

Contrasting State-Run TV Channel Ratings: A Comparative Analysis of the Evolution of “Qazaqstan” and “Al-Jazeera”

ZHANIBEK UTEMISOV

L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Kazakhstan

ABSTRACT

A comparative analysis of the activities of pro-state TV channels Qazaqstan TV and Al-Jazeera and their relationship with the state are detailed herein, taking into account the specifics of their functioning and the evolution of the television industry in Kazakhstan and Qatar. Using the example of Al-Jazeera, the study demonstrates that the state funding of media does not necessarily aim to fuel branding propaganda through TV channels, but rather to help them acquire independence from state regulation, for example, increasing the role of an entity that complements the functions of the state, and identifies the information needs of its audience. On the other hand, data are presented that indicate the difficulties Qazaqstan will have to face in the post-pandemic era and the rapidly changing digital world, as well as challenges ahead in terms of competitiveness and competition for the audience. Qualitative and quantitative statistical methods were employed to validate the hypothesis that the rating of networks does not hang with the factor of state funding, but related to the content materials. A detailed content analysis of the information agenda was carried out, and a brief historical development of both TV channels was studied. Statistical data provided by open international sources, as well as comparative financial data on these channels, were investigated. In the context of the article, recommendations are made for Qazaqstan TV to tailor their agenda according to a changing socio-political environment.

Keywords: *Qazaqstan TV, Al-Jazeera, public opinion, political discussion, news agenda.*

INTRODUCTION

Both the modern digital revolution and media information are important platforms for people to coordinate and mobilize efforts among like-minded people. With a growing number of people using digital media technologies to access information and to communicate worldwide, satellite television has begun to take a back seat to digital media in recent years, the latter becoming an integral part of the political lives of many citizens. For the consumer, the digital revolution means that media is becoming widely available. Nevertheless, modern global challenges in the new era of independent Kazakhstan have shifted attention to a number of important issues of communication, more specifically satellite television, which has played an important role in the development of media literacy in Kazakhstan’s society and in strengthening political stability in the country.

Based on two case studies on state-led channels—Republican TV and Radio Corporation Kazakhstan (hereinafter referred to as RTRC or Qazaqstan) and Al-Jazeera—, this paper argues that despite the comparative rise of worldwide media corporation hegemony, media globalization has not tilted the global balance of media flow in any meaningful way. Both RTRC and Al-Jazeera have been dependent on the rulers of their respective countries, the former both politically and economically, and the latter only economically. Kazakhstan’s largest television network, RTRC is a public institution owned by the state and run by a group of executives, who are not only appointed by the ruling party, but also have high positions in state bureaucracy. RTRC enjoys certain privileges, including political and ideological aspects,

and plays the important roles of news making and organizing public opinion; it is considered as a voicing organ of the state. At the same time, Al Jazeera presents a new model of media influence (Souaget al., 2022).

The development of digital media in modern society has greatly contributed to the transformation of digital TV and the transition of television digitalization to new electronic platforms. The diversity of content and diversity of media ownerships showed that, in a digital ecosystem that promises many opportunities, digital journalism still has to deal with the dilemma between social responsibility and the political economy of media (Nurlatifah & Mutmainnah, 2021).

The beginning of this new era in the television industry involved less of the development of digital broadcasting and more of the ability to watch TV programs from digital media, and access broadcasters over the Internet. The influence of the state-run Qazaqstan and Al-Jazeera channels has been undermined in a number of ways. In the present work, the lower rating of Qazaqstan channel in comparison to Al-Jazeera, as a consequence of globalization and increasing popularity of social networks among new generations, will be explained by tracing the trajectory of television systems both in Kazakhstan and Qatar based on statistical data taken from international sources. Moreover, the controversial trend of popularity of the two state-led channels will be demonstrated, in which both enterprises were reduced to secondary media players from having monopoly in their respective countries, while one of them entered the world stage to compete with global corporations.

METHODOLOGY

Both Qazaqstan and Al-Jazeera view themselves as channels representing an alternative perspective that is remarkably different from those of Western international television networks; the present study aims to elucidate the nuances and variations of the side of the international media spectrum that these two channels represent. Situations where state-funded promotion of ownership has taken place provides us with pertinent examples to discern the possible differences between the news agenda of the two networks when covering international and local issues. It shall shed light to the subtle differences that had been previously ignored, and then discuss what implications those differences may have for the relationship of the state with such state-led media.

In fact, I have been familiar with Qazaqstan TV since Kazakhstan became independent and with Al-Jazeera since I started watching it in 1998. In order to better understand the nature of media policy in Kazakhstan and Qatar as well as the national role of both TV channels in campaigning efforts, I have examined how the programmes of these channels use signs connoting authority, such as news clips or contributions from focusing on the honour of a reporter, or infographics that connote technological sophistication and contemporaneity, to creating focus in a discourse to structure it.

A further focus of this analysis is on the history of development of television in Kazakhstan and Qatar. Statistical data provided by open international sources, as well as comparative financial data on these channels, were investigated. Based on these data, studies were conducted and conclusions were drawn.

It is also important to study the philosophy and internal rules of each channel, as well as empirical data on the published laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and those regarding TV and media policy of the state of Qatar.

For the purpose of in-depth analysis of Qazaqstan TV activities, I personally participated in online seminars, which were held by specialists and journalists working with the Qazaqstan TV channel throughout November 2020 aimed at students of the Faculty of Journalism and Political Science in Eurasian National University in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan.

Television Arrives in Kazakhstan and Qatar

a) "Republican TV and Radio Corporation Qazaqstan"

Qazaqstan TV is a state-funded TV and radio corporation that implements the information policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan. It constitutes the following: national TV channel Qazaqstan, TV channels Qazsport, baby channel Balapan, culture channel AbaiTV, Qazaq radio, radio Shalqar, radio Astana, radio Classic and regional TV and radio companies.

The official birth of television in Kazakhstan fell on 29 June 1957, when the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, Dinmukhamed Konaev, adopted a Resolution on the formation of a Committee on radio broadcasting and television under the Council.

The first TV test broadcast was held in the capital of the Kazakh SSR, the city of Alma-Ata on 8 March 1958, at the studio which is now headquarters of RTRC Qazaqstan. Later, its own regional TV studios gradually appeared in other cities of the Kazakh SSR (Barlybayeva, 2011).

Topics covering scientific and technological achievements were first covered and promoted in the 1950's and 1960's. All such programs were mainly devoted to friendly, moral, and ethical topics (Olzhai, 2008). Over time, the television infrastructure developed and its technical capabilities improved significantly. By 1987, the Qazaqstan channel ranked fourth among all channels in the USSR Republics in terms of TV broadcasting, and second in terms of production of feature films and documentaries.

The liberalisation of the television sector was more implicitly allowed in Kazakhstan after the proclamation of independence on 16 December 1991. In response to political and media developments in the Post-Soviet Union Republics, state monopoly over the airwaves was withdrawn. In the first few years of independence, the Soviet system of the Committee on radio and television was dissolved, and the Kazakhstan TV (Qazaqstan TV) and Radio Company was established. New reforms began in the country with newly gained independence, and commercial media started to emerge. During this difficult period of time, the media was the bridge between the government and the people.

One of the most important achievements of the channel compared to other participants of the media space is the undisputed leadership in the promotion and popularisation of the spiritual, customary and cultural heritage of the Kazakh people. Television channels in the country are generally broadcast both in Kazakh and Russian language, but since 1 September 2011, Qazaqstan TV switched to broadcasting exclusively in the Kazakh language. In addition, the channel is also a leader in terms of self-produced projects, which make up at least 87% of its total broadcast volume documentaries (RTRK, 2020).

b) TV Broadcasting in Qatar

With the advent of television in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf region, Arab television was controlled by individual governments from the 1950s until the advent of Al-Jazeera. The

potential of television was used by Arab governments as a tool for controlling society and shaping public opinion. Television funding was provided exclusively from national budgets.

On 25 June 1968 Qatar started airing the state-run Qatar Broadcasting Service (QBS). Initially, QBS aired radio programming in Arabic languages. The Department of Information was created in 1969. Following independence on 3 September 1971, Qatar launched its first TV channel known as the Qatar TV (QTV) with a single channel that broadcasts black and white programming for three to four hours a day. The Government formed the Ministry of Information and Culture in 1972, and three years later, a separate department—the Qatar News Agency—was added to the ministry (Auter, 2004).

A second, English-language channel was launched in 1982, and the Qatar TV satellite channel went on air in December 1998. Qatar Television Is a channel run by the Qatari government as a public service channel, offering programs targeted at the general public. Broadcast from the Qatari capital Doha, the programs on Qatar TV’s schedule include news bulletins and news chat shows, programs on business news, documentaries, as well as religious and entertainment programs (Al Jazeera, n.d.).

All television channels operating in Qatar, such as Showtime Arabia (a digital satellite pay TV network) or Al Muftah (Cable Vision Group) are government-owned (Krish, 2019), except for Al-Jazeera satellite channel, which is considered a private entity (Al Jazeera, n.d.).

In this occasion Miles (2005) stresses that Al-Jazeera has made history because “it has reversed the flow of information so that now, for the first time in hundreds of years, it passes from East to West”. Qatari officials cited Al-Jazeera’s team of reporters as an example of its international character. Public opinion polls in the Arab world have repeatedly indicated that Al-Jazeera actually positions itself as an independent and trustworthy source of (Samuel-Azran, 2013).

DISCUSSION

1) Rebuilding the Qazaqstan TV Channel in Independent Kazakhstan.

The collapse of the totalitarian Soviet system greatly influenced the further development of television in the Republic. A rapid decline of total state control of the media and its increased commercialization provided it with profitable content. Alternative TV began to appear alongside state TV in the early 1990s. A completely new information situation emerged, where various political, financial and creative forces in the competition defended the right to broadcast on TV channels, the number of which saw a dramatic surge due to the development of technology. The professional skills of TV show creators, however, are crucial in the fight for the viewer's attention. The educational power of television comes from two types: commercial TV with its income mainly from advertising, and non-commercial TV operating at the expense of the public and private charitable foundations (Barlybayeva, 2007).

Television brought to the viewer an unprecedented amount of revealing material covering previously prohibited topics and previously untouchable problems. The number of live broadcasts increased, dialogical forms of TV broadcasting replaced the monologue of the air, and direct telephone connections became a common phenomenon on TV. In such a market, media content provided little, if any, of the information needed for democratic governance.

According to statistics from 1993, the rating of Qazaqstan channel fell with the increasing number of commercial TV corporations, with its television audience at only 27% of the total population. In order to increase this rating, the work of introducing foreign

broadcasting formats, such as that of the BBC Corporation, partially began in 1994. One of the first such changes was the hourly news release. Foreign documentaries were also televised on the channel. By 1994, state television and radio broadcasting had reached its peak of crisis in terms of popularity among viewers, trust in its objectivity and the reliability of information (Barlybayeva, 2011).

Thus, 4 April 1994, the Republican Television and Radio Corporation of Kazakhstan (with the official name Qazaqstan at that time) was established, with the State as its founder. The aims and objectives of media products were the following: form a fundamentally new television of high culture and quality in Kazakhstan; improve the broadcasting management; form a unified information space in the country and activate its entry into global information processes; strengthen the material and technical base, and coordinate research activities in the field of television; create optimal conditions for investment in the industry; and increase the competitiveness of domestic television and radio broadcasting (Uchet, 1994).

All programs of the channel were mainly devoted to the coverage of events taking place in Kazakhstan. Consequently, the national domestic and foreign policy and ongoing socio-economic reforms were promoted in the population. The role of corporations in strengthening public consent to domestic politics was emphasized. The channel set the task of highlighting spiritual and cultural development, the social situation of the people, positive aspects of independence and the improvement of the welfare of the people after independence, to clearly show that the democratic policy of the future will lead to the well-being of the entire country and all of its people. Subsequently, the first national TV and radio broadcasting network was put into operation in 1997 with the provision of signal transmission services from TV stations to transmitters in human settlements.

Kazakh channels had to compete with Russian channels, which had more advanced technical equipment and operational experience. In 1996, over half (58%) of Kazakhstani viewers preferred Russian and foreign channels. Four years later (by 1 February 2000) 194 TV and radio companies existed in the Republic of Kazakhstan, of which 172 were commercial. Many of them, however, almost entirely copied the programs of foreign channels, as they did not have sufficient funds for their own projects, and the main share of revenue came from advertising. In order to support domestic channels and improve their ratings, amendments were made to the mass media regulation laws in 3 May 2001, specifically stating that the broadcast and retransmission of TV and radio programs of foreign mass media should not exceed fifty percent starting from 1 January 2002, and exceed twenty percent of the total volume of TV and radio broadcasts starting from 1 January 2003 (Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 1999).

Since 1992, Kazakhstan has succeeded in implementing large-scale reforms in the telecommunications and broadcasting sectors. Reforms were carried out in areas like the creation of a legislative and regulatory framework, the introduction of new information technologies, structural adjustment, and the corporatization and privatization of enterprises (Sarsenbayev & Seilov, 2000). QazaqstanTV began to open foreign journalistic points in some capitals of the world in 2007, and launched advanced technology with multimedia satellite system TV signal transmission using digital TV, which meant the creation of direct broadcasting.

RTRC joined the Association for International Broadcasting on 17 June 2013, which includes over 50 major international and national TV and radio broadcasters, such as BBC

World, Al-Jazeera, Deutsche Welle, and other well-known and authoritative electronic media. Furthermore, RTRC also became a member of the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development in 29 July 2013, which unites 100 major international and national broadcasters.

In order to strengthen the cooperation, exchange experience, train personnel, implement joint projects in the field of communications, as well as to apply and develop high standards and technologies in the field of TV and radio broadcasting on a long-term and mutually beneficial basis, RTRC Qazaqstan signed memorandum with different foreign TV channels (RTRK, 2020).

Nowadays, Qazaqstan TV is the largest media resource in the country, competing with 3328 registered media resources, of which 2790 are periodicals, 128 are TV channels, 70 are radio channels, and 340 are news agencies and online publications (as of January 15, 2019).

II) Al-Jazeera and the Transformation of the Middle East Media Landscape

From the very beginning Qatar has chosen a course of political recognition. The monarchical and political elite of Qatar were looking for ways to create media independence from regional media giants like the Pro-Saudi MBC, and also trying to compete with the media monopolies of Western satellite TV channels broadcasting 24-hour news, such as CNN International and BBC World, and created their own highly professional round-the-clock satellite TV service, the JSC Al-Jazeera satellite channel (Salamandra, 2003).

The eve of the opening of the TV channel is considered political will of Sheik Hamad, who in 1996 expressed his disappointment by the lack of press freedom in the Arab world, and pledged to let Al-Jazeera Report the news as they see fit. In a 1997 speech, the Emir said “I believe criticism can be a good thing, and some discomfort for government officials is a small price to pay for this new freedom” (New World Encyclopedia, n.d.). The channel stood out among other Arab television organizations for its marked bravery in covering events and problems of the public, as well as political life. It was known for presenting an independent, balanced picture of the news covering the full range of opinions on issues (Al Jazeera, n.d.).

In everyday life, Arabs are used to expressing their political views behind closed doors and, in many cases, during informal meetings. According to El-Nawawy and Gher (2003), Al-Jazeera gradually moved political debates that traditionally took place in Arab souks (traditional Arabic markets) and teahouses to the level of mass broadcast. Prior to Al-Jazeera, the Arab TV channels, mostly controlled by national ministries of information or sponsored by the state, did not dare to criticize or contradict the official authorities and their representatives. They served as a propaganda machine and did not step beyond the opinion of Arab governments and political protocol news. Thus, it can be argued that Al-Jazeera has brought the public sphere of political debate to a new arena—the Arab television screen (El-Nawawy & Gher, 2003).

The channel often organizes discussions on various issues, during which diverse and sometimes polar points of view are expressed. Al-Jazeera sometimes broadcasts political dialogues including criticism of certain Arab political elites. This type of information transmission is not always understood by the governments of the region (Al Jazeera, n.d.). The channel's publication staff has received a total of about 400 official protest notes (Samuel-Azran, 2017).

The operations of Al-Jazeera have been the focus of intense international discussion ever since the events of 11 September 2001. The Qatari channel was accused of being anti-American, as it was broadcasting an interview with the leader of “al-Qaeda”. In the early

2000s, hawks in Washington tried to blame Al-Jazeera for its anti-American rhetoric in covering the US-Iraq war. The US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld had voiced his disapproval of “Al-Jazeera” due to its coverage of Iraq and its interviews with Arab dissidents. He also claimed that some of the reporting by Arab media such as Al-Jazeera had damaged US initiatives in the Middle East (Al Jazeera, 2005).

The US Congressional Research Service (CRS) produced a report on Al-Jazeera in this context. A range of possible actions was proposed therein, including the creation of an alternative Arabic Language Television Network, the promotion of more moderate Arab satellite networks, and the encouragement of privately owned pro-Western stance competitors to Al-Jazeera (Hudson, 2005).

A fair and constructive critique of Al-Jazeera, articulated from within the Arab world and abroad, is the most important incentive to further a pluralistic, responsible, commercial and public service-oriented media environment, especially given that satellite television plays a vital role in driving structural change in the Middle East region.

It must be noted that mass media is neither a true instrument of political institutions or a catalyst for democratic transformation. This can still contribute to the consolidation and activity of citizens in the political life of their country. Al-Jazeera and later private Arab news channels inspired and contributed to the Foundation of a pluralistic political culture in Arab society. As suggested by Hudson (2005), the information revolution, including the “Al-Jazeera effect”, has weakened the information control of authoritarian regimes over their societies, and created a new transnational Arab public space where Arabic-speaking populations can discuss political topics and exchange information. In other words, for the first time in the history of the Arab world, Al-Jazeera dared to provoke a public debate on the most important issues of the modern Arab world, allowing the free flow of information, obscene news coverage, and unrestrained political debate. From the point of view whether a network adheres to the values of journalistic professionalism, the only difference between Al-Jazeera and Western networks is a pro-Arab instead of a pro-Western position. This made “Al-Jazeera” the most popular and controversial news channel in the region.

Within just a few years since its formation, the Qatari satellite broadcaster became the highest ranked and most reliable source of electronic news in the Middle East, while the staid and politically conservative national television stations rapidly lost both their former market share and political significance. Thus, it is easy to see that the rise of Al-Jazeera to general Arab prominence has put enormous pressure on the transformation of the Middle East media landscape as a whole (Wildermuth, 2005).

RESULTS

State funding and TV channel ratings – Qazaqstan. Qazaqstan TV is a state channel; more precisely, the founder of the channel is the Ministry of Information and Communications of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The main aims and objectives of the corporation’s broadcasting policy are to provide content that is informational, educational, and entertaining. When broadcasting information, it adheres to balance and objectivity, and is engaged in popularizing and promoting the values of national and world culture, as well as ideas of humanism and friendship between ethnic groups of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Obviously, the media achievements of Qazaqstan TV are expensive for the state budget, just like those of other media resources of the country, which are financed by the state in a certain way in the form of various types of state information orders. According to

an investigation by journalist Maricheva (2020), 49 billion KZT (130 million USD) (according to the average exchange rate of the USD-KZT pair valid in February 2019, 377 KZT per 1 USD) was assigned in 2019 for state information orders in Kazakhstan. Most of this funding was allocated to Qazaqstan TV—about 21 billion KZT (55.7 million USD). At the same time, Qazaqstan TV had almost no profit from 2014 to 2018.

However, Table 1 shows that the overview of media in the TV advertising market for the period of 2016 puts Qazaqstan TV in seventh place. The share of the channel was about 3.8% (GRP) of the total advertising volume of all TV channels operating in the country.

Table 1: Share of Qazaqstan TV channel from the total number of GRP in Republic of Kazakhstan 2016-2020

Place in the total amount of GRP in Kazakhstan	Years	Channel share of total GRP
7	2016	3.8%
7	2017	4.5%
7	2018	4.3%
8	2019 (January-June)	4.2%
8	2020 (January-June)	3.7%

In the same way, Qazaqstan ranked seventh in the TV advertising market in 2017 and 2018 with a share of 4.5% and 4.3% (GRP) prospectively.

The channel’s ranking position went down to eighth position in the TV advertising market in 2019 and 2020 (January to June) and had 4.2% and 3.7% (GRP) of the total national TV advertising volume respectively (TNS Central Asia, 2020).

For comparison, these figures are considered low compared to the statistics of TNS Central Asia for 2009, when RTRC’s share of the total TV advertising was 6% (Fu-Chai-Chi, 2010).

From the aspect of international company ratings, Internet media resource Similarweb (2020) presents an international rating of Qazaqstan’s websites ratings for the previous 6 months. Upon analyzing data using the site, the international rating of web traffic of qazaqstan.tv (<https://qazaqstan.tv/>) can be summarized as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: International rating of web traffic of qazaqstan.tv for February 2021

1	Global rating	103,598
2	Total number of site views in last 6 months (September 2020-February 2021)	2,860,000
3	Total number of site views in February 2021	320.000
4	Monthly average duration of visit	00:03:25
5	Monthly average number of pages per visit	2.22
6	Traffic coming from search engine	56.17%
7	Traffic coming from social networks	2.08%

The Kazakhstani rating website for Internet statistics (zero.kz, 2020) conducted a survey of the rating levels of 2095 domestic sites between 01/11/2020 - 01/12/2020. In the context of this study, the Qazaqstan TV channel website was rated 14th for the period. The number of

views for that month for Qazaqstan reached 3,562,368, it had 1,069,458 users, and reached 484,475 hosts. Meanwhile, the list was topped by the site zakon.kz (Law news, <https://www.zakon.kz/>) with 38,041,820 views, 4,357,875 users and 1,673,315 hosts.

Moreover, according to a study by TNS Central Asia (2020) the average daily share of Qazaqstan TV in the society sharply decreased in the second part of the year (Table 3).

Table 3: Average daily share of Qazaqstan TV. Coverage rate of the population in 2020 by months

#	Month	Coverage rate of the population
1	January	48.72%
2	February	42.5%
3	March	47.49%
4	April	46.67%
5	May	45.98%
6	June	37.94%
7	July	41.02%
8	August	7.12%
9	September	7.47%

“Al-Jazeera”. The financing and rating of “Al-Jazeera” is discussed next. Despite the fact that the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, provided a 137 million USD loan for the creation of Al-Jazeera in 1996, the Qatari government has repeatedly declared the independence of the channel. Moreover, the Emir of Qatar at the time claimed that the money was not a grant, and that Al-Jazeera should have repaid the loan (Middle East Policy Analyst Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division, 2003).

According to (Helman, 2009), the government of Qatar had invested more than 1 billion dollars in Al-Jazeera English by 2009, and covered more than 100 million dollars a year in losses for the operations of Al-Jazeera Arabic. For the small volume of its advertising, making a profit is not a high priority for the channel.

The lack of freedom of speech and strict censorship in the Arab world has allowed the expansion of the success prospects of the new Arab TV channel Al-Jazeera, especially as no one had yet occupied the niche of free, uncensored broadcasting of events (Samuel-Azran et al., 2016).

In terms of reaction between the ruling party in the Qatari government and Al-Jazeera, the relationship between the channel and the Qatari royal family has always been a source of controversy according to a report published by the BBC in 1 October 2011. Al Jazeera has always operated under Qatar’s political and economic umbrella, but the network’s critics claim the relationship goes deeper and that the channel is really only an arm of the emir’s government (Miles, 2011). Despite this, Figenschou (2014) believes that the channel is state-funded in terms of financial resources, though operationally independent, and the “editorial line and policy is set independently from any governmental interference”. Conversely, Al-Jazeera dependence on the Qatari government is not within “a serve the nation”

arrangement, although there is an inherent commitment to serve the greater Arab nation (Tantawi, 2008).

Due to its active media activity and criticism of the political leadership, Al-Jazeera has high ratings in comparison to other TV channels in the region. This has gained the channel a fast growing audience, reaching an estimated 45 million regular viewers in late 2002 (Auter et al., 2004). According to Fanack Chronicle of the Middle East and North Africa (Fanack, 2016), market research agencies state that Al-Jazeera Arabic was the most watched news channel across the 21 countries of the Middle East and North Africa. Based on those surveys, the channel claimed that the number of its viewers in the Arab world exceeded 23 million, which is over 34% more than those of all its Pan-Arab competitors combined.

Fahmy and Emad (2011) states that the Al-Jazeera Arabic news website (Al Jazeera.net) was launched 1 January 2001 in response to demand from Arab-speaking countries for online news from the Al-Jazeera brand. The Al-Jazeera English website was launched on the eve of the war in Iraq (16 February 2003) to offer news to English speakers about the war from a non-Western perspective. Accordingly, the majority (81.4%) of users of the English-language website originate from the United States and other Western countries, while the vast majority of users (98%) of the Arabic-language website are from the Arab world.

In the year of 2013, Al Jazeera.net had over 45 million recorded unique visitors and more than 3.4 million people downloaded the Al-Jazeera Arabic apps. Based on official website statistics, the audience of Al-Jazeera channel is increasing every year. According to data for 2020 (November), at the time of writing, more than 20 million people had subscribed to their Facebook page and over 60 million had visited different pages of the channel on Facebook. The channel became available in 400 million homes around the world (Al Jazeera, n.d.).

As previously done for Qazakhstan TV, relevant data was obtained for Internet media resources from one of the international rating companies, similarweb.com. Based on data from the site, the international rating of the web traffic of Al Jazeera.com for October 2020 can be summarized as shown in Table 4 (Similarweb, 2020).

Table 4: International rating of the web traffic of Al Jazeera.com for February 2021

1	Global rating	2,238
2	Total number of site views in last 6 months	190.7 million
3	Total number of site views in February 2021	24.2 million
4	Average duration of visit	00:01:41
5	Average number of pages per visit	1.69
6	Bounce Rate in October	67.69%.
7	Traffic coming from search engine	44.06%
8	Traffic coming from social networks	6.51%
9	Traffic direct	46.52%

At the time of writing, according to British site of yougov.co.uk (2022, <https://yougov.co.uk/>), Al-Jazeera was the 16th most popular and 66th most famous TV

channel. The channel was described by fans as analytical, educational, credible, and such that keeps one up to date and ahead of the curve.

The results of “What Great Britain thinks of Al-Jazeera” questionnaire gave the following ratings:

- 16% - positive opinion
- 23% - negative opinion
- 27% - neutral opinion
- 66% - have heard of

Further Al-Jazeera ‘audience facts’ were obtained from a further Internet source. Viewers subject to the research ranged from 15 to 40 years of age. While most viewers reported watching Al-Jazeera for an average of 3-4 hours a day, viewers in the age range of 15-29 years spent an average of an extra hour daily on watching.

Furthermore, the majority of Al-Jazeera viewers lived in populated urban cities, while a very small percentage reported to live in rural areas. The majority of Al-Jazeera’s audience had a high school degree, and the second largest group of viewers reported having less than a high school degree. A high ratio of Al-Jazeera viewers reported being married, while a smaller ratio was single (New World Encyclopedia, n.d.).

In stark contrast to Al-Jazeera’s assertions of its independence from Qatari interests, some scholars assert that the channel exists to serve the interests of its sponsor and regularly fails to report on matters involving Qatar, such as breaches of foreign workers’ rights (El-Nawawey & Iskandar, 2003). According to Powers (2009), Qatar uses Al-Jazeera to leverage its political status and is able to successfully conceal its relationship with the media enterprise, since the country is a peripheral player in international politics. According to Da Lage (2005), the Emir uses Al-Jazeera in Qatar’s “double game” of maintaining diplomatic and economic ties with the West, but at the same time criticizing these countries on the channel. Sakr (2002) argues that the true reason underlying the Qatari Emir’s decision to launch Al-Jazeera was to achieve greater power against other Gulf countries and position Qatar as a regional leader, albeit the strong political influence of the channel that resulted in the recent Gulf crisis in 2017-2021, involving severed diplomatic ties and demands by Qatar’s neighbors, such as the closure of the channel (Asisian, 2018). However, some researchers (Kanakaner et al., 2020) note the role of the Al Jazeera channel in covering global issues such as the Rohingya crisis. This crisis points to the importance of visual media in the political, social, and economic interactions of today’s rapidly changing world.

CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that both TV channels operate from state funding, the political context of their media content differs, and their scale and target audience are directed in opposite ways.

Qazaqstan TV officially declares that it is a state-owned channel, and does not try to hide its loyalty to state policy. Its main goal is to promote the culture of the Kazakh people and their language, as well as to form a unified information space in the Republic of Kazakhstan to implement the country’s information policy. At the same time, the Qatari channel Al-Jazeera tirelessly claims to be an independent television network that adheres to an independent information policy, and has pushed the boundaries of free access to information, freedom of thinking and expression.

It is worth noting that, due to the high level of distrust of official media resources in Kazakhstan among the population, the official standpoint of the position of Qazaqstan TV in protecting the interests and position of the country's leadership has contributed to the decline in the ratings and number of watchers of the channel. In addition, the results of research conducted by the Business Information, Social and Marketing Research Center (BISAM, 2016) show that the basic value of state information orders hardly covers market prices, which makes it unattractive for the channel to perform independent media production. In addition, the state system deprives state media of the possibility of higher earnings, increased prestige expressed in ratings, and the placement of more interesting and attractive content. According to BISAM (2016), there is no other way out than to balance the inevitable rise of core prices by reducing the volume of state information order. It regards transition from “frontal” propaganda to more flexible ways of influencing the audience the possible means of both increasing efficiency and saving money on decreased state information order volume. This transition should be carried out not just in terms of content, but also regarding the fundamentally new nature of Kazakhstan's information space, especially the growing development and deep penetration of social networks into society.

Furthermore, according to a survey of Kazakhstani journalists conducted by United States Agency for International Development, USAID (2019) experts, the state information order is a negative factor for the development of mass media in Kazakhstan. According to journalists, it is necessary to abolish the state order and withdraw media focused on state orders from the market, which will get rid of unreadable media and promote the battleground for real advertisers, thus encouraging the appearance of honest and readable media.

In contrast, Al-Jazeera raised and presented to its global audience topics and events that mainly interested them through following the principles of objectivity, and in the context of framing that coincided with their emotional and cultural perception while adhering to an independent information policy over the years of activity in the media sphere. who states that Aljazeera has its own footprint in covering human rights violations, which assists news organizations and reporters in framing minority crisis news (Kanakaner et al., 2020). Thus, it promoted the interests of the peoples of the Arab countries at the expense of the interests of the governments of these countries, calling for the ethical code of journalism to be followed. That is, to adhere to the principles of journalism, fairness, balance, independence, trust and diversity without giving priority to commercial or political considerations over professional considerations.

In this way, some commentators point out that the popularity of Al-Jazeera is one of the key factors in shaping public opinion among the audience. Moreover, the rapidly growing popularity of the channel has helped create its own personal vision regarding the crisis in the region (Ziani et al., 2022).

Regarding TV audience, Qazaqstan TV, as a resource broadcasting in a purely Kazakh language, is aimed at domestic viewers and the Kazakh-speaking audience living in countries such as Russia, Uzbekistan and Turkey. It is clear that its audience size is limited within a specific language line. In contrast, Al-Jazeera's target reach has much wider boundaries. Its Arabic-language channel is aimed at all 22 countries of the Arab world and Arab emigrants dispersed around the world, whereas the English version targets the entire English-speaking audience on the planet.

It should be noted that the competitive environment of Qazaqstan TV at the local level seems much more modest than that the Qatari channel faces in the media markets of Arab

countries, or the global level with corporations such as CNN and BBC (Brown & Youmans, 2012).

The sphere of media activity is highly diverse and changeable even for the domestic Kazakhstan TV broadcasting market, where an audience of 18 million people forces TV channels to fight for each viewer. For a broadcasting company, the experience that Al-Jazeera has gained, and the productivity it showed in a relatively short period of time, is exceptional. For local Kazakhstan TV channels, the history of the Qatari channel represents a good example to follow, and the professional operational principles of the corporation are worth adopting. In the post-Covid period of economic transformation, the state support and financing of TV channels will no longer be at the level of the pre-pandemic years due to the economic pressure of international markets on the country's budget, and increasing competition due to international media corporations arriving in the market of Kazakhstan. Considering the scenario that RTRC Qazaqstan remains the national cohesive cultural media asset of the country, any decisions on media reformatting, in terms of content and marketing, should be effective and progressive (Scientific and professional seminar, 2020). Moreover, the current young and professional staff of the TV channel is prepared for a creative role in front of a society and a country that is looking forward to systemic reforms and changes at all levels of state administration.

BIODATA

Utemissov Zhanibek is a second year doctoral student at the Faculty of Journalism and Political Science of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Kazakhstan. Email: zhanibek.utemissov@gmail.com

REFERENCES

- Al Jazeera. (2005, June 4). Rumsfeld blames Al Jazeera over Iraq. <https://www.AlJazeera.com/news/2005/6/4/rumsfeld-blames-AlJazeera-over-iraq>
- Al Jazeera. (n.d.). Al Jazeera channel (Arabic): The voice of the people. <https://network.AlJazeera.net/en/channels/AlJazeera>
- Asisian, N. (2018). The Qatar crisis, its regional implications, and the US National interest. *Small Wars Journal*. <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/qatar-crisis-its-regional-implications-and-us-national-interest>
- Auter, P. J. (2004). Meeting the needs of multiple audiences: An examination of the Al Jazeera and English Al Jazeera websites from the public relations perspective. *Global Media Journal*. <https://www.globalmediajournal.com/open-access/meeting-the-needs-of-multiple-audiences-an-examination-of-the-aljazeera-and-english-aljazeera-websites-from-the-public-relations-perspective.php?aid=35085>
- Auter, P., Arafa, M., & Al-Jaber, K. (2004). Who is Al-Jazeera's audience? Deconstructing the demographics and psychographics of an arab satellite news network. *Transnational Broadcasting Studies Journal*, 12, 1-5.
- Barlybayeva, S. (2007). *Телевидение в мире и в Казахстане* [Television in the world and in Kazakhstan]. Kazakh University.
- Barlybayeva, S. (2011). *Телевизионная журналистика* [Television journalism. Methodological manual]. Kazakh University.
- BISAM-Business information center. (2016). Sociological and marketing research. <https://www.bisam.kz/ru/>
- Brown, K., & Youmans, W. L. (2012). Intermedia framing and intercultural communication: How other media affect American antipathy toward Al Jazeera English. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 41(2), 173-191. <https://doi.org/jwc7>
- Da Lage, O. (2005). The politics of Al-Jazeera or the Diplomacy of Doha. In Zayani, M. (Ed.), *The Al-Jazeera phenomenon: Critical perspectives on new Arab media* (pp. 49-65). Routledge.
- El-Nawawy, M., & Iskandar, A. (2003). *Al-Jazeera: The story of the network that is rattling governments and redefining modern journalism*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Book Group.
- El-Nawawy, M., & Gher, L. A. (2003, July 2). Al Jazeera: Bridging the East-West gap through public discourse and media diplomacy. *Arab, Media & Society*. <https://www.arabmediasociety.com/al-jazeera-bridging-the-east-west-gap-through-public-discourse-and-media-diplomacy/>
- Fahmy, S., & Al Emad, M. (2011). Al-Jazeera vs Al-Jazeera: A comparison of the network's English and Arabic online coverage of the US/Al Qaeda conflict. *International Communication Gazette*, 73(3), 216–232. <https://doi.org/btkfv5>
- Fanack. (2016, April 25). The declining popularity of Al-Jazeera news network and other channels. <https://fanack.com/culture-en/al-jazeera-declining-popularity~66525/>
- Figenschou, T. U. (2014). *Al-Jazeera and the global media landscape: The South is talking back*. Routledge.
- Fu-Chai-Chi, E. (2010, May 24). Kazakhstan's advertising market earned \$134 million in 2009. *MediaSostav*. <https://www.sostav.ru/columns/adpress/2010/0048/>
- Helman, C. (2009, June 25). Will Americans tune to Al Jazeera? *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/forbes/2009/0713/comcast-al-qaeda-will-americans-tune-to-al-jazeera.html/?sh=769c07b0541e>

- Hudson, M. (2005). Washington vs. Al-Jazeera: Competing constructions of Middle East realities. *Arab Media and Society*. <https://www.arabmediasociety.com/washington-vs-al-jazeera-competing-constructions-of-middle-east-realities/>
- Kanaker, O., Abughazlih, M. O., & Kasmani, M. F. (2020) Media framing of minorities' crisis: A study on Aljazeera and BBC News coverage of the Rohingya. *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 36(2), 1-16.
- Krish, D. (2019, November 30). English and Arabic TV channels in Doha Qatar. *Online Qatar*. <https://www.onlineqatar.com/living/expat-life/english-and-arabic-tv-channels-in-doha-qatar>
- Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on mass media*. (1999). Amendment of the laws of RK [No. 451-I, July 23 1999, (as amended by the laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 181-II of May 3 2001; No. 509-II of December 19 2003)]. https://online.zakon.kz/document/?doc_id=30015965&pos=2;-51#pos=2;-51
- Maricheva, D. (2020, April 29). How much does Kazakhstan spend on state orders in the media? *The Village Kazakhstan*. <https://www.the-village-kz.com/village/business/hopes-figure/11035-skolko-v-kazahstane-tratyat-na-goszakaz-v-smi>
- Middle East Policy Analyst Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division*. (2003, July 23). The Al-Jazeera news network: Opportunity or challenge for U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East? (CRSReport for Congress). Congressional Research Service. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20030723_RL31889_263754fc6591defbc2dde7a76141678fcdca4fdc.pdf
- Miles, H. (2011, October 1). Al-Jazeera boss steps down: strains with Qatar royals? *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-15129440>
- Miles, H. (2005). *Al-Jazeera: The inside story of the Arab news channel that is challenging the West*. Grove Press.
- New World Encyclopedia*. (n.d.). Al Jazeera. https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Al_Jazeera
- Nurlatifah, M., & Mutmainnah, N. (2021). Disruption and collaboration in digital journalism: Ambivalence of social responsibility and political economy practices of media companies. *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 37(1), 181–195. <https://doi.org/10.17576/jkmjc-2021-3701-10>
- Olzhai, K. (2008). *50 years for Qazaqstan channel, inheritance of National TV*. Atamura.
- Powers, S. (2009). *The geopolitics of the news: The case of the Al-Jazeera network* (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Southern California, Los Angeles). USC Libraries. <https://doi.org/10.25549/usctheses-m2740>
- RTRK. (2020). *Description of the corporation*. <https://rtrk.kz/ru/about/>
- Sakr, N. (2002). *Satellite realms: Transnational television, globalization, and the Middle East*. I.B. Tauris.
- Samuel-Azran, T. (2013). Al-Jazeera, Qatar, and new tactics in state-sponsored media diplomacy. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 57(9), 1293-1311. <https://doi.org/f47zgz>
- Samuel-Azran, T. (2017). An Al-Jazeera effect in the US? A review of the evidence. *Global Media Journal*, 15, 29. <https://www.globalmediajournal.com/open-access/an-aljazeera-effect-in-the-us-a-review-of-the-evidence.php?aid=86478>

- Samuel-Azran, T., Assaf, I., Salem, A., Wahabe, L., & Halabi, N. (2016). Is there a Qatari–Al-Jazeera nexus? Coverage of the 2022 FIFA World Cup controversy by Al-Jazeera versus Sky News, CNNI and ITV. *Global Media and Communication*, 12(3), 195-209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742766516676208>
- Salamandra, C. (2003, July 2). London’s Arab media and the construction of Arabness. *Arab, Media & Society*. <https://www.arabmediasociety.com/londons-arab-media-and-the-construction-of-arabness/>
- Sarsenbayev, A., & Seilov, S. (2000). *Телерадиовещательный комплекс Республики Казахстан (проблемы и перспективы)* [TV and radio broadcasting complex of the Republic of Kazakhstan (problems and prospects)]. Elorda.
- Scientific and professional seminar. (2020). *Online master class of representative specialists of the Qazaqstan TV channel for the students of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University* (Conference paper). Nur-Sultan, 2 November – 11 November [Zoom conference].
- Similarweb. (2020). qazaqstan.tv. <https://www.similarweb.com/website/qazaqstan.tv/#overview>
- Souag, M., ElZein, S. E., Abdelmoula, E., & Nacik, L. M. (2022). *Al Jazeera tells its story: In-depth studies*. Al Jazeera Media Network. <https://online.flippingbook.com/view/332302273/4/#zoom=true>
- Tantawi, O. (2008). *The dialectics of power in a global media scene a comparative study of five international television news channels CNN, Al Arabiya, al Jazeera, BBC, and Al Jazeera English* (Master thesis, The American University in Cairo, Egypt). Academia.
- TNS Central Asia. (2020). Overview of the advertising market Kazakhstan. *Kantar*. https://kantar.kz/analytic/obzor_reklama_rinok_KZ_2016/show_author
- Uchet. (1994, July 15). Issues of the republican corporation "television and radio of Kazakhstan": Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Kazakhstan (No. 796). https://zakon.uchet.kz/rus/history/P940000796_/01.11.1994
- USAID & Internews. (2019). Research on the needs of the media community in Kazakhstan. <https://ru.internews.kz/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/issledovanie-potrebnostey-mediasoobshchestva-kazahstana.pdf>
- Wildermuth, N. (2005). Defining the 'Al Jazeera effect': American public diplomacy at a crossroad (conference paper). *The 17th Nordic Media Research Conference*, Ålborg, August 12, 2005.
- YouGov. (2022). Al-Jazeera popularity & fame. https://yougov.co.uk/topics/entertainment/explore/tv_channel/Al_Jazeera
- Zero.kz. (2020). Kazakhstan rating. Internet statistics service. https://zero.kz/period_2592000/sub_report_all/
- Ziani, A., Elareshi, M., Chaudhary, S., & Alsridi, H. (2022). Gulf Elites’ Dependence on International Press in Times of Crisis: The US-Iran crisis 2019-2020. *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 38(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.17576/jkmjc-2022-3801-01>