

Polling Media and Political Science Professors on Al-Jazeera Channel's Professionalism

(Summary)

Al-Jazeera Satellite Channel has been most significant media phenomenon in The Arab World in the past decade. The need arises, therefore, to evaluate the channel by key Arab media and political science experts.

In an endeavor to poll Arab political science and media professors on Al-Jazeera professionalism, the Knowledge World Center for Polls in Jordan conducted an **11-month**-old project in **19 Arab countries** in cooperation with the most important Arab experts specialized in this field. **Forty-six researchers**, supervisors, and assists from **19 Arab countries - 26 of whom are PhD holders** - participated in the project, the first of its kind in the Arab World and the largest effort attracting this number of college professors.

The poll results and the relevant initial were both examined and developed by at a workshop by an academic committee of experts and professors specialized in political science, media, and statistics.

The **poll's objectives** go as follows:

1. Measuring how Arab experts view Al-Jazeera's professionalism;
2. Measuring the channel's viewership among the elite experts at Arab universities; and
3. Determining which Arab news channel has the largest viewership among the Academic elite in the Arab world.

The poll was meant to explore Al-Jazeera's professionalism and objectivity. Objectivity was measured through **neutrality**, **credibility**, and **balance**. **Professionalism**, on the other hand, was measured through examining the development of the technical aspects related the presentation of media subject matter in terms of **simultaneous translation**, **live relay connectivity**, the **scientific background of presenters and program writers**, **news scoops**, **images** captured by Al-Jazeera's photographers, and the **rhetoric** and concepts used to describe events.

Geographically, the study, which started on 1 February 2007 and ended on 9 January 2008, covered **19 Arab countries**: Jordan, Emirates, Bahrain, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Iraq, Kuwait, Morocco, Yemen, Tunisia, Syria, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Lebanon, Libya, Egypt, and Mauritania.

Methodology

The total size of the study population - which is made up of PhD holders specialized in political science and media and working at Arab Universities - stood at **1251** respondents from **19** Arab countries. While **616** of them are **media experts**, **635** are **political science specialists**.

The Strata Sample technique was used. The population was divided into strata according to their majors and the countries they come from.

Sample size and distribution: **298** respondents are **media specialists**, **307** are specialized in **political science**, and **6** are specialized in areas that were not identified.

The **sample size -48.84%** - is almost twice the size usually needed for a poll. In addition to being graphically representative of the study population, the sample was highly credible, balanced, not stereotyped, and able to run an assessment. The **response rate** was **100%**, with a margin of error less than 1% of the main variables of the poll.

Poll Results

Reflecting a high level of professionalism and objectivity, the results showed, at the level of general indicators, that **98.4%** of the respondents **watch Al-Jazeera** at a daily average of **3.2** hours, or **1,168** hours per year. It also showed that they watch a variety of **more than 20 programs** despite the fact that **news programs** were the most viewed at a rate of **22.3%**.

Al-Jazeera came **first as the Arab news channel viewed** most **77.2 %** by political science and media professors. This rate is **three times** and **28 times** higher than the rates given to the channels that came **second 17.9%** and **third**.

As for professional indicators, **37.3%** of the sample said that **certain sides have a negative effect on the channel's professional performance**, while **40.6%** - an almost similar rate - said that this **interference is either nonexistent or is positive**.

While **73%** of the respondents said they believe that **Al-Jazeera will apologize, withdraw**, or "**might apologize**" for wrong information, **17.2%** said **otherwise**.

As for **Al-Jazeera staff's professional skills and background**, **75.6%** of the respondents gave the channel a **high rating**. **91.3 %** said that the channel's teams can move to the scene of the event fast, while **55.1%** said the channel's staffers observe standard Arabic.

Simultaneous **translation** got **76.9%**; **news scoops** **82.5%**; **high image technicalities** **76.5%**; the **scientific knowledge of the channel's anchormen** **72.6%**; and the **debate abilities of the moderators** **74.5%**.

As for **Al-Jazeera's objective** indicators, the results varied. On **credibility**, **46%** of political science and media professors said that Al-Jazeera is **highly credible**, while **50.1%** said it is **relatively credible** and **2.6%** said it has **low credibility**. In other words, **96.1%** of the respondents said that **the channel's credibility is either high or relatively high**. The majority of those who said that the channel's credibility is high come from Mauritania, Emirates, and Egypt, while those who said its credibility is relatively high come from Oman **100%**, Saudi Arabia **81.8%**, and Kuwait **71.4%**.

While **29.7%** of the respondents said that the **channel is balanced** as regards allowing various views to express themselves as well as regards allocating balanced air time to these views, **60.6%** said that this **balance is relative**.

Asked **how "cautious" Al-Jazeera is** when raising a certain issue and carrying a sensitive story, **18%** said that the channel is **cautious** in this respect, while **29.7%** said **it is not** and **50.2%** said it is **"sometimes" cautious**.

While **35.2%** of the sample said that the channel uses largely **neutral terms** to describe a certain event, **52.9%** said that it is **occasionally neutral** and **10.2%** said **it is not neutral**.

It should be noted that some respondents do not view the lack of term-related neutrality as a necessarily negative attitude, as is the case when using the term "martyrs," rather than "those killed" to refer to the Palestinians killed by the Israeli entity.

As for using **neutral images** when relaying reports and news, **38.5%** said that the channel is **largely neutral**, whereas **47.3%** said it is **sometimes neutral** and **12.3%** said **it is not neutral**. The same note on terms neutrality applies here as well.

As for the **countries to which Al-Jazeera gives greatest attention**, **15.9%** said that **Iraq** comes first, **15.6%** said **Egypt** comes Second, **14.5%** said **Palestine** comes Third, then **9.6%** said **Lebanon**. It is clear that these countries are the scene of hot unfolding events that attract media attention. The political and cultural weight of Egypt makes it attract more attention than other countries.

10.8% said Al-Jazeera gives **Islamic trends** -including HAMAS, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Al-Qa'ida- more importance. Only 203 professors - **33.2%** of a total of 611 - responded to this question. On the other hand, **47.4%** of the respondents said Al-Jazeera gives more attention to **1945-1970 era**, as compared to **33.95%** who said that gives more attention to **1970-present era**.

The poll results show that the **Naser's Era** [after the late Egyptian President Jamal Abd-al-Naser] was the modern era that attracted the largest portion of Al-Jazeera coverage **47.4%**. When compared with the responses given to the previous question on whether Al-Jazeera gives more attention to the religious trends and political Islam, this response shows that Al-Jazeera is far more inserted in Naser's Era than in different Islamic trends and movements, bearing in the mind the state of enmity between Abd-al-Naser's regime and the Muslim Brotherhood Movement.

While **45.6%** of the respondents said that **the channel does not** present material that is purposefully intended to **inflict harm or distortion**, **37.8%** said it **sometimes does this** and only **9.3%** said that **the channel intentionally carries distorting stories**. These rates show how divided the respondents are on this issue.

In conclusion, the results show that Al-Jazeera's objectivity is high, ranging from very high to relatively high; where as the results on its professionalism ranged from excellent and very good.

For the most important academic class (political professors and media professors) Al-Jazeera is the channel viewed most, with a volume of viewership that is far greater than that of other news channels.