

Media in the arab world

[Media](#)



Al-Jazeera is an independent news network functioning from Qatar, which has been steadily gaining attention since its inception in 1996. The network has been fairly controversial in its choice of topics and very unconventional as well which would explain why more Arabs and Westerners alike gravitate to it for information about the current state of the Middle East. It first became popular when the network acquired a videotape containing Osama bin Laden's message regarding the 9/11 terrorist act. In the subsequent months, Al-Jazeera became the exclusive recipient of what came to be a series of bin Laden's messages.

Al-Jazeera is characterized by its bold actions of bringing to the public issues that were previously considered sensitive or even taboo to be discussed on-air. Some of these topics include politics, corruption, terrorism, issues on gender and sexuality, religion and family values. Previously, societal dictates make discussions about topics like these only possible behind closed doors, never for the public audience. Because of the strict censorship that Arab governments have of the media, it has been pretty hard to come up with or relate an accurate and objective description of what's happening in the Middle East but fortunately, the network Al-Jazeera changed all that.

So what are its impacts to the known world? For one thing, Al-Jazeera served as one wake-up call to the Arab world. If before, the Middle East is left in the dark about things that concern them directly, it isn't so now. Also Al-Jazeera encouraged a lot of Arabs to get involved with present issues regarding politics, security or even religion. Since Al-Jazeera began its popularity boom, its viewer's frequency has been uncontested. People in the Middle East are

as enthused now as we are when it comes to keeping up with all of the crucial happenings in the Middle East. (El-Nawawy Mohammed, 2002)

Their most popular program is called “ The Opposite Direction”. With this, Al-Jazeera invites proponents of both sides to discuss a particular issue. The show is very popular that a lot of political officials and experts are willing to appear on it. This lively discussion sometimes turn into hot debates between opposing parties resulting in very controversial airings where guests walk off the stage or yell at each other at the top of their voices. Scenes that have been previously non-existent in Middle East television. Because they are independent, the Qatari government imposes little, if at all, restrictions on the network. Another fact that contributes to its growing popularity no doubt. (Mohammed el-Nawawy, 2002)

Aside from impacting Arabs in the Middle East, Al-Jazeera has also established quite a name in the western world. Al-Jazeera effectively challenged the monopoly of western news networks like CNN and NBC on coverage about Middle East events, a change that most Arabs welcomed because accusations about western networks portraying them (Arabs) in a bad light are numerous. Even within Middle East networks themselves as well as international ones, there is a recognition that Al-Jazeera’s always ahead especially when it comes to groundbreaking news in the Middle East. In fact, the network is so noteworthy that it helped put the Qatari government in the map.

It also helped a lot of Arabs who are living in other parts of the world. For the first time, they are now shown an accurate picture of how it is like in their

hometowns that further strengthens their ties to their respective, to use Benedict Anderson “imagined communities”. This helps them relate to important matters that concern them which would provide them enough opportunity to act on it. In a certain level, Al-Jazeera helped a lot in bridging geographical gaps and bringing the Arab consciousness closer and closer. Today, if one wants to know what’s happening in the Middle East, Arabs and Westerners alike turn to Al-Jazeera for news.

The Al-Jazeera network certainly created a significant impact to the power of media everywhere. I’d like to think that what Al-Jazeera represents most is the epitome of what freedom of expression means. The right to express themselves, the media’s, should not be repressed whether in the Middle East or anywhere else. In this respect, Al-Jazeera serves as a beacon that proves that no matter what restrictions are imposed on speech whether culturally or socially, its freedom can still be attained.

References

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Mohammed el-Nawawy, A. I. (2002, April 15). *Al-Jazeera: How the Free Arab News Network Scooped the World and Changed the Middle East*. (J. J. Myers, Interviewer)