

## Conference Report

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY IN QATAR SYMPOSIUM

# Fresh Global Media Players:

Redistributing Communication Power



الصندوق القطري لرعاية البحث العلمي

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# FRESH GLOBAL MEDIA PLAYERS: Redistributing Communication Power



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# FRESH GLOBAL MEDICINE

## Redistributing Community



EVERETTE E. DENNIS // DEAN AND CEO, NU-Q



# Foreword

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**IN AN AGE OF DISRUPTION**, the legacy media find themselves in a struggle caused by the digital revolution, forcing traditional players to transform and reinvent themselves. At the same time, innovators in the marketplace are cropping up, some in places not heretofore media centers. Professors Khalil and Downing recognized that the landscape of global media is undergoing a creative, technological, economic and political metamorphosis, and it was this monumental shift that engaged their curiosity and led them to propose a conference to explore these issues.

*Fresh Global Media Players* was supported in part by the Conference Workshop Sponsorship Program of the Qatar National Research Fund. The conference featured panels of leading media scholars and industry experts who presented to an audience of media leaders, journalists, faculty and staff. This report is a synthesis of the presentations and lively discussion that followed, a summary of this useful engagement into global communication by fresh players from both expected and unusual places.

During the work that led up to this conference and through its proceedings, students have remained our center focus. It is our primary goal to engage NU-Q students in discussions where the systematic calibrations of the academy meet the test of priorities of media industries. They are, in fact, tomorrow's global media players, the future leaders of new and continuing media enterprises.

**EVERETTE E. DENNIS, Dean and CEO, NU-Q**

# Conference Introduction

By Joe Khalil and John Downing, NU-Q

## THE VELOCITY OF MEDIA CHANGE

On the global stage, the velocity of change in media initiatives is, it seems, accelerating almost every month. Often when people discuss these changes they focus on communication hardware, and indeed, the emergence and exploitation of newer communication technologies have been pivotal. ‘Newer’ is relative, however: satellites, after all, are nearly 60 years old and optical fiber cables 50. Digital compression and mobile media technologies have almost immeasurably lengthened the horizons of these early inventions. Transoceanic cables have had a major rebirth. Remote sensing can now operate with over 16,000 color intensities (shades).

Yet, to use a frequent expression from technology studies, the invention, development, applications and even non-uses of these information opportunities are, every last one of them, “socially shaped.” Media industries, governments, banks, education and health services of all kinds, hackers and criminals all figure among the global forces which are constantly forming and re-forming communication technology apps (in the very broadest sense of ‘apps’).

NUQ’s *Fresh Global Media Players* conference targeted the media industries segment of this array of global forces for close scrutiny. The trajectory and consequences of current technological, political, economic and social global transformations will become clear in the years ahead. For now, a group of internationally renowned scholars and industry professionals gathered in Doha to question the driving forces,

underlying causes and current mutations in global media.

A discussion of the velocity of change in a global media context also evokes the notion of communication power. Broadly defined as the ability to produce and distribute media content, communication power has long been restricted to the dynamics of supply from large media producers to satisfy the demands of a global audience. The increased and widespread ability to produce and receive media content is redistributing communication power and is giving rise to non-traditional global players. From the popularity of global TV formats to individual chat app users, the production, distribution and consumption models are being re-thought.

At this conference, we questioned whether we can usefully continue to take for granted the international dominance of a few enormous players. Are global media flows absolutely dominated by giants, some old and some new, such as the BBC, News Corp., Sony, WPP advertising agency, Edelman PR, Pearson publishing, Apple, Samsung, Google and their very closest rivals?

Back of this immediate issue, however, lies a deeper question of even more moment. Where is all this going anyway? This even tougher question has been kicked around for the best part of fifty years, and not just in the sometimes closeted halls of the academy, but in a series of major international public arenas and forums.





## COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION FOR WHAT? AND FOR WHOM?

Recent decades have seen expansive media growth to the point that it can be argued that each media company is potentially a global company. Examples addressed in the conference included how television and video producers in Nigeria and Turkey are distributing their products internationally, how state-backed news channels are structured like multinational corporations and how advertising and social media companies are disrupting traditional media monopolies. Media industries have undergone significant structural change overall, growing to become pervasive and increasingly influential global forces for the imaginable future. Some of the most significant changes pivot on the communication objectives—are we broadcasting, networking, or both? Are our goals development, profitability, democratization, all three and perhaps others?

To better understand the potential role of these fresh media players, we must have more background on long-standing policy divisions regarding global communication priorities. A huge international debate roiled the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) through the 1970s and into the first half of the 1980s. It was framed in part in the USA's "modernization" strategy for developing the economies of the poorest nations, a strategy framed with the spread of media and information technologies as a key dimension of stimulating markets and innovation. The strategy was also, however, stamped with the

dynamic of Cold War competition for spheres of influence between the West and the Soviet bloc. At that point in time, the state-centered Soviet development model retained—at least from a distance—quite a strong pull among the leaders of many freshly de-colonized countries.

Furthermore the West, especially the USA, was frequently accused of exporting its media and musical culture in a way that risked swamping, and eventually blotting out entirely, other nations' cultures. The term "cultural imperialism" distilled this accusation. Often joined to this attack was the claim that exported US media worked to instill a consumerist mentality around the planet, paving the way for a self-destructive hunger for US-made products. Thus "modernization" and "cultural imperialism" proponents locked horns, in a rarely merry dance.

The fundamental issue was how to significantly address the gap between the abundance of media flows and technology in the affluent West and their relative absence in what was then still often termed the "Third World." Everyone agreed that for those regions to grow their economies, their education, their public information level, this gap had to be closed. But agreement stopped there.

After a decade of contentious multi-national argument, UNESCO dropped the debate entirely.

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## SOME ISSUES WILL NOT DIE QUIETLY

The communication technology gap, and the planetary dominance of Western communication firms, did not melt away. The notion of ‘globalization’ and the adjective ‘transnational’ moved to center stage, reframing questions on communication power. As the rise of Sony, and later Samsung, testified, ‘Western’ was not a geographical term. But despite these additions, until the very recent explosion of smartphone ownership in hitherto virtually un-connected zones of the world, the have/have-not scenario was as tangible across the planet in all forms of media communication as in health care.

In response to this reality, in 2000 the UN officially requested the International Telecommunications Union to organize two international summits on the Information Society. These took place in 2003 and 2005. By that point, the ITU, no longer restricted to

government representatives, also had major corporations in the communication field routinely involved in its policy conferences. Yet right from 2003 there were representations made that it was a grave error to restrict debate to these very heavy-duty government and business players. Opening the debate to representatives of the global public was urged to be vital if solutions viable for that public were to have any prospect of being hammered out successfully.

The policy debates continue around the planet, with one concrete outcome of the two Information Summits being the Internet Governance Forum, in which there is indeed space for global government, corporate and public voices to engage with each other. The IGF is scheduled to make a final report to the UN in 2015. Public debate about the future direction of global media is expanding, not contracting.

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## MEANWHILE, BACK IN THE ACADEMY...

...research had not stagnated. The arrogance of the assumption that the West should serve as the “modernization model” for other countries had taken a knock. New, less absolute readings of planetary communication and cultural dynamics emerged to prominence, such as the notion of “cultural hybridity.” This suggested that cultural flows were rarely one-way, as in the “cultural imperialism” notion, but rather a process of melding. Similarly the ugly term “glocal” was coined in order to pinpoint the frequent fusion of global and local forces, whether cultural or economic. Notably, Japanese scholar Iwabuchi Koichi urged that the specificities of different world-regions (the Arab region, Latin America, East Asia) should be taken seriously, not just the totally-global and the resolutely-local dimensions of our planet.

“Soft power,” originally a US foreign policy term coined to denote Hollywood, Nashville

and Silicon Valley’s contributions to offsetting the public relations impact of the USA’s “hard power” (military action), was adopted by other governments and even some academics.

Not least, the term “transnational” had swung into wide usage as a means to acknowledge the emerging relocation of power—in separate nodes of huge corporations based in a variety of sites across the planet, not just at a single first world address.

This, then, is the context for this conference. With the emergence of fresh players such as the Al Jazeera Media Network, new government players such as China’s CCTV, uncertain Internet advertising strategies, TV series format trade, the younger generation’s focus on mobile phones, digital piracy, is our global media environment in some form of reconstitution, or even meltdown?



## AND IN THE PAGES AHEAD...

Bridging the continuing concerns within industry and policy circles with theoretical and research pursuits, the conference interventions offer new vistas towards investigating an increasingly complex global media landscape.

The understanding of global media built on the model of few large Western-based producers creating content to be consumed by audiences everywhere is shattered. This is not only the result of enabling technologies of production, but the emergence of fresh global players in news and entertainment. The nature and pace of media change are likely to accelerate and amplify, though this may turn traditional media giants into dinosaurs while allowing fresh players to emerge around the world.

The division of global media between media rich Global North producers and media poor Global South consumers requires a closer inspection. Even notions of geocultural markets and South-South media exchanges need to be rethought in light of changing patterns of consumption. Notably, analysis based on methodological nationalism, which restricts focus to separate nation-states, should be replaced by methodologies capable of capturing media produced, distributed and consumed across borders.

While it remains true that few large producers have continued to dominate the media landscape, it is increasingly difficult to label these producers as Western. The complex matrix of funding, creative labor and reliance on global markets encourage us to re-think what global media are. However, this lens may risk masking power relations.

In light of these complexities, it is becoming important to re-think the distribution of communication power, taking into consideration the emergence of state and non-state actors, lower barriers to entry and multiple ways to distribute and access communication and information. The explosion of communication content being produced and distributed outside



FROM LEFT, ANNABELLE SREBERNY  
AND ANNE GENIETS

the traditional media conglomerates points toward a shift of communication power—the ability to develop and share content—on at least three fronts. First, fresh players such as Google or pirates are able to circumvent traditional advertising, funding and distribution models. Second, social media tools such as chat apps or state-backed multi-national news networks such as Al Jazeera are providing alternative information narratives. Third, small, innovative and nimble media producers such as North European TV format creators or Saudi web series producers are able to develop and promote media content that challenges the dominance of traditional entertainment providers.

But wait: history has shown that media companies are extremely adaptable and have been able to absorb challenges and changes through integration, intimidation or innovation. The central questions about the re-distribution of communication power will continue to mark the debates regarding the changing global media structure for some time to come.

# The Economics of News

BY YASER BISHR, KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Global Executive Director, Development and Strategy, Al Jazeera Network

**THE ECONOMICS OF NEWS OVER THE PAST COUPLE OF DECADES** has been a hard nut to crack: the current business model is not working, and content producers are the ones bearing the brunt.

Some believe that the news industry is in this poor state because we are stuck in journalism formalism—or journalism formalin, some would say—wherein we want to preserve the way we do things rather than adapt to the changing world.

This is simply not true: news organizations have changed. We have invested in new ways of journalism, particularly in the digital realm, to add vigor to our content. We have cut costs and streamlined our operations to free up cash and invest in our future. We have diversified content and improved traffic on our online properties. We are pushing for a new metric: viewing content is not enough, we want people to engage with the content.

Yet all of these changes are still not enough to make ends meet. To make money in news, the business model says, you must advertise. I put it to you that advertising will never be enough. The news business model is convoluted.

First of all, journalists are not doing well. The number of editorial staff in newsrooms dropped by some 20,000—about a third—between 1990 and 2010, according to a 2013 Pew Research study.<sup>1</sup> Even with fewer content producers on staff, those who remain are feeling the crunch. A survey done by Project Word found that 84% of journalists have used their own money to subsidize their work, 55% failed to recoup their expenditures and 69% said outlets commissioned pieces from them without covering the expenses.<sup>2</sup> So journalists are not doing well, yet these are the people we rely on

to bring us the news, keep things in check and tell us what's happening around the world.

Journalism is funded primarily through advertising. A 2014 Pew Research Study says that 69% of funding comes from advertising and 24% from the audience through paid subscriptions, with less than 1% from new investment.<sup>3</sup>

Here is the challenge with advertising: between 2012 and 2014, half of all global digital ad revenue was split among 12 companies, starting with Google at 31.5% of global ad revenue. None of these companies are news organizations or content producers.<sup>4</sup> To look at it another way, 12 companies are splitting 50% of the global ad revenue, while news organizations and content producers are not able to cover costs.

The business model for news organizations was created before the era of Google. In 2008 Jeff Zucker, then at NBC Universal, coined the phrase, “trading analogue dollars for digital pennies,” to describe the financial straits of media companies.<sup>5</sup> He later amended that to “digital dimes,” and then “digital quarters,” but the truth is that for news organizations, we will never be trading in digital dollars.

In 2003, US newspapers were dwarfing Google in the ad market; 10 years later, a different picture emerges. Over the past decade, Google stock has jumped 900%,<sup>6</sup> while *The New York Times* has tumbled 70%.<sup>7</sup> News organizations are under valued and under funded.

The business model is collapsing because, in part, of the audience. Today search engines are king: the audience turns to them as the primary source of information, as well as the source to confirm or validate news. The search engines curate news for the audience,



# FRESH GLOBAL MEDIA

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**YASER BISHR // GLOBAL EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR, DEVELOPMENT AND  
STRATEGY, AL JAZEERA NETWORK**

sending them in myriad of directions and profiting from every click-through. A glimpse at the algorithm Google uses to aggregate and prioritize the news reveals what is important to them, and by extension, the audience: staff size, numbers of news bureaus, the breadth of the news source, the global reach of the news source and writing style, among others. These are the assets that help determine the highest quality content, and not surprisingly, also cost the most to maintain.

The bottom line is that news organizations are crucial to the way search engines deliver news, but it is the search engines—not the content producers—who are making the money.

I suggest a radical approach: we the publishers are too valuable to online traffic, and the current business model must be disrupted. What if we as news organizations come together to create a news revolution: block Google from indexing our online properties, and ask the more than

500 million engaged readers to follow us on another social platform? This would be a news revolution.

- <sup>1</sup> “The State of the News Media 2013.” Pew Research Center. [www.stateofthemediamedia.org](http://www.stateofthemediamedia.org).
- <sup>2</sup> “Untold Stories: A survey of freelance investigative reporters.” Project Word 2014. [www.projectword.org](http://www.projectword.org)
- <sup>3</sup> Holcomb, Jesse and Amy Mitchell. (March 26, 2014). “The Revenue Picture for American Journalism and How it is Changing.” Pew Research Center. [www.journalism.org](http://www.journalism.org).
- <sup>4</sup> “Microsoft to Surpass Yahoo in Global Digital Ad Market Share This Year.” (July 15, 2014). [www.emarketer.com](http://www.emarketer.com).
- <sup>5</sup> Satell, Greg. (August 19, 2013). “Is Big Media Trading Digital Dollars for Analog Dimes?” *Forbes Magazine*. [www.forbes.com](http://www.forbes.com).
- <sup>6</sup> Russolillo, Steven. (August 19, 2013). “Google’s IPO, Nine Years Later: Only Nine Stocks Beat It.” *The Wall Street Journal*. [www.blogs.wsj.com](http://www.blogs.wsj.com).
- <sup>7</sup> Based on stock prices from Nov. 1, 2003 to Nov. 1, 2013, retrieved from [finance.yahoo.com](http://finance.yahoo.com).

AXIS ONE

# Technological Change, Policy and Regulation

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## Charlie Hebdo and the global media/event horizon

*Annabelle Sreberny*

In our highly mediated world, events occur whose significance is magnified as a result of their intense media representation. Not only across Europe, but across the planet, coverage of the slayings at the *Charlie Hebdo* office in Paris exemplified this, seemingly obliterating other news stories and galvanizing varied reactions.

I wish to think about this as a powerful global media/event horizon, the term echoing physicist Stephen Hawking's suggestion of a boundary in space-time, a point of no return at which the gravitational pull becomes so great as to make escape impossible.

One way to approach this case is by interrogating the synthesis proposed by Andreas Hepp and Nick Couldry between the concepts of "media events" and "mediatization." They suggest

an emphasis on an event as played out across different media products, which *Hebdo* clearly manifested.

But we need to go further, beyond a reliance on a single nation's experience (methodological nationalism) to understand such media events as globalized phenomena, and to see that both parts of the media/event process are always-already transnational and transcultural. Such an event is potentially both unifying and disruptive. It evidences a global public space of agonistic encounter, but hardly the orderly global public sphere notion to which some still cling.

These arguments are supported with a multi-layered analysis of media that includes mainstream channels, through the commentariat and social media, to embodied communicative activities on the ground.

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## Advertising and media in the age of the algorithm

*John Sinclair*

The twenty-first century is experiencing a fundamental transition in social communication paradigms, most often simplistically characterized as a shift from mass media to social media. We need to examine soberly the disruption which the advertising industry is undergoing as it struggles to adapt its former business model to the extraordinary opportunities now afforded for Internet marketing, and to still maintain its hold over the traditional media, notably television and print. 'New' media companies, particularly Google with its early dominance of search advertising, have quickly risen to claim exceptional influence over the global flows of advertising revenue which are the life-blood of the media industries.

Advertising agencies now find they must strive to match the technical expertise of Google and other such fresh global media players in

the new digital space that they have opened up between the agencies and the Internet. Digital advertising involves the generation, placement, distribution, measurement and general management of online advertisements. The new technologies enable an unprecedented behavioral targeting of prospective consumers who surrender information about themselves when they use platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Certain practices in exploiting these platforms' users for marketing purposes have provoked social criticism and regulatory intervention in the more established markets. All this now forms a third line of business for the advertising industry, the first two being, historically, the placement and creation of advertisements. By mapping out these transformative structural changes, this research aims to understand an industry in flux and under global challenges.



## The geopolitics of piracy

*Tristan Mattelart*

It is time to break with the perspectives that criminalize the piracy of audiovisual products and consider instead piracy as a complex socio-economic and political phenomenon. In consonance with a growing body of literature offering new perspectives on this phenomenon, this research describes piracy as one of the key elements of an informal economy of communications, which plays a central role in the way people around the world access cultural products.

A synthesis of existing literature on the subject clearly suggests how the networks of this informal economy give shape to unofficial transnational flows of cultural products, which, despite being still relatively under-researched, contribute significantly to the processes of cultural globalization. Not only do these pirate flows contribute to an increased global presence of primarily US cultural products, but they contribute also to the transnational circulation of the products of some cultural industries of the so-called Global South.

To what extent the networks of the informal economy of communications have fuelled the rise of new “contra-flows” of non-Western cultural products? They have not, to date, given shape to “counter-hegemonic” flows, i.e. flows that carry contents running counter to the dominant meanings with which hegemonic American programs are encoded.

Finally, against the view that piracy represents a major menace undermining the power of US cultural industries, we need to recognize how, on the ground, these industries have accommodated to this phenomenon, effectively transforming the threat into a means of increased market domination.



AXIS TWO

# News media developments

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## Power, players, platforms: Global media strategies and the generation challenge in the developing world

*Anne Geniets*

This research is on strategies of international broadcasting organizations (IBOs), such as the BBC and CNN, in low and middle-income countries (LMIC). In particular, it focuses on challenges IBOs face in connecting with a younger, mobile phone-focused generation. It examines the potential of smartphone platforms in LMIC to reach and connect with new, younger audiences.

The paper suggests that due to a marked drop in prices of low-end smartphones and the growth of the popularity of chat apps such as Whatsapp and Wechat in LMIC, chat apps have become a potent tool for IBOs to reach and engage previously underserved segments of LMIC populations.

There are a number of challenges for IBOs using chat apps, and research on the use of chat

apps by IBOs is still mostly anecdotal. Insights gathered so far suggest that a) chat apps tend to attract new users, often a younger audience; b) chat apps tend to be often the first time these new audiences engage with IBOs; c) the interaction between IBOs and their audiences in chat apps tends to be more personal and emotional; and d) chat apps are accessible for low-income, semi-literate or illiterate people as they allow for video-clips and images to be disseminated.

Thus the potential of chat apps not only lies in reaching the general public and in potentially tapping into their existing relational networks, but in delivering instant, tailored news to them. They may, too, engage audiences personally by allowing them to interact with IBOs, without having to be able to read or write.

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## Al Jazeera reconsidered: Reflections on media from the global south

*Mohamed Zayani*

Two decades after its launch, Al Jazeera Network has left an indelible mark. It evolved from a modest Arabic language channel beamed out of a small compound in Doha to a multi-channel, multi-platform, multi-language network with a global audience and offices throughout much of the world. In the process, it has dramatically altered the Arab media landscape, complicated the region's geopolitical reality and redefined the boundaries of communication from the global south.

If Al Jazeera merits attention again, it is because the latest phase in the recent history of the Middle East has altered the kind of media dynamics and political configurations upon which Al Jazeera has thrived all along. It can be argued that the Arab uprisings have thrust Al Jazeera anew to the fore, or that Al Jazeera managed to use the interest in these uprisings to sustain an eroding news leadership. In both scenarios, these

geopolitical mutations have also complicated our understanding of certain dynamics that have been closely associated with Al Jazeera.

In considering both the impact of the uprisings on Al Jazeera's standing in the Middle East region and the implication of the broader media and communication changes on the network's ability to retain its global media prowess, this research examines a number of variables: technological innovations, journalistic practices, audience expectations, media consumption changes, alternative journalism, geo-political interests, ideological challenges, competing voices and institutional considerations. The outcome is to develop a matrix of dynamics that could help draw out the theoretical relevance of emergent global media players that operate outside established Western traditions of communication power and outside normative models.





FROM LEFT: JOHN DOWNING, ANNABELLE SREBERNY, JOHN SINCLAIR AND TRISTAN MATTELART

## CCTV News: Soft power in a crowded mediasphere

*John Jirik*

The concept of soft power—the ideological component of the ‘going out’ project launched by the Chinese government in 2001 in the mediasphere—demands critical assessment. China’s academy and polity enthusiastically embraced Joseph Nye’s conceptualization of soft power soon after it was introduced into China’s policy discourse in the early 1990s. Nonetheless, we need to question whether a focus on soft power can adequately explain the emergence of the international television state broadcaster, or whether factors should be considered which go further than considering media simply as a political instrument.

This research is about the emergence and the expansion of CCTV News, the English-language twenty-four hour news service run by China Central Television (CCTV), China’s state broadcaster. It aims to offer an alternate reading of the emergence of CCTV News that emphasizes the accidental rather than strategic character of the evolution of the channel.

Three questions need to be addressed: 1) how is CCTV News positioning itself in relation to China’s soft power policies; 2) which challenges does CCTV News face from and pose to other 24/7 news channels; and 3) how is CCTV News responding to the emergence of a younger mobile-phone oriented generation of media users.

Despite the channel’s impressive production capacity and its global reach, CCTV News struggles with its identity and audience. It is important to evaluate how these problems could impact the future development of the channel. Whether CCTV News is a sustainable long-term project and if so under what conditions, are issues tentatively explored in my research.

Using a combination of discourse analysis and participant observation, this research contributes to understanding the re-emergence of state television broadcasters as significant players in global media.

AXIS THREE

# Entertainment Media Developments

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## Challenging US leadership in entertainment television? The state of Europe's producer-distributors

*Andrea Esser*

The new millennium has seen a rebalancing of powers in the transatlantic television trade. European companies have been at the forefront of developing and exporting TV formats—entertainment programs such as *Big Brother* or *Idols*, sold for local adaptation around the world. The rapid growth of the format business during these 15 years was accompanied by the formation of transnational production-distribution conglomerates across Europe, including broadcaster-affiliated firms, such as Fremantle Media or Red Arrow, and financial investor-backed conglomerates, such as All3Media, Banijay Group and Zodiak Media Group. Today they all have multiple production and distribution subsidiaries on several continents.

The historically difficult-to-penetrate US television market opened up to European formats and as a result the transatlantic trade balance for entertainment programs shifted visibly. Moreover, the US majors failed to

realize the potential of the format business and therefore had a comparatively small stake in its global market. However, US media conglomerates with significant investment in the television sector have recently been using their deep pockets to acquire some of the newly formed European-based production and distribution conglomerates.

This research traces the trajectory of the major European producer-distributors, using elite interviews, trade journals, companies' annual reports, websites and press releases to assess: the power shifts between European and American TV producers and distributors; the complex set of reasons for the merger and acquisition spree within Europe; and the potential consequences for local production. It aims to understand the implications of global conglomeration and large-scale investment by private financiers and asks: does it matter where the headquarters are?

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## Not cool enough for the Neo-Ottomans: Turkish TV series in the Middle East market

*Sevda Alankuş & Eylem Yanardağoğlu,*

Media researchers Marwan Kraidy and Omar Al-Ghazzi have proposed that the current appeal of Turkish TV series should be explained as “neo-Ottoman cool,” their way of referring to Turkey's increased political and economic attractiveness in the region; in other words, its soft power and its potential as a role model that successfully combines Islam with democracy. However, our analysis of survey data from nine countries in the region, together with in-depth interviews with Istanbul producers and distributors and previous audience reception studies, pushes in a different direction. Explaining regional audience interest requires we see the neo-Ottoman cool concept's weakness in explaining the full dynamics of contextual and contingent relations between economy, politics and ideology.

Research continues to indicate the growth of demand for Turkey's TV series, with new products continuing to attract strong audiences. This is despite Turkey's declining political image, and its support for opponents of the current regimes in Egypt and Syria. Nor has a ban introduced on some Arab channels crimped the Turkish industry's strength in the regional market. As of June 2014, more than 70 Turkish TV series reached audiences in 75 countries.

This research underpins the region's “glocal” flexibility and market articulations that overarch its soft power politics. We must, too, acknowledge the characteristics of drama as a genre that cross-culturally attracts women viewers, and the limits of commonly cited notions of cultural proximity.





A Q & A SESSION PROVIDED FOR ROBUST DISCUSSION.

## Local pull/global push: Audiences and business in Arab entertainment television

*Joe Khalil*

Grounded in recent fieldwork, this research investigates an emerging Arab media environment marked by implications of media convergence, cultural awakenings, increasing media commercialization and global media expansions. We live at a particular juncture in Arab media history when audiences are increasingly demanding to see and hear from people who are like them, and read about stories from their immediate location. This is to be evaluated in association with socio-political reforms and democratic struggles that have culminated in the Arab Uprisings. Political power aside, this drive is also associated with economic and technological powers that facilitate access to and interest in these forms of media. But for these very same reasons—political, economic and technological—there is a global push toward partnerships with foreign media to offer thematic

channels such as Fox Movies, franchising of media products such as Arab Idol, or channels such as MTV, and of course the sale of movies, series and other media products.

By discerning local, regional and global vectors, this paper addresses the following questions: how will Arab entertainment media survive against a local audience pull and the global business push; and how is media power affected by changes in traditional media platforms (from television to online), producers (from state to international) and genres (scripted formats and reality television). The paper will proceed by examining aspects of the global business push followed by manifestations of the local audience pull, and will conclude with initial remarks regarding the reconfiguration of communication power.

# About the Contributors

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**SEVDA ALANKUŞ** is the dean of the faculty of communication at Kadir Has University in Istanbul. Since 1983, she has been teaching and researching feminist media studies and critical journalism theories. She leads projects and training in peace journalism and gender-based news reporting as the coordinator of the independent communication network, bianet.org.

**YASER BISHR** is the executive director of strategy and development at Al Jazeera Media Network. Yaser is leading the network's transformation from a regional broadcaster to a global media player. Key responsibilities include leading Al Jazeera's digital media strategy, workplace technology transformation, merger and acquisition, innovation and incubation initiative, and Al Jazeera's global expansion strategies.

**JOHN DOWNING** is professor in residence in the communication program at Northwestern University in Qatar. He is editor of *The Encyclopedia of Social Movement Media* (2011) and was international communication area editor for the *International Encyclopedia of Communication* (2008). His published research has focused on social movement media, race and media and media in the former Soviet bloc.

**ANDREA ESSER** is a principal lecturer in media and communications at the University of Roehampton, London. Her research interests include the political economy of television production and distribution, media transnationalization and cultural globalization. Recent work considers the TV format phenomenon: the growth of the format market, patterns of flow, the format's role in production and scheduling and the intricacies of format adaptation. Currently she is a guest professor at the University at Aarhus, Denmark.

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# About the Contributors, continued

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# #NUQGlobalMedia Tweets

 **Global Media 2015** @GlobalMedia15 · Feb 21

"The mobile phone generation poses a considerable challenge to news channels"-  
John Jirik #CCTV #NUQGlobalMedia #QNR  
#newsmakers

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**Simin Radmanesh** @SiminRadmanesh · Feb 21

Looking at communications from the academic side of the street @ Fresh Global Media Players Conference #NUQGlobalMedia #NUQ #MemacOgilvy

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**Rosie Garthwaite** @rosiepelican · Feb 21

Fascinating Fresh Global Media Players conf about rising volume of alternative voices like @AJENews @cctvnews and @RT\_com #NUQGlobalMedia

 **Global Media 2015** @GlobalMedia15 · Feb 20


"An event such as #CharlieHebdo brings out diverse strengths of arguments" - Annabelle Sreberny #SOAS @NorthwesternU #QNR #NUQGlobalMedia



**Katja Iversen** @Katja\_Iversen · Feb 21

12 comp take 50% of global ad revenue. Where does that leave journalism and news? @YaserBishr #NUQGlobalMedia

 **Global Media 2015** @GlobalMedia15 · Feb 20

"Google's competitors have an advantage by moving to mobile advertising."- John Sinclair #Unimelb @NorthwesternU #QNR #NUQ

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