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How Arab is Al-Jazeera English?

Comparative Study of Al-Jazeera Arabic and Al-Jazeera English News Channels

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Abstract

This paper aims to identify the similarities and differences between Al-Jazeera English (AJE) and Al-Jazeera Arabic (AJA) according to their representation by country and region on the one hand and story placement and story type on the other. Particular attention is given to the Arab countries and the region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The study analyzes the content of the main evening (KSA time) news bulletins of the two channels over a six-month period (November 2006 – May 2007), in which 477 news stories are examined. The newscasts of AJE and AJA are analyzed over two rolling weeks and two constructed weeks.

Introduction

Al-Jazeera International [English] wants nothing less than to break the Western monopoly on the telling of history, by expanding the spectrum of perspectives participating in English language discussion of world issues. [It] aspires instead to create a global channel with a target audience of the planet's English speakers. (Malek, 2006, p.11).

AJE is thought to have the capacity to reach 100 million households worldwide in 60 countries (Gibson, 2007; Mio TV, 2008). In less than two years, the viewership of AJE has reached 110 million households (*MySin Chew*, July 30, 2008). Its targeted audience is large and diverse across continents including Europe, North America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East (Hanely, 2007, pp. 24–25).

AJE is described as the “New United Nations,” where journalists from over 50 nations are brought together. It is supported by an “open budget.” In addition, it broadcasts from an Arab Muslim country and claim to have a focus on the developing countries.

Changing the news agenda, expanding the audience choices, revolutionizing the international news, breaking the Western hegemony of international news production, adding a new perspective to global events, challenging the West or changing the direction of the flow of international news, and many other roles were assigned to AJE even before its launch on November 15, 2006. Its officials, journalists and many observers and commentators have various opinions and expectations concerning the new channel.

In AJE's statement and motto, the channel's officials illustrate their intention of “setting the news agenda.” AJE was launched with the message “global media has [*sic*] changed forever” (El Naggar, November 16, 2007). Nigel Parsons, the then managing director of AJE, asserted: “[The channel] can take on the likes of CNN, BBC, Sky News and Fox News,” stating that AJE's aim was to “revolutioniz[e] viewer choice and set out a different news agenda” (Jones, 2007, p. 38).

Dave Marash, a Jewish American news anchor and one of the most renowned names to join AJE, said: “We’re gonna seek out the areas neglected by the Western-oriented media.” The promise was that the audience would be provided with news coverage that was neither American- nor European-centric. Consequently, it could expect a wide diversity of the geographical map of the news bulletins. Other commentators have gone further, suggesting that since the news channel broadcasts from Doha and is subsidized by Qatar, a Third world country, then the implication is that there will be more representation of the developing world or the “majority world” (Franks, 2004).

Along the same lines, Waddah Khanfar, general director of Al-Jazeera Network, said: “One of our goals is to reverse the flow of information to the South” (Indo-Asian News Service, 2006). This view is supported by various observers in the international media. A month after the launch of AJE, Ramzy Baroud wrote that the channel was a “notable addition to the growing global efforts aimed at counterbalancing American–European domination over world media” (Baroud, 2006).

Nevertheless, an “alternative” or non-Western news agenda is not possible without the fulfillment of certain conditions. One is the location of the news channel in a Middle Eastern Arab country, the majority of whose population is Muslim. Another condition is what is described as an “open budget.” Claude Colart, senior news producer of AJE in Africa, explains that AJE has both “the will and the budget to cover the developing world more seriously” (Kwanele Sosibo, 2007). Sosibo believes that the total of AJE’s bureaus in South America and Africa outnumber those of CNN and the BBC put together.

In July 2007, eight months after the launch of AJE, Aaron Barnhart McClatchy of *The Times Union*, wrote: “I’ve been monitoring the new channel for several months over the Internet It’s global, meaty, consequential, and compelling in the best sense of the word. And I’m not the only one who thinks so.” AJE “allows us to see the news from an Arabic

point of view without having to hire Arabic translators” (Snoddy, 2007). Although observers and commentators present AJE as a news voice for the Middle East or Arab countries to reach English-speaking audiences worldwide, AJE officials and journalists insist that the channel is also a new voice for the Third world or the South.

AJE: a Change of Agenda, Direction of News and Perspective of Coverage

One of the main challenges facing AJE in the United States, Britain, France and other European countries is its brand, specifically, the reputation of its sister AJA. The channel has been accused by many American officials as being the representative of “terrorists and jihadists”. The Arab satellite television Al-Jazeera (Arabic) is the enemy, or so the American public is told: “Osama TV” (blog), “Jihad TV,” “killers with cameras,” “the most powerful ally of terror in the world” (Lynch, 2003, p.36; McKelvey, 2007). Nevertheless, despite this negative presentation of AJE by American officials, the channel’s “news and views” are described by American media experts as the “greatest good” for policymakers and experts in Washington (Hanely, 2007, pp.24–25).

AJE producers assert that the channel’s role exceeds presenting a fresh perspective on the Arab world and Middle Eastern conflicts: “[N]o other TV channel understands how American political policies affect the Middle East. And no other network even tries to interpret American culture for an Arab eye” (Haddon, 2007). AJE’s Washington bureau chief said in a panel discussion: “We act as a two-way highway ... there are lots of things Arabs and Americans share. Hopefully, we can widen the circle of understanding” (Haddon, 2007).

Besides introducing a broader view of the Middle East in its news reports and broadcasts, AJE is said to be the “people’s channel.” “[T]he channel broadcasts live and worldwide 16 hours a day, focusing heavily on the developing world.” According to its promotional material, it hopes to provide “accurate, impartial and objective news for a global audience from a grass-roots level” and to become “the channel of reference for Middle East

news” (McKelvey, 2007). Perhaps no other channel could produce a leading story on people suffering from leprosy in Iraq from the angle of human interest, as did AJE.¹ The channel also broadcasts a weekly program called *People and Power*, which discusses the various means employed by ordinary citizens around the world to empower themselves. *Listening Post*, presented by Richard Gizbert is one further example of the channel’s policy.

The grass-roots part is key. Al-Jazeera English offers an ambitious – perhaps quixotic – approach to news, placing an emphasis on ordinary people. ... “CNN doesn’t go for the little man,” explains Hugh Miles, a Cairo-based journalist. ... It shows Minister A meeting Minister B and talking about an important issue. Al-Jazeera produces shows about an ambulance driver in Gaza and a gold miner in the Congo.” (McKelvey, 2007)

AJE has been under scrutiny since it began broadcasting in November 2006. Its content has been monitored by various media monitoring groups and bodies, including the BBC Media Monitoring Services. Having been described, for example, as changing the flow of international news (Malek, 2006), as well as the “devil’s advocate” symbolizing the “multi-directional nature of globalization” (Caldwell, 2001), “propagandizing for Al-Qaeda” (Pearl, 2007), changing the news perspective on Middle Eastern issues, AJE is expected and seen to take various roles.

Some important factors have produced these expectations and the atmosphere of excitement surrounding the channel. They include the fact that the channel broadcasts from an Arab country, it is part of Al-Jazeera network, and is primarily associated with AJA. *These factors raise the question of the identity of AJE, which is at the heart of the discussion of its roles and duties. From this question stem two points for consideration: Firstly, can AJE be considered an Arab channel and on what basis? Secondly, what is its relationship with AJA?*

It is problematic to define AJE as an Arab channel, even though the following factors contribute to that label:

1. The channel is funded by an Arab Muslim amir, Shaykh Hamad ibn Khalifah al-Thani, Amir of Qatar.
2. AJE's headquarters are in Qatar, an Arab Muslim country.
3. The channel broadcasts half of its daily airtime from Doha.
4. It presents its contribution to the global stage of international news as adding a new perspective on reporting news about the Middle East.

Therefore, the roles and possible contribution of AJE cannot be examined without consideration being given to these points, in particular, the channel's funding, taking into account the sophistication of the Qatari agenda. The country is pursuing a leading position in the Arab world and in the Middle East in general, besides establishing and maintaining sound ties with the United States, Europe, and Israel.²

Nevertheless, there is also a range of factors that give rise to hesitation in labeling AJE an Arab channel. The most important of these is that the channel's staff and management consist of more than 50 nationalities, many of whom have American nationality or have had an American education and profession. Of its journalists, 140 have been hired from CNN, NBC, CBS and other US stations like Fox News Channel and the Associated Press Television (McKelvey, 2007). Some of these journalists continue to be "closely associated with the images of their former stations," namely, CNN and the BBC (El Amrani, 2006, p. 193). Furthermore, two of AJE's former managing directors came from these stations: Nigel Parsons from the BBC, and Tony Burman and the current managing director (2008) from the Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC). This composition of AJE's staff imports "Western", in particular, American professional and ideological settings that are thought to

influence unduly news production at the channel, raising slight doubts in the public mind about its Arab identity and, therefore, its new perspective on international news reporting.

Anchoring and presenting are done mostly by American and British presenters. Local correspondents are preferred in many of the countries from which AJE reports, which is one of the channel's most distinctive policies. The same policy is practiced to a lesser extent by other channels, including the BBC World (BBCW), although it is more apparent in AJE. This policy can enhance the fresh perspective on international news that AJE promises to provide, that is, the national or local impression of events.

Another factor contributing to the complexity of the Arab label is that AJE "has sought to meld an American news sense with the intimate – and often graphic – take on world conflicts that is a hallmark of its sister network" (Haddon, 2007). Here, Haddon means that in some aspects, the style is comparable to that of AJA, yet, at the same time, it is rooted in the American news culture. Furthermore, AJE is subject to some influence by the BBCW, for, according to viewers surveyed in Pakistan, where AJE has replaced the BBCW, there was little noticeable difference between the two channels (Raza, 2007).

Editorially, AJE is far removed from AJA. AJE is affirmed to be free from direct intervention by its sponsor or financial patron and independent in its content and editorial policy from AJA. The channel's Washington bureau chief, Will Stebbins, was quoted to assert:

Not only is Al-Jazeera English editorially independent of Al-Jazeera Arabic – although they each share the same guiding spirit – but each of the four broadcast centers of Al-Jazeera English retains editorial independence over its own content, allowing each center to present the news as seen from its particular position in the world. (McKelvey, 2007)

In addition, AJA's journalists said: "[C]ontact between the two [AJA's and AJE's staff] seems to have been minimized on purpose" (El Amrani, 2006, p. 193).

Investigating the Arab identity of AJE is a challenging exercise, the complexity of which is increased by a number of factors that need to be taken into account. In particular, the angle from which the question is approached has its own influence in a study where different approaches can produce different answers.

Besides the previous factors, the label a news channel can take is affected to large extent by its focus. Ideally, an international news channel has fair representations of all countries when it comes to news reports. The news values are used to examine the event at hand; hence the coverage is an event-based coverage. Unfortunately, research in international news proves otherwise.

Ethnocentrism is always one of the most serious shortcomings of international news organizations and provokes the strongest complaints (Najjar, 2007). The BBCW and CNN International (CNNI), as well as the international Press, have been criticized for being American- or Euro-centric (Gans, 2004). Major Western international (American) news channels have been criticized for being ethnocentric in their representation of the various countries covered in their newscasts or the distribution of news items on other countries. There has also been disapproval expressed of their underrepresentation of other countries, nations and ethnicities, especially those of the Third world. In his comparative study of international news in the Associated Press and ten American newspapers, Horvit (2007, p. 33) found that there was a "concentration of coverage. Even the Associated Press[...] still devoted most of its resources to covering a few countries. As noted earlier, 70 percent of the news produced by the Associated Press involved just 25 countries." Ethnocentrism was one of the complaints made by members of the audience of international news organizations. In Banaji and Al-Ghabban's (2008, p. 1008) study of British Asian news consumers after

al-Qa'idah's attack on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, the research participants found that audiences said that they

channel-hopped in the hope of finding more news than they felt they were getting on each of the particular channels, becoming increasingly frustrated with CNN and the BBC for what they saw as a monolithic and repetitive attention to America.

Ray Hanania, veteran Chicago City Hall reporter, was quoted in *The Times Union* as having written in his blog that he had been watching the channel. His observation was that AJE was amazing because it "report[ed] things about the world that we never hear about in America" (McClatchy, 2007, p. E2).

Many commentators assert that AJE is very distinct from its Western counterparts, including CNN and the BBC, in several ways. The "channel's topical magazine-style shows, filling the second half hour of each news-hour" is believed to add a "perspective to global events." Rhys Jones described AJE's coverage of the assassination and funeral of the Lebanese Opposition leader, Pierre Jemayel, on November 21, 2007. Comparing AJE's coverage with that of the CNNI and the BBCW, he wrote:

While BBC and CNN went with run-of-the-mill coverage [especially of Gemayel's funeral], the analysis and depth of AJE's thorough and thoughtful coverage set the new Arab channel apart. While Western channels focused largely on the rift between Gemayel's anti-Syrian faction and Hizbulla, AJE offered in-depth insight into the growing sectarianism in Lebanon, especially divisions within the Christian community – an issue which was largely missing from the mainstream news outlets. (Jones, 2007, p. 37)

In his analysis of the unprecedented success and popularity of AJA, Miladi (2003, p. 950) believes that it stems from the audience's perception of CNN and BBC coverage or, as he

puts it, “the perceived inaccurate and biased reporting of Western media, above all by CNN, since the Gulf War of 1992.” Whether AJE is challenging the West or competing with and complementing the Western channels, that is, the BBCW and CNNI, this aspect of its role is clearly of great importance.

Another question at the center of the discussion about the role and character of AJE is its possible relationship with and independence from AJA. Jamil Azar pledged that the new channel would address an audience that would be different from that of AJA by the nature of its language and culture: “But the spirit of challenging taboos and traditions is going to be the same” (Charman, 2007). The same question was raised by Jo Swift (2006), who had doubts about AJE being a “pale shadow of its sister network.”

AJE is confronted with various challenges concerning its audience. Its affiliation with its sister AJA might cast a negative shadow over it in relation to audiences in the United States and Western Europe in particular. On the other hand, AJE’s marked differences from its Arabic counterpart might disappoint its Arab audiences, who expect to have more “balance” in the news coverage of their concerns, especially the Palestinian question and the Iraq war.

If AJE is to appeal to a wide international audience, including English-speaking Arabs and Muslims, it needs to provide a unique combination of news content. The channel should be very careful in its presentation of particularly sensitive and controversial issues that can provoke fierce disagreement. However, AJE is also expected to draw a geographical chart of its coverage that is distinct from that of other channels. That is the issue tackled in this paper.

Research Question

To what extent do AJE and AJA resemble each other or are sisters in their representation of countries and regions in their news broadcasts, in particular, the frequency and duration of news stories, topic preferences, and story placement?

Methodology

A total of 477 news stories were analyzed over six months. Of this total, 237 news stories were broadcast by AJE and 240 by AJA. The newscasts of the two news channels were video recorded from November 15, 2006 to April 30, 2007. The sample included two rolling weeks and two constructed weeks, based on a strategy that ensured the maximum representativeness of the broadcasts. A sampling strategy often used for obtaining a representative sample of television coverage is that one continuous week – Monday to Sunday – [is] followed by a “rolling” or composite week, that is, Monday of one week, Tuesday of the following week, Wednesday of the following week, and so on. (Hansen, Cottle, Negrine, & Newbold, 1998, p. 103)

The two rolling weeks began on the first day of AJE broadcasting, November 15, 2006, and ended on November 28, 2006. The two constructed weeks included broadcasts from January 4 to April 30, 2007. A KSA prime-time evening newscast was recorded and coded from the two channels each day. The constructed weeks includes newscasts provided by AJA and AJE on the following dates: Thursday, January 4; Friday, January 12; Saturday, January 20; Sunday, January 28; Monday, February 5; Tuesday, February 13; Wednesday, February 21; Thursday, March 1; Friday, March 9; Saturday, March 17; Sunday, March 25; Monday, April 2; Tuesday, April 10; and Wednesday, April 18, 2007.

The newscasts were recorded live and then coded. A researcher was trained to code the news stories according to a number of predetermined dimensions, including country frequency, region frequency, country duration, region duration, North/South position, story placement, and story type. These aspects were examined and differences and similarities identified between the two channels. The unit of analysis was the individual news story. Each story was coded first according to the news channel and then the nation first mentioned in it.

The frequency with which individual nations were mentioned in the news stories determined the score that they were given for content analysis.

News items were coded according to country frequency. The subject of each news item was coded as the country first mentioned in it. Other countries mentioned later in the same news item were not counted. Therefore, for each news story, only one country was counted.

News stories were coded for region frequency, covering six regions. The regions were coded according to the coded country and consisted of the following: the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Europe including Scandinavia, North America, Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. This scheme was based on Horvit's categorization, which defines the world's regions as follows: Western Europe, Asia, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, the Americas, and Africa (Horvit, 2003). In this study, North and Latin America are treated separately because of the huge gap in the coverage of these regions by AJE and AJA, for the United States is the most reported country globally (Wu, Denis, 2000). Both Western and Eastern Europe are treated as one entity here as they are physically. The Middle East and North Africa were coded in one category because they include all the Arab countries.

The duration of each news story was coded according to the country, and its duration according to each region was calculated. Each story was monitored for up to 10 minutes, even if it ran for longer.

Concerning the story placement, each news story was coded first according to the country and its placement in the newscast. Each story was coded as Story 1, Story 2, and Story 3 up to Story 10. Many of the newscasts consisted of fewer than ten news stories, and none exceeded this number.

Each news item was coded according to the position of the country that was the subject of the report. If the country was in the northern half of the planet, then the story was coded as North, and if it was in the southern half, then the story was coded as South.

The story type was coded according to Hess's six categories: accident/disaster, combat, crime, culture, diplomacy, domestic government, business, environment/science, human interest, human rights, sports and others (Hess, 1996, p. 127).

Limitations

There was a need for both visual and qualitative analysis of news content. The qualitative analysis of the content was to be conducted so that the framing of different issues in the news was examined with special reference to conflicts in the Middle East. An analysis of other non-news TV programs broadcast by AJE would provide a more accurate assessment of the presentation of countries and regions. The reason is that these programs tend to be more thematically structured and they provide more detailed information and knowledge of areas that are only occasionally mentioned in mainstream international news.

Findings

Country Frequency

It is not surprising that most of the news (65 percent) broadcast by AJE and AJA was focused on only nine countries. The highest frequency of news was concentrated on Iraq, the Occupied Territories of Palestine (OTP), Lebanon, and the United States in that order, comprising around 40 percent of the total news broadcast by the two channels. These countries were followed by the United Kingdom, Russia, Somalia, and Iran, completing the 65 percent.

Iraq and the OTP claimed the highest percentage of coverage by both AJE and AJA. However, both channels broadcast about the same number of news stories about the OTP and

Lebanon. AJE broadcast only 25 news stories about Iraq compared with 33 by AJA, as shown in Table 1.

A comparison of the number of news stories broadcast by AJA and AJE about each country indicated that AJA focused more on the Arab world and the Middle East, such as Iraq, the OTP, Somalia, Israel, Iran, Egypt and the United States. AJE, on the other hand, broadcast more news stories about the United Kingdom, Russia, and other countries.

Countries like Australia, Congo, Brazil, China, Fiji, India, Mozambique, Myanmar, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, North Korea, Poland, Rwanda, Singapore, Spain, Sri Lanka, and Zimbabwe were never reported by AJA, although they were the subject of news stories broadcast by AJE. However, Jordan, Libya, and Qatar were mentioned at least once in the news bulletins broadcast by AJA during the period under examination, though they were never reported by AJE.

Table 1

Country	AJE		AJA		Count	Percent
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent		
Iraq	25	10.5	33	13.8	58	12.2
OTP	26	11.0	28	11.7	54	11.3
USA	19	8.0	24	10.0	43	9.0
Lebanon	14	5.6	14	5.8	26	5.9
UK	16	6.8	6	2.5	22	4.6
Russia	13	5.5	7	2.9	20	4.2
Somalia	7	3.0	10	4.2	17	3.6
Iran	6	2.5	9	3.8	15	3.1
Israel	6	2.5	9	3.8	15	3.1
Egypt	4	1.7	10	4.2	14	2.9

Time Devoted to Each Country

What is the mean of the time devoted by AJE and AJA to each country? Are there differences here between the two channels?

Country	AJE (Mean)	AJA (Mean)	Both Channels (Mean)
Iraq	2.95	2.93	2.94
OTP	3.51	2.62	2.78
Lebanon	5.85	2.72	4.29
USA	3.17	3.14	3.16
UK	2.20	2.70	2.34
Russia	7.48	1.86	1.61
Somalia	1.73	3.23	2.61
Iran	1.76	2.70	2.33

There was little or no difference found in the mean of the time devoted by AJE and AJA to news stories about Iraq, the United States, United Kingdom, and Russia. However, differences appeared in the mean of the time devoted to the following countries. AJE allocated more time to its news stories about the Occupied Territories of Palestine and Lebanon, whereas AJA concentrated more on countries like Somalia and Iran, as shown in Table 2. These findings support those of the previous question about the frequency of news stories, for AJA broadcast more news stories than AJE on Somalia and Iran, as shown in Table 1. Clearly, AJA broadcast longer news stories than AJE except when reporting on the Occupied Territories of Palestine, Lebanon, and the United States.

Region Frequency

The MENA stood out as the region most frequently reported by the two channels. It occupied 55 percent of all the news stories broadcast by AJA, though only 42 percent of

those broadcast by AJE, as shown in Table 3. AJA broadcast more stories than AJE about North America, and considerably fewer about Europe (including Scandinavia) and Africa. The Caribbean was not covered at all by AJA. However, it should be noted that Europe occupied a high percentage – nearly a quarter – of all the news stories broadcast by AJE.

Table 3

Channel	AJE		AJA		Both Channels
Region	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Total
MENA	97	42.2	129	55.8	226
Europe inc. Scandinavia	56	24.3	36	15.6	92
North America	19	8.26	24	10.3	43
Asia	24	10.4	23	9.9	47
Africa	26	11.3	15	6.5	41
Latin America	4	1.73	4	1.72	8
Caribbean	4	1.73	0	0	4
Total	230	99.96	231	99.8	461

It is interesting to note that there was more frequency of coverage of Europe than the United States by AJE, although AJA broadcast more stories than AJE about the United States. AJE's policy on coverage was based on various factors. When it began broadcasting, it had few viewers in the United States because most of the American cable providers refused to deal with the channel. According to the *New York Times*, the cable operators regarded AJE as "too hot to handle" (Pfanner, 2008). At the same time, however, the channel was available in Europe.

Time Duration – Region

Surprisingly, AJE devoted more time than AJA to the MENA by reporting longer, although fewer, news stories. The mean of the duration of AJE's news stories about the

Table 4b

Channel	AJE		AJA		Both Channels	
	No.	Mean	No.	Mean	No.	Mean
MENA	97	3.6842	129	2.8180	226	3.1897
Europe inc. Scandinavia	56	1.7107	36	2.2361	92	1.9163
North America	19	3.1781	24	3.1465	43	3.1605
Asia	24	2.0118	23	2.4283	47	2.2156
Africa	26	1.7449	15	3.0778	41	2.2325
Latin America	4	2.1375	4	1.5875	8	1.8625
Caribbean	4	0.8625	–	–	4	0.8625

Position: North/South Representation

The regions classified as South comprised the Middle East and North Africa, Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and those classified as North comprised North America, the Caribbean, and Europe including Scandinavia.

The data showed that both AJE and AJA broadcast more news stories about the South than about the North. The South was the subject of around 74 percent of all the news stories broadcast by AJA, compared with the smaller proportion of 65 percent of AJE's output of news covering that region, as shown in Table 5. This result confirms the achievement of the network's pledge. On the day that AJE was launched, Waddah Khanfar, the general director of Al-Jazeera network, was quoted as emphasizing: "[O]ne of our goals is to reverse the flow of information to the South" (Indo-Asian News Service, 2006).

Table 5

Channel	AJE		AJA		Both Channels	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
North Regions	79	34.3	60	26.0	139	30.2
South Regions	151	65.7	171	74.0	322	69.8
Total	230	100.0	231	100.0	461	100.0

Story Placement

After the Middle East and North Africa, AJA allocated most of its leading news stories (the first news story of each bulletin) to North America, particularly the United States. Iraq, the OTP, Lebanon, and the United States had an equal chance of being the subject of a leading news story broadcast by AJE, whereas AJA allocated 33 percent of its leading new stories to Iraq, followed by the OTP (22.2 percent), Lebanon (14.3 percent), and the United States (11.1 percent), as shown in Table 1 of the Appendix.

Table 6a

Story Order	Country	AJE		AJA		Both Channels	
		No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
1 st	Iraq	5	17.9	9	33.3	14	25.5
	OTP	5	17.9	6	22.2	11	20.0
	USA	5	17.9	3	11.1	8	14.5
	Lebanon	4	14.3	4	14.3	5	9.1
2 nd	Iraq	6	21.4	7	25.9	13	23.6
	OTP	10	35.7	3	11.1	13	23.6
	Lebanon	3	10.7	3	11.1	6	10.9
	USA	1	3.6	5	18.5	6	10.9

3 rd	Iraq	8	28.6	1	3.7	9	16.4
	OTP	2	7.1	4	14.8	6	10.9
	Somalia	3	10.7	3	11.1	8	10.9
	Lebanon	0	0.0	3	11.1	3	5.5
	USA	1	3.6	3	11.1	4	7.3

Table 6b: Story Placement (Both Channels)

Channel	Story 1		Story 2		Story 3		Story 4		Story 5		Story 6		Story 7		Story 8		Story 9		Story 10		All Stories	
	AJ E	AJ A	AJ E	AJ A	AJ E	AJ A																
MENA	18	19	24	16	12	14	8	19	7	13	7	13	9	12	5	11	4	7	3	5	97	129
West Europe inc. Scand.	2	2	2	1	8	4	9	2	10	3	12	5	8	7	4	3	1	5	0	4	56	36
North America	5	3	1	5	1	3	3	1	2	4	2	4	2	2	–	2	2	–	1	–	19	24
Asia	0	0	1	3	1	1	3	1	7	5	3	3	3	3	4	3	1	1	1	3	24	23
Africa	2	1	0	0	6	4	3	3	2	1	2	1	2	1	5	2	2	2	2	–	26	15
Latin/South America	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	4	4
Caribbean	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	4	0
Total	28	26	28	26	28	26	26	26	28	26	28	26	26	25	19	22	11	16	8	12	230	231
Missing	–	1	–	1	–	1	2	1	–	1	–	1	2	–	1	–	2	1	–	2	7	9
Total	–	27	–	27	–	27	28	27	–	27	–	27	28	–	20	–	13	17	–	14	237	–

It is noticeable here that there was an emphasis on the MENA by both channels. That region was the subject of 24 second news stories, being the highest proportion (86 percent) of AJE’s second news stories in all the channel’s news bulletins (see Table 6). AJA also shared the tendency to report more news about the MENA in its leading news stories. The high

percentage of the frequency of news stories on the region continued toward the end of the news bulletins (Story 8), but decreased in Stories 9 and 10.

The MENA occupied around 50 percent of AJA's news stories across order and time, with 73 percent of its leading and fourth stories, and a decrease in its percentage of second and third stories, as shown in Table 6. Similarly, the MENA occupied a sizable proportion – 64 percent – of the leading news stories broadcast by AJE. News stories covering Europe including Scandinavia began increasing from the third to the sixth story, where it reached a peak of around 43 percent of all news stories. This region occupied a range of 20 to 40 percent of AJE's news items from the leading to the eighth story. There was more frequent coverage of North America by AJE in its leading news stories than by AJA, where the region was more frequently reported in the channel's second, fifth and sixth stories.

Topic

AJE reported considerably fewer news stories than AJA on the following topics: combat and military action, domestic government and internal politics, and external diplomacy and political conflict. However, AJE reported more news stories about nongovernmental attacks, internal clashes and civil war, human rights, and items of human interest. The difference between the level of reporting by the two channels on combat and military action might stem from the fact that AJA broadcast more news stories on this topic from the MENA, particularly from Iraq, as shown in Table 1. It could also be connected with AJA's tendency to be seen as the people's channel, reporting news from the "grass-roots level" (McKelvey, 2007), such as the story on people suffering from leprosy in Iraq, already mentioned

Of AJE's reports about domestic government and internal politics, 40 percent came from Europe and Africa, which compared favourably with only 15 percent of AJA's stories of this type coming from the same regions. A similar difference between the two channels

also appeared in the level of news reporting on human right and items of human interest. As shown in Table 7, AJE broadcast more frequent stories about accidents and disasters.

Table 7

Channel	AJE		AJA		Both Channels	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Accident/Disaster	10	4.2	4	1.7	14	2.9
Combat (Wars/Military Combat/ Weapons)/Nuclear Power Development	26	11.0	36	15.0	62	13.0
Domestic Government/Internal Politics/ Elections	38	16.0	54	22.5	92	19.3
Business/Environment/Science	6	2.5	8	3.3	14	2.9
Human Interest/Human Rights/Protest/ Demonstrations (Memorial)	27	11.4	16	6.7	43	9.0
Health/Education	9	3.8	4	1.7	13	2.7
Religion	6	2.5	9	3.8	15	3.1
Nongovernmental Attacks/Internal Clashes/ Civil War/Crime/Hijacking (Violent)/ Terrorism	53	22.4	28	11.7	81	17.0
External Diplomacy & Political Conflict	56	23.6	77	32.1	133	27.9
Celebrity/Entertainment/Modeling	6	2.5	4	1.7	10	2.1
Total	237	100.0	240	100.0	477	100.0

Conclusion

A comparison of the news content of AJE and AJA has produced both clear similarities and marked differences. The findings of this study show that the OTP, Iraq, and Lebanon – in that order – were the subject of the highest number of news stories broadcast by both channels, with the OTP and Lebanon, followed by Iraq, allocated the highest mean of time duration per news story by AJE. The OTP was given more attention by AJE than AJA,

which focused more on Iraq. This was clear from the day when AJE was launched, on November 15, 2006, for the first hard item broadcast by the channel covered the Palestinian–Israeli conflict (BBC Monitoring Services, 2006).

Both channels allocated a sizable proportion of their news reports to the MENA, although AJE broadcast far fewer reports than AJA on the region. Marked differences in the level of reporting by the two channels occurred elsewhere. Although AJA reported more news stories than AJE from Somalia, Egypt, and Sudan in that order, each of AJE's news stories on those countries were allocated a longer time duration, as shown in Tables 1 and 2 in the Appendix.

Clearly, both channels reported more news from the South than from the North. However, while AJA focused mainly on the MENA, AJE also included other regions. AJE broadcast more news stories about Asia and Africa, though very few about Latin America. This suggests that, to some extent, AJE's promise of focusing on the developing world has been supported by the findings of this study, although that is more true of Asia and Africa than Latin America, which is the subject of only 1.7 percent of the channel's news stories.

AJE performed well in presenting more news items about the Middle East than the remainder of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It also reported news from areas of the developing world not covered by AJA, for example, Congo, China, Fiji, Myanmar, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe. However, Africa, Asia, and Latin America together were given less coverage than Europe including Scandinavia.

According to the data, unlike AJA, AJE showed a clear interest in Europe including Scandinavia, for this region was the subject of 24 percent of the channel's news items, as shown in Table 3 (p.17). This finding confirms the experts' expectations concerning AJE's audience. The *Financial Times* (2006) reported: “[A]lthough the channel is available to a potential audience of 80 million households worldwide, in its first year, it is targeting 5

million viewers, initially most of them will be in Europe and the Middle East.”³ Evidently, AJE reported more news stories from Europe, with the United Kingdom being given the highest representation.

Although AJE broadcast from Kuala Lumpur and Washington, this was not reflected in the number of news stories about North America and Asia. The channel “broadcasts 30-minute news bulletins anchored from Kuala Lumpur at 1300 and 1400 GMT, ... and from Washington at 2300 GMT (BBC Monitoring Services, 2006). The situation in the United States is understandable, for the channel has faced difficulties in reaching its American audience. However, it is available to all English-speaking audiences in India, Pakistan, China, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore.

AJE’s news stories are longer and more detailed than those broadcast by AJA. Peter Feuilherade (2006) compared the length of AJE’s news stories with those of CNN and the BBC:

[T]he channel’s news programs are good on depth but slow in pace compared with BBC World or CNN. AJE does not broadcast much actual news, averaging only around one item every five minutes in a typical hour-long bulletin.

Obviously, Arab countries are at the focus of AJE’s attention. Yet, the channel does not equally represent other areas that are neglected by the English speaking international news organizations. Certainly, AJE is a major source on the Middle Eastern news for English speaking audiences all over the globe. Furthermore, the channel is potentially providing a new local perspective on the major issues concerning Middle Eastern peoples, most of whom are Arabs and Muslims.

The channel also provides quality in depth news on areas occasionally covered in the international news media including Asia, Africa and Latin America, yet this does not satisfy

its promise of revolutionizing international news, especially when it comes to Latin America. AJE is independent and different from AJE in relation to their editorial policy. This is clear in the differences found concerning country representations, region representations, story placement and story type.

Evidently, the label of the channel is to be determined. There is a chance that AJE can have its own Middle Eastern label, there is little evidence to support that the channel is a third world channel apart from its focus on Middle Eastern issues and countries. There are two features to be examined concerning its potential distinctive label. These characteristics include firstly; “the channel of the people” emphasizing the regular citizens in all countries as news sources; secondly; its tendency to have local correspondents in the various areas covered. They can be emphasized or can fade away in the future.

¹ On August 9, 2008 at 1400 hours KSA time.

² The channel “is rarely critical of its chief patron, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifah al-Thani, the emir of Qatar. Al-Jazeera gained a reputation for hard-hitting coverage in a region of mostly state-run broadcasting. It became the most-watched channel in the Arab world with an estimated 40 million viewers” (Egelko, 2008).

³ Tony Blair, the then UK prime minister, was the first world leader to be interviewed by the channel on November 20, 2006, five days after its launch (McKelvey, 2007).