



**BBC Trust**

**BBC Arabic TV**

Opinion Leader research report: April 2009

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

The BBC World Service, part of the BBC Global News Division, delivers news and information services in 32 languages across the globe. The service aims to benefit audiences around the world and be the best known, most creative and most respected voice in international news.

The BBC Trust is responsible for ensuring that the BBC World Service adheres to the values and purposes of the BBC and delivers its remit in line with the Royal Charter. The Trust selected BBC Arabic TV for its research in 2009 and this report forms part of an independent assessment that will be submitted to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (providers of grant-in-aid to the BBC World Service).

BBC Arabic TV is the first publicly funded vernacular TV service to be launched by the BBC World Service. BBC Arabic TV broadcasts news, current affairs, documentaries and interactive debate 24 hours a day (recently increased from 12 hours) by satellite, and its key markets include the Middle East and North Africa ('MENA'). Prior to the research, BBC Arabic TV had generally been welcomed and had received positive press coverage since its launch. It has built on the foundations of BBC Arabic Radio and positive perceptions of the BBC in the Middle East in general.

Despite these positive reactions, BBC Arabic TV has also faced a number of challenges, including:

- The crowded satellite market, including many 24-hour Arabic channels that provide news output – the fact that BBC Arabic TV was only broadcasting for 12 hours a day until recently was identified as a potential weakness by some regional commentators<sup>1</sup> and this may have had a lasting impact on perceptions
- The US-funded Al Hurra channel, which has been heralded as a bid to win Arab 'hearts and minds', may have put the target market on the defensive, making them suspicious of the motivations behind the new BBC service and sensitive to any bias or attempt to influence opinions
- There is some information that opinion formers in the Arab world regularly watch English language news programmes and may bypass BBC Arabic TV in favour of BBC World, CNN and others<sup>2</sup>
- There is some evidence that audiences in the Middle East favours emotional connection as well as credibility and impartiality and BBC Arabic TV may struggle to engage audiences without compromising BBC values<sup>3</sup> - key challenges identified are for the service to be 'stimulating' and to promote repeat viewing

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<sup>1</sup> 'BBC Arabic TV 'should try to be different'', Faisal Abbas, Media Editor, Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper

<sup>2</sup> 'The BBC World Service Arabic TV: Revival of a Dream or Sudden Death by the Competition?' Hussein Y. Amin, TBS Senior Editor

<sup>3</sup> BBC World Service quantitative research findings

These issues demonstrate the unique challenge for BBC Arabic TV: both Arab and wider international audiences require this service to demonstrate its impartiality and lack of bias, however its success may also hinge on its ability to emotionally engage audiences and thereby cut through the competition. In addition, because opinion formers within local audiences may also consume English language BBC outputs, the BBC is under extra scrutiny to ensure that its messages and editorial stance does not conflict across the different media and services.

## 1.2 Research aim and objectives

The overall aim of this research was to evaluate perceptions of BBC Arabic TV amongst current and future opinion formers in terms of its content and how it is delivered. The research was carried out with opinion formers who regularly consume local, regional and international news coverage to provide insight into how BBC Arabic TV is perceived, and within this to evaluate how it performs against competitors.

The objectives of this research were to explore the following questions:

- Does the service meet the needs of its target audience, achieving relevance and emotional connection without compromising BBC values?
- Is there any evidence which indicates concerns about standards of accuracy and impartiality?
- Does the service have an appropriate range of stories and treatments?

## 1.3 Approach

### *Methodology*

The research comprised of a series of in-depth qualitative interviews with current and future opinion formers across 6 different countries. Opinion formers were chosen as the audience for this research because of their influential status and ability to comment on wider issues.

As it was a requirement that all research be carried out with Arabic speakers, and due to the need to gain a detailed understanding of the needs and attitudes of opinion formers in the target markets, Opinion Leader worked closely with the Pan Arab Research Centre ('PARC'), our regional partner in the Middle East, to deliver this project.

PARC is based in Dubai and has the capability to conduct research in all of the markets included in this research. It has an in-depth understanding of the media environment across all of the key markets for BBC Arabic TV, due to its media-monitoring work across the region and qualitative and quantitative research projects that it has conducted for other broadcasters in the region.

### *Markets selected*

The selection of regions included in the study was designed to cover a range of markets that included those that have either relative freedom as well as those that have state control of domestic media, as well as markets comprising audiences that are either homogeneous or heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity and religion. The 6 countries selected for this research were also chosen as they are key markets for BBC Arabic TV in terms of strategic objectives and market size:

- Iraq
- Egypt
- Lebanon
- Kuwait
- Saudi Arabia
- Tunisia

These specific markets were chosen for a number of reasons:

- Iraq has the highest penetration of BBC Arabic TV viewers (as indicated by World Service research).
- Saudi Arabia (SA) was included because the first BBC Arabic TV service, launched by BBC Worldwide, was in partnership with and had funding from the Saudi Arabian Mawariad Group. This was closed in 1996 after just two years on air following screening of a panorama documentary critical of the Saudi royal family. In addition Al-Arabiya, one of BBC Arabic TV's main competitors is based in this market. This may have affected the perceptions of, and responses on this new service. SA is also an example of a market with tightly controlled domestic media.
- We also chose to conduct research in Lebanon, Egypt and Kuwait as these provide a good cross-section of countries which have either relative freedom or state control of domestic media as well as audiences that are either homogeneous or heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity and religion, and also provide a good spread of locations across the region.
- Tunisia was selected in order that North Africa was included and also because it is the former site of the Arabic League of Nations and was therefore felt that opinion formers here may have a more international perspective in a region where penetration of BBC Arabic TV is lower.

### *Sampling and recruitment*

The sampling and recruitment ensured that each market covered opinion formers in the following categories:

- Senior managers in the public and private sector
- University professors/senior lecturers
- Politicians/government advisers
- Heads of non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

- Senior managers in cultural organisations
- Journalists/commentators
- Up and coming entrepreneurs (those likely to be in a position of influence in the future)

PARC conducted desk research to develop initial sample lists of current opinion formers in each country. PARC's local market knowledge helped to ensure that opinion formers who are in senior positions of influence were included in the lists. Recruitment was carried out via an approach letter, along with a bona fide letter on behalf of the BBC Trust to people on the sample list, which was then followed up by phone calls. Those who were willing to take part were asked a series of screening questions to ensure they fitted the recruitment criteria.

To select the up and coming entrepreneurs we worked with partners in each country, namely other PARC offices in SA, Egypt and Kuwait and other research agencies (EMRHOD in Tunisia and Asharq Research Centre in Iraq). Working with partners ensured suitable participants were included in the study that were likely to be influential in the future and fitted the other criteria set out in the specification.

In addition, participants were recruited to satisfy a number of other media consumption criteria ensuring, for example that all participants watch BBC Arabic TV and competing international or Arabic news channels at least three times a week. We also aimed to recruit participants with a mix of preferred channels and a range of news consumption levels.

A further consideration was that participants reflect broadly the demographic make up of BBC Arabic TV's viewers. The demographic criteria achieved were:

- 60% male, 40% female
- Aged between 20 and 50
- Interested in local, regional as well as international news
- Viewers of BBC Arabic TV as well as competing channels

### *Fieldwork*

A total of 36 opinion formers were interviewed as part of this research. The interviews were all conducted face-to-face and lasted roughly one hour.

Eligible respondents who were willing to participate in the research were met at a time and place of their convenience. Most of the interviews took place at the participants' offices. Suitable incentives were offered to respondents in the form of office stationery.

This research was conducted between mid-February and mid-March 2009. This was shortly after the BBC took the decision not to air the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) appeal for humanitarian assistance for the residents of Gaza. Considering how topical this issue was at the time, all

spontaneous mentions by participants have been captured (the appeal was launched on February 2 2009).

The completed sample frame for the interviews is shown on the following page:

Region	Market	Number of interviews	Men	Women
Levant	Iraq	6	4	2
	Egypt	6	4	2
	Lebanon	6	4	2
Gulf	Kuwait	6	4	2
	Saudi Arabia	6	4	2
North Africa	Tunisia	6	2	4
Total		36	22	14

## 2. Executive summary

### 2.1 Introduction

The BBC Trust commissioned Opinion Leader to conduct qualitative research among current and future opinion formers to evaluate BBC Arabic TV in February and March 2009. The objectives were to explore whether the service meets the needs of its target audience, achieving relevance and emotional connection without compromising BBC values, and to examine if there is any evidence which indicates concerns about standards of accuracy and impartiality.

A total of 36 in-depth interviews were conducted with opinion formers across 6 markets: Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia. Opinion formers are defined as people in senior positions of influence in the following categories:

- Senior managers in the public and private sector
- University professors/senior lecturers
- Politicians/government advisers
- Heads of non-governmental organisation (NGOs)
- Senior managers in cultural organisations
- Journalists/commentators
- Up and coming entrepreneurs (those likely to be in a position of influence in the future)

Across the sample, participants were recruited to broadly reflect the demographic profile of BBC Arabic TV's viewers. In addition, all participants were recruited to themselves be BBC Arabic TV viewers and regular news consumers.

### 2.2 Main Findings

#### *Wider news consumption habits and priorities*

Most participants say they access news using a variety of different sources and formats, including TV, radio, newspapers and online; however, for the majority, TV is the preferred news source as it is seen as a lively, interactive and an exciting source of information. Given the pressures of their professional lives, opinion formers access news to fit around their daily routines. For example, many say they access news online throughout the course of the day whilst at work in order to remain up to speed with the latest news and breaking stories. For more in-depth coverage and analysis they prefer to access news via the TV in the evening, once they are relaxed and have free time to absorb the information provided.

Opinion formers seek access to a wide variety of news covering local, national, regional and international issues. The majority of participants say they like to feel they are up to date with what is



happening in the wider world; however they are predominantly interested in local and national news, followed by regional news to keep them up to date with events across the Arab world.

The majority of opinion formers say they purposefully access news from more than one source in order to access a wide variety of opinion, and to ensure balance in their news consumption.

Throughout the course of discussion, a number of common attributes emerged that participants look for in a news provider. These include, in order of importance:

- Credibility, impartiality and accuracy of coverage – these attributes are seen to constitute professional coverage. Within these, transparency in terms of the way news is covered is deemed important
- Variety – both in terms of the presenters and the types of news programmes available on a channel
- Speed of news coverage – the speed with which stories are broadcast is an important consideration
- Comprehensive coverage and in-depth analysis is considered important
- Professionalism in the coverage
- Empathy and connection with the Arabic cause
- Headlines and news ticker that are attention grabbing
- Affinity with presenters

### *General perceptions of the BBC*

Participants acknowledge that the BBC has a long-standing and established history in the international broadcast market. It is described by some as being a leader in the world of news channels and, as such, having a trustworthy image. Participants feel that the BBC has a strong link with Britain, which is seen to further reinforce its image of heritage and tradition.

When initially asked about the BBC, opinion formers almost automatically refer to BBC Arabic Radio, which has had a prominent presence in the Arab market since its launch in 1938. It is primarily through radio that participants have built an affinity with the BBC brand.

Participants spontaneously speak of the BBC's reputation of impartiality, credibility and objectivity in providing news and there is a strong belief that BBC Arabic TV provides an unbiased service that is reliable and trustworthy.

### *Views of BBC Arabic TV*

Perceptions of BBC Arabic TV are largely positive with many of the characteristics that are associated with the BBC as a whole also attributed to the channel.

### ***Key strengths***

The opinion formers interviewed believe that the key strengths of BBC Arabic TV are that it is a trustworthy and credible news channel presenting information in an impartial, unbiased way and successfully combining high quality journalism with in-depth analysis. It is also perceived to have the resources necessary to be able to report from the scene of the event and to cover a wide range of areas and regions of conflict that other channels have less access to. Another feature that significantly adds to its appeal is that BBC Arabic TV is seen to present news in a wide variety of formats – for example through talk shows that practice freedom of speech and cover 'bold' topics.. BBC Arabic TV is spontaneously described as 'powerful', 'professional' and 'experienced'.

### ***Areas for improvement and recommendations***

Whilst overall perceptions of BBC Arabic TV are largely positive, there are potential areas for improvement. In particular, some opinion formers raise questions about whether the channel is sufficiently emotionally engaging for Arab viewers and therefore question its ability to attract and retain audiences and cut through the competition.

There is also a desire for more country-specific news, reflecting the priority opinion formers place on accessing local and national news. There is a sense among some that BBC Arabic TV does not sufficiently highlight the differences between Arabic countries, which is perceived to suggest a lack of in-depth understanding of the region and its issues. For example, social issues in particular Arab countries are not felt to be represented. This perceived gap contributes towards the view that BBC Arabic TV is not felt to be sufficiently emotionally engaging for Arab viewers.

Participants would like to see the channel increase its presence by placing more reporters across the Arab world and in more remote locations to strengthen ties with Arab viewers and create a perception of being closer to events (this would also reassure viewers of a greater cultural understanding).

Additionally, some opinion formers believe that BBC Arabic TV would be more appealing if there was greater coverage of live events from the scene, rather than from the studio, which can result in the viewer feeling removed from the 'action'.

A few participants also feel that the channel does not cover a sufficient variety of topics and would like to see a greater diversity in terms of its programme content. Broadening content, in particular including more programmes covering social issues, sports and entertainment news would help increase excitement towards the channel. This is seen as important if the channel wants to attract greater numbers of younger viewers.

Participants also suggest BBC Arabic TV should facilitate greater viewer interactivity to provide more engaging programmes, and would like to see the channel recruit more experienced presenters and provide current presenters with more training.

### 3. Main Findings

#### 3.1 Wider news consumption habits

##### Summary

- Most participants access news using a variety of different sources and formats; however, for the majority, TV is the preferred news source
- Opinion formers access news to fit around their daily routines, for example, access breaking news online during the day and watch in-depth coverage and analysis via the TV at night
- Opinion formers seek access to a wide variety of news covering local, national, regional and international issues; however, they are predominantly interested in local and national news
- The majority of opinion formers access news from more than one source in order to access a wide variety of opinion to ensure balance in their news consumption.
- There are a number of common attributes that participants look for in a news provider. These include, in order of importance:
  - Credibility and impartiality of the news provider
  - Variety of news
  - Speed of news coverage
  - Comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the news
  - Professionalism in the coverage
  - Empathy and connection with the Arabic cause
  - Strong headlines / news ticker
  - Affinity with presenters

##### *Sources and formats consumed*

Almost all opinion formers interviewed across the markets use television as their primary source for news. Other key sources used include the internet and, to a lesser extent, radio and newspapers. The opinion formers we spoke to do not use mobile phones to access news information.

##### *Television*

For most participants, television is the most important and useful source for news information. It is the preferred medium, allowing them to easily follow local, regional and international news and is spontaneously described by participants as a 'window to the world'.

It is also seen as a lively, interactive and exciting source of information; its ability to offer live footage of breaking news making the viewer feel 'at the heart of the event'.

Respondents currently access a number of TV channels specifically for Arabic news, most notably BBC Arabic TV Channel, Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya. Other channels viewed include MBC news, Orbit news, LBC news, CNBC Arabic, Al Hiwar news, Al Ikhbaria, Al Alam channel and Al Hurra (Al Hurra is especially mentioned by Iraqi respondents).

In addition, some Egyptian participants watch local news channels such as Nile TV, Al Masriya and Al Faida'ya. These channels are preferred as they broadcast Egyptian news, which is seen to be more relevant to them than news from the wider Arabic world. Furthermore, these participants feel that Nile TV connects with them emotionally – understanding their interests and representing their opinions.

*"I like it [Nile TV] because it speaks my language." (Egypt, Private Sector, Male)*

### **Internet**

In addition to television, the internet is used as a key source for news, particularly when participants are away from home or without access to a television. Following the news on the internet is seen as a useful way of catching up on the latest events both within the Arabic region as well as wider international news. The internet is used as the primary source of information for some.

*"Nowadays the internet has become the main news source for our daily lives." (Lebanon, Academic, Male)*

Whilst the internet is a less utilised source of news than television overall, participants frequently check news websites for news they might have missed on television; it is regarded as an easily accessible and available source for breaking news, and 'catching up' on news. A number of newspaper and news channel websites are used for this reason, including websites for the BBC, Al Hurra, Al Diyar and Asharq Alawsat, a leading pan-Arab daily newspaper (for Iraqi participants in particular).

*"It is important to use the internet when there is a specific news story taking place and I cannot reach on the TV." (Egypt, Cultural Organisation, Female)*

*"I visit the BBC website if I cannot watch BBC Arabic TV." (SA, NGO, Male)*

### **Radio**

The radio is a rarely used source of news and information by participants, with many feeling that it lacks 'vitality and dynamism'. It is now seen to be more outdated than other media and most opinion formers say they tend to use radio as 'background noise' or as entertainment when in the car.

*"Listening to the radio has become outdated. When you have 24 hour news channels on television and you can watch news bulletins every half hour, you do not need to listen to the radio." (Egypt, Public Sector, Male)*

*"This is no longer the time of the radio. I may listen to it in the car, but no more than that." (SA, Cultural Organisation, Male)*

However, for some opinion formers, particularly Saudis and Iraqis, the most popular radio station for international news is BBC Arabic Radio. A small number also listen to Monte Carlo radio station for Middle Eastern News.

### *Interest in regional and international news*

Opinion formers are interested in accessing a wide variety of news covering local, national, regional and international issues. Though the majority of participants say they like to feel up-to-date with what is happening in the wider world, they are predominantly interested in local and national news, followed by regional news to keep them up to date with events across the Arab world.

*"One should be aware of all events happening in the Arab and Western world. Middle Eastern news covers our main causes, like those of Palestine, Iraq, Iran and the Gulf. There are subjects which you need to be aware of. You need to know the news of your Arab and Muslim brothers and know how you can offer help." (SA, Academic, Female)*

Opinion formers feel a strong affinity with the rest of the Arab community and perceive that events occurring in the rest of the Arab world will have a direct effect on their local environment.

Similarly, international news is primarily followed for the impact it has on the Arab world. Events occurring in the international world, including any changes in the economy, terrorist related events, and the US elections, for example, are all seen potentially to affect the Arab world, either directly or indirectly.

*"The world is now led by a great force. We are interested in the news of big countries and our relationship with them, our rank compared to them, how we are benefiting from them, what the benefits are and if they will enhance development or politics and address terrorism cases." (SA, Journalist, Female)*

In addition, participants feel that international news provides them with both access to, and insight into, other cultures and societies. They enjoy learning about different people, their daily lives and a wide range of views and opinions. There is a strong sense that BBC Arabic TV successfully provides this window.

*"I like to learn about the details of each country and about their culture. I like topics which build bridges between different people." (SA, NGO, Male)*

### *Choosing a news provider*

When choosing a specific channel or source of news, a number of characteristics and features drive opinion formers' decisions. These are listed below in order of importance:

#### ***Credibility and impartiality of the news provider***

Credibility and impartiality are both seen as key attributes for news providers. Some participants, most notably those from Kuwait, place much importance on the assumed political ties of providers (either through its country of origin or its owner/editor).

*"I watch 'Russia Today' but I question their analysis because its Russian owner has his own agenda to achieve." (Kuwait, Academic, Male)*

Transparency is deemed to be important for credibility; opinion formers are looking for an honest reflection of the news and events. Moreover, the majority feel it is important for them to access a variety of news sources to ensure impartiality (this is discussed in more depth below). In addition, quality of coverage, depth of analysis, and 'showing both sides of the story' is important.

#### ***Variety of news***

Variety of news is seen as one of the most attractive features of a news channel as this fulfils viewers' appetite for diversity in the news they consume. Variety is seen as important in both the content and the presenters of the news and programming.

#### ***Speed of news coverage***

Speed of news coverage is another priority. This includes up-to-date stories and live coverage from the scene of events. However, it is worth noting that a number of participants recognise the BBC's commitment to accuracy as well as speed. Opinion formers feel they would not want to compromise accuracy for speed.

#### ***Comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the news***

Although the opinion formers value live reports, they also want these to be supplemented with comprehensive and in-depth analysis. This type of analysis is seen to be particularly useful as it has an educational role.

#### ***Professionalism in the coverage***

This relates to precision of the news and background research carried out for each topic. Opinion formers regard this as important in adding objectivity to the channel.

### ***Empathy and connection with the Arabic cause***

Having cultural empathy is important for Kuwaiti and Iraqi opinion formers in particular. They feel that this is best demonstrated through the transmission of topics that relate to Arabs and their lives.

### ***Strong headlines/news ticker***

Strong headlines and news tickers help catch opinion formers' attention and encourage them to consume the full story. Some also mention the importance of using colours that stand out in the headlines at the bottom of the screen.

*"Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya covered Gaza news with very strong headlines. They encourage me to watch the news every day." (SA, Journalist, Female)*

### ***Affinity with presenters***

A few opinion formers (those from Egypt in particular) choose a news channel based on the presenters - how likeable and engaging they are seen to be.

*"The anchor makes you want to watch the news or stay away from it." (Egypt, Private Sector, Male)*

### ***News consumption***

Most opinion formers in the sample prefer to watch the news in the evening, in most cases after 8pm as this is the most convenient time for many to watch the news. Evening viewing is often with family members. A few regularly watch the news early in the morning before going to work, or in the afternoon if coming home for lunch. The majority also access the news online throughout the course of the day.

Most participants regularly access more than one source of news. Key reasons for this include:

### ***Depth of information on the topic discussed***

Many seek more than one news source to gather as much information as possible on a particular topic. Some news channels cover different details of the same topics and viewers gain different perspectives and more 'rounded' opinions. Topics are invariably discussed differently across the channels depending on, for example, the political inclination and the values of each channel. Thus, watching a number of different news sources fulfils participants' need for diversity. Some opinion formers also mentioned that they like to compare the news transmitted by each channel; this provides them with peace of mind that they have been exposed to a number of different opinions.

*"You watch Al Jazeera for its defiance while you watch Al Arabiya for its moderate views." (SA, Cultural Organisation, Male)*

*"I like to hear more than one opinion on the same topic." (Iraq, NGO, Female)*



*Country-specific information*

Watching a number of different channels allows participants to gather more detailed information on specific Arab countries and regions that may be covered less thoroughly on other channels.

## 3.2 Perceptions of the BBC as a whole

### Summary

- Opinion formers say that the BBC has a long-standing and established history in the international broadcast market, and many feel it has a trustworthy image
- Participants feel that the BBC has a strong link with Britain, which is seen to further reinforce its image of heritage and tradition
- When initially asked about the BBC, opinion formers almost automatically refer to BBC Arabic Radio, and it is primarily through radio that participants have built an affinity with the BBC brand
- Participants spontaneously speak of the BBC's reputation of impartiality, credibility and objectivity

The majority of participants perceive BBC radio to be the backbone of the BBC as a whole. BBC Arabic Radio is an establishment that participants say they, and previous generations, grew up listening to. Therefore, BBC Arabic Radio is automatically connected to people's pasts and triggers a certain level of nostalgia. This also contributes to the BBC brand being linked with a sense of heritage and tradition.

*"The British Broadcasting Corporation dates back years and years. It has deeply established roots and has covered very important events, including those in the Middle East. Thus, any listener or viewer seeking credibility would watch the BBC to see the other side of news which other channels do not display sometimes." (SA, Journalist, Female)*

The BBC has a strong reputation in the Arabic world, derived from the perceived quality and credibility of its coverage, and general experience and professionalism.

*"In addition to the credibility of news that is adopted by the [BBC], it is also accurate in conveying the news." (Iraq, Academic, Male)*

*"The BBC channel is like the grown up man. Notice that I said man and not woman. It's a man who has experience and wisdom." (Kuwait, Academic, Male)*

Participants feel that BBC has a number of core strengths, all of which contribute to its overall reputation. Most notably, these strengths include:

- **A high level of credibility, objectivity and impartiality.** Impartiality in particular is a key characteristic attributed to the BBC.

*"It gathers its information from different types of analysis and evidence, so the viewer is provided with a wide horizon of information. The BBC convinces the viewer by several means, not just one." (SA, Academic, Male)*

*"I like that the BBC is objective in its approach to subjects." (Lebanon, Journalist, Female)*

*"Strong and committed to neutrality." (SA, Cultural Organisation, Male)*

- A **recognised and well-established name** - many of the respondents talk about the history and origins of the BBC, its link with Britain, and refer to a strong history and past. This history and reputation means the BBC is viewed as a credible and trustworthy source.
- Having **well-produced documentaries** – these are seen as professional and interesting.

### 3.3 Evaluation of BBC Arabic TV

#### Summary

- Perceptions of BBC Arabic TV are largely positive with many of the characteristics that are associated with the BBC as a whole also attributed to the channel
- The opinion formers interviewed believe BBC Arabic TV has a number of key strengths:
  - It is perceived to be a credible channel providing news that is unbiased and impartial
  - It is described it as 'powerful', 'professional' and 'experienced'
  - It is perceived to successfully combine high quality journalism with in-depth analysis
  - It is perceived to cover a variety of news, in a wide range of areas and regions of conflict
  - It is perceived to provide up-to-date coverage of the latest events
- Despite positive perceptions overall, some participants do mention areas in which they believe the channel could be improved. Perceived weaknesses among **some** opinion formers include:
  - The channels lack of emotional engagement with its Arab viewers
  - Its perceived lack of country-specific news
  - Repetitive half hourly news bulletins
  - Perceived lack of emotional engagement from presenters
  - Lack of diversity in terms of its programme content
  - Lack of live coverage from the scene of an event
  - Lack of access to the channel in some regions.

#### *Accessing BBC Arabic TV*

Many participants currently watch BBC Arabic TV four to five times a week, primarily in the evening after 8pm, with a few also watching in the mornings. The evening is deemed as the best time to view the news as this is when opinion formers have returned from work and are comfortable and relaxed.

#### *Overall perceptions of BBC Arabic TV*

Overall perceptions of BBC Arabic TV are positive. The channel is considered by most in the same light as the BBC generally, as a credible and impartial news and information source. The perceived ability to present information in an unbiased manner is particularly valued because it means the information is reliable and allows viewers to 'make up their own minds'

*"[BBC Arabic TV] is a neutral channel, which does not have a specific direction. It is not biased towards a particular side." (Kuwait, Journalist, Female)*

BBC Arabic TV is also seen as a comprehensive channel that offers in-depth news analysis. Its news coverage is spontaneously described as 'powerful', 'professional' and 'experienced'.

Crucially, it is also considered to cover areas and regions of conflict, which other channels are seen to have less access to. This is evident from recent coverage of events in Gaza, where opinion formers feel BBC Arabic TV managed to broadcast interviews and coverage in areas that are not reachable by other TV stations.

### *Perceived strengths*

As highlighted above, key spontaneous strengths associated with the channel include:

#### ***Unbiased and impartial***

BBC Arabic TV is viewed as a credible channel providing news that is unbiased and impartial. This is related to the perceived credibility of the BBC overall, but also to specific aspects of BBC Arabic TV's coverage, which is felt to be factual and also to relay a cross-section of opinions, allowing viewers to make up their own minds.

*"Anyone who follows the news should know that BBC is a school and teaches many values, like exactness and the objectivity. It's a well-known culture that cares about the precision and the impartiality before the quickness. BBC takes many things in consideration." (Lebanon, Academic, Male)*

*"They do not exaggerate the news. They provide credible news and impartiality which is a very good thing about the channel." (Egypt, Private Sector, Male)*

*"It provides you with the news no matter what the consequences are." (SA, Journalist, Female)*

*"It is backed by the British Government. However, it does not interfere in the channel." (Iraq, Up and Coming Entrepreneur, Male)*

*"BBC Arabic is neutral... especially compared to other channels, which exaggerate the news or cover one side of the news." (Kuwait, Journalist, Female)*

*"BBC Arabic TV is distinguished by being a neutral channel and consequently can gain the trust of the Arab viewer." (Egypt, Journalist, Female)*

#### ***Variety of coverage and international focus***

The variety of news from different parts of the world transmitted by BBC Arabic TV is also valued and contributes to the channel having an international image. However, it should be noted that although the international news coverage is seen to be strength, a number of opinion formers would like to see more local news. There is also a perception that BBC Arabic TV's coverage of international events is due to it being an international channel based in London.

*"It is a good channel for the news, it is bold and you can always follow the world news on it." (Kuwait, Private Sector, Male)*

*"I regard BBC [Arabic TV] as an international passport that takes me to different parts of the world." (SA, Journalist, Female)*

### ***Experienced approach***

The history of the BBC is generally felt to be one of experience, accuracy and reliability - these traits are felt to also apply to BBC Arabic TV. More specifically, the channel's approach to news analysis is described by some opinion formers as mature and experienced.

*"BBC Arabic TV is like an old man, wise and deep, while American channels are like a teenager, still immature." (Kuwait, Academic, Male)*

### ***Interactivity***

Opinion formers recognise that the channel allows viewers an element of interactivity, for example through SMS text messaging, phone calls and emails. These mechanisms contribute to a sense that BBC Arabic TV is open to dialogue and discussion and opinion leaders feel this two-way communication helps the channel to be 'close to the viewer'.

*"It gives Arabs a chance to represent themselves." (SA, Journalist, Female)*

### ***Up-to-date, regular coverage***

BBC Arabic TV is seen as providing up-to-date coverage of the latest events. Those particularly who are aware of the 24 hour coverage hold this in high regard.

A minority spontaneously link BBC Arabic TV's (perceived) strong financial position to its ability to provide up-to-date coverage, as this allows the channel to have a wide network of offices and reporters.

*"BBC has huge financial capabilities" (Journalist, Lebanon, Female)*

Overall, it is felt that the regular news bulletins allow viewers to stay up-to-date with the latest news. However, whilst participants appreciate the usefulness of being able to be quickly brought up to date with the latest news and events, many also acknowledge the downside of this - that it often becomes repetitive and a 'turn off' after prolonged viewing.

*"Its 24 hour news broadcast means that you can get the news that you want directly at any time and live the event and, although the audience may get bored, it is a strength of the channel." (Egypt, Private Sector, Male)*

### ***Accessibility***

BBC Arabic TV is seen to convey news and information in a straightforward, easy to understand way, which is greatly appreciated as it is seen to make the service more accessible.

### ***Perceived weaknesses***

Despite positive perceptions overall, some participants do mention areas in which they believe the channel could be improved. Perceived weaknesses include:

#### ***Lack of emotional engagement***

There is a split of opinion on this issue. Some opinion formers believe that BBC Arabic TV lacks emotional engagement with its Arab viewers and lacks empathy with, and connection to, the Arab world. It is seen by some as being overly 'British' and as needing to strengthen its ties to the Arab community.

This perception that BBC Arabic TV lacks emotional engagement also stems from the perception that it focuses on international news to a greater extent than regional and local news. Most participants interviewed feel that there is not enough country-specific news, most strongly felt by those in Iraq.

*"For BBC Arabic TV to be more emotionally engaging, it must present actual stories from Arab society, for example, stories to be closer to local than international." (Iraq, Academic, Male)*

*"Some people do not watch it just because they think of it as a British channel." (Iraq, NGO, Female)*

*"For BBC to touch the hearts of the Arabs, it should...know about their customs and traditions. They should let go of the image that Arabs are those terrorists who hit the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in America." (Lebanon, Journalist, Female)*

*"The most important thing is that the channel should care about the Iraqi cause, appreciate its importance in our region and report all the international events that are related to the Iraqi case." (Iraq, Politician, Male)*

Some opinion formers also feel that the channel does not sufficiently highlight the differences across Arabic countries.

*"It should highlight the differences among Arab communities. It should not deal with them as if they are all one. Saudi is not like Egypt, not like Iraq. Not all Arabs are the same." (SA, Academic, Female)*

In contrast, Al Arabiya is seen to be 'an Arabic channel for the Arabic people'. It is well-liked for having a high level of interaction with its viewers, as well as being emotionally engaging through its narration of the news.

### ***One sided reporting***

Most perceive BBC Arabic TV to be neutral and objective in relaying the news. However, some Iraqi opinion formers believe BBC Arabic TV provides one-sided reports when covering Iraqi news and this leads them to question the channel's impartiality. In particular, some Iraqis believe that the channel can sometimes be biased towards a specific party.

*"They have a problem with lack of neutrality when it comes to interviewing guests, commentaries and news about Iraq, and the old regime." (Iraq, Cultural Organisation, Female)*

*"BBC radio is known for its neutrality, while BBC Arabic TV has changed this {and} has become emotionally connected to specific parties in society." (Iraq, Up and Coming Entrepreneur, Male)*

### ***Repetitive***

The half hourly news bulletins are seen by some as repetitive and this can induce 'channel hopping'. While repetition is accepted as somewhat of a necessary evil (so that viewers can get up to speed with breaking news as soon as they turn the channel on), they often find this frustrating when watching the channel for prolonged periods. Some suggest that changing the presenter more frequently may help the news to seem less repetitive.

*"I have noticed that the BBC channel repeats the news. The news is being repeated to you around the clock. Repeating the news in this manner results in boredom and even abstaining from watching the channel. You watch the news and then again after 45 minutes it is re-run." (Iraq, Private Sector, Male)*

*"I feel like it is a recorded tape that is repeated." (SA, Cultural Organisation, Male)*

### ***Lack of live coverage***

The majority of participants believe that transmitting images from the scene of the event adds to the channel's credibility. There are split opinions when it comes to the amount of live coverage offered by BBC Arabic TV.

Some opinion formers, particularly those from SA, feel that BBC Arabic TV does not offer sufficient coverage of live events and too often reports from the studio, not at the scene of the event. This results in the opinion formers feeling removed from what is happening.

*"Sometimes you feel that the reporter is reporting from behind a desk and not in the middle of the event." (Egypt, Private Sector, Male)*



It is important to note, however, that others disagree. For example, most Egyptian opinion formers believe that the BBC Arabic TV is particularly good at transmitting live coverage from where the event is taking place.

While participants differed in their opinions of the extent of BBC Arabic TV's live coverage, they all identified this as an important feature for news coverage.

### ***Variety***

Some opinion formers feel that the channel does not cover a sufficient variety of topics and would like to see a greater diversity in terms of its programme content. In particular, some opinion formers suggest that the channel focuses on politics and the economy more than social and entertainment topics.

However, personal interests varied across the sample, with viewers from different age groups and genders, in particular, reporting different interests. For example, to attract a younger audience, it was felt to be important that sports, entertainment news and general interest programmes are given a greater prominence.

*"It lacks diversity of programmes and is mostly based on news bulletins. It is weak when it comes to offering exciting programmes. There should be more excitement which attracts the viewer, such as analytical programmes, sports programmes." (Egypt, Public Sector, Male)*

*"Most Arabic regions are comprised of young people. Therefore BBC Arabic should be more aimed at younger generations." (Lebanon, NGO, Male)*

### ***Network of reporters***

For many participants it is also felt to be important that there is a strong network of reporters operating in different regions. Some do not feel that the BBC presently has a sufficient pool of reporters 'on the ground' to cover all regions. Additionally, as mentioned above, opinion leaders feel that the channel would be more emotionally engaging overall if there was more coverage live from the scene.

*"BBC Arabic TV should have a wider net of reporters covering Lebanon. Now there are the upcoming parliamentary elections as well as the International Tribunal for Hariri, BBC Arabic TV must have reporters on the ground to cover these issues." (Lebanon, Journalist, Female)*

### ***Presenters lack of emotional engagement***

For some participants, particularly opinion formers from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, BBC Arabic TV presenters can be perceived to lack emotional engagement and appear 'distant' in their conveying of the news. Some mention that the presenters feel like 'strangers'.

*"You feel that the presenter is a stranger, while at other channels, you find presenters who seem to interact with the news as well as with the audience, making us feel like we know them." (Kuwait, Journalist, Female)*

*"Their presenters are not known; their personalities are ordinary, although academically they are educated and are good." (SA, Entrepreneur, Male)*

It should be noted, however, that to others this approach helps to present an unbiased view of the news. This was particularly the case amongst some Tunisian, Lebanese and Egyptian opinion formers who perceive the presenters to be neutral, which helps convey impartiality of the channel overall.

### ***Visual appeal***

A small number of Tunisian participants feel that the channel uses colours that are less appealing than other channels and would like the colours used to be more bold and striking.

*"When I compare it with Al Jazeera, I notice the red colour that attracts my attention unlike BBC Arabic TV channel colours that are faded and not attractive." (Tunisia, NGO, Female)*

Linked to this, some feel that the graphics used in the studio are weak and could be more high-tech. For example, it is deemed that Al Arabiya uses new technologies that give the illusion that the presenter is standing close or in the midst of the event, while still in the studio.

### ***Lack of access to channel***

There is some spontaneous mention of the lack of access to the channel in some regions. This is particularly highlighted amongst some Lebanese participants.

### ***Low profile of channel***

There are also a minority who feel that the channel would greatly benefit from increased advertising across other media so that people are more aware of its presence.

## ***In detail: Perceptions of programming and content***

### ***Presenters***

Some participants, particularly Egyptians, feel the BBC Arabic TV presenters have a straightforward, accessible style. The language used is seen as comprehensive and clear and the presenters are described by opinion formers as 'experienced', 'educated' and 'cultured'. The journalists are perceived to be professional, both in terms of their manner and their physical presentation, for example, the modest dressing of their female reporters. There is also a perception that presenters are

neutral, handling conflicts and opposing points of view well. This contributes to the perception that BBC Arabic TV is unbiased.

*"I like Samir [Sam] Farah, Imam Al Kassir and Othman Sirt. They have a simple style." (SA, Up and Coming Entrepreneur, Male)*

*"I like Rania Al Alattar. She is so good and kind." (Egypt, Private Sector, Male)*

However, there is a sense among other participants in SA and Egypt that the BBC Arabic TV presenters belong to a young generation of journalists, some of whom are viewed comparatively poorly with presenters on competing channels, primarily because they are seen to lack experience, knowledge and gravitas. Consequently some participants suggest that further training of BBC Arabic TV presenters would be beneficial.

*"The new generation of presenters needs to work hard in order to gain experience compared with the older generation." (SA, NGO, Male)*

Some opinion formers suggest that bringing in new presenters on a regular basis (for example, every few months) would ensure that the channel remains lively, dynamic and engaging. Some also suggest that the addition of higher profile presenters from across the Arabic region would enhance the channel's offer and appeal.

*"If they brought in famous presenters who are the best such as Shada Omar, Rima Maktabi, Najat Sharaf Al Die, George Ghanem etc who we know and recognise, we would follow them." (Lebanon, Up and Coming Entrepreneur, Male)*

*"I think it's important that they make a programmes presented by Souad Karout El-Ashi, the most important journalist in Lebanon. She now runs a talk show on NBN. George Kurdahi is also eye-catching. It's important that BBC Arabic TV brings someone important in from each country to attract viewers." (Lebanon, Journalist, Female)*

### ***Variety and content***

Overall, participants believe that BBC Arabic TV covers a wide range of different types of content in a comprehensive manner, providing variety and offering something for everyone.

There is particular praise for BBC Arabic TV's coverage of news items such as politics and the economy and, for some, sports news.

Participants believe that BBC Arabic TV's news content is underpinned by a good understanding of the issues and its audience – and so felt to be tailored to their needs. One opinion former commented:

*"It has a good communication with the audience; there are many people who are working behind the scenes in order to understand the needs of the Iraqi." (Iraq, NGO, Female)*

Opinion formers also perceive BBC Arabic TV's news coverage as credible, believing that the speed with which news items are reported and the balance of opinions that are presented (for example by hosting guests who have different points of view) help build this image of credibility. In addition, participants believe that BBC Arabic TV's news reports are unique due to their wide geographical coverage: their reporters' are seen to be able to enter a wide range of regions (due to the BBC network's global reach) that are perceived to be inaccessible by other channels.

There is further praise for BBC Arabic TV's wide coverage of international news; however some participants criticise the content of its international news, believing it is too focused on international news at the expense of local Arab news. Linked to this point, some participants believe that the channel lacks diversity when it comes to regional news, especially in terms of coverage of specific topics about the Middle East. Furthermore, some Iraqi respondents believe that the channel's coverage of news within the Arab community can be imbalanced, sometimes missing key events in particular areas at the expense of coverage in other areas.

*"Sometimes they forget that there are events happening in regions other than the main ones being covered." (Lebanon, NGO, Male)*

Despite overall positive perceptions of the content of BBC Arabic TV, some participants believe that there is a lack of variety beyond traditional news topics - especially in terms of social and entertainment programmes - which is seen by some to make BBC Arabic TV a less exciting and engaging channel than some of its competitors. Some participants also say they would like to see more cultural, social and scientific news sitting alongside with more political, economic and sports news to enhance the channel's content. There is a sense that by increasing the range of different types of programmes available on BBC Arabic TV, the channel would be able to attract more viewers – spanning wider age groups and different interests.

*"My wife and children are not going to watch BBC Arabic TV unless it adds more diverse topics to the schedule such as shows on fashion, health, and festivals." (Iraq, Private Sector, Male)*

*"BBC Arabic TV should show more entertainment programmes or light entertainment news without taking out the element of news. It would attract the viewer." (Egypt, Public Sector, Male)*

### ***Live images***

The use of live images to support coverage of news items is perceived to be important by opinion formers, as it is seen to increase interest in the items by adding colour and ensuring that the coverage is lively and engaging, but also, crucially, it enhances perceptions of credibility. Participants therefore feel that if BBC Arabic TV increased its use of live images, the channel would be seen as even more credible. This view is particularly strongly held amongst male Saudi opinion formers.

### ***Studio design***

BBC Arabic TV's studio design is well-liked by many participants and is described as modern and attractive. However, some participants believe that the décor could be renovated and updated more often to hold viewers' interest. As stated earlier, some participants believe that the colours of the set design could be more bold and striking; potentially giving it more of an 'Arabic feel'.

*"Al Jazeera has better décor than BBC Arabic TV. It is more lively and dynamic, while BBC Arabic has a classic British décor." (Tunisia, Up and Coming Entrepreneur, Female)*

*"On Al Arabiya you can see the anchors standing, allowing you to take a better look at the decor, while BBC Anchors are always sitting down." (SA, Up and Coming Entrepreneur, Male)*

### ***Story telling techniques***

Participants believe that BBC Arabic TV's reporters present stories clearly and consistently, retaining the attention of the viewer. There is a belief that the channels presenters in the field are courageous and that they go to great lengths to tell the 'best' story to the viewer in the most engaging way, often facing and enduring difficult situations as a result.

### ***Language and Tone***

BBC Arabic TV presenters' use of language, and their style and tone is seen to be very much 'in keeping with' language, tone and style of presenters on BBC Arabic Radio. Opinion formers say that they find the presenters' voices clear and understandable and that their pronunciation and enunciation is 'excellent'. Their use of language is described by participants as 'simple Arabic', and there is a belief amongst some participants that the presenters' choice of words means 'anyone' can follow what they are saying – enhancing access to the channel.

*"It chooses calm presenters whose Arabic language is good." (Iraq, Private Sector, Male)*

*"BBC Arabic TV is able to maintain the correct Arabic language and its clarity." (Kuwait, Academic, Male)*

*"The tone is very clear as is the language of the presenters." (Egypt, Public sector, Male)*

However, whilst believing that the use of language is simple and accessible some participants believe that the tone and style of BBC Arabic TV presenters prevents them from achieving social connectivity with the viewer. These opinion formers believe that presenters can appear too detached and disengaged from the topic of discussion, and that the personality of the presenter is not evident through watching the channel. A minority of participants believe that BBC Arabic TV presenters are emotionless, and describe them as 'lifeless' and 'neutral', adding to the view that some presenters fail to really 'connect' with some of the topics, thus failing to connect with the audience.

*"The style of the announcers is lifeless. They try to be funny and amiable but they are serious and committed to a certain text." (SA, Journalist, Female)*

### ***Geographical coverage***

BBC Arabic TV is seen to have a wide ranging geographical coverage including far-reaching places and countries that other television news providers are not seen to be able to access. This, coupled with its global network, is seen as enabling BBC Arabic TV to provide strong, in-depth international news.

However, when it comes to providing in-depth information about specific countries within the Middle East region, some opinion formers feel the coverage is limited and lacks depth compared to other Arabic channels. Thus, some opinion formers feel coverage on a local level is limited.

*"I think that they have one correspondent in Iraq, while the rest of the channels have many correspondents/reporters - certainly Al Hurra does." (Iraq, Private Sector, Male)*

*"BBC Arabic TV presents news about Darfur, Gaza, and Turkey. Not all of this news would be of interest to me... However, Al Hurra rarely goes beyond Iraq." (Iraq, Private Sector, Male)*

### ***Access***

Some Lebanese participants in particular believe that there is limited access to BBC Arabic TV, and importantly, feel they can not get easy access to the channel, both in their homes or at public spaces.

*"In Lebanon BBC Arabic TV isn't well-known." (Lebanon, Journalist, Female)*

*"Unfortunately, BBC Arabic TV is not even available in hotels when you travel". (Lebanon, Academic, Male)*

### ***Values***

Overall, the vast majority of participants believe that BBC Arabic TV has strong journalistic values. These values are seen to come from a commitment to objective and balanced reporting. Most participants believe that BBC Arabic TV is highly credible, and describe its key qualities as 'neutral' and 'accurate'. In particular, its international news is seen to be impartial.

It should be noted that for the majority of participants, the BBC's position on the DEC appeal was not felt to have had an impact on perceptions of BBC Arabic TV overall, or of the BBC's values, and for many it was not mentioned throughout the interview.

Some participants who did mention the DEC appeal commented that they understood the BBC's decision, and one respondent commented they saw its stance reinforcing perceptions of impartiality:

*"The BBC has rejected this issue after thinking about it as a political matter and not as an emotional or humanitarian one, this is my opinion, and I feel sorry for those who did not understand the policy of this channel." (Iraq, NGO, Female)*

However, a small number of opinion formers say that BBC Arabic TV's refusal to air the DEC appeal has had a negative impact on perceptions of its credibility for them personally. These participants believe that it was a questionable decision given they regarded the appeal as a humanitarian issue. However, these same participants say that they still hold BBC Arabic TV in high regard, and spontaneously talk about many strengths of the channel.

*"I feel depressed, disappointed and ashamed that a school in the level of BBC refused to broadcast the Gaza aid announcement for people facing death." (Tunisia, Politician, Male)*

*"From their position on the Gaza incident, they hurt a lot of people and the justification was silly. They refused to advertise the call for help. Their attitude was very bad and I see them taking part in the crime." (SA, NGO, Male)*

### **Programmes**

The following documentary programmes and talk shows on BBC Arabic TV were mentioned by participants as being ones they view most frequently:

**Nuqtat Hewar (Talking Point):** is BBC Arabic TV's popular interactive multimedia programme, seeking to combine emotional engagement and impartiality. It is broadcast live on radio, television and online. The first 50 minutes of the 90 minute programme are simulcast on radio and television after which the presenter is seen walking from the TV studio to the radio booth where he continues the debate. The presenter plays a crucial role acting as moderator with the audience who participate via emails, text messages and phone calls as well as pre-recorded webcam contributions and vox-pops from around the Arab world. Each Nuqtat Hewar focuses on a single-issue. Each issue to be debated is drawn from audience discussion on the website prior to the programme going on air. Contributors are selected from the same source. The topics are largely driven by the news agenda although producers aim to get a mix of political and social topics, including controversial subjects such as sex and religion.

This programme is described by participants as an 'enticing' programme that highlights opposing views of the same topic. In addition, this programme is praised for approaching what are seen to be 'daring' topics. As well as this, the fact that the programme is broadcast live is seen to make it unique and creates the view amongst participants that it is a lively and dynamic show. Opinion formers also say that the timing and scheduling of the programme is convenient; however, some Iraqi opinion formers say they would like to see this programme shown every day, whilst a few Tunisian interviewees would like it to be repeated at night.

Viewer interaction through SMS, telephone and emails is seen to be appealing, allowing the viewer to present their views and speak their mind. Some opinion formers expressed an interest in having more programmes with this option.

In addition, Nuqtat Hewar's presenter Samir Farah is well-liked by opinion formers who describe him as credible and professional, whilst having a familiar, accessible style.

*"I think that the idea of the Nuqtat Hewar programme which is shown on the BBC Arabic TV station is great." (Iraq, NGO, Female)*

*"There is a programme called "Nuqtat Hewar" which you do not see on any other Arabic Channel because it would be banned. It is presented by Samir Farah who is highly credible and professional. He is a gentleman. He has a simple style that makes you feel as if you are sitting in a coffee shop with your friends and not watching TV." (SA, Cultural Organisation, Male)*

In terms of improvements to the programme, some opinion formers suggest that if it concentrated on different regions in each show it could be even more engaging to more viewers.

**Agenda Maftouha (Open Agenda):** A weekly discussion programme broadcast on the equivalent of a Sunday night (Friday evening). The 50 minute programme has three or four guests who debate and discuss the issue of the week. The time allows for an in-depth exploration of a particular topic helped by the use of graphics and views from the region.

This programme is well-liked by participants for tackling issues of a 'daring' nature, such as conflicts in the region, which change each week. Its presenter, Mahmoud Murad, is thought to be excellent, with a great narration technique and style that is described as 'calm and assuring', thus allowing the viewer to interact and engage with him. He is also described as 'well-prepared' and knowledgeable, which is seen as necessary considering the issues covered in the programme. Some participants say that they find the timing of the programme suits their lifestyles, and that they appreciate the re-runs so they don't have to miss something they enjoy watching.



*"Open Agenda' is a programme that discusses a problem every Friday where they choose good guests." (SA, Cultural Organisation, Male)*

**Lagnat Taqassy al-Haqaeq, The Fact-Finding Commission (The Commission):** An investigative programme similar to BBC Radio 4's Moral Maze recorded on location in studios across the Arab world. It features a broad range of sensitive subjects including social, economic and political issues as well as investigations into specific events and tragedies. The panel of experts and opinion formers chaired by an Arabic TV presenter considers evidence from a wide range of viewpoints, expertise and experience with witnesses.

This programme's strengths are believed to lie in its social and emotional appeal, for example, covering topics about children. Many participants say they like the fact that the programme is filmed outside the studio which results in it hosting varied guests with different views on the subject matter. These aspects are deemed to add an element of excitement to the programme.

Participants believe that daily broadcasts of the programme would help to increase its appeal, as well as more live coverage from the scene of the event.

*"They should broadcast live from the field and then discuss the topics with their guests in the studios." (Tunisia, Politician, Male)*

**An Qorb (Close Up):** A series of seven investigative documentaries especially produced by BBC Arabic TV. They aimed to offer journalism that was relevant to the lives of viewers in MENA and tackle a range of social issues. Subjects included: the plight of disabled people in the Middle East as seen through the eyes of a disabled man in Yemen, an investigation into the increasing number of illegitimate children being born in Morocco and investigation into the high levels of pollution in Cairo that's affecting the lives of many Egyptians.

Participants like the fact that An Qorb covers different topics in every episode. Some of the more daring topics are particularly well-liked and opinion formers say that they enjoy watching programmes that discuss daring issues in society as these help to create interest and engage the viewer. However, these programmes are perceived by a minority of opinion formers in SA to portray a negative image of Arabs.

**Fi Essameem (To the Point):** A half hour weekly interview programme presented by Hasan Muawad. The programme focuses on a one to one interview with a controversial personality or interviews around a controversial news subject. The presenter challenges guests on their views and on statements they've made.

This programme is also perceived by most respondents to be valuable, informative and insightful given it features knowledgeable guests, for example a recently featured interview with Amr Moussa (Secretary General of the Arab League). Participants also appreciate the interactive dialogue between the presenter and the viewer.

*"The presenter seems well-prepared for the topic discussed. He knows what to ask and how to explain to the viewer the different points of view." (Kuwait, Private Sector, Male).*

**Al Alam Hatha al-Masaa (The World this Evening):** A daily news and analysis programme headed by two presenters. It features the top four or five stories of the day and examines the issues around these stories in detail with background reports, interviews, discussions and analysis. The programme also features longer films and explanations of issues using the video wall.

This programme is described by participants as a summary of the entire day's events in one news bulletin broadcast at night. Opinion formers say they appreciate the fact that this programme updates the viewer on the news late at night in a well-summarised way.

*"End of Evening gives you a summary of the events of the whole day, from its beginning until it ends. This, in my opinion, is a good trait." (SA, Entrepreneur, Male)*

### ***Opinion formers' preferred programmes***

Overall, opinion formers believe that BBC Arabic TV offers a good variety of programmes, but there is a definite thirst for more variety, in particular there appears to be an appetite for an increased number of documentaries. Participants say they would like to see further documentaries that cover a wide range of topics to suit varied tastes and interests – this is very personal, and favourite programmes and tastes differs across local markets. For example, opinion formers in Tunisia would like to see the addition of programmes which discuss topics about Tunisia and host Tunisian guests.

*"There should be diversity of programmes alongside the news programmes - this would add an element of attraction to watch the channel." (Egypt, Public Sector, Male)*

*"The viewer's life is not only based on politics but rather on money, health, sports, social issues such as family issues and religion so it has to be inclusive of all those topics." (Egypt, Private Sector, Male)*

### ***Programme Scheduling***

The majority of opinion formers say that they prefer to watch BBC Arabic TV in the evening. As mentioned, some participants like the repetition of programmes which allows them to catch up on anything that they might have missed due to their busy work schedules. However, some up and coming entrepreneurs would prefer the repeated programmes to be scheduled at the weekend, as this is when they have the most time to watch TV. In addition, despite its perceived importance, the

repetition of news every half an hour is considered 'dull' to a minority. Some participants say that the repetition of the programmes would seem less 'boring' if the news bulletins were a little more lively – for example, more analysis, different reporting styles, increased use of live images and varied camera angles.

The 24 hour broadcast of the channel is widely applauded by those participants who are aware of it, as they welcome the opportunity to catch-up on the news at any time of the day. However, some feel that this extended air time should result in a greater variety of programmes being added to the channel and have not yet seen evidence of this.

*"Of course it is better to watch it 24 hours a day. In the Middle East, some people sleep late and some people sleep early. This means that we can watch the news at any time that is suitable for us. It could be at 2am." (SA, Journalist, Female)*

*"I would like to see more cultural programmes added to the channel now – geographical reports, environmental reports, scientific reports etc etc." (Iraq, Private Sector, Male)*

As stated above, some participants would like to see more documentaries added to the schedule, covering a variety of topics that satisfy the different tastes of different viewers. Many would like to see more programmes at night, as this is key viewing time for opinion formers.

A minority of opinion formers also highlight the need to adapt the schedule to fit the Middle Eastern week rather than the European one.

*"Thursday and Friday are the weekend here while they are off on Sunday in Europe. They should take this into consideration and should have different programmes or rerun favourite programmes during this period. This is why the Arab viewer watches Al Jazeera more." (SA, Up and Coming Entrepreneur, Male)*

### 3.4 Perceptions of competitors

#### Summary

- Opinion formers watch a range of news channels to compare how events are portrayed
- The majority of opinion formers perceive BBC Arabic TV to have two main competitors: Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya.
- These two channels are perceived to have a number of strengths:
  - Al Jazeera is well liked for its coverage of live events and is praised for its good quality presenters and 'specialised' strands for each type of news
  - Al Arabiya has a 'local feel' with a reputation of high quality and is perceived to be the 'fastest' in reporting the news 'as it happens'. It is also felt to provide in-depth detailed regional and world news
- Both channels are criticised by opinion formers due to:
  - Their perceived lack of ability to reach and talk to influential leaders
  - A feeling that the channels' presenters report on crisis news in a personal way, which contributes to the perception that these channels are more biased than BBC Arabic TV
- They strongly perceive Al Jazeera in particular to have a biased stance
- Other competitors that are mentioned include Al Hurra, MBC News, Al Alam, (Egyptian satellite TV), Deutsche Welle and Al Manar (however these were watched less often and mentioned in less detail).

#### *Competitive landscape*

The majority of opinion formers perceive BBC Arabic TV to have two main competitors: Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya.

Other competitors that are mentioned include Al Hurra, MBC News, Al Alam, (Egyptian satellite TV), Deutsche Welle and Al Manar (however these were watched less often and mentioned in less detail).

International news competitors are seen to include CNN, FOX, CNBC, France 24 and Russia Today.

#### *Comparative performance*

#### *Content and depth*

When seeking news, opinion formers appear to turn to certain news channels for certain topics. Whilst many say that they watch a wide range of news channels to compare how the same event is portrayed on different channels, they do have preferred news sources depending on the type of news they wish to access. For example, when seeking international news, participants say they are more likely to access BBC Arabic TV rather than local sources, where as for local news, participants say

they are more likely to access local news sources, as they feel the topic will be covered in more depth.

The channels that opinion formers choose to access differ according to the type of news. For example, even though recent international and regional events, such as Gaza, Darfur, the global economic crisis or the US presidential election were covered widely across the news channels, some channels were felt to excel in different areas, and to present different information. BBC Arabic TV is highlighted for the neutrality of its coverage, whereas Al Jazeera is appreciated for its live coverage of important events, and participants perceive Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera's coverage of the Gaza crisis was the most impressive - they feel these channels have a good number of reporters covering news from the scene of the event, which is felt to add more excitement and attraction to the news. Whilst BBC Arabic TV is also believed to have good live coverage, Al Jazeera is perceived to be particularly strong at this.

BBC Arabic TV is seen by some participants to have covered the Gaza events through main headlines, without delving deeper into the detail, reflecting some concerns about the channel's coverage generally. However a number of opinion formers, namely those from Egypt, Iraq and Tunisia, believe that BBC Arabic TV was the only channel who covered the Gaza crisis with neutrality and therefore its coverage stood out to them. Nevertheless, its 12 hour coverage (as it was then) was seen to hinder its ability to keep the viewer up-to-date on the breaking news – a feature which other channels are seen to excel at.

*"People were compelled to watch other channels because BBC was unavailable for 24 hrs." (Egypt, Journalist, Female)*

### ***Speed and access***

Al Arabiya is perceived to be the 'fastest' in reporting the news as it happens. Through its live coverage and interaction with the event, participants say they feel they can trust the channel to provide up-to-the-minute news with details from the scene of the event as it is happening. They also feel the channel provides in-depth detailed news that covers both regional and world news.

Al Jazeera is also felt to be 'on the ground' when the event is happening. Opinion formers feel Al Jazeera provides a large amount of much live coverage to its viewers, due to its perceived wide network of reporters. This level of live coverage is felt to add realism and dynamism to the channel.

*"Al Jazeera ... has huge capacities, thus, having a reporter in every country in the world, and have the ability to cover the news quickly." (Kuwait, Journalist, Female)*

However, a few Egyptian opinion formers mention that despite Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya's access to events, the channels' perceived lack of ability to reach and talk to influential leaders connected with the events they are reporting on, alongside lack of impartiality, are seen as weaknesses.

BBC Arabic TV is perceived to cover news in areas that are not accessible by other channels, for example, during the events in Gaza, BBC Arabic TV was perceived to have the ability to cover Israel where other channels were not able to enter. BBC Arabic TV is felt to be similar to Al Hurra in this respect because they both have good international coverage, whilst Al Arabiya is seen as strictly Arabic.

### ***Neutrality***

As previously mentioned, some participants believe that BBC Arabic TV has a unique neutral stance and covers events with a calm tone and a neutral manner. This is perceived to give freedom to the viewer to watch a channel that does not use exaggerated tone or political stance to distort content.

Many opinion formers talk of Al Jazeera's perceived biased stance, and inclination towards certain audiences. A small number of participants believe that Al Jazeera is pro-Qatari Government, and others talk more generally of its perceived biased nature and particular religious viewpoint. Many contrast its level of neutrality with either BBC Arabic TV or Al Arabiya – both of which are seen to be more open and secular.

*"Al Jazeera is biased. Even the analyst is usually biased towards a party." (Egypt, Public Sector, Male)*

*"Al Jazeera is inclined towards a certain audience that it attracts, as compared to BBC Arabic TV that is largely impartial." (Iraq, Academic, Male)*

*"During the Gaza war, Al Jazeera distorted the truth so people started resorting to BBC Arabic TV to get the truth of all things happening in Gaza." (Egypt, Journalist, Female)*

### ***Emotional engagement***

For some participants perceptions of impartiality are informed by the emotions shown by presenters concerning the incident they are reporting on.

As mentioned previously, some participants, particularly those from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, believe that BBC Arabic TV presenters can lack emotional engagement with some topics being discussed and can appear distant from the news. Some mention that the presenters feel like 'strangers'. However, others feel this stance allows them to remain objective and present the news in a neutral way.

*"I did not see a personal opinion of the presenters on BBC Arabic. They try to deliver the information to all levels." (Kuwait, Entrepreneur, Male)*

In contrast to the BBC Arabic TV presenters, a minority of opinion formers feel the presenters from Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya report on crisis news in a more personal way. This is viewed as a negative feature by most as the presenters are seen to show their own point of view on issues, for example, changing the tone of their voice or dressing in black attire when mourning victims of war, and having an obvious 'high temper and tone'. To most respondents this contributes to their perception that these channels are more biased than BBC Arabic TV.

*"The problem in Al Jazeera is that they include their point of view in the news and this is wrong. They shouldn't oblige their opinion on me. They should leave me to think freely to myself while the BBC doesn't oblige their perspective on the event." (Egypt, Academic, Male)*

*"I told you that I used to watch Al Jazeera but I no longer watch it because the presenter was biased towards a certain party - which is not his role." (Kuwait, Entrepreneur Male)*

*"Al Arabiya presenters were dressed in black during the Gaza event." (SA, Private Sector, Male)*

However, the minority of opinion formers from Kuwait feel the presenter's style from Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya helps the viewer engage emotionally, and attracts them to watch the channel. These participants are also likely to feel BBC Arabic TV's presenters are emotionally disengaged and do not showing signs of empathy with the victims. To some, this results in them feeling 'disconnected' from BBC Arabic TV and its presenters.

*"Al Jazeera is more capable from this point of view, they deliver the information and they are acquainted with the subjects and they get it through to the viewers easily." (Kuwait, Private Sector, Male)*

### ***Programme schedule***

With regards to the programme schedule, although other Arabic news channels are thought to offer a greater variety of programmes than BBC Arabic TV, the BBC's approach of repeating some programmes is praised by participants for giving further opportunities to watch programmes that are missed.

*In detail: Views of competitors*

***Al Arabiya:***

Al Arabiya is an Arabic-language television news channel, established in 2003 with funding from the Saudi-controlled Middle East Broadcasting Center and Lebanese Hariri Group. It is based in Dubai Media City, United Arab Emirates. Al Arabiya is seen as deliberately created competitor to Al-Jazeera, with some claiming that it was founded "to cure Arab television of its penchant for radical politics and violence", Al-Jazeera being the main target<sup>4</sup>. However, it draws accusations of pro-Saudi or pro-American bias itself.

Al Arabiya is regarded as one of BBC Arabic TV's main competitors. Opinion formers perceive it to have a number of key strengths, predominately revolving around its 'local feel', reputation, presenters and content.

Al Arabiya is seen as 'an Arabic channel for the Arabic people'. Participants believe it is well-established in the Arab world, and is that it is credible and neutral in its coverage. It is well liked for having a high level of interaction with its viewers, as well as for being emotionally engaging in the way it narrates its news coverage. Its image is described by participants as 'elegant', due to the high quality of its studios and presenters.

*"BBC Arabic TV is more international compared to Al- Arabiya, which is more regional and closer to us." (Iraq, Academic, Male)*

*"Al Arabiya is pure Arabic." (Iraq, NGO, Female)*

Opinion formers believe Al Arabiya's presenters enrich the channels offering. They are highly regarded for their welcoming attitude, dynamism on set and some describe them as being 'familiar' faces. In addition, they are seen to represent a number of different nationalities – a fact which is well-liked by participants. This is felt to reflect the channel's ability to connect to a wide range of audiences.

A further perceived key strength is the regular change of presenters throughout the day which is seen to help to keep repetitive news stories interesting, particularly given the channel offers 24 hour viewing. It should be noted that although BBC Arabic TV change their presenters throughout the day this was not picked up by participants.

*"This change of anchors throughout the day breaks the routine, even if they are saying the same news." (SA, Journalist, Female)*

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<sup>4</sup> A voice of moderation helps transform Arab media". The International Herald Tribune. (4 Jan 2008)



Opinion formers believe that Al Arabiya offers a great variety of programmes, covering, for example, the economy, science and Arabic events. A few opinion formers in Kuwait also say that they appreciate the 'quick' news bulletins in the morning that make use of a number of different reporters, and broadcast from inside the studio and on location. These factors are seen to add 'liveliness' to the channel. Moreover, Al Arabiya's live coverage of events and the inclusion of live guests are perceived to help to keep viewers engaged, and participants feel that the channel 'interacts well with the Arab society'.

*"Where would you turn to for breaking news? Al Arabiya, because I'm interested in knowing the effects of news upon us, and upon our Arab brothers." (SA, Academic, Female)*

### ***Al Jazeera:***

Al-Jazeera is a TV network headquartered in Qatar. It launched in 1996 with funding from the Emir of Qatar, following an abrupt closure of the first BBC Arabic TV service.

Al-Jazeera's availability (via satellite) throughout the Middle East is credited with changing the media landscape in the region, presenting controversial views regarding the governments of many countries. While the station claims to be politically independent, others claim that it voices the views of the Qatari government.

The station has attracted controversy, in particular, over screening of al-Qaida videos, links to the Muslim Brotherhood and its coverage of Iraq.

Al Jazeera is seen to have a number of key strengths that are noted by opinion formers. The majority of participants believe that the channel has a wide coverage, with reporters in various locations, good breadth of topics covered, and that its news is presented in an appealing way.

*[Al Jazeera] "Has number of reporters, in more than one location at the centre of the event." (SA, Journalist, Female)*

It is described as being 'comprehensive' in its programming, which is seen to attract a wide variety of viewers. In addition, opinion formers believe that the channel provides rich coverage of news as well as speedy transmission. Some participants comment on, and praise, its 'specialised' channels for each type of news such as sports news and documentaries.

Overall, Al Jazeera's presenters and reporters are well-regarded by participants. They are felt to be strong in terms of Arabic pronunciation and grammar, confidence and experience. The presenters are also seen to cover a range of nationalities, thus they are perceived to connect to a wide range of viewers.

*"Al Jazeera presenters are characterised by their experience, eloquent Arabic, and the variety of nationalities." (SA, Entrepreneur, Male)*

In addition, some Lebanese participants believe that Al Jazeera works hard to interact with the audience through its live shows and exclusive interviews with high profile guests - it is described by some as 'creative'. In addition, a few of the Tunisian participants believe that the channel discusses 'daring' topics that other channels do not touch on – this is seen as a key strength.

However, as stated previously, Al Jazeera is perceived by some participants to be biased and lacking in objectivity. It is thought to manipulate the viewers' emotions by using sensationalism, for example showing negative images of certain countries - this is a view held most by Egyptian opinion formers.

*"Al Jazeera sometimes invites people to talk about Egypt in a cruel way and discuss issues in a way that shows a lack of respect for Egyptians." (Egypt, Male, Academic)*

*"During Gaza incidents, I knew that if I watched Al Jazeera it would not reflect the whole truth." (Egypt, Journalist, Female)*

Another perceived weakness of Al Jazeera is the limited number of documentaries it has on its schedule. BBC Arabic TV is seen to perform comparatively well in this respect.

#### ***Al Hurra:***

Al Hurra is a United States-based satellite TV channel, sponsored by the U.S. government. It was launched in 2004. It broadcasts 24 hours a day without advertising. Iraq receives a dedicated version of the channel called Alhurra Iraq which in Iraq has more viewers than Al-Jazeera. Outside of Iraq, Al-Hurra is widely perceived to be overly pro-American.

Aside from opinion formers in Iraq, Al Hurra is the channel least frequently mentioned by participants as a channel they watch on a regular basis.

Some Iraqi participants, however, have very positive attitudes towards this channel as they perceive Al Hurra to be a good source of local information - particularly about their own country - believing that it covers Iraqi news in detail and conveys 'the truth'.

*"Al Hurra and particularly Al Hurra – Iraq that is specialised in Iraq news, so it gains more attention from the Iraqi public." (Iraq, Male, Private Sector)*

However, other participants regard Al Hurra as biased and believe that it presents a one-sided view – being pro-American, representing Arab views in a Western way.

*"As a Muslim Arab, I don't watch Al Hurra because it presents killing and blood as being normal, and gives the image that we are terrorists." (SA, Journalist, Female)*

***MBC:***

MBC is a Saudi-owned TV company broadcasting a mix of free-to-air news and entertainment channels via satellite. It was launched in 1991 as the first privately owned TV station in the Middle East, broadcasting from London before moving to Dubai in 2002. It is the parent company of Al-Arabiya.

The presenters of MBC are seen by participants as being its key strength. They are liked for their narrating style – which is described as humorous. A few opinion formers from Kuwait feel MBC manages to maintain an element of excitement by bringing in new presenters regularly.

***Al Alam:***

Al Alam is an Iranian Arabic-language TV news channel. It was launched in 2003 by Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting. It broadcasts 24 hours a day across the Middle East.

This channel is perceived to be a highly credible channel by participants and is seen as being impartial.

***Deutsche Welle Arabic:***

Deutsche Welle Arabic is Germany's international broadcaster aimed at people who are interested in Germany and Europe, particularly to current and future opinion leaders and decision makers. It broadcasts 12 hours a day with content ranging from politics, business, culture, society and sport to documentaries and features dubbed into Arabic.

Some participants like this channel for its coverage of topics such as technology and science – this is seen to be a real point of difference for this channel according to some of the Iraqi opinion formers. Its coverage of pollution and the environment is also seen to be a key strength.

***Al Manar:***

Al Manar is a satellite TV owned by Hezbollah, broadcasting from Beirut. It launched in 1991 with funding from the Islamic Republic of Iran. Al-Manar is designated a "terrorist entity", and banned by the United States, France, Spain and Germany.

It is a self-proclaimed "Station of the Resistance" and a key part of Hezbollah's so-called "psychological warfare against the Zionist enemy," i.e. the state of Israel, and way of spreading its message across the Arab world. As a result the programming is geared towards coverage of the Palestinian and Iraqi topics with frequent calls for armed resistance against the US and elimination of "the Zionist entity" (i.e. Israel).

Tunisian participants believe that Al Manar has good coverage of Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian issues. Its talk shows are also praised for being very 'personal' – attracting the viewer to watch them.

## 4. Key market differences

### Summary

- Generally there is consistency in opinion across the sample, however, there are small differences noted across markets:
  - Opinion formers in Egypt are most likely to access local news channels that they have an emotional connection to. Live coverage of events is a key pull to BBC Arabic TV
  - Opinion formers in Saudi Arabia are most negative about BBC Arabic TV, due to their perceptions of the channel employing inexperienced presenters and portraying negative images of the Arab world
  - Opinion formers in Iraq feel positive towards BBC Arabic TV for its speedy and credible world news coverage, however do have a thirst for the channel to provide more local news
  - Opinion formers in Kuwait would particularly like to see BBC Arabic TV demonstrating a more detailed understanding of, and close connection to, the Arab community and its causes
  - Opinion formers in Lebanon hold the channel in high regard, however, they believe that BBC Arabic TV needs to work on increasing awareness of the channel in Lebanon, as well as making it easier to access

Despite relatively small numbers of participants in each of the countries researched, a number of differences arose across the markets, and these are outlined below.

### *Egypt*

Participants in Egypt are most likely to use local news channels (such as Nile TV) as their primary source of information, as they feel they are most likely to have an 'emotional connection' with these channels.

Despite tending to use local news channels as their primary source of information, participants are positive about BBC Arabic TV overall, believing that the key strengths of the channel are that it provides live coverage of events and that the style and tone used by the presenters is good (although some participants believe feel that some presenters are inexperienced).

### *Saudi Arabia*

Despite relatively positive perceptions overall, Saudi participants were most vocal in identifying perceived weaknesses of BBC Arabic TV. These perceived weaknesses include inexperienced presenters who are not seen to be fully aware of local issues, and general negative images of the Arab world through programmes such as 'Close Up'.

The refusal to air the DEC appeal also had some impact on the Saudi participants, with some feeling it negatively affected the channel's image of impartiality.

Furthermore, Saudi participants in particular call for an increase in programming on social issues.

### *Iraq*

Opinion formers in Iraq are positively disposed towards BBC Arabic TV for its perceived speedy and credible world news coverage; they feel that generally speaking, the channel satisfies its viewer's needs. The primary criticism aired by Iraqi participants is that BBC Arabic TV is not seen to focus enough on Iraqi issues and local news. Moreover, some feel that the Iraqi news that BBC Arabic TV does cover is often biased. There is a strong appetite amongst these participants for the channel to provide more detailed news coverage of the issues currently faced by Iraqi society, and that it does so in an impartial way.

### *Kuwait*

The primary concern amongst Kuwaiti participants is that BBC Arabic TV channel should aim to demonstrate a more detailed understanding of, and close connection to, the Arab community and its causes. These participants do not feel that BBC Arabic TV currently does this sufficiently, which is in part due to its perceived 'British' image. They suggest that the inclusion of more Gulf market news would improve their overall perceptions of BBC Arabic TV.

### **Lebanon**

Lebanese participants in particular hold the BBC and BBC Arabic TV in high regard for its strong values and levels of objectivity.

However, Lebanese participants speak spontaneously of the perceived need for BBC Arabic TV to attract younger viewers. It is felt that this should be done through offering a more diverse range of programmes to include entertainment and cultural shows, as well as by increasing the number of interactive programmes which participants particularly favour.

Opinion formers in Lebanon also believe that BBC Arabic TV needs to work on increasing awareness of the channel in Lebanon, as well as making it more readily available – a number of respondents stated they can not easily access the channel as it is not widely available.

### *Tunisia*

In general BBC Arabic TV is a well-respected channel by Tunisian participants, with some opinion formers stating it offers better quality content than competitors. Tunisian opinion formers say that they particularly like the documentaries offered.

Participants from Tunisia call for more Tunisian-related programming, including interviewing local guests. These participants are also more likely to share negative comments about the studio set design used on BBC Arabic TV, feeling it could be bolder in its use of colours and in its design.

## 5. Summary and areas for consideration

Overall, BBC Arabic TV has a solid reputation amongst opinion formers and is seen as a credible channel on account of being seen to report issues accurately, objectively and impartially.

Despite being perceived to have good access to areas and regions of conflict, some opinion formers believe that BBC Arabic TV lacks empathy with, and connection to, the Arab world, and therefore it is seen by some to lack emotional engagement with its viewers. Because of this, BBC Arabic TV is perceived to have a lower presence in the Arab world than some other news channels in the region. Strengthening ties with viewers and being closer to regional events are seen as ways for BBC Arabic TV to potentially increase viewership within the Arabic region.

Opinion formers believe that BBC Arabic TV's offer could be further improved by providing more live coverage from the scene, with increased direct contact and interaction with people affected by the event in question. They believe that in order to enhance the BBC's coverage, there may be a need for a stronger network of reporters operating in different regions, thereby ensuring that its news reporting is enticing to viewers.

In terms of programming, participants say they are keen to see more talk shows and documentaries on BBC Arabic TV in addition to the high quality news content - they would like BBC Arabic TV to be 'more than a news channel', and they would like to see more variety in programmes. Participants suggest that the focus of talk shows and documentaries should be on Middle Eastern topics covering social, educational, religious and sports issues to complement BBC Arabic TV's existing well-regarded politics and news coverage.

Opinion formers are also keen for BBC Arabic TV to feature an increased number of high calibre guests such as government officials. They would also like to be able to interact with the channel to a greater extent, for example, have the chance to give their opinion on an issue rather than simply watching linear coverage.

In addition participants believe that featuring an increased number of well-known presenters and reporters who have depth of experience (longevity combined with exposure to the mass market) would attract more viewers to BBC Arabic TV. The inclusion of presenters and reporters from different nationalities is also seen as a potential way to cultivate wider connectivity to the channel.

A few participants suggest that BBC Arabic TV should boost its advertising campaigns to raise awareness about it, especially in Lebanon.

Lastly, respondents welcome the idea of BBC Arabic TV introducing new programmes targeted to each country and hosted by famous and well-known hosts in each country.



## 6. Appendix – Discussion guide



### BBC Arabic TV

#### Research aims:

The study will address the following issues:

- The extent to which BBC Arabic TV meets the needs of its target audience
- Does the service achieve relevance and emotional connection without compromising BBC values?
- How do viewers rate the channels standards of accuracy and impartiality
- The range of stories and treatments

#### 1. Warm up

- Introduce self and explain that PARC is an independent research company working for Opinion Leader in the UK and the BBC Trust to understand what opinion formers think of BBC Arabic TV
- Explain that the interview is confidential and that their name will not be attached to any comments in the report
- Explain tape recording for record only
- The interview will last 45 minutes – 1 hour
- Answer any questions they may have about the research

#### 2. BBC: Overall perceptions

- Please can you tell me a little about the BBC and what you know about them?
- Overall what do you think of the BBC? Explore reasons for answer.
- What do you like / dislike about the BBC? Why?
- How would you describe the BBC to someone that has never heard of it?
- (If DEC comes up allow respondent to talk about the issue and their feelings towards it. Probe on perceptions of the BBC before and after DEC decision)

### 3. Context: news consumption

- Please can you tell me a little about the News channels and programmes you watch?
- Thinking specifically about Middle Eastern/ Arabic World and International news, where do you go for this?
  - Explore radio, TV, online and mobile sources
  - Probe for specific providers
- Why do you consume this kind of news?
- What is important to you when choosing a news channel?
  - Probe on:
  - Breaking news/speed
  - Headlines
  - Content/Range of stories (Do they cover all the issues you want eg. sport/business/social issues?)
  - Insight/analysis
- When do you tend to watch news programmes? (What time of day?) (With family or alone?) [Less important but interesting if time]
- Explore rationale for accessing a range of different news services and key offers of each

### 4. Overall perceptions of BBC Arabic TV

- Thinking specifically about BBC Arabic TV, how often do you watch it?
  - Why do you watch it?
  - Do you watch at specific times of day? When?
  - Do you switch on for specific programmes – if so which ones? Why?
- Overall what do you think of BBC Arabic TV?
  - Explore reasons for answer
- Again, if DEC comes up allow respondent to talk about the issue and their feelings towards it. Probe on perceptions of BBC Arabic TV before and after DEC decision. (Moderator be sure to get a read on the impact this may have had on perceptions)
- How would you describe BBC Arabic TV to someone who has never watched it or heard about it?
  - Encourage participants to describe both the overall service as well as the content and look and feel of the channel
- What do you like about BBC Arabic TV? Why?
  - Explore reactions to, and relative importance of:
  - Presenters/anchors/ newsreaders [not to be confused with reporters out in the field or on location] (probe if necessary on: personality, interviewing technique, appeal, relevance, style, level of formality, warmth, friendliness, clarity, 'can relate to')

- Content - range of stories covered, relevance of stories covered, comprehensiveness of coverage (probe on regional vs. international, human stories, repetition, range and quality of guests/interviewees)
- Format (use of presenters, interviews, graphics, design, studio, location reports; look and feel, level of interactivity/audience participation)
- Story-telling techniques (e.g. location reporting, use of case studies, human interest/emotional stories, people-based/issue-based, investigative/cutting edge, excitement, insight, analysis, reporter involvement, use of pictures)
- Language and tone – (probe: accessibility, clarity, level of engagement)
- Values (probe for: neutral/fair/objective/impartial presentation of stories; accuracy, credibility, engaging/relevant to me etc)
- Scheduling (probe: suitability of news or specific programmes timings, awareness of schedule)
- Multi-media format (are people aware that there is an accompanying website? Is this important?)
- How do you think BBC Arabic TV could be improved? Why?
  - If not already covered, explore reactions to, and relative importance of:
    - Presenters
    - Content
    - Format
    - Story-telling
    - Language and tone
    - Values
    - Scheduling
    - Explicitly prompt on whether BBC Arabic TV could be more (emotionally) engaging – if so how?
- What are the key strengths / weaknesses? (Moderator be sure to prioritise key strengths and weaknesses)
- Ask participant to map BBC Arabic TV against their 'ideal' news channel/ programme and explore any gaps that exist.
- Did you have any expectations of BBC Arabic TV when the service first launched? If yes, what were these and has BBC Arabic TV lived up to your expectations? Why? Why not?
- What would you change about BBC Arabic TV to make it more suited to your needs/ideal for you?

## 5. Overall perceptions of BBC Arabic TV's competitors

- Who do you think are the main competitors to BBC Arabic TV?
  - Encourage participant to think of as many as possible
- For each, ask: how do they compare to BBC Arabic TV?
  - What do they do better than BBC Arabic TV?

- Probe on views and importance of:
  - Presenters
  - Content
  - Format
  - Story-telling
  - Language and tone
  - Values (including balance and neutrality and accuracy)
  - Scheduling
  - How engaging they are
- What does BBC Arabic TV do better than them?
  - Probe on views and importance of:
    - Presenters
    - Content
    - Format
    - Story-telling
    - Language and tone
    - Values (including balance and neutrality and accuracy)
    - Scheduling
    - How engaging they are
- If not already discussed spontaneously, explore views (including strengths, weaknesses) of the following channels:
  - Al Jazeera
  - Al Arabiya
  - Al Hurra
  - (Moderator ensure the above 3 channels are specifically probed, and take note of any other competitors that are raised at this point, exploring views)
- If not already covered, ask participant:
  - Do you think the content on BBC Arabic is more/less balanced and neutral than other Arabic news channels? Why – give examples? Explore importance of this for overall perceptions
  - Do you think the content on BBC Arabic is more/less accurate than other Arabic news channels? Why – give examples? Explore importance of this for overall perceptions
  - Do you think the content on BBC Arabic is more/less engaging than other Arabic news channels? Why – give examples? Explore emotional engagement and importance of this for overall perceptions
- What do you think have been the biggest/most controversial stories recently?
- Which channels covered them well and which covered them less well? Why?
  - Probe on importance of:
    - Presenters
    - Content
    - Format

- Story-telling
- Language and tone
- Values (including balance and neutrality)
- Scheduling
- How engaging they are
- If there was a big breaking news story about the region, which news channel would you turn to first? Why? Probe fully for reasons

## 6. BBC Arabic TV in detail: perceptions of programming and content

- If not already covered: *overall*, what do you think about the content on BBC Arabic TV?
- What do you think about the range of content on BBC Arabic TV? Probe for views on:
  - Types of stories
  - Range of geographical coverage
  - Coverage of sport and non-news stories (economic, social, business, weather)
- Overall, do you find the content of BBC Arabic TV stimulating? Why?
- Overall, do you find BBC Arabic TV engaging? Why?
- How do you think that the content provided on BBC Arabic TV could be improved?

HAND OUT COPY OF BBC ARABIC TV SCHEDULE. EXPLAIN THAT THIS IS A RECENT SCHEDULE FROM BBC ARABIC TV SHOWING AN AVERAGE DAY.

- Were you aware that BBC Arabic TV is now a 24 service?
  - If yes, what do you think of the change from a 12 to 24 hour service? Has it impacted your overall views of the channel?
  - If no, does this change your views of the channel at all? Explore reasons
- Which programmes on this do you think you would watch? Why those and not others?
- What do you think about the range / mix/ balance of programming provided?
- What would you like to see more of?
- What would you like to see less of?
- How do you think that this schedule compares to the scheduling of other Arabic TV channels?

## 7. The future of the service

(EXPLAIN THAT THE BBC WOULD LIKE THEIR HELP ON AN IMPORTANT ISSUE THAT THEY ARE TRYING TO RECONCILE)

BBC ARABIC TV AIMS TO ACHIEVE RELEVANCE AND EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT FOR ITS ARAB AUDIENCES WHILE ENSURING THAT IT COVER STORIES IN AN ACCURATE, NEUTRAL AND BALANCED WAY

- To what extent do you think BBC Arabic TV manages to deliver on this aim currently?
- Encourage participant to think of specific examples to this aim?
  - Get specific examples where possible

- Do you have any final piece of advice for BBC Arabic TV?

Thank and close