

Credibility of Televised News in Libya: Are International News Services Trusted More than Local News Services?

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Abstract

This paper reports survey findings on Libyan university students' perceptions of the credibility of two local channels – *Al Jamahiriya TV* and *Al Libiya TV* – and two pan-Arab television news channels – *Al Jazeera TV* and *Al Arabiya TV*. Respondents were asked to evaluate the credibility of these televised news services on a series of five-point bipolar scales (e.g., fair or unfair). In general, the pan-Arab television news services were given higher credibility scores than the local television news services. Higher credibility ratings however were significantly correlated with an increased likelihood of reported watching of both local television news services, but only one of the international television news services (*Al Jazeera TV*).

Keywords: News credibility, Arab media, Libyan TV, young adults, *Al Jazeera*, Arab news credibility.

Introduction

There has been major growth in Libya in the volume of news provision in the past 10 years across all major news media, but especially in the broadcast media and the Internet. Among the most prominent developments has been the introduction of satellite television transmissions that have brought pan-Arab world news services to Libyan media consumers. Local televised news services have also been placed on this transmission platform. Since the late 1990s, Libyan audiences have devoted steadily growing patronage to international news services, especially to *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya*. Competing with these news sources from outside the country are two local Libyan television news channels, *Al Jamahiriya* and *Al Libiya*.

These developments have at once opened up a more diverse array of news sources for Libyan news consumers and at the same time posed a threat to indigenous local news services. Pan-Arab world televised news services enjoy more lavish production budgets that result in news programs that hold more appeal to Libyan news audiences. There is also evidence that the international and local television news services exhibit different psychographic profiles in respect of their viewers' motivations for tuning in. This could mean that there is still scope for local services to cater effectively to important niche markets despite the strong competition for channels such as *Al Jazeera*.

Using a sample of undergraduate students drawn from the leading university in Libya, this paper investigates the importance of the perceived credibility of certain TV news services as a factor to that may drive their consumption. Thus, the main focus of this research was to examine whether students' perceptions of these news sources encouraged them to use them more often than those perceived in less favorable terms. This assumption was reinforced by prior evidence that the more news consumers believed in a TV news service, the more likely they are they tune into it (Tsfati and Cappella, 2003). The paper also compares the relative perceived credibility and use of news from local and non-local TV services in Libya.

Overview of Libyan Television

Libyan TV services began in 1968, using human and technical resources co-opted from radio broadcast services. Tripoli and Benghazi were the only two areas initially covered by television broadcast transmissions. After the revolution in 1969, Libyan television went

through a period of change. As a result, the television industry and its employees had to follow official government policies. Television was accorded special importance because it was seen as a useful tool to develop society and to inform the public about new political targets .

From 1990, satellite TV was introduced and offered Libyan viewers a more diverse range of programs, which they readily adopted. The Libyan government permitted the spread of satellite TV reception equipment. These new channels quickly attracted local audiences and supplanted local TV services in public affection. Libyan people generally were able to obtain more of their news from different satellite TV channels than from local TV services. Even when local services were available on the same satellite technology platform as international services, the latter commanded far greater audience shares .

Since 2000, there has been a dramatic expansion of news provision in Libya and this has been manifest most of all on television . As of 2006, more than 14 Libyan satellite TV channels were established. The Libyan news services which faced the brunt of this challenge from abroad were those provided by *Al Jamahiriya*, *Al Libiya* and *Al Shbabiya*. *Al Shbabiya* was launched only in 2008 and is owned by the state. It only broadcasts programs that are related to young adults. Moreover, the majority of its programs are music videos, traditional and modern music and some newscasts about young people across the world.

Al Jamahiriya TV was established in 1996, and it is owned by the state. The service used to be the main news provider in the country until the emergence of satellite TV channels. It offers news coverage of international appeal and provides more space to local affairs than international ones. However, *Al Jamahiriya* now airs a diverse range of programs such as cultural, entertainment, arts, drama serials, and sports. It broadcasts two different news programs for foreigners, one of which is newscast in English and another in French. *News at Nine-Thirty* is the main evening news program broadcast daily. For a long period this program has been considered to be the most watched newscast in the country, but since 2007 it has been overtaken by *Al Libiya* TV.

Al Libiya TV was established as the first privately owned broadcaster in Libya in 2007. It was supported by *Al Gadhafi's* son, *Saif al-Islam* . The channel consists of a group of professionals known to operate at the forefront of new television developments. It was seen as introducing a new look to Libya's media and providing alternative news and diversity

programs. *Al Libiya* was the first satellite TV channel to offer professional news programs and entertainment to its Libyan audience. It was also the first to break the taboo of discussing issues related to the affairs of the regime . However, the channel has faced different obstacles from the state, especially opposition from powerful circles within Libya and even other neighbouring countries, such as Egypt. Up to the start of the 2011 uprisings in Libya, the channel was owned by the Libyan Jamahiriya Broadcasting Corporation (LJBC).

Internationally, there are a number of TV news services that have changed the way in which news is presented and delivered in the Arab world. Even though there are many satellite TV channels broadcasting a diverse array of news programs, a small number of specific pan-Arab TV news services have captured the attention of Arab viewers above all other channels: *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya*. These TV services have arguably been at the forefront of pan-Arab news media since the 2003 Gulf war and have enjoyed relatively high viewership .

Al Jazeera TV is a 24-hour Qatar-based news service that was launched in 1996. It has risen to prominence in the last ten years in light of its daring coverage of Arab social and political interests . Since it began, *Al Jazeera* has attracted and won the minds of millions of Arab viewers . However, while it has come to be regarded as a highly credible news source among Arab viewers it has also earned much anger from Arab and Western governments for the way it has covered major conflicts and served as a mouthpiece for organizations and individuals classed as terrorists . Over the years, *Al Jazeera* has also been criticized for its slanted coverage and its tendency towards sensationalism and demagoguery .

Al Arabiya TV is owned and operated by the Saudi ARA Group, this is a 24-hours-a-day news channel that was launched in 2003. It started with a US\$300 million budget from Saudi Arabia . The channel carries general news, current affairs, business and financial market reports, sports news, and documentaries. *Al Arabiya* is part of the (MBC) group, which consists of MBC One, Two, and Three . Its programs have adopted the ‘unbiased’ vocabulary preferred by Arab and Western governments. Moreover, the main reason for establishing it was to respond to the attack of *Al Jazeera*. Its ambition is to establish itself as the responsible alternative to *Al Jazeera* . Although it aims to provide rational news coverage and avoid ambiguous agendas, it has been criticized for some of its war coverage.

It is important to note that these various TV channels have a number of differences and similarities. For instance, although *Al Jamahiriya* is the main news provider for the Libyans, like some Arab state TV channels, it is not the most popular and attractive channel. *Al Libiya* on the other hand may be seen as an alternative news program to the local viewers that adopts a different style of presentation from the news that *Al Jamahiriya* broadcasts. *Al Jamahiriya* news is often described as boring and not related to Libyan viewers' interests. While *Al Libiya* news seems to be closer to the hearts of Libyans.

With regard to the pan-Arab TV services, *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya* share characteristics such as broadcasting around the clock, adopting Western media news presentation styles, having highly professional teams of journalists, commanding large audiences across the Arab world, and in describing themselves as independent news channels. There are also a number of key differences between them. *Al Arabiya*'s agendas and interests are seen to be closer to those of Arab governments than *Al Jazeera*'s. *Al Arabiya* has adopted an editorial strategy that is sympathetic to the Arab governments. Moreover, *Al Arabiya* claims to offer news that is not tainted by sensationalism nor deliberating provocation. A further observation is that while *Al Jazeera* deals with the news based on Qatar's perspectives, *Al Arabiya* reflects Saudi Arabia's views.

It should be noted that within the Libyan context, at the time of this research it was pertinent to ask questions about the significance of the international news, pan-Arab TV news services to local audiences, and about how they might have shifted allegiances from established local TV news suppliers. Furthermore, one of the study interests was to find out whether there are specific qualities in the eyes of local Libyan audiences that are attached to the pan-Arab TV services that differentiate them from the indigenous TV news services that they had previously had to rely upon. In particular, do the new pan-Arab TV news services represent more credible news sources for Libyan audiences? (Clearly, since the research was carried out, the political circumstances in Libya have changed significantly. Even so, this research still has relevance in helping us to understand whether specific news services can continue to play a significant part in news provision in the future).

Literature Review on Television Credibility

Credibility study has featured as a large part of mass media research for more than five decades . Credibility is observed as a factor that defines the quality of news and can, through defining the reputation of news providers, also potentially plays a part in influencing news consumption . As this paper aimed to look at the importance of credibility ratings to consumption, it is interesting to know whether news sources perceived to higher credibility are used by students the most. Originally, study was focused on the dimensions of sources credibility , and later studies have highlighted variations in the perceived credibility attributed to different media channels . Despite the difficulties in identifying the credibility term, simply put, credibility can be defined as believability; “credible information indicates believable information” . O’Keefe defined media credibility as “judgments made by a perceiver [...] concerning the believability of a communicator” .

A credible news medium can be defined in different aspects. The medium’s reputation among its users as a trustworthy source of information is one important factor; this depends, however, on whether that source has emerged as consistently reliable in terms of the factual accuracy of its reporting and the absence of political bias. Some agree that credibility perceptions come from evaluating multiple dimensions simultaneously . However, in fact credibility relies on an individual’s perceptions .

Theoretically, research has distinguished credibility in two principal realms: the credibility of “source and medium” . The former describes how different adaptations in source characteristics influence individuals’ motivations to modify their attitudes toward certain messages , while the latter is defined as an individual communicator, such as a broadcaster or world leader, which has been described as an individual, group, or organization.

In a similar vein, Tseng and Fogg defined four types of source credibility. The first, presumed credibility, arises from the assumptions of the perceiver. For example, a stereotype about an object or source, ‘Arab state-owned media are generally less credible’, can lead to a credibility judgment. Such as ‘do not believe what the state media say’, absent of any other efforts. Reputed credibility is based on source labels and brands. These sources, such as *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya TV*, are labeled as trustworthy Arab news providers in the Arab world , and are perceived as credible by the label of the brand. Surface credibility is based on a

user's simple inspection of superficial characteristics for example, 'judging *Al Jazeera* by its coverage'. One might argue, for example, that '*Al Jazeera TV* received its high credibility from the way in which it presents its news programs', which influences people or viewers' perceptions of its value and credibility. Finally, experienced credibility is based on a user's first experience with a source over time. For example, by watching a certain TV channel program over time, viewers can assess its competence and trustworthiness. However, experienced credibility may be the most complex method of making credibility judgements, because 'it can be easily changed over time and by situations such as war and conflicts'.

Consistent research evidence has emerged over many years and in many different countries that television is the most trusted source of news out of all major news media. This trust is borne out of a perception that televised news observes the highest standards of objectivity in its news reporting. Despite this long-standing reputation, the quality and relevance of television journalism has been questioned. Arguments have been made for television news to embrace more opinionated discussions of news issues as well as providing accurate, factual reporting.

For news consumers, however, knowing that television news can be trusted to report news stories accurately, comprehensively and impartially lends it a certain authority and meets their broad expectations of the objectivity of television as a news medium. The credibility of television news, however, can be defined and measured in a number of ways. For example, Flanagin and Metzger indicated that credibility varies by medium and types of information sought by people, such as news and entertainment. Other researchers have reported demographic differences, in particular, gender, age, and education, associated with the perceived credibility of specific news sources.

Credibility is one critical component of the standards of objectivity attained. Other important factors in this context comprise elements of factualness such as accuracy, completeness or comprehensiveness, and relevance. In addition, televised news is expected to demonstrate impartiality that is often further defined in terms of the balance and neutrality of its coverage.

Credibility and News Consumption

The literature on the impact of credibility finds that credibility leads to an increased likelihood of cooperative engagement. However, the complexity of the news landscape around the world has evolved as digital technologies have introduced new platforms for news transmission. While once operating in distinct markets, for example, broadcast and print news media now find themselves competing head-on for news consumers on the Internet. In this context, the reputation of news sources has become a branding issue that is no longer simply attached to a specific medium such as television. Johnson and Kaye indicated that the Internet may affect the credibility of the medium as a source of information and entertainment. Abdulla pointed out that newspaper and television news credibility exhibited greater similarity to each other than they did to less credible news found on the Internet.

Increasingly, judgments about the credibility of news are grounded in the established reputation of the named news supplier, regardless of the medium through which news is being communicated. Thus, despite the growth of independent news suppliers in the online world, it is the established news brands such as the BBC and CNN that continue to command large audiences. Within the Arab world, *Al Jazeera* has emerged as a further contender in the international news space that has sought to create a platform for the reporting of news that is not dominated by Western perspectives.

Even the established news brands, however, cannot presume that their reputations are secure. Events can occur that challenge brand images, as the BBC found during the Hutton enquiry into the editorial policies and practices followed by its journalists and their managers. In the United States, evidence has emerged that the major television news networks have experienced a fall in public trust. Hence, news brand reputations need to be continuously reinforced and the corporate agencies that underpin them must be sensitive to the possibilities that just one significant mishap in the quality of their news provision could produce critical damage to brand image. In an increasingly crowded and competitive news marketplace, news suppliers also need to know their audiences and their needs, and ensure that they continue to provide news that is both interesting and relevant.

Past studies have showed that demographic characteristics reveal a different pattern of relationships with TV news consumption and credibility perception. For example, age was positively correlated to the perception of television credibility. Gender was slightly correlated

with the credibility rating of television. Females rated news on television as considerably more credible than males . University students will expose themselves to news information they see as a credible source. If we apply the principles of general credibility to the TV news context, we would expect to find that students who believe a certain TV service to be at higher level of credibility to consume it more than students who believe it is less credible.

Arab News Credibility

Approximately before the mid-1990s, the majority of Arab media were governed financially or politically by government authorities, and Arab audiences had little free access to both speech and news, therefore, they did not expect much trustworthy information from local sources . Most news programs were monitored and media employees were viewed as part of the government system, essentially governmental mouthpieces . That has changed with the coming of satellite TV channels and the Internet in the mid-1990s, as more Western media styles have been copied and adopted by several Arab media organizations such as MBC, *Al Jazeera*, and *Al Arabiya* which adopted the BBC and CNN as a model in developing news broadcasting . People have been able to compare the qualities of different news providers (local versus international). For example, *Al Jazeera* apparently is a news provider that attracts Arab audiences and presents its news information in a way that is different from Arab governmental perspectives ; ‘it is preferred by more Arab TV viewers than any other channel’ . The new era of Arab satellite TV services is generally seen, in fact, ‘to represent Arab viewers and interests’ . Tsftati and Cappella described a similar situation to that of *Al Jazeera TV* by stating that when media users trust ordinary media, they typically consume more news, but ‘if they are suspicious of the truth of media outputs, they might seek alternatives’ .

In terms of the credibility of source, *Al Jazeera* is also ranked as the most watched channel in the Arab world, followed by *Al Arabiya*, and MBC, and as the most credible sources in Arab nations . It is not surprising that *Al Jazeera* is now a respected as a ‘brand’ in Arab countries and even in the world ; it is claimed that 24 percent of broadband users in the US access the channel’s services . This study aims to investigate whether credibility perceptions are related to reported viewing of television news services by Libyan students. In

other words, it looks at whether news sources perceived by university students as having higher credibility are also used the most.

The research reported in this paper extends earlier work by examining further the brand images of local and international television news services in Libya. On this occasion, 'brand' is defined in terms of the perceived credibility of these news services. An 11-item credibility ratings scale was developed with inputs from previous studies and was informed by preliminary pilot work. These measures were applied to four satellite television channels – *Al Jamahiriya*, *Al Libiya*, *Al Jazeera*, and *Al Arabiya* – all broadcast in Libya. They were designed to provide answers to four important research questions:

RQ1. In general, how credible do university students perceive news on TV to be?

RQ2. Are some TV news services seen as more credible than others?

RQ3. How do local TV news services compare with international TV news services in terms of their perceived credibility?

RQ4. Is perceived credibility significantly related to level of consumption of different news sources?

The research was confined to a university student population and hence does not attempt to represent the views of Libyan adults outside higher education. Nevertheless, the study is important because the availability of such empirical evidence in Libya is scarce, the majority of the country's population is aged under 25, and the better educated among these will provide most of the country's political and business leaders in the future. It should also be noted that the findings reported here were collected before the unrest that the country experienced from February 2011.

Methodology

A survey was carried out in December 2009 with a sample of 400 university students at *Al-Fateh* University, which is the largest university in Libya. A stratified random sampling approach was applied to the university's student population, with sampling strata set by gender and faculty. The latter represented 14 university faculties at different study levels. A self-completion questionnaire was administered in the university with either the first author or an assistant as moderator.

Within each faculty, a simple random was selected to produce the target total sample of 400 undergraduate students. To illustrate the sampling process, for example in the Faculty of Engineering the total number of students was 7,204. This number was divided by the total number of university students, 40,893, to compute its percentage contribution to the total university population. In this case, it represented 17.60% of all students at the faculty. This percentage figure was set as the quota for recruitment from this faculty, by dividing it by the target sample figure of 400 respondents. In this case, the figure came to 70 students. This process was repeated across all faculties. The majority of the questionnaires were filled out during break times, after finishing lectures, or at some other time when it was convenient for the participants to answer.

The questionnaire obtained details about respondents' personal demographic attributes (as indicated in relation to the sampling strata above), study details, and reported consumption of different news media in Libya. A range of other questions were asked about respondents' news interests, motives for using different news media and perceptions of the importance of different types of news. Data on the latter measures are not reported in this paper, which focuses on young Libyan adults' perceptions of the credibility of two local (*Al Jamahiriya*, *Al Libiya*) and two pan-Arab world (*Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya*) satellite television news services and how these perceptions link to reported watching of these services.

The 11 credibility scale items asked respondents to evaluate each of the four television news services on the following dimensions: is fair or unfair; is biased or unbiased; is misleading; tells the whole story; relevant to me; is accurate or inaccurate; is thorough or superficial; separates facts and opinions; concerned about the public interest; is factual or opinionated; and, has well-trained versus poorly-trained reporters. Respondents were asked to rate each of these characteristics along a five-point scale. Items were coded or recoded so that they were scaled in the same direction with five as the highest possible rating (positive rating) and one the lowest possible rating (negative rating).

Respondents were asked to state how often they used these television news services for news. The reported frequency of use responses was recorded originally on a five-point scale from 'daily' (1) to 'never' (5). After initial frequency distributions were computed, this scale was combined to a three-point scale (with scoring reversed), by combining 'daily', '4-6 days per week' to become *Daily* (3) and combining '1-3 days per week' and 'less than once a

week' to become *Occasionally* (2) while keeping the 'never' (1) point intact. Collapsing the scale helped to equalize the distribution of respondents across frequency options and avoid the use of data that derived from very small cell sizes.

Finally, respondents were required to provide details about their gender, age, faculty, family members, and their family's monthly incomes. More than half the sample was female (58 percent) and under half was male (42 percent). The average age of the sample was 21. Respondents represented undergraduate levels of 14 faculties of *Al-Fateh* University. 57 percent of the respondents reported that they lived in middle family units of between four to eight people. 30.5 percent of them lived with large family households of more than eight persons, while 11 percent of them lived in small family units of fewer than four. 1.8 percent of respondents reported they lived on their own. Around two-thirds of the respondents (67.5 percent) lived in low-income families earning less than US\$800 monthly and 20.3 percent lived in high-income families earning more than US\$1,600. One in eight of respondents (12.2 percent) lived in middle-income families earning from US\$801 to US\$1,600 monthly. The majority of the respondents reported that they generally consumed news from different sources.

Results

Overall mean credibility ratings were calculated for each television station. Cronbach's Alpha scores were computed across all 11 items in respect of each of the four television news services and achieved high enough scores to indicate high internal consistency between these items (.78 for *Al Jamahiriya*; .75 for *Al Libiya*; .70 for *Al Jazeera*; and .72 for *Al Arabiya*).

In order to understand how university students judged the credibility of news coverage, the study made comparisons between the overall credibility ratings of the four TV news services. Across all four television services, the mean credibility rating was 3.54 (out of five). There were statistically significant differences between the credibility profiles of the pan-Arab TV news services and those originating within Libya. *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya* were generally more highly regarded than even the new local television news operations in terms of credibility. The highest rated service was *Al Jazeera* (M=3.90) followed by *Al Arabiya* (M=3.71) with the two local television services, *Al Libiya TV* (M=3.38) and *Al Jamahiriya TV* (M=3.18), the lowest rated. The finding was significant using *one-way* ANOVA test, $F =$

(1,394) = 133.07, $P < .01$. In general, in response to RQ1, these TV news services were regarded as being fairly credible as information sources. In response to RQ2, however, there were significant differences between them in their relative perceived credibility.

With regard to pan-Arab TV services, a similar result was reported by Jamal and El-Nawawy who found that *Al Jazeera* TV was preferred by more Arab viewers than any other channel. Al-Asfar also found that *Al Jazeera* was the most popular television channel with Libyan audiences and other findings indicated that this channel was seen as most credible source of news. The differing credibility profiles of local versus pan-Arab television news services were also consistent with earlier research showing that international television news channels tend to attract distinctive opinions from those associated with local news media.

Further analyzes were carried out on these bipolar-type items using a repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) test in order to determine whether the mean differences between different television news channels were significant. The repeated measure, ANOVA, provides supporting evidence that there were significant differences in regarding different television news services. Significant differences emerged on seven out of the 11 measures used here. These results are summarized in Table 1

Credibility items	Jamahiriya	Libiya	Jazeera	Arabiya	F-value
Fair or unfair	3.41 ^a	3.70 ^{ab}	4.31 ^{abc}	4.13 ^{abc}	78.015*
Tells the whole story	3.22 ^a	3.33 ^b	4.15 ^{ab}	3.97 ^{ab}	87.420*
Accurate or inaccurate	2.96 ^a	3.37 ^{ab}	4.24 ^{abc}	3.97 ^{abc}	152.933*
Thorough or superficial	2.85 ^a	3.27 ^{ab}	4.23 ^{abc}	4.00 ^{abc}	188.688*
Separates fact and opinion	3.24 ^a	3.25 ^b	3.70 ^{ab}	3.59 ^{ab}	21.699*
Factual or opinionated	3.58 ^a	3.72 ^b	4.37 ^{ab}	4.24 ^{ab}	86.348*
Well-trained reporters	2.69 ^a	3.10 ^{ab}	4.36 ^{abc}	4.13 ^{abc}	254.005*

Note: Means with uncommon superscripts differ significantly at the .05 level. Scores ranged from 1 to 5. - Tests for within-subjects contrasts. * $P < .001$; $df = 1,394$

Table 1 Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for Mean News Credibility Scores

RQ3 asked whether there were differences in the perceived credibility of local versus non-local (or international) Arab TV news services. The results showed that there were. In general, the non-local services were rated more highly, though not on all measures. As shown in Table 1, analyzes of variance revealed significant differences across the four television channels on seven credibility measures. Bonferroni tests on these means indicated the

location of significant perceived credibility differences between *Al Jamahiriya TV* and *Al Jazeera TV*, between *Al Jamahiriya TV* and *Al Arabiya TV*, between *Al Jamahiriya TV* and *Al Libiya TV*, between *Al Libiya TV* and *Al Jazeera TV*, between *Al Libiya TV* and *Al Arabiya TV*, and between *Al Libiya TV* and *Al Jamahiriya TV*.

Al Libiya was perceived as more credible than *Al Jamahiriya* in respect of factual quality of coverage, fairness, comprehensiveness and overall standard of reporting. *Al Jazeera* was rated as superior to *Al Arabiya* on all seven credibility items. *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya* were also rated significantly higher than both local TV news channels on all seven credibility measures displayed in Table 1.

News Credibility and Consumption

One of the concerns of this study was to find out whether news sources perceived to be higher credibility are the most consumed. It is indicated that those who reportedly spent more time watching a specified TV news service were also usually more likely to rate it higher in terms of its credibility, although this was not true of *Al Arabiya*. To investigate this relationship a series of Pearson *r* correlations were computed between reported frequency of viewing each of the four television news services and perceived credibility score. The results are summarized in Table 2. Only variables between which significant statistical relationships emerged are shown.

Credibility items	Jamahiriya		Libiya		Jazeera		Arabiya	
	<i>r</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>n</i>
Is fair or unfair	.25**	400	.13*	397	.14**	398	.35 ^{ns}	398
Tells the whole story	.21**	400	.06 ^{ns}	397	.11*	398	.08 ^{ns}	398
Relevant to me	.09 ^{ns}	400	.11*	397	.17**	398	.07 ^{ns}	398
Is accurate or inaccurate	.15**	400	.09 ^{ns}	397	.16**	398	.09 ^{ns}	398
Is thorough or superficial	.06 ^{ns}	400	.11*	397	.11*	398	.06 ^{ns}	397
Separates fact and opinion	.20**	399	.04 ^{ns}	397	.02 ^{ns}	398	.03 ^{ns}	398
Concerned about the public interest	.12*	398	.10*	397	.12*	398	.07 ^{ns}	398
Is factual or opinionated	.20**	400	.12*	396	.08 ^{ns}	398	-.04 ^{ns}	398
Has well/poorly-trained reporters	.21**	400	.10 ^{ns}	396	.13**	398	.07 ^{ns}	398

Note: **P* < .05. ***P* < .01. ^{ns} Not significant. Correlation levels 2-tailed

Table 2 Correlations between Perceived Credibility and Consumption of Four Television News Services

With *Al Jamahiriya*, viewing frequency was positively correlated with positive ratings of the channel in terms of being fair, telling the whole story, having well-trained reporters, separating fact from opinion, being factual rather than opinionated, being accurate, and showing concern about the public interest. With *Al Libiya*, greater reported frequency of viewing was associated with more positive ratings for being fair, being factual rather than opinionated, thorough, relevant, and concerned about the public interest.

For *Al Jazeera*, there was an increased likelihood of reported viewing among respondents who rated that channel more positively in terms of being relevant, accurate, fair, having well-trained reporters, concerned about the public interest, telling the whole story, and thorough. With *Al Arabiya*, no significant correlations were found between news credibility ratings and reported viewing of this service.

In general, the higher the positive credibility rating a channel received, the more likely it was to be viewed for both local television news services and for *Al Jazeera*. Credibility perceptions were largely unrelated to how often respondents claimed to watch *Al Arabiya*.

Discussion

Libyan university students were surveyed to assess their opinions about the credibility of local and pan-Arab televised news services broadcast via satellite. In general, all these televised news channels were regarded as providing a 'credible' news service, when scores were averaged across them on a series of evaluative ratings that assessed attributes such as accuracy, fairness, relevance, thoroughness, and the professional standard of reporting. In relation to the first research question, therefore, the findings revealed that television news services in Libya were generally perceived as being credible, but in scoring 3.5 out of 5, they were rated as moderately credible rather than overwhelmingly so.

The second research question asked whether some televised news services were regarded as more credible than others. Further analyzes confirmed that there were differences here between the ways the four televised news channels were rated. The two local services were regarded as less credible than the two non-local services. *Al Jamahiriya* and *Al Libiya* were generally rated as poorer than *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya*. Of the two local TV services, *Al Libiya TV* was more highly regarded than *Al Jamahiriya TV* in terms of credibility. Between *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya*, the former was more highly rated of the two in credibility terms. Ayish found that *Al Jazeera* scored the highest credibility score among UAE students ahead

of *Al Arabiya TV* and other media. The lower credibility of the two local TV services may be because they were less timely than the two pan-Arab TV services that carried live news about current events, as Al-Asfar indicated. These findings emphasize the notion that the more consumers believe a TV service, the more they turn to it. Tsfaty and Cappella pointed out that ‘when audiences believe the mainstream media, they consume more mainstream news. When they disbelieve the media, they seek alternatives’. Yet, respondents might have watched local TV services more for local analyzes into what is happening around them.

The third research question probed further for whether there were differences in ratings of the local versus pan-Arab TV news services. Evidence emerged from this survey that among Libyan students, the two pan-Arab TV news services were more highly regarded than the two local TV services. *Al Jazeera* was especially highly rated across all credibility-related scales used here. The findings were consistent with earlier studies that found that the new international Arab news channel, *Al Jazeera*, was seen as the most credible source of news. Further, Jamal and Melkote observed that *Al Jazeera* has succeeded by enhancing naturalness and credibility to news. This finding also supported earlier Western research that the more consumers trust a source of news the more credible they determine it to be.

The fourth research question asked whether credibility perceptions were related to how much television news services were consumed. It has been reported previously that those people who are heavy users of certain media should be more likely to perceive their preferred media as more credible. In a series of analyzes to explore this issue, credibility perceptions were disaggregated in relation to each of the four televised news services. The findings here revealed that greater perceived credibility was significantly and positively correlated with reported frequencies of viewing television news across a range of credibility ratings for both local television news channels and for *Al Jazeera*. Such relationships were largely absent in the case of reported viewing of *Al Arabiya*. This result confirms the observations of others who have argued that people are more likely to consume a news service that is perceived as a credible source.¹

The two local Libyan television channels, while both similarly considered, were not equally well received. Out of nine credibility-related evaluative ratings that were significantly associated with reported frequency of watching these four televised satellite news services, seven were significant for claimed viewing of *Al Jamahiriya* compared with five that were

significantly linked to claimed viewing of *Al Libiya*. The latter station is the more recently established. What also emerged was that credibility ratings were more powerfully related to the reported viewing of *Al Jamahiriya* than to that of *Al Libiya*.

For the older local station, increased reported viewing was associated with the clarity and quality of the factual information it was perceived to deliver, while these factors were less important as drivers of viewing the newer local station. Instead, the more recently launched service attracted viewers who rated it more highly for the relevance of its coverage. Relevance of coverage did not emerge as significantly related to reported viewing of *Al Jamahiriya*. The presence of reportage that was factual or opinion seemed to be less important for the newer station than the need for it to be clear about *when* it was being factual or opinionated. These findings could suggest that young and well-educated adult Libyan news consumers have an appetite for news that pushes the boundaries and offers different points of view rather than straight factual reporting.

It was clear also that the appeal of *Al Jazeera* was driven not just by the factual quality and perceived professionalism of its reporting (the latter being important also for watching of local television news channels), but also by the relevance and diversity of the discussion of news that went beyond simple factual reportage. What was also important was that the significance of such credibility perceptions for viewing loyalty was not guaranteed even for new international televised news services. The complete absence of any links between these ratings and reported viewing of *Al Arabiya* reinforced this observation. The findings therefore revealed a selective news consumer market in Libya – at least among young and well-educated Libyans – that could articulate clear reasons for its news preferences. They also indicate that there is scope for local and non-local television news services to thrive provided they establish a distinctive brand that resonates at least in part with specific needs and interests of the country's news audiences.

Conclusion

This study comprised exploratory research to investigate public perceptions of the credibility of four TV news services. Undergraduate students were sampled and represented the views of well-educated Libyans about the news carried by local and pan-Arab TV services.

The local service, *Al Libiya TV*, was apparently viewed with suspicion by Libyan students and, thus, was perceived as less credible. This was perhaps because respondents thought any new medium that operates under state control would be no more trustworthy than those that went before it. *Al Jamahiriya TV* has usually been negatively received by most Libyans, who consider it as the mouthpiece of the government and its immediate allies. The centrally controlled editorial policy of these local TV news services meant that both were restricted from being able to compete effectively, in terms of news values and presentation quality, with the two pan-Arab TV services.

Furthermore, this may be why respondents rated *Al Jazeera* as the most credible of the three TV channels compared here. For those respondents, *Al Jazeera* was powerful enough even to match non-Arabic TV channels like the BBC and CNN – a finding consistent with conclusions from past research that indicates that pan-Arab TV news services tended to attract distinctive opinions in contrast to those associated with local news media. The findings also revealed the importance of perceptions of the credibility of news sources for news consumers and their news consumption. Young adult news consumers here regarded those news services rated as more credible as important to them, revealing how their perceptions of quality informs their link with the various news sources available to them. The reputation of a news source was linked to news consumers' views of their personal news awareness, understood in terms of knowledge and understanding of salient issues. This finding gives a subtle and yet powerful measure to assessing the importance of news source credibility in the process of consumption – that is, that such sources are utilized by students in constructing their identities and feature prominently in their interactions with others. More research on these findings is required.

This paper focused on the perception of credibility of different TV news services. Its main strength lies in the fact that it investigated the importance of credibility ratings to consumption in the Arab world, where a dearth of prior evidence exists on this question. It was, however, reliant on the testimonies of students in one university which limits how far we can generalize these results to other population groups. The authors recommend that future research should extend this work to wider populations defined by age and education level. Given the consequences of political change across the Arab world, there is a continuing

need to monitor the impact of the mainstream news media and the trust that Arab people in different Arab nations invest in them.

As a final point, it is important to acknowledge that this research was carried out when the *Gadhafi* regime still governed Libya. Following the events that took place in February 2011, a new government has displaced the old one. It is difficult to predict what the future will hold for Libya at this time. Nevertheless, the findings reported here provide rare insights into the perceptions of a specific sector of the Libyan population about televised news providers. While the government may have changed, the people are still largely the same. The main lessons learned from this research are that Libyan news consumers seek out news sources they believe to be credible. Local TV news provision was far from universally liked and the popularity of new TV services broadcast from beyond Libyan borders indicated an appetite for news that extended far beyond the diet provided by local government controlled services. There is no reason to believe this appetite for diverse news sources will disappear in the new Libya that will emerge in the years ahead.

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i **Note:** when all of the 11 credibility items for each TV services were correlated to how much TV news was viewed. It was found that there were positive correlations between watching all TV news services and perceived them as credible source, for *Al Jamahiriya* was ($r(400) = .22, P < .01$), for *Al Libya* was ($r(397) = .12, P < .05$), for *Al Jazeera* was ($r(398) = .21, P < .01$) and for *Al Arabiya* was ($r(398) = .10, P < .05$, all 2-tailed).

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