

Study finds news logo can affect viewer biases

April 21 2011

(PhysOrg.com) -- Americans are more receptive to Al Jazeera English's reporting when they think it is actually CNN International's broadcast, a new University of Michigan study finds.

Researchers conducted an online experiment to gauge how Americans view and assess Al Jazeera English, a global news network, in the weeks after it received praise for its coverage of the Arab uprisings.

The study's participants watched a news clip produced by AJE with the network's logo, and the same clip edited to carry CNN International's (CNNI) logo. The average respondent, the study indicated, gave more credit to [CNN](#) International for the AJE-produced news clip edited to look like a CNNI report.

William Youmans and Katie Brown, both doctoral candidates in the Department of [Communication Studies](#), said the findings suggest that there remains substantial prejudice against Al Jazeera among some Americans.

In recent years, AJE has filled a gap in the global market for televised international news. However, it has not received a welcome reception in the United States, in part, the researchers wrote, because many people associate AJE with Al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden and other American adversaries. Many Americans presume the network is biased and driven by an anti-American agenda.

Research also indicates another factor: Many Americans are not interested in [global news](#).

The study involved 177 Americans, whose age ranged from 17 to 67. About 66 percent were female, and most (59 percent) lived in a suburb. The majority of participants (80 percent) were white, and nearly all who completed the survey did not watch AJE or CNNI regularly.

Participants were divided into three groups: those who watched the original clip with the Al Jazeera logo; those who watched the same clip, but edited with the CNNI logo; and those who did not view a clip.

The news clip, which originally aired on AJE, featured a story about the Taliban and its position towards peace talks with the government in Kabul. The story was selected because it exemplified good journalism and did not directly criticize the United States nor any American forces or figures.

CNNI was rated as significantly less biased to participants who viewed a clip from AJE attributed to CNNI compared to those who saw no clip. In other words, the clip boosted perceptions of CNNI, the researchers said. Those watching the AJE clip, however, did not rate AJE's bias any differently than did the control group.

Participants were also asked would they have a preference or influence their local cable company's decision about carrying Al Jazeera or CNNI. Most were indifferent to the Al Jazeera network, while some would not watch it. Small numbers indicated they would pressure their cable companies for or against carrying Al Jazeera.

"This suggests that even after Egypt's protests, AJE's brand faces opposition in the [United States](#)," Youmans said.

But researchers did find optimism regarding a market for AJE. Those with pre-existing anti-Arab sentiments and self-identified conservative ideology were more likely to negatively assess AJE. However, people who expressed liberal political views and those who did not harbor suspicions of Arabs may be more open towards changing their views of AJE with exposure to the channel's reporting.

"The reception of AJE may say more about contentious state of politics towards relations with the Arab world within the U.S. than it does about the network itself," Brown said.

The best move for AJE in a politically polarized America where international news followers are relatively small is focusing its broadcast online, the researchers noted.

The findings appear in the latest issue of *Arab Media & Society*.

More information: www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=768

Provided by University of Michigan

Citation: Study finds news logo can affect viewer biases (2011, April 21) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-04-news-logo-affect-viewer-biases.html>

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