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An Al-Jazeera Effect in the USA? A Review of the Evidence

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Abstract: Some scholars argue that following 9/11, Al-Jazeera has promoted an Arab perspective of events in the US by exporting its news materials to the US news market. The study examines the validity of this argument through a review of the literature on the issue during three successive periods of US-Al-Jazeera interactions: (a) Al-Jazeera Arabic's representation in US mainstream media following 9/11, specifically during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; (b) Al-Jazeera English television channel's attempts to enter the US market since 2006; and (c) the reception of Al-Jazeera America in the US, where the paper also adds an original analysis of Al-Jazeera America's Twitter followers' profiles. Together, these analyses provide strong counterevidence to the argument that Al-Jazeera was able to promote an Arab perspective of events in the US.

Keywords: Al-Jazeera, Qatar, counter-public, intercultural communication, United States, Twitter

In the last decade and a half, the Al-Jazeera media network has invested tremendous efforts to penetrate the US market, in what has possibly been the most ambitious attempt in history by a non-Western media network to broadcast to the heart of the world's leading Western power. Qatari-sponsored Al-Jazeera's attempts to enter the US market were largely a response to growing interest in images from the battle zones of the Middle East and the Arab world following 9/11. Al-Jazeera's efforts to implant itself in the US market as a legitimate and credible news source can be divided into three main phases that correspond to the successive launches of various Al-Jazeera media network platforms targeting US audiences. The first phase started after 9/11, when Al-Jazeera Arabic signed content-exchange agreements with leading US news stations that sought the use of its exclusive images from the Afghani battle zone and its exclusive videos featuring Al-Qaeda's leaders. The launch of the Al-Jazeera English television channel in November 2006 marks the beginning of the second phase, designed to reach English-speaking television viewers directly, without mediation. Finally, the launch of Al-Jazeera America in August 2013 represents the third and most recent attempt to target US audiences, specifically by creating the look and feel of a local US channel.

In light of Al-Jazeera's export of its news materials to the US after 9/11, which forms the first main encounter of the US audience with the Al-Jazeera brand, various voices have argued that dissemination of the channel's news materials in the West promotes the advent of an Arab perspective in the US. Ingrid Volkmer (2002) argued that the global spread of Al-Jazeera's images during the war in Afghanistan constitutes the birth of "...a new dimension in the global news flow, which not only refines domestic and foreign news in national journalism in times of crisis but also the news angle of transnational networks, such as CNN." (p. 241; see also Jasperson and El-Kikhia, 2002). El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003), who analyzed Al-Jazeera's images on CNN during the war in Afghanistan, posited that Al-Jazeera footage forced the Arab perspective on the Bush Administration. The titles of several works, such as *Al-Jazeera: The Story of The Network That is Rattling Governments and Redefining Modern Journalism* (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003) and the more recent *The Role of New Arab Satellite Channels in Fostering Intercultural Dialogue: Can Al-Jazeera English Bridge the Gap?* (Khamis, 2007) further attest to the popularity of the notion that Al-Jazeera promotes an Arab perspective in the US. Next, in an evaluation of the Al-Jazeera English viewership effect on its audiences, Powers and El-Nawawy (2009; and El-Nawawy and Powers, 2010) found some evidence that a greater amount of Al-Jazeera English viewing correlated with decreased dogmatic views.

While most of these studies examined the Al-Jazeera effect during a particular episode, such as the use of exclusive Al-Jazeera Arabic images from the battlefield in Afghanistan (Jasperson and El-Kikhia, 2002, 2003; Volkmer, 2002), the launch of Al-Jazeera English (Powers and El-Nawawy, 2009), or the so-called Arab Spring (Youmans and Brown, 2011), and thus often offer anecdotal findings, this paper aims to encompass the majority of studies on Al-Jazeera's presence in the US since 9/11 to provide the most overarching conclusion on the issue to date. Using a comprehensive analysis of the literature on Al-Jazeera's interplay with the US during the three phases mentioned above, and an original study of Al-Jazeera America's Twitter profile followers (conducted in light of the scarce literature on Al-Jazeera America, which forms the third phase), the paper aims to conclude whether Al-Jazeera's activities in the US in the past 15 years indeed promoted an Arab perspective in the US news realm.

The analysis, thus, is divided into three periods, each focusing on evaluations of a specific Al-Jazeera platform, and representing phases in Al-Jazeera's development and efforts to target the US audience. The study begins with an analysis of the representation of Al-Jazeera Arabic's news material during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001-3. Next, it provides an account of the attempts by Al-Jazeera English TV channel (AJE) to gain distribution on US cable and satellite audiences after its November 2006 launch. Finally, the study examines the reception of Al-Jazeera America, launched in August 2013, via an original evaluation of the profile and activity patterns of Al-Jazeera America's Twitter followers.

Phase I: The resonance of Al-Jazeera Arabic in the US after 9/11

The Al-Jazeera media network rose to fame in the West following the 9/11 attacks, specifically when, on October 7, 2001, Al-Jazeera Arabic gained exclusive access to Osama bin Laden's video and audio recordings, the first of a series of tapes featuring bin Laden and Al-Qaeda leaders to which Al-Jazeera had exclusive access. In addition to airing the first bin Laden tapes, which Western stations widely rebroadcasted, Al-Jazeera was also the source of exclusive images from the Afghanistan war, secured by its exclusive access to Kandahar and Kabul. Like the bin Laden tapes, these images appeared on mainstream Western networks with an "Al-Jazeera exclusive" logo. In many respects, then, the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks marks Al-Jazeera's entry to the center of the global news scene.

Accordingly, early scholarly evaluations of the advent of Al-Jazeera news material to the West predicted a rosy future for the Qatari station as an influencer on Western public opinion. Ingrid Volkmer argued that Al-Jazeera's rise to global fame erodes "national (or local) public spheres" worldwide and has the potential to promote the emergence of a "global public sphere" inclusive of the Arab perspective (Volkmer, 2002, pp. 241-243). Similarly, in an article published in *Columbia Journalism Review*, Journalist Rick Zednik argued that the global spread of Al-Jazeera's reports affects public opinion in the receiving countries (Zednik, 2002). El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003) published a highly cited book on Al-Jazeera, arguing that the channel had a revolutionary effect on Western public discourse. Jasperson and El-Kikhia's (2002) were among the first to examine empirically the role of Al-Jazeera's news material in building the governance, military and humanitarian media frames in reporting by US news networks, using CNN as a case study. Based on their qualitative analysis, Jasperson and El-Kikhia argued that Al-Jazeera gave a new perspective that had been absent to US media reporting of previous conflict: the perspective of the Arab world.

Indeed, Azran's (2004) empirical analysis of the representation of Al-Jazeera Arabic's material on the five major networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX and CNN) at the peak of the war in Afghanistan strongly contradicts the above assertions. Instead, it shows that Al-Jazeera's news images were mostly ignored and Al-Jazeera played a limited role in the US coverage of the war. His analysis found that although Al-Jazeera aired daily images of dead and injured Afghans during the war in Afghanistan, the US networks only used Al-Jazeera's footage of civilian casualties. According to Azran, a possible explanation of US media's self-censorship of Al-Jazeera's battlefield images is the demonization of the channel during the war by the George W. Bush's administration. Specifically, US Defense Secretary Rumsfeld argued that Al-Jazeera had fabricated images of Muslim casualties, casting a long shadow of doubt over the channel's credibility. In an interview on *NBC Evening News* on October 28, 2001, Rumsfeld described Al-Jazeera's coverage as "propagandistic and inflammatory," claiming that Al-Jazeera fakes images of dead and injured Arab civilians. A similar conclusion regarding the stereotypical use of Al-Jazeera's images

and disassociation from their source emanates from Wessler and Adolphsen's (2008) analysis of the representation of Al-Jazeera's images on Western stations during the 2003 War in Iraq, which revealed that when presenting Al-Jazeera's material, Western stations distanced themselves from the source and "cautioned" their audiences that these Al-Jazeera images represent the Arab perspective of events only and not necessarily the truth. Furthermore, Zaharna (2005) argued that the Al-Jazeera / US relationship resembles a dance of intercultural miscommunication as it is accompanied by systematic cultural clashes that heightened US distrust of materials from the Qatari station.

Frustrated by Al-Jazeera Arabic's struggle to gain fair representation in the US, Al-Jazeera media network executives launched Al-Jazeera English.net website on February 16, 2003, the eve of the war in Iraq, with the aim of reaching US audiences without mediation. However, Samuel-Azran's (2006) analysis showed that Al-Jazeera English.net's clout in the US online realm was minor. It was therefore not surprising that the Al-Jazeera media network launched Al-Jazeera English TV channel in November 2006, with the aim to gain direct access to US television viewers, as described in greater detail below.

Phase II: Al-Jazeera English TV channel launched and blocked

On November 15, 2006, the Al-Jazeera network launched Al-Jazeera's first 24/7 television news channel in English, Al-Jazeera English (AJE). This significant step furthered their objective to advance from the category of regional ethnic media providers in the Middle East to that of major international news networks. With the launch of AJE, the Al-Jazeera network became the world's first English-language news channel to have its headquarters in the Middle East. AJE strategically focused on appealing to three target groups: (1) viewers in developing countries who seek exposure to non-Western perspectives of global news events, as an alternative or complement to BBC World News and CNN; (2) second- and third-generation Arab and Muslim immigrants in English-speaking countries, who prefer consuming their news in the English language but still want to watch a news station that stresses the Arab perspective; and (3) Westerners who are familiar with the Al-Jazeera brand and want to hear the news directly from Al-Jazeera rather than from local channels that re-present Al-Jazeera's materials.

Importantly, Al-Jazeera implemented a proactive penetration strategy from day one. For example, it chose to station AJE in four key cities: Doha, London, Washington DC, and Kuala Lumpur. The initial choice of stationing one of their broadcast headquarters in the US capital, with over 150 staff members and 4 hours of daily broadcasts from Washington during prime time, was clearly intended to appeal to the US market and acknowledge its significance. A further move to gain credibility in the US is also evident in AJE's recruitment strategy, which capitalized on the reputations of well-known TV anchors and personalities in the West, in-

cluding Dave Marash (formerly with ABC), David Frost (formerly with BBC), and Riz Khan (formerly with CNN).

Importantly, academic evaluations identified that AJE presents in its stories a good balance between Western and non-Western regions, thus providing a great mix for the Western viewers interested in better understanding non-Western regions such as Africa, which have little coverage on Western stations (Al-Najjar, 2009; see also Meltzer, 2012). According to Figenschou (2011), AJE plays an important role in the global news landscape as it focuses on suffering in the non-West world and transmits it to the West. Painter (2008) also posits that AJE represents a welcome attempt to counter the traditional Western news hegemony with information flowing from the non-Western to the West.

Indeed, some analyses optimistically identified that several Western outlets welcomed the advent of the new English-speaking Qatari-based station. According to King and Zayani (2008), who conducted a global analysis of the coverage of AJE materials in English newspapers worldwide, AJE gained significantly more positive coverage than its Arabic counterpart, mainly because newspapers associated the channel less with terrorism in comparison to Al-Jazeera Arabic and more as a globally oriented news station.

In stark contrast, Samuel-Azran (2010) identified that US news outlets expressed fierce resistance to AJE as soon as the channel announced its launch. Thus, already on November 16, 2006, one day after the official launch, US stations questioned the principles of the channel after AJE's Riz Khan said live that "he is not the one to judge" whether Hezbollah and Hamas are terrorist organizations. Considering that both Hamas and Hezbollah are officially classified as terrorist organizations by the US (Hamas is also considered a terrorist organization by Canada, the European Union, Israel, Japan, Australia and the United Kingdom; Hezbollah is on the terrorist list of six Western countries), Khan's comment was considered a highly provocative statement in the eyes of US commentators. Samuel-Azran (2010) added that expressions of a hostile welcome for the new channel came from Fox News, which portrayed the launch of Al-Jazeera English as a joke, as illustrated in Brit Hume's introduction on Fox News of the new channel, five days after AJE's launch:

Hume: Finally tonight, the new English-language Al-Jazeera network is not being carried on a single major American cable or satellite TV provider, but you can take my word for it, it will soon be a huge hit here. With promos like this, they can't miss.

(begin Fox News Channel-produced video clip)

Announcer: Coming soon to the United States, it's the Al-Jazeera network for America. The leader for news, sports, and quality entertainment in the Middle East is now available in the land of the great Satan. Check out exciting dramas and hilarious sitcoms. Shows like *I Love Uzi*, *Kurd Your Enthusiasm*, *30 Rocks*, *Dancing with the Shiites*, *Extreme Makeover: Cave Edition*, *Saddam Squarepants*, *My Name is Oil*, and, of course, *Everybody Hates Israel*. The Al-Jazeera network for America. Call your Zionist-controlled cable company today. (Fox Special Report with Brit Hume, November 20, 2006)

Samuel-Azran's (2010) analysis of AJE's efforts to penetrate the US market reveals that such critical sentiment and rebuff affected AJE's efforts to find distributors in the US. Although the channel was originally reported as being on the verge of signing a distribution contract with Comcast, the largest US cable provider, to carry the channel on the Detroit cable system (where 200,000–300,000 of the 1.8 million Arabs living in the US are located), Comcast reportedly backed out of the negotiations only days before AJE's launch, setting a precedent against carrying AJE. Indeed, AJE's negotiations in subsequent months with the other major cable carriers — Cox Communications and Time Warner — also failed.

Accordingly, when AJE was launched in November 2006, only two small cable carriers agreed to carry it — Burlington TV (BT) in Vermont, and Buckeye in Toledo, Ohio. Buckeye's decision to carry the channel was based on Toledo's large Arab population. For Burlington Telecom, a city-chartered and privately financed cable company in Vermont, the decision was based more on the progressive nature of the city of Burlington. While Burlington Telecom in Vermont and Buckeye in Ohio were both positioned in small cities with negligible distribution, their decision to carry AJE elicited criticism and threats from conservative pressure groups, particularly the conservative group Accuracy in Media (Zeppernick, 2006).

Due to AJE's increasingly problematic image in the US, AJE also struggled with the credibility concerns of US advertisers. To overcome its rocky start, AJE hired a high-profile Manhattan-based PR agency to enhance its prestige and promote its brand name. Brown Lloyd James (BLJ) was hired to monitor anti-AJE messages 24/7 on television, newspapers and the web, and to respond instantly to any negative commentary about the channel. Additionally, BLJ launched an "I want AJE" campaign, which included a website dedicated to debunking "myths" about the Al-Jazeera brand. It presented Al-Jazeera as a network that adheres to a strict code of ethics, emphasized that it does not show beheadings, and that, despite its being "Arab-sourced," even Israelis consume some of their news from Al-Jazeera. BLJ further stressed the last point, noting that Al-Jazeera had conducted more interviews with Israeli officials than either CNN or BBC.

However, these efforts to legitimize AJE in the US mostly failed, as can be illustrated, for example, by the refusal of most US companies to advertise on the channel. The cost-benefit ratio seemed too low for US advertisers who were extremely fearful of potentially antagonizing US consumers. In an article in December 2007, more than one year after AJE's launch, business magazine *Fast Company* reporter Linda Tischler asked major commercial media buying companies — OMD, Starcom, MediaVest, MindShare, and Carat — about their intentions to buy ads on AJE. They all reportedly "refused to respond or politely declined to comment." The magazine article further quoted Marketing guru Ernest Lupinacci, formerly CEO of the ad agency Anomaly, who explained why US companies will never advertise on AJE: "If you're a marketer, your worst nightmare is to wake up and read a headline on the Drudge Report: 'U.S. Widgets to Buy Airtime on Al-Jazeera'" (Tischler,

2007). This anti-Al-Jazeera spirit also allegedly affected major advertisers such as Yahoo! and America Online, which decided to retract ad campaigns on the network.

Several recent studies have attempted to explain AJE's rejection in the US. Davis' (2013) study of the reasons behind AJE's faltering in the US and Canadian markets identified that the US administration's negative comments on Al-Jazeera as an enemy source trickled down and were used by public interest groups to thwart Al-Jazeera's distribution in the US.

The US failure of AJE was also explained by findings of an experimental study of US citizens' perception of messages from Al-Jazeera, which revealed citizens' possible racial and cultural bias. Youmans and Brown (2011) studied the reception of Al-Jazeera in American society during the Arab Spring, which was considered by some to be AJE's "greatest moment" in the US, for bringing the images of liberation in various Arab countries, and promoting democracy in the Arab world. In their experiment, 177 US participants representing a sample of the US population were randomized into one of three groups: viewers of an AJE clip, viewers of a CNN International (CNNI) clip, and a control group. Participants in the AJE and CNNI groups viewed a news story that originally had aired on AJE about the Taliban and the movement's position on peace talks with the government in Kabul. As part of the experiment, for the CNNI group, AJE markings were removed and replaced with CNNI branding. Those in the control group did not watch a video. The findings of the experiment clearly showed that even during the so-called "AJE moment," substantial prejudice against AJE persisted among the American public, as the average respondent gave more credit to CNNI for an AJE-produced news clip edited to look like it had been produced by CNNI than the credit attributed to AJE for the same clip. Not surprisingly, prejudice against AJE was highly correlated with conservative political ideology and anti-Arab sentiments.

In light of all the above-mentioned hurdles, AJE eventually transferred its Washington, DC offices to Doha on January 28, 2011, clearly signaling defeat, after its countless attempts to penetrate the US television market failed. However, it returned to the US media market in 2013, making its most bold initiative to reach US audiences in the form of its new Al-Jazeera America channel.

The third round: Al-Jazeera America

Following AJE's unsuccessful attempt to gain wide popularity in the US, the Al-Jazeera media network looked for a new approach. On January 2, 2013, Al-Jazeera purchased Al Gore's left-leaning news channel Current TV for \$500 million and subsequently closed down its operations and set up Al-Jazeera America in its place. According to Los Angeles Times writer Joe Flint (2013), the acquisition of Current TV represented Al-Jazeera America's attempt to gain access to over 50 million US viewers over the heads of the cable satellite providers who originally declined to give AJE access.

Al-Jazeera announced its intention to reorganize its overall broadcast structure in English, with AJE broadcasting globally while Al-Jazeera America broadcasted exclusively to the American audience, providing both domestic and international news to US viewers. Launched on August 20, 2013, the Al-Jazeera America channel (AJAM) established headquarters in NYC and employed a team of close to 800 journalists and staff. It also opened twelve bureaus in major US cities as well as three broadcast centers, making it the news organization with one of the largest news-gathering capabilities in the US. Along with its goal of becoming an integral part of the American landscape, AJAM focused its hopes on challenging the major US news networks such as CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC.

Importantly, an internal debate within Al-Jazeera revolved on the line of coverage that Al-Jazeera America should adopt. Prominent Al-Jazeera journalist Marwan Bishara, the network's senior political analyst, sent an email to multiple Al-Jazeera executives, urging them to verify that the network would not try to appease its US viewers but maintain Al-Jazeera's famous bold journalism (Greenwald, 2013). He wrote that he was concerned that Al-Jazeera executives, in order to gain wider US acceptance for the channel, signed a deal with US distributors, ensuring that Al-Jazeera America would take a significantly different line from AJE. Bishara claimed that such agreements would only harm Al-Jazeera America's prospects in the US, not only because they represent a betrayal of the channel's high journalistic norms but also because US viewers would feel that such an appeasing attitude actually insults their intelligence, and would dissuade them from viewing the channel.

In any case, regardless of its journalistic approach, Al-Jazeera America faced resistance from the start. Although AJAM inherited Current TV's existing distribution deals, not all distributors were on board with this acquisition: Time Warner Cable, the largest pay-TV provider in Los Angeles, chose to drop Current TV from its TV offering upon the news of the sale to Al-Jazeera. According to *The Huffington Post*, the reason given for this decision was that it had not consented to the acquisition (Fung and Mirkinson, 2013). AT&T also decided to remove AJAM from U-verse — the AT&T brand of telecommunications services in 22 US states — the night before the launch, reducing the launch's reach by around 5 million U-verse customers. Ultimately, at its launch, Al-Jazeera America premiered in about 45 million homes. However, following AJAM's decision to go to court over the alleged breach of agreement, Time Warner Cable and Al-Jazeera America announced on October 24, 2013 that they had reached an agreement and were bringing Al-Jazeera America to Time Warner Cable. On June 27, 2014, AT&T and U-verse also added AJAM to its offering as part of a settlement of an AJAM lawsuit against them for breach of contract. These acts brought AJAM broadcasts to New York, Los Angeles, Dallas, and other major markets, creating a substantial increase in viewership reach that raised the total number of homes in the US with access to the channel to 55 million.

Since the beginning, however, there were very strong indications that AJAM was not likely to become a commercial success with US audiences. The channel attracted an average of only 17,000 prime-time viewers in its first year of operation. In late 2014, when AJAM began reporting about Gaza, ISIS, and the racial events in Ferguson, Missouri, where an unarmed 18-year-old Black was killed by a White police officer, viewership rose by 50% to around 25,000. Nevertheless, AJAM's prime-time viewership average was still dramatically smaller than US stations, and its viewership was equal to 5% of CNN's 600,000 viewers, and a mere fraction of Fox News' 1.87 million loyal prime-time viewers in the same period (Winsor, 2014).

Considering Al-Jazeera's image and viewership, US advertisers unsurprisingly avoided launching advertising campaigns on AJAM. According to *Ad Age* magazine (Poggi, 2013), of the 153 advertisers that used to buy advertising time on Al Gore's Current TV, only a few national brands bought time on AJAM when it was first launched. Originally, the limited advertising shown on the channel was portrayed by AJAM as a strategic move during its "trial period," with CEO Ehab Al Shihabi attributing it to AJAM's desire to present unbiased, fact-based journalism without the clutter of advertising. However, Poggi (2014) noted that one year after its launch, there were still no signs of change in advertisers' initial resistance of the station. Combined, the low viewership statistics and little money flowing from advertisements clearly reflect huge losses: While it was not in Qatar's interest to disclose its losses from its AJAM operations, a lawsuit by an AJAM employee revealed that the network had an operating loss of \$250 million in 2013, and \$335 million in 2014 (Ariens, 2016). Considering the money paid for purchase of the channel's slot from Current TV, AJAM's operation cost Qatar well over a billion dollars, not including the operating losses of 2015 and 2016.

Importantly, in comparison to these commercial failures, AJAM actually has had impressive successes in the content department, and won several Peabody awards, including two for its flagship investigative show *Fault Lines*, and others for documentaries on cholera in Haiti and on a deadly factory fire in Bangladesh. However, as these prizes failed to win viewers or advertisers for the network, AJAM started to cut back on expenses and lay off staff (between 60 and 100 staff members) in 2014, one year after its launch (Atkinson, 2014), leading to the ultimate closure of Al-Jazeera America in April 2016.

A social network analysis study of AJAM's followers

Since few studies exist on AJAM's audiences or the reasons for its failure, this paper includes a social network analysis to identify the profile of Al-Jazeera America followers on Twitter, with the aim of shedding light on the reasons for its fiasco. The Twitter social network is arguably the platform that most resembles a news medium. A widely cited study (Kwak et al., 2010) found that Twitter's follower-

following topology is characterized by a non-power-law follower distribution, and low reciprocity, which all indicate a deviation from known characteristics of human social networks. Thus, Twitter serves as an effective platform for journalists, opinion leaders, politicians, and traditional news networks, to distributing real-time tweets to a wide audience in some form of an extension to news networks' platforms. In addition, Twitter's structure allows scholars to conduct social network analyses in more efficient ways than other platforms, thus offering opportunities to better understand news consumption patterns on social networks. Thus, an analysis of AJAM'S Twitter following patterns can illuminate trends that might better explain why AJAM terminated its operation after only a few years, despite the massive investments in the station.

A social network analysis was originally conducted in March 2015 to understand who AJAM's US news consumers are, but in light of AJAM's closure soon afterward, the analysis is used here to gain a post factum understanding of the reasons for AJAM's failure. The social network analysis study uses data from Twitter, a social network that is highly popular among news consumers, to reconstruct the network of AJAM followers and identify the profile of the average AJAM follower by examining other news sources they follow.

As noted, the analysis was conducted on March 21, 2015, 18 months after AJAM's launch and one year before its final closure. The data of Al-Jazeera America's 290,102 Twitter followers were collected and downloaded. I examined the news-following habits of AJAM Twitter followers to understand whether they represent mostly liberals or, alternatively, come from the entire political spectrum. The media outlets followed by AJAM Twitter followers in our sample were compared with Groseclose and Milyo's (2005) analysis of US media network's political sentiment based on the ideology scores computed for 20 US media outlets (For example, Fox News was high on the conservative scale and MSNBC was high on the liberal scale). A political sentiment score was computed as the quotient of the number of times that a particular media outlet cited various think tanks and policy groups, and the number of times that members of Congress cite the same groups. Ideology scores range from 0 (indicating a conservative outlook) to 1 (indicating a liberal outlook).

As indicated in Figure 1, 67,348 (58%) of Al-Jazeera America Twitter followers follow at least one additional news outlet from our list, meaning that 42% of AJAM followers do not follow any other news station on Twitter, indicating that AJAM functions as an echo chamber. Table 1 presents a list of the followed outlets in ascending ideology score order. The number and percentage of users who follow both Al-Jazeera America and each outlet appear in separate columns.

Figure 1: Overlap between users who follow Al-Jazeera America and at least one other media outlet.

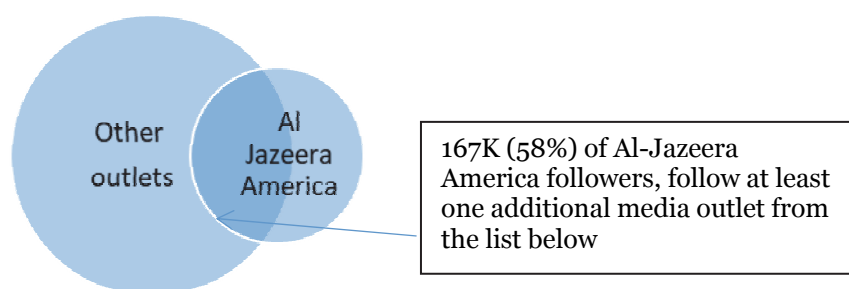


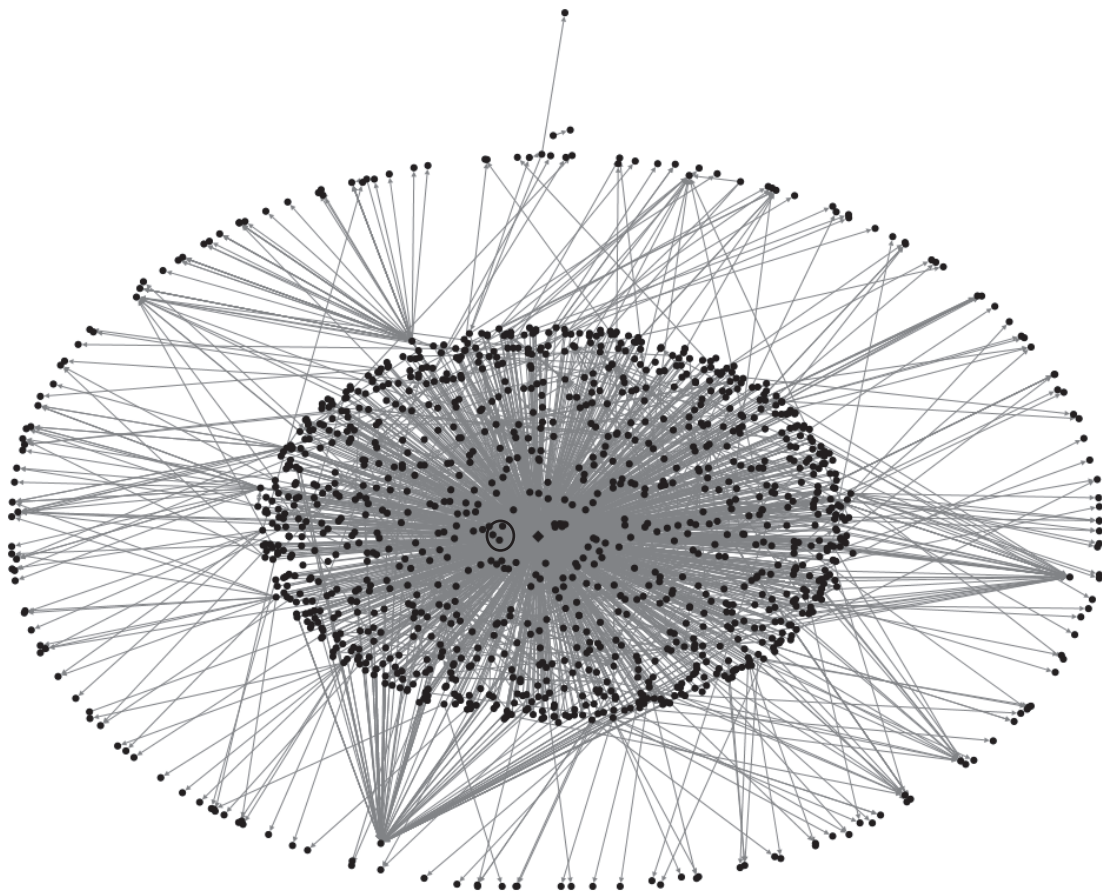
Table 1: Breakdown of Al-Jazeera Followers who Follow at Least One Other Media Outlet

News outlet	Twitter Handle	Percentage of Al-Jazeera followers who follow this outlet	Number of Al-Jazeera followers who follow this outlet*
Fox News	FoxNews	2.6%	4351
The Drudge Report	DRUDGE_REPORT	2.7%	4518
Washington Times	WashTimes	2.9%	4853
Wall Street Journal	WSJ	4.1%	6861
US News & World Report	USnews	4.9%	8200
The L.A. Times	LAtimes	5.1%	8535
USA Today	USAtoday	5.1%	8535
Good Morning America	GMA	5.1%	8535
The News Hour	NewsHour	5.2%	8702
CBS News	CBSNews	5.3%	8869
Newsweek	Newsweek	5.4%	9037
Washington Post	Washingtonpost	5.4%	9037
The Today Show	TODAYShow	5.5%	9204
Time Magazine TIME	TIME	5.7%	9539
ABC World News	ABCWorldNews	5.7%	9539
CNN Breaking News	CNNbrk	5.8%	9706
NBC Nightly News	NBCNightlyNews	5.8%	9706
The New York Times	nytimes	6%	10,041
Morning Edition (NPR)	MorningEdition	6.6%	11,045
Other	Other	5.1%	8535

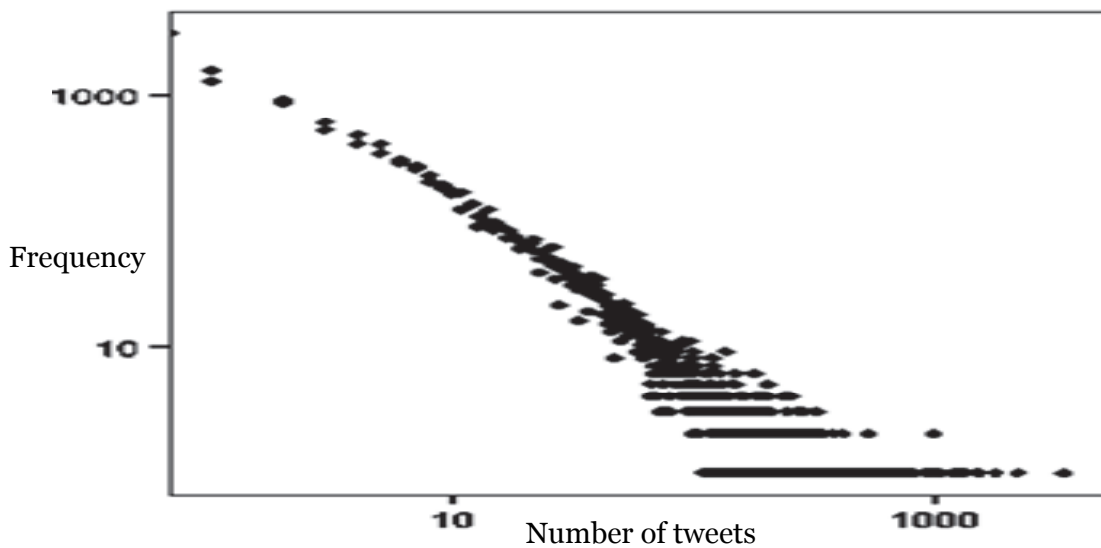
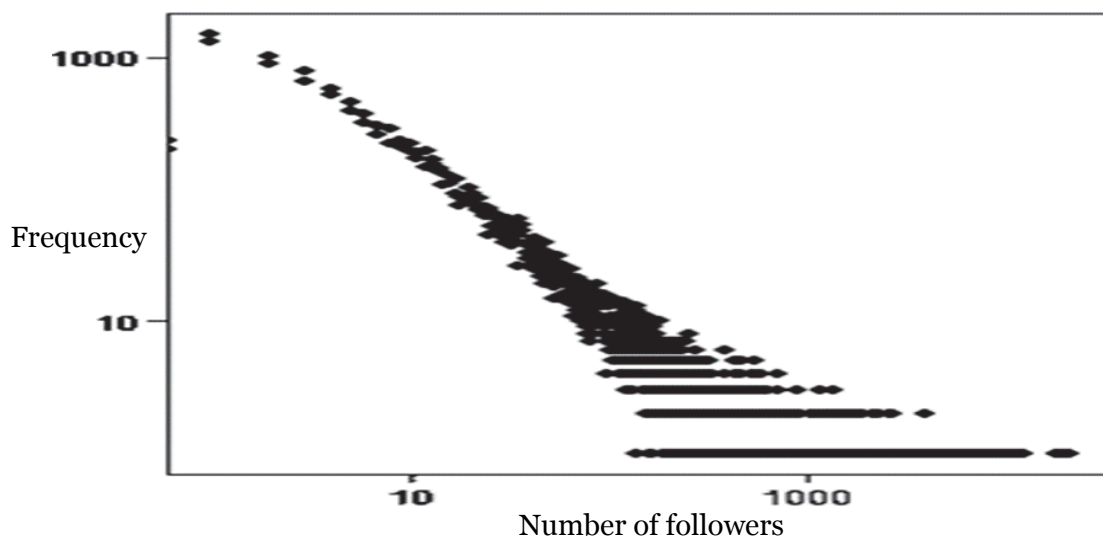
*Of the 290,102 Al-Jazeera followers in our sample, 167,348 (58%) follow at least one other media outlet from the above list (see figure 1).

To reconstruct the network of AJAM re-tweets, the study used information on links within our sample of Twitter users. The result of this reconstruction is depicted in Figure 2. The most notable aspect is the dramatically low number of re-tweets (1,279). To better understand the network of re-tweeters in particular, the list of re-tweets (of tweets originally tweeted by AJAM) was downloaded. I then mapped who re-tweeted AJAM's original tweets, and reconstructed the network of AJAM followers using these links.

Figure 2. Al-Jazeera America's re-tweet network, March 21, 2015 – December 31, 2015 (N = 1,279). The circled diamond is the node representing Al-Jazeera America Twitter account.



The distribution of re-tweets made by AJAM Twitter followers in the sample (see figure 3) demonstrates a heavy-tailed distribution (Cha, Mislove and Gummadi, 2009); that is, *a small number of users who tweeted many tweets*, while the majority of Twitter followers tweeted a small number of tweets. The same heavy-tailed distribution was evident when one looks at the number of followers of each user in the network (see Figure 4): A small number of users had many followers, while the majority of these Twitter followers had few followers.

Figure 3: Re-tweet distribution of Al-Jazeera followers.**Figure 4: Degree centrality of Al-Jazeera Twitter followers.**

To conclude, the analysis identifies that 42% of AJAM's 290,102 followers on March 21, 2015 refrain from following any other US news station. Based on past studies that found that Al-Jazeera's news consumers in the US are mostly Muslims or belong to the radical left of the political map (Johnson and Fahmy, 2008), it is possible that many of the 42% of AJAM Twitter followers who do not follow other news outlets belong to these categories. In addition, the majority of AJAM followers did not demonstrate high re-tweet activity. Combined, the findings strongly indicate AJAM'S failure to attract diverse news consumers on Twitter, and equally importantly, they indicate that AJAM had little success in engaging its followers and motivating them to share its material in the form of re-tweets and thus increase its cycle of influence.

Discussion and conclusions

The article examines Al-Jazeera's reception in the US since 9/11 via three analyses of Al-Jazeera television stations that gained access to US viewers via (1) analyses of the re-presentation of Al-Jazeera Arabic's news material on US stations (2) review of AJE's ability to gain distribution in the US, and (3) an original analysis of Al-Jazeera America's audiences in the US via a social network analysis of AJAM'S Twitter following patterns. The study reveals that resistance toward Al-Jazeera's attempts to broadcast to US audiences persisted over the various stages of Al-Jazeera's attempts to penetrate the US markets. Resistance is evident in US media networks' self-censorship during the re-presentation and representation of Al-Jazeera Arabic's news material during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Phase I, around 2001-3); refusal of cable and satellite carriers to carry AJE and the success of conservative interest groups to pressure those that did consider carrying AJE (Phase II, AJE, 2006-AJAM's 2013 launch); and AJAM's limited viewership and its failure to attract diverse news consumers and engage its followers (Phase III, AJAM, 2013-6).

The paper shows, then, that the US media, administration, and cable companies, among other institutions, as well as mainstream US viewers for the most part consistently denied the Arab perspective entry into the US public sphere. Thus, based on the empirical evidence, the main finding of the paper is that the idea that Al-Jazeera's advent promoted an Arab perspective of events in the US is a myth, and Al-Jazeera largely failed in the US market. In contrast to optimistic globalist perspectives that predicted that Al-Jazeera would inevitably force the US to include the Arab perspective in the mix of opinions to which the US public is exposed, this study indicates that the chances of a genuine exchange of diverse cultural perspectives between Al-Jazeera stations and the US media are slim.

While the original AJAM social network analysis above does not illuminate all the reasons for AJAM's failure, one possible, at least partial, explanation for the general blockage of Al-Jazeera perspective is the wider prejudice against Muslims in the US among various populations in the US, a bias indicated in many surveys, particularly after the 9/11 attacks, and continues to rise. To illustrate, according to a 2010 ABC News/*Washington Post* poll, only 37% of Americans have a favourable opinion of Islam, the lowest rating since 2001. According to a 2010 *Time Magazine* poll, 28% of voters do not believe that Muslims should be eligible to sit on the US Supreme Court, and nearly one-third thinks that Muslims should be barred from running for president (Altman, 2010). In addition, a *USA Today*/Gallup poll conducted around the launch of AJE (Saad, 2006) found that 22% of Americans would not want to have a Muslim as their neighbour, and 39% also said they favoured requiring Muslims, including US citizens, to carry special identification. Thus, the refusal to give Al-Jazeera a fair chance, which was a major element of the AJE and Al-Jazeera America campaigns, is possibly related to ethnocentric feelings no less than it is to the content of AJE and Al-Jazeera (which was, as noted, largely

created or adapted to suit the US audiences' tastes and even won awards in the US). To support this strong statement, consider Youmans and Brown's (2011) study cited above, which found that the Al-Jazeera brand promotes strong scepticism toward content that was otherwise perceived to be credible.

Another possible reason for the rejection may be related to various allegations made over the years against the Al-Jazeera network of being a long arm of Qatar to achieve its political goals. Al-Jazeera was established in 1996 allegedly as part of Qatar's reforms and the "westernisation" project initiated by the country's emir, Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, who replaced his conservative father after a successful non-violent coup in 1995. The new emir was open to ideas from the West and one of his first acts was to cancel media censorship. Since Al-Jazeera's inception in 1996, the Qatari government has publicly asserted the station's independence from Qatari interests. Although the Qatari emir provided the Al-Jazeera founding team with \$137 million to create the channel, he declared that the money was a loan, not a grant, and stipulated that he expected Al-Jazeera to repay the loan and move into private hands by 2001. Nonetheless, in 2001, when Al-Jazeera failed to generate a profit and covered only 35% to 40% of its costs from advertising (Sharp, 2003), the emir decided to extend the loan indefinitely. According to *Forbes* magazine, by 2009 the government of Qatar had invested more than \$1 billion in AJE and covered more than \$100 million per year in losses for Al-Jazeera Arabic's operations (Helman, 2009). Despite the generous funding, the emir persistently asserts that Al-Jazeera's staff members, who are Western-educated reporters with work experience in major international broadcasters, are trained to adhere to professional norms regardless of the station's sponsor. In stark contrast, critics claim that Al-Jazeera is a political instrument designed to increase Qatar's international influence. Several scholars have noted that Al-Jazeera criticizes "everyone" but the Qatari government and regularly fails to report on "sensitive" matters involving Qatar, such as violations of foreign workers' human rights (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003). It has been argued (El Oifi, 2005; Fandy, 2007; Sakr, 2002) that the true reason for the Qatari emir's decision to launch Al-Jazeera was to achieve greater leverage against rival Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia. Samuel-Azran (2013) showed empirically how Al-Jazeera's coverage of Saudi affairs was fully aligned with Qatar's interests throughout the 2002-2007 Qatari-Saudi rift.

Still, other, less grim, explanations may indicate that the resistance to Al-Jazeera's stations is not a function of the networks' specific features and sponsor, but pertain to wider bias and resistance of US audiences of anything foreign. This includes even countries counted as US closest allies: to illustrate, consider a comparable international news networks station, the UK-based BBC World News and its failure to gain wide US viewership. Indeed, because of its image as a foreign source, it took the BBC World News, which was launched in 1991, 11 years to find a major distributor in the US in light of its image as a foreign station, and continued to suffer from low ratings in the US (McKenna et al., 2009; Samuel-Azran, 2016). Nevertheless, it is important to remember that BBC World News is widely accepted by

various cable and satellite providers including Cablevision, Comcast, Time Warner Cable, Verizon, DirecTV, Charter, AT&T, U-verse, and others. As of 2014, US distribution and advertising sales for BBC World are handled by AMC Networks, which are the minority partner of BBC America, the BBC's entertainment channel, which caters to US tastes with shows such as reality cooking shows with celebrities, which were launched in 1998 and achieved relative success in the US.

However, taken together, the studies cited here also show that diversification of US mainstream media is not a lost cause: As indicated in the news-following habits of AJAM's followers on Twitter, liberals appear to be more open and likely to follow AJAM's material. These followers could be described as news consumers who aim to engage with and be exposed to an alternative Arab news angle on current events. Future studies should target these news consumers and further identify and characterize their motivations to follow Al-Jazeera. Another recommended route for future studies is to specifically examine the extent the ethnic composition of AJAM Twitter follows who follow AJAM as their main and sometimes sole news source as an expression of protest against local media.

Finally, future studies should continue to examine Al-Jazeera's clout in other Western countries, as well as other exchanges between audiences and non-Western international media. This will help to determine whether the results presented here characterize other Western countries' reception of non-Western news material or whether intercultural dialogue does flourish in some other regions and countries.

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