

ATTITUDES OF ALGERIAN JOURNALISTS TOWARDS NEWS PROGRAMMES ON AL JAZEERA: A FIELD STUDY

Chibani Rabah¹

¹University of Algiers 3, Algeria, Chibanirabah@yahoo.fr

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Abstract:

The objective of this study was to identify the attitudes of Algerian journalists towards Al Jazeera's news programmes, which have become a major media phenomenon in the Algerian, Arab, and global media landscape due to the topics they cover and the taboos they have broken compared to the official Arab media .

The researcher used a questionnaire to study 71 Algerian journalists through a purposive sample, as there is no clear catalogue of the number of Algerian journalists.

The study found that both male (43) and female (22) Algerian journalists watch Al Jazeera's news programmes. Additionally, the majority of Al Jazeera's viewers have an intermediate or higher level of education. Media professionals' attitudes towards Al Jazeera's programmes range from viewing it as a professional institution to viewing it from the angle of ideological newsmaking.

Key words: Attitudes, Algerian journalists, News programmes, Al- jazeera channel.

Introduction:

Psychologists agree that attitudes are emotional and affective responses formed through previous experiences and associations between stimuli and responses. It is important to note that attitudes should be evaluated objectively and without bias. It is crucial to maintain a clear and logical structure when discussing attitudes and their formation. If the association between a specific stimulus and a specific response leads to the individual receiving a penalty and the removal of anxiety and tension, then positive emotions are likely to be repeated. Whenever this positive association occurs, it can result in the formation of either positive or negative predispositions, feelings, or attitudes towards things. It is important to avoid subjective evaluations and use clear, objective language with precise word choice. The text should also adhere to conventional structure and formatting features, while maintaining a formal register and avoiding biased language. Additionally, the text should be grammatically correct and free from errors.

The emergence of Al Jazeera is widely regarded as a significant moment in media history and has received extensive coverage. Experts acknowledge that the substantial increase in satellite channels in the Arab world since the 1990s has transformed the global media landscape into a complex, interconnected, and multidirectional network of diverse voices, media, and trends. The text examines the relationship between Al Jazeera and its Qatari owners, the structural restrictions that affect the channel, and how Qatari interests influence the channel's editorial line. It is an important topic of discussion in elite circles.[1]

The news production process at Al Jazeera is influenced by two key factors: the journalists' perception of their audience and their news format. It is evident that there are varying perceptions among Al Jazeera journalists regarding their audience and news format. The journalists' perceptions impact the selection, preparation, and presentation of stories. The study shows a correlation between

journalists' perceptions of their audience and the news format, as well as a connection between the news agenda and their attitudes towards the stories.[2]

Al Jazeera has been influential in transforming the Arab public sphere by providing a platform to discuss significant political and social issues. However, press freedom in the Arab world still faces challenges, such as government censorship, arrests, and violence against journalists. To enhance press freedom in the Arab world, Arab governments must take steps to ensure press freedom, including abolishing censorship, releasing imprisoned journalists, and protecting journalists from violence. Arab civil society organizations should support press freedom by monitoring violations and calling for reform. Arab journalists should work professionally and courageously to provide the information needed for informed decisions about the future.[3]

Al Jazeera has gained widespread recognition in the Arab world and beyond for its coverage of controversial issues in the region. While some praise the channel for providing a platform for diverse opinions, others criticize it for alleged bias and hate-mongering, as well as its influence on Qatar's foreign policy, Arab public opinion, women's empowerment, coverage of regional conflicts, and relationship with American public diplomacy.[4]

Experts note that governments initially attempted to resist Al Jazeera, but ultimately found little success. Instead, they adapted to the network and learned to coexist with it. Rather than attempting to suppress it, many governments created their own 'grassroots' satellite channels or chose not to interfere with program production.[5]

In 2013, Al Jazeera Company received the lowest ratings among political science and media experts and specialists. However, the company's overall performance was improved by a high level of professionalism among its athletes. Nationalities also had an impact on ratings and specializations, as statistically significant differences were found in the subject matter, professionalism, and performance of Al Jazeera as a whole. These results indicate that Al Jazeera's strategy is moving towards certain countries, which has led to criticism from government officials in some Arab nations. Despite its limitations, this study contributes to our understanding of media in authoritarian societies and provides valuable insights for policymakers seeking to develop more effective use of innovative media.[6]

Although Al Jazeera was established with the aim of providing better coverage of news and events in Qatar, the Arab world, and beyond, some critics have accused the network of promoting Islamist ideology. This is due to the transformation of both Al Jazeera Mubasher Misr and the classic Arabic channel, which has led to strained political relations with neighboring countries such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt. According to the study, Al Jazeera and Qatar's foreign policy are not identical. Instead, each institution defines its internal territory and enforces external relations.[7]

Studies have shown that Al Jazeera's coverage may have been influenced by Qatar's geopolitical interests, as the country funds the network. For instance, after Qatar cut ties with Bahrain in 2017, Al Jazeera's coverage of the Bahraini uprising became more sympathetic. Furthermore, Al Jazeera's coverage of the Arab uprisings was inconsistent, indicating a potential use of double standards. For instance, opponents of the Syrian regime have been depicted as rebels and champions of freedom, whereas pro-democracy protesters in Bahrain have been portrayed as sectarian.[8]

In retrospect, the state of Arab media and its relationship with the political sphere differed from what we observe today. The launch of Al Jazeera in 1996 was a significant event that brought about

subsequent changes in both media and politics. The most notable of these changes was the Arab Spring, which began in Tunisia in December 2010. It is argued that Al Jazeera has had a democratic impact on the new Arab public sphere. At the same time, this work aims to address a gap in the current literature by exploring the largely unexplored Arab world, which has been overlooked by many previous studies. In contrast to the dominant narrative about democracy, which often overlooks the increasing role of the media in political change, this text takes a bottom-up approach. It argues that, particularly in the Arab situation, it has become almost impossible to separate the changes in the media landscape from those taking place in the political field.[9]

In a highly competitive media environment, Al Jazeera's two websites did not refrain from negative coverage of any of the conflict's participants. The findings suggest that, overall, the two Al Jazeera websites did not offer distinct perspectives on the war between the United States and Al Qaeda to Arabic and English Internet users[10].

Materials and Methods:

The researcher employed a questionnaire to describe and analyse the attitudes of Algerian journalists towards Al Jazeera's news programs. A 'Likert' scale was used to measure attitudes based on 34 statements, with response options ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly oppose.'

The Cronbach's Alpha statistical coefficient was estimated at 0.81 after testing the scale .

A purposive sample of 71 Algerian journalists was used due to the lack of a reliable index or statistics for the profession's organization in Algeria .

The study's quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 22. The data was summarized using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. Additionally, inferential statistics, such as standard deviation, were employed with a significance level of 0.05.

Results:

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the study population

Variable	Number	Frequency(%)
Male	49	69.0
Female	22	31.0
Total	71	100.0

The results of the table with information on demographic characteristics. 69.0% (49 respondents) of the participants were male and 31.0% (22 respondents) were female. The total number of participants was 71.

Table 2. Educational level of the study population

Variable	Number	Frequency(%)
Bachelor	43	60.6
Postgraduates	28	39.4
Total	71	100.0

The table provides information about the educational level of the study group. It shows that 60.6% (43 respondents) of the participants had a bachelor's degree, while 39.4% (28 respondents) had a postgraduate degree. The total number of participants was 71.

Table 3. Occupation for the study population

Variable	Number	Frequency(%)
Journalist	36	50.7
Head of Department	13	18.3
Editor in Chief	18	25.4
Editorial Director	4	5.6
Total	71	100.0

The table provides information on the professions of the respondents. It shows that 50.7% (36 respondents) of the participants worked as journalists, 18.3% (13 respondents) were department heads, 25.4% (18 respondents) were editors-in-chief and 5.6% (4 respondents) were chief editors. The total number of participants was 71.

Table 4.A t-test to find out the differences in the mean scores of the sample members and the media professionals' attitudes towards Al Jazeera News Channel's programmes according to the variable "gender."

Gender	number	arithmetic mean	standard deviation	t-value	significance level
Male	49	82.06	13.052	.579	0.002
Female	22	80.36	6.329	.738	

The table shows the results of the t-test conducted to find out the differences in the mean scores between the sample members and journalists regarding their attitudes towards Al Jazeera News Channel's programmes according to the variable 'gender'. The table shows that the mean score for male sample members was 82.06, while the mean score for female sample members was 80.36. The standard deviation for male sample members was 13.052, while the standard deviation for female sample members was 6.329. The calculated t-value was 0.579, the degrees of freedom were 69 and the significance level was 0.002. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between male and female sample members regarding their attitudes towards Al Jazeera news programmes

Discussion:

The study results indicate that 49 male respondents watch Al Jazeera news programmes, while 22 female respondents do so.

This contrasts with the study conducted by Qaqish, Odai Ahmad Al-Momani, and Mohammad Hashem ,which found that documentaries are significant in the lives of Jordanian women, as they provide both information and entertainment.[11]

According to Marc's study, the majority of Jordanians watch Al Jazeera (72%), followed by Al Arabiya (54%) and Al Hurra (1.5%). In Cairo, the majority of residents watch Al Jazeera (88%), followed by Al Arabiya (35%) and Al Hurra (5%).[12]

A study consistent with the findings indicated a strong correlation between quasi-social interaction and the time users spend on Al Jazeera and its website. Additionally, it revealed that individuals residing in the Middle East exhibit higher levels of quasi-social interaction with Al Jazeera

compared to those living outside the region. Furthermore, the study reveals that individuals aged 18-24 exhibit greater levels of quasi-social interaction with Al Jazeera compared to older age groups. Additionally, those with higher levels of education display increased levels of quasi-social interaction with Al Jazeera in comparison to those with lower levels of education.[13]

The study results indicate that respondents with an intermediate level of education watch Al Jazeera news programmes. Out of a total of 71 respondents, 43 had a bachelor's degree and 28 had a post-graduate degree.

Auter, Philip Arafa, Mohamed Al-Jaber conducted a study which confirmed that individuals with intermediate education are the most frequent viewers of the channel. Specifically, 46.4% of viewers have a bachelor's degree or equivalent, 29.7% have completed high school and some university years, 18.8% have a master's or doctorate degree or equivalent, and 5.1% have other educational levels. Additionally, the study found that individuals with lower incomes watch the channel more frequently than those who are more affluent.[14]

The study confirms that respondents watch Al Jazeera's news programmes due to their professionalism. However, professionalism is a relative issue, as confirmed by a study conducted by Toni Rouhana. The study showed that Al Jazeera articles used sectarian-based language, and that articles covering violence received the highest number of sectarian-based comments. Furthermore, the study revealed that user comments containing sectarian-based discourse were linked to expressions of sectarian identity. This type of discourse was found to be more prevalent in comments discussing violent events.[15]

Conclusions:

The study reached an important result, which is that the Algerian journalists have a positive attitude towards the Al Jazeera channel and the various news programmes it produces, as the general results of this study proved that these media professionals follow the channel continuously and interact with it, and that they consider it their favourite channel among the Arab news satellite channels, and this shows the position that the Al Jazeera channel has occupied among the audiences in the Arab countries in general, and among the Algerian journalists in particular, due to the nature of the content that the channel broadcasts from news, news reports and various talk shows.

The channel's advanced technological resources in terms of studios and modern broadcasting equipment, as well as its human cadres of journalists and correspondents spread around the world, have allowed it to become a leader in the Arab and even global media space, This has allowed it to obtain live images from the scene of events and exclusive news, which has made it one of the most important sources of news, similar to news agencies or some leading international news channels such as CNN, and from this point of view, we find that Algerian journalists, as found in this study, follow the "Al Jazeera" channel with great interest, considering that it is not just a channel.

These findings are in line with the media experts' opinion that Al Jazeera has succeeded to a great extent in attracting viewers in the Arab countries and even in the world, through its coverage of the most important events in the world, recorded around the clock and from the sites of these events, and by complementing the news broadcast by its journalists with analytical studios by hosting experts and analysts who provide explanations and details of interest to viewers and followers.

Among the reasons why Algerian journalists have a positive attitude towards Al Jazeera's news programmes, according to the findings of the study, we mention the presence of a number of

journalists of Algerian nationality among the channel's press staff, some of whom are famous on the channel's screen presenting news bulletins, As we can see, some of them have been with Al Jazeera since it was founded in 1996, and this may increase the level of trust that the channel enjoys among Algerian journalists in terms of following its news programmes and making it one of their news sources.

In recent years, Al Jazeera has become a media phenomenon recognized by the Western media that dominates the global media scene, so the results of the study are in line with this trend and support the positive attitudes of Algerian journalists towards Al Jazeera and its news programmes .

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