



US public diplomacy in the Arab world:

The news credibility of Radio Sawa and Television Alhurra
in five countries

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ABSTRACT

This study surveyed a convenience sample of Arab college students in five Arab countries regarding their perceptions of the news credibility of two US-sponsored networks targeting Arab audiences: Radio Sawa and Television Alhurra. To assess the credibility of these networks, the students were asked to use a 12-item credibility scale developed by Gaziano and McGrath. The study found no correlation between the respondents' frequency of listening to Radio Sawa and their perception of its news as credible. Moreover the study revealed that the students' attitudes toward US foreign policy had worsened slightly since they started listening to Radio Sawa and watching Alhurra. Many respondents stated that if the US desires to improve its image in the Arab world, it should leave Iraq and adopt an even-handed policy on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Results of this study show the need for the US administration to acknowledge that no matter how savvy its public diplomacy efforts in the Middle East, they will be ineffective in changing Arab public opinion if that public is dissatisfied with US policies on the ground.

KEY WORDS

news credibility ■ paradox of the plenty ■ public diplomacy ■ Radio Sawa ■ situational response ■ sleeper effect ■ soft power ■ Television Alhurra

Introduction

In the aftermath of the 2001 attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, the US government launched a series of multimillion-dollar programs designed under a wide-scale public diplomacy plan to improve America's image in the Middle East and win the hearts and minds of the Arab people. Two such programs, Radio Sawa and Alhurra satellite television, were supervised by the Broadcasting Board of

Governors (BBG), the Federal body responsible for all US international broadcasting. The target audience for Radio Sawa and Television Alhurra is the younger Arab generation, who will be tomorrow's decision-makers.

The main objective of Radio Sawa and Television Alhurra is to help explain various aspects of American foreign policy and 'to provide information about basic characteristics of American society that are important for Arab and Muslim audiences to know and understand' (Rugh, 2004: 154). This information is regarded as critical at a time when there is increasing Arab dissatisfaction with the US presence in Iraq and its handling of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Purpose of the study

This study surveyed college students at universities in five Arab countries (Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Palestine, and Morocco) regarding their perceptions of the news credibility of Radio Sawa and Television Alhurra, and how far these perceptions were correlated to the frequency of using these channels. The students were asked to use a 12-item credibility scale developed by Gaziano and McGrath (1986). The study also investigated whether the students' attitudes toward US foreign policy had changed since they started tuning in to Radio Sawa and Television Alhurra. And finally the study asked students for their suggestions for improving US public diplomacy efforts in the Arab Middle East.

Significance of the study

Understanding how the young or, as the US Department of State likes to call it, the 'successor' generation in the Arab world perceives news on Radio Sawa and Television Alhurra should be of considerable interest to Washington decision-makers as they evaluate their current diplomacy efforts in the Middle East. Recent polls have shown that Arab opinion of US foreign policy is overwhelmingly negative. A 2004 poll conducted by Zogby International in six Arab countries showed that Arabs, while not strongly opposed to American culture, detest US foreign policy (Zogby International, 2004). When asked in the poll: 'What is the worst thought that comes to mind when you hear about America?', foreign policy issues were noted in almost 80 percent of the responses across the board in all six countries. The most frequently cited were 'unfair Middle East policy', US responsibility for Arabs' suffering (particularly in Iraq and Palestine), and what was perceived as 'the US preoccupation with "Arab oil"' (Zogby International, 2004: 7).

Another poll conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press in March 2004 showed that majorities in some Muslim countries such as Jordan and Turkey believed that 'America pays little or no attention to their [countries'] interests in making its foreign policy decisions' (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2004: 6).

In many cases, it is difficult to determine the size and nature of audiences tuned in to foreign broadcasting because of methodological difficulties, language barriers, and foreign government bureaucracies (Fortner, 1994). These challenges are commonly experienced by researchers interested in Arab public opinion. 'Because of the challenge of political sensitivities, or the reluctance to disclose [certain] information . . . ascertaining reliable data is difficult at best, and often impossible' (Gher and Amin, 1999: 61). Yet accurate and reliable audience research is essential to assess the impact of international broadcasting. Public opinion research may play a critical role in designing foreign relations strategies and in enhancing mutual understanding between nations (Free, 1968).

Literature review: US image in the Arab world

The United States currently faces serious challenges as a result of its deteriorating image in the Arab Middle East. As mentioned above, recent polls show that the overwhelming majority of Arab opinion responds favorably to American values, but is critical of US foreign policy. Andrew Kohut, director of the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, is cited in Seib as saying that 'the most serious problem facing the United States abroad is its very poor public image in the Muslim world, especially in the Middle East/Conflict Area' (Seib, 2004: 3).

Several polls have shown that a major source for anti-Americanism in the Middle East is the Arab perception of US bias in favor of Israel. A 2001 poll of people from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Egypt and Lebanon concluded that 60 percent of the respondents in those countries cited the Palestinian conflict as the 'single most important issue' that negatively affected their perception of the US policy (Talbot, 2003).

Shibley Telhami argues that the issue of Arabs' opinions of America 'is not about the objective reality of where the blame lies; it is about entrenched perceptions. The public in the Middle East blames the powers that be, and sees Israel as . . . an occupier of Arab lands, and the United States as the anchor of that order' (cited in Meyer, 2003: 42).

Telhami does not believe that the media play a major role in shaping Arabs' negative perceptions toward the United States. In his April 2004 testimony before the US Senate's Committee on Foreign Relations, Telhami argued that it is overall foreign policy on the ground, not the media, that contributes the most to anti-Americanism. 'There are many people in the Middle East that do not have satellite television. They express just as much anti-Americanism as those who do' (Telhami, 2004: 47).

In his testimony in the same hearing, Edmund Ghareeb, a Middle East expert, cited the US invasion of Iraq as a further source of anti-Americanism in the Arab world. 'They [Arabs] look at Iraq and ask if this is a war of freedom and democracy or a fight for oil and hegemony' (Ghareeb, 2004: 69).

William Rugh, an expert on Middle East politics, argued that Arabs' immediate reaction to the 9/11 events 'was sympathy for Americans as victims' (Rugh, 2004: 147). According to Rugh, many Arabs even saw some justification in the US war against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. However, as the US government 'expanded the definition of "the enemy" beyond Al-Qaeda, Arabs and Muslims concluded that [US President] Bush's perception of the problem, and of the enemy, differed substantially from theirs' (Rugh, 2004: 147).

However, despite strong evidence pointing to alternative conclusions, the negative image of US policies in the Arab world actually prompted US officials to intensify their public diplomacy efforts in the Arab Middle East.

Public diplomacy

The term 'public diplomacy' characterizes activities once described as propaganda. Malone (1988: 3) argued that public diplomacy is the process of 'communicating directly with the people of other countries . . . to affect their thinking . . . The objective, in most cases, is to influence the behavior of a foreign government by influencing the attitudes of its citizens'.

Public diplomacy utilizes a variety of techniques, such as academic exchange programs, participation in international exhibitions and festivals, setting up cultural centers in foreign countries and using international broadcasting (Gilboa, 2000). Boyd (1997: 446) identified four reasons as to why countries broadcast across national borders: 'to enhance national prestige; to promote national interests; to attempt religious or political indoctrination; and to foster cultural ties'.

Gilboa (2000) cited another reason as to why a country broadcasts across its national borders: to create a favorable perception of its policies among foreign audiences. This is especially important in public diplomacy, where perceptions may sometimes be more important than reality. 'If people believe something to be true, it is frequently the same, in political terms, as if it were true' (Tuch, 1990: 5).

Modern diplomats argue that the 'actual consequences of a given policy initiative' depend upon the way 'both the domestic and the foreign publics perceive the issues and the policy offered. This understanding depends partly, of course, on the way in which the communications media – formal and informal – present the picture. But it depends more profoundly on the complex of [peoples'] knowledge, attitudes, and prejudices' (Fisher, 1972: 8).

Ross argued that diplomats must realize that 'it is not what one says, but it is what the other hears that ultimately matters most' (2002: 77). Furthermore, what people hear, and the way they hear it, is often determined to a large extent by their perceptions of the message's source. It is therefore of the utmost relevance that Radio Sawa and Television Alhurra are an integral part of recent US public diplomacy efforts in the Middle East.

Radio Sawa

Radio Sawa's official name is the Middle East Radio Network. 'Sawa' is Arabic for 'together'. According to its official website, Radio Sawa is a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week Arabic-language radio network, which began broadcasting on 23 March 2002. It seeks 'to effectively communicate with the youthful population of Arabic-speakers in the Middle East by providing up-to-date news, information and entertainment on FM and medium wave radio stations throughout the region' (Radio Sawa website).

With a \$35 million budget, Radio Sawa set up offices in Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan. Its regional broadcast center is located in Dubai, UAE (Gedda, 2002). To attract young (under 30) Arab listeners, the content is mostly music. For about 53 minutes of each hour it broadcasts Arabic and Western pop songs alternately, the rest of the time being divided between a short news bulletin at quarter to, and a longer one at quarter past, each hour (Guttman, 2004).

The initiator of the Radio Sawa idea is Norman Pattiz, an American media entrepreneur, who believes that regional Arab media contribute to the deterioration of the US image in the Arab world. Pattiz, who also

chairs the BBG's Middle East Committee, said, 'There's a media war going on [in the Arab world], with incitement, hate broadcasting, disinformation, government censorship and self-censorship, and America is not in the race . . . You don't have to be a rocket scientist to understand that this isn't the way we want to be presented in the Arab world' (Guttman, 2004).

Radio Sawa has been subject to criticism by several media observers. For example, Ali Abunimah (2002: para. 18) argues that Radio Sawa is 'a quick fix solution to a deep and worsening problem that will ultimately prove disappointing to its creators'. According to Abunimah, Radio Sawa would have a hard time establishing itself as a go-to news source in the Middle East where there is information saturation from a myriad satellite channels.

Similarly, in his description of an environment where there are many sources of information that compete for audiences' attention, Joseph Nye coined the expression the 'paradox of the plenty'. According to Nye (2004: 89), 'attention rather than information becomes the scarce resource' in such an environment. Radio Sawa would have to compete fiercely for Arab audiences' attention, divided among many other news outlets.

William Rugh goes further and argues that Radio Sawa drastically reduces the effectiveness of the US public diplomacy efforts. 'Although Radio Sawa may be useful in some ways, it does not replace more serious broadcasts' (Rugh, 2004: 159). el-Nawawy and Iskandar also argue that Arabs might likely be suspicious of the intentions of Radio Sawa in the Middle East. 'There is a strong likelihood that [Radio Sawa] will be seen as a way to sell Americanism through entertainment rather than tackle issues that plague the [Arab] region' (el-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2002: 195).

In an October 2003 report to the Committee on Appropriations of the US House of Representatives, Ambassador Edward Djerejian, who led the US Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, adopted a modified position. He proposed that creating a large following in the Arab world should not be Radio Sawa's main goal. His report stated that Radio Sawa should prove its ability to change Arab audiences' negative attitudes toward US policy and 'move the needle' toward what the US Department of State, in its public diplomacy mission statement, calls 'influence' (Djerejian, 2003: 30).

However, it is hard to see how Radio Sawa may be able to 'influence' Arab public opinion if its listeners do not pay attention to the news it broadcasts. According to the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram Weekly*, there

is a big chance that 'the Arab youth will split the strategy [regarding Radio Sawa]: take the US sound and discard the US agenda' (cited in el-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003: 213).

The Djerejian report also reviewed the results of an ACNielsen survey conducted in five Arab countries over July–August 2003. The survey showed that Radio Sawa had an average listenership of just over 31 percent among the general population 15 years and older (BBG website). The Djerejian report highlighted the weakness of the survey, which had only one question on attitudes toward the United States. It asked, 'How favorably or unfavorably inclined are you personally toward the USA?', and yielded more positive views from Radio Sawa listeners than from its non-listeners. 'This result was to be expected since any listener to a US-sponsored station is likely to be favorably disposed to the United States. A better question would be whether Sawa had changed a listener's attitudes toward America' (Djerejian, 2003: 31).

Television Alhurra

According to its official website, Alhurra (Arabic for 'The Free One') is a commercial-free Arabic-language satellite television network, devoted to news and information (Alhurra television website). Alhurra, whose legal name is 'Middle East Television Network', was launched on 14 February 2004 with a \$62 million budget. It is designed to counteract the impact of popular news channels in the Arab world such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya (Seib, 2004). In the words of Norman Pattiz, who spearheaded the launching of the network, 'Alhurra will present fresh perspectives for viewers in the Middle East that we believe will create more cultural understanding and respect' (Broadcasting Board of Governors website).

In his testimony before the US Senate's Committee on Foreign Relations in April 2004, Mouafac Harb, Alhurra's news director, highlighted what he considered Alhurra's objective approach in covering news. He said, '... Alhurra has brought a new idea to journalism in the Middle East – telling the truth. We do our work the way it is supposed to be done. We play it straight and we behave like news professionals because that is what we are' (Harb, 2004: 21).

However, several media experts question Alhurra's success in changing Arabs' negative opinions toward US policy, especially in a highly competitive media environment where some Arab satellite channels have gained Arabs' trust. Shibley Telhami, in his April 2004 testimony before the US Senate's Committee on Foreign Relations, argued that Alhurra's 'detached objectivity' may not appeal to Arab

audiences, especially when it comes to covering highly sensitive issues like the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Telhami, 2004: 52).

Telhami said, '[Alhurra's] aim is to be precisely dispassionate while facing a passionate audience' (2004: 52). To illustrate his point, Telhami referred to Alhurra's coverage of Israel's assassination of Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin in March 2004. Despite overwhelming Arab concern about this incident, 'Alhurra ran a short story as the news [about the assassination] broke, then went back to its normal programming, which focused on an episode in American history' (2004: 52). This may be one reason why many Arab viewers would rather watch indigenous Arab satellite channels which reflect their convictions in a way that Alhurra does not.

Kim Elliott, a veteran audience researcher at Voice of America, also expressed his doubts, in an interview with Sefsaf, that satellite networks with strong ties to the US government can gain mass appeal. He argued that the Arab people will always look at Alhurra as a propaganda station that publicizes the ideas of the US government (Sefsaf, 2004).

Several US policymakers argue a different position again, that channels such as Alhurra should be utilized to enhance foreign audiences' understanding of the US position, but not necessarily in the expectation that it will make them embrace it. In his testimony during the hearing on Public Diplomacy and International Free Press, before the US Senate's Committee on Foreign Relations in February 2004, Senator Joseph Biden said, ' . . . we tend to think of public diplomacy in terms of, we're going to convince people that they have to, or should, adopt our views, our values, our system. And I think that may be a bridge too far' (Biden, 2004: 4). In Biden's view, it would be good enough if Muslims understand the motives behind the US policies, even if they don't accept them.

Previous surveys on Alhurra

Regardless of what Alhurra's proponents and opponents say about it, there is no question that more research needs to be conducted on how the Arab public perceives the credibility of Alhurra. Very few surveys have been carried out to that end. One was conducted in seven Arab countries in April 2004 (two months after Alhurra's launching) to measure the channel's popularity in the Arab world. The survey, which was administered by Ipsos-Sat, a Middle East research company hired by the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), showed that an average of 29 percent of adults had watched Alhurra in the previous week

(Broadcasting Board of Governors website). Another survey that was conducted in 2005 using a sample of Egyptian viewers showed that the majority of the respondents did not report using Alhurra as a major source of news (Mubarak, 2005).

The pivotal issue of credibility

Joseph Nye, who coined the term 'soft power', and defined it as 'getting others to want the outcomes that you want' (Nye, 2004: 5) through co-opting rather than coercing them, argued that credibility is an essential factor in the success of soft power, which is an integral aspect of public diplomacy. 'Communities tend to cluster around credible cue givers, and, in turn, perceived credibility tends to reinforce communities' (Nye, 2004: 89).

Much credibility research began in the 1950s and focused on defining the dimensions of the source, or communicator, that receivers perceive as credible. Infante defined source credibility as 'a set of attitudes toward a source that influence how receivers behave toward the source' (1980: 21). The well-known postwar American researcher Hovland and his associates specified source credibility by identifying two dimensions that can be used to measure it: expertness and trustworthiness. According to them, receivers' awareness of a source's intention or motives to persuade others in a way that would benefit him, would negatively affect the source's trustworthiness. If the receivers have unfavorable attitudes toward the communicator, they will either be inattentive to the message or will not go out of their way to understand its content (Hovland et al., 1953).

Hovland and Weiss (1951: 648) also, however, coined the term 'sleeper effect', which they described as the possibility that the passage of time would make receivers more accepting of messages presented by an untrustworthy source. Nonetheless, this effect, they argued, would not take place if 'the communicator and his stand [on issues] are so intimately associated that one spontaneously recalls the source when he thinks about the issue' (Hovland and Weiss, 1951: 649).

Writing some 20 years later, Berlo et al. argued that credibility is not a uni-dimensional, dichotomous (either high or low) concept, but rather a more complex, multi-dimensional and relational variable that is defined in terms of the receivers' changing perceptions rather than the source's static and objective characteristics. 'The "image" of the source', they argue, 'is dynamic in that it both influences and is influenced by the communication event' (Berlo et al., 1969/1970: 576).

Building on this latter approach, Gunther proposed that a person's perception of a source's credibility is a 'situational response' governed by the stake that person has in the issue at hand, as well as how controversial the issue itself is (Gunther, 1992: 147). According to Gunther, the higher the audiences' personal stake in an issue and the more controversial it is, the less their trust in a source's treatment of that issue, especially if that treatment goes against the audiences' beliefs.

One of the most widely used credibility scales was the 12-item credibility index developed by Gaziano and McGrath in their 1986 study of newspaper and television credibility. Their study, conducted for the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), included items that asked whether television and newspaper news was fair, told the whole story, was unbiased, was accurate, respected people's privacy, watched out for audiences' interests, could be trusted, was factual, separated fact and opinion, was concerned with community well-being, had well-trained reporters, and was concerned with the public interest (Gaziano and McGrath, 1986). Rimmer and Weaver (1987) reported a .90 Cronbach alpha for the internal reliability of Gaziano and McGrath's scale. Statistically, a reliability level as high as this is a very strong index that the items on the scale measure identical and not dissimilar characteristics.

Media use and perceived credibility

Several studies have shown a positive correlation between the frequency of media use and the audience's perception of media credibility. Shaw stated that:

it is as plausible to hold that an individual would tend to consume more of the products of a medium perceived more believable, as it is to suggest that an individual on special occasions, such as an interview or survey situation, would tend to declare in favor of a medium he uses the most. (1973: 310)

Schweiger concluded in a study that compared 'television-believers' (i.e. those who had trust in television) with 'newspaper-believers' that there was a significant correlation between the perceived credibility of a medium and its amount of usage (Schweiger, 2000: 54). Rimmer and Weaver (1987) argued that attitudinal, preference or affective measures that involve choice of media show more correlation with credibility levels than behavioral measures that ask for the frequency of media use.

Research questions

This study will attempt to address the following research questions:

- RQ1. Will the students' frequency of use of Radio Sawa and/or Television Alhurra be positively correlated to the perceived news credibility of both channels in general?
- RQ2. Will the students' frequency of use of Radio Sawa and/or Television Alhurra be positively correlated to their degree of favorability toward US foreign policy?
- RQ3. Will the students' perception of the degree of news credibility of Radio Sawa and/or Television Alhurra be positively correlated to their degree of favorability toward US foreign policy?
- RQ4. Have students' attitudes toward US foreign policy improved since their exposure to Radio Sawa and/or Television Alhurra?
- RQ5. Is there a correlation between the students' use of other Arab radio news sources and their perception of Radio Sawa's news credibility?
- RQ6. Is there a correlation between the students' use of Arab 24-hour satellite news channels and their perception of Television Alhurra's news credibility?
- RQ7. Would travel to the US make a difference in the students' perception of Radio Sawa's and/or Television Alhurra's news credibility?

Method

Survey and sample

This study relied on a cross-sectional survey method to collect data from a non-probability convenience sample of readily accessible college students majoring in Communication at Arab universities in five Arab countries (Kuwait, the UAE, Jordan, Palestine, and Morocco). Although convenience samples contain unknown quantities of error, and generate results that cannot be reliably generalized to the population as they lack external validity, they are still helpful in collecting exploratory information and can produce useful data (Wimmer and Dominick, 1997).

A convenience sample was the most appropriate for this study given the challenges and complications that researchers in the Arab world often face, such as political sensitivities and reluctance born of fear to participate in a survey. In the end, however, 394 students filled out

questionnaires for this survey. Collecting data from such a relatively large sample about an issue of high political sensitivity such as the issue at hand is difficult at best in the Arab world, and often impossible.

Instrument and procedure

The survey utilized a paper questionnaire that included a news credibility scale adapted from Gaziano and McGrath (1986). The semantic-differential scale had 12 items, which respondents were asked to rate using a series of five-point scales anchored by bipolar adjectives. The items in the scale are listed above in the summary of Gaziano and McGrath's study. A summated mean was computed for the scale. The questionnaire included other Likert-type, closed-ended questions. It also included open-ended questions that yielded more detailed information regarding the students' perceptions of Radio Sawa and Television Alhurra, and their assessment of the US public diplomacy efforts in the Arab world.

The questionnaire was devised in English, but translated into Arabic by the researcher, who is a native Arabic speaker. The researcher contacted five Arab Communication instructors at five Arab universities in the five countries mentioned above. The five universities are Kuwait University, Yarmouk University in Jordan, Sharjah University in the United Arab Emirates, Al-Najah National University in Palestine, and the Institut Supérieur d'Information et de la Communication in Morocco.

In contacting the instructors, the researcher used a network of Arab Communication professors, which has been formed through the Arab-US Association for Communication Educators (AUSACE), an organization consisting of educators, media professionals, and students in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. The questionnaires were faxed to five Arab professors who are members of AUSACE. The professors then distributed the questionnaires to their students and mailed back the completed questionnaires to the researcher in the United States.

Results

Summary statistics

Of the 394 students who filled out questionnaires for this study, 46 were from Morocco, 59 from Kuwait, 99 from Jordan, 172 from Palestine, and 18 from the United Arab Emirates. Of this sample, 40.6 percent were male and 59.4 percent were female. Of the total, 277 (70.3%) reported

Table 1 Countries' news credibility means for Radio Sawa and Television Alhurra

Country	Radio Sawa news credibility		TV Alhurra news credibility	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Morocco	2.17	.618	2.46	.757
Kuwait	3.29	.586	3.14	.552
Jordan	2.68	.612	2.66	.783
Palestine	2.71	.776	2.62	.829
UAE	3.08	.192	3.00	–

listening to Radio Sawa for either news or music, while 147 (37.3%) reported watching news or other programs on Television Alhurra. Of the students who listened to Radio Sawa, 43.1 percent reported listening to the station for music 'often' or 'very often', while 13.5 percent reported listening to it for news 'often' or 'very often'. Of those who watched Television Alhurra, 10.9 percent reported watching it for news 'often' or 'very often', and the same percentage reported watching it for other programs 'often' or 'very often'.

Descriptive statistics of the students' responses to Gaziano and McGrath's news credibility scale, which ranged from 1 (the lowest M) to 5 (the highest M) yielded overall credibility means of 2.73 and 2.68 for Radio Sawa and Television Alhurra respectively. Respondents from Kuwait displayed the highest news credibility means for both Radio Sawa and Television Alhurra, while respondents from Morocco displayed the lowest for both stations. See Table 1 for countries' news credibility means for Radio Sawa and Television Alhurra (1 is the lowest mean and 5 is the highest).

Research questions

RQ1. Will the students' frequency of use of Radio Sawa and/or Television Alhurra be positively correlated to the perceived news credibility of both channels in general?

The students' frequency of use was measured by a question asking for the average number of hours per day spent listening to Radio Sawa, and the same question regarding Alhurra. Pearson correlation analysis showed no significant relationship between students' frequency of listening to Radio Sawa and their perception of Radio Sawa news as credible. However, a small positive linear relationship was revealed by

Pearson correlation analysis between students' frequency of watching Television Alhurra and their perception of its news as credible in general ($r = .21, p < .05$).

RQ2. Will the students' frequency of use of Radio Sawa and/or Television Alhurra be positively correlated to their degree of favorability toward US foreign policy?

Despite references in the literature that suggest frequency of using American-sponsored networks is correlated to favorability toward the United States, the Pearson correlation showed *no* significant relationship between the frequency of listening to Radio Sawa and favorability toward US foreign policy. The Pearson correlation also showed *no* significant relationship between the students' frequency of watching Television Alhurra and their favorability toward US foreign policy.

RQ3. Will the students' perception of the degree of news credibility of Radio Sawa and/or Television Alhurra be positively correlated to their degree of favorability toward US foreign policy?

The Pearson correlation showed a small positive linear relationship between the students' perception of Radio Sawa news as credible in general and their favorability toward US foreign policy ($r = .29, p < .05$). A stronger positive linear relationship was also detected by running a Pearson correlation test between the students' perception of Television Alhurra news as credible in general and their favorability toward US foreign policy ($r = .40, p < .05$).

RQ4. Have students' attitudes toward US foreign policy improved since their exposure to Radio Sawa and/or Television Alhurra?

To measure whether students' attitudes toward US foreign policy have improved since their exposure to Radio Sawa, students were given a scale of 1 to 7 (where 1 meant 'much worse' and 7 meant 'much improved'), and asked to rank their attitude toward US foreign policy, compared to their attitude before they started listening to it. The same question was posed regarding Television Alhurra. Results showed that the students' attitudes toward the US foreign policy had *worsened* slightly since they had started listening to Radio Sawa and watching Television Alhurra. The means for students' answers on this scale were: $M = 3.35$ ($SD = 1.66$) for Radio Sawa, and $M = 3.19$ ($SD = 1.68$) for Television Alhurra.

RQ5. Is there a correlation between the students' use of other Arab radio news sources and their perception of Radio Sawa's news credibility?

Pearson correlation analysis showed that students' perception of Radio Sawa news as credible held a small negative correlation with their use of Arab radio news ($r = -.19, p < .05$). Thus students who listened to Arab radio news channels more frequently had a lower tendency to perceive Radio Sawa news as credible.

RQ6. Is there a correlation between the students' use of Arab 24-hour satellite news channels and their perception of Television Alhurra's news credibility?

The Pearson correlation test revealed that students' perception of Television Alhurra news as credible also held a small negative correlation with their use of Arab 24-hour satellite news ($r = -.15, p < .05$). Students who watched Arab 24-hour satellite TV news more frequently had a lower tendency to perceive Television Alhurra news as credible.

RQ7. Would travel to the US make a difference in the students' perception of Radio Sawa's and/or Television Alhurra's news credibility?

One-way analysis of variance showed a difference between those respondents who reported traveling to the United States and those who did not, regarding their perception of Radio Sawa's news credibility ($F = 4.78, p < .05$). Students who reported traveling to the United States had a higher tendency to perceive Radio Sawa news as credible than those who did not report traveling to the United States. It is important to acknowledge, however, that only 30 respondents of the total sample reported traveling to the United States. One-way analysis of variance, however, showed no significant difference in perception of Television Alhurra's news credibility between those respondents who reported traveling to the United States, and those who did not.

Discussion

Data from this study partially support the literature on media credibility that suggests a positive correlation between the frequency of media use and the audience's perception of media credibility. This was the case with Television Alhurra, whose news was believed to be more credible by the respondents who reported watching it more frequently. However, as this study showed, the respondents' perception of Radio Sawa's news

credibility was not correlated with how frequently they listened to its programming. The explanation for this result is that most respondents in this study's sample reported listening more frequently to Radio Sawa's music, not its news. Even answers to an open-ended question that asked students about what they liked the most about Radio Sawa showed that it was music that attracted them the most. The question here is: if music is what attracts young people the most to Radio Sawa, how can it be expected to improve their perceptions of US foreign policy?

This study showed that the respondents' frequency of using Radio Sawa and Television Alhurra is not correlated to their degree of favorability toward US foreign policy. This result contradicts one important claim expressed in the 2003 report by the US Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World. The point in question was that '... any listener to a US-sponsored station is likely to be favorably disposed to the United States' (Djerejian, 2003: 31). One explanation of that study's result is that there may be reasons other than favorability toward the United States in general that would make young people in the Arab world use American-sponsored networks frequently. One such reason would be their musical appeal among young Arab people.

The research reported here showed that, overwhelmingly, students' perceptions of the credibility of Radio Sawa and Television Alhurra news are positively correlated to their degree of favorability toward the US foreign policy. For US officials this would signal the urgency of trying to enhance the credibility of American-sponsored networks targeting Arab audiences. However, this may be much easier said than done. As discussed in the literature review, foreign audience perceptions of the source that sent the message play a vital role in public diplomacy efforts. Today, many Arabs have serious doubts about the intentions of US officials behind launching Radio Sawa and Television Alhurra. The question that is being asked about these channels in many Arab circles is: why now?

The relatively low news-credibility means for Radio Sawa and Television Alhurra shown in this study's results confirm the findings of Hovland et al. back in 1953 that receivers' awareness of a source's intention to persuade others in a way that would benefit him, would negatively affect the source's credibility. Because many Arab media users today are intensely aware of the US administration's motives in trying to win Arab hearts and minds and improve its image in the Arab world, they have a tendency not to trust news broadcast on Radio Sawa or Television Alhurra. In assessing the way both networks are perceived in the Arab world, one has to consider that they are still relatively new,

especially Television Alhurra, which has been around for less than two years. A further question here is whether frequency of use over time might make Alhurra and Radio Sawa news any more credible in the eyes of Arab audiences – the phenomenon described by Hovland and Weiss (1951) as the ‘*sleeper effect*’. Further studies should be conducted to ascertain this.

One significant finding in this study is that respondents’ attitudes toward US foreign policy have worsened slightly since their exposure to Radio Sawa and Television Alhurra. In their answers to an open-ended question about what they liked or disliked about Sawa and Alhurra, most respondents noted that the US administration was trying to manipulate Arab opinion through networks like Sawa and Alhurra.

A Jordanian respondent wrote that ‘Radio Sawa serves US interests and helps it spread its control over the world and to serve Zionist interests’. A Palestinian respondent wrote that the US administration ‘[spreads] lies and fabricates news’ through Television Alhurra.

Many respondents expressed a strong dissatisfaction with US policies toward the Middle East. In this context, a Moroccan respondent stated that ‘the US deceives Arabs while acting as a peace leader’. In their answers to another open-ended question about what the US needs to do to win the Arabs’ hearts and minds, several respondents mentioned that the US should get out of Iraq and stop taking Israel’s side at the expense of the Palestinians. It is the US stand on these two highly sensitive issues – the situation in Iraq and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict – that contributes most to its severely deteriorating image in the Arab world. And that spills over into the way many Arabs perceive the credibility of Sawa and Alhurra. These networks may be completely unable to change opinions on these two issues, on which Arab audiences have a very strong stand. In this context, it maybe useful to draw on Gunther’s (1992) concept of ‘*situational response*’, which he used to explain that the higher the audience’s personal stakes in an issue, the less their trust in the source’s treatment of that issue.

The US administration may need to face this reality and realize that launching channels such as Sawa and Alhurra must go hand-in-hand with changing and/or modifying its policies on the ground. This researcher believes that actions speak louder than words. It is only when the Arabs see a US policy that reflects their own interests that they will trust the American-sponsored channels or any other form of public diplomacy. In this very context, Philip Seib (2005: para 8) argues too that ‘public opinion is ultimately shaped more by the substance of the policy [on the ground] than by how policy is sold’.

Another important finding in this study was that the respondents who listened to Arab radio news or watched Arab 24-hour satellite TV news more frequently, were less inclined to perceive news on Radio Sawa and Television Alhurra as credible. This strongly indicates that Arabs trust their indigenous 'Arab' satellite news media more than they trust the US-sponsored 'Arabized' networks. Before the start of the 1990s, Arab audiences did not trust their own news media, and were used to seeking out Western media outlets for news about what was happening in their own countries. But with the explosion of Arab satellite television and the appearance of Arab 24-hour independent news networks such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, Arabs today feel that they have their own professional news sources which they can trust.

The case can be made through this study that along with urgently needed changes in US foreign policy, for Arab-American understanding to be successful there is also a need for continuous dialogue to be carried out between the United States and the Arab world on official, intellectual, and popular levels. In order for this dialogue to be successful, there have to be direct, face-to-face interactions between the two sides. This study suggested that respondents who traveled to the United States might have a higher tendency to perceive Radio Sawa news as credible even under current conditions, than those without this experience. This reflects the need for cultural exchange programs to bring young Arab students and scholars to the United States to learn about its various cultural and social aspects firsthand, and for the reverse movement to take place on a large scale from the USA to Arab countries.

Acknowledgement

The researcher would like to express his gratitude to Dr Leonard Teel, the Director of the Center for International Media Education at Georgia State University's Department of Communication, for establishing most of the connections that helped with distributing the questionnaires for this study to college students in the Middle East, and to Qing Tian, a doctoral student at Georgia State University's Department of Communication, for helping with the data entry and statistical analysis for this study.

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