ALJAZEERA ON YOUTUBE™: A CREDIBLE SOURCE IN THE UNITED STATES?

By

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I came to the United States 11 years ago in pursuit of an education and my journey ends with this dissertation. My faith, my family and my love of my country have certainly kept me going throughout.

To Allah for all the blessings He has bestowed upon me.
To my family for their patience while I was away
To Kuwait for believing in me and for giving me the opportunity of a lifetime
I hope I made everyone proud.
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By

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At a time when Aljazeera is figuring prominently in media debates because of its extensive coverage of the Arab Spring, along with cable company efforts to prevent it from broadcasting nationally, this is one of the first studies to look at how the American public reacts to news coverage from Aljazeera. Through the literature behind the hostile media effect, this experiment tried to find out how factors like attitudes toward and interest in the Arab World influenced perceived credibility of Aljazeera. Moreover, with the rising global use of YouTube™ for news, this study’s goal was to shed light on the prospects of YouTube™ in giving global media companies like Aljazeera a chance to compete with the U.S. media monopoly. Two videos from the Aljazeera YouTube™ channel were manipulated to look like CNN. Each of 447 participants watched one of the four videos, and results indicated that when viewers judge source credibility or choose to use online interactivity, it made a difference whether viewers saw the Aljazeera or CNN logo on the news clip, even though the content was identical. Aljazeera was generally viewed as less credible than CNN; the most negative responses came from people with unfavorable attitudes toward Arabs and high interest in Arab topics. However, participants reacted more positively as they showed more
interest in using YouTube™’s interactive functions when the videos were attributed to Aljazeera. The most interest came from those with favorable attitudes toward Arabs and from participants who were active YouTube™ users. Results showed two conflicting opinions of Aljazeera: an offline view and online one. While a segment of the population viewed the Arab news organization in an unfavorable manner and will probably be against it being available on cable in the United States, another segment of the population viewed the channel favorably and showed more interest in spreading its name using the interactive functions of online technology.

Also, this was one of the first studies to test and confirm that some concepts of the hostile media effect theory—such as partisanship, involvement and source—do trigger how people choose to use the Internet’s interactivity functions in response to a certain media stimulus.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The recent wave of revolutions in several Arab countries has certainly captured the attention of the whole world, but as regional and international news networks were scrambling to send reporters to the Middle East and make sense of the situations in places like Egypt, Libya and Yemen, one media outlet was there from the beginning and was offering more coverage and context than any other news organization. As Aljazeera, the first independent news channel from the Arab World, became the front runner in its effective coverage of the Arab Spring, many in the media industry have dubbed this period “Aljazeera’s moment” (Worth & Kirkpatrick, 2011; Ferguson, 2011). But despite being available in 220 million households in more than 100 countries, cable companies have yet to allow Aljazeera to broadcast to a national audience in the United States (Burman, 2011). Given the history of negative portrayals of Arabs in the Western media along with the unfavorable public perceptions of the region, Aljazeera’s position as a news organization from the Arab World has made it difficult to be warmly welcomed in American households.

However, with the growth of the online media industry and with Aljazeera’s online successes, where traffic of its online live-stream recently increased by 2,500% during the wave of Arab revolutions and 60% of that traffic coming from the United States, one may wonder if Aljazeera can be accepted by an American audience (Burman, 2011).

When the Arab news channel began gaining popularity in the world—as a result of its exclusive first images of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and its exclusive interviews with Osama Bin Laden that were viewed all around the world—it received harsh criticism from the Western world, especially from the United States (El-Nawawy
and Iskandar, 2003; Barkho 2010). Western governments and media labeled it a network that harbors terrorism and promotes anti-West antagonism. Bill O’Reilly called the network dangerous because “its newscasts often inflame Arab radicals….as we’ve seen, they can come to the U.S.A. and do immense harm” (2003). The Bush administration also publicly showed its resentment toward the news network when former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld described it as a “mouthpiece for the terrorists” (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003, p. 40), and when President George W. Bush urged the Emir of Qatar to “tone down” the network’s coverage.

The network received even more heat when its English language channel went on air in 2006, making it one of the top three global TV news channels. With critics continuously fighting it, the news organization wasn’t welcomed in the United States as cable companies resisted broadcasting its programming to a national American audience (Kaplan, 2011; Stelter, 2011). In response, Aljazeera began investing in its online operations to reach the largest audience possible. Certainly, one of Aljazeera’s online successes is its very active YouTube™ channel that showcases clips of its newscasts and programs to millions of viewers all around the world. The Aljazeera coverage of the recent uprisings in the Middle East and the ongoing Israeli/Palestinian clash, along with its in-depth reporting of events happening outside the Middle East such as the 2011 Japanese earthquake and its aftermath, have certainly grabbed the attention of many online news audiences in the United States (Ali & Guthrie, 2011). It even caught the attention of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who said American audiences are flocking to Aljazeera because it provides “real news” (Huffpost, 2011). Today, Aljazeera English’s YouTube™ channel is one of the most viewed and active
channels on YouTube™ as more than five clips from Aljazeera’s newscasts and popular programs are uploaded daily. But how does this success online translate to American audiences who have been receiving unfavorable coverage of the Arab news organization while not being given the opportunity to watch the channel on cable?

With the Internet gaining on television and becoming the “go to” medium for news (Pew, 2011b), many Americans now have access to online news stemming from global and alternative news organizations that do not operate or broadcast in the United States. Moreover, with this growing interest in global news organizations, few studies have looked at how people in the United States view news originating from foreign countries, let alone news stemming from a Middle Eastern news organization. This is one of the first studies that does so by seeing how students from a large southeastern university view and rate the credibility of YouTube™ videos from Aljazeera.

Two main objectives guide this research: first, through the literature behind the hostile media effect, which states that partisans or people who have strong ties to a specific group or event tend to view neutral coverage of an issue as biased against their side, this experiment tried to find out how factors like attitudes toward the Arab World, knowledge of the Arab World and interest in the Arab World influenced how participants from the American public perceive the credibility of Aljazeera. But unlike most of the studies concerned with the hostile media effect, this study did not intend to find out how partisans with polarized views reacted to an issue that pertains to them. Rather, in an effort to make the theory more generalizable, this study was one of the first to test how regular people with different attitudes toward a certain region reacted to news reports covered by an organization from the Arab World.
Second, in view of the rising global use of YouTube™ for news, this study’s goal was to shed light on the prospects of YouTube™ in giving global media companies like Aljazeera a chance to challenge and compete with the U.S. media monopoly. Specifically, the experiment tried to find out what factors determined the extent to which participants would use the interactive functions offered by YouTube™.

Two videos pulled from Aljazeera’s YouTube™ channel were used. One represented a high controversy video, which showed coverage of the January 2009 Israeli attack on Gaza that resulted in the death of more than 1,000 Palestinians. The storyline of the news report was different from what people in the United States may have been exposed to, in that it showed some gruesome images of the attacks and mostly presented the Palestinian side of the story rather than the Israeli side. The other video was classified as the low controversy video and was about Goodluck Jonathon, who took over the presidency of Nigeria after the previous president died. The focus of the video was mainly on the future of Nigeria and the character of Jonathon, who many think is a reformer. Through manipulating the sources of these two videos by making them look like they were from CNN, this study tried to find out how participants reacted to videos with exactly the same content, but with different sources. Comparing reactions to the same news content attributed to different news organizations made sure the focus was on the news channel and not the content of the videos.

With a sample of 447 students from a large southeastern university, this study found that when judging source credibility or choosing to use online interactivity, it made a difference whether viewers saw the Aljazeera or CNN logo on the news clip, even though the content of the videos was exactly the same. Aljazeera was viewed as less
credible than CNN overall, and the most hostile responses toward the Arab news channel came from people with unfavorable attitudes toward and high interest in the Arab World. However, participants who viewed the videos attributed to Aljazeera showed more interest in using YouTube™’s interactive functions than those who viewed the videos accredited to CNN. The most interest came from participants with favorable attitudes of the Arab World and from those who were active YouTube™ users. Results showed two conflicting opinions of Aljazeera: an offline view and online one. While a segment of the population viewed the Arab news organization in an unfavorable manner and will probably be against its efforts to become available on cable in the United States, another segment of the population viewed the channel favorably and showed more interest in spreading its name and coverage using the interactive functions offered by online technology.

From a theoretical perspective, the study found that exposure to the exact same content but attributed to different sources did influence how credible participants perceived the source to be. Moreover, unlike other researchers who stressed the need for strong ties to an issue or group for hostile media perceptions to be present, this study confirmed that people don’t have to be labeled as partisans for them to show hostile media perceptions toward a certain issue, region or media. Also, this was one of the first studies to test and confirm that some concepts of the hostile media effect theory such as partisanship, involvement and source do trigger how people choose to use the Internet’s interactivity functions in response to a certain media stimulus. Specifically, this study found that those who agree with or have favorable views of a certain media stimulus would be more inclined to use the interactive functions offered by the Internet.
Interactivity is, therefore, viewed as a way to spread and advertise media that is considered favorable.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

At a time when Aljazeera is figuring prominently in recent media debates because of its extensive coverage of the Arab Spring, along with cable company efforts to prevent it from broadcasting nationally, this is one of the first studies to look at how the American public views Aljazeera. Specifically, using concepts from the hostile media effect theory, this research tried to find out how factors like attitudes toward the Arab World, knowledge of the Arab World and interest in the Arab World influenced how participants from the American public perceive the credibility of Aljazeera. Moreover, with Aljazeera’s successful online ventures and in light of the rising use of YouTube™ for news, this study’s goal was to shed light on the prospects of YouTube™ in giving international media companies like Aljazeera a chance to challenge and compete with the U.S. media monopoly.

The objectives of this study touch upon a number of topics and the following review of literature tries to paint a comprehensive picture of all the areas involved in the research. As this study was mainly about how the American public reacted to Aljazeera, the chapter begins with an in-depth history of the news organization which includes the inception of the Arabic channel in 1996, the struggles and success of the channel in the Arab World, and its monetary gains along with its rising controversy in the West following the September 11th attacks. Also, this part of the chapter talks about the launch of the English version in 2006 alongside its successful online ventures that followed.
With Al Jazeera’s extensive online operations, it is fair to say that without the developments of technology and the concepts of new media, Al Jazeera would not have found a platform to present its agenda to a global audience. Because one of the study’s objectives is the prospect of the Internet—YouTube™ specifically—in creating a forum for everyone to be part of the news making business, the chapter also talks about the history of new media and the concepts that come along with it while giving more emphasis on YouTube™ and the development of online video.

Using the hostile media effect theory as the groundwork for this experiment where the study focused on how attitudes and interest in the Arab World influenced perceptions of Al Jazeera, the review of literature also takes a historical approach with regards to Arab portrayal on U.S. media and how it affected the American public’s views of the region. With Edward Said’s (1978) Orientalism being the focus of this discussion, this part argues that while negative opinions of Arabs have been prevalent for a long time, Americans didn’t really become aware of this view until the United States was involved in that region right after World War II. Three specific events were to be significant in the characterizations and portrayals of the Arab World: the inception of the State of Israel in 1947 and its aftermath, the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis and the 2001 September 11th attacks.

Finally, in discussing the hypotheses and research questions this chapter looks at the history of source and media credibility studies and sets the theoretical framework behind the hostile media effect theory.
Aljazeera

The Beginning

Before Aljazeera and the boom of satellite TV in the Middle East, Arabs were only able to get broadcast news from their local government-controlled TV channels. On a typical newscast, Arabs saw every detail of the daily agendas of their government officials: presidents shaking hands, public officials opening hospitals or schools and coverage of other national and public events. El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003) said government-owned media spent more money on the technical side of the news broadcasts than on the quality of the news content. As a result, the content was very subtle, mainly one sided and non-confrontational or controversial.

Arabs who were thirsty for more reliable news and diverse analysis of issues that concerned them at that time—especially during times of crisis or major news events—usually sought out foreign-based Arab language radio broadcasts like the Voice of America, Radio Monte Carlo-Middle East and BBC World Service Arabic Radio (Ghareeb, 2000; El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003).

The big breakout, however, came when BBC Arabic radio, which was gaining popularity in the early 1990s, announced that it was pursuing a 24-hour Arabic news channel. The idea attracted Saudi investors who backed the channel financially. The aspiration was that “this new TV service would be the largest and most influential media force in the Arab World” (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003, p. 31). As the channel was close to going on air, the contract between both parties—BBC and the investors—was severed because of disagreements on editorial independence. There was speculation that the relationship between both sides broke because of BBC’s plans to produce a documentary that was to showcase executions and human rights issues in Saudi
Arabia. The unhappy Saudi investors claimed that “BBC violated cultural sensitivities” (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003, p. 31).

While all this controversy between BBC and the Saudi investors was going on, Aljazeera, which means “the island” in Arabic, was on the verge of being launched with the intentions of it competing against BBC Arabic. The network was primarily funded by the young and unconventional Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, who overthrew his father in a nonviolent coup. He wanted to make a name for himself—after the negative publicity following the coup— by reforming his country and making it stand out among the other Arab countries. He liberalized its political system by starting an elected legislative council, whose members used to be appointed, and by giving women the right to vote. Above all, he abolished the Ministry of Information that ran local and TV stations and was responsible for censoring and setting legal grounds for journalists and newspapers. Al-Thani made his country home of the first free news media in the Arab World (Ghareeb, 2000; El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003).

Aljazeera was a vision with financial legitimacy, but it was missing a well educated, experienced and enthusiastic staff that was willing and capable of transforming the status and quality of Arab news media. The termination of BBC Arabic left many contracted employees jobless, and that was the best gift Aljazeera could ever ask for, according to El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003). “Aljazeera not only recruited the staff of the former BBC network but also its editorial spirit, freedom and style” (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003, p. 31).

Aljazeera Arabic went on air in 1996 with “the opinion and the other opinion” as their slogan and mission. The news organization quickly became the most viewed
satellite channel in the Arab World, mainly because it captured the hearts and attention of Arab viewers through its daily in depth and diverse analysis of events, and its provocative and confrontational talk shows that gave viewers, for the first time, a chance to call in, ask questions and present their opinions. Adding to that is its daring culture of breaking taboos imposed by Arab traditions and politics.

**Controversy in the Arab World**

For the first time, an Arabic TV channel tackled issues that were considered against Middle Eastern media standards: sex, polygamy, corruption of Arab governments, women’s rights, human rights and Islamic fundamentalism. Arab oppositionists in exile could debate live on TV with nationalists or government officials; secularists had an opportunity to go an air and debate Islamic and religious issues with scholars; Islamic fundamentalists and extremists were given air time to provoke their rhetoric on the West and Arab governments; and for the first time ever in the Arab World, representatives from Israel—who Arabs view as the enemy—were given a chance to present their side of the story.

But Aljazeera really made a name for itself through its coverage of the Palestinian Intifada or uprising in September 2000. Millions of Arabs saw footage of young Palestinians fighting Israeli military with stones and graphic images of dead and injured Palestinians. One of the most memorable images of that era was footage of a 12-year old boy, Mohammad Al-Durra, who was shot dead by Israeli gunfire while his father was shielding him from the artillery. This news clip of a young boy dying in the arms of his helpless crying father, along with other emotional scenes broadcast by Aljazeera have, according to El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003), “increased Arab sympathy for Palestinians and augmented Arab hatred for Israeli leaders and their policies” (p. 56).
Before Aljazeera, Arabs heard and saw a glimpse of the Palestinian plight, but never before did they witness such graphic and real images 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

As Aljazeera stepped over the religious, cultural and political boundaries of the Arab World, many people felt offended by some of its coverage. “Practically every Arab state has found something objectionable at one time or another…” (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003, p. 114). Saudi officials have publicly condemned Aljazeera for giving dissident groups the ability to discredit the royal family and threaten the stability of the Middle East. Saudi writers and intellectuals showed anger and concern for the anti-Islam remarks made by the secularists and fundamentalists who regularly appear on the network’s talk shows. Kuwaitis had their share of problems with Aljazeera, which they view as a channel that has an apparent bias toward Iraq. During one of Aljazeera’s live programs, an Iraqi viewer living in Europe called in and said of the late emir of Kuwait, “God should not be asked to save a man who embraces atheists and permits foreign armies to enter Kuwait” (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003, p. 120). In retaliation to Aljazeera’s inability to censor the caller and its unwillingness to apologize, Kuwaiti officials ordered a shutdown of the Aljazeera office in Kuwait and also threatened, at one point, to pull its ambassador from Qatar. The recent wave of revolutions in the Middle East have also sparked controversy as Arab leaders in the midst of being ousted began blaming Aljazeera for biased reporting and shut down its local offices (Ferguson, 2011)

All this controversy challenged the Qatari government as it tried to balance its relations with other Arab countries while ensuring the independence and success of
Aljazeera. This controversial news channel became the most popular and most watched channel not only for the Arabs living in the Middle East, but also for Arab expatriates in the United States and the rest of the world.

It was not surprising to see a channel as unconventional as Aljazeera rise in the ratings amongst the Arabs, but no one imagined that this small news organization, headquartered in the tiny, once unknown, state of Qatar, to be a global phenomenon.

**Aljazeera Scoops the World**

Aljazeera slowly began to scoop the world during the events following the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003; Barkho, 2010). It was the only news organization with an office in Afghanistan before the attacks. It was also the first news organization to land exclusive interviews with Osama bin Laden before and after the attacks. Immediately after the attacks, it broadcast re-runs of its exclusive 1998 interview with Bin Laden and showed the only images of Afghans demonstrating and setting fire to the U.S. embassy in Kabul. But it was October 7, 2001— the day the United States launched its first attacks on Afghanistan— when millions of people all around the world witnessed Aljazeera’s awkward looking golden logo on their TVs. As Aljazeera showed exclusive footage of the war, it also landed interviews and videotaped statements from Al-Qaida operatives and Osama Bin Laden. Because it was the only network operating in Kabul at that time, other networks, mostly Western media outlets, bought and showed excerpts from Aljazeera. El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003) said the exclusive Osama Bin Laden tapes were “as much a selling point for Aljazeera and its host country, Qatar, as the Gulf War was for CNN and the United States” (p. 176).
Its popularity grew even more when the United States began its air strikes on Baghdad in 2003. It showed non-stop footage from cities all around Iraq and established itself as the “go-to station for war coverage in the Arab World” (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003, p. 202).

**Controversy in the West**

But Aljazeera’s coverage of both wars did not come without controversy. By giving people from Al-Qaida airtime to showcase their extreme perspectives, Aljazeera was criticized by Arab and Western governments as being a propaganda instrument for Bin Laden and other Islamic extremists. Former Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, was once quoted saying that “Aljazeera was serving as a mouthpiece for the terrorists” (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003, p. 40), and Fox News Watch host, Eric Burns, even speculated on air that Aljazeera had a “working relationship” with terrorists (2005).

Emotional and striking footage of civilian casualties—especially children, damaged houses and buildings, and mothers crying for the loss of their families brought even more criticism and disapproval from the West. “More recently, accusations against Aljazeera are laden with claims that the satellite network’s framing of Middle Eastern and world events is igniting Muslim and Arab anger and fury against the United States, its military campaigns and its foreign policies” (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003, p. 23).

The disapproval with Aljazeera went beyond verbal criticism and into physical threat when its Web site was hacked during the network’s rising hype in the West. Visitors were directed to either a screen with an American flag or a porn site. Also Aljazeera’s offices in Kabul and Baghdad were both bombed by American air strikes, killing one of Aljazeera’s prominent faces in Baghdad. The U.S. government denied
accusations of intentional targeting and claimed the bombings of both bureaus were accidental (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003).

Financial Prosperity and Aljazeera English

Putting all the controversy aside, the coverage of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq actually brought good news to the network that never had an intention of global expansion. Aljazeera’s unconventional reporting gave the organization worldwide recognition and ensured its prosperity and longevity. El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003) said:

Suddenly, offers from news organizations around the world began pouring on Aljazeera, as did requests for information. Journalists from various news outlets crowded Aljazeera’s newsroom, director’s office, e-mail in-boxes and telephone lines with requests for interviews, requests for resource sharing, and questions about the controversial footage and videotapes, some to make deals, others wanting to cover Aljazeera as it covered news. The hype turned Aljazeera into an overnight sensation and made it a household name (p. 162).

Vesely (2002) said the network’s success transformed it from an organization with an annual deficit of $100 million a year to one with rising profitability. The network’s financial stability encouraged expansion of the news organization. Aljazeera now has a documentary channel, a children’s channel, and a sports channel that is receiving great popularity in the Middle East because of its exclusive rights to broadcast several European soccer leagues.

One of the recent additions to the organization is Aljazeera English, which went on air in November 2006, making it “one of the three biggest global English-language, 24-hour news channels and the only one in the Middle East” (Hanley, 2007, p. 24). The other two are BBC and CNN International. According to Deborah Potter, Director of NewsLab, both channels present similar Western views, but with different accents
Potter acknowledges that Aljazeera “covers stories that others ignore, and gives stories that everyone else covers much more time” (2007).

Aljazeera English has attracted well-known journalists from other prominent news organizations like BBC and CNN. Some of these journalists include David Frost of the BBC and Riz Khan from CNN (Hanley, 2007; Barkho, 2010). The English network originating from the Middle East has 70 bureaus operating around the world,—CNN has 33—employs 400 reporters and is broadcast in 100 countries (Ali & Guthrie, 2011). The network also follows a unique organizational style in that its programming follows the sun—from the East to the West. The first four hours of its coverage broadcast from Kuala Lumpur, then the next 11 hours from Qatar, the following five hours from London and the final four hours from Washington. Each headquarter operates independently and presents the views of the region it is in (Miles, 2006).

Yet the negative stereotypes stemming from the Western media toward the Arab network has made it difficult for the organization to find a cable company that will allow Aljazeera English to go on air. According to a News Times article, “Aljazeera English is not actually banned, but the reputation of its Arabic sibling as the preferred outlet for videos from Osama bin Laden has made the English-language version too hot to handle for some cable operators. A lack of space on crowded cable systems has also made it difficult for operators to offer Aljazeera English” (Pfanner, 2008). In an interview with National Public Radio, managing director of Aljazeera English and former editor in chief of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Tony Burman stressed the fact that Aljazeera Arabic and Aljazeera English are independent from one another and that if given a chance to be viewed in the United States, the American audience would realize
that most of the stereotypes aimed at Aljazeera are untrue. Outside the United States, “the Aljazeera brand, so to speak, is one of the most popular, successful and recognized brands in the world….It kind of ranks in many areas of the world with the BBC, so it is actually a very strong, credible brand,” Burman said (Conan, 2008). The next step for Aljazeera English, according to Burman, is try to convince the American public and the cable distributors to allow the news channel to operate in the United States, but Burman is aware that Aljazeera must first discredit the allegations and the stereotypes associated with it.

One way to do so is by increasing their online investment so that the American public can experience Aljazeera’s coverage and realize that such allegations attributed to the channel are untrue. Today, Aljazeera English has become one of the most—if not the most—successful news organizations on the Web (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003; Sennitt, 2007; Conan, 2008). With recent uprisings in the Middle East, Al Jazeera has received great attention in the U.S. media, most of which was somewhat positive. While some news shows credited Aljazeera for its reporting, one of the most important appraisal came from Secretary of State Hilary Clinton: “Viewership of Al Jazeera is going up in the United States because it’s real news,” Clinton said. "You may not agree with it, but you feel like you’re getting real news around the clock instead of a million commercials and, you know, arguments between talking heads and the kind of stuff that we do on our news which, you know, is not particularly informative to us, let alone foreigners” (Huffpost, 2011). Its online operations proved to be successful during the revolutions in the Arab World, as its readers and viewers online increased and as the U.S. media used some of its streams (Stelter, 2011). But while Aljazeera is usually in
the spotlight when the focus is on the Middle East, it also prides itself on in depth coverage of other nations like the Hurricane in Haiti and the most recent earthquake and its aftermath in Japan (Ali & Guthrie, 2011). However, even when some journalists were recently applauding Aljazeera for its coverage, there were others like Bill O'Reilly who still casted a weary eye toward the channel—he called the channel anti-American and ant-Semitic in one of his shows that went on air during the wave of Arab revolutions (Kaplan, 2011). So with these contradicting views of the Arab news channel, can Aljazeera’s online practices attract more of the American public and come closer to breaking through the media monopoly in the United States?

**Media Monopoly and Online Media**

**Big Media Monopoly and the Status of Journalism**

Journalism can be traced back to the 1400s when Johannes Guttenberg invented the printing press, which made the mass distribution of books possible. Newspapers began in the 1600s, but rapid advances in mass communication did not occur until the industrial revolution in the 19th century when newspapers flourished and became the dominant source of information for Americans. Moreover, the century introduced new mass communication technologies like the telegraph, the telephone, the phonograph, the motion picture projector and the radio (Dessauer, 2004, Gillmor, 2004). But it was the 20th century, which according to Gillmor (2004), introduced a new era in the media industry in which the corporatization of journalism brought about drastic changes to the status of journalism in the United States. As industries began consolidating, and as big corporations started taking over smaller family-owned businesses, journalism not only became profit-oriented, but was also associated with great political power. The prevalence of radio throughout the 1900s, the introduction of television in the 1970s,
and the beginning of cable television in the 1990s further augmented the role of corporate media.

Bagdikian (2004) said “though today’s media reach more Americans than ever before, they are controlled by the smallest number of owners than ever before. In 1983 there were fifty dominant media corporations; today there are five” (p. 16). These five corporations, which include Time Warner, The Walt Disney Company, Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation, Viacom and Bertelsmann, according to Bagdikian (2004) “decide what most citizens will—or will not—learn” (p.16). Through their control and ownership of most of the newspapers, magazines, book publishers, motion picture studios and TV and cable channels, these companies have created power that was unprecedented in any previous imperial rule or dictatorship. While they do compete with one another, the big five actually do not intend to take over one another. Bagdikian (2004) said similar to the global cartel OPEC, the media companies work in an oligopoly where they join ventures, lend each other money, communicate with each other and make decisions together to ensure their dominance and power over the media and the political environments. All five conglomerates are part of one of the most powerful lobby group in Washington, the National Association of Broadcasters. Also through their massive profits, these conglomerates have become major contributors in major political campaigns in the U.S. This mutual relationship between the political and media structures have, in essence, influenced what information is available to the public. As will be seen later, this relationship has especially been influential to coverage relating to the Middle East and the religion of Islam.
This concentration of media ownership has also caused a shift in the journalism environment. Scott (2005) said that journalism is in crisis as “it has become increasingly clear that the public service mission of democratic journalism has been abandoned by the commercial press in favor of expanding profit margins already swollen to levels of 20 to 30%. In practice, this has meant shackling the quality of a news organization to the fortunes of the equity market, almost inevitably sacrificing long-term credibility for short-term returns” (p. 90). As a result, the news media experienced cut backs on such practices as investigative journalism and foreign correspondence and began focusing more on less costly and mass appealing solutions—sensationalism where news emphasized sex and violence and celebrity journalism; confrontational journalism, which included interviews and debates between partisans; and reliance on press releases from governments and businesses, which homogenized content across all media (Scott, 2005; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996).

People have, in essence, become less trusting in traditional media and began exploring alternatives in the online world. Recent statistics from PEW’s 2011 State of the Media showed that people are spending more time with news, but with regards to the medium of choice, the Internet is the only media platform that gained users while all others have lost audiences (PEW, 2011a; PEW, 2011b). While the Internet’s users increased in number by 17.1%, cable news has lost the most with a 13.7% decline in viewership from 2010. The report also concluded that, for the first time, every cable news channel has lost viewers. CNN’s primetime viewers declined by 37%, MSNBC viewers declined by 5%, and FOX, the leading cable news network in the U.S., experienced an 11% decrease in primetime viewers. Moreover, some reports show
that while media organizations are losing their audiences, Aljazeera English is at its peak, thanks to its successful online operations (Ali & Guthrie, 2011, HuffPost, 2011). “Online viewership of Al-Jazeera English spiked during the demonstrations in Egypt – up 2,500% at its peak, with nearly half of the followers from the United States” (HuffPost, 2011). This great increase in the online consumption of news invites us to an in-depth look of new media.

The Internet and New Media

Journalism has certainly gone through many developments, but none as fast and as unique as the recent changes the Internet has caused. Dessauer (2004) said “it took electricity 50 years to reach 50 million users in the United States, whereas it took radio 38 years, it took personal computers 16 years, it took television 13 years, and it took the Internet just 4 years” (p. 122). When Tim Berners-Lee created Hypertext Text Markup Language (HTML) in 1990, which made it possible for anyone to publish Web pages, big media companies went online right away. By 1996, most of the news outlets, be it print or broadcast, had some sort of online presence. At first, most of the online content was usually just copied from its original form and posted online. Slowly, however, editors realized the potential of the Internet in introducing new journalistic practices.

First, the Internet gave the news media the opportunity to break news faster with little effort. Second, the availability of the Internet gave users an opportunity to view whatever news they want, whenever they wanted it. Third, the use of hyperlinks allowed readers who were interested in a certain topic to view related information like an older story, a multimedia production or a different site. Fourth, the Internet allowed news editors to publish materials in multimedia formats—text, visuals, audio, and later video. Fifth, the interactivity function of the Internet made it possible for users and the news
media to communicate with one another. Finally, unlike traditional media which has limits on time and space, the Internet has no limitations, and allows journalists to offer in-depth multilayered stories (Dessauer, 2004).

According to Dessauer (2004), people began noticing Internet news during the 1996 coverage of the Olympics and the presidential elections, but the Internet really became an important medium in 1998, when 20 million people went online to view the Starr Report’s detailed legal documents about President Bill Clinton’s affair with Monica Lewinsky. Dessauer (2004) said “this was the first time that such an important document was made available online, even before most news outlets had it” (p. 123).

Surveys and polls showed that every year more and more people went online to get their news (Dessauer, 2004, Scott, 2005), but Internet usage didn’t surpass traditional media as was predicted. Moreover, major news outlets that have invested a lot of time and capital for their online ventures realized that they were not making any money. No one was willing to pay for information, online advertising was at its early stages and was not getting any revenue, and competition from other news-oriented sites increased. Global news agencies that went online challenged the media monopoly in the United States, as people had a chance to get their news from the BBC just as easily as they could from CNN. The large portals such as Yahoo and AOL provided a lot of competition as these sites didn’t produce news, but, rather, collected news links from all news sites and organized them categorically, which made them more user friendly than the regular news sites. But the most competition came from the Web-only news sites such as Salon, APBNNews and Slate. According to Scott (2005), “these operations attracted a great many talented journalists away from traditional media jobs, promising a
bright future in the new industry of digital news” (p. 96). But still, most news media online didn’t make any money, and by 2000 most of the traditional media companies began cutting back on their online investments and started seeking new cost-effective and profitable moves while many start-up, Web-only news companies stopped their operations.

The only sites that survived and flourished, however, were the niche sites—porn, financial news and consumer reports—and the blogs. Scott (2004) said “their existence was predicted on the uniqueness of their content or approach” (p. 97). But what went wrong? And why didn’t the news media achieve gains online as many media and technology experts predicted? For Scott (2004), the issue was supply and demand. For quite some time, supply exceeded demand. Moreover, the content supplied online was almost the same as what was available on traditional media, so people didn’t really find it necessary to go online to get their news. Gillmor (2004) stated that, while advancements in Internet tools and the technologies initiated a new way of looking at journalism, people didn’t realize the Internet’s full potential. “The web was already a place where established news organizations and newcomers were plying an old trade in updated ways, but the tools were making it easier for anyone to participate. We needed a catalyst to show how far we’d come” (Gillmor, 2004, p. 18). That catalyst, according to Gillmor (2004) came on September 11, 2001.

While most were watching the coverage of the attack and its aftermath on TV, many news Web sites received record traffic as people wanted to know more and make more sense of what happened (Dessauer, 2004). Unprecedented traffic caused news sites to go down and many people could not access them. Gillmor (2004) said it was at
that moment when people realized the power of blogging: bloggers began posting articles from global news sources, New York City bloggers and those who witnessed the attacks shared their experiences with everyone, and people from all around the globe were able to express and share their feelings for the world to see. According to Gillmor (2004), “the day is frozen in time, but the explosions of the airplanes into those buildings turned new heat on a media glacier, and the ice is still melting” (p. 22).

**September 11th, the Catalyst that Changed Journalism**

The September 11 attacks have certainly triggered a change in online news. According to the 2002 Pew biennial survey, which analyzes American’ news habits, 25% of Americans went online for news at least three times a week compared with 23% in 2000 and for those under the age of 30, online news had the second largest following after television news, while newspaper readership declined and television audiences remained the same. In 2003, when the United States went to war with Iraq, the rate of people who went online for news reached unprecedented levels. According to a March 2003 Pew survey, 17% of online American users said the Internet was their main source for news, compared to only 3% after the September 11 attacks. Still, television proved to be the go-to medium for news about the Iraq war.

But as the war went on, and as many Americans expressed disapproval of the way the Bush administration misled them into believing that Sadaam Hussein had ties with the September 11 attacks, a new form of journalism began gaining acceptance. Gillmor (2004) calls it grassroots journalism, where people, mostly from the blogosphere, became part of news making. “Call them newsmakers. Call them sources. Call them the subjects—and sometimes, in their own view, the unwilling victims—of journalism. But however we describe them, we all must recognize that the rules for newsmakers,
not just journalists, have changed, thanks to everyone’s ability to make the news” (Gillmor, 2004, p. 45). Three early events or issues were critical in showcasing the power of the blogosphere in challenging the news media. First was in 2002 when then Republican Senator, Trent Lott, was seen giving a speech at one time presidential candidate Strom Thurmond’s 100th birthday where he said that the country would have been better off had Thurmond won the election. The issue at stake was the fact that Storm Thurmond ran a presidential campaign in 1948 with a segregationist agenda, but many of the traditional news media outlets didn’t notice the connection, and the ones that did, didn’t give it much attention. The bloggers, however, caught the connection, showed their frustration, and forced the news media to cover the story. As a result of this media coverage triggered by the blogosphere, Trent Lott resigned as majority leader.

In 2004, when the photos of the Abu Ghraib prison abuses first circulated online, the news media covered the story of the abuses, but censored or didn’t show the pictures to the public. People went online to view the photos, and as a result, disapproval of the Bush administration increased and the United States’ image suffered globally (Gillmor, 2004). The Internet has allowed, according to Gillmor (2004), the gates to come down where secrets are hard to keep, and when they spread, they spread real fast.

Also in 2004, Dan Rather’s career went into jeopardy when his 60 Minutes report on George W. Bush’s National Guard records was disputed by a number of bloggers. CBS fired four producers connected to the story, and many people believe that Dan Rather’s resignation was in part due to that report (Gillmor, 2004).
Johnson & Kaye (2004) said the rise of the blogs was a result of distrust of traditional media’s coverage after the September 11th attacks. In studying weblog users, Johnson and Kaye (2004) said bloggers view blogs as highly credible, even more credible than traditional media. Of the 3,747 bloggers surveyed, almost three-quarters said they viewed weblogs as credible. They said blogs provide more depth and thoughtful analysis than traditional media. Weblog reliance, however, was the strongest predictor of credibility, meaning the more you rely on blogs for news, the more you will think of it as credible.

Adding to the blog’s credibility is the trend of sourcing blogs in traditional news media. In their research, Messner and DiStaso (2008) found that there is a news source cycle between blogs and newspapers, in which both mediums continuously use one another as sources. Messner and DiStaso (2008) said “the focus of the newspapers has shifted from treating weblogs as a new phenomenon reported on because of their unusualness to the use of them as legitimate sources in reporting context” (p. 451).

While the Internet gave the people a chance to be part of the news making business after the September 11 attacks, it also opened doors for global news organizations to be part of the news agenda in the United States. Aljazeera is certainly one of those news organizations that have attracted great online traffic. Since the September 11th attacks and the events following that period, the number of visitors to Aljazeera’s Web sites skyrocketed. El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2003) said that Internet search engines that monitor the most searched keyword reported that at one point, Aljazeera received more searches than the word “sex”. Tony Burman, managing
director of Aljazeera English, said the Aljazeera English Web site gets around six million
hits a week, and more than 60% of the visitors come from the United States.

The September 11 attack was certainly the catalyst that made people realize how
their voice matters, and by smartly using the Internet’s tools, they could be heard.
Through increased online operations, it also opened doors for U.S. news organizations
along with international ones like Aljazeera to attract global audiences. But as demand
of online news was on the rise, so did the technology of the Internet. The introduction of
streaming video via sites like YouTube™, which is a critical part of this study, has
certainly been a huge factor in the evolution of new media.

**Online Video and YouTube™**

Up until 2004, the use of text and images, via blogging, chatting or building Web
sites, provided the most competition to mainstream media. The growth of online video,
however, hiked up this rivalry between old and new media and introduced a new era of
participatory culture. Online video was available since the beginning, but did not gain
prominence until very recently. In the early stages of online video technology, videos
were only downloadable—users could not stream the videos. Slow Internet speeds
made downloading time consuming and the limited storage capacity forced media
producers to supply really short videos. Online video technology was not up-to-date with
the rising demand in online consumption.

The introduction of phone cameras made it possible for anyone to travel around
and capture video of any sort. Most of the time phone cameras are used to capture
personal pictures or video, but their prevalence made it possible for anyone to instantly
capture still images or video of actual events even before the media does. A person
with a camera phone was able to take a photo of the London underground bombers.
This camera phone image was then viewed on TV, in newspapers and over the Internet. According to Andrew Baron (2010), a blogger of new media issues, the Asian Tsunami, which happened in late 2004, was “online video’s first major event” where many people flocked to the Internet to view amateur videos of this tragedy captured by camera phones. From there on, online video became a major player in the news media and the entertainment industry.

In 2005, when streaming online video became possible, many online video sites began appearing, but only one was able to capture this niche market early on: YouTube™. Founded by former PayPal employees, Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim, YouTube™ was launched in June 2005 and quickly became a household name and one of the most popular sites in the world. Its success was aggrandized when Google bought the company in October 2006 for $1.65 billion. Com-Score, an Internet market research company, stated that in 2008, 37% of all online videos being watched in the United States were from YouTube™. Fox Interactive media came in second with only 4.2%. Burgess and Green (2009) said “As a user-created content community, its sheer size and mainstream popularity was unprecedented” (p. 2).

When compared to the other early online video sites like Meta Café and Blip.tv, YouTube™ was not much different, so how then did it become the number one online video site in the world? Burgess and Green (2009) attributed YouTube™’s success to three different factors. They said the site got good publicity when a profile of it appeared on TechCrunch, a popular technology blog, on August of 2005. Its four main features—recommendations in the form of related videos and the abilities to e-mail video links, comment on videos and embed them on different sites or blogs—made
YouTube™ stand out as a user friendly and an interactive online video site. But it was YouTube™’s copyright battle with NBC Universal that brought the attention of this online video site to the public. The *Saturday Night Live* clip titled, Lazy Sunday, was to be influential in this battle. Lazy Sunday was a two and a half minute clip—viewed 1.2 million times in the first 10 days of being online—of two Geeks from New York rapping about cupcakes and going to see the *Chronicles of Narnia*. NBC’s aggressive demand to remove this clip along with hundreds of other NBC related videos, and the extensive media coverage of YouTube™’s copyright infringement that followed made YouTube™ a household name. “Although early reporting in the features, technology and business pages discussed YouTube™ and video sharing as the Internet’s new ‘new thing’ it was through this big media related event that YouTube™ became a regular subject for the mainstream media” (Burgess and Green, 2009, p. 3).

Those three narratives for YouTube™’s success—a technological innovation loved by the tech people, a user friendly and an interactive online video site and a platform for media distribution like television—contradicted what the founders intended YouTube™ to be used for. The online-video site started with a slogan of “Your Digital Video Repository.” The founders envisioned YouTube™ as a place where people stored their personal videos. Their early mission statement read:

- Show off your favorite videos to the world
- take videos of your dogs, cats, and other pets
- Blog the videos you take with your digital camera or cell phone
- Securely and privately show videos to your friends and family around the world…and much, much more (Burgess and Green, 2009, p. 3).

Today, YouTube™’s slogan is “Broadcast Yourself,” which could basically mean many things. YouTube™, among other things, can be looked at as a broadcast
platform, a media archive and a social network, but it is really difficult to define.

Burgess and Green (2009) said:

It is variously understood as a distribution platform that can make the products of commercial media widely popular, challenging the promotional reach the mass media is accustomed to monopolizing, while at the same time a platform for user-created content where challenges to commercial popular culture might emerge, be they user-created news services, or generic forms such as vlogging—which might in turn be appropriated and exploited by the traditional media industry. Because there is not yet a shared understanding of YouTube™’s common culture, each scholarly approach to understanding how YouTube™ works must make choices among these interpretations, in effect recreating it as a different object each time…(p. 6-7).

However one can define YouTube™, one thing is for sure: the prominence of YouTube™ along with the many user-friendly video editing tools available everywhere, individuals and global media-corporations, for the first time, were able to compete with the broadcast media in the United States. Moreover, Jenkins (2006) described YouTube™ content as “spreadable content” (p. 275), and this spreadable function of YouTube™ has recently been utilized with social media. The increased use of social media like Facebook and MySpace, in essence, has also increased YouTube™’s popularity. YouTube™ has now opened doors for a new form of convergence and participatory culture between old and new media and between individuals and media corporations. Burgess and Green’s (2009) content analysis of YouTube™ videos provides a better understanding of this convergence culture. In their analyses of the most viewed, most favorited, most responded and the most discussed videos appearing in August, September and November of 2007, the authors were trying to find what they call the “the YouTubeness of YouTube™.” Their sample consisted of 4,320 videos and they coded for four different criteria: Origin of video (user created or traditional media company), uploader of the video, the genre of the video and the theme of the video.
Of the 4,320 videos coded, 1,812 were clips taken from traditional media sources, 2,177 were user created videos, and 331 were unknown. Regarding the uploaders, 61% of the videos were uploaded by individuals, only 8% of the videos were put on YouTube™ by large corporations, 20% of the videos were uploaded by small-to-medium businesses and the rest had unidentifiable uploaders.

When looking closely at the most viewed and the most favorited categories, most of the videos contained content taken from traditional media. In the most discussed and the most responded categories, however, the majority of the videos contained unique content created by YouTube™ users. In the videos containing traditional media content, the material was usually of informational programming, which included clips from news networks, clips related to the 2008 presidential elections and celebrity interviews; scripted materials, which apply to all the videos containing sketch comedy, animation or segments from dramas or soap operas; live content, which usually consists of footage from sporting events or from the debates; music videos; and promotional videos like movie trailers and product advertisements. Those clips of traditional media content were mainly uploaded by individuals who viewed the actual programs on TV, recorded them, selected some segments of these programs, edited a video and put it online. These uploaders use a process called redaction or quoting where they select snippets of the most important part of a specific program and put them on YouTube™. “YouTube™ functions as a central clearing house service that people use to catch up on public media events, as well as to break news stories and raise awareness, as in the citizen journalism’s role” (Burgess & Green, 2009, pg. 49).
Most of the time, though, quoted materials in the most viewed categories are not of breaking news. Rather, they reflect the public and the media’s agendas. After a soccer game, for example, people who missed that game would go on YouTube™ to view the highlights. Similarly, during the presidential elections, many clips regarding the elections were viewed. The Sarah Palin interview with Katie Couric and Tina Fey’s impression of the vice presidential candidate were widely popular at that time. Redaction and quoting has also made celebrities of some television personalities. Many media experts believe snippets of the Daily Show and the Colbert Report that appeared on YouTube™ helped Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert gain more prominence amongst younger audiences (Burgess & Green, 2009, Jenkins, 2006). More recently, Susan Boyle, a British singer who participated in a talent show in England, became a global sensation because of a clip of her performance that appeared on YouTube™.

The traditional media content shows one aspect of YouTube™, and the other can be experienced from the user made content, which included vlogs (40%), user created music videos (15%), live material (13%) like sports footage or a musical performance, informational content (10%) such as game or movie reviews, and scripted material (8%). These results suggest most people would rather view videos than create them and upload them on YouTube™. The user created videos, however, are that ones that provide breaking news and create celebrities without the help of big media—they set the agenda.

The vlogs of Lonleygirl15, which began appearing on YouTube™ in July of 2006, caught the attention of the mainstream media and drew many people to log on
Lonleygirl15, better known as Bree, vlogged about her troubled life as a teenager and her battles with her religious parents, but as the media and the public’s attention of her story grew, so did the suspicion of its authenticity. It later turned out that Lonleygirl15’s videos were a hoax and were part of a film making experiment by some independent film producers (Burgess & Green, 2009). Even though Lonleyrirl15’s vlogs were part of a hoax, it is this mass attraction to her story that legitimatized the use and the power of the vlogs.

Recently, a vlogger by the name of Chris Crocker became an instant sensation when he posted a vlog titled “leave Britney alone” where he appears to be crying and very sympathetic to the way the media has been treating Britney Spears. Another famous vlogger created “What the buck show,” which is a weekly YouTube™ show about the latest entertainment news, and is now one of the most viewed shows on YouTube™.

These YouTube™ celebrities along with the rest of video uploaders and members of the site have created their own social network. While this social network is small, it does pose many challenges to big media who have recently adapted to this recent interest in online video. Burgess and Green (2009) said “YouTube™ clearly represents a disruption to existing media business models and is emerging as a new site for media power. It has received significant press attention, and is now part, however begrudgingly accepted, of mainstream media landscape, but is also regularly used as a vehicle for rehearsing public debates about new media and the Internet as a disruptive force on business and society, particularly with regard to young people” (p. 15). Large media corporations have complained and filed copyright infringement lawsuits regarding the practice of redaction. In addition to NBC’s copyright battle with YouTube™, Viacom
filed a lawsuit in 2006 demanding the removal of about 100,000 clips containing content taken from Comedy Central, Nickelodeon and MTV. Global corporations like Mediaset and the English Premier League also pursued legal action. Moreover, to combat this online video community, large corporations have decided to be part of the online video business. When YouTube™ removed NBC clips of its site, NBC contemplated signing a deal with YouTube™ to deliver its content, but later decided to provide its content on their own online video venture, Hulu. Today many media corporations and production companies, including CBS, have signed deals with YouTube™ to provide online content.

There is no doubt that YouTube™’s success has opened doors for everyone to enter the online video business, be it individuals, media corporations, businesses, celebrities, governments and politicians. For Jenkins (2006), YouTube™ exemplifies a convergence culture where, through online video, all the players in the online world can interact. Some of this convergence culture was experienced during the 2008 presidential election. The increased interest in the election has created an unprecedented evolution in online media where YouTube™ became the go-to site for news, advertisements and satire pertaining to the elections. All of the candidates running in the primaries and general election had YouTube™ channels, which were constantly updated with the latest political ads and video messages to the voters. Hillary Clinton, for example, used YouTube™’s platform to announce her candidacy, and Barack Obama’s campaign, at one point in time, was uploading two to three videos daily (Grove, 2008). CNN, one of the largest cable news channels in the United States, hosted the first ever YouTube™ debates during the democratic and republican
primaries. Individuals also pitched in as the Obama Girl video became an instant hit on YouTube™ and a video from a Ron Paul supporter helped the candidate raise more than $4.2 million in just one day. What was more intriguing and more influential, however, were the videos created by the YouTube™ community that generated embarrassing, and sometimes, controversial moments for the candidates. The popularity of the “Bomb Bomb Iran” video articulated McCain’s Bush-like foreign policy direction; redacted videos of Sarah Palin’s crushing performance in the Katie Couric interview along with Tina Fey’s impression of her proved to be fatal to the McCain campaign; clips of Reverend Jeremiah Wright’s anti-American remarks hurt Obama’s campaign for quite some time; and the many videos of Biden’s countless gaffes created a comical character out of the vice presidential candidate.

In an interview with the Beet.TV Blog, news specialist Olivia Ma said the 2008 presidential race along with the Beijing Olympics have caused a more than 500% increase in consumption of news and politics videos from YouTube™ (Plesser, 2009). YouTube™’s news and political director, Steve Gorve (2008), said:

Such wonderment might be expected since YouTube™ gained its early notoriety as a place with videos of dogs on skateboards or kids falling off of trampolines. But these days, in the 10 hours of video uploaded to YouTube™ every minute of every day (yes — every minute of every day), an increasing amount of the content is news and political video. And with YouTube™’s global reach and ease of use, it’s changing the way that politics — and its coverage — is happening (p. 25).

But will YouTube™ and other online video sites replace traditional media? A recent PEW (2011b) study found that the Internet has gained on TV as the public’s main source of news, but while television remains the most dominant medium for news as 66% of the public rely on it, its dependence rate declined from 74% in 2009 and 82% in 2002. However, one striking result from this survey is that with television remaining the
dominant source of news amongst all Americans, for those under 30 years old, the Internet surpassed television as the main source for news for the first time in 2010. Regarding online video, Gavin O’Malley (2009) from Online Media Daily said according to media research firms, Trendstream and Lightspeed, “having gone from zero to mass market in three short years, online video is the fastest growing media platform in history.” Moreover, managing director of Trendstream, Tom Smith, was quoted saying, “the broadcast mode is dead…now is the time for co-creation, user distribution and a true democratization of video content” (O’Malley, 2009). According to recent statistics from comScore, online video content and viewership is increasing—about 178 million viewers watched an average of 187 videos during December 2009. Google sites, which include YouTube™, attracted 135.8 million unique visitors while Yahoo sites came in second with 59.8 million unique viewers. Also, during that same month, Google sites delivered more than 13 billion videos representing 33% of all the videos viewed by American users. Of those 13 billion videos, 99% were from YouTube™. Hulu replaced Fox Interactive and came in second with a little bit more than one billion videos viewed, accounting for 3% of the videos viewed (comScore, 2010).

While there are a number of online video sites over the Internet, YouTube™ remains the most dominant. YouTube™ is an open space for everyone to join, but some big media companies like NBC, ABC and FOX have decided not to be part of this platform. Rather, these companies post their content on their own sites or on Hulu. Hulu can be useful to those people who miss out on their favorite episodes where they can visit the site and watch reruns with limited commercials, but Hulu eliminates convergence and participation, which are key functions in making YouTube™ popular
among online video viewers. Also, because of copyright issues and global licensing, people outside the United States cannot access all programs. It is this convergence culture that YouTube™ creates, which makes this online video site unique. Anyone can participate and anyone can view, upload, share and comment on videos.

**Aljazeera Online**

Little attention has been given to the role of global news organizations, which are utilizing the Web to reach audiences in the United States and compete with big media. For those organizations, which include Aljazeera, YouTube™ has certainly become the go-to-site. Today many news organizations from around the world have their YouTube™ channels, and as television viewership is on the decline, Grove (2008) said these organizations must take advantage of the free services of YouTube™ if they want their content to be viewed. “The ones that have been doing this for a while rely on a strategy of building audiences on YouTube™ and then trying to drive viewers back to their Web sites for a deeper dive into the content” (p. 26). Certainly, Aljazeera English is one of the most successful organizations in applying Grove’s strategy, and while many cable companies have banned Aljazeera from broadcasting in the United States, its online practices have proven to be successful.

The Aljazeera Arabic Website was launched in 1996, and quickly became one of the top online news sources for Arabs. According to an Aljazeera corporate statement, in 2002 the site received more than 811 million impressions and 161 million visits (2005). The site won the prize for the number one source of news for Arabs in 2004 and also in 2005, was nominated for a Webby, the equivalent of an Oscar for the online culture. The Aljazeera English Web site was online before the English channel went on air. The corporate statement read that Aljazeera English "officially breaks the language
barrier, the Web site is developed to bring people and continents together and it is coming true, a new window of opportunity to see the world through is now opening” (2005). Today, the Aljazeera English Web site offers free streaming video of the English channel, and a “Mobile Service” where users can receive the latest news via text messages.

Aljazeera has also proved successful in its operations on YouTube™ which began in 2007 (Conan, 2008). Before the launch of the channel, Russell Merryman, editor-in-chief of the Web and New Media operations at Al-Jazeera English, said “The new Al-Jazeera English branded Channel on YouTube™ will allow us to approach and interact with our viewers in a new way and will give us a chance to target other potential audiences through this new global platform. It is a perfect way to promote our best content and set the news agenda for Internet users around the world” (Sennitt, 2007). Today, the channel is one of the most viewed and active channels on YouTube™ as more than five clips from Aljazeera’s newscasts and popular programs are uploaded daily. Users from all around the world can view the clips, rate them, and share them with other users via social network sites like Facebook.

In an interview with NPR, Burman said, “the YouTube™ channel for Aljazeera English is by far the most popular one on YouTube™” (Conan, 2008). As of August 21, 2011, Aljazeera has 23,267 clips on its channel with 213,596 subscribers compared to CNN’s 35,942 subscribers. The Aljazeera YouTube™ channel has proved to be effective with its coverage of events in the Middle East along with events happening around the world. The recent uprisings in the Middle East along with the Japanese earthquake that were amongst the top 100 viewed videos are examples (Ali & Guthrie,
2011). More recently, with YouTube™ developing live stream technology, Aljazeera is one of the very few organizations that have a live stream on their YouTube™ channel. Other news organizations like BBC and CCN still do not.

**The Arab World in the Eyes of the American Public**

**Aljazeera Credibility and Orientalism**

The Aljazeera Arabic and English channels both operate 24 hours a day and cover a wide variety of topics and news from all around the world. But up until the recent positive press the network has received due to coverage of the uprisings in the Middle East, American viewers were only exposed to the Aljazeera coverage through excerpts appearing on U.S. TV of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the exclusive interviews with Osama bin Laden and other Al-Qaeda operatives. In other words, whenever the audience in the United States got a glimpse of Aljazeera, it was usually associated with violence and terrorism. The criticism it received from the American media and the Bush administration further reinforced the idea that it was an anti-American news organization which harbors terrorists. Research has shown that credibility is not inherent in a source, but is rather a perception held by the audience (Schweiger, 2000). Ariyanto et al. (2007) note that:

In terms of how people feel about the integrity of media coverage, the extent to which the coverage is objectively biased is less important that people’s perception of whether it is biased. Furthermore, there is a growing body of evidence that perceptions of bias are influenced by a range of factors that do not relate to the content of media coverage, but rather are embedded in the intergroup context within which the issue is played out (p. 266).

It is of no surprise that Aljazeera is perceived negatively because, historically, the Arab World has been portrayed in a negative manner. From ancient works of literature, art and science, Said (1978) stated that there has always been a dichotomous theme in
the depiction of Eastern cultures by Western societies in which the “Orient”—the East or, in this case, the Arab and Islamic world—has been viewed as radically different and inferior to the West or the “Occident”. The process of “dealing” with foreign people and cultures is what Said (1978) calls Orientalism—“dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (p. 3). Thus Orientalism includes all the writings, images and attitudes manufactured by the West to create a highly-motivated, self-centered and unrealistic view of the Orient (Lockman, 2004).

Those distortions of the East, however, do travel and evolve over time. According to Lockman (2004), “some European scholars, writers and others appropriated certain images and notions about the East and Islam from what they had come to perceive as Europe’s distinctive past, refashioned them in keeping with their own contemporary concerns, and propagated them as relevant to their own time” (p. 8).

Negative depictions of the Arab World have been going on for centuries. Arabs have been portrayed, among other things, as uncivilized, violent, unsanitary, dangerous and abusers of women. But today, with the development of the media industry along with Western interventions in the region, those views have become more prevalent and powerful in shaping modern perceptions of the region and its people (Said, 1978; Lockman, 2004).

While there was a preconceived notion of what constitutes Arabs and Arab cultures, Americans didn’t really become aware of this view until the United States was involved in that region right after World War II. McAlister (2005) said “Foreign policy
statements and government actions become part of a larger discourse through their relation to other kinds of representations, including news and television accounts of current events, but also novels, films, museums exhibits and advertising” (p. 5).

Negative depiction of Arabs in the United States intensified as the media covered the American involvements in the region after World War II. Three specific events were to be significant in the characterization of an Arab: the inception of the State of Israel in 1947 and its aftermath, the 1979 Iranian hostage crisis and the 2001 September 11th attacks.

The Second World War had profound societal and economic impact on Europe. With economic difficulties, weakened militaries and increased nationalist resistance, Britain, France and the rest of Europe could no longer sustain their control over their colonies. As a result, decolonization of European colonies in Africa, Asia and the Americas occurred mostly in the 1950s and 1960s. Whether peacefully or through revolt and war, most of the colonies became independent nation-states during the years following World War II. These newly formed states, however, couldn’t find adequate means to support themselves financially, and therefore, had a hard time stabilizing their political systems. They had to seek help from one of the two emerging powers of that era: the United States, with its free-market capitalist agenda, and communist Russia (Lockman, 2004; Ochsenwald & Fisher, 2004).

During the Cold War, both superpowers viewed the instability in the third world as an opportunity to reach their long-term goal of global hegemony—political, economic and military control of the world. “In this context of rapid change and widespread instability, U.S. government officials became convinced that the United States had to
use its influence to shape the postwar world, particularly what were seen as weak and vulnerable new-nation states in Asia and Africa…” (Lockman, 2004, p.113).

The Arab World was, without doubt, one of those unstable regions that captured the attentions of both superpowers. For the United States, however, the Arab World was too valuable mainly because of its oil resources, military facilities and closeness to the Soviet Union (Hahn, 2005). With the Arab World holding the largest portions of the world’s oil reserves, the treasured fossil fuel was one of the important, if not the most important, motive behind the pursuit of maintaining full control of the region and diverting any sort of Soviet influence (Lockman, 2004, Hunt, 2007, Hahn, 2005). The United States’ strategy in the region was not only threatened by Soviet interference, but also by internal struggles within the Middle East: across the Arab World, discontent with previous Western control of the region—due to poverty and social injustice—swayed Arabs to revolt against their governments and seek nationalist, left-leaning secular movements; rivalries between the different Arab states created an era of hostility and instability; and the Arab/Israeli conflict reached unprecedented highs as both sides fought continuously. With all the controversy and chaos in the Middle East after World War II, the United States had to make vital decisions to ensure its authority over the region and its resources. As the media covered the events happening in the Middle East during that time, those decisions, which included creations of new alliances with some countries and dodging away from others, proved to be central in shaping American views on the Arab and Islamic worlds.

**Media Sets the Agenda**

The Arab World was relatively unknown to many Americans, but with U.S. involvement in the region after World War II, the American public had to turn to the
media and the entertainment industry—newspapers, television, movies and novels—to understand and get to know the region. Louw (2004) said in evaluating local news, audiences can easily carry out their own reality checks by comparing the news with their experiences and understandings, but when it comes to news from foreign lands, such reality checks do not exist. The audiences become solely dependent on the news media, and have no choice but to accept and believe what is reported.

For many Americans tuning in to the coverage of the U.S. involvement in the Middle East after World War II—and even today—the Arab World was both, relevant yet uncertain. The way the media and the entertainment industry portrayed and framed major events in the Middle East would eventually set the stage for what would be a generalized image of the region and its people. In talking about the American public's reliance on the media, which included television, radio, magazines, newspapers and movies, Bayoumi and Rubin (2000) said:

One aspect of the electronic, postmodern world is that there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed. Television, the films and all the media's resources have forced information into more standardized molds. So far as the Orient is concerned, standardization and cultural stereotyping have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century academic and imaginative demonology of the mysterious Orient” (p.91).

Israel, the Arabs and the United States

Zionism and the inception of the state of Israel:

In the 1930s and 1940s, anti-Jewish sentiment in the United States was widespread as, according to a 1938 survey, 58% of the American public believed that the prosecution of Jews by Hitler was entirely or partially the Jewish people’s fault, and in another survey conducted in 1939, most Americans questioned the Jewish influence over business and politics in the United States (Suleiman, 1988). More intriguing was a
1942 survey which found that 77% of the American public was against allowing Jewish exiles from Germany to live in the United States. But this anti-sentiment toward the Jews and Israelis disappeared during the Cold War and spilled over to the Arabs. The Jewish communities and Israelis suddenly became known for their courage, bravery, diligence and hard work and the Arabs, while not looked at positively before, were viewed as uncivilized, barbaric and cruel toward the Israelis (Suleiman, 1988). Suleiman (1988) said the transformation of the Jewish and Israeli image in the United States was, in part, attributed to the success of the Zionist movement's public relations campaign in the United States that fought for "defending Israel and advancing her cause at the expense of the Arabs" (p. 2). The media campaign that emphasized the plight of Jews under the Nazi regime played very well with the non-Jewish American public who sympathized with the Zionist cause. Hahn (2005) said "they pitied the victims of Nazi prosecution, identified with Jewish settlers seemingly repeating the U.S. frontier experience, predicted that Jews would make Palestine prosper, and looked down upon Muslims and Arabs" (p. 22). Adding to this pro-Zionist attitude were the Evangelical Christians who, based on Biblical divination, vividly rallied behind the establishment of a Jewish State.

The clash between securing national interests in the Arab States and following the domestic zeal for Zionism was resolved during Harry Truman's presidency when he chose the latter by publicly recognizing the State of Israel and, at the same time, neglecting the State Department and the Pentagon's caution that "supporting Zionism would undermine vital national interests in the Arab World, whose political loyalty seemed essential to prevailing over the Soviet Union in the emerging Cold War" (Hahn,
2005, p. 22). Hahn (2005) said Truman’s endorsement of the Zionist ambitions was due to his evangelical Christian background and to his compassion toward the Jewish suffering in Germany. More importantly, his decision to support Zionism had a political motive, especially after the public support toward Israel grew and the power of the Jewish political and corporate lobby became a force to be reckoned with. Suleiman (1988) said “the Democratic and Republican parties, hoping to capitalize on the issue in order to advance their own fortunes, began to out-bid each other both in being the first to announce their support, and in offering more support, for the Zionist cause” (p. 5). From then on, Israel became a national interest for the United States, only this interest was more related to politics at home.

Arab revolt and the 1956 war

Meanwhile in the Arab World, discontent with British and French colonial rule over the region along with the resentment of the Western decision to allow the inception of the state of Israel encouraged a sea of anti-Western sentiment and nationalist revolutions which threatened two of most important interests in the United States: Israel and oil. The most prominent figure in this Arab nationalist wave was Jamal Abdul Nasser who, in 1952, succeeded in overthrowing the monarchy and obtaining full control of Egypt. Nasser became a heroic figure in the minds of many Arabs, as he openly rejected U.S. Middle Eastern policies while promoting the need for Arab unity and the sharing of oil, one of the chief Arab resources. The threat of Nasser grew as he made arms deals with the Soviets and when he nationalized the British and French owned company that operated the Suez Canal. In an attempt to take back the Suez Canal, the British, French and Israelis attacked Egypt in 1956. The attack, however, further transformed Nasser into a prominent figure, “the man who stood up to the West
(Israel) and emerged triumphant” (Lockman, 2004, p. 119). Nasser’s success was responsible for energizing a number of nationalist-motivated challenges in the Arab World—the 1958 fall of the Hashemites in Iraq and the near fall of the Jordanian pro-Western monarchy. For the United States, such movements threatened its political and economic interests in the region and were to be fought strategically and stopped immediately. The United States began to maintain military bases in some Arab countries, trained their military, supplied them with weapons, signed anti-Soviet agreements with them and provided them economic aid (Lockman, 2004). In doing so, the United States, under the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations in the 1950s and early 1960s, also took a benevolent approach in the Arab/Israeli conflict and avoided any part in the peace keeping process because, according to Hahn (2005), “it promised to encourage Arab radicalism” (p. 37).

During this time—the 1950s and early 1960s—the Zionist media campaign along with the pro-Israeli American media coverage of the events in the Middle East proved to be successful in creating a positive image of Israel and a negative one of Arabs. Also, in this era the attention was focused on the Arabs and the Arab terrorists in their quest to deny the innocent and courageous Israelis the right to statehood. In his content analysis of six national news magazines and the New York Times’ News of the Week review during the Suez crisis in 1956, Suleiman (1988) found that the Arabs were presented as the “bad guys” aggressing against the “peace loving” Israelis, and any harm to the Arabs caused by the Israelis was framed as “reprisal raids.”

**The 1967 Six-Day War:**

Even though the Arab/Israeli conflict received attention in the United States, it was not until Lyndon Johnson’s presidency when the Israeli issue became more prominent
than usual. Unlike Eisenhower and Kennedy, who tried hard to appease Nasser, Johnson, a strong proponent of the Zionist cause, took a much firmer approach toward the Egyptian leader. Johnson eliminated economic aid to Egypt which stirred a war of words between both leaders where Johnson accused Nasser of encouraging the Palestinian Liberation Organization to attack Israel, sympathizing with the Viet Cong and threatening the pro-U.S. governments in Iran, Jordan and Saudi Arabia (Hahn, 2005). The tension between Egypt and the United States escalated to unprecedented levels until the 1967 Six-Day War when Israel was able to launch a surprise attack on Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian forces. The attack was in retaliation to Nasser’s expulsion of UN troops policing the Sinai peninsula and to his decision to close the Straits of Tiran to Israeli ships (Ochesenwald & Fisher, 2004; Hahn, 2005). Experts believed that the Arab forces were too strong for the Israelis to handle, but it only took them six days to defeat the Arab coalition. Suleiman’s (1988) news magazine analysis of the 1967 conflict showed a clear rise in pro-Israel and anti-Arab bias. More striking was the vilification campaign aimed at Nasser where all troubles in the Middle East were attributed to the collaboration between the Egyptian leader and the Soviets.

The storyline of the 1967 War took a different framework that further reinforced Israel’s image in the United States. The Israeli success came when the United States was experiencing massive losses in Vietnam and public resentment toward the war was increasing. Right after Israel’s victory, the news media became enthusiastic about the storyline: A newly formed country defeating three nations in just six days, while the United States, with its powerful military and endless finances couldn’t handle a defenseless country like Vietnam (McAlister, 2004). The framing of the 1967 war
brought Israel’s courage and will to American homes, and that moment, according to McAlister, saw the emergence of a dominant view that it was “just and in U.S. national interests to act not only with Israel, but also like Israel on key international issues” (p. 158). The events following the 1967 war along with the media and Hollywood’s obsession with Israel further strengthened that view, which still stands strong to this day.

Whether in the media, movies or in political statements made by public figures, Israel is highly revered in the United States. The country is viewed as the only real democracy in the region and the main strategic ally to the United States to which its existence is in American national interest. This view emerged right after the inception of the State of Israel in 1947 and has grown stronger ever since. The Arabs and Israelis have fought continuously ever since the state’s birth, but the media and the entertainment industry have usually followed one path in covering this conflict: the innocent democratic country attacked by Arab barbaric villains. Suleiman (1988) concluded that during this era of escalating Arab/Israeli tensions, Americans only saw the Arabs through the lens of the Zionists and the Israelis. The Zionist media success was due to two main reasons. First, the Zionist cause was allowed to flow freely without any counter-arguments presented by Arabs or pro-Arab groups in the United States. Second, any account of Arabs was related to Islam, which has always been viewed in an unfavorable manner in the United States (McAlister, 2004).

The Iranian Hostage Crisis

The U.S., victim of terrorism

In November 1979, a group of students loyal to Ayatollah Khomeini stormed the U.S. Embassy in Iran and held 65 Americans hostage for 444 days. Their actions were
in retaliation to President Jimmy Carter’s decision to allow the Shah to receive medical
treatment in the United States. As mentioned earlier, terrorist attacks from the Middle
East received a good deal of attention from the American media, but the Iran hostage
crisis received an unprecedented amount of coverage and viewership. ABC estimated
that 12 million people tuned in to their specials daily, which was more viewers than what
the *Tonight Show with Johnny Carson* received (McAlister, 2004).

For the first time, the United States, not Israel, became the victim of a terrorist
attack in the Middle East. The proximity and high impact of the event were behind the
rise of mass media, television and network news in particular. Said (1981) stated,
“never before has an international trouble spot like Iran been covered so
instantaneously and so regularly as it has been by the media: Iran has therefore
seemed to be in American lives, and yet deeply alien from them, with an unprecedented
intensity” (p. 25). The role of network news in American society was established during
coverage of the Vietnam War. The Iranian hostage crisis further reinforced the network
news’ function as more time was devoted to the crisis and as more people tuned in. But
it also introduced a new platform of news presentation: the late-night news special,
which, everyday, dedicated thirty minutes to an hour of in-depth coverage about Iran
and the hostage crisis. ABC’s *America Held Hostage* was the most popular, and after
four months of going on-air, was replace by *Nightline*, which still exists today. During the
news coverage of this crisis, Iran was turned into a “sign system” consisting of a limited
number of generalizations and depictions that were repeated continuously: bearded
mullahs and veiled women; creepy images of Khomeini; and close-ups of Iranians
burning the American flag and chanting “Death to America” (Naficy, 1995). More
importantly, coverage emphasized the victimization of the United States as emotional stories about the hostages accompanied by interviews with family members filled the airwaves (McAlister, 2004). Through personal stories and interviews with family members, the media depicted the hostages as average citizens and ignored the reality that many of them were diplomats and some were, in fact, CIA operatives. One more powerful theme, however, emerged during the coverage of this event and created a shift in the way the media portrayed the Middle East.

**Islam replaces the Arab World**

McAlister (2004) emphasized, “for the fourteen months that it dominated the U.S. nightly news, and for nearly a decade after in various cultural texts, the Iran story became the paradigmatic signifier of America as a nation imperiled by terrorism” (p.199). Unlike coverage during the Arab/Israel conflict which focused on Arab terrorism, the new form of terrorism was characterized by the religion of Islam, which became “highlighted as the dominant signifier of the region, rather than oil wealth, Arabs, or Christian Holy Lands” (McAlister, 2004, p. 200). Even though Iran is not an Arab country and its version of Islam—Shiism—is not practiced by most Arabs, the whole region, with its diverse religions, cultures and politics, was symbolized with Islam. McAlister (2004) said Islam was the common denominator between Arabs and Iranians, so the morphing of the Arab/Palestinian conflict with the hostage crisis seemed to be the most applicable way to make sense of the situation. Shaheen (2001) said during the crisis, about 70% of Americans wrongly identified Iran as an Arab country. Militant Islam became one of the hottest topics of discussion as long editorials appearing in major publications along with in-depth news stories on television tried to explain Islam to the American people. McAlister (2004) said “the vast variety of Muslim beliefs and
practices, spread across four continents, were summarized in simplistic, often overtly hostile summaries of the “essence of Islam”, which was now allegedly on display in Tehran” (p. 211). Said (1981) added “the Iranian revolution and the hostage crisis have furnished alarming evidence of what has come to be called the rise of Islam” (Said, 1981, p. x).

**The September 11th Attacks**

Spillman & Spillman (1997) said nations “need” enemies so that they can establish a method of social control that reinforces the values of their system. “As a hegemonic device, a common enemy can serve to distract attention and divert aggression and energy toward a common threat” (Merskin, 2004, p. 159). The media further emphasizes the context of enemies by structuring simplified binary oppositions: there are always the bad guys and the good guys. “Some individuals and groups are idealized, while others are demonized and villainized” (Louw, 2004, p. 156). During the Cold War, Russia and its former communist government were described as irrational, fearsome and incomprehensible (Padgett & Allen, 2003). After the fall of the Soviet regime, and in attempt to find a new ‘other,’ Padgett and Allen (2003) said the American media began focusing more on Islam and its threat to Western values. Said (2002) stated even though Islamic countries were allies of the U.S. in combating communism, America had to look for a new outside enemy to prove its hegemony: Islam and the Arab World were the prime candidates. What made Islam an easy target for the United States however, was the Jihadist movements’ new agenda.

From the early 1970s until the mid-1990s, the Islamic movements’ main objective was to get rid of the secular nationalist governments at home. As Zawahiri and many other jihadis used to say, “the road to Arab Jerusalem must pass through Egypt” (p. 50).
The shift to globalism occurred around the mid-1990s when the jihadis defeated the Soviets in Afghanistan, when the jihadist operations on the home front appeared to be a failure, and when the Saudis allowed the Americans to build bases and liberate Kuwait (Gerges, 2005).

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 mobilized young Muslims from the Arab World to fight for the sake of their religion and to resist any sort of aggression on dar al-Islam. At a time when the Soviets were represented by evil because of their communist ideology, the rest of the world viewed Afghanistan as a victim and rallied behind the Jihadi movement in resisting the Soviet intervention. The United States, which viewed the invasion from a Cold War perspective, collaborated with other Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia, in financially and militarily assisting the jihadi movement—little did they know that the jihadis, while fighting the communists, had another target in mind. “The Afghan war was a rehearsal ground for the real battle to come, against the near enemy, not the far enemy” (Gerges, 2005, p.98).

This “real battle” came after the Saudi royal family rejected Osama Bin Laden’s offer to bring about an army of mujahideen to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi forces, and instead opted to use the assistance of the Americans. The idea of U.S. forces being stationed in what is considered the holiest land in the Muslim world did not play very well among Muslims. As a result, many young Muslims who were oppressed in their own secular societies and who were livid with the U.S. presence in Muslim lands found refuge in joining the ranks of Al-Qaeda. As Bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri, the leaders of Al-Qaida—sent their messages to the Muslim world via tapes, video, books and articles, they became the most prominent figures of resistance in the Islamic region.
And as more people joined, Al-Qaeda operations increased in number and intensity—the bombings of U.S. embassies in Africa, for example. But Bin-Laden’s resilience in wanting something of bigger impact led his organization to orchestrate and implement the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center.

The 9/11 attacks, indeed, made a huge impact and changed the way the whole world operates. More importantly, the development of the media with the advent of the 24-hour news cycle via cable news and the Internet have created a new platform to demonize Islam and reinforce the negative public perceptions of Islam and Arab cultures.

**The media responds.** When the planes first hit the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, the media rushed to cover this tragic event, but failed to make sense of it and present a clear narrative. The first few days of coverage focused on the heroism of the victims and the firefighters. But when it became evident that the attack was initiated by Al Qaeda, the terrorist organization, its leader, Osama bin Laden, and the religion it claims to represent, Islam, became easy targets for the media and politicians. President Bush and his administration stressed Islam as the enemy by introducing phrases or words like “us” and “them”; “good vs. evil”; “axis of evil”; “those people”; “demons”. This “good vs. evil” story line has also helped in strengthening public support to start wars Afghanistan and Iraq. Islam was portrayed as a backward religion in need of modernization and democracy; a religion that harbors terrorists who hate and want to kill Americans; and a religion that oppresses its people who are in need of freedom. Merskin (2004) said, “the resultant “we-they” dichotomy produces a kind of group think that supports separation of particular racial, religious, ethical, or cultural groups


positioning them as hostile and alien” (p. 159). As a result, today in the age of intolerance toward discrimination of any kind, all but the Arabs and Muslims have been part of this intolerance. That was clearly evident during the post 9/11 coverage as the media didn’t even try to make sense of the attacks and the reasons behind them. McAlister (2004) said “the U.S. media abetted the administrations’ framing of the conflict in depoliticized terms by systematically avoiding any discussion of links between the September 11 attacks and U.S. policy in the Middle East, particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict” (p. 279). More importantly, however, the media focused on demonizing Islam and decided to ignore the anti-Al Qaeda sentiment experienced in the Muslim world. Regarding the Muslim response, Gerges (2005) concluded:

Contrary to the received wisdom, the dominant response to Al-Qaeda in the Muslim world was very hostile, and a few activists, let alone ordinary Muslims, embraced its global Jihad. By the same token, a broad representative spectrum of Arab and Muslim opinion makers and Islamists utterly rejected Bin laden and Zawahiri’s justification of their attacks on America and debunked their religious and ideological rationale. Al-Qaeda faced a two-front war, internally and externally, with the interior front threatening its very own existence. (p. 270).

In many journalism textbooks, aspiring reporters are taught to avoid clichés and generalizations, yet, in covering Islam and the Arab World, journalists have often grouped Muslims into a narrow category of labels like “terrorists” and “fundamentalists.” With this consistent negative reporting, Wiegand and Malek (1995) said that it is no surprise that the Western public believes that Islam is a threat to the survival of democracy. Former CBS anchor, Dan Rather, was quoted saying “the most dangerous ideology is fundamental Muhammadism” (Wiegand & Malek, 1995, p. 205). Wiegand and Malek (1995) said “when simplified and biased comments such as these are made
by publicly trusted members of the press it is only likely that Western society would accept such views” (p. 205).

With the recent revolution movements across the Arab World, the region and its people were getting some positive coverage in the American media for their attempts in deriding their dictatorships and calling for social reform and more political freedoms. Despite that favorable coverage of the Arab World, recent data from Pew Research Center (PEW, 2011c) revealed that the negative views of the region still persist. In terms of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, 48% of Americans said they sympathize with Israel and only 11% side with the Palestinians. In response to the revolutions in the region, the Pew survey (2011c) also concluded that the American public “continues to cast a wary eye on the turmoil sweeping the Middle East”. Also, in the aftermath of the killing of Osama Bin Laden, a study found that perceptions of Muslim Americans worsened and that Americans were more tolerant of restrictions against American Muslims (Nisbet et al. 2011). What this says is that even in good times, the Arab World is still viewed unfavorably by the majority of Americans. Looking at it from Said’s (1993) perspective, with Arabs being depicted negatively for a long time and across many mediums, these negative depictions become embedded in American or Western cultures and are very hard to erase.

**Theoretical Background and Hypotheses**

Based on this notion that many Americans perceive the Arab World negatively, through this experiment, the study tried to find out how participants react to a news video report from an Arab news source that has been harshly criticized by the American media. Two videos pulled from Aljazeera’s YouTube™ channel were used. One represents a high controversy video, which shows coverage of the January 2009 Israeli
attack on Gaza that resulted in the death of more than 1,000 Palestinians. The storyline of the news report is different from what people in the United States may have been exposed to, in that it will be showing some gruesome images of the attacks and will be mostly presenting the Palestinian side of the story rather than the Israeli side. The other video is classified as the low controversy video and is about Good luck Jonathon, who took over the presidency of Nigeria after the president died. The premise of the video is mainly on the future of Nigeria and the character of Jonathon, who many think is reformer. Through the manipulation of the sources of these two videos by making them look like they were from CNN, the study tried to find out how participants perceived the credibility of videos with exactly the same content, but with different sources: Aljazeera, which has received negative press in the United States and CNN, which is seen as the most credible cable news channel by American viewers (PEW, 2008a).

The experiment focused on how participant’s attitudes toward the Arab World influenced their perception of Aljazeera’s credibility. Moreover, through the emphasis on new media, via YouTube™, the experiment will shed light on how reliance on the Internet for news and overall perceived credibility of traditional news sources influenced perceived credibility of Aljazeera. Further, the research looked at factors stimulating the use of interactive functions offered by YouTube™.

Credibility

Even though credibility has been an essential topic of research since the beginnings of the field of mass communication, researchers have yet to agree upon a definition of the concept and ways to measure it (Meyer, 1988; Self, 1996; Kiousis, 2001). Mass communication scholars do agree, however, that credibility is multidimensional and stress the importance of identifying the specific aspect of
credibility that is being tested or analyzed. Kiousis (2001) said “when charting out the concepts, at least three referents are germane to people’s perceptions of news: the journalists delivering the content, the news outlet they represent, and the medium through which the information is being relayed” (p. 388). To put it in simpler terms, credibility research usually focuses on the source, medium or the media channel.

Source credibility studies examine how certain attributes and characteristics of a communicator—individual, group or organization—can influence attitude change toward a certain message. Research on medium credibility looks more closely at the effects of the channel through which the content is delivered. The mediums in this case could be television, radio, newspaper or the Internet (Kiousis 2001). A third component of credibility that has received little empirical attention and that could easily be confused with either source and medium is what Bucy (2003) calls media credibility or media channel credibility. Unlike source credibility, which focuses on the senders’ characteristics like trustworthiness or expertise, Bucy (2003) defines media channel credibility as “perceptions of a news channel’s believability, as distinct from individual sources, media organizations, or the content of the news itself” (p. 248). This kind of research focuses more on the perceptions of credibility rather than the objective characteristics of the source or the medium. Moreover, research on media channel credibility looks more closely at factors that may influence those perceptions—demographics, involvement with issues, knowledge, media use and group allegiance amongst other things.

An example could better illustrate the differences between the three concepts: someone watching Anderson Cooper’s show, *Anderson Cooper 360*, online could
categorize Anderson Cooper as the source, the Internet as the medium and CNN as the media channel. It is also very important to recognize that these three concepts overlap and, according to Kiousis (2001), "boundaries between channel and source credibility are somewhat blurred but are associated given their common conceptual foundation….we argue that perceived credibility is primarily a function of both source and channel characteristics" (p. 388).

The earliest research on credibility focused more on the source where researchers conducted a number of experiments to identify certain characteristics that can be associated with a credible source. Hovland and his associates, who were the pioneers of this specific aspect of credibility research, concluded that source expertise and trustworthiness are the two major components of source credibility (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953). Berlo et al. (1970) questioned the theoretical foundations of Hovland’s two-dimensional concept of source credibility and conducted a number of experiments to come up with a more established picture of the concept. Through a factor analysis of many source attributes and characteristics, Berlo et al. (1970) found that source credibility actually falls within three factors: safety, qualification and dynamism. Other scholars like McCroskey (1966) and Chaiken (1979) also ran their own sets of factor analyses and came up with other dimensions of source credibility. Kiousis (2001) said “It becomes clear that one overarching pattern resonating in credibility research is that scholars have failed to agree fully on the core dimension of the concept” (p. 384).

Researchers have also failed to find consensus with ways to measure the credibility of mediums and news media channels. The scales and factors provided by
Gaziano and McGrath (1986) and Meyer (1988) are the most accepted measures used in media credibility research. In trying to identify the dimensions of media credibility, Gaziano and McGrath (1986) asked 875 participants to rate the credibility of newspapers and TV news using a 16-item scale. The factor analysis of the 16 variables provided one factor that included 12 items—fair, biased, tell the whole story, accurate, respect people’s privacy, watch out for people’s interest, concerned about the public interest, factual and have well trained reporters—that is currently known as the Gaziano and McGrath (1986) credibility index. Meyer (1988) replicated Gaziano and Mcgrath’s factor analyses and yielded two factors: community affiliation and a five-item believability scale which included fairness, bias, accuracy, trustworthiness and completeness. Other researchers have also created their own sets of credibility indexes. Bucy (2003), for example, used five-item credibility index that consisted of believability, fairness, accuracy, informativeness and depth; Kiousis (2006), whose index is used for this study, utilized a credibility index containing six dimensions: accuracy, believability, fairness, objectivity, bias and sensationalism.

Medium credibility studies have focused on which mediums audiences deem more credible and what factors determine such accounts. Earlier studies have found that television was viewed as more credible than newspapers (Westley & Servin, 1964; Roper, 1985; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986) Newhagen and Nass (1989) viewed the differences in credibility ratings as stemming from the way people view both mediums in their evaluations. When evaluating television, people will base their judgments on how they view the journalists or reporters. In newspapers, however, people rarely associate a certain journalist to a newspaper and will more likely evaluate the medium as a whole.
The emergence of the Internet and the wide acceptance of online news has also intensified interest in medium credibility research. Johnson and Kaye (1998) surveyed politically-interested Web users to see if they viewed online news as more credible than their traditionally-delivered counterpart. They found that online newspapers and online candidate publications were viewed as more credible than traditional media. Moreover, similar to other studies that examined the effects of media use and reliance on credibility, they found that online reliance was strongly related to credibility ratings. Other studies focusing on medium credibility have also investigated the effects of the interactivity and multimedia functions of the Web on medium credibility. Kiousis (2006) concluded, “a positive main effect on perceived source credibility was observed when participants used multimedia content that was available…” (p. 354).

Surprisingly, not many studies have looked at the credibility of news channels. The Pew Research Center (2008a) surveys people every few years asking them to rate the believability of the different cable news channels, network news and the BBC. In 2008, they found that CNN got the highest credibility ratings where 30% of the participants said they believed all or most of its news. The CBS show, 60 Minutes (29%), local TV news (28%) and NPR (27%) followed. Fox News (23%), CBS News (22%) and the BBC (21%) got the lowest ratings. While this study did looked at most channels viewed in the United States, it also added specific shows like 60 Minutes and News Hour and this could have hindered the specificity of what was to be studied. One interesting result, which could be useful to this study, was the part on the BBC where participants rated it as the least credible. The study looked at how party affiliations
influenced credibility ratings and concluded that Democrats are three times more likely to say they believe all or most of BBC news (PEW, 2008a).

With regards to credibility research, Gunther (1992) said, “one alternative orientation lies in defining credibility not as an objective property of the source but as a receiver perception. Audience characteristics then become an inviting course of theoretical inquiry…” (p. 148). Some audience characteristics that have been subject to inquiry in credibility research include demographics, media use and reliance, and group membership. This study will specifically look at how people perceive Aljazeera compared to CNN based on audience characteristics like attitude toward, interest in and knowledge of the Arab World.

In terms of demographics, research has shown that highly educated males with high incomes and media use perceive media to be less credible than others. Moreover, younger and less educated audiences tend to be less skeptical of media and more likely to view news as credible (Gunther, 1992; Johnson and Kaye, 1998; Bucy, 2003). As mentioned above, media reliance can also be a strong predictor of perceptions of credibility where the more people rely on a certain media, the more they believe it is credible (Wanta & Hu, 1994; Johnson & Kaye, 1998). One study relating to Aljazeera looking at media reliance found that Aljazeera Arabic viewers rated the network as highly credible. While the Aljazeera audience viewed the network as credible on all measures, they ranked CNN and BBC as low on truthfulness, accuracy and fairness (Johnson & Fahmy, 2008).

In his study of group identification and the perception of media credibility toward social groups, Gunther (1992) found that demographics do not usually play a big role in
perceptions of credibility. Rather, group identification and involvement are the strongest predictors of credibility ratings. He concluded that “high involvement prompts not only more scrutiny, but more biased scrutiny of media content and therefore increases the likelihood that a person will take a skeptical view of the source of that content” (1992, p. 161). This point of view, which is more concerned with group allegiance and involvement on perceptions of credibility, is the basic foundation of the hostile media effect theory.

The Hostile Media Effect

The Hostile Media Effect theory claims that partisans, or people who have strong ties to a specific group or event, tend to view neutral coverage of an issue as biased against their side. Vallone et al. (1985) showed compiled footage of network news coverage of the 1982 Beirut massacre to undergraduate students with pro-Israeli and pro-Arab partisanship. Prior to the experiment, the participants were tested for their levels of knowledge of the Beirut Massacre and their general attitudes toward Israel and Palestine. After the experiment, the participants completed a questionnaire which focused on perception of fairness and objectivity of the coverage and the sources responsible for it. Regarding perception of bias, both groups viewed these programs and those responsible for them as biased against their side. Pro-Arabs viewed the coverage as biased against their side and the pro-Israelis saw the same coverage as biased in favor of the Palestinians. In terms of fairness, the authors concluded that “two questionnaire items suggest that pro-Arab and pro-Israeli subjects saw different news programs—that is, they disagreed about the very nature of the stimulus they had viewed” (Vallone et al., 1985, p. 582). Both groups recollected more negative references to their side than positive and both groups agreed that nonpartisans or neutral audience
members who view the coverage would be inclined to support the opposing group. Additionally, Vallone et al. (1985) analyzed the role of levels of emotional involvement and knowledge toward the Beirut Massacre in perceptions of bias within each partisan group. They concluded that the more knowledgeable participants within both groups—pro-Israeli and pro-Arab—viewed the coverage to be even more biased against their side. Moreover, they found that “perceptions of bias were also more pronounced among subjects who rated themselves as higher in emotional involvement and concern” (1985, p. 583).

While Vallone et. al (1985) focused on the original concept of hostile media, which was more concerned with partisans of a particular issue and how they reacted to a balanced news story on that issue, other studies have also looked at the effect of source on hostile media perception.

Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken’s (1994) research was one of the first hostile media studies that looked at the source, in which they hypothesized that it is “plausible that prior beliefs in hostile media bias, rather than partisanship per se, may lead people to prejudge a specific program as biased” (p. 167). They replicated the study done by Vallone et al. (1985) and added another variable concerned with prior beliefs about the source, which is one of the main concerns in this study. Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken (1994) asked their subjects to rate the degree to which they believed the U.S. media favored the Israeli or Palestinian side in coverage concerning the Middle East. While their results were not very conclusive, Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken (1994) found that prior beliefs in media influenced some biased judgments toward media content, but did not play a significant role in influencing memory categorization and recollection. They
concluded that prior beliefs “appear to have exerted a heuristic influence upon judgments of program content and overall bias” (Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken, 1994, p. 177). To put in simpler terms: if it is believed by participants that the media favors the opposite side, then the participants might inherently judge that the news coverage is biased against their side, but not necessarily remember what was in the news coverage. Moreover, Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken stressed the fact that further investigation is needed to strengthen evidence behind prior beliefs about the source.

Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken (1994) did include a source aspect to their study, but they only asked a question concerning prior beliefs in the U.S. media. Other studies have put more focus on the source by incorporating the concept, similar to this experiment, in the experimentation and manipulation processes. In their experiment concerning partisans in the genetically modified food issue, Gunther and Schmitt (2004) manipulated their stimulus based on source reach. They gave participants the same content but presented in two different ways: a newspaper story format (broad reach) and a student-essay format (narrow reach). They concluded that evidence of hostile media perception appeared when the content was presented in the news story format, but disappeared when it was presented in the student essay format. Moreover, they found some support of assimilation bias, agreement with the content rather than disagreeing with content, in the student essay-format. In explaining their findings regarding mass media, Gunther and Schmitt (2004) said, “the sense of broad reach and thus of potential influence on others invoked by mass media may generate perceptions of hostile content” (p. 66).
While Gunther and Schmitt (2004) looked at source in terms of its levels of reach, two other studies concentrated on how differences within mass media sources—broad reach sources—influence hostile media perceptions. Arpan and Raney (2003) analyzed how participants from a Southeastern university reacted to a balanced newspaper article about off-field problems with football programs in their university and in a rival university. More important, the researchers wanted to see if source manipulation can influence the reactions. The same newspaper article was reproduced three ways, where each one appeared to have been taken from a different newspaper—the hometown newspaper, the rival-city newspaper and an unknown or a neutral newspaper. The authors believed that the students would automatically think that the rival-city newspaper would be biased against their football program. The subjects were pre-tested for their levels of fanship and then were randomly assigned to one of the three groups. Across all conditions, the participants viewed the article as more biased against the home team than against the rival team. Regarding the differences in the reactions between the three conditions, perception of bias against the home team was lower in the home team condition, than in the rival-team condition, but the results were not very significant. The authors concluded “the findings of this study support the utility of integrating the traditional source effects perspective with that of hostile media effect, suggesting the need for further study” (p. 276).

In studying how Muslim and Christian participants from Indonesia reacted to an article covering an inter-religious conflict in Indonesia, Ariyanto et al. (2007) were much more successful in connecting prior beliefs with hostile media effect. The 212 participants were randomly assigned to three conditions where they read the same
news article about religious conflict, but each one was attributed to a different newspaper: a Muslim newspaper, a Christian newspaper and an unidentified newspaper. The study showed some evidence regarding the role of a newspaper’s religious affiliation in influencing perception of bias. The article was viewed as biased in favor of Muslims when it was attributed to a Muslim newspaper and vice versa. The authors concluded that:

When predicting perceptions of media bias, we need to be mindful not just of the group membership of the perceiver (as has been the case with the traditional work on hostile media perception), but also the group allegiance of the media. Consumers of media do not simply reflect on the content of the message, they peer beyond the words and make assumptions based on whether the media outlet has previous or apparent allegiances of the ingroup or outgroup (p. 277).

While it is fair to say that many media organizations have some sort of group allegiances, most traditional media in North America do not associate themselves with a religion as in the case of this study. The fact that the media used in the study were attributed to a certain religion, and the fact that religion is such a polarizing issue, may have swayed the results of the experiment. Having said that, the study does present valid evidence that perception of bias can be influenced by prior beliefs about the allegiance of the media, which is one of the major factors of this experiment as it was hypothesized that prior beliefs about the Arab World and how the U.S. media covers the region can affect how people rate the credibility of Aljazeera.

Looking at past research on hostile media perception like the examples mentioned earlier, the assumption has usually been that, amongst partisans, there is a contrast bias in reactions toward a neutral news story pertaining to a specific issue. Contrast bias usually occurs when partisans from different political, religious or social groups view a neutral stimulus as biased against their side and favorable to the other side—
their views of the same exact content are usually in contrast of one another. Gunther et al. (2009) said “perceptions of message content as favorable or unfavorable to one’s own point of view can fall anywhere on a continuum from assimilation to contrast” (p. 748). With assimilation, partisans react to a similar stimulus as favorable to their side like what occurred in Lord, Ross & Lepper’s study (1979) where both supporters and opponents of the death penalty viewed the same news content as supporting their views. Assimilation bias can be more evident in studies that use slanted news stimulus rather than manipulated neutral news content and in studies that recruit participants with similar beliefs. Gunther et al. (2009) attempted to research the assimilation side of the hostile media continuum by recruiting only subjects who shared similar beliefs regarding genetically modified rice. A group of Native Americans, who view wild rice as a cultural and spiritual part of their living, and a group of non-Native American opponents of genetically modified rice were part of the study. The subjects were exposed to the same content opposing genetically modified rice presented in six different ways: low reach friendly, medium reach friendly, high reach friendly, low reach unfriendly, medium reach unfriendly, and high reach unfriendly. The friendly source conditions usually came from Native American writers or publications; the unfriendly source conditions came from non-Native American publications. The authors found an overall assimilation bias rather than contrast bias in their findings, meaning the participants mostly agreed with content, but the levels of agreement varied between groups. Regarding the friendly or unfriendly source conditions, the researchers found no significant main effects with source, but perceptions of bias did differ significantly in the friendly source conditions where Native
Americans viewed the content from friendly sources as significantly less agreeable than non-Native Americans.

**Hypotheses and Research Questions**

This research utilized the different experimental designs used in previous studies, but took a different approach in trying to come up with a relationship between source and hostile media effect. As seen above, integrating source in hostile media perceptions has produced mixed results, and by utilizing the manipulations of source in this experiment, the study intended to add to the scholarship focusing on source effects in hostile media perception. Moreover, many of the hostile media effect studies that also looked at source have focused on the issue at stake and the partisan reactions toward the content of the news story rather than on reactions toward the source itself. This was one of the first hostile media effect studies that gave emphasis on the source rather than on the content of the news report or story. The main concern of this study was to see how differently participants from the American public react to YouTube™ news clips with exactly the same content, but attributed to different news organizations: Aljazeera and CNN.

Also, research on hostile media effect tends to focus on how different people with different levels of partisanship react to a neutral or a balanced coverage of a certain issue that pertains to the partisans. In fact most studies recruited participants from partisan groups rather than from the general public. In summarizing results from previous hostile media studies, Oh et al. (2011) said “the studies showed that people with either strong opinion toward an issue or a strong group identity tend to have hostile media perception. Without a specific issue and a certain level of strength of participants’ opinions, hostile media perceptions dissipated” (p. 42). By narrowing itself to only
partisans and a specific issue, this becomes a great limitation to the theory. In an effort to generalize the hostile media concept, the present study did not seek to find out how partisans with polarized views reacted to an issue that pertains to them. Rather, the goal was to see how regular people from the United States with different attitudes toward the Arab World differed in their hostile media perceptions toward online news clips with the same content, but attributed to either an organization from the Middle East or one from the United States.

Adding to the generalizability of the hostile media concept, rather than using a neutral story with manipulated content as in previous hostile media effect studies, this study experimented with actual videos found on the Aljazeera YouTube™ channel without any sort of manipulation in content. To shift the focus on the issue or the content of the videos and give emphasis on the source, a high controversy and a low controversy story with content not relating to each other were used. The high controversy news clip was a one-sided story concerning a recent clash between Israelis and Palestinians, and the low controversy video was about the turnover of the presidency in Nigeria to a young reformer. Through the manipulation of both videos to make them look like they originated from CNN, the study tried to see how participants reacted to news clips with the exact same content, but attributed to two different sources.

As mentioned earlier, Gunther et al. (2009) said that perceptions of media can fall anywhere in a continuum between assimilation to contrast. People will not always view media as hostile. Sometimes people will view media as neutral and in other cases as favorable to them. "Thus, to describe and interpret between-group differences where,
for a particular partisan group, judgments do not actually fall in the unfavorable side of neutral, researchers have developed the notion of relative hostile media effect” (Gunther et al., 2009, p. 751). Gunther et al. (2001) said relative hostile media effect usually occurs when the stimulus is slanted in one direction, similar to the news content used in this study, rather than manipulated to be neutral. Parisians who are exposed to such slanted stimulus will recognize the bias, but each group will view the slant as relatively in opposition to their side. Gunther et al. (2009) present an example in which partisans who read a pro-animal rights article agreed that the article was in favor of animal rights. However, participants who were in support of animal research viewed the article as significantly more favorable to animal rights than animal rights activists did. Kinnally (2008) presented another example where people who support genetically modified food viewed coverage in favor of their side as unfavorable to their position, but their perception of bias was relatively weaker than participants who oppose genetically modified foods.

The decision of not using partisans or focusing on a specific issue in this experiment was made in an effort to provide the hostile media effect theory a more generalizable approach. However, with no strong attachment to a specific group or issue, it was acknowledged that the results might not yield big differences in contrast bias. Therefore, it was assumed that relative hostile media effect, rather than hostile media effect will be the main case in this experiment. More specifically, reactions toward the stimulus will probably be in the same direction, but they will also be relatively divergent from one another depending on the participants’ different characteristics.
This study grouped the participants in terms of their attitudes toward the Arab World as a whole, their knowledge of the region and their interest in the region. Along with some basic demographic information, they were tested on their media use, YouTube™ use and perceptions of U.S. media. After the pre-test, the participants were then randomly assigned to watch one of four videos: Aljazeera high controversy (Gaza); CNN high controversy (Gaza); Aljazeera low controversy (Nigeria); and CNN low controversy (Nigeria). The participants were then questioned on source recall and perceptions of credibility and were asked to comment on the clip. With regards to YouTube™, participants were surveyed on the extent to which they would use YouTube™’s interactive functions—comment, share, post a video response—in reaction to what they viewed.

Based on the general idea of hostile media effect—that partisans would rate a perfectly neutral story as biased against their side—and based on later studies that focused on prior beliefs and perception of media bias among other things, the researcher hypothesized the following:

\textit{H1: There will be a difference in how participants with favorable and unfavorable attitudes rate the credibility of both news sources.}

\textit{H2: Participants with unfavorable attitudes toward the Arab World will rate the news clips from Aljazeera as less credible than the CNN news reports.}

Going back to the conclusion of Vallone et al. (1985) regarding the effects of knowledge and emotional involvement in hostile media perceptions, in which partisans with more knowledge and more involvement of the Beirut Massacre rated the footage as
more biased against their side than did the participants with lower knowledge of the crisis, the researcher hypothesized the following:

**H3**: Participants who view the Aljazeera news clips and who have higher knowledge of the Middle East will more likely remember the source than those who have lower knowledge of the Middle East.

**H4**: For the participants with unfavorable attitudes toward the Arab World, their level of Arab knowledge will influence how credible those participants view Aljazeera compared with CNN.

**H5**: For the participants with unfavorable attitudes toward the Arab World, their level of interest in the Arab World will influence how credible those participants view Aljazeera compared with CNN.

One other dimension this study focused on was concerned with hostile effect and their relation to prior beliefs regarding media credibility in the United States. The participants were pretested for their media use and their perceived credibility of the media in the United States. They were also questioned on their perceptions of media treatment toward the Arab World. In Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken’s (1994) study in which participants were asked to rate the degree to which they believed the U.S. media favored the Israeli or Palestinian side in coverage concerning the Middle East, the authors found that prior beliefs in media influenced some biased judgments toward media content. Based on these results the researcher hypothesized the following:

**H6**: Participants who perceive the media in the United States as less credible will view the Aljazeera news clips as more credible than participants who perceive the media in the United States as credible.
H7: Participants who believe that U.S. media coverage of the Arab World is biased will view the Aljazeera news clip as more credible than participants who believe that media coverage of Arab World is balanced.

Regarding media use, many studies on medium credibility have shown that people usually rate the medium they mostly rely on as more credible than others (Cobbey, 1980; Shaw, 1973). In his study on medium credibility, Kiousis (2001) found that media use was “marginally connected with perceptions of credibility” (p. 397). People who relied on newspapers and the Internet for their news did rate these mediums as credible, but no similar effect was found with the participants who used television as their main source for news. Also, in studying credibility of blogs, Johnson and Kaye (2004) said bloggers view blogs as highly credible, even more credible than traditional media. In terms of media use and its effects on hostile media perceptions, one recent study used data from two surveys, in 2000 and 2007, to explore how hostile media perceptions in election coverage were influenced by political ideology, levels of political involvement and media use. Oh et al. (2011) found that higher levels of partisanship and political involvement were strong predictors of hostile media perceptions, but that was not the case for media use. They found that in 2000, no media use had an effect on hostile media perceptions. Data from the 2007 survey, however, revealed that people who relied on network news showed fewer hostile media perceptions whereas relying on radio influenced more hostile media perceptions. Oh et al. (2011) concluded that the effect of media reliance on hostile media perceptions was inconsistent across both time periods and stressed the need for further investigation “to identify the conditions under which use of an individual medium influences the magnitude of hostile
media perception” (p. 50). Taking these findings into account and in an effort to further the research on media use and its effects on hostile media perceptions, the researcher hypothesized the following:

**H8: Participants who rely on the Internet for their news will view the Aljazeera news clip as more credible than participants who rely on other mediums for their news.**

Because Aljazeera in the U.S. is mainly available online, it was hypothesized that people who rely on news from the Internet rather than from traditional sources may have come across the channel and may be more inclined to accept news from alternative sources.

Another major aspect of this study relates to the online news phenomenon and its interactive functions. More specifically, the study focuses on YouTube™ and its prospects in challenging the media monopoly in the United States. As explained earlier in the literature review, cable companies have not carried the Aljazeera channel in the United States. As a result, Aljazeera has put quite a lot of effort into its online operations. Their YouTube™ channel, specifically, has gained prominence among online video viewers, and as online use and online video viewing is on the rise, one may wonder if a medium such as YouTube™ could give Aljazeera an opportunity to challenge the media monopoly in the United States. Not many studies have looked at YouTube™, and this is one of the first studies that has. Burgress and Green’s (2009) study on the “YouTubeness of YouTube™” was one the first to investigate this online phenomenon. As mentioned earlier, in their content analysis of the most viewed, most favorited, most responded and most discussed videos appearing from August to November of 2007, the authors found two dimensions of YouTube™: One dominated by
big media and the other by YouTube™ members. Regarding the most viewed and the most favorited, most of the videos consisted of content taken from traditional media sources. In the most discussed and the most responded categories, however, the majority of the videos contained unique content created by YouTube™ users. These results tell us there are specific behavioral intentions that online video viewers would like to partake in. Some users only choose to view the videos, while others take an extra step and use the interactive functions offered by the site—share videos with their friends, comment on videos, or post reply-videos.

Ling et al. (2005) said that in many online communities, less than 10% of the users make more than 85% of the content, and in their book about YouTube™, Snickars and Vonderau (2009) talk about the “90-9-1” rule, which states that 90% of online audiences never interact, 9% occasionally interact, and only 1% do most of the interacting. For them, “the typical YouTuber just surfs the site occasionally, watching videos and enjoying it” (p. 12). One question that deserves some attention concerns why YouTube™ users choose to use the interactive functions available in the site. In other words, what motivates users to use the interactive functions? Is it their attitude toward a specific issue (partisanship)? Or is it their experiences with YouTube™ and the Internet as a whole? Hanson and Haridakis (2008) employed the perspectives of uses and gratifications, which states that the audiences actively seek specific media and engage in specific media behaviors to satisfy individual needs, to analyze the factors that influence watching YouTube™ news clips and sharing them with family and friends. They concluded that motivations for watching news clips were different from the motives of sharing those news clips with others, in that people who had intentions of seeking
information were more likely to watch a news clip on YouTube™ whereas YouTube™ users who share news clips with friends and family said they did it for purposes of interpersonal expression. Similarly, in his study of user generated content from personal webpages, blogs, forums and YouTube™, Leung (2009) found that recognition and social needs were the two strongest motivations behind generating online content. Moreover, gratification from being recognized was more significant with producing content on blogs and YouTube™, whereas participation in forums was triggered by social needs.

While not specific to YouTube™, one recent study that looked into factors influencing interactivity concluded that the willingness to contribute online is effected by the perceived value of the contribution along with the likelihood of being rewarded for that contribution (Li, 2011). Particularly, benefit from the online community and interest in the community along with perceived social approval were the strongest predictors of deciding to contribute online. Li (2011) described benefit from the online community as the degree to which people think they gain from being members or active users of an online community, be it Facebook, YouTube™, a blog, or Wikipedia. Interest in the community, however, refers to the information and topics discussed in that specific online community. Li (2011) said, “the effect of benefit of the community suggests a reciprocatory relationship in the context of online attachment, while the role of personal interest reflects the value associated with the community and the need to realize that value by contributing” (p. 291). Perception of social approval indicates the degree to which contributors believe their contributions will get positive responses and are valuable to that specific community. Li (2011) said unlike real or organizational settings
where social approval is reduced to the members of that specific setting, the online world offers something different. He concluded, “the large size of online communities, the heterogeneity of the members of online communities with different goals, the diverse information shared in online communities, and the possible strong social impact, produced a stronger effect of social approval on the willingness to contribute” (p. 292). What all these studies suggest is that people usually contribute or interact online to satisfy themselves by being recognized or by showing support to the online social group they belong to.

This study tried to shed more light on this specific issue and, in doing so, was one of the first studies to incorporate the concepts of hostile media effect with online media interactivity. Many experiments on hostile media effect concentrate on how partisans react to a balanced news story, where the main focus is on whether those partisans believe that specific news story is favorable or unfavorable to their side. The development of online media and the concept of interactivity invite us to investigate whether the main factors of hostile media perceptions— the levels of partisanship, prior knowledge, emotional investment and source—also influence the use of the interactive functions available on media sites in general, and YouTube™ specifically.

Participants were pre-tested on their YouTube™ use. Specifically, they were asked how much they rely on and use YouTube™, and for what purposes, and their history of usage—how often do they regularly comment on videos, share videos or post videos. After viewing the video, participants were given a chance to comment on the video and were also asked about the likelihood of whether they would share the video
with their friends or a post a video reply. No research focusing on this aspect of YouTube™ could be found. The researcher posed the following questions:

RQ1: Do the concepts of the hostile media effect theory such as levels of partisanship, emotional involvement and source play a role in how participants choose to use YouTube™’s interactive functions?

RQ2: Can the choice of using online interactive functions be incorporated with the hostile media effect theory?

RQ3: Do other factors concerned with online media use determine whether or not people choose to use YouTube™’s interactive functions?

Youmans and Brown’s Aljazeera Study

During the process of analyzing and writing the results for the present study, a study that was very similar to this experiment showed up online. If this would mean anything, it will hint to the significance of studying Aljazeera and, more specifically, American perceptions of the Arab news organization. In their effort to see how manipulations of source in an original Aljazeera news report influenced perceptions of credibility, Youmans and Brown (2011) randomly assigned 177 Americans to three different conditions: the Aljazeera condition, where they watched a news clip about the Taliban; the CNN condition, which was the same exact clip but with CNN credits; and the control where participants didn’t watch anything. The subjects were first pre-tested for their news viewing habits, ideology and levels of anti-Arab sentiment, then exposed to the stimulus and, finally, post-tested on things like perceptions of bias, trustworthiness and intention to watch. Regardless of which condition participants were in, they were asked to give reactions toward both CNN and Aljazeera—that is, subjects in the CNN condition were also asked about their perceptions of bias toward Aljazeera.
With regards to perception of bias, Youmans and Brown found that respondents deemed CNN to be more credible than Aljazeera, but the most significant effect was experienced in the CNN condition, where participants saw a clip attributed to CNN and then were asked about the credibility of Aljazeera. The researchers also found that conservative political ideology along with increased anti-Arab sentiments correlated with more negative views toward Aljazeera.

While their results were significant and do complement the conclusions from this experiment, the researcher of the present study believes that some of the experimental procedures may have influenced such results. With regards to experimental methods, one major threat to internal consistency is when participants can easily figure out the hypotheses or intention of the study (Babbie, 2004). By asking participants in each condition to answer questions about both Aljazeera and CNN, the study makes it clear that the experiment was comparing the credibility of CNN and Aljazeera, and this likely influenced how participants answered the post-test questions. In the present experiment, participants were asked to base their responses on only the news channel they were exposed to. Moreover, this experiment was guided by a theoretical framework and also has an online interactivity aspect to it. However, with the 447 participants in the present study being students from one university, Youmans and Brown’s online sample, which was only 177, was more representative, as the age of the respondents was from 17 to 67.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

There were two main objectives to this experiment. First, through the literature behind hostile media effect, this experiment tried to find out how factors like attitudes toward the Arab World, knowledge of the Arab World and interest in the Arab World influenced how participants perceive the credibility of Aljazeera. Second, in view of the rising global use of YouTube™ for news, along with the very small number of research projects studying this phenomenon, this study’s goal was to shed light on the prospects of YouTube™ in giving global media companies like Aljazeera a chance to challenge and compete with the U.S. media monopoly. Specifically, the experiment tried to find out what factors determined the extent to which participants would use the interactive functions offered by YouTube™.

Design

Through a time span of two weeks, beginning on January 31, 2011 and ending on February 10, 2011, undergraduate students from a large Southeastern university entered a research computer lab where they were randomly assigned to four different settings. Before the study began, participants were given a brief presentation about Qualtrics, which was the survey software used in this study, and were told that the experiment was designed to test their attitudes toward online media coverage of international events. All participants were first pretested on their overall attitudes toward the Arab World, their knowledge of the region, their interest in the Arab World, their media use, their perceived credibility of U.S. media and their history with YouTube™. Each participant then viewed one of four YouTube™ videos that were originally from Aljazeera English’s YouTube™ channel. Two videos from Aljazeera were used and
were also manipulated to make them look like they were from CNN. After viewing the video, participants had the option to comment on the clip and were then asked a series of questions pertaining to the dependent variables: source recall, perceptions of credibility and the use of YouTube™’s interactive functions.

The sample consisted of 447 students enrolled in either journalism or history courses and their incentive for participating in the study was extra-credit awarded by their professors.

**Pre-test and Independent Variables**

**Attitude toward the Arab World (favorable, unfavorable):** To determine whether participants had favorable or unfavorable perceptions of the Arab World, they were asked to fill out an attitude test. It was difficult to find a well-established attitude test pertaining to a geographic location and its people. In spring of 2006, Pew Research Center conducted a global study about attitudes toward Islam, Muslims and Muslim countries. One attitude test from the Pew Research Center was used in this study in which participants were asked to rate, on a five-point scale, whether they associated certain characteristics to the people of the Arab World. These characteristics included: generous, violent, greedy, fanatical, honest, selfish, devout, immoral, arrogant and tolerant. Because of the very negative conations associated with some of these characteristics, some people may not feel comfortable answering this survey question, or they might not have an opinion on some of these characteristics, so it was determined that a no answer option would also be available for the participants.

In case the scale did not yield reliable results it was determined that it would be necessary to include a simple question asking participants to rate, on a 5-point scale, their perceptions of the Arab World. This question was also taken from the 2006 Pew
Global Attitudes Project. For internal validity purposes and to decrease the probability of participants figuring out that the main purpose of the study was to test their perceptions of the Arab World, a similar attitude test pertaining to Sub-Saharan Africa was used. In experimental methods, this is called a single-blinded experimental technique. In an effort to enhance internal validity and to conceal the fact that this experiment is only about the Arab World, participants were also asked to fill out the same survey relevant to Sub-Saharan Africa.

**Interest in the Arab World (high, low):** To determine their level of interest in the Arab World, participants were asked to fill out a three-item involvement scale. Participants were asked, on a five-point scale, to agree or disagree on three different statements regarding the Arab World ("I think about the Arab World a great deal"; "the Arab World is a personally relevant topic to me"; and "I actively seek the most recent information about the Arab World"). Again, for internal validity purposes and to hide the fact that this experiment was only about the Arab World, participants were also asked to fill out the same survey relevant to Sub-Saharan Africa.

**Knowledge of the Arab World (high, low):** Regarding the level of knowledge, participants were asked to answer six multiple-choice questions pertaining to the Arab World. The questions can be found in Appendix A. The six questions were pre-tested in the pilot study for variance. Participants who got three or less answers correct were categorized as having low knowledge, and those who scored four or more were identified as having high knowledge.

**U.S. media credibility (high, low):** As mentioned earlier, although there are many ways to test credibility of media, in his study, ‘Exploring the impact of modality on
perceptions of credibility for online news stories,’ Kiousis (2006) used a credibility index using six factors, which have been consistently used in credibility studies: accuracy, believability, fairness, objectivity, bias and sensationalism. Using a five-point scale, participants were asked to rate credibility of the U.S. media using these six dimensions.

**U.S. media treatment of the Arab World (favorable, unfavorable):** Using Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken’s (1994) approach in which participants were asked to rate the degree to which they believed the U.S. media favored the Israeli or Palestinian side in coverage concerning the Middle East, participants were asked, on a five-point scale, whether they thought U.S. media coverage of the Arab World was favorable or not. Again, for internal validity purposes and to make sure that participants did not realize that this study was about the Arab World, the same question pertaining to Sub-Saharan Africa was provided.

**Medium dependent on for news:** Participants were given a list of different mediums and were asked to rate, on a five point-scale, how dependent they are on each medium. The mediums used in the survey were: newspaper, TV, radio, online news sites, YouTube™ and blogs.

**YouTube™ use:** Participants were asked to rate their YouTube™ usage (daily, weekly, monthly, never), the purpose of usage (Entertainment, information, other), and whether they have a user name or a YouTube™ channel. Moreover, on a five-point scale, participants were also asked if they considered themselves to be active users of YouTube™, meaning do they comment, share videos or post video replies.
**Political and religious:** Participants in the study were also asked, on a five-point scale, how religious they consider themselves to be and what political ideology do they affiliate with.

**Demographic information:** basic demographic information about gender, age, race, religion and year in school was also provided by the participants.

**Stimulus and Manipulation**

After the questionnaire process, the participants were then directed to a screen where they each watched one of four YouTube™ videos. Two of the videos were taken from Aljazeera English’s YouTube™ channel and were shown in their original form. The other two were the same videos, only edited to make them look like they were from CNN. Since the study was concerned with source credibility, in addition to the logos of the news organizations that appear on the videos, it was made clear for the participants what the source was and its origin on screen. Figure 3-1 shows what the participants saw and read before they viewed the videos.

One video is about the 2009 clash between Gaza and Israel that received wide global media attention. The video is completely one sided where painful and gruesome images of damaged infrastructure and dead bodies are shown. At one point, the camera is focused on a Palestinian policeman lying on the ground and muttering what is called the tashahud, which is what Muslims say moments before they die. The voiceover also adds to the pro-Palestinian bias in the video. In one instance, the reporter insinuates that the Israelis are targeting humans when he says “the human targets were no match for the high explosions that hit them.” This specific video was chosen for a number of reasons: it covers an event that was downplayed or ignored by the American media; it presents a different side than what the American audiences are
used to; it was one of the top viewed videos (about 800,000 views) about the Gaza crisis on YouTube™; it is one of the top 20 most viewed video on Aljazeera’s YouTube™ channel; the reporter had an American accent making it seem that it was a report from the United States; and, compared to other videos from Aljazeera about this event, this video was much less graphic. Other videos had extremely horrific and gruesome footage of dead children and women and those clips could have easily played on the participants’ emotions and feelings.

Gunther (1992) said trust in media declines when the issues being covered are controversial or are considered bad news. Because the content of the video is so controversial, and because the purpose of this study is to look at media channel credibility rather than content, it was decided that showing another video with less controversy could maintain the focus of the study, which is the credibility of Aljazeera. The low controversy video is about Goodluck Jonathan, who took over the presidency of Nigeria after the president died in May, 2010. The premise of the video is mainly on the future of Nigeria and the character of Jonathon, who many think is a reformer. This video was chosen because research has shown that African countries are usually not in the minds of American viewers, the video did not get much viewership online, and the narrator of the video also has an American accent.

Through the manipulation of the sources of these two videos, the researcher tried to find out how participants reacted to videos with exactly the same content, but with different sources: Aljazeera, which has received negative press in the United States and CNN, which is seen as the most credible cable news channel by American viewers.
More importantly, the use of a high controversy video and a low controversy one made sure the focus was on the source rather than on the content.

**Dependent Variables**

After viewing the video, participants had the option of commenting on it. Then they were directed to a page where they answered questions pertaining to the dependent variables.

**Recall:** to see if they recalled the source of the video, participants were asked an open ended question, which was what news channel was this report from?

**Perceived credibility of news source responsible for the video:** using the same credibility tests used in the pre-test, participants rated, on a five-point scale, the source of the video on accuracy, believability, fairness, objectivity, bias and sensationalism.

**Use of interactive features:** using a five-point scale participants were asked to rate the extent to which they would comment on the video, share it with others and post a video reply.

At the end of the survey, participants were debriefed about the experiment’s intent and the manipulations used. During the experiment, the unexpected Arab wave of revolutions took place and it was believed that the extensive U.S. media coverage of the events could have affected some of the outcomes. It was therefore determined that a second round of experimenting was needed to ensure internal validity and consistency of the results. A second round of the experiment took place from May 16, 2011, to May 19, 2011, with 115 students participating. Because of the small number of participants, it was also determined that only the high controversy videos will be used in the experiment. Results indicated that there were no significant differences in data between
both time frames. A more detailed analysis is available in the results chapter. This result also validated the use of data from the first round of the experiment.

Data from the experiment was then entered into SPSS™ and tested for significance. The analysis of the data will appear in the results chapter.

Figure 3-1. What the participants saw and read before they viewed the videos.
As mentioned earlier, this experiment had two major aspects to it. The first part was concerned with the credibility of Aljazeera and looked at how factors like Arab attitude, Arab knowledge, Arab interest and perceived U.S. media credibility influenced how participants reacted to videos with the same exact content, but with different sources. The second part focused on YouTube™ use and tried to find out what factors determined the extent of using YouTube™’s interactive function in response to the videos being watched. Before looking at general findings and the data analyses of the hypotheses and research questions concerned with both parts of the study, the chapter begins with a look at the sample used in the study. The chapter will also include results from the second round of the experiment, which was conducted for internal validity purposes in response to the wave of Arab revolutions that occurred while the main study was in progress.

Sample
The sample consisted of 447 students enrolled in either journalism or history courses and their incentive for participating in the study was extra-credit awarded by their professors. Sixty-three percent of the sample was female and 37% of participants were males. The average age of participants was 20 years old. With regards to school year, 17% were freshmen, 28% were sophomores, 28% were juniors, 26% were seniors and less than 1% identified themselves as either graduate students or “other”. Anglo-Americans (whites) comprised 44% of the total sample where as 15% were Latin Americans, 8% were Asian Americans, 7% were African Americans and the rest identified themselves as one of the following: Native American (1%), Arab American
(2%), multiracial (5%), foreign student (2%) and other (15%). In terms of religion, 61% identified themselves as Christians, 12% were Jewish, 3% were Muslims, 1% were Hindu, 1% were Buddhist, 7% identified themselves as having another religion and 15% reported that they do not have a religion.

**Credibility of Aljazeera vs. CNN**

**General Findings**

**Credibility scores**

After viewing the videos, each participant was then asked to rate the credibility of the news organizations responsible for it. A factor analyses of the six credibility variables used in this study—accurate, believable, fair, biased, objective and sensational—revealed that removing sensationalism would yield one component and would produce an alpha-reliability score of 0.77, indicating good reliability. Scores from the five variables were added up and a new credibility variable was created.

**General findings: second round of experiment**

A second round of the experiment took place a few months after the Arab revolution wave story died down in the U.S. media. To make sure that the unexpected extensive U.S. media focus on the Arab revolutions did not affect results of the experiment, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the credibility scores of the sources used in the study between participants in both time frames. The analyses showed that the credibility score difference between both time frames—February ($M = 16.80, SD = 2.84$) and May ($M = 16.87, SD = 3.18$)—was very small and insignificant, indicating that if the Arab revolution wave influenced results, this influence did not change between both time periods $t(338) = -.218, p = .828$. This result assured us that using data from the first round of the experiment was acceptable.
General findings: All stimuli

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare how participants rated the credibility of news organizations in all conditions: Aljazeera high controversy, CNN high controversy, Aljazeera low controversy and CNN low controversy. The tests revealed that exposure to a certain source and a certain level of controversy yielded significant differences in perceived credibility of Aljazeera and CNN $F(3, 433) = 11.78, p < .000$. Post hoc analyses using the Scheffe post hoc criterion showed that average credibility score of Aljazeera in the Aljazeera high controversy condition ($M = 16.48, SD = .28$) was significantly lower than credibility scores of the Aljazeera low controversy condition ($M = 17.89, SD = .24$) and the CNN low controversy condition ($M = 18.57, SD = .29$). Also, the CNN high controversy condition ($M = 17.10, SD = .26$) had a higher credibility score than the Aljazeera high controversy, but the difference was not significant. The credibility scores of the CNN high controversy only showed significance with the CNN low controversy video. These results indicate that Aljazeera in the high controversy condition received the lowest credibility scores and CNN in the low controversy condition was seen as the most credible. Moreover, while levels of controversy did play a role in how participants rated Aljazeera in the high controversy condition when compared with the two low controversy videos, the same effect did not occur with the CNN high controversy video. There was no significant difference between the credibility score of CNN in the high controversy condition and Aljazeera in the low controversy condition, indicating that participants who watched the CNN high controversy video had similar reactions toward the source with those who watched Aljazeera in the low controversy video. Table 4-1 and Figure 4-1 show credibility scores given to CNN and Aljazeera in each of the four conditions.
General findings: Channel

To further investigate the effect of source on the credibility scores attributed to Aljazeera and CNN in all conditions, the stimuli were grouped in terms of the news channel they represent. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the credibility scores of both news organizations. The analyses revealed that Aljazeera received a significantly lower credibility score ($M = 17.18, SD = 2.84$) than CNN ($M = 17.83, SD = 2.96$), $t(445) = -2.37, p = .01$. The differences in mean scores of both channels can also be seen in Table 4-1.

This significant difference between the sources also indicates that the manipulation of the source was satisfactory.

Using the credibility scores given to the news organizations as the dependent variable, a multiple regression model was constructed to get an idea of what the best predictors of source credibility were. Several independent variables were inserted into the model, but a closer look at some of these independent variables is essential. In addition to channel and controversy, other independent variables that were a major part of this study include: Arab attitude, Arab interest, Arab knowledge and the perception of credibility of media in the United States.

For Arab attitude, the initial plan was to use the attitude scale from the Pew Research Center, which asked participants to rate, on a five-point scale, whether they agreed or disagreed with certain characteristics associated with the Arab World. These characteristics include generous, violent, greedy, fanatical, honest, selfish, devout, immoral, arrogant and tolerant. It was also determined that a “No Answer” option would be available to the participants just in case they do not feel comfortable answering this part of the survey. After the data was entered onto SPSS™, some of the attitude
variables were first reverse coded so that they all flow in one direction. All the no answer selections were deselected and a factor analyses was conducted. The factor analyses yielded three components. One component was generated when “violent”, “fanatical”, “greedy”, “selfish”, “immoral” and “arrogant” were used. Alpha-reliability scores for the attitude toward the Arab World scale were 0.851, indicating a strong reliability. Using this scale, however, would mean that all the no answer options should be omitted from the analyses, yielding only 354 out of 447 total responses. It was decided that not using about 100 responses in the analysis would do injustice to the results. Therefore, it was determined that responses from the general favorable/unfavorable question will be used for participants’ attitudes toward the Arab World. Responses from the five-point favorable/unfavorable question were used in the regression model and in all other analyses dealing with attitude. An Arab attitude index variable was also created for further analysis. Participants who said they had very unfavorable or unfavorable attitudes toward the Arab World were categorized as having an unfavorable attitude toward the Arab World (N = 182, 42%); participants who felt neither favorable nor unfavorable toward the Arab World along with those who indicated they had a favorable and a very favorable opinion toward the Arab World were categorized as having a favorable attitude toward the region (N = 252, 58%). The scale used for this part also had a “No Answer” option, which 14 out of 448 participants filled in as their response regarding Arab attitude. It was determined than in any test concentrating on Arab attitude, these 14 responses will be deselected.

With regards to Arab interest, a factor analysis of responses from the three questions concerned with interest in the Arab World yielded one component and an
alpha-reliability score of 0.86, indicating strong reliability. Responses from the interest variables were then added together to create an Arab interest variable, which was used in the regression model as a continuous variable. Using a median split, an interest index variable (Low/High) was also created for further analyses. Fifty four percent of the participants (N = 241) were characterized as having low interest in the Arab World and 46% (N = 206) were regarded as having high interest in the region.

As for the level of knowledge, participants were asked to answer six multiple-choice questions pertaining to the Arab World. The questions can be found in Appendix A. An Arab knowledge variable was created on the basis of how many questions each participant got right. An Arab knowledge index variable (Low/High) was also created for further analyses. Participants who got three or less answers correct were categorized as having low knowledge (N = 297, 63%), and those who scored four or more were identified as having high knowledge (N = 151, 34%).

Using a five-point scale, participants were asked to rate credibility of the U.S. media using the same six dimensions used for the dependent variable: accurate, believable, bias, fair, objective and sensational. A factor analyses revealed that removing sensationalism would yield one component and would produce an alpha-reliability score of 0.76, indicating acceptable reliability. Responses from U.S. media credibility variables were then added together to create a new U.S. media credibility variable. Using a median split, a high/low perception of U.S. media credibility index was also created for further analyses.
As shown in Table 4-2, gender and school year were entered the first block, which accounted for less than 1% of the variance. In the second block, which reported 8% of the variance, the channel and level of controversy were inserted as independent variables. The third block, which was the main focus of this regression model, accounted for 15% of the variance and showed that along with channel and controversy, Arab attitude, Arab interest and perceived U.S. media credibility were strong predictors of the credibility scores given to the news channels. Arab knowledge, however, was not a significant predictor of the credibility of the news channels used in this study. A closer look at some of these predictors of credibility follows in the data analyses of the hypotheses.

**Hypotheses**

The first and second hypotheses dealt with how attitude (favorable/unfavorable) toward the Arab World influenced how participants rate the credibility of Aljazeera and CNN. H1 stated that there will be a difference in how participants with favorable and unfavorable attitudes rate the credibility of both news sources. Credibility scores of the news organizations were subjected to a two-way analyses of variance. Results showed that there was a significant main effect with source \( F(1, 429) = 7.02, p = .008 \), but not with attitude toward Arabs \( F(1, 429) = 2.11, p = .147 \). However, there was significant interaction effect \( F(1, 429) = 4.42, p = .036 \), indicating that effect of source credibility is contingent upon whether participants had favorable or unfavorable attitudes toward the Arab World. In this case, a stronger effect was seen amongst the participants with unfavorable attitudes toward the Arab World where those who were in the Aljazeera conditions viewed the channel as significantly less credible than those in the CNN condition, even though the content of all videos is the same. This result indicates that
H1 was supported. Figure 4-2 shows the interaction effect between credibility scores of Aljazeera and CNN and attitude toward the Arab World.

H2 looked closely at participants with unfavorable attitudes toward the Arab World, and stated that those with unfavorable attitudes will view Aljazeera as less credible than CNN. Participants with unfavorable attitudes toward the Arab World were first selected and an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the credibility scores given to both news organizations. The analyses revealed that Aljazeera ($M = 16.61$, $SD = 2.70$) received a significantly lower credibility score than CNN ($M = 17.96$, $SD = 3.16$), $t(180) = -3.09$, $p = .002$. This analysis showed that even though all content was the same, participants with unfavorable attitudes toward the Arab World viewed Aljazeera as less credible than CNN. Hence, H2 was also supported. Table 4-3 shows how participants with unfavorable and favorable attitudes toward the Arab World rated the credibility of Aljazeera and CNN.

Knowledge was the main concern in H3, which stated that participants who view the Aljazeera clips and who have high knowledge of the Arab World will more likely remember the source than those with lower knowledge of the region. Participants who were in the Aljazeera conditions were first selected and cross-tabulations with Pearson’s Chi-square coefficients were used to study the statistical significance of relationships and interactions between the levels of knowledge of the Arab World and source recall. Results suggest that the number of participants who remembered Aljazeera did differ by levels of knowledge of the Arab World $X^2 = (1, N = 223) = 18.961$, $p = .000$. Of the 143 participants who were characterized as having low knowledge of the region, only 31 (21%) remembered the source, while 40 (50%) of those with high
knowledge of the region correctly recalled Aljazeera as the source of the videos being watched. These results also show that H3 was supported. Table 4-4 only looks at those who were in the Aljazeera conditions and shows cross tabulations with Pearson’s Chi-square coefficients for the relationships between source recall and the level of knowledge of the Arab World.

H4 combined knowledge and attitude together and stated that within the participants with unfavorable attitudes toward the Arab World, level of Arab knowledge will influence how credible participants view Aljazeera compared to CNN. Participants with unfavorable attitudes toward the region were first selected and their credibility scores toward Aljazeera and CNN were subjected to a two-way analyses of variance with source and knowledge levels (low/high) as independent variables. Results indicated that there was a significant main effect with source $F(1, 179) = 9.479, p = .002$, but not with Arab knowledge $F(1, 179) = .317, p = .574$. Thus H4 was not supported but was in the right direction.

H5 took the same approach as the previous hypothesis and looked at how Arab interest plays within participants with unfavorable attitudes toward the Arab world revealed significant results. Participants with unfavorable attitudes toward the region were first selected and their credibility scores toward Aljazeera and CNN were subjected to a two-way analyses of variance with source and Arab interest levels (low/high) as independent variables. Results showed that main effects with both source $F(1, 179) = 8.96, p = .003$ and Arab interest $F(1, 179) = 7.41, p = .007$ were significant, indicating that H5 was supported. These results suggest that within participants with unfavorable attitudes toward the Arab World, those with higher interest in the region
viewed both channels as less credible than participants with low interest in the region. Moreover, across all conditions and all participants, those with higher interest and unfavorable attitudes toward the Arab World viewed Aljazeera the least credible and showed the most hostile media effect toward the Arab media organization ($M = 15.89$, $SD = 3.03$). Table 4-5 looks at participants with unfavorable attitudes toward the Arab World and shows how levels of knowledge and interest in the Arab World influenced credibility scores of Aljazeera and CNN. Figure 4-3 shows participants with unfavorable attitudes toward the Arab World and how their levels of interest in the region influenced credibility scores of the channels they viewed.

H6 stated that those who perceive the media in the United States as less credible will view Aljazeera as more credible than participants who perceive the media in the United States as credible. The participants who viewed the Aljazeera clips were first selected and an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the credibility scores given to Aljazeera by those who viewed the U.S. media as credible and those who view it as not very credible. The analyses revealed that those who perceived the U.S. media as less credible ($M = 16.76$, $SD = 2.96$) viewed Aljazeera as significantly less credible than those who believed the U.S. media is more credible ($M = 17.56$, $SD = 2.68$), $t(221) = -2.118$, $p = .035$. These results suggest that those who were skeptical of the U.S. media were also skeptical of Aljazeera. Hence, H6 was rejected, but results were significant in the opposite direction. Due to this finding and from the analyses from the multiple regression discussed earlier, a closer look at how people viewed the U.S. media and their effect on how credible they considered each channel was determined to be important.
Credibility scores given to Aljazeera and CNN were subjected to a two-way analysis of variance with source and perception of U.S. media credibility (low/high) as independent variables. Results show that main effects with both source $F(1, 444) = 5.01$, $p = .025$ and perception of U.S. media credibility $F(1, 444) = 6.45$, $p = .011$ were significant. This analysis indicates that those who viewed the U.S. media as credible gave both channels higher credibility scores than those who viewed the U.S. media as less credible, with CNN getting the higher score. Also, those who viewed an Aljazeera clip and believed the U.S. media are not very credible ($M = 16.76$, $SD = 2.96$) gave Aljazeera the lowest credibility score. Table 4-6 and Figure 4-4 show how levels of perceived U.S. media credibility influenced credibility scores of Aljazeera and CNN.

H7 stated that participants who believe that U.S. media coverage of the Arab World is biased will view Aljazeera as more credible than participants who believe that media coverage of Arab World is balanced. Participants were asked, on a five-point scale, whether they thought U.S. media coverage of the Arab World was favorable or not. An index pertaining to this scale was created in which participants who believed U.S. coverage of the Arab World was very unfavorable or unfavorable were put in one group ($N = 405$) and those who believed U.S. media coverage of the Arab World was neutral, favorable or very favorable were put in another group ($N = 42$). Not many participants believed the U.S. coverage of Arabs was balanced, but credibility scores of the news organizations were subjected to a two-way analyses of variance with source and perceptions of U.S. coverage of the Arab World acting as independent variables. Results indicate that there was a significant main effect with source $F(1, 443) = 11.41$, $p = .001$, but not with perceptions of U.S. coverage of the Arab World $F(1, 443) = .008$, $p
=.928. However, there was a significant interaction effect \( F(1, 443) = 6.10, p = .014 \), indicating that effect of source on credibility scores was contingent upon whether participants believed U.S. coverage of the Arab World was favorable or unfavorable. The strongest effect was seen amongst the participants who believed U.S. media coverage of the Arab World was balanced and who were in the Aljazeera conditions (\( M = 16.06, SD = 2.95 \)), in which Aljazeera received the lowest credibility scores. Moreover, across all conditions and all participants, participants who believed U.S. media coverage of the Arab World was balanced and who were in the CNN conditions gave CNN the highest credibility scores (\( M = 18.84, SD = 2.90 \)). Due to the small number of those believed the U.S. media coverage of the Arab World was balanced, these results indicate that H7 was partially supported. Figure 4-5 shows the interaction effect found in this analysis.

H8 was concerned with online use and its effects on the credibility of Aljazeera. One of the questions in the pre-test asked participants to rate, on a scale of five, how dependent they are on online news. An online-news dependency index variable was created with 345 participants (77%) identified as highly dependent on online news and 103 (23%) characterized as not dependent on online news. Credibility scores assigned to Aljazeera and CNN were subjected to a two-way analyses of variance with source and online news dependency (low/high) as independent variables. Results indicate that there was a significant main effect with source \( F(1, 444) =5.68, p = .018 \) but not with online news dependency \( F(1, 444) = .111, p = .740 \). Thus H8 was not supported.
YouTube™ Interactive Functions

General Findings

After viewing the videos, participants were asked, on a five-point scale, to rate the extent to which they would comment on the video, share it with others or post a video reply. A factor analysis of these three variables yielded one component with an alpha-reliability score of 0.69, approaching acceptable reliability, which most researchers view as being 0.70 (Nunally, 1978). DeVellis (1991) said anything between 0.65 and 0.70 is minimally acceptable and reliability scores above 0.70 are considered respectable. Also, researchers like Kiousis (2006) had an alpha reliability score of 0.68 in one of his articles about credibility. One of the main reasons behind this reliability score may be the fact that people showed more interest in commenting on the videos and sharing them with friends and family rather than posting a video reply. This may indicate that the three variables did not have as strong of an internal consistency as was expected. This is understandable, as people will usually show more interest in commenting on or sharing a video rather than posting a video reply. Still, 0.69 is very close to acceptable reliability—in the case of DeVellis (1991), it is considered minimally acceptable—and because video replies are a major factor of YouTube™ interactivity, it was determined that using this scale would not be problematic. Scores from all three variables were added up and a new variable called “Use of YouTube™ interactive functions” was created. A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the extent to which participants would utilize YouTube™’s interactive functions in the Aljazeera high controversy, CNN high controversy, Aljazeera low controversy and CNN low controversy conditions. The tests revealed that exposure to the different stimuli yielded significant differences $F(3, 433) = 6.92, p < .000$. Post hoc analyses using the Scheffe
post hoc criterion showed that participants in the Aljazeera high controversy condition ($M = 5.38, SD = 1.96$) had the highest use of YouTube™ interactive functions scores, but only showed significance compared with participants in the CNN low controversy condition ($M = 4.33, SD = 1.38$). The difference between scores from the CNN high controversy condition ($M = 4.97, SD = 1.84$) and the CNN low controversy condition was close to significance at a $p$ value of .054. These results suggest that participants would be most likely to use YouTube™’s interactive functions the most when the source is Aljazeera and when the videos are of higher controversy.

When the stimuli are grouped in terms of source, an independent samples t-test revealed that the extent to which participants would use YouTube™’s interactive functions on Aljazeera’s videos ($M = 5.12, SD 1.85$) was significantly higher than the CNN videos ($M = 4.65, SD = 1.66$), $t(445) = 2.80, p = .005$. These results indicate that a further investigation of the use of YouTube™’s interactive functions is needed.

**Research Questions: YouTube™ interactive functions**

A multiple regression model was constructed to find out what were the best predictors of the use of YouTube™’s interactive functions. Several independent variables were inserted into the model. As displayed in Table 4-8, channel and controversy were inputted in the first block, which accounted for 4% of the variance. A number of independent variables were inserted in the second block, which accounted for 17% of the variance. As the regression model shows, along with channel and controversy, Arab attitude, Arab interest, YouTube™ activeness and political ideology were good predictors of the extent of using YouTube™’s interactive functions in response to the videos watched by the participants. Other independent variables like
having a YouTube™ username, having a YouTube™ Channel, online news dependency and YouTube™ news dependency were not significant predictors.

In an effort to better answer the research questions concerned with factors influencing the use of YouTube™’s interactive functions, a further look at some of these independent variables was in place.

A two-way analyses of variance was conducted with use of YouTube™’s interactive functions as the dependent variable, and source and Arab attitude as the independent variables. Results showed that significant main effects were found with both source $F(1, 429) = 6.40, p = .012$ and Arab attitude $F(1, 429) = 8.82, p = .003$. This analysis indicated that those with favorable attitudes toward the Arab World and those who viewed Aljazeera videos ($M = 5.37$, $SD 2.01$) were the most likely to use YouTube™’s interactive functions, and those with unfavorable attitudes toward Arabs and who viewed the CNN videos ($M = 4.43$, $SD 1.48$) were the least likely to comment on the videos, share them with family and friends, or post a video reply.

A similar two-way analysis of variance was also conducted, but with interest in the Arab World as an independent variable. The results showed that main effects with source $F(1, 443) = 9.16, p = .003$ and interest in the Arab World $F(1, 443) = 29.20, p = .000$ were both significant. Like results from the attitude test, results showed that participants with high interest in the Arab World and those who viewed Aljazeera videos ($M = 5.66$, $SD 1.70$) were the most likely to use YouTube™’s interactive functions, and those with low interest in the region who viewed the CNN videos ($M = 4.30$, $SD 1.41$) were the least likely to utilize YouTube™’s interactive functions. Figure 4-6 shows how
levels of Arab interest and source influence the extent of which participants would use YouTube™’s interactive functions in response to the videos they viewed.

Political ideology and source were also subjected to a two-way analysis of variance with the use of YouTube™’s interactive functions as the dependent variable. Participants were asked, on a five-point scale, to rate their political ideology, with 1 being conservative and 5 being liberal. A new political ideology variable was created where the participants were divided into three groups: conservatives (N = 128, 29%), moderates (N = 150, 34%) and liberals (N = 170, 38%). The results revealed significant main effects with source $F(1, 443) = 8.132, p = .005$ and political ideology $F(1, 443) = 3.371, p = .035$ where conservatives in all conditions were the least likely to use YouTube™’s interactive functions. However, liberals who were in the Aljazeera condition were the most likely to utilize the interactive functions offered by YouTube™ in response to the videos they watched.

One of the questions in the pre-test asked participants whether they used YouTube™ for news. Using responses from this question along with source as the independent variables and the likelihood of using YouTube™’s interactive functions as the dependent variable, a two-way analyses of variance was conducted. The results revealed that both source $F(1, 444) = 8.03, p = .005$ and use of YouTube™ for news $F(1, 444) = 13.01, p = .000$ showed significant main effects. This analysis indicated that participants who use YouTube™ for news and who were in the Aljazeera conditions ($M = 5.47, SD 1.81$) were the most likely to use YouTube™’s interactive functions, and those who do not rely on YouTube™ for news and who were in the CNN conditions ($M
Another similar test investigated the effects of YouTube™ activeness and source on the extent to which participants would use YouTube™’s interactive functions. Participants were asked, on a five-point scale, if they consider themselves active YouTube™ users. A new YouTube™ activeness (high/low) variable was created with those who said they were not active at all or not active put in the low activity group (N = 309, 69%), and the rest were in the high activity group (N = 139, 31%). A two-way analyses of variance was conducted with use of YouTube™’s interactive functions as the dependent variable and source along with YouTube™ activeness as the independent variables. Results showed that significant main effects were found with both source F(1, 444) = 7.22, p = .007 and Arab attitude F(1, 444) = 9.75, p = .002. This analysis suggested that the highly active YouTube™ users who watched the Aljazeera videos (M = 5.69, SD = 2.09) were the most likely to use YouTube™’s interactive functions. On the other hand, the low active YouTube™ users who watched the CNN videos (M = 4.58, SD = 1.65) were the least likely to use YouTube™’s interactive functions. Figure 4-7 shows how levels of YouTube™ Activeness and source influence the extent of which participants would use YouTube™’s interactive functions in response to the videos they viewed.

Another two-way analysis of variance concerned with YouTube™’s interactive functions was conducted using participants having a YouTube™ channel and source independent variables. Results showed significant main effects with having a YouTube™ channel F(1, 444) = 7.23, p = .007 and source F(1, 444) = 7.11, p = .008.
This analyses revealed that participants with a YouTube™ channel and who were in the Aljazeera conditions ($M = 5.65, SD = 1.96$) were most likely to either comment on the videos, share the videos with family or friends and post a video reply. On the contrary, participants without a YouTube™ channel and who were in the CNN conditions ($M = 5.57, SD = 1.57$) were the least likely to use YouTube™'s interactive functions.

Table 4-9 shows results of the previous tests dealing with the use of YouTube™'s interactive functions, source and the rest of the independent variables.
Table 4-1. Credibility scores of each stimulus and source

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stimulus</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aljazeera High Controversy</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>16.48</td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN High Controversy</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>17.10</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aljazeera Low Controversy</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>17.89</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN Low Controversy</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>18.57</td>
<td>3.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source
- Aljazeera: 223, Mean 17.18, SD 2.84
- CNN: 224, Mean 17.83, SD 2.96

Note. Post hoc analyses found significance at between Aljazeera high controversy condition and Aljazeera and CNN low controversy conditions; also significance between CNN high controversy condition and CNN low controversy condition. T-test of credibility scores of CNN and Aljazeera was also significant, p < .05.

Table 4-2. Predictors of credibility scores assigned to channel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Variance R²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.022</td>
<td>.650</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Year</td>
<td>-.100</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel</td>
<td>.112</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controversy</td>
<td>.257</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab Attitude</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab Interest</td>
<td>-.098</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab Knowledge</td>
<td>.387</td>
<td>.699</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube™</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.978</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activeness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Media</td>
<td>5.551</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Incremental R²</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.167</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. For block 3, $R_{adj}^2 = .15$, $F(9, 423) = 9.456, p = .000$
Table 4-3. Arab attitude and credibility scores assigned to Aljazeera and CNN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Credibility Score</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aljazeera</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorable Arab Attitude</td>
<td>17.62 (N=128)</td>
<td>17.77 (N=123)</td>
<td>-.426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfavorable Arab Attitude</td>
<td>16.61 (N=90)</td>
<td>17.96 (N=92)</td>
<td>-3.095</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-4. Cross-tabulations between levels of knowledge and remembering Aljazeera as the source

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source Recall</th>
<th>Arab Knowledge Levels</th>
<th>X²</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>112 (78%)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>18.961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>31 (22%)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. This test is only looking at participants who were in the Aljazeera conditions (N =223)

Table 4-5. Credibility scores of CNN and Aljazeera, and interest and knowledge levels of participants with unfavorable attitudes toward the Arab World

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Credibility Score</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>16.23 (N=31)</td>
<td>17.93 (N=31)</td>
<td>.317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>16.81 (N=59)</td>
<td>18.00 (N=61)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.405</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>15.89 (N=38)</td>
<td>17.24 (N=34)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>17.13 (N=52)</td>
<td>18.39 (N=58)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. This table only shows mean credibility scores of participants with unfavorable attitudes toward the Arab World (N = 182). Participants with unfavorable attitudes toward the Arab World and with high interest in the region showed the most hostile media perception toward Aljazeera.
Table 4-6. Credibility scores of CNN and Aljazeera and perceived credibility of U.S. media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Credibility Score</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aljazeera</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>p</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility of U.S. Media</td>
<td>17.56</td>
<td>18.67</td>
<td>19.299</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High (N=117)</td>
<td>(N=104)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (N=106)</td>
<td>(N=120)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-7. Credibility scores of CNN and Aljazeera and U.S. media coverage of the Arab World

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Credibility Score</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aljazeera</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>p</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Media Coverage of Arab World</td>
<td>16.06</td>
<td>18.84</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.928</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorable (N=17)</td>
<td>(N=25)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfavorable (N=206)</td>
<td>(N=199)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

U.S. Media Coverage of Arab World*Channel 6.101 .014

Note. Significant interaction effect between perceived U.S. media coverage of Arab World and source. Across all participants and conditions, those who believed U.S. media coverage of the Arab World was balanced and who were in the CNN conditions gave CNN the highest credibility scores.
Table 4-8. Predictors of the extent of using YouTube™’s interactive functions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Variance R²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Channel</td>
<td>-.131</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controversy</td>
<td>-.165</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental R²</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab Attitude</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab Interest</td>
<td>.270</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Ideology</td>
<td>.111</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube™ Username</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.824</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube™ Channel</td>
<td>-.056</td>
<td>.234</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube™ Activeness</td>
<td>.147</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube™ Dependency</td>
<td>.059</td>
<td>.216</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online News</td>
<td>-.031</td>
<td>.495</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental R²</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Incremental R²</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.189</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. For block 2, $R^2_{adj} = .17$, $F(10, 436) = 10.129$, $p = .000$
Table 4-9. The extent of using YouTube™’s interactive functions, channel and other independent variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Use of YouTube™’s Interactive Functions</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aljazeera</td>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8.821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorable</td>
<td>5.38 (N=128)</td>
<td>4.80 (N=123)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfavorable</td>
<td>4.72 (N=90)</td>
<td>4.34 (N=92)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>29.200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>5.66 (N=101)</td>
<td>5.01 (N=105)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>4.66 (N=122)</td>
<td>4.30 (N=119)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube™ for News</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5.47 (N=76)</td>
<td>5.12 (N=76)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>4.93 (N=147)</td>
<td>4.41 (N=148)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube™ Activeness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9.751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>5.69 (N=74)</td>
<td>4.81 (N=65)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Active</td>
<td>4.83 (N=149)</td>
<td>4.58 (N=159)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube™ Channel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5.65 (N=40)</td>
<td>5.13 (N=31)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4.58 (N=193)</td>
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<td>4.41 (N=63)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>5.39 (N=83)</td>
<td>4.91 (N=87)</td>
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*Note. Main effects with channel were also significant in all of the above. p>.05*
Figure 4-1. Credibility scores of channel across all stimuli

Figure 4-2. Interaction effect with source, credibility scores of channel and Arab attitude
Figure 4-3. Credibility scores of channel and Arab Interest amongst participants with unfavorable Arab attitudes

Figure 4-4. Credibility scores of channel and perceived U.S. media credibility
Figure 4-5. Interaction effect if favorable/unfavorable U.S. media coverage of the Arab World and credibility score of channel

Figure 4-6. Use of YouTube™ interactive functions, channel, and Arab Interest
Figure 4-7. Use of YouTube™ interactive functions, channel, and YouTube™ activeness
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Results from the study showed that when judging source credibility or choosing to use online interactivity, it made a difference whether viewers saw the Aljazeera or CNN logo on the news clip, even though the content of the videos was exactly the same. In general, Aljazeera was viewed as less credible than CNN, but the more unfavorable responses toward the Arab news channel came from people with unfavorable attitudes toward and high interest in the Arab World and from participants who believe that the U.S. media covers Arabs in a balanced manner. However, participants generally reacted more positively as they showed more interest in using YouTube™’s interactive functions when the videos were attributed to Aljazeera than when they were accredited to CNN. The most interest came from those with favorable attitudes toward the Arab World and from participants who were active YouTube™ users. The discussion identifies two conflicting opinions of Aljazeera: an offline view and online one. While a segment of the population viewed the Arab news organization in an unfavorable manner and will probably be against it being available on cable in the United States, another segment of the population viewed the channel favorably and showed more interest in spreading its name and coverage using the interactive functions offered by online technology.

The Offline View: Aljazeera Credibility in America

General Findings

The general findings from all conditions and all participants showed that exposure to a media stimulus containing the exact same content, but with manipulations in source—in this case CNN or Aljazeera— did influence how participants rated the
credibility of the news organization they were exposed to. Specifically, participants who saw the Aljazeera logo rather than the CNN logo on the same videos were more likely to view Aljazeera unfavorably. Even though the independent samples t-test revealed that Aljazeera ($M = 17.18$) was viewed as less credible than CNN ($M = 17.83$), the difference in mean credibility scores assigned to both news organizations was significant, but the difference was very small. This small difference indicated that, looking at the participants as a whole, no contrast bias in perceptions of credibility between both channels was in effect. Rather, these results revealed that participants displayed what Gunther (2009) calls relative hostile media effect: “to describe and interpret between-group differences where, for a particular partisan group, judgments do not actually fall in the unfavorable side of neutral, researchers have developed the notion of relative hostile media effect” (Gunther et al., 2009, p. 751). To put it in simpler terms, participants rated both channels in the same direction, but one channel was viewed as significantly less credible than the other. In an effort to increase the generalizability factor of the hostile media effect theory, participants were not recruited from partisan groups, and these results may have been influenced by the non-partisan factor associated with this study. It must also be noted that the sample used for this experiment was far from a representative sample. Participants were mostly undergraduate students in their late teens or early twenties—the average age was 20—and as previous credibility studies have shown, younger and less educated audiences are less skeptical of the media and tend to view news more credible than older and more educated audiences (Gunther, 1992; Johnson and Kaye, 1998; Bucy, 2003). This mix of nonpartisans and a younger age of participants may have been the main reason
behind the lack of contrast bias between Aljazeera and CNN. Also, the credibility scores of Aljazeera and CNN included ratings from the low and high controversy videos. As explained earlier, the decision to use the credibility scores from both the low and high controversy videos was made in an effort to put the focus on the source of the videos rather than on the content. The high controversy videos were viewed as less credible than the low controversy videos, so mixing these results together led the mean credibility scores of Aljazeera and CNN to fall within the relative hostile media area.

Even though the difference was small, the data analyses revealed that the difference was significant and that exposure to the exact same content but attributed to different sources did, in fact, influence how credible participants perceived the source to be. Without looking at factors such as attitude toward Arabs and interest in and knowledge of the Arab World, which might have greater influence on how participants viewed the credibility of Aljazeera in comparison with CNN, these results indicate that source does play a major role in hostile media effect. Specifically, participants who saw an Aljazeera logo rather than a CNN one on videos with the exact same content were more likely to view Aljazeera unfavorably. More important, even though these results fall in the realm of relative hostile media, this study showed that, unlike other researchers who stressed the need of strong ties to an issue or group for hostile media effect to be evident, the hostile media theory also applies to nonpartisans. It must be noted, however, that while participants were not recruited from partisan groups like pro-Arab or pro-Israeli groups, it is likely that some of the 447 students who participated in this study may be considered partisan. Still, this further enhances the effort to generalize the hostile media effect theory because in a general population, it is very likely to find
people with extreme views about the Arab World along those who are disinterested in
the region. This conclusion is further emphasized and supported in the discussion of the
hypotheses where differences within the participants—levels of Arab attitude, Arab
interest and Arab knowledge—were taken into account.

The fact that no contrast bias was seen in this experiment may be good news for
the Middle Eastern news organization, which is trying to gain acceptance in the United
States. These results show that the participants as a whole viewed Aljazeera as
significantly less credible than CNN, but the difference in credibility ratings was not very
big. However, this experiment was conducted when conflict between the Arab World
and the United States was at a lower level and when the Obama administration’s Middle
East policy was more concerned with diplomacy and mending ties rather than the
preemptive war strategies previously employed by the Bush administration. In fact, this
study was conducted at a time when the Middle East and the Aljazeera network itself
were getting some favorable coverage as the U.S. media were extensively covering the
wave of revolutions happening across the Arab World (Ferguson, 2011). The New York
Times stated that “It was Aljazeera’s moment” (Worth & Kirkpatrick, 2011); The Nation
viewed Aljazeera’s coverage as the “most comprehensive coverage of any network in
any language hands down” (Scahill, 2011); Rachel Maddow said “Aljazeera has been
an absolute lifeline for the rest of the world in understanding what is going on” (Maddow,
2011); and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated the Aljazeera offers “real news”
(Huffpost, 2011).

This kind of positive coverage may have had a part in the lack of contrast bias, but
the experiment was conducted during the very early stages of the Arab Spring, so the
effect of such favorable coverage may have not been felt as much by all participants in the study—the study was conducted during the beginning of the Egyptian demonstrations before Mubarak stepped down. If the experiment had been conducted at a time of high tension in Arab/U.S. relations, a larger contrast bias may have been observed, as people would have some negative impressions in their minds about the Arab World, and therefore, the situation would affect their thoughts about a news channel from the Arab World. This goes hand in hand with Gunther’s (1992) assertion that “credibility is not a trait that people ascribe consistently to a channel but, rather, a highly situational assessment….The situational approach proposes that important components of the trusting or skeptical response do not exist until a person has something to be trusting or skeptical about” (p. 149).

In addition to the situational response, the participants were college students who were very young when the September 11th attacks occurred and when tensions between the U.S. and the Arab World were at a boiling point. Even though they lived through this critical time in history, these young participants, as opposed to an older population, may have comprehended this conflict or been affected by it differently. Also an older population who has lived through the coverage of the September 11th attacks and its aftermath may be more familiar with Aljazeera as excerpts from the channel along with the unfavorable coverage of it were more prevalent at that time. Running this experiment with an older population may yield even more interesting results. If the results stay the same with an older population, then this could be even better news for Aljazeera as it could mean that people of all ages are prone to accept a news channel from the Middle East. A very similar study to this experiment, which was conducted at
about the same time, recruited 177 Americans ranging from 17 to 67 years old and concluded that “the average respondent gave more credit to CNN International for an Aljazeera English-produced news clip edited to look like a CNN International video, a boost not given to Aljazeera English when the clip carries Aljazeera English’s logo” (Youmans & Brown, 2011, para 1). This could be bad news for Aljazeera as it would still need to work harder to gain the trust of the American public. Ariyanto et al. (2007) concluded in their study on source and hostile media effect, “it appears unlikely that news outlets can deflate accusations of bias simply by reporting the news in an objective way, because by virtue of their group membership they are condemned to be judged as biased” (p. 277).

Results from the regression analyses revealed that source, level of controversy, Arab attitude, Arab interest and perceived credibility of the U.S. media were all significant predictors of how credible the participants perceived Aljazeera and CNN to be. With regards to source, these findings support the conclusion made earlier that even if the content was the same, seeing an Aljazeera or a CNN logo on the video clips did influence how credible participants believed that source to be. These results from the regression analyses also support the study’s goal of showing that source or the origin of the source does play a major role in the hostile media effect theory.

In terms of controversy, the data showed that the high controversy videos were viewed as less credible than the low controversy videos, regardless of the source. There was no surprise in that because as Gunther (1992) has said, people would view a certain story or channel as less credible when the issue being covered is of high controversy. In fact, this was the reason behind adding a non-controversial or low
controversy video to the mix. The main purpose of this study was to see how the source, rather than the content, influenced perceptions of credibility, and using credibility scores from high- and low-controversy videos made sure the focus was on the source and not the content of the videos.

It was very satisfying to see that even without recruiting partisans for this study, levels of Arab attitude, Arab interest and perceptions of the U.S. media did affect how participants rated the credibility of Aljazeera and CNN. An in-depth look at each of these variables and the effects of the variations within them could be seen in the discussion of the hypotheses. If one thing could be taken from this regression analysis, it is that a person doesn’t have to be strictly partisan to have an opinion on a certain issue or region. Again, while participants were not recruited from partisan groups like pro-Arab or pro-Israeli groups, it is likely that some of the 447 students who participated in this study may have extreme views and may be considered partisan. Selecting partisans (pro-Arabs, anti-Arabs) for this experiment may have produced results closer to contrast bias rather than relative hostile media, meaning both groups will view the stimuli in a contrasting manner. Pro-Arabs will view CNN as not credible and Aljazeera as more credible, whereas anti-Arabs will view CNN as credible and show unfavorable reactions toward Aljazeera. The decision to use nonpartisans was made in an effort to make the hostile media effect theory more generalizable and to see how regular people react to news reports from Aljazeera. By using nonpartisans’ reactions, the study was able to get a more general idea of how Americans view Aljazeera in comparison to CNN. These results further support the previous assertion that, unlike other scholars
who stressed the need for strong involvement in an issue for the hostile media effect to be evident, there is a place for nonpartisans in this theory.

**Attitude, knowledge and interest**

Previous hostile media effect studies have shown that increased partisanship along with increased levels of knowledge and emotional involvement toward a specific issue influence hostile media perceptions. Because the study did not use partisans and because the Arab World has been a major part of U.S. foreign policy and U.S. media coverage, it was believed that people didn't have to be part of a pro-Arab or anti-Arab group to have an opinion or attitude toward the region and its people. Results from H1 and H2 showed attitude toward Arabs had an effect on perceptions of source credibility, and that effect was more prevalent amongst those with unfavorable Arab attitudes. Participants with favorable or neutral attitudes toward the Arab World viewed Aljazeera \( (M = 17.62) \) as slightly less credible than CNN \( (M = 17.77) \), but that difference was insignificant. However, among the participants with unfavorable Arab attitudes, those who viewed Aljazeera \( (M = 16.61) \) thought it was significantly less credible than CNN \( (M = 17.96) \), even though the content of the videos was the same. More interestingly, and as the interaction effect demonstrated, among the participants exposed to CNN videos, those with unfavorable Arab attitudes thought CNN was more credible than participants with favorable attitudes toward Arabs.

These results showed two important synopses: first, the credibility of CNN was stable regardless of the level of Arab attitude. Second, participants with favorable attitudes toward the Arab World showed indifference to the manipulations of source, whereas participants with unfavorable Arab attitudes viewed Aljazeera as significantly less credible than CNN. It was not surprising to see that the credibility of CNN did not
shift as attitude toward Arabs changed because as a news organization, CNN is a widely known global brand, and research has continuously shown that amongst American audiences it is viewed as the most credible cable news channel (Pew, 2008a). For those who viewed the Arab World favorably, the manipulations of source in the videos did not affect their views on either CNN or Aljazeera. These results may suggest that people are more accepting of a news organization from the Arab World if they are sympathetic with Arabs or have a neutral view of the region. For those with unfavorable Arab attitudes, seeing the Aljazeera logo instead of CNN’s on the videos caused a shift in how they viewed the credibility of the videos, and these results indicate that those with unfavorable attitudes of the Arab World are less accepting of Aljazeera than people with favorable or neutral feelings toward the region.

These results show that, at least, a segment of the U.S. population will not be fond of the news network originating from the Middle East. This should not be surprising for Aljazeera or any other news channel because it is natural for a certain news organization to have people in support of it and to have a segment of the audience in opposition to it. In the U.S., for example, it is widely known that conservatives or Republicans are big fans of Fox News, and liberals or Democrats prefer news from MSNBC (Pew, 2008a). Even in the Middle East, Aljazeera Arabic has people—specifically from the Gulf—who are in opposition to it and who prefer watching other news channels like Alarabia. There is no doubt that Aljazeera does have a certain political agenda, but so does every other news channel and each of those channels will attract a certain segment of the population (Barkho, 2010; Kaplan, 2011). What Aljazeera English has, however, is a unique style of operating that could fill the gap in
the consumption of news in the Unites States. Dave Marash (2007), former *Nightline* correspondent and current anchor for Aljazeera English in Washington, D.C., describes the uniqueness of Aljazeera best:

> It is a news channel different from all its competitors. Different from the American news channels and network news divisions in this: they concentrate 80% of their news-gathering, 80% of their reporters, crews, producers, bureaus, and attention on North American and Western Europe. We concentrate 80% of our news resources and attention everywhere else. We are different from our global competitors like CCNi and BBC World because our news people are not mostly Americans or Brits, but are mostly citizens of the states, or at worst, the regions they report from (p. 47).

Many people agree that Aljazeera does bring a more diverse perspective of news from all around the world, but argue that the U.S. population is less interested in foreign news and more concerned with local politics. In general, people are more concerned with news that is closer to home, but every once in a while, events happen around the world that also capture the attention of many people (Ali & Gunthrie, 2011; Stelter, 2011). The hurricane in Haiti, the Chilean miners, the earthquake in Japan and its nuclear scare, the Arab wave of revolutions, and the recent British royal wedding are all examples of foreign events that attracted the American news audiences. In an interview in *The New York Times*, the head of Aljazeera English’s online operations, Mohamed Nanabhay, said this about the great increase of American visitors to Aljazeera’s online live stream during the first few days of the Egyptian revolt: it is “just a testament to the fact that Americans do care about foreign news” (Stelter, 2011, para 10).

For H3, even though the origin of the videos—Aljazeera or CNN—was clearly stated on the screen, viewers with high knowledge of the Arab World and who were in the Aljazeera conditions recalled the source being from Aljazeera far more than those with lower knowledge of the Arab World. Arab knowledge, however, didn't play a role
with remembering CNN as more than 90% of the participants who watched the CNN videos recalled the source. It wasn’t surprising to see that CNN was recognized far more than Aljazeera because CNN is an older news organization, it is on cable and has been for many years, and the CNN brand is one of the most popular news brands around the World. Aljazeera English, however, is a fairly recent news organization which began its operations in 2006 and, despite currently being available in 220 million households in more than 100 countries, it has yet to be carried by cable companies around the United States—it is only available in Washington DC, Toledo, Ohio, Burlington, Virginia and just recently in New York City (Burman, 2011). It was, therefore, not surprising to see that those with lower knowledge of the region couldn’t recall the source as much as those with higher knowledge. Participants who have a good level of knowledge of the Arab World should have come across or heard of Aljazeera as it is the most popular news organization in the region and is a much talked about topic amongst Arabs.

If Aljazeera was to start broadcasting all over the United States, would those who are not familiar with it tune in? If the Oprah channel is any indication, attracting audiences to a new cable channel is very tough and keeping those audiences is even tougher (Allen, 2011). As mentioned earlier, what Aljazeera does is offer a much-needed alternative to the current news environment in the United States. In response to Aljazeera’s recent launch in New York City, Dave Saldana, communications director of Free Press, said Aljazeera brings a new point of view to American news and whether it is a success or failure is not the point. “When every news outlet is singing from the same hymnal and there is no healthy skepticism, when the official line is bought without
question, well that’s a very dangerous thing for democracy” (Gerhart, 2011). Having said that, being an unknown brand name in the United States may be a good thing for Aljazeera as it could make it easier for the news organization to shape perceptions of those who are unaware of the channel rather than spending time and effort in trying to change the perceptions of those who already have preconceived views toward the channel. But for Aljazeera, its biggest obstacle is being associated with the Arab World, which is not perceived very well by the American public. As Ariyanto et al. (2007) concluded in their study about hostile media effect and group membership of the media, “trust is easily lost but...difficult to regain” (p. 278). With the Arab World continuously being portrayed negatively, looking at it from Said’s (1993) perspective, over time, these negative depictions of Arabs become embedded in American or Western cultures and are very hard to erase. For Aljazeera, being associated with the Arab World, where trust is still an issue, will definitely make it hard to attract a national audience in the United States.

While Vallone et al. (1985) found that increased levels of knowledge amongst partisans increases perceptions of bias, that was not the case for the participants in this study. Results from the fourth hypotheses suggested that within participants with unfavorable Arab attitudes, different levels of Arab knowledge did not show significance with how they viewed the credibility of Aljazeera versus CNN. This may be due to the fact that nonpartisans were used as differences in knowledge of a particular issue or group amongst partisans may signal stronger ties and involvement with that particular issue or group. In this study, increased levels of Arab knowledge did not necessarily
correlate with a higher emotional attachment to issues concerned with Arabs or the Middle East.

However, levels of Arab interest did play a role in how people viewed the credibility of Aljazeera. Across all participants, those with unfavorable Arab attitudes and with high interest in the Arab World showed the least acceptance of Aljazeera and the most hostile media effect toward the Arab news organization. Amongst the nonpartisan population, it can be held that this group—unfavorable views of Arabs and with high interest in the Arab World—was the most anti-Arab and was the most invested in Arab issues. While there is no evidence that this group is partisan because they were not recruited from partisan groups, it could be concluded that this group was the closest to be considered partisan. Results from H5 support the hostile media effect notion, which states that hostile media perceptions increase as the level of emotional involvement toward an issue increases (Vallone et al, 1985; Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken 1994; Ariyanto et al., 2007). These findings further support the conclusion that differences in hostile media perceptions—or relative hostile media perceptions in this case—can also be experienced amongst nonpartisans.

These results also suggest that there is a segment of the U.S. population that will not be supportive of a news channel with Arab origin. Specifically those with unfavorable attitudes toward the Arab World and who have high interests in Arab affairs showed the most resentment toward the channel. This conclusion also goes hand in hand with Youmans and Brwon’s (2011) recent finding that “perceptions of Aljazeera English as biased is robust among American viewers in general, and especially among those politically conservative and suspicious of Arabs” (para 30). What does this say to
Al Jazeera? Well, despite the recent positive coverage of Arabs in the U.S. media and the attenuation of U.S./Arab tensions due to the planned withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq and Obama’s Middle East policies, recent data from Pew Research Center (2011c) revealed that American views of the Middle East remain unchanged. In terms of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, 48% of Americans said they sympathize with Israel and only 11% side with the Palestinians. In response to the revolutions in the region, the Pew survey (2011c) also concluded that the American public “continues to cast a wary eye on the turmoil sweeping the Middle East.” Also, in the aftermath of the killing of Osama Bin Laden, a study found that perceptions of Muslim Americans worsened and that Americans were more tolerant of restrictions against American Muslims (Nisbet et al. 2011). What this says is that even in good times, the Arab World is still viewed in an unfavorable manner, and this could be bad news for Al Jazeera. Going back to situational factors and credibility where Gunther (2009) stated that trusting or being skeptical of a certain media is highly correlated with situations, one would imagine how Al Jazeera would be viewed if the U.S./Arab tensions rise again or if Al Jazeera covers stories that some may view as anti-American. Would those who—like Rachael Maddow, Sam Donaldson or Secretary of State Hillary Clinton—recently praised Al Jazeera for its effective coverage and “real news” continue showing their admiration to the channel? Or will their views change depending on the situation and the political climate they are in? Marty Kaplan (2011), Huffington Post columnist, demonstrated that some of the figures who are praising Al Jazeera now didn’t show the same enthusiasm after the September 11th attacks. In his piece, he quotes CNN’s Fareed Zakaria who said, “Al Jazeera fills
airwaves with crude appeals to Arab nationalism, anti-Americanism, anti-Semitism and religious fundamentalism” (Kaplan, 2011).

Perceptions of U.S. media, media use and the credibility of Aljazeera

With regards to the findings of the effects of perceived credibility of the U.S. media on the credibility of Aljazeera, H6, which stated that participants with unfavorable views of U.S. media will rate Aljazeera as more credible than CNN, was rejected. Based on the literature on credibility research, it was believed that if people thought the U.S. media were not very credible, then they might view Aljazeera as an alternative and regard it as more credible than CNN. In fact, the findings showed the exact opposite: those who viewed the U.S. media as less credible rated both channels as less credible than those with favorable views of the U.S. media, and within the participants who believed the U.S. media are not very credible, Aljazeera received a significantly lower credibility rating than CNN. These results showed that those who were skeptical of the U.S. media were even more skeptical of Aljazeera. It could be that people who have unfavorable views of the U.S. media are the more avid news consumers and are more knowledgeable about the media environment in the U.S. and elsewhere. In general, those people are usually more critical of the media, and that may be the reason for them to show skepticism toward both channels. As for those with favorable views of the U.S. media, they may be the ones who are not very interested in news and who do not know much about what is going on around them. These people are in more need for orientation and would, therefore, be usually less critical of news and more accepting of what the news has to say regardless of the source, as this study has demonstrated.

H7 supported Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken’s (1994) assertion that prior beliefs about media could yield hostile media effect. Participants who believed the U.S. media
covered Arabs in a favorable manner viewed Aljazeera as significantly less credible than CNN. Moreover, out of all participants, those who believe the U.S. media coverage favored Arabs gave CNN the highest credibility ratings. Even though literature and research has shown that Arabs are continually stereotyped and are covered in a negative manner in the U.S. media (Lockman, 2004; McAlister, 2005, Pew, 2011c), there is still a segment of the U.S. population that believes the Arab World is covered fairly. This segment of the population might include the people with extreme unfavorable views of the Arab World, and the results indicated these people showed a lot less enthusiasm toward Aljazeera. In fact, out of all the tests, these results were the closest to showing a contrast bias between two groups—the difference in credibility ratings of CNN and Aljazeera was the highest within participants who believed the U.S. media coverage of the Arab World was balanced.

Online media use and its effects on the credibility of Aljazeera was the main concern in H8. Research has suggested that people usually rate the medium they rely on the most as more credible than other mediums (Cobbey, 1980; Shaw, 1973; Kiousis, 2001). Because most Americans can view Aljazeera only online, it was hypothesized that people who rely on the Internet for news may be more aware of Aljazeera and think of it as more credible than CNN. The hypothesis was rejected, and even though CNN was regarded as more credible than Aljazeera amongst people who rely on the Internet for news, online media dependency did not show any kind of significant influence on the credibility of both CNN and Aljazeera. Studies that compared the effects of Internet use and traditional media use on credibility usually treated the Internet as a new phenomenon, not used and not understood by many. Although in the past utilizing this
concept of new media vs. traditional media may have been plausible, today, as more and more people are getting their news online and as more traditional media outlets have their content available online, the lines between traditional media and online media have certainly become blurred. Therefore, online news should not be considered separately: it is the media. A recent Pew (2011b) study found that the Internet has gained on TV as the U.S. public’s main source of news. Their survey found that 41% of the public gets most of its news from the Internet, a 17% increase since 2007. Television remains the most dominant medium for news as 66% of the public relies on it, but its dependence rate declined from 74% in 2009 and 82% in 2002. However, one striking result from the Pew survey is that while television remains the dominant source of news amongst all Americans, for those under 30 years old, the Internet surpassed television as the main source for news for the first time in 2010. With most of the participants in the present study being college students, it was, therefore not surprising to see that reliance on the Internet didn’t influence the credibility of either Aljazeera or CNN. With inconsistent findings in previous studies about media use and hostile media perceptions, the study’s attempt to analyze online media dependency and its influences on the credibility of Aljazeera has also produced insignificant results. Further study is still needed to fill the gap in the media use and dependency aspects of the hostile media theory.

The Online View: Aljazeera and YouTube™

General Findings

While Aljazeera was viewed as less credible than CNN, participants reacted to the channel more positively when they were asked to rate the extent to which they would use YouTube™’s interactive functions in response to the videos they watched. Even
though the videos were of the same content, as a whole, participants showed more interest in using YouTube™’s interactive functions—commenting, sharing or posting a video reply—when the videos were attributed to Aljazeera than when they were accredited to CNN. It should be noted that the mean scores of extent of interactivity toward each channel are very low—they fall between 3 and 6 out of a possible total of 15. The use of nonpartisans was certainly a strong factor behind the low interactivity interest because as demonstrated earlier, use of online interactivity is enhanced with increased attachments to a specific issue, group or online community (Ling et al., 2005; Li, 2011). More importantly, in terms of online interactivity, this is normal as the vast majority of Internet users are known to be consumers of information and not producers or contributors (Ling et al., 2005; Snickars & Vonderau, 2009). Still, even with a low interest in using YouTube™’s interactive functions, we should consider why participants showed more interest in utilizing interactivity with the Aljazeera videos than they did with the CNN.

The regression analyses showed that channel, controversy, Arab interest, Arab attitude, political ideology and YouTube™ activeness were the best predictors of using YouTube™’s interactive functions in response to the videos being watched. To better analyze these motivations of interactivity, the variables were grouped into three main categories: media characteristics, which include channel and controversy; ideological differences, which include Arab attitude, Arab interest and political ideology; and technology use, which includes YouTube™ activeness and other variables concerned with YouTube™ use, but were not part of the regression model: use of YouTube™ for news and having a YouTube™ channel.
RQ1 & RQ2: Hostile Media Effect and YouTube™ Interaction

With regards to media characteristics, the results showed that people would rather use YouTube™’s interactive functions in response to Aljazeera videos than they would with the CNN videos. It could be that participants would prefer to comment on, share or post a video reply to Aljazeera videos because Aljazeera is not widely broadcast in the United States or because it is not very well known amongst Americans. Its rareness or uniqueness may be reasonable factors to explain these results. As for CNN, it is one of the most popular news organizations in the United States and in the world; so seeing a CNN video online would be considered normal and may not trigger a strong inclination to use the interaction functions available. But to further explain these results, it is more plausible to look at it in terms of ideological differences and technology use within participants and to analyze it using results from the perspective of hostile media perceptions and from previous studies concerned with online interactivity.

In terms of ideological differences, results indicated that participants with favorable Arab attitudes, with high interest in the Arab World, and who were more politically liberal showed more interest in utilizing YouTube™’s interactive functions in response to the videos. Moreover, those participants would more likely to interact if they were watching an Aljazeera video than they would if they were watching the same exact videos, but with CNN credits.

In answer to RQ1, this was one of the first studies to test and to confirm that some concepts of the hostile media effect theory such as partisanship, involvement and source do trigger how people choose to use the Internet’s interactivity functions in response to a certain media stimulus. Moreover, this study found that those who agree with or have favorable views of a certain media stimulus and those who have high
interest in the region or issue specific to the media stimulus would be more inclined to use the interactive functions offered by the Internet. Looking specifically at these results, within the participants who viewed the Aljazeera videos, those with favorable attitudes toward the Arab World and who were more interested in the region were more likely to utilize YouTube™’s interactive functions in response to the videos they watched. Participants with unfavorable Arab attitudes and lower interest, however, showed less enthusiasm with sharing, commenting on or posting a video reply in response to the Aljazeera videos. Those with favorable Arab attitudes and with high interest in Arab issues may be the ones who are more accepting of Aljazeera and who wouldn’t mind using the Internet to spread or talk about videos from a news organization with Arab origins. On the other hand, those with unfavorable views of the Arab World showed less interest in responding to videos of Aljazeera because they may have been less fond of the channel and may not want to advertise it and spread its name to others in their online community.

Similar to Li’s (2011) study, the effects of favorable Arab attitudes and high Arab interest on the extent of using interactive features in response to Aljazeera videos may also be looked upon in terms of social approval: participants may believe their contributions will get positive responses and are valuable to the YouTube™ community. People who are part of an online community may be diverse in terms of country of origin, race, religion, level of education and socioeconomic status, but for it to be called a community, those people must have a specific issue or field that brings them together. Those with favorable Arab attitudes and with high interests in Arab affairs will find a lot of people online with similar beliefs and interest and who would most likely be accepting
of Aljazeera. The belief that sharing or commenting on an Aljazeera video would trigger positive responses from people with similar views, and that it would help spread the name of an Arab news organization that is not allowed to operate across the United States may be good indicators of why those participants showed more interest in utilizing YouTube™’s interactive functions in response to Aljazeera videos than they did with CNN.

The results from this study indicated that the extent of using interactivity was associated with positive or favorable feelings toward the stimulus. Surprisingly, interest in using interactivity declined as the feelings and attitudes toward the stimulus were unfavorable. One may think that people would respond or be active concerning an issue or a news channel that they disagree with, but as this study and other studies have confirmed, interaction or contribution online is enhanced when people who have more passion in a specific issue or group find something they agree on and when those people believe that interacting or contributing would benefit that issue or group (Hanson & Haridakis, 2008; Leung, 2009; Li, 2011).

The results also found that liberals showed more interest than conservatives in utilizing YouTube™’s interactive functions in response to the Aljazeera videos. While political ideology was not a significant predictor of the credibility of Aljazeera, participants who were more liberal did view Aljazeera as more credible than conservatives. However, in their study that is very similar to this one, Youmans and Brown (2011) found that “as conservatism increases, reported trustworthiness of Aljazeera English and the intention to watch Aljazeera English decreases, while opposition to cable carriage increases” (para 21). Moreover, with the recent Arab wave
of revolutions, it was evident that there were more liberal than conservative media pundits who praised the Aljazeera coverage of those events. In fact, when most of media and political figures were giving Aljazeera positive remarks, Fox News’ Bill O’Reilly stated that the channel was anti-Semitic and anti-American (Kaplan, 2011). These results may imply that liberals are more accepting of Aljazeera and because of that, they are more likely to utilize YouTube™’s interactive functions in response to Aljazeera videos.

With regards to RQ2, the analysis above is solid proof that the choice of using online interactive functions can be incorporated with the hostile media effect theory. While previous hostile media effect studies mainly looked at how participants rated the credibility of a certain stimulus pertaining to a certain issue, this study was one of the first to introduce a new concept pertaining to online media. While this study found a significant influence of hostile media perceptions on the extent of using the Internet’s interactive functions, further study is needed to get a better understanding of this phenomenon. Because research on interactivity has shown that online interactivity increases as people become more attached to a specific online community or become more interested in the topics or issues concerned with that online community, use of a more partisan population to study this aspect will probably yield stronger conclusions (Hanson & Haridakis, 2008; Leung , 2009; Li, 2011). With their close attachments and fervor to certain issues, partisans should show stronger inclinations as to use or not use interactivity in response to certain stimulus.

**RQ3: YouTube™ Dependency and Interactivity**

For RQ3, in addition to the concepts concerned with hostile media perceptions, differences in YouTube™ use had significant influences on the extent of using
interactivity. The results specifically showed that participants who considered themselves as active users of YouTube™, who said they used YouTube™ for news and who have a YouTube™ channel were more likely to use interactive features. Amongst those participants, however, the ones who were exposed to Aljazeera showed more interest in utilizing YouTube™’s interactive functions than the ones who watched the CNN videos.

Unlike earlier findings where media dependency and use did not influence hostile media perceptions, YouTube™ dependency and use not only encouraged more online interaction, but it also influenced more use of YouTube™’s interactive functions in response to Aljazeera videos. These results indicate that avid YouTube™ users were more accepting of Aljazeera and did show higher motives in responding to videos from the Arab news organization either by commenting, sharing with friends and family or posting a video reply. Using Li’s (2011) conclusion that perceived benefits from the online community and interest in the community predict contributions online, active YouTube™ users and those who own YouTube™ channels can be characterized as the ones who regard YouTube™ as a beneficial online community. As for those who depend on YouTube™ for news, they can be identified as the ones who have a shared interest in using YouTube™’s social platform for news and information. These are the participants who probably spent the most time on YouTube™, and because Aljazeera has one of the most popular YouTube™ channels and, every once in a while, has videos amongst the top 100 most viewed videos, those participants may have been aware of Aljazeera and may have been exposed to some of its YouTube™ videos.
Regardless of why participants in this study showed more preference in using interactive features in reaction to Aljazeera videos, these results indicated that while a segment of the U.S. population views Aljazeera as less credible, another segment of the population shows more support of the Arab news organization in the online world.

This is could be good news for Aljazeera because while television is still the dominant source of information in the United States, as stated previously, the Internet is catching up, and amongst those who are under 30, its use for news has surpassed that of television (Pew, 2011b). Moreover, out of all media platforms, cable news has suffered the most since 2010 as every cable news channel has lost viewers. Yin (2011) said “while the impending doom of traditional media may seem imminent, TV viewers have not disappeared but simply moved elsewhere—to the Internet.” Additionally, as statistics show that more people are visiting online video and video sharing sites, some media analysts speculate that online video will be the future TV (Pew, 2011b; Yin, 2011; Kang, 2011). With sites like Netflix and Hulu, people no longer need to be at home to watch their favorite television shows—they can watch them anytime and anywhere using their computers, smart phones or other devices. Even with these advanced technologies, media analysts previously believed television still had the upper hand because of its “liveness” (Uricchio, 2009). However, with advances in Internet speed and with YouTube™ announcing its live stream development, “liveness” is now also part of online video.

If one thing can be taken from these statistics, it is that the future of news is in online video, and Aljazeera has shown great advancements in this area as it has one of the most active, developed, and less costly online video operations (Sennitt, 2007;
Compared to other news organizations, Aljazeera has one of the most viewed and active channels on YouTube™, as more than five clips from Aljazeera’s newscasts and popular programs are uploaded daily. Users from all around the world can view the clips, rate them, and share them with other users via social network sites like Facebook. Moreover, unlike other news organizations that only offer limited live streaming of special events or ask viewers to pay for full streaming of their channels, Aljazeera has tried to reach out to as many viewers as possible by offering free live stream of the channel on a number of online media platforms. In addition to live streaming on their Web site, they have free high definition live stream applications for smartphones, and they are also one of the first and very few news organizations that have a live channel on YouTube™. These technology investments have proved to be successful during the wave of Arab revolutions as traffic to Aljazeera English’s live stream increased by 2,500%—and 60% of those visitors came from the United States (Burman, 2011).

But in the online world, technology itself is not enough for a news organization to get and keep an audience. With its focus on global news and its professional style of presentation, Aljazeera has made a name for itself by offering a unique and attractive product online. It is, however, the participatory culture of the Internet that made it possible for Aljazeera advocates and supporters to spread the name of the organization around the world. Hanson and Haridakis (2008) said “video sites like YouTube™ give news organizations the opportunity to reach audiences through a secondary market of mouse clicks and forwarded e-mails, and viewers of news are now part of the distribution chain” (para 48). If results from this study are of any indication, Aljazeera will
likely have more supporters in the online news world than if it goes live on U.S. cable. This could mean that focusing more on advancing its online operations rather than trying to get on cable may be a better step for Aljazeera, especially in the long-run as statistics have demonstrated that the future TV is online (Pew, 2011b). Having said that, for it to get a wider audience in the United States, Aljazeera must be available on all media outlets and in the United States, cable TV is one of the major media platforms.

**Conclusion**

This study’s objectives were to see how attitudes toward the Arab World influence perceptions of Aljazeera amongst the American public and to determine whether the hostile media effect was present. Moreover, in view of the recent rising trend of news content on YouTube™ and the much heated debate about the future and effectiveness of online media, another objective behind this experiment was to evaluate the prospect of YouTube™ in providing a platform for global media companies like Aljazeera to challenge the media monopoly in the United States.

**Hostile media effect**

Looking at the results from a theoretical perspective, this is one of the first studies to specifically focus on the effects of source on hostile media perceptions. The results indicated that exposure to the exact same content but attributed to different sources did, in fact, influence how credible participants perceived the source to be. Moreover, in an effort to make the hostile media effect theory more generalizable, nonpartisans were recruited for this experiment. Unlike other researchers who stressed the need for strong ties to an issue or group for hostile media perceptions to be present, this study confirmed that there is a place for nonpartisans in this theory—people don’t have to be
full-fledged partisans for them to show hostile media perceptions toward a certain issue, region or media.

One of the most important findings with regards to hostile media effect is the theory’s relationship with online interactivity. This was one of the first studies to test and confirm that some concepts of the hostile media effect theory like partisanship, involvement and source do trigger how people choose to use the Internet's interactivity functions in response to a certain media stimulus. Specifically, this study found that those who agree with or have favorable views of a certain media stimulus would be more inclined to use the interactive functions offered by the Internet. Interactivity is, therefore, viewed as a way to spread and advertise media that one approves of or agrees with. However, more experimentation is needed to further validate the effects of this phenomenon.

**Aljazeera**

This study found that there were two conflicting views of Aljazeera. The offline view showed that a segment of the population regarded the Arab news organization in an unfavorable manner and will probably be against its attempts of it being available on cable in the United States. The online view suggested that another segment of the population viewed the channel favorably and showed more interest in spreading its name and coverage by utilizing the Internet's interactive capabilities.

**Aljazeera on cable: The offline view**

Getting wide acceptance from the American audience will be difficult for a news organization originating from the Arab World. This study has shown that even in good times when Arabs have been receiving positive coverage in the U.S. media and when U.S./Arab tensions are lower than usual, Aljazeera was still viewed in an unfavorable
manner. Ariyanto et al. (2007) concluded in their study on source and hostile media effect, “it appears unlikely that news outlets can deflate accusations of bias simply by reporting the news in an objective way, because by virtue of their group membership they are condemned to be judged as biased” (p. 277). As it was demonstrated in the literature review, whether in movies, books, television or on the news, the Arab World has always been depicted in a negative manner. These unfavorable views intensified after the Second World War as the United States interest in the Middle East grew and as the media covered American involvements in the region (McAlister, 2004). Looking at it from Said’s (1993) perspective, over time, these negative depictions of Arabs become embedded in American or Western cultures and are very hard to erase.

The future of the Middle East is uncertain in the aftermath of the Arab revolutions, but as regimes have fallen or are about to fall and new regimes get to power, U.S./Arab relations will surely change. Time will tell if they will change for the worse or the better, but no matter what happens, it will still be hard for an Arab news organization like Aljazeera to find a warm welcome in American households.

**Aljazeera, New Media and YouTube™: The online view**

Even though cable companies in the United States have declined to carry the channel nationally, the Internet has made it possible for Aljazeera to be watched not only by Americans, but by people from all around the world. Aljazeera’s unique presentation and grasp of international news coverage have played a big part in attracting audiences, but if it weren’t for advancements in online video technology and Aljazeera’s strategic use of such technology, the channel wouldn’t have been that successful. Specifically, it is YouTube™’s popularity along with its ease of use and participatory culture—whereby people have also become part of news distribution—that
made it possible for a news channel from the Arab World to become one of the leading global news organizations.

Recent statistics show that as more people leave TV and flock to the Internet, the future of television is online (Pew, 2011b). This view has been further enhanced with YouTube™’s new live stream technology, which gives media organizations like Aljazeera a chance to present their programs live over the Internet. If the 2,500% increase in traffic to Aljazeera’s live stream during the early stages of the Arab revolution is any indication, it is that YouTube™ and online video technology has certainly opened up doors for global news organizations like Aljazeera to compete with and challenge the media monopoly in the United States.

Limitations

One of the major limitations of this experiment was the non-representative sample that consisted of college students who were mostly between 18 and 22 years old. With this study focusing on an Arab news organization that became widely talked about after the September 11 attacks and when tensions between the United States and the Arab World were at an all time high, the fact that participants were young—between 8 and 12 years old—when the attacks happened may have influenced the results. Even though they lived through this critical time in history, they may have a different outlook of the event and its aftermath than an older population might have. Also, an older population who has experienced the coverage of the September 11th attacks and its aftermath may be more familiar with Aljazeera as excerpts from the channel along with the unfavorable coverage of it were more prevalent at that time. Running this experiment with a more representative sample may yield even more interesting results.
Also, recruiting for the experiment began in early January 2011. When the study was under way—from January 31 to February 10—the unexpected wave of Arab revolutions, dubbed “the Arab Spring Movement,” began, and it was believed the extensive media coverage of the region during that time may have played a role in the final results. Another round of experimentation took place in early May 2011 to make sure that such coverage of the Arab World did not affect the results. The data indicated no significant differences between the two groups. However, this experiment was conducted during a time when conflict and tensions between the United States and the Arab World were low and when the Arab World was receiving unprecedented positive media coverage. Certainly, the timing of the experiment could be considered a limitation in that interest in the Arab World might have been higher, in general, among this population than it would have been only a few months earlier.

Even though the name of the channel and the origin of Aljazeera were clearly stated on the screens and on the videos, many participants could not recall the name of the channel. Because Aljazeera does not broadcast in the United States and because nonpartisans were used in the experiment, the fact that many of the participants were not aware of the channel and its place of origin was not surprising, but was also another limitation.

Finally, in an effort to study YouTube™’s interactive functions, participants saw YouTube™ videos on their screens and were asked to rate the extent they would use interactive functions in response to what they saw. Using Qualtrics software for the survey certainly limited the ability to create a YouTube™ experience for watching the videos. Participants just saw an embedded clip and were told that it was from
It would have been more effective had the participants viewed the actual videos on YouTube™ and then see whether and how they would use the interactive features.

**Future Study**

One of the main limitations was the young age of the participants, which was not a very representative sample. Running the experiment again with an older and a more representative sample will surely add to the findings. Also, while this experiment looked at how manipulations of source between Aljazeera and CNN effected perceptions of credibility, it would be interesting to add other media organizations to the mix like Fox News, MSNBC or BBC and see where Aljazeera stands. Another interesting idea is to re-run the same exact experiment, but with a population from the Middle East. A comparison between American and Middle Eastern viewers would further strengthen these results; specifically those concerned with hostile media effect as a more partisan population could be recruited. This experiment asked participants to comment on the videos they watched and, surprisingly, 330 out of the 447 students commented. An extensive content analyses of these comments would be interesting and may compliment the existing results.

Finally, this was one of the first studies that incorporated concepts of the hostile media effect with online interactivity. While results did generate significant findings, a further look at this area is needed. Because research on interactivity has shown that online interactivity increases as people become more attached to a specific online community or become more interested in the topics or issues concerned with that online community, use of a more partisan population to study this aspect will probably yield stronger conclusions. With their close attachments to and fervor for certain issues,
partisans should show stronger inclinations as to use or not use interactivity in response to certain stimulus.
APPENDIX
SURVEY

PRE-TEST
Interest in and attitude toward different regions of the world
In this section, you will be asked a few questions concerning different regions in the world.

Interest
Please indicate on the scales below whether you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding different regions in the world.

I think about the Arab World a great deal:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Arab World is a personally relevant topic to me:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

I actively seek the most recent information about the Arab World:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I think about Sub-Saharan Africa a great deal:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
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</table>

Sub-Saharan Africa is a personally relevant topic to me:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I actively seek the most recent information about Sub-Saharan Africa:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Attitude**

Please indicate on the scales below your views and attitudes toward the following regions. You may also choose not to answer the questions if you don't want to or if you think that you do not know how to answer it.

The Arab World:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Unfavorable</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Very Favorable</th>
<th>NA/Unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sub-Saharan Africa:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Unfavorable</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Very Favorable</th>
<th>NA/Unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you think that relations these days between people in the Arab World and people in Western countries such as the United States and Europe are generally good or bad? You may choose not to answer the question if you don’t want to or if you think that you do not know how to answer it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Bad</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>NA/Unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All things considered, do you think that Arab countries should be more economically prosperous? You may choose not to answer the question if you don’t want to or if you think that you do not know how to answer it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>NA/Unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Indicate which of the following statements best describes why Arab countries are not prosperous:

- Policies of the United States and other Western countries
- The lack of democracy in the Arab World
- The lack of education in the Arab World
- Islamic fundamentalism
- Corruption of Arab governments
- Other
- NA/Unsure
Indicate on the scales below whether you associate the following characteristics to people of the Arab World. You may also choose not to answer the questions if you don’t want to or if you think that you do not know how to answer it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Do Not Associate</th>
<th>Strongly Associate</th>
<th>NA/Unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generous</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greedy</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanatical</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfish</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devout</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immoral</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

160
Indicate on the scales below whether you associate the following characteristics to people of Sub-Saharan Africa. You may also choose not to answer the questions if you don’t want to or if you think that you do not know how to answer it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Associate</th>
<th>Strongly Associate</th>
<th>NA/Unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrogant</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA/Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerant</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA/Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generous</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA/Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
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<td>NA/Unsure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greedy</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA/Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanatical</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA/Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA/Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfish</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NA/Unsure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Knowledge of the Arab World
The following questions will test your knowledge of different regions and countries around the world.

1. What is the capital city of Egypt?
   a. Alexandria
   b. Amman
   c. Cairo
   d. Istanbul
   e. NA/Unsure

2. Is Iran an Arab country?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. NA/Unsure
3. In what continent or continents is the Arab World located?
   a. Only in Asia
   b. Parts of Asia and Europe
   c. Parts of Asia and Africa
   d. Parts of Asia, Europe and Africa
   e. NA/Unsure

4. Every year, millions of Muslims travel to Mecca to perform pilgrimage. In what Arab country is Mecca located?
   a. Iraq
   b. Saudi Arabia
   c. Palestine
   d. Jordan
   e. NA/Unsure

5. The Arab World is predominantly Muslim, but within the religion of Islam, there are two dominant sects: Sunnis and Shiites. The majority of Arabs are:
   a. Sunni
   b. Shiites
   c. Evenly distributed
   d. NA/Unsure

6. Oil is a major resource found in a number of Arab countries. Which of the following Arab countries doesn't not have oil?
   a. Qatar
   b. Iraq
   c. Jordan
   d. Kuwait
   e. NA/Unsure
**Media Credibility and Media Use**

In this section, you will be asked to provide information about your media use and your views on the U.S. media. Please indicate on the scales below how dependent you are on the following mediums for news and information.

Television:
- Not at all Dependent
  - 1
- Dependent
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5

Newspapers:
- Not at all Dependent
  - 1
- Dependent
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5

Radio:
- Not at all Dependent
  - 1
- Dependent
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5

Internet:
- Not at all Dependent
  - 1
- Dependent
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5

Blogs:
- Not at all Dependent
  - 1
- Dependent
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5

YouTube™:
- Not at all Dependent
  - 1
- Dependent
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5

How do you think the Media in the United States represents the Arab World?
- Very Unfavorable
  - 1
- Very Favorable
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5

164
How do you think the Media in the United States represents Sub-Saharan Africa?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Unfavorable</th>
<th>Very Favorable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please indicate on the scales below whether you agree or disagree with the characteristics used to describe the media in the United States.

For the most part the media in the United States is Accurate:

- Strongly Disagree
- Strongly Agree

Believable

- Strongly Disagree
- Strongly Agree

Fair

- Strongly Disagree
- Strongly Agree

Objective

- Strongly Disagree
- Strongly Agree

Biased

- Strongly Disagree
- Strongly Agree

Sensational

- Strongly Disagree
- Strongly Agree
**YouTube™ Use**

In this section you will be asked about your experiences with YouTube™. Please indicate, which of the following statements best describes you:

- I view YouTube™ videos at least once a day
- I view YouTube™ video more than once a day
- I view YouTube™ videos at least once a week
- I view YouTube™ videos at least once a month
- I do not view YouTube™ videos regularly
- I do not view YouTube™ videos at all

If you do visit YouTube™ on a regular basis, what is you purpose of visiting the online video site. Please feel free to circle as many answers as you like:

- News/information
- Entertainment
- Music
- Comic relief
- Sports
- Other

Do you have a YouTube™ account (a username)?

- Yes
- No

Do you have YouTube™ channel?

- Yes
- No

If you do have an account or a channel, do you consider yourself an active YouTube™ user? Do you comment on videos? Share? Favorite? Make reply videos? Please indicate your answer on the scale below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not Active at all</th>
<th>Very Active</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Demographics
In this section, you will be asked to provide information about yourself.
1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
   a. Male
   b. Female
3. What is your school year?
   a. Freshmen
   b. Sophomore
   c. Junior
   d. Senior
   e. Graduate
   f. Other
4. What is your ethnicity?
   a. African American
   b. Native American
   c. Anglo American (Caucasian)
   d. Asian American
   e. Hispanic American
   f. Multiracial
   g. International student
   h. Other

Political and Religious Affiliations
In this section, you will be asked to provide information about your political and religious affiliations.
Regarding your political attitudes, please indicate on the scale below if you consider yourself more conservative, moderate or more liberal:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Conservative</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Very Liberal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you consider yourself religious?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Religious</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
POST-TEST

Comment

After viewing the YouTube™ clip, use the following box to comment on the video. You are free to write whatever you want about the video: write about your feelings, whether you agree or disagree with it, whether you want add information to it and so on. You can also choose not to comment and proceed to the next section.

Source Recall

The YouTube™ news clip that you just viewed was from a popular global news organization. Which one was it?

Perceptions of Credibility

After viewing the clip, please indicate on the scales below whether you agree or disagree with the characteristics used to describe the news organization responsible for it:

For the most part the party responsible for the video was

Accurate:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Believable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fair

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Objective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Biased

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sensational
Strongly
Disagree
1 2 3 4 5
Strongly
Agree

**You Tube™ Behavior**

If you run across this video on You Tube™, please indicate the extent to which you would:

Comment on the video:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Maybe</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Share the video with family or friends:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Maybe</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Post a reply video:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Maybe</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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LIST OF REFERENCES


Li, X. (2011). Factors influencing the willingness to contribute information to online communities. *New Media and Society, 65*, 567-574.


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Eisa Al Nashmi graduated from the English Academy in Kuwait with a respectable GPA that earned him a scholarship from the Ministry of Higher Education to study abroad. He earned his bachelor’s degree in journalism with a minor in business from California State University, Fresno in 2004. With a GPA of 3.96, Eisa was offered a prestigious scholarship from Kuwait University, the largest public university in Kuwait. In an effort to support academia at the local level, Kuwait University annually gives out a limited number of scholarships to Kuwaitis. The scholarship allows Kuwaitis to pursue graduate education at highly accredited universities around the world, and upon completion of a doctoral degree, the students are offered a teaching position at Kuwait University. With that scholarship, Eisa earned his master’s degree in journalism with an emphasis on new media from the University of Florida in 2007. Eisa was then accepted at the doctoral program at the University of Florida. He received his Ph.D. in the fall of 2011 and will become a mass communication and journalism professor at Kuwait University.