

NOW ON YOUTUBE: RECEPTION OF AL JAZEERA ENGLISH ON THE VIDEO SHARING SOCIAL NETWORK SITE

Muhammad Abdul-Mageed
Department of Linguistics and
School of Library & Information Science,
Indiana University,
Bloomington,
USA

Abstract

Social network sites (SNSs) have recently gained high popularity among users and constitute an area of increasing interest for researchers from different disciplines. YouTube, the video sharing site owned by Google, is also the most significant video-based tool on the Web that provides users with multiple affordances for socializing and is therefore an example of a SNS. Although news making organizations have been using SNS to reach out to Web users for quite some time now, there is surprisingly no research that I know of that investigates this phenomenon. The controversial, yet highly influential (see e.g., El-Nawawy & Iskander, 2003; Zayani & Saraoui, 2007), bilingual news network Al Jazeera has been on the forefront as an appropriator of YouTube as a tool for communicating its message. Reasons behind Al Jazeera English's launch of its YouTube channel include its inability to secure a deal with a cable television company to broadcast within the U.S. The network is accused of spreading anti-American and anti-Israel propaganda, and hence cable television companies within the U.S. have been reluctant to carry the channel. To this date, however, it is not clear how the network's YouTube channel is being received in the English-speaking world generally or in the U.S. specifically. This paper is a first attempt toward investigating this specific issue of reception in the US.

More specifically, the goal of this paper is to identify the user groups, evaluations, and types of addressees related to comments on the Al Jazeera English YouTube channel via answering the following three main research questions:

- RQ1:** To what geographical regions do commenters on Al Jazeera English's YouTube videos belong?
- RQ2:** What are the evaluations (i.e., positive, negative, or neutral) that characterize comments on Al Jazeera English YouTube videos?
- RQ3:** What (who) are the addressees targeted by comments on Al Jazeera English YouTube videos?

In addition, I attempt to answer some intersections of these questions (i.e., who are the addressees by commenter group?, what are the types of evaluations by commenter group?, and what are the types of evaluation and addressees by commenter group?).

A content analysis (Bauer 2000; Herring, 2009) was employed to investigate these facets in a corpus of 1000 comments on 50 videos produced by Al Jazeera English and made available to users over the network's YouTube channel. Results show that

commenters clustered in Western English-speaking countries, especially the U.S. and UK. Commenters were found to address one another most of the time, but also other commenters and, to a lesser degree, the Al Jazeera English channel. Intricate patterns of attitudes toward Al Jazeera were found to exist. For example, U.S. users were found to target the network with far more negative (%=60) than positive (%=12) comments.

References

- Bauer, M. (2000). Classical content analysis: A review. In *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound*. M. Bauer & G. Gaskell (Eds). Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 131-151.
- El-Nawawy, M., & Iskandar, A. (2003). *Al-Jazeera: The story of the network that is rattling governments and redefining modern journalism*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Herring, S. C. (In press, 2009). Web content analysis: Expanding the paradigm. In J. Hunsinger, M. Allen, & L. Klastrup (Eds.). *The International Handbook of Internet Research*. Springer Verlag. Preprint: <http://ella.slis.indiana.edu/~herring/webca.2008.pdf>.
- Zayani, M., & Sahraoui, S. (2007). *The culture of Al Jazeera: Inside an Arab media giant*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.