

# **BATTLEGROUND**

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# **THE MEDIA**

VOLUME 1 (A-N)

*Edited by Robin Andersen and Jonathan Gray*



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accepted the report's findings to not mandate pricing. The report's conclusions were also partially supported by the U.S. General Accounting Office's October 2003 study (see <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d048.pdf>).

However, the social conservatives in the House Committee, and the vocal à la carte supporter Senator John McCain, chair of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, strongly encouraged the FCC to continue studying the issue. Lending momentum for further study was Powell's announcement in January 2005 that he would resign, and three months later President Bush's appointment of Kevin Martin, an FCC commissioner who had made opposition to indecency a cornerstone of his television policy, to the chairmanship. So the FCC's media bureau went to work on the issue, but instead of conducting additional research it merely revisited portions of the Booz Allen study and identified "problematic assumptions" and "biased analysis." For example, the bureau argued that the Booz Allen report mistakenly assumed that under à la carte, viewers would watch less TV and that diversity would not necessarily decrease because advertisers would likely find niche channels with paying subscribers more valuable.

But the bureau's report is most enthusiastic about saving money for "mainstream" audiences and increasing ratings for the most popular channels. In supply-side economic language that refers to "market efficiencies" and optimizing aggregate "consumer value," the report embraced the likelihood that à la carte would create more choices for "mainstream consumers" but less "niche programming that appeals to a small set of subscribers." What this says to the civil rights organizations and "niche" channels such as Si TV and TV One, which are mostly produced and watched by historically underrepresented groups, is that a properly efficient marketplace, restored by à la carte pricing, would rightly weed out these "over-valued" niche networks (see [http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs\\_public/attachmatch/DOC-263740A1.pdf](http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-263740A1.pdf)).

As Patricia Williams has demonstrated, in conceiving the general viewing public as segregated into "mainstream" and "niche" audiences, we suppress the interests of historically marginalized communities under the guise of a "neutral 'mass' entertainment." Rather than define a mainstream culture that is oblivious to its dominant status across class, gender, and race, against a ghettoized cultural "other," as Williams argues, we should develop "a view of a market in which there are not merely isolated interest groups, of which the 'mass market' may be one, but in which 'mass' accurately reflects the complicated variety of many peoples and connotes 'interactive' and 'accommodative' rather than 'dominant' or even just 'majoritarian.'" Thus, allowing viewers to channel surf across a variety of channels, even ones they do not watch regularly, creates a more diverse representation of our mass culture that is available to all.

#### FROM CONSUMER CHOICE TO CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

Though cable operators have maintained opposition to à la carte, several large systems have offered "family-friendly" bundles, such as Time Warner's "Family Choice Tier," which was made available in March 2006. But waiting for cable

giants like Comcast (which owns TV One) and Time Warner (which owns Si TV) to decide what constitutes diversity and how much we should pay for bundled programming does not solve the structural issues of vertical integration, media conglomeration, and the unequal distribution of advertising dollars for programs that include the perspectives of communities of color. When the progressive Consumers Union and the Free Press support à la carte in opposition to a broad spectrum of communities of color, and they do so by framing the issues using the classical economic language of individual consumer choice (the title of a Consumers Union report supporting à la carte is "Let the Market Decide"), we risk reproducing the abstracted, universalistic discourses of consumer choice and neutral markets that have reinforced current neoliberal free-market structural arrangements rather than invoking the cultural rights of historically disempowered groups and the necessity that we all interact broadly with cultural difference instead of walling off our television viewing through personalized channel subscriptions.

Rather than narrowing viewership of culturally diverse networks such as Si TV through à la carte pricing, perhaps the industry needs prompting to make these diverse networks more widely available. Placed on limited digital tiers, Si TV reached less than 14 million subscribers as of 2007, while close to 80 million households had access to "mainstream" cable/satellite networks. In this case, the cable marketplace, as a space for the general public to participate in the diversity of Latino culture in the United States, falls far short of creating a common space for engaging with cultural difference.

See also Cable Carriage Disputes; Conglomeration and Media Monopolies; Government Censorship and Freedom of Speech; Media Reform; Minority Media Ownership; Obscenity and Indecency; Regulating the Airwaves; Representations of Race; Representations of Women.

#### Note

An earlier version of this article was published in *Flow*, an online journal of television and media: see "A la carte Culture," *Flow* 4, No. 3 (April 2006) at [www.flowtv.org](http://www.flowtv.org).

**Further Reading:** Gripsrud, Jostein, ed. *Television and Common Knowledge*. New York: Routledge, 1999; Lewis, Justin, and Toby Miller, eds. *Cultural Policy Studies: A Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002; Secrest, Lawrence W., and Richard E. Wiley. "Recent Developments in Program Content Regulation." *Federal Communications Law Journal* 57, no. 2 (March 2005): 235-42; Williams, Patricia J. "Metro Broadcasting, Inc. v. FCC: Regrouping in Singular Times." In *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed., Kimberle Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Pelle, and Kendall Thomas, 191-200. New York: The New Press, 1995.

John McMurria

#### ADVERTISING AND PERSUASION

Advertising is the driving force behind American business and the largest industrial economy the world has ever known. It is the mediator between the consumer and the vast array of products available from manufacturers across the

global. As a mode of communication, it employs powerful persuasive strategies designed to convince viewers, readers, and audiences of all media that purchasing products will make them popular, relieve their anxiety, and gratify almost any need. As an aesthetic form, it has been called the art of capitalism, and because of the emotional techniques it often employs, it has been condemned as manipulative and psychologically harmful. Advertising continues to penetrate public space and find new distribution sources with each new, popular media format, and the debate over advertising's influence on society and culture is continually renewed.

With economies of scale, for over a century industrial capitalism has been able to manufacture and deliver commodities to world markets on an unprecedented scale, with Americans comprising the largest market for world goods. The availability of such a quantity of products demands rapid distribution in retail outlets, from high-end department stores to the expanding box stores that now pock the county's landscape. Products must be sold to consumers whose spending consistently outstrips their income, and desire to purchase more products must be continually stimulated. Advertising brings together media and marketing research, extraordinary creative talent and vast audiovisual resources including new computer-based digital technologies, all with the purposes of selling the commodities capitalism has to offer.

### STRATEGIES OF PERSUASION

Often the material differences that distinguish one product from its competitor are slight, and marketers understand that relying simply on product information is not an effective way to instill desire for products. In today's advertisements, the psychological and emotional strategies of persuasion are referred to as the "soft" sell, and they vary greatly from one commercial campaign to another, but many are familiar as recognizable standards.

#### *Celebrity Endorsements and Brand Identity*

The celebrity pitch is ever popular because audiences admire the glamour and often trust those they have come to know through popular media. Products endorsed or used by the familiar faces on TV and in magazines are effective ways of compelling consumers to buy more things. If Michael Jordan likes Nike, and sports fans like Michael Jordan, then those fans will be more inclined to want the products he uses. Behind simple admiration is also the implied promise that sports gear of a particular brand will increase the consumer's chances of better performance. "Liking sports" also becomes a consumer identity, and wearing certain sports gear distinguishes the consumer as a sports fan. Brands associated with particular players and teams further refine these cultural signifiers of identity. In this way, sports clothing of all sorts becomes equally important as a cultural communicator and not just an item of apparel. As a form of symbolic communication, sports gear is worn as much for style as for athletic activity. As products move further away from materiality, and exist as cultural symbols, "style over substance" becomes a quality of consumer culture.

### *Models of Perfection*

For the female consumer of beauty, fashion, and glamour products, celebrity endorsement is also essential. Far more effective than extolling the ingredients or quality of any particular brand of make-up, perfume, or shampoo is the promise that those products are the very ones used by the beautiful models and celebrities that populate the landscape of popular culture. In what is called "latent content," the message implies that the beautiful, perfect models have been transformed by the products into the stunning visions seen in the advertisements; as one cosmetics company teases, "Maybe she's born with it. Maybe it's Maybelline." But consumers are rarely aware that pictures of models have almost always been "touched up" to present perfect images. Graphic digital technology is also used to create larger-than-life advertising images that seem perfect, and along the way cultural standards of beauty become impossible for average consumers to emulate. When women are constantly told they can and should look like the glamorous models in advertisements, it is no wonder that the majority of American women are dissatisfied with their own body image. Underlying many advertising appeals to join the world of beautiful people and fantasy wish fulfillment is the anxiety of not fitting in or living up to the cultural standard.

### *Anxiety*

Some strategies of persuasion play on personal anxieties, especially those for hygiene products. The word halitosis entered the cultural lexicon in early Listerine advertisements, and since then, dandruff, bad breath, and hair loss have all been portrayed as impediments to social acceptance, mobility, and fulfilling

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### MINORITY REPORT: FUTURISTIC VISIONS OF CONSUMER CULTURE

In preparation for the film *Minority Report*, Tom Cruise and the film's creators reportedly consulted with marketing and advertising professionals in order to more accurately portray what the world of consumer culture might look like in the year 2050. In *Minority Report*, the body becomes branded and the market penetrates every aspect of life and body. In the film Cruise is seen walking through a Gap store as sensors automatically "read" the individual human code identified in his irises. An automated voice reminds him of his last purchase in an attempt to interest him in another. Some of the most chilling scenes in the movie revolve around the idea that marketing information is inscribed within the human body, specifically within the eyeball. The eye-reading technology exists within a total information society, and that information has a dual purpose. It is also used for state control. In one of the most gruesome sequences, the film presents a dystopian future in which the commercial information is shared with a repressive governing regime with severe consequences to individual liberty. As he struggles to maintain his freedom, Cruise's character is forced to have his eyes brutally removed. The film is fiction and it depicts an extreme case, but it serves as a warning of the dangers of accumulating, cross-referencing, and centralizing huge amounts of personal data on individual citizens and making it available to those who would use it for political purposes.

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interpersonal relationships. Products are offered as the solutions to these personal and social problems. Mothers who wash their children's clothes in certain brands of detergent are assured happy, healthy kids who will continue to love them while wearing their clean, white, stain-free garments. Such promises are often made through compelling scenarios depicted visually on television and in magazines. A variety of ads that play on guilt are directed toward parents. From the OnStar automotive assistance system to airbags and tires, these ads make the point that if you love your children you will use these products. Children sometimes featured sitting in the backseat talk about how happy they are that their Dad bought a particular car.

### *Language of Association*

Images are key to the persuasive strategies of advertising. Visual messages can make associations and create implied meanings without advertisers ever having to make direct promises about the quality of their products. Taking a picture of gold nuggets placed next to coffee beans and adding the caption, "The Gold Standard in Coffee," allows the consumer to associate the value of gold with that of coffee. The photograph and caption transfer the cultural value of gold onto the brand of coffee being advertised. But even a casual "decoding" or "textual analysis" of the ad can reveal the false nature of the communication. Under logical and visual analysis, it becomes clear that the quality of a mined metal has little to do with the flavorful taste of an agricultural product, and that gold and coffee have little real connection. Yet visual and verbal associations allow advertisers to make claims about products without having to verify them or state them directly. In this way, consumers often accept obvious exaggerations without critically evaluating them. Media literacy has become an important educational curriculum designed to help the public, especially children, understand the ways in which persuasion carries implied meanings that do not hold up under scrutiny.

### *The Promise of Belonging through Consumption*

With the slogan "Pepsi, The Choice of a New Generation," Madison Avenue launched the lifestyle ads of the 1970s. Such ads often promised satisfaction through group consumption. A picture of a group of friends all wearing the same Dockers khakis, or all drinking the same soda, is an image of belonging. Products confer a sense of group identity and a way to recognize other members of the same peer group, now defined as a consumption subgroup. The ad's promise of fulfilling interpersonal relationships is made visually. Because of the documentary nature of the photograph, it is indisputable that the consumption subgroup is content being together. However, if these implied messages were stated directly, "Wear these jeans and you will have the friends you want," or "The people who drink Coke have more friends," the assertion would be much less credible and therefore much less effective as persuasion. In this way, marketing strategies and aesthetic design work together to create more powerful modes of persuasive communication, both visual and verbal.

### *Marketing Segmentation*

Lifestyle ads were designed to appeal to consumption subgroups, and since then the consuming public has been increasingly differentiated into smaller groups of people that share similar demographics, such as age, gender, race, education, and income. Market researchers look for other consumption indicators as well, and "psychographics" add values, beliefs, opinions, and behavioral practices to the mix. Carving up what was once a huge, ill-defined mass public into smaller groups has allowed the advertising industry to target consumers with messages specifically designed to more clearly defined tastes. Selling products by associating them with the values and sensibilities of various subgroups is referred to as "marketing stratification" and remains dominant within the industry. Agencies and their clients are willing to pay higher ad rates for messages they can be confident will reach the people most likely to be persuaded by the targeted message. With each new marketing campaign, a once-broad public continues to be refined into specific market segments.

Such marketing practices work hand-in-hand with media and have influenced the economics and program design of not only broadcast and cable media, but radio, magazines, and Internet content as well. With its multiple channels, cable television originated as a "narrowcasting" medium, in which programming directed at specific audiences dovetailed with the advertising created to appeal to those same tastes and sensibilities. In this way viewers were defined as consumers and targeted as markets for specific products. As numbers of viewers are sold to advertisers through rating, and with higher rates for audiences "primed" with compatible programming, television, radio, and other media are increasingly defined as marketing mediums as well as entertainment or information sources. These marketing practices and the merger of media content with advertising campaigns paved the way for the insertion of advertising into programs themselves, and product placement became a dominant commercial practice during the last two decades of the twentieth century.

### *Commercializing the Media*

The deregulation of broadcasting, beginning in the early 1980s, lifted restrictions on the amount of advertising that could be aired on television. This resulted in the further commercialization of programming and the development of program-length commercials, which characterize many shows that feature products from beginning to end. Infomercials—long-form advertisements that mimic the formats of other shows, especially news and information programming—became popular on late-night television and cable services alike. Public interest groups are critical of these developments and have appealed to the Federal Communications Commission for regulations that would force these shows to be identified as commercially designed programs. Media watch groups have also criticized new hybrids of commercial media such as advertisements produced in public relations firms disguised as information segments that now frequently air on local news programs.

## ADBUSTERS AND "CULTURE JAMMING"

Founded in 1989 by Kalle Lasn and Bill Schmalz in Vancouver, Canada, Adbusters is an anti-consumerist organization that has mixed education, research, activism, and art to complain about advertising's many excesses. Adbusters is particularly well known for its parodic advertisements that mock the bravado, false promises, and absurd logic of ads. Thus, for instance, taking aim at Camel cigarettes' animated character Joe Camel, a series of Adbusters ads follow "Joe Chemo," showing him hospitalized by his addiction. Another parodic ad for Calvin Klein's Obsession depicts, in classic black-and-white photography style, a young woman bent over a toilet bowl, offering the suggestion of a more sinister "obsession" with thinness fueled by Calvin Klein ads. Adbusters publishes a reader-supported magazine, and has also been instrumental in launching the annual Buy Nothing Day and TV Turnoff Week.

Adbusters and its fellow culture-jammers aim to rob advertising signs, symbols, and logos of their power, and to implore citizens to read ads critically. But in a sign of how invested media corporations are in pursuing advertising by making their messages ad-friendly, commercial broadcasters in both the United States and Canada have refused to play Adbusters's anti-ads. Thus, other culture-jamming groups have taken to "repurposing" outdoor advertising and to reclaiming public space, using pranks, anti-ads, and media events to "jam" advertising. One long-standing group, the San Francisco Billboard Liberation Front, adds critical commentary, often amusing and witty, to billboards. For example, a McDonald's ad depicting a breakfast sandwich with the tag line, "Suddenly you're a morning person," in the Downtown Berkeley BART stop was changed to read "Suddenly you're a nothing person."

## STEALTH STRATEGIES

As the fast-moving, highly competitive world of advertising seeks new media formats and persuasive strategies to promote product brands, corporate image, and commercial icons, a variety of edgy advertising practices under an assortment of titles have emerged in recent years. From brand buzz, to seeding, stealth, undercover, guerilla and renegade, these practices are designed to enter into the consumer's consciousness just under the critical radar that recognizes advertising as persuasive communication. These undercover formats have an important shared characteristic; their promotional aspect is not revealed and they lack recognizable "sponsorship." To the hip new marketers, sponsorship has become a dirty word. Unlike product placement and other hybrids of commercial media, these persuasions are often interpersonal and take place in both public and private places. For example, a man on the street asks a passerby to take his picture. As the interaction proceeds, opportunity to promote the camera arises. The passerby would be surprised to find that the man has actually been hired to sell the camera. In another example, a person may sit down at a bar and order a drink within earshot of others, then strike up a conversation.

He or she is selling a particular brand of alcohol. And some companies pay college students to "buzz" the latest CD from a musical group to their friends at parties.

Other unconventional sales promotions take place in retail stores and at the point of purchase. In some boutique clothing stores, employees are now paid to be "peer trend setters." These people casually offer comments about what products and styles are hip and fashionable to shoppers who are looking for clothes and sampling products. "Seeding" a new product can be done by leaving empty bottles or cans on tables at locales where targeted consumers will see them and assume they are popular with other members of their consumption group.

Humans have long engaged in market relationships, trading and bargaining for goods and services, but drawing out the differences between earlier forms of market interactions and present business strategies reveals that bargaining entails the application of individual skills, a type of personal theater of pretext, pretend, persuasion, and resistance. But with stealth marketing the interaction assumes a false premise. By concealing its purpose, the "mark" does not have the chance to display skill or offer resistance. The playing field is not level. At its worst, some forms violate trust and may create a cultural atmosphere that spoils the public sense of mutual respect and honesty. For these reasons, some marketers have made strong statements against these practices.

## MARKETING DISCRIMINATION

As advertisers' data regarding consumer purchasing behavior has increased in recent years, so too has marketing discrimination, whereby certain real or potential customers are given better treatment, while other real or potential customers are ignored. Hence, for instance, since statistics suggest that the elderly do not consume as highly as do younger shoppers, and that they are more likely to have developed brand loyalties that will not easily be swayed, many advertisers ignore this market completely, meaning that advertising-driven media forms such as television and magazines are often overwhelmingly youth-focused.

Moreover, as database marketing has become a hot trend, advertisers and retailers are now able to personalize their advertising, no longer just relying on broad demographic trends. Thus, many retailers and other businesses are mailing coupons and special notices only to "good" customers, or to those deemed *likely* to be good customers. When mixed with television viewing data recorded by cable boxes, DVRs, and TiVo, and with developments in digital television delivery being made, this trend could easily result in differentiated programming or personalization for different audience members. Some citizens welcome the prospect of personalized marketing, but personalized marketing means not simply that each person will receive different ads, programming, and services, but that some may receive no or poor programming or service, hence further threatening the democratic potential of broadcasting and other supposedly "mass" media.

## ADVERTISING AND POLITICS

If we look at social-cause marketing from this point of view, we might say that every aspect of our lives, even political ideas, becomes fertile ground for marketing products. Some popular commercial campaigns now revolve around political ideas, many promising social change and a more peaceful world through the purchase of products. In fact, a prominent critic of consumer culture, Thomas Frank, argues that one of the only spheres where protest and criticism are currently acceptable in our culture is advertising. Online messages for Diesel clothing tell consumers that to achieve "successful living" they must "take action," fight, shout, and wake up "the rebel inside you." With visual references to baby-boom hippies, a young woman in a headband makes the peace sign and compels us to "reject the established mints" and eat Mentos. Another Mentos ad references "flower power," a countercultural slogan from the 1960s, with a daisy and the words "peace, love and happy mints." Playtex promises a new "women's movement" by which the company means "freedom from seams and stitches" with the Only You bra. Like many "postmodern" commercial messages, these ads are presented with a sense of irony, making claims, yet making fun of themselves at the same time for making such silly claims. Nevertheless, they successfully tie political impulses for peace, social change, and women's liberation to consumer identities and purchasing products.

Social-causal marketing, both serious and comedic, has been criticized for making arbitrary claims that mislead consumers and negatively effect political participation. Critics argue that advertising in general, and "socially conscious" commercials in particular, lead to a passive, uninformed public. Such advertisements appeal to the political desires for freedom and equality, yet offer no real strategies to achieve social change. Purchasing products does little to move the world in the direction depicted in the ads. Buying Mentos will not lead to world peace; wearing Diesel clothing will not change the world; and women cannot achieve equal status, respect, and independence by wearing a particular bra. When political sentiments are directed toward consumption, the public is compelled to consume, not actually participate in politics in ways that might achieve social and political goals.

This leads us to understand the commercialization of politics in a complicated light. Advertising's effect on American politics has been felt more directly through election campaigns that have become a type of commercial politics, in which highly targeted political messages are designed through the use of focus groups and directed toward voting subgroups, each of which is watching or listening to its favorite program. In a process that mirrors the selling of products, an image of a political leader is also sold to the public, turned audience and then consumer. As politicians devise persuasive messages they must "stay on message," and authentic discourse becomes harder to find in the political arena. It reaches greater levels of distortion with negative political advertising that often plays on fear, anxiety, and disgust. "Going negative" is also known to "turn off" the voting public, causing political analysts to charge that commercially driven election campaigns create a cynical, politically disengaged citizenry. For these

reasons, and because of the high cost of airtime, campaign reformers advocate that corporate media outlets should provide "free time" for political candidates to better serve the public interest and to disentangle the candidates from the special interests, which are often the ultimate funding sources for expensive ad campaigns.

## SWEATSHOPS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

It is frequently asserted that we live in a postindustrial society with an economy driven by information systems and symbolic culture. Advertising is certainly part of that symbolic culture, but commercial messages are, most of the time, selling goods, the products of industrial production, even though such commodities are often produced in other, less developed countries. Americans for the most part are not exposed to the factory conditions and the exploitation of workers who toil under extreme conditions in underpaid jobs. Nike has long been criticized for refusing to pay a fair wage in countries such as Indonesia, Vietnam, Mexico, and China, even though its advertising campaigns feature powerfully humanistic visions of individual liberation. Writers such as Naomi Klein have documented the exploitation of cheap labor markets by American companies and popular brand labels. It can be said that advertising creates a symbolic world that surrounds everything from trainers to sports gear, from dolls to toys, in a fantasy of consumer culture, which removes products from the unpleasant realities of their production. Left uninformed about corporate global practices, the consumer is more susceptible to commercial persuasions. Public interest advocates, human rights organizations, and labor groups such as the Workers Rights Consortium have pressed for external monitoring of factory conditions in countries around the world, and these proposals, together with environmental concerns, have been brought to bear on international trade organizations and the major economic summits of the developed world.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, industrial capitalism seemed to hold the promise of well-being and economic security to a Western world eager to achieve a standard of living unparalleled in human history. Indeed, early advertisers were often visionary utopians who advocated for personal growth and spiritual attainment. By the twenty-first century, the promise of industrial production heaves under the weight of an environmental crisis, including air and water pollution, toxic by-products, and the destruction of human environments as well as animal habitats. The unanticipated and unwanted side effects of industrial production are now widely understood, such as the extravagant depletion of global resources, and global warming, the consequence of greenhouse gases discharged into the atmosphere due to an unsustainable level of energy use. Thus far, with only a few exceptions, advertising has not been able to come to terms with the need for conservation and more ecologically sound, environmentally friendly corporate practices. Instead, ads have used the beauty of the natural world in images of nature as just one more "selling hook." The extraordinary imagery of pristine landscapes used to sell SUVs illustrates this point. These vehicles have become, for critics, the symbol of conspicuous consumption

of unrenowable fossil fuels and one of the worst offenders for releasing harmful levels of emissions into the atmosphere.

Advertising influences society and culture on many levels. It compels us to define who we are and what will make us happy. In a very real way, advertising propels our consumption lifestyle and is intimately tied to a set of market relationships that drives the global economy. Only by understanding the broader role advertisements play in culture, the environment, and the globe will we be better able to make choices about what to buy and how we want to live.

See also *Body Image; Branding the Globe; Hypercommercialism; Media and Electoral Campaigns; Media Literacy; Pharmaceutical Advertising; Political Entertainment; Product Placement; Ratings; Representations of Women; Television in Schools; Video News Releases; Youth and Media Use; Women's Magazines.*

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Robin Andersen

## AL-JAZEERA

The Qatari-based Al-Jazeera satellite channel, the first 24-hour all-news network in the Arab world, has been surrounded by much controversy since its inception. Its uninhibited critique of authoritarian governments has infuriated many Arab officials, who have not been used to seeing a broadcast network that is not appeasing their policies. Its exclusive broadcast of tapes by Osama bin Laden and his lieutenants and its unvarnished reporting on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the most recent war in Lebanon have catapulted it into the international media spotlight. It has been heralded by its admirers as a beacon for freedom of expression, and accused by its critics of sensationalism and biased reporting. Indeed, some U.S. officials charged the station with anti-American bias for its coverage of the "war on terror."

Al-Jazeera is an anomaly that has defied all odds. It came out in a region that has not been known for its free and open media environment; it was launched by Qatar, a small peninsular country in the Persian Gulf that hardly had any impact on the Arab media scene before Al-Jazeera; it challenged the Western news networks' monopoly over the global news flow; and it gave the Arab people a platform through which they can express their opinions without red lines, listen to different points of view, and engage in lively and bold political debates about issues that used to be buried under the carpet of government censorship before the advent of Al-Jazeera. When covering the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the station includes a wide spectrum of international opinion, but has been criticized in some official U.S. circles for including graphic images of the U.S. bombing in the Middle East. Its daring coverage has made it the news station of choice for more than 40 million Arab viewers worldwide.

## AL-JAZEERA TIMELINE

- November 1, 1996—Al-Jazeera launches with a start-up grant of \$140 million from the Qatari emir.
- January 1, 1999—Expands from 6 hours a day to 24 hours a day.
- October 7, 2001—Broadcasts a statement by Osama bin Laden two hours after the U.S.-led coalition begins military strikes against Afghanistan.
- October 30, 2001—When asked by a correspondent from Al-Jazeera's Washington bureau about the authenticity of pictures showing Afghani children as war casualties, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld accuses the network of propounding Taliban propaganda.
- November 13, 2001—The United States launches a missile attack on Al-Jazeera's office in Kabul, Afghanistan. Although no Al-Jazeera staff are hurt in the attack, the building is destroyed and some employees' homes are damaged. In a letter to Al-Jazeera dated December 6, 2001, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense Victoria Clarke states, "The building we struck was a known al Qaeda facility in central Kabul."
- March 4, 2003—The New York Stock Exchange bans Al-Jazeera (as well as several other news organizations) from its trading floor indefinitely, citing "security concerns" as the official reason. A few months later the ban was rescinded, according to a New York Stock Exchange spokesperson.
- April 8, 2003—U.S. bombs hit Al-Jazeera's office in Baghdad, killing reporter Tareq Ayyoub. At a briefing in Doha, Qatar, the network's managing director says the Pentagon was informed of the network's location in Baghdad several months before the war started. Brigadier General Vincent K. Brooks says of the Al-Jazeera attack, "This coalition does not target journalists. We don't know every place journalists are operating on the battlefield. It's a dangerous place, indeed."
- September 23, 2003—Iraqi interim government suspends Al-Jazeera (and Al-Arabiya, an Arab news channel based in Dubai, United Arab Emirates) from reporting on official