



REUTERS  
INSTITUTE for the  
STUDY of  
JOURNALISM

**Reuters Institute Fellowship Paper, University of Oxford**

**WHY DO WE SEE WHAT WE SEE?**

A comparison of CNN International, BBC World News and Al Jazeera English analysing the respective drivers influencing editorial content

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Hilary Term 2010  
Sponsor: King Edward VII Foundation

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the KE7 Foundation for providing the amazing opportunity to study at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford. It was wonderful to be sponsored by an organisation that not only supported my research with a generous bursary but with immense enthusiasm and encouragement.

I would particularly like to thank my adviser, Richard Sambrook, and James Painter, Head of the Fellowship Programme, whose guidance, counsel and inspiration were invaluable.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to the current and former staff of RISJ (David Levy, Angela Julian, Alex Reid and Kate Hanneford-Smith). Additionally, I would like to thank Al Jazeera English's brilliant archive department as well as CNN International's terrific library team for their assistance in gathering footage.

Finally, it would be remiss if I failed to mention my husband, family, Dr Hatty Oliver, Tessa Dunlop, Dr Anne Geniets and Nina Bigalke without whose optimism and advice I could not have accomplished this.

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## ABSTRACT

This research will attempt to identify the key drivers of editorial content in the 24/7 news sector. Using qualitative semi-structured interviews and content analysis, I will examine the impact of various drivers including audience, institutional culture, funding models and philosophies on the editorial content of CNN International, BBC World News and Al Jazeera English.

Despite sharing an identical mission of aiming for a global perspective, each channel clearly interprets a similar philosophy in different ways – by way of very different priorities, structures, processes and output. As a result, while all the three channels were revealed to share the same primary driver (institutional culture), their respective secondary drivers are key to their distinctive characteristics.

## INTRODUCTION

Television news plays an integral role in how a society receives information. In the era of 24/7 international, rolling news, such networks take on both active and passive functions. The proliferation of global news channels launched over the last five years, including Russia Today, France 24 and Telesur, indicate that while there is an appetite for international news, there is also a desire from state broadcasters wanting a platform to provide their national perspective. Notably, the vastly improved and cheaper technology available has greatly lowered entry barriers. All of this has occurred during the post-Eighties so-called 'information revolution' – with audiences becoming increasingly aware of the significance of events that happen outside of their respective countries' borders.

The three international, English-language, news channels which – by nature of size, distribution, budgets and reputation – have most impacted the global television landscape and have the greatest power to influence public opinion are CNN International, BBC World News and Al Jazeera English. Amid each network's different histories, remits, identities and varied broadcasting business models (including funding, programming, production, delivery and audience), each must compete to maintain market share and global name recognition.

This research will attempt to identify what are the key drivers of editorial content in the 24/7 news sector. Essentially, it will seek to answer why we (as viewers) see what we see. I will use qualitative semi-structured interviews and content analysis to scrutinise what goes into the strategic process within these broadcasting organisations. I will examine the impact of various drivers including audience, institutional culture, funding models and philosophies on the editorial content of CNN International, BBC World News and Al Jazeera English.

## PROJECT OUTLINE

Through examining coverage and rhetoric (that is, how each network describes their philosophy and practice in their own words), a comparison can be made between these international news organisations imparting their individual approaches to global news. As three of the most popular global news media outlets, CNN International, BBC World News and Al Jazeera English carry distinctive characteristics in terms of culture, posited mission and presentation style. Moreover, the three channels have the resources and skill to conduct in depth coverage and analysis all over the world.

For this research, I interviewed a key executive from each network: 1. Tony Maddox, Managing Director of CNN International, 2. Richard Porter, Director of News Content, BBC World News, and 3. Al Anstey, who until recently was Al Jazeera English's Head of News, and is now its Director of Media and Development. Studying the interviews will provide initial indicators to help decipher the relationship between mission and practice.

Using the method of content analysis I selected three dates in which notable coverage of a newsworthy event of global importance occurred in different parts of the world. Each had intense coverage of United States President Barack Obama's November 2008 election and its immediate aftermath, the 2008 Mumbai attacks and last year's climate change summit in Copenhagen. Analysing the channels' coverage of the same events will provide greater understanding of how the editorial output of their operations differ despite espousing similar missions and a core desire to reach global audiences.

I collected data on CNNI's World Report, BBCWN's BBC World News and AJE's News on the following dates: 1. 8 November 2008; United States; President Barack Obama's first press conference as president-elect, 2. 29 November 2008; India; the final day of the 2008 Mumbai attacks; and 3. 19 December 2009; Denmark; The final day of the Copenhagen Climate Change summit. For each date, I watched the 5am GMT news half hour – a broadcast slot that all three channels had in common for both content (strictly news, not current affairs programming) and length (30 minutes).

I then coded each newscast based on: 1. Number of stories aired; 2. Geographical location of each story; 3. Total running time of broadcast minus ads and weather reports; 4. Which story ran first; 5. The placement and length of selected event for each date; 6. Tone of selected event; 7. Frequency of words noted in selected event; 8. Who was interviewed/soundbited in the selected event; 9. The nationality and race of the anchor; and 10. The nationality and race of reporter of selected event. Headlines, advertisements and weather reports (unless presented as a story) were not included in the monitoring as not all of the archived material received to review each channel contained these window dressing elements.

After watching and coding each newscast, I was able to draw a few basic conclusions about the way these organisations create and deliver their broadcasts. However, due to the limited sample size and scope of study and time limitations, evaluating the data only allows me to make some preliminary observations. This paper should only serve for

revealing and commenting on observed facts and trends, which would have to be validated by more detailed research.



## BACKGROUND

“Global satellite channels, such as CNN International, BBC World, and Al Jazeera, address international and often multicultural audiences. They frequently strive for a global editorial viewpoint” Jean K. Chalaby<sup>1</sup>

Unsurprisingly, striving for a global editorial viewpoint or perspective was a stated claim made by each executive interviewed<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, despite the fact that each network provides highly distinctive programming, the executives often concurred when discussing audience, reach, coverage and aims.

To better understand the distinguishing differences between the channels, it is important to very briefly review their structures, missions and styles.

CNN International launched in 1985. It is owned by Time Warner. The channel’s headquarters are based in Atlanta and it has broadcasting centres there, as well as in London, Abu Dhabi and Hong Kong. It maintains 47 bureaux around the world (33 outside of US); and about 4,000 employees in over 200 countries<sup>3</sup>. CNNI reaches more than 200 million households and hotel rooms.

BBC World Service Television launched in 1991 as the international news and current affairs division of the British Broadcasting Corporation. Its name changed to BBC World in 1994 and then to BBC World News in 2008. Its headquarters and main broadcasting centre are in London; it also broadcasts an hour each daily from its New York and Washington offices. It has 50 foreign news bureaux and correspondents in almost every country in the world; and about 3,500 employees (including BBC News journalists). BBCWN attracts 74 million viewers<sup>4</sup> a week, is available in more than 200 countries and territories worldwide, and reaches 295 million households and 1.7 million hotel rooms.<sup>5</sup>

Al Jazeera English launched in 2006 as a sister channel to the long established Arabic language Al Jazeera network. Its headquarters are based in Doha, Qatar. Broadcasting centres are located there and in Kuala Lumpur, London and Washington, DC. Combined with the Arabic language channel, it shares 69 bureaux; and has about 1,000 employees. AJE is available to 130 million homes in over 100 countries<sup>6</sup>.

The 24-hour operations and expansive reach of these global news networks enable them to cover the world in real time. However, despite the common quest to provide a global perspective, the numerous and varied locale of overseas bureaux and moreover, the

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<sup>1</sup> Chalaby, Jean K. “Deconstructing the Transnational: A Typology of Cross-Border Television Channels in Europe”, *New Media & Society* (7) p155 (2005)

<sup>2</sup> Maddox, Tony, interview, “CNN International challenges viewers to open themselves to voices, places and perspectives that might be unfamiliar to them.”; Porter, Richard, BBC World News, “We set out to take a global perspective.”; Anstey, Al, Al Jazeera English, “[We are] coming at news from a global perspective.” (2010)

<sup>3</sup> CNN International Media (2009)

<sup>4</sup> At time of writing, viewing figures were only available for BBCWN; no equivalent for CNNI or AJE.

<sup>5</sup> BBC Press Office, [bbc.co.uk/pressoffice](http://bbc.co.uk/pressoffice) (2010)

<sup>6</sup> Al Jazeera English marketing (2009)

frequent assertions that each is not influenced to a significant degree by the location of their headquarters<sup>7</sup>, a difference is felt immediately upon viewing each channel. As Lucy Kung-Shankleman remarks of the BBC and CNN - that the two channels “exhibit strong differences in terms of fundamental mission, national context, product range and financial basis”<sup>8</sup> - a parallel observation can be drawn between CNNI, BBCWN and AJE.

For instance, when questioned during the interviews, what their company’s philosophy or mission was, each executive responded in a manner that revealed the idiosyncratic personalities of their channels:

Tony Maddox of CNNI’s response had a distinctly “gung-ho” American, pioneering spirit about it:

“The mission we set ourselves is this: In addition to our historical core value of covering breaking news unlike any other network, CNN International challenges viewers to open themselves to voices, places and perspectives that might be unfamiliar to them. Our tagline, GO BEYOND BORDERS, reflects what we aim to do each and every day, delivering smart and stimulating journalism to an increasingly interconnected world. We take our viewers further in terms of news delivery and give them new and unexpected insights. Every day we challenge stereotypes and beliefs, deepen understanding, broaden conversations for our audience while adding context and analysis to the news.”

In contrast, Richard Porter of BBCWN stuck to the straightforward, no nonsense, brass tacks style the public has come to expect of ‘Auntie’:

“We want to reach the maximum number of people around the world with high quality news and current affairs information in a way that is economically sustainable.”

For his part Al Anstey referred to relative newcomer AJE’s underdog position, defining his channel’s mission in the framework of how it is unlike its two biggest competitors. Here he was likely referring to AJE’s decision to launch itself as a foil to both BBC World News and CNNI. With its “South to North” view of the world, it believes that the values of impartiality that the two Western based networks hold so dear act “as a cover for Western hegemonic power, and seeks to redress the balance<sup>9</sup>”.

So called “counter-hegemonic<sup>10</sup>” networks, like Al Jazeera English, seek to challenge CNNI and BBCWN’s long-term dominance on the global news frontier, (and the Western points of view critics claim they project), their influence in the geopolitical economy and how they have helped mould and shape the way other international journalists define the rules of global journalism.

Al Anstey said: “The mission here is to what we call ‘redress the balance’. The dominant news networks in the globe, i.e. BBC and CNN, are excellent operators but they do come

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<sup>7</sup> CNNI, BBCWN and AJE are often said to have an American, British and Arab slant respectively; each executive asserted that their channel had no bias, only a global perspective.

<sup>8</sup> Kung-Shankleman, Lucy, *Inside the BBC and CNN: Managing Media Organisations*, p3 (2000)

<sup>9</sup> Painter, James, *Counter-Hegemonic News: A case study of Al-Jazeera English and Telesur*, p3 (2008)

<sup>10</sup> Painter, James, *Counter-Hegemonic News: A case study of Al-Jazeera English and Telesur*, p1 (2008)

from a perspective and obviously if you watch CNN you get a by and large American perspective of the world view and if you watch the BBC you get a slightly more British perspective on the world view. The mission here was basically to put every country in the world on a level playing field, then evaluate each story on its own merit and cover those stories on that basis. Therefore if you've got a story in Bangladesh that is level and you've got a story that's in Boston that is level and they're at the same level, Boston will not win because it's in the Western world or because it's in the richer world, we will take each story at its own merit... We also seek to give voice to untold stories, promote debate, and challenge established perceptions.”

However, their varied models mean that such news is presented in different ways. BBCWN's traditional approach of distributing facts and information, imparting knowledge and a general motivation to inform and educate the public stands in stark contrast to CNNI's model of putting a strong emphasis on what viewers want and therefore packaging its programmes to appear as “attractive<sup>11</sup>” and visually appealing as possible to audiences.

From their respective inceptions, as “CNN concentrated on breaking news, the BBC intended to adopt a more interpretive approach<sup>12</sup>”. Don M Flournoy and Robert K Stewart, in their book, “CNN: Making news in the global market” note: “While CNN was avowedly commercial, the public service orientation of the BBC would be emphasized (referring here to BBCWN). At least these were to be the distinctive features according to BBC proportional (sic) materials.<sup>13</sup>”

Journalism professor Lewis A. Friedland in an essay on international news networks summed their differences thus: “Whereas the BBC has gained a reputation for objective rather than mass market appeal news presentation and gathering, CNN has earned a reputation for airing globally attractive ‘mass’ news events, such as the Challenger explosion, the Tiananmen Square uprising, and others. Because its organisational structure is as a news channel and news source in one, on a commercial basis, it must cover events of this type to sell programmes to broadcasters as well as to a large audience.”<sup>14</sup>

But while BBCWN undoubtedly covered the same events, the manner in which each channel did is where the difference lies. So much so that in his book, *News as Entertainment: The rise of infotainment*, Daya Kishan Thussu said that BBCWN has “greater international credibility<sup>15</sup>” compared to CNN's (and implicitly CNNI's)

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<sup>11</sup> Kung-Shankleman, Lucy, *Inside the BBC and CNN: Managing Media Organisations*, [“[CNN] is an organisation which places viewer attractiveness at the top of its list of priorities. This inevitably means presenting material in a way that achieves maximum impact which in turn means concentrating on action rather than analysis on the moving or the shocking at the cost of the important (but perhaps worthy and boring).”] p194 (2000)

<sup>12</sup> Flournoy, Don M. and Stewart, Robert K., *CNN: Making News in the Global Market*, p139 (1997)

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*

<sup>14</sup> Friedland, Lewis A., *Covering the World: International Television News Services*, p128 (1993)

<sup>15</sup> Thussu, Daya K., *News as Entertainment: The Rise of Global Infotainment*, p67 (2007)

“Hollywood-inspired<sup>16</sup>” programming.

Professor Friedland further observed: “Historically, the BBC has maintained an air of high culture, and high mindedness. But it has also been a force for the extension of British culture and political influence throughout the world. BBC World Service Radio bound the commonwealth together culturally. As the torch in international news passes from radio to television, BBCWSTV will attempt to carry on that global mission. CNN’s Robert Ross has responded bluntly to the BBC’s cultural claims: ‘BBC likes to say that their network is strong on analysis, and they’ll spend ten minutes explaining to people the background, the implications, and the history. We don’t do that. We give them three minutes of ‘here’s what’s happened.’ They criticise us for what we do, and we find their style quite condescending and supercilious.’<sup>17</sup>”

Put simply, according to critics quoted in various sources of literature, BBCWN believes it knows best, while CNNI believes viewers know best and in turn work to give them what they want.

Tony Maddox, CNNI, sums it up thus: “We live and thrive by being relevant to the audience and our business partners. We are a commercial business, there is no safety net for us, if we fail to deliver the audience, we can't deliver to advertisers and distributors. We have to be smart and respond accordingly as there is no room for complacency.”

Richard Porter, BBCWN, on the other hand suggests that the audience is not everything: “Presumably you can't just treat that [the audience as a driver] in isolation – that’s all we're doing, we're doing it for the audience. I can think of two immediate reasons why that's not a good thing: one, you might not be able to necessarily provide just what the audience wants and secondly it might not be very desirable to give the audience always just what they want.”

Since its launch just over four years ago, AJE has asserted itself as being the “third voice” in 24/7 television news in that it provides an alternate point of view – one that originates in the Middle East - to the long-time stalwarts CNN International and BBC World News – both with headquarters in the West. It was set up “with the explicit intention of challenging the ‘BBC/CNN approach’ to world events”<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Thussu, Daya K., *News as Entertainment: The Rise of Global Infotainment*, p52 (2007)

<sup>17</sup> Friedland, Lewis A., *Covering the World: International Television News Services*, p31 (1993)

<sup>18</sup> Painter, James, *Counter-Hegemonic News: A case study of Al-Jazeera English and Telesur*, p1 (2008)

## TONE

Viewing each channel's newscast reveals differences in approach, word choice and overall tone. The tables<sup>19</sup> below show how CNNI and AJE tend to use stronger, evocative language, while BBCWN is much more measured in tone. This ties back in to CNNI's market driven approach; in contrast BBCWN, despite relying on commercial funding, maintains strong ties with its public service roots.

“As such, market-oriented journalism relies on the increasing use of emotionally-intense narrative styles in an effort to involve news consumers and to secure greater advertising revenue by attracting larger audiences (Eveland, Seo, & Marton, 2002), whereas public service journalism prefers fact-based objectivism to show detachment.<sup>20,</sup>”

A recent example of the divergence of coverage between the three channels occurred in the aftermath of the January 2010 Haiti earthquake. While BBCWN provided its standard measured and interpretive approach, CNNI made headlines when two of its correspondents crossed the line from reporting the story to becoming a part of the story. Anderson Cooper ended his report on looting in the quake ravaged country by picking up a bloodied child caught in the melee and dragging him to safety. In another report, the network's resident neurosurgeon and correspondent, Dr Sanjay Gupta performed surgery on a young girl in an aircraft carrier after no other qualified doctors could be found. Subtle, detached unemotional news reporting it wasn't.

AJE is still a young channel barely out of its launch phase and as a result only limited research and analysis is available on them. However, the channel, like CNNI, is known for its use of dramatic language and imagery as a way of setting themselves apart (not for commercial reasons since they are effectively state funded). But while CNNI's critics question the network's occasional offerings of infotainment, AJE's critics slate the channel for presenting a less than “neutral”<sup>21</sup> tone in its coverage – coverage that Al Anstey would describe as an instance of the channel “playing devil's advocate”. He explained: “There's an Al Jazeera mantra: the one side of the story, the other side of the story. There are often many different sides to a story and I think one of the best ways of tackling that is to be devil's advocate – put yourself in the shoes of the antagonist. If everyone in the world is saying Mugabe is a bad man let's have a look and see who is supporting Mugabe. When Karadzic was taken, there was a huge number of people in Serbia who felt Karadzic was a national hero – let's look at that perspective and let's cover that perspective as well as the opposing point of view or the other point of view. The devil's advocate element of it is also something that demarcates us from the BBC and CNN.”

Whereas CNNI framed part of the Haiti relief effort in terms of its heroic correspondents,

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<sup>19</sup> Again, because of the highly limited nature of this study, definitive conclusions cannot be drawn, the data can only point to possible indicators.

<sup>20</sup> Zheng, Lu and Zhou, Shuhua, “Public Service vs Marketability: BBC & CNN's Coverage of the Anti-Japanese Protests in China”, *China Media Research* (5) p1 (2009)

<sup>21</sup> Pfanner, Eric, “Al Jazeera English retools for a U.S. Market”, *The New York Times* (2008)

AJE seemed to angle its coverage around its “South to North” news flow remit. Some of its reports suggested that US humanitarian aid efforts in Haiti constituted a military plan to take over the country.

AJE’s use of evocative material can be explained as part of its position as being a newcomer and underdog, needing to garner attention and audiences through the use of emotionally-charged language and imagery.

“Truly ‘global’ television news has to be conflict-driven or it will cease to exist as such.”<sup>22</sup> Mehdi Semati

Across all three newscasts that I viewed, CNNI’s tone was matter of fact and straight with the exception of when they addressed any conflict-driven topics where they would become much more emotional and sensationalist. It stood apart as the only channel out of the three to use the evocative term “terrorist” to describe the antagonists in the coverage of the 2008 Mumbai attacks. Watching CNNI’s coverage of the attacks, compared to the very sober coverage by the other two channels, was like watching a Hollywood Western set in Bollywood. There was even a heartwarming love story in the middle of it (involving a package from the US about a young American couple murdered in the attacks.) Moreover, its decision to use the terms “terrorists” and “extremists” to describe the gunmen contributed to its coverage having a much more dramatic feel to it.

The BBC has published editorial guidelines caution against the use of such emotional language: “The word ‘terrorist’ itself can be a barrier rather than an aid to understanding. We should try to avoid the term, without attribution. We should let other people characterise while we report the facts as we know them. We should use words which specifically describe the perpetrator such as ‘bomber’, ‘attacker’, ‘gunman’, ‘kidnapper’, ‘insurgent’, and ‘militant’. Our responsibility is to remain objective and report in ways that enable our audiences to make their own assessments about who is doing what to whom.”<sup>23</sup> AJE appears to follow a similar policy. Moreover, the comparatively strong language it used to describe the reaction to the bombing (notably raising the discussion of whether Pakistan may have played a role in some way), and its decision to mention controversial “rumours” that were circulating at the time, contributed to the dramatic feel of its coverage.

BBCWN maintained a dry, distant, factual and straightforward tone throughout. This channel was so careful to remain undramatic and unexciting in its coverage of the 2008 Mumbai attacks that at times its on location reporter, Nik Gowing, seemed at a loss for words to describe the event’s antagonists. Not wanting to continue to repeat the neutral terms “militants” and “gunmen”, he and the studio-based anchor started to simply refer to the attackers vaguely as “they”, “those who did this”, “these people” and “men”. Even the briefest slip of the tongue – when Nik Gowing unintentionally called the attackers “terrorists”, he immediately corrected himself and returned to the term “militants”.

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<sup>22</sup> Semati, Mehdi, “Reflections on the Politics of the Global ‘Rolling-News’ Television Genre”, *Transnational Broadcasting Studies* (6) (2001)

<sup>23</sup> BBC Editorial Guidelines in Full: War, Terror and Emergencies (2010)

AJE tended to express an air of concern, alarm and a justice-seeking agenda. This was notable in its coverage of US President Barack Obama’s first press conference as well as in its coverage of the Copenhagen Summit. Much of its coverage of the former was dedicated to highlighting the US’s “failing economy”. In the 3 minute 42 second long package, 40 seconds of detailed graphics and 17 descriptors, including “huge losses”, “belly up”, “dismal” and “hard pressed”, were used to address the economic crisis in the US. The two other channels only used images of President Obama’s press conference (with the single exception of CNN flashing a still of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad momentarily when discussing foreign policy) and spoke of the US’s economic crisis only in voiceovers by the reporter. This came across much more understated than AJE’s 40 second graphic sequence introduced by their anchor with the words: “Look at this!”. Additionally, AJE raised a sense of alarm when it referred to the Copenhagen Summit as a “failure” almost three times more than CNNI did and nearly double the number of times than BBCWN. See Tables 1.1 – 1.3.

Table 1.1 Word frequencies, Mumbai

	Antagonists	Witnesses	City	Reaction/ Aftermath
CNNI*	Terrorists – 11 Gunmen - 8 (Islamic) extremists - 2 Militants – 2	Hostages – 9 Survivors - 4 Guests – 3 Victims - 2 Escape - 2	Rumours – 4 Siege - 3 Financial heart - 2	Condemn - 2 Fingers pointed -2 Pakistan - 1
BBCWN	Militants – 8 Gunmen - 6 They - 5 Men – 4	Survivors – 2 Guests - 2 Hostages - 2	Delhi – 1 Democratic society - 1	Tragedy -1
AJE	Gunmen – 7	Hostages – 4	Security forces – 9 Control – 4	Concern – 2

Table 1.2 Word frequencies, Obama

	Obama	Economy in crisis	Foreign policy
CNNI	Pressure, projecting confidence, brainpower, deliberate, cautious	3	1
BBCWN	Hope, promise, cheering, handshakes, supporters, celebrate, happy music, victory, respect	12	0

AJE	Focused, in control, optimistic, self confident/assured, new era	17	4
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Table 1.3 Word Frequencies, Copenhagen

	Progress	Failure	Developing nations	Developed nations/ Emerging economies*	Science
CNNI	3	8	4	1	2
BBCWN	1	11	7	14	2
AJE	1	21	6	12	7

\*Emerging economies (India, Brazil, China and South Africa) are listed with developed nations as they were only mentioned within context of their relationship with the United States.



## FUNDING

CNNI is commercially funded, pooling resources with its parent channel, CNN, in which it draws from an annual budget estimated at €1.2bn (£1b)<sup>24</sup>.

A mix of advertising and subscription funds BBCWN, but it does not operate in the same wholly commercial way as CNNI. It shares many of the resources provided by its publicly funded parent channel, BBC News, which in 2004 (the most recent figures I was able to gather) operated on a budget of £350m<sup>25</sup>. However, this figure does not reflect the channel's annual income, which in 2009 was £60.9m. However, BBCWN pays a licence back to the publicly-funded BBC for the material it makes use of, at a rate benchmarked against other international broadcasters.

AJE operates on some advertising income but is primarily privately subsidised by the Emir of Qatar who is reported to have invested £670m between 2006 and 2009<sup>26</sup>.

Is it because CNN International and BBC World News have commercial considerations that their broadcasts are so different? Al Jazeera English claims to be editorially unhindered and devoted to a serious hard-news agenda. Does AJE have particular freedoms and diversity of programming that they lack because editors don't have to take commercial considerations on board?

According to culture and communications professor, Ingrid Volkmer, "CNNI is an entirely privately owned, commercially operating station. It has to compete <...> for international audiences by broadcasting an 'attractive' programme in order to be able to compete for air time and to receive subscription fees from international broadcasters who acquire the right to broadcast segments of its output."<sup>27</sup>

While recognising the channel's commercial model, Tony Maddox adopted a deeply pragmatic attitude when reflecting on whether CNNI faced certain pressures as a result. Operating on the largest budget of the three, he said that CNNI has "far greater freedoms" due to its funding model. He said: "It means we have no political pressure or prescribed aim or editorial agenda. We thrive as a commercial operation and operate in an environment of 'Can do!' rather than 'What should we do?' We know exactly what we need to achieve from a commercial point and we have huge resources because of our many successes as an international news organization, one of which is significant profitability."

Richard Porter said that BBCWN's funding model, compared to a privately or publicly funded company, had both pluses and minuses. He said: "There are ways in which we have more freedom to act because we are sort of masters of our own destiny. There are

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<sup>24</sup> Chrisafis, Angelique, "The news through French eyes: Chirac TV takes on 'Anglo-Saxon imperialism'", *The Guardian* (2006)

<sup>25</sup> BBC News Press Office (2004)

<sup>26</sup> Mason, Rowena, "Al Jazeera English focused on its American dream", *The Daily Telegraph* (2009)

<sup>27</sup> Volkmer, Ingrid, *News in the Global Sphere*, p127 (1999)

ways in which we have less freedom in that if you have a guaranteed income it's easier to plan, to make decisions about what you're doing in two, three years time. The reality is that we start from the same way of thinking of our content as someone who is funded by the license fee or someone who is funded by the Foreign Office. That's why we're in this. It's what we want to do it for and the funding mechanism is secondary to that but do we do things that have commercial value? Well I hope we do, yes."

Al Anstey rejected the proposition that, at least for AJE, its funding model could be a factor when trying to determine the driver behind broadcasting output because his channel is "not a commercial enterprise. Obviously we do look at revenue and we are commercially minded but we are very privileged to be able to do our job without feeling any pressure to do anything for a commercial reason and therefore funding is not a guiding force or a driving force in what makes up our bulletins."

He considered AJE "privileged" to be privately funded, explaining that without the commercial pressures faced by its competitors, its journalism is "pure and simple". He said: "For two reasons I think it gives us greater freedoms. Number one is because as an editorial decision maker you're able to make the decision on the basis of the story. There's no commercial imperative, there's no sort of political influence and therefore you really are looking pure and simple at the story. So that does certainly give us the freedom. The second thing is that funding enables you to actually put people on the ground and one of the other core principals of what we do is original journalism and to get original journalism you have to actually put journalists on the ground on the story. That means you've got to travel and that costs money so obviously to have sufficient funding to actually eye witness stories and news gather at location rather than second hand through an agency or second hand through someone else's reporting does give us a lot of editorial freedom. I think it sharpens up the product and makes us a good, reliable source of information – our own people are on the ground telling us what they're seeing."

Beyond input from the channel's executive, Al Jazeera English's funding model suggests that the channel's editorial teams operate without any commercial considerations. Being effectively bankrolled by the Emir of Qatar has allowed AJE to broadcast news and programming dissimilar to the standard fare viewed on CNN International or BBC World News. For instance, as cited in James Painter's case study of Al Jazeera English and Telesur, "AJE had significantly more coverage of events in developing countries than BBCW and CNNI: 81 per cent compared to 47 and 53 per cent respectively."<sup>28</sup> Or as Lawrence Pintak, Founding Dean of the Edward R. Murrow College of Communication at Washington State University noted after reviewing the channel's first day of broadcast: "It is refreshing to see stories from largely ignored corners of the world, but on Day One, they came at the expense of other important developments, whether in the United States, Europe or Japan"<sup>29</sup>.

Speaking to The Sydney Morning Herald about AJE, Hugh Miles, author of *Al-Jazeera: How Arab TV News Challenged the World* said: "I think Al Jazeera's agenda is different

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<sup>28</sup> Painter, James, *Counter-Hegemonic News: A case study of Al-Jazeera English and Telesur*, p29 (2008)

<sup>29</sup> Pintak, Lawrence, "A CNN for the Developing World", *Speigel Online* (2006)

to other channels because it's not profit making... Al Jazeera is in this really privileged position where they have this very very rich man who is backing them and has given them a very free rein. I think there are more question marks about channels like CNN or FOX News, about their financial backers, because I think the people who run, influence and finance them are more involved in global politics than the Emir of Qatar.<sup>30</sup>

Despite previous studies suggesting that CNNI's content was purely at the mercy of pleasing its stakeholders while AJE sits at the opposite end of the spectrum, all of the executives interviewed insisted that their channel was wholly editorially unfettered by how they are funded. Yet it can be deduced that the way in which each channel is funded does impact editorial decision making to a certain degree. As Tony Maddox of CNNI was quoted previously, CNNI is a commercial business that thrives "by being relevant to the audience and our business partners." As a wholly commercially funded operation, CNNI strives to generate a healthy revenue to create the quality programming its audience has come to expect. BBCWN's Richard Porter acknowledged that the channel's broadcast product was "partly about funding", particularly because, like CNNI, it relies on advertising to fund its existence. As for AJE's model, its executive made evident that the manner in which they are funded omits any commercial burden. Unlike CNNI or BBCWN they have the luxury not to have to think about advertisers or audience demographic when deciding what they cover.

Even with their varied funding models highlighting a marked difference between CNNI, BBCWN and AJE –, it turned out that the more compelling determinant of output was not how they received their monies but rather how they spent their budgets. In other words, how do they manage the funding they are given? How is the money divided among the various resources? According to Kung-Shankleman, the broadcasting commodity can be defined as "the total set of broadcasting outputs that results from the interaction between the set of audience needs which broadcasting attempts to satisfy and the historically given set of production resources which the broadcasting industry has at its disposal for the fulfilment of that task<sup>31</sup>".

Richard Porter addressed this difference when he considered whether funding was an important indicator of content: "Yes, it's partly about funding, but it's not simply about funding. It's also about - with the funding it's about the choices you make. For example, anecdotally, probably we have fewer people now in the Moscow bureau than we did 20 years ago. And we've got more people in the Middle East than we did 20 years ago. And that's kind of obvious that that's a response to the changing world events. It's not just a question of we haven't got enough money to do the things we want to do; it's with the money you've got where do you put it."

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<sup>30</sup> Miles, Hugh, "One to contend with ... Al Jazeera English", *Sydney Morning Herald* (2007)

<sup>31</sup> Kung-Shankleman, Lucy, *Inside the BBC and CNN: Managing Media Organisations*, p46 (2000) [citing Garnham and Locksley, in Blumberg and Nossiter, 1991:10]

## AUDIENCE

All three channels appeal to an international audience, but not necessarily the same viewers. CNN International's emphasis on business programming makes the network very attractive to the business elite across Europe, Africa and Asia<sup>32</sup>. According to Thierry Vissol, who studied their European audience share, CNNI and BBC World News attract "high educated and wealthy social categories"<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, they appeal to "the top end of socioeconomic categories, which represents more or less 20 per cent of the EU population, and specifically the top 10.4 million (4 per cent) of Europe's leading consumers and decision makers. Obviously, their social behaviour differs much from that of the average consumer."<sup>34</sup>,

As the avowed outsider of the group, Al Jazeera English is believed to appeal to a more independent audience in Europe and North America, while gaining a greater share of mid-range to lower socioeconomic households across the rest of the world. Corey Pein addressed this in his piece *Is Al-Jazeera ready for Prime Time?*, when he wrote that the channel hoped to target: "Westerners dissatisfied with the mainstream media and intrigued by a news organization that openly attacks the 'blatant lies' behind the invasion of Iraq and purports to speak for the world's forgotten billions. There are many millions more [Muslims] in Southeast Asia and Africa who understand English, but not Arabic -- though their relatively meager incomes aren't as attractive to advertisers."<sup>35</sup>

Without hesitation, both executives from CNNI and BBCWN asserted that they believed audience was the key driver for editorial output.

In response to the question, "What do you believe is the key driver for broadcast output?" Tony Maddox of CNNI replied: "The audience. We know our audience well and, not just meeting but anticipating their needs is what we strive for everyday."

Richard Porter of BBCWN said: "I would try to start with the audience actually and I think this must be the case for any news broadcaster or any journalist; the point of it is to reach people. You're not doing it just into a vacuum. You want to produce news that people will consume, therefore it's extremely important to us to understand what it is the audience is doing, what demand there is of a the kinds of products that we produce, how they use that information, what they do in their lives. All those sorts of things. I think it's really crucial as your starting point to begin with the audience. We know through extensive research that the audience values the kind of serious intelligent journalism that we provide. We know they're an audience of that kind of content and so that's what we play to. But I think presumably you can't just treat that in isolation that all we're doing, we're doing it for the audience."

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<sup>32</sup> Ipsos Business Elite Survey (2009)

<sup>33</sup> Vissol, Thierry, "International and Pan-European News Channels: An Overview", *Reflets and Perspectives* (2006)

<sup>34</sup> Vissol, Thierry, "International and Pan-European News Channels: An Overview", *Reflets and Perspectives* (2006)

<sup>35</sup> Pein, Corey, "Is Al-Jazeera Ready for Prime Time?", *Salon.com* (2005)

However, AJE's Al Anstey placed audience firmly second as a driver: "I would suggest it's the story itself and second of all it's the audience, there's no point in covering a story if you don't think your audience is going to be interested."

A possible explanation behind CNNI and BBCWN's instant recognition of their audiences is the fact that both organisations conduct extensive audience research. AJE on the other hand, has not published any audience research (yet). As seen above, Corey Pein only addressed who AJE "hoped" to appeal to before launch. However, some four years later, the company remains uncertain who exactly its audience is. In fact, critics cite the lack of audience research as a major flaw in AJE's business practice, arguing, how can they ever hope to catch up to its competitors if they continue to have little idea who its audience is. "It is for the audience that the media are constructing and conveying information, and, if it were not for the audiences, the media would not exist."<sup>36</sup>

An aspect that all three had in common is the fact that they all broadcast in English. Beyond English being the mother-tongue of CNNI and BBCWN, the language has become the language of the global economy and diplomacy. However, it also limits their reach to some extent, since English is still the language of the elite in many countries<sup>37</sup>.

Lewis A. Friedland reflected on some of the implications of this: "Because English is established as the international language of business and diplomacy, it is easy to overlook the implications of the de facto establishment of English as the language of an emerging world forum of information and public opinion. Outside of the English-speaking world, and some of Western Europe and Japan, English remains a language of elites. To the extent that an English language world television system become the medium for global opinion, it excludes the participation of the greater part of the world's population, including the world's middle classes. The de facto choice of English restricts the market for global television to the world's upper and upper middle classes and of course, those whose native tongue is English."<sup>38</sup>

Tony Maddox of CNNI reflected on this point: "Detailed research shows that the average age of the international news channel audience is lower than that of domestic operations. The reason behind that is that many of those who watch CNN International have English as a second, third or even fourth language. That, in turn, will help determine the type of lifestyle and profession (business, politics, the arts, sport and leisure, etc, they are involved in). It also helps to establish how the audience uses their free time and why they would watch a channel like CNN International. Because of those factors, we develop programmes to meet the audience's expectation of international news that includes not just business, but also sport and culture."

Richard Porter, BBCWN, said of its audience: "What we don't have is a completely

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<sup>36</sup> Hanes, Philip J., *The Advantages and Limitations of a Focus on Audience in Media Studies* (2000)

<sup>37</sup> This does not take into account the fact that CNNI and the BBC have launched channels in foreign languages.

<sup>38</sup> Friedland, Lewis A., *Covering the World: International Television News Services*, p26 (1993)

common demographic. So for example that kind of person could be a 23-year-old student in Ghana or could be a 57-year-old businessman in South Korea. They've got things in common even though the demographic might be very different. Overall on average, it's actually quite young for a news channel. Certainly when compared to a domestic news service our average age of viewing is late 30s as opposed to sort of 50 plus that it would be in the UK.”

Note that while CNNI and BBCWN were able to clearly identify their audience, Al Anstey of AJE spoke of its audience in generalisations: “Anyone in the globe who speaks English, obviously; who’s got a hunger for international news. People who will benefit from what’s going on not only just in their locale but on the other side of the globe The bland answer is English speakers who are interested in international news. But it’s people who are hungry to learn, who are interested in something that’s not just on their front door and also those people who are interested in joining the dots of world events – if you look at the politics of the world, the aftermath of the Iraq war – what happens in one corner of the globe so often ripples out to have an effect on another corner of the globe. We want to appeal to a wide audience – to the powerful and to the people as well. We want everybody.”

In their own distinctive ways, each executive described a similar audience. Given that they are English language channels, appealing to an international audience, it’s no wonder that they mostly attract the very elite from those nations where English isn’t a first language. However, AJE’s Al Anstey did express a considerable difference in who he hoped to appeal to, that is in line with AJE’s mission to “reverse the flow of information”: “Not only do we aim to cover and broadcast to those affected by the corridors of power but to also broadcast to the wealthy, to travellers and to the people in the developed world. There is a massive audience of people in the developing world who speak English, who are interested and who are not necessarily the focus of other networks.”

## RHETORIC

Because of the limited nature of this study, it is not possible to claim a direct causation or link between the content analysis and what each executive says their network does in the interviews. However, it is possible to highlight interesting overlap and disconnect between some of the rhetoric discussed during the interviews and what came out of watching the broadcasts. Please bear in mind that any of the “matching” or “conflicting” output noted is only in context of the selected news shows viewed or interviews conducted.

Most of the rhetoric, when discussing their respective channel’s with the senior editors, did indeed match up with what was aired on television.

Key areas where the rhetoric did clearly match the channel’s output were:

- CNNI lives and thrives by being relevant to its audience and business partners: “We are a commercial business, if we fail to deliver the audience, we can't deliver to advertisers and distributors”; global perspective
- BBCWN – “stories that have the greatest global significance”; represents a global perspective “not from a British point of view”; global perspective
- AJE - levelled playing field; “non-Western, global perspective”; “devil’s advocate” perspective; “regional authority in key decision making”; in depth coverage; “we don’t need to adhere to any formula”; “give a voice to the voiceless”

The one area where all three were able to deliver – to varying degrees – was in providing a “global perspective” shown by the variety of locations around the world stories which were either broadcast from or covered in the news half hour.

Of the news programmes reviewed, the majority (34.8%) of CNNI’s coverage focused on North America (where its headquarters are based), whereas the bulk of stories aired in BBCWN’s sample came from Western Europe (where its headquarters are based – 54.5%). AJE had no clear dominant location. Its greatest coverage was split almost evenly between North America, Western Europe and the Middle East (24.1% , 20.7% and 20.7%, respectively).

CNNI dedicated more coverage to Eastern Europe than either BBCWN or AJE (8.7% compared to 0% and 3.4%, respectively).

While AJE had the most coverage of the Middle East (20.7%), this region ranked a significant third among CNNI’s numbers with 13% (particularly when compared to BBCWN’s 4.5%). The reason behind the amount of coverage CNNI provided from the Middle East can be assumed to be because of the US’s present heavy military involvement in this part of the world.

AJE had significantly less coverage of Western Europe than either CNNI or BBCWN (20.7% compared to 30.4% and 54.5%, respectively). However, AJE had more coverage of events in developing and emerging nations (within South America, Africa and Asia) than CNNI and BBCWN (31% compared to 12.9% and 22.7%, respectively). See Table 1.6.

An example that clearly demonstrated AJE's belief that they "don't need to adhere to any formula" was evident in a four minute package they created called "Europe's Eastern Border; efforts to stop Moldova's Human Traffic". The package aired towards the end of the 8 November 2008 thirty-minute news segment. It matched AJE's rhetoric in two ways: First, they "levelled the playing field". They covered a story from a part of the world that often goes under-reported by its competitors and gave it as much attention as a story from the "West" (while other stories covered in the show were the same as on the other networks, AJE was alone in mentioning this one); and secondly, they threw out the rule book when it came to following a standard news package sequence. This was evident as its reporter executed a piece to camera while struggling to pick his way through a crowded, narrow hallway holding the individuals involved in the story. For several seconds all the audience could hear was a disembodied voice until the reporter finally emerged through the entanglement of people. The channel seemed to want to highlight the concept that they truly like to get into the "thick" of a story. It was also evident that they worked hard to "give a voice the voiceless" by the range of people chosen for interviews or soundbites (see Table 1.5).

Some areas where a conflict appeared between broadcast output and the rhetoric used in interviews:

- CNNI – "challenge viewers to open themselves to voices, places and perspectives that might be unfamiliar to them"

CNNI's assertion appeared inconsistent because often it appeared as if the "challenging" and "unfamiliar" stories were the ones providing an overwhelmingly American perspective. For instance, on the 19 December 2009 segment, the channel took more time to discuss the box office potential for James Cameron's latest film, *Avatar*, (54 seconds) than the stories of the stolen Auschwitz sign (15 seconds), the proposal to ban bull fighting in Spain (15 seconds) and a volcano erupting in the Philippines (19 seconds) combined.

Another example occurred on the 29 November 2008 news segment. CNNI broke out of its regular format and devoted the entire 30 minutes to covering the final day of the Mumbai attacks. In the middle of its varied reports and contributions for reporters on the ground in Mumbai and from its Atlanta headquarters, they managed to squeeze in a package from Brooklyn, New York (2 minutes 31 seconds) in the middle of it about an American couple who were murdered in the attacks.



However, while the immediate thought may be to question whether CNNI feels unable to exclude any US stories, perhaps the more pertinent reason behind the inclusion of American angled stories goes back to the question of resources.<sup>39</sup>

- BBCWN – “takes you further behind the headlines so there is more explanation, analysis, debate and discussion in support of the main news stories”; “we have a mixed staff “; “give a voice to those who do not have a voice”

BBCWN’s claim that it “takes you further behind the headlines so there is more explanation, analysis, debate and discussion in support of the main news stories” was not upheld in the limited viewing for this research. Unlike CNNI and AJE, it failed to offer any in depth reports or news features. After each executive made the same claim of wanting to offer a “global perspective” and to “challenge our viewers”, they all, also concurred in their claims to “provide in depth coverage”. However, this again comes back to the concept of resources. AJE’s headquarters are based in the Middle East and the US is in the middle of two wars, therefore it is not a surprise that AJE and CNNI would have enough reporters based in Afghanistan to provide more than a simple news story, but also feature-type packages. However, as noted, BBCWN didn’t have any news features or follow up stories after the main news item. See Table 1.4.

Moreover, its desire to “give a voice to those who do not have a voice” was not evident in the individuals chosen for interviews or used as soundbites. Often – and this was particularly notable in its coverage of the Mumbai attacks – an older British statesman-like figure would be called upon to offer insight whereas CNNI and AJE chose local people. BBCWN took much of its observational commentary, 3 minutes 46 seconds, from its Developing World Correspondent David Loyn as he sat in a studio in Delhi. CNNI aired 1 minute 45 seconds of witnesses either caught up in the attacks or of reaction from people affected by them. AJE broadcasted 18 seconds of local individuals. Out of the seven people chosen for interviews or soundbites across BBCWN’s Copenhagen and Mumbai packages, only one could be considered “voiceless” (a representative from the developing world), whereas out of CNNI’s 14, four were “voiceless” (Mumbai package: Southeast Asian nationals) and AJE had three out of a possible eight (both packages: an Indian national, a developing and an emerging world leader) (see Table 1.5)

Table 1.4 In depth reports/newsfeatures

	In depth analysis	News features
CNNI	US – 4 W Europe - 1	Afghanistan – 2 E Europe - 1

<sup>39</sup>(A useful future study would be to analyse not only how resources are distributed but how often a news package is used between a parent channel and its offshoot. It would obviously be financially sound to share news productions across a single network.)

BBCWN		
AJE	US – 1 Asia - 1 E Europe - 1	Middle East (incl Afghanistan) – 2 US - 1

- AJE - regional authority in every part of globe

AJE struggled to live up to its claim of having regional authority in every part of globe. Two informational interviews conducted of former employees suggested that while the channel is quite strong in many parts of the globe, its knowledge of the United States is comparatively weak and therefore its coverage there is lacking. When Dave Marash, its most prominent American hire departed the company in 2008, the former senior anchor said that he “sensed an anti-American sensibility creeping into the coverage<sup>40</sup>,” – a claim that AJE vigorously denies<sup>41</sup>. Dave Marash added that at the time of his departure there were more Canadians than Americans working at the Washington bureau<sup>42</sup>. Additionally, according to media professors Shawn Powers and Mohammed el-Nawawy, early content analysis of the network “points to a repeated and thorough effort at producing programming that has more depth than most contemporary televised news, as well as an agenda that emphasizes issues of particular importance to those living outside the post-industrialized Western world (Schatz, 2007)”<sup>43</sup>. This does not necessarily suggest an inherent weakness in those stories covered within the Western world, but leads to the question that since its focus appears to be on the “South” could this simply be interpreted that from a resource perspective this happens at the expense of the “North”<sup>44</sup>? Dave Marash reinforced this notion when he implied that AJE’s news from the “South” was its strongest: “Al Jazeera is a real news channel, one that needs to be watched by the rest of the world. If you care about the world south of the equator, then it is the best network out there.<sup>45</sup>” Moreover, Guardian reporter Mark Lawson noted similar concerns when he described AJE’s first day of broadcast as “unbalanced in its concentration on [the Middle East] and the resulting almost contemptuous attitude to US and UK affairs<sup>46</sup>”.

<sup>40</sup> Stelter, Brian, “American Anchor Quits Al Jazeera English Channel”, *New York Times* (2008)

<sup>41</sup> Al Anstey rejects “that there is an anti-American bias wholeheartedly”. He insists that the channel takes an equally critical approach to any story they cover. “If you looked at our coverage globally, we were doing stories in many parts of the world that were critical of those countries or governments or corporations.” Interview (2010)

<sup>42</sup> Staff writer, “Anti-American claims at Al-Jazeera as it loses US anchor”, *Brand Republic* (2008)

<sup>43</sup> Powers, Shawn and el-Nawawy, Mohammed, “Al-Jazeera English and Global News Networks: Clash of Civilizations”, *Media, War & Conflict* (2) p263 (2009)

<sup>44</sup> Al Anstey, interview, “Within our news gathering reach, we have put our locations world wide and therefore we don’t necessarily have more bureaus in the developed world as the developing world and of course that helps us in achieving this global perspective because we’ve got journalists in the developing world – across Africa, Asia, Latin America”. (2010)

<sup>45</sup> Habhab, Delia, “A conversation with David Marash”, *The Arab American News* (2008)

<sup>46</sup> Lawson, Mark, “Weather in Arabia, crisis in Gaza, and no sign of Sir David’s Through the Cavehole”, *The Guardian* (2006)

Table 1.5 Interviews/soundbites

	Mumbai	Copenhagen
CNNI*	6 Western witnesses (1 minute, 11 seconds); 1 Indian national witness (20 seconds); 3 vox pops in Islamabad (14 seconds); exclusive interview Pakistani PM (11 seconds)	2 developed nation leaders (35 seconds); 1 International NGO (20 seconds)
BBCWN	Indian police chief (15 seconds); BBC Developing World Correspondent (3 minutes 46 seconds)	4 developed nation leaders (1 minute 16 seconds); 1 developing world (20 seconds)
AJE	Indian police chief (12 seconds); local resident (6 seconds)	1 developed nation leader (28 seconds); 3 International NGOs (4 minutes 19 seconds); 1 emerging nation leader (5 seconds); 1 developing world leader (31 seconds)

\*CNNI did not make similar claims of providing a “voice to the voiceless”; the Obama package was not included because each broadcast only included soundbites from president-elect Obama

Table 1.6 Frequency of location

	North America	South America	Western Europe	Eastern Europe	Africa	Asia	Middle East
CNNI	34.8% (8)	4.3% (1)	30.4% (7)	8.7% (2)	4.3% (1)	4.3% (1)	13% (3)
BBCWN	18.2% (4)	4.5% (1)	54.5% (12)		9.1% (2)	9.1% (2)	4.5% (1)
AJE	24.1% (7)	10.3% (3)	20.7% (6)	3.4% (1)	6.9% (2)	13.8% (4)	20.7% (6)

\* While AJE covered more of the world, more often than CNNI and BBCWN, to understand this difference better, further, more in depth research focusing on the channels’ resource distribution is necessary.



## INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

This study takes its lead from Lucy Kung-Shankleman's<sup>47</sup> insightful thesis explaining that the driving force in the editorial decision making process lies in an organisation's culture.

CNNI, BBCWN and AJE's varying organisational cultures "mean that an identical mission is interpreted in different ways, and as a result gives rise to very different priorities, structures and processes"<sup>48</sup>.

MIT professor Edgar Schein's theory of organisational culture defines it as "a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way you perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems"<sup>49</sup>. His definition was applied to determine how great an influence institutional culture has on broadcast output.

BBC World News and CNNI espouse an effectively identical set of journalistic values when it comes to the creation of news: balanced, fair and impartial. As two of the oldest and most dominant international news organisations, they have more or less set the model of practice to which many other institutions around the world strive.

While CNN does not make its journalistic policies public, it can undoubtedly be assumed that its broadcasting mandate is in line with the agreement accompanying the BBC Charter to which James Painter refers in *Counter Hegemonic News*. It requires the BBC: "to produce comprehensive, authoritative and impartial coverage of news and current affairs in the UK and throughout the world, to support fair and informed debate ... the BBC is forbidden from expressing an opinion on current affairs other than broadcasting."<sup>50</sup>

AJE, with its counter-hegemonic take, is known for its prerogative to dedicate more airtime to news stories from the developing world which otherwise go unremarked upon at its rival networks. In his article, *Will Al-Jazeera Find Its Groove?*, Lawrence Pintak noted that Al Jazeera English appears to come into its own particularly when it covers Middle East stories. He discussed how during the coverage of Pierre Gemayel's funeral, AJE offered "a perspective not heard on the other channels — one in a comprehensive series of interviews with the key players in the drama not seen elsewhere"<sup>51</sup>.

However, having poached much of its newsroom and management staff from its rivals, the network seems to bend over backwards in its drive to assert an authentic difference in offerings. Lawrence Pinktak described AJE's output thus: "Al-Jazeera International is

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<sup>47</sup> Kung-Shankleman, Lucy, *Inside the BBC and CNN: Managing Media Organisations*, (2000)

<sup>48</sup> Kung-Shankleman, Lucy, *Inside the BBC and CNN: Managing Media Organisations*, p214 (2000)

<sup>49</sup> Schein, Edgar H., *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, p17 (2004)

<sup>50</sup> Painter, James, *Counter-Hegemonic News: A case study of Al-Jazeera English and Telesur*, p2 (2008)

<sup>51</sup> Pintak, Lawrence, "Will Al-Jazeera English Find Its Groove?", *Columbia Journalism Review* (2006)

perhaps trying too hard to show it does not have the Western-centricism of CNN, the BBC and their counterparts... [Broadcasting] a self-conscious, sometimes excruciating, emphasis on being the non-Western voice.<sup>52</sup>”

Asked to describe the culture of their channels, the executives’ answers immediately highlighted some of the visual differences apparent between the three:

Tony Maddox, CNNI: “CNN has a very mixed culture. CNN International's anchors come from all over the world, more than 50 languages spoken in the CNN newsrooms in Atlanta alone and nearly 30 nationalities represented on air. And when you add that to the resources of the 33 CNN offices outside the US, you can see that CNN International does not subscribe to one culture, value or assumption. All of our staff have one motivation and challenge to find and deliver news of the highest journalistic values.”

Richard Porter, BBCWN: “We have 80 years of history and we have the culture that comes with it. All the values that we know. I mean mostly those values are very good thing. We have a very strong set of assumed values about the need to be independent and accurate and fair and responsible and sensible and intelligent. They are kind of instinctive values about what we do but that also makes a difference to how we approach things and the approach we take.”

Al Anstey, AJE: “We are international, inquisitive. We have a devil’s advocate element. We think outside the box. We evaluate each story on its own merit so there should be no inherit bias in the story selection whether it be geographical or political.”

Viewing the selected news segments revealed a possible contributory element of institutional culture: the nationality and race of the anchors and reporters (of the specific package selected).

One very important test of “global perspective” arguably is a diverse makeup of staff. The more culturally diverse the make-up of each network’s staff, the more substance each could then have to claim that they offer a “global perspective”. It would be more difficult to assert the claim of offering a “global perspective” without such a mix. The backgrounds of these individuals may indicate who is in attendance at key editorial decision making meetings and who contributes to story selection (see Table 1.7).

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<sup>52</sup> Pintak, Lawrence, “Al-Jazeera English: Day One Report Card”, *CommonDreams.org* (2006)

Table 1.7 Anchors/reporters

	Western	Non Western		black	white	Middle Eastern	Asian
CNNI	9	2		1	6	2	1
BBCWN	6				6		
AJE	4	1			1		4

In the sample that I watched, CNNI and AJE appeared to achieve their desired aim of a “global perspective” via this factor of diversity, but this was not the case for BBCWN. At least in the segments viewed, their presenters and anchors lived up to former Director General Greg Dyke’s claim of the BBC being “hideously white”.<sup>53</sup> Remaining true to the American commitment to diversity, CNNI almost resembles a Benetton ad. AJE’s mix was moderate. What was fascinating is that despite AJE and CNNI looking good on paper, and working hard to “tick all the boxes” – bureaus all over the world, diverse work force, good representation of minorities - they still have huge erroneous perceptions to overcome when it comes to their content being viewed as pro American or pro Arab. BBCWN on the other hand has maintained the trusted brand for so long - often singled out as the one among the three for providing a true global perspective - that they are rarely questioned about its mix of staff. It is often believed that it is only incidental that its headquarters and sole broadcasting centre are based in London. But the exclusive white British makeup seen in the selected broadcasts prompts the question of whether it is the BBC’s reputation that has allowed them to continue to be so popular and perceived as globally representative for so long?

<sup>53</sup> The segments might not be representative of the wider picture. BBC World News says that four out of their ten regular news presenters each day come from an ethnic minority.

## CONCLUSION

From all of the data, I identified a correlation between the tone, rhetoric, make up of staff and institutional culture on the one hand and the editorial decision making and allocation of resources on the other. This does not prove that there is a direct causation between philosophy and content as it is likely there are other equally pertinent variables, but it is a correlation nonetheless. All three organisations assert the same mission: to serve the public, to reach audiences and most notably to achieve a global perspective. However, the research shows that an identical mission can be interpreted in different ways and as a result can give rise to very different priorities, structures, processes, and output. As a result, while I believe that the three channels all share the same primary driver (institutional culture), their respective secondary drivers are key to their distinctive characteristics.

“An organisation’s strategic processes and priorities can only extend as far as culture ‘permits’” Lucy Kung-Shankleman<sup>54</sup>

Institutional culture is defined here as “a paradigm of interrelated and unconscious shared assumptions which directs how members of that organisation think, feel and act<sup>55</sup>”. Moreover for the purposes of this research, institutional culture is also viewed as being derived from each channel’s funding model and cultural legacy.

CNNI is typified by its “American, can-do culture<sup>56</sup>”; BBCWN, carries the “burden of its history<sup>57</sup>” and inhibiting pride<sup>58</sup>, with much of its culture reliant on its high performance in the past; whereas AJE’s “underdog mentality” and “culture of inferiority... spurs it towards extremes of... creativity and risk-taking<sup>59</sup>”.

CNNI’s secondary, distinguishing driver is its audience (and from this the significance of its commercial funding model as a driver can be derived). “The audience, regardless of

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<sup>54</sup> Kung-Shankleman, Lucy, *Inside the BBC and CNN: Managing Media Organisations*, p200 (2000)

<sup>55</sup> Schein, Edgar H., *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (1992)

<sup>56</sup> Flournoy, Don M. and Stewart, Robert K., *CNN: Making News in the Global Market*, p124 (1997)  
[“Chris Cramer, who had had plenty of opportunity to observe the Turner culture from afar during his years at the BBC, said he finds the Turner/ CNN culture “extremely teamly”: The notion of team working is real here, very very inclusive, even for outsiders like myself. There is a desire here for you to succeed, not fail, and I come from a culture where they like you to fail. Very much an information-sharing culture not an information-is power culture. The notion of failure does not exist. I am not sure it is in their dictionary.”]

<sup>57</sup> Richard Porter, interview, “We have 80 years of history and we have the culture that comes with it.” 2010

<sup>58</sup> Moss Kanter, R., *The Change Masters: Corporate Entrepreneurs at Work*, “based on high performance in the past, [where organisation members] feel they belong to a meaningful entity.. can realise cherished values by their contributions.. and pride creates self-reinforcing upward cycle – performance stimulating pride stimulating performance.” – all feature [of these traits] prominently in the BBC’s culture. However, translated to a different context, they are less than positive, contributing, amongst other things to insularity and inflexibility. pgs149-151 (1984) [as cited in Kung-Shankleman, Lucy, *Inside the BBC and CNN: Managing Media Organisations*, p202 (2000)]

<sup>59</sup> Kung-Shankleman, Lucy, *Inside the BBC and CNN: Managing Media Organisations*, Kung-Shankleman describes CNN as thus but can be applied to AJE in its position as newcomer taking on heavyweights and wanting to alter status quo and flow of information from South to North, p202 (2000)



the medium, has not been historically passive or inconsequential in shaping its participation in, or the content of, popular media.<sup>60</sup> In his paper, “The Advantages and Limitations of a Focus on Audience in Media Studies”, Philip J. Hanes pinpoints the integral relationship between a producer (in this case a broadcaster) and their audience. “The producers of media texts often work with an image of the audience and what it wants. Therefore, a focus on audience is advantageous, as the media must work to satisfy the audience.”<sup>61</sup> Not only did CNNI’s Managing Director, Tony Maddox, emphasize the immense importance the channel places on its audience – its consistently high viewing figures, making them the most watched international news channel globally – but the highly stylized nature of its output indicates the relevance placed on market-driven journalism<sup>62</sup>.

Moreover, the resonating impact of CNNI’s founder cannot be overlooked. Ted Turner is considered a maverick, intense, emotional and even swashbuckling. All of these characteristics remain as evident today as when he founded the domestic network and later the international channel some thirty years ago. The bold and dynamic output seen on CNNI is very much the hopes and aspirations of Ted Turner made real. Journalist Joshua Hammer describes Ted Turner and his empire brilliantly if pithily: “If Marshall McLuhan’s global village exists, its capital is the CNN headquarters in Atlanta.”<sup>63</sup>

While CNNI’s primary and secondary drivers differ, BBCWN’s primary and secondary drivers both clearly point to culture at being the main influence behind broadcast output. The way in which it is funded does play a role as it faces similar commercial pressures as CNNI. However, the manner in which it chooses to respond to those pressures differs greatly. The channel’s reputation, roots in public service ethos<sup>64</sup> and its commitment to honouring its founder, Lord John Reith, all derive from its institutional culture.

The BBC is nothing if not its reputation. The same undoubtedly holds true for its sister network BBC World News. Despite this study’s limited findings that revealed BBCWN’s conflicting rhetoric, a lack of in-depth reports and an absence of global perspective, the channel remains hugely popular and respected. This is largely due to the high level of trust audiences have maintained in the channel over the years. According to Daya K. Thussu, in his book *News as Entertainment: The Rise of Global Infotainment*, BBC is the most trusted global news brand garnering the highest vote of 48%, (CNN received 44% and AJE 23%).

Another aspect of the channel that may well be impacting output is the lack of diversity among the journalists and individuals chosen for interviews/soundbites noted in Tables 1.5 and 1.7. The “hideously white” environment referred to by former Director General, Greg Dyke and the old boys club, which Today programme editor, Ceri Thomas, inferred

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<sup>60</sup> Ball-Rokeach, S. and Cantor, M., *Media, Audience and Social Structure*, p200 (1986)

<sup>61</sup> Hanes, Philip J., *The Advantages and Limitations of a Focus on Audience in Media Studies* (2000)

<sup>62</sup> Maddox, Tony, interview, “We are a commercial business, there is no safety net for us, if we fail to deliver the audience, we can’t deliver to advertisers and distributors.” (2010)

<sup>63</sup> Hammer, Joshua, “Triumphant Ted Turner, the Swashbuckling Media Visionary Brightened Our Hopes for a Global Village”, *Playboy* (37) p76 (1990)

<sup>64</sup> To not simply entertain, but inform opinion and develop tastes with integrity and high editorial ambitions

when he recently alleged that women did not have a thick enough “hide” or skillset to prosper in the tougher BBC jobs,<sup>65</sup> seems to have had an impact on those who are selected for hire and who are deemed “experts”.

Moreover, the channel’s roots in public service run deep. Its founder Lord Reith imposed his own personal, deeply religious, code of ethics on the organisation that included a deeply held desire to “improve” the public. This is reflected in Professor Friedland’s earlier observation: “Historically, the BBC has maintained an air of high culture, and high mindedness.<sup>66</sup>” BBCWN’s approach to audience and output, in some respects, continues to reflect Lord Reith’s belief that “Few [listeners] know what they want, and few what they need.<sup>67</sup>”

At barely four years old, AJE is still very much finding its feet. It was difficult to pinpoint its main driver. It is most likely institutional culture with influences from its funding, founder and legacy from its sister channel. These determinants will nevertheless evolve over time as the channel solidifies its identity.

The question of its identity is part of the uncertainty of understanding the core motivations of AJE. Long-standing tension between AJE and its long established sister channel Al Jazeera Arabic (AJA) concerning conflicting cultural ideologies have often been reported. As Ben Dowell wrote in *The Guardian*, “It is said by one source that executives on the main Arabic al-Jazeera network are trying to exert more control over the English-language channel, which is mainly staffed by western journalists.<sup>68</sup>”

AJE’s identity crisis started very early on when at the last minute before launching, the channel suddenly changed its name from Al Jazeera International to Al Jazeera English due to ructions between AJA’s and AJE’s management teams.<sup>69</sup> In his essay, *Counter Hegemonic News*, while praising the channel for offering a counter perspective to the dominant networks, James Painter had difficulty trying to identify what exactly defines AJE. He wrote: “It is aiming to offer something different to the BBC and CNN, albeit without a strongly partisan perspective. Its distinctiveness lies more in this new editorial perspective than any other aspect of the channel. The precise nature of its editorial vision is hard to pin down at times<sup>70</sup>”.

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<sup>65</sup> Mills, Eleanor, “Dear BBC, Women Vote Too”, *Sunday Times* (2010) [Only 20 percent of BBC Radio 4’s flagship programme, Today, features a female presenter or reporter. *Sunday Times* columnist Eleanor Mills reacted to Ceri Thomas’s explanation of the shortfall thus: “That’s right, the poor fairy-headed girlies just can’t cut it with the big boys, can they? We can’t be trusted to talk to politicians unless it’s on Mumsnet about biscuits. Let’s just all stay at home and bake cupcakes and read bedtime stories like proper ladies, shall we? And perhaps, if it’s okay with you and not too challenging, we might pop up occasionally to talk about frocks or raising children — or, I don’t know, gardening.”]

<sup>66</sup> Friedland, Lewis A., *Covering the World: International Television News Services*, p31 (1993)

<sup>67</sup> Congdon, T. *et al*, *Paying for Broadcasting*, pxvii (1992)

<sup>68</sup> Dowell, Ben, “Dilluisioned of Doha”, *The Guardian* (2008)

<sup>69</sup> *ibid*, [“‘This was one of the most significant events and took away in a stroke the real independence that al-Jazeera International stood for,’ said a staff insider about the decision.”]

<sup>70</sup> Painter, James, *Counter-Hegemonic News: A case study of Al-Jazeera English and Telesur*, p6 (2008)

Dan Sabbagh, when he was Media Editor of *The Times*, also addressed the ambiguity of who exactly is AJE's audience. He wrote: "[I]t was never clear who the viewer was: outside Africa and Asia, resources were stretched. The mix of news could only have pleased diehard internationalists; most people also want a good dollop of news from home, but there was little from the US or Britain, where many English-speaking viewers are likely to be. There was also precious little marketing or viewing data."<sup>71</sup>

Unlike CNNI and BBCWN, AJE has the luxury to take its time to figure out what its editorial objectives definitively are, who its audience is and assert its independence from its sister channel during this "teething" stage because it does not rely on advertisers anywhere to the same degree as its competitors. Not having the burden of the commercial pressures that are growing in all areas of the Western media, and instead relying mainly on its private funding, enables the channel to produce its challenging and diverse broadcasts. Its funding model enables AJE to practice its commitment to provide a counter hegemonic perspective while simultaneously working to establish its identity as it continues to prove itself<sup>72</sup>.

As the way in which the public receives its news and information continues to evolve, it will be interesting to note how these channels transform in response. It is likely that not only will their key drivers change, but ones not mentioned in this research may surface. Again, as this study is limited and the conclusions are tentative, it would be ideal to continue the research by examining a greater number of news segments over an extended period of time. Additionally, it is worth examining the thesis posed from an economic perspective and analyse how much these channels spend on which region and then cross-referencing this with the effect it has on output.

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<sup>71</sup> Sabbagh, Dan, "Us-and-them syndrome eats away at al-Jazeera English", *The Times* (2008)

<sup>72</sup> Powers, Shawn and el-Nawawy, Mohammed, "Al-Jazeera English and Global News Networks: Clash of Civilizations", *Media, War & Conflict* (2) p271 (2009) ["Veronica Pedrosa, an AJE anchor in Kuala Lumpur, said: AJE is somewhat freer to report without a kind of projection of who its viewer is. It's not just concerned with viewership and ratings as CNN and BBC worldwide, because it is funded by the government of Qatar as opposed to being commercially driven, it doesn't have stockholders it needs to answer to. It's also trying to prove itself. I remember that in my job interview for my current position, I asked my boss: 'So if you're not worried about viewers, if you're not worried about money, what is going to be the gauge of your success?' He responded: 'well, high quality journalism'."]

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