ascending ideology score order. The number of users who follow both Al Jazeera America and each outlet appears in the third column (**Figure 1 and Table 1**).

To reconstruct the network of Al Jazeera America re-tweets, the study used information on links within our sample of Twitter users. The result of this process is depicted in **Figure 2**. In particular, for the list of re-tweets (of tweets originally tweeted by Al Jazeera America) was downloaded. I then mapped who re-tweeted Al Jazeera America's original tweets, and reconstructed the network of Al Jazeera America followers using these links (**Figure 2**).

The distribution of the re-tweets made by the users in the sample demonstrates a heavy-tailed distribution [22]; that is, there are a small number of users who tweeted many tweets, while the majority of the Twitter users tweeted a small number of tweets. The same heavy-tailed distribution was evident when one looks at the number of followers of each user in the network: A small number of users had many followers, while the majority of these Twitter users had few followers (**Figures 3 and 4**).

To conclude, the analysis identifies that 42% of the Al Jazeera America's 290,102 followers on March 21, 2015 refrain from

Table 1 Breakdown of Al Jazeera followers who follow at least one other media outlet.

News outlet	Twitter Handle	Percentage of Al Jazeera followers who follow this outlet	Number of Al Jazeera followers who follow this outlet*
Fox News	FoxNews	0.026	7,543
The Drudge Report	DRUDGE_REPORT	0.027	8,337
Washington Times	WashTimes	0.029	8,413
Wall Street Journal	WSJ	0.041	11,894
US News & World Report	USnews	0.049	14,215
The L.A. Times	LAtimes	0.051	14,795
USA Today	USAtoday	0.051	14,795
Good Morning America	GMA	0.051	14,795
The News Hour	NewsHour	0.052	15,085
CBS News	CBSNews	0.053	15,375
Newsweek	Newsweek	0.054	15,666
Washington Post	Washingtonpost	0.054	15,666
The Today Show	TODAYShow	0.055	15,956
Time Magazine TIME	TIME	0.057	16,536
ABC World News	ABCWorldNews	0.057	16,536
CNN Breaking News	CNNbrk	0.058	16,826
NBC Nightly News	NBCNightlyNews	0.058	16,826
The New York Times	nytimes	0.06	17,406
Morning Edition (NPR)	MorningEdition	0.066	19,147

*Of the 290,102 Al Jazeera followers in our sample, 167,348 (58%) follow at least one other media outlet from the above list.

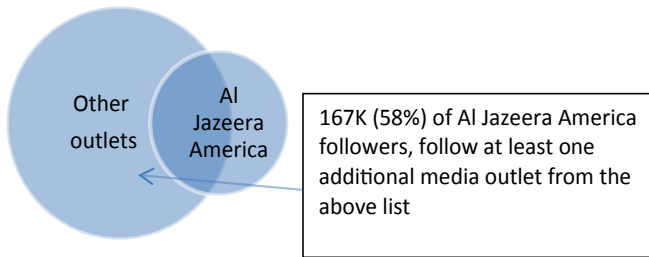


Figure 1 Overlap between users who follow Al Jazeera America and at least one other media outlet.

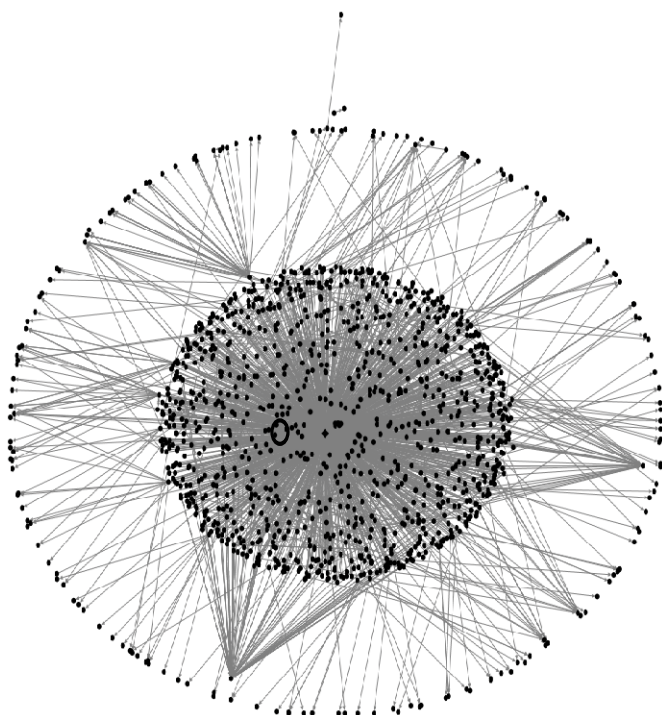


Figure 2 Overlap between users who follow Al Jazeera America and at least one other media outlet.

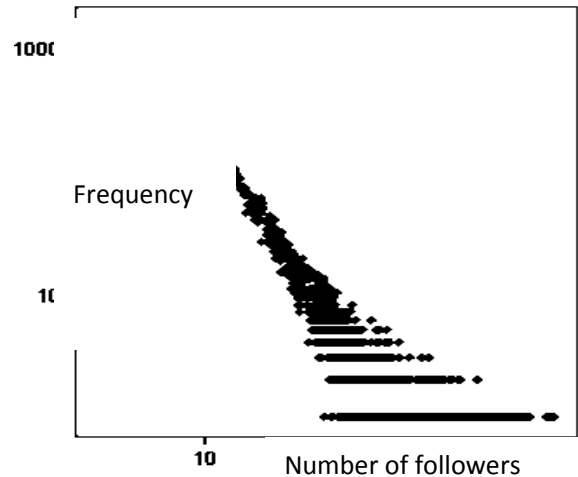


Figure 4 Degree centrality of Al Jazeera followers.

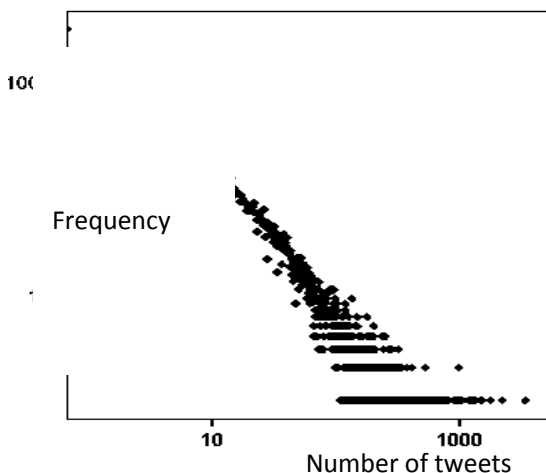


Figure 3 Re-Tweet distribution of Al Jazeera followers.

following any other US new station. Based on past studies that found that Al Jazeera’s news consumers in the US are mostly Muslims or belong to the radical left of the political map [23], it is possible that many of the 42% of Al Jazeera America Twitter followers who do not follow other news outlets belong to these categories. In addition, the majority of followers did not demonstrate high re-tweet activity. Overall, the findings demonstrate that Al-Jazeera’s followers were not active and nearly half followed only Al-Jazeera, thus to an extent illuminating patterns of a secluded station that did not manage to become part of the mainstream US media.

Discussion and Conclusions

The article examines Al Jazeera’s position and audience in the US since 9/11 via three analyses, and reveals that resistance and distortion of Al Jazeera’s attempts to broadcast to US audiences have persisted despite the different incarnations of Al Jazeera. Resistance is evident in US media networks’ self-censorship during the re-presentation of Al Jazeera’s news material in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Phase I); refusal of cable and satellite carriers to carry AJE and conservative pressure groups’ ability to pressure those that did consider carrying AJE (Phase II); and the little activity and tendency to re-tweets amongst Al Jazeera America on Twitter as (Phase III as further indicator of Al-Jazeera’s little clout and success of Al-Jazeera in the US despite its various incarnations.

The studies show, then, that the US media, administration, and cable companies, amongst other institutions, as well as US mainstream viewers for the most part consistently denied the Arab perspective entry into the US public sphere. Thus, the main finding of the paper based on the state of evidence is that the idea that Al Jazeera’s advent promoted an Arab perspective of events in the US is a myth, and Al Jazeera by and large failed to reach US market. In contrast to optimistic globalist perspectives that predicted that Al Jazeera would inevitably force the US to include the Arab perspective in the mix of opinions to which the US public is exposed, this study indicates, then, that the chances

of a genuine exchange of differing cultural perspectives are slim.

While the analysis of studies does not illuminate the exact reasons behind the evidence, one possible explanation to the general blockage of Al Jazeera perspective could be a general bias against Al Jazeera America and Al Jazeera English is, at least partially, part of the wider prejudice against all things Muslim that was revealed in many surveys, particularly after the 9/11 attacks. According to a 2010 ABC News/**Washington Post** poll, only 37% of Americans have a favourable opinion of Islam, the lowest rating since 2001. According to a 2010 **Time Magazine** poll, 28% of voters do not believe that Muslims should be eligible to sit on the U.S. Supreme Court, and nearly one-third think they should be barred from running for president [24]. In addition, a USA Today/Gallup poll [25] found that 22% of Americans would not want to have a Muslim as their neighbor, and 39% also said they favored requiring Muslims, including US citizens, to carry special identification. Thus, the refusal to give Al Jazeera a fair chance, which is part of the Al Jazeera English and Al Jazeera America campaign, is most likely related to ethnocentric feelings no less than it does to Al Jazeera English and Al Jazeera content, which is, as noted, was largely created or adapted to suit the US audiences' tastes. Youmans and Brown [8] study mentioned above, which found that the Al-Jazeera brand promotes strong

scepticism towards content that otherwise perceived credible strongly supports this notion.

However, taken together, the studies also illuminates that not all is lost as some liberals, as indicated in the news following habits of Al-Jazeera America followers on twitter described above, appear to be more likely and open to follow Al Jazeera's material: These followers could be described as news consumers that aim to engage and be exposed to an alternative Arab news angle of events. Future studies should target this news consumer's and further identify and characterize the motivations of to follow Al-Jazeera. Another recommended route for upcoming studies is to examine specifically whether the groups that follow Al-Jazeera comprise mostly minorities, including ethnic minorities, particularly Muslims, who are dissatisfied with the local US media and decide to follow Al Jazeera America as their sole news source as a demonstration of protest.

Finally, , future studies should continue to examine Al Jazeera's clout in other Western countries, as well as other exchanges between audiences and international foreign media, to determine whether the results presented here characterize other Western countries or whether intercultural dialogue flourishes in other regions and countries.

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