

Satiric news decreases bias against Arab-Americans and Al Jazeera: study

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(Phys.org) -- Satiric news coverage—a format seen on programs such as "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart"—decreases Arab American prejudice and bias against Al Jazeera English.

A new University of Michigan study finds that Americans can change their views about Al Jazeera English, a global news network, depending on how it is covered by other media.

AJE has not been welcomed in the United States, in part, because many people associate it with Al Qaeda and other American adversaries. Many Americans presume the network is biased and driven by an anti-American agenda.

Katie Brown and William Youmans, the study's authors and doctoral candidates in the U-M Department of Communication Studies, said their research shows that the bias against AJE correlates with prejudice against Arab Americans. In an online experiment, both bias and prejudice decrease among viewers of lighter, comedic news programming.

Nearly 250 adult Americans completed an online survey about their news viewing habits and were placed in three clip-viewing conditions: some watched an "NBC Nightly News" report, others a "Daily Show" segment, and the rest watched no clip.

Program clips used in the study came from 2006 and reported the launch

of AJE. Clips included footage of Osama bin Laden, commentary from the Bush administration and discussion of backlash. The reports also mention AJE's inability to find cable distribution in the U.S.

"The Nightly News" provided serious, hard [news coverage](#). "The Daily Show," however, framed the same issues in ironic and humorous tones, and mocked the concern over AJE's presence in the U.S. depicted by other American news outlets.

Participants then randomly were placed into one of three conditions: AJE, CNN International and no video. In the AJE condition, they watched the original clip about potential peace talks between the Taliban and Kabul government. In the CNNI group, participants watched the same clip without AJE markings and re-edited to appear like a CNNI clip.

In rating the clips, participants showed more bias against AJE and had less interest to watch the network compared with CNNI. The research also indicated that those who first watched the hard news coverage of AJE were more likely to hold negative evaluations of AJE's clip, while satiric soft news coverage of AJE produced opposite results—making viewers more receptive to AJE.

"It seems a one-two punch of a satiric soft [news](#) framing of the network and actual exposure to AJE can together overcome antipathy toward AJE," the researchers said.

How other media frame AJE may help its entry into the U.S. market, they suggested.

Satirical shows skewering the mainstream's portrayal of AJE as a platform for terrorism can also change some Americans' views towards Arab-Americans.

"Given the increased discrimination against Arab-Americans in the wake of the war on terror, this suggests satire can decrease prejudice," Brown said. "Perhaps by laughing at the absurdity of discrimination, we can become more aware of our own prejudices, thus helping open intercultural acceptance."

The findings appear in the current issue of *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*.

Provided by University of Michigan

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