

Americans Turn to Al-Jazeera for Raw Images of War, Study Finds

April 19 2010, By Jeff Harrison

(PhysOrg.com) -- Research by Shahira Fahmy in the UA School of Journalism showed that visitors to Al-Jazeera's website, including Americans, went there looking for graphic images of war that U.S. media generally don't publish.

Sometimes gruesome war-time images of death and destruction are necessary for getting the whole story, even if you have to go to non-U.S. media to find them, according to a study by an associate professor in the School of Journalism at the University of Arizona.

Shahira Fahmy reported in a study published this month in *Media, War and Conflict* that visitors to the English-language Al-Jazeera website overwhelmingly support the network's decision to run graphic images of war that are important pieces of information missing from Western media.

Fahmy, along with researcher Thomas Johnson of Texas Tech University, conducted two online surveys of Al-Jazeera Web users during November and December 2004. They found that most of those who use the Al-Jazeera English-language website are from the U.S., Canada, the U.K and Australia. Respondents indicated that they appreciate the graphic pictures of war they find on the site that they don't see in mainstream media. As one user explained:

"It (Al-Jazeera site) gives me a sense of what the grueling reality is on the ground. U.S. media only reports strength of their troops and gives

reports of deaths just in terms of numbers. Whereas the pictures on (Al-Jazeera) presents the other side of the war...the people impacted. It presents the real human disaster that is happening."

Findings suggested nine out of 10 of those surveyed support the broadcasting of graphic visuals, including that of the Iraq War and Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Also, nine out of 10 said the news site provides [visual information](#) that cannot be found on CNN or other Western media, and half said the information is missing from Arab media. One user said:

"[CNN](#) and other Western media have abdicated their journalistic responsibility to provide balanced, objective news and have instead become a voice of the government - not controlled by the government but controlled by the big multinational multimedia conglomerates that own them and by their own self censorship." Another respondent went further, claiming that American media is "controlled and censored by Bush and his cronies."

Fahmy said the dilemma that photo editors face of whether a graphic photo of war and conflict would be too shocking to view gathered around the breakfast table might no longer hold true in the current media environment.

"Younger audiences, especially the 'YouTube' generation, seek graphic visual images in a far different way than audiences did before the World Wide Web," Fahmy said. "This has serious implications for the news media. I think it's time for [media](#) organizations to amend their ethical codes to allow for more graphic visuals in an effort to provide a more comprehensive and realistic view of war and conflict to U.S. audiences."

The study is titled "When Blood Becomes Cheaper than a Bottle of Water: How Viewers of the English Version of Al-Jazeera Website

Judge Graphic Images of Conflict."

Provided by University of Arizona

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