

Media and governance in the Palestinian territories

There is good access to media across the Palestinian Territories and the audience relies on the media for information on politics and current affairs. This audience often consults multiple media sources in search of reliable information. Qualitative research participants felt the programmes produced by BBC Media Action offered a constructive means of holding decision-makers to account, one that is lacking elsewhere (in the media and otherwise).

The project

BBC Media Action in the Palestinian Territories is implementing a Department for International Development (DFID)-funded project aimed at facilitating greater transparency in political decision-making, deepening the democratic process and encouraging a culture of transparency and accountability. Through the production of multi-platform factual discussion programmes, the project aims to provide Palestinian people with a platform to discuss political and social issues with key decision-makers and also hold them to account. The project also aims to equip the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) to produce audience-driven governance programming through an extensive programme of capacity

building. It consists of two discussion programmes broadcast on TV, radio and available online, *Aswat Min Filasteen* (Voices from Palestine) a co-production between the Palestinian Broadcast Co-operation (PBC) and BBC Arabic - which airs quarterly - and *Hur El Kalam* (Free to Speak) produced by PBC - which airs monthly in the months between episodes of *Aswat Min Filasteen*.

Research approach

The project's quantitative baseline research was completed in August 2012. This consisted of a representative survey of 1,500 Palestinian adults aged 15 years and above across the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. A longitudinal qualitative audience panel (30 people) was established in January 2013 to explore the impact of the project over time. The first round of fieldwork with the panel was completed in February 2013 and consisted of in-depth interviews with each of the panel participants.

Key findings

- Media access was high across the Palestinian Territories, especially access to TV (almost all adult Palestinians - 98% - can access TV at home). Social media usage was high among all demographics, especially those under 35 years of age, men, and those living in the Gaza Strip.
- TV was the most frequently mentioned source of information about politics and current affairs (by 51% of Palestinians). To what extent a media source represented local interest(s) and provided reliable information were key considerations for audiences.

- The potential for the media to play a role in accountability was understood (and expected) by most Palestinians but there is more the media can do. In particular it can do more to provide a forum on local issues such as the effects of inflation and unemployment and it can be more effective at facilitating solutions and eliciting a response from government.

Project context

The Palestinian Territories comprises two separate geographic locations, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Its situation is unique: a stateless people overseen by a national authority that has limited control over many things that affect its population. The Palestinian radio and TV landscape is relatively young. Broadcasting was not allowed until after the Oslo accords in 1993. The media today can be divided into three categories: state-controlled media such as Voice of Palestine and Palestine Television (the radio and television channels of the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation, PBC), private media and factional or partisan media that belong to political organisations.

Implications and impact

In order to reflect the priorities identified by audiences the project should build and maintain the credibility of the programmes. This includes the choice of panellists and topics, the provision of multiple viewpoints (through packages and diverse audience) and the demonstration of strong editorial values. Attention should be given to maintaining truth and accuracy while presenting information that serves the public interest.

Social media should continue to be integral to the project and may contribute to promoting transparency by providing an additional space for dialogue and discussion.

The programme might counteract apathy among audiences (and support the constructive nature of dialogue and discussion) by following up on stories covered during the programmes and providing examples of impact where questioning leaders has led to a response/ resolution.

“I’m sure these kinds of shows will help Palestinians to hold their officials to account where they can express their opinions through various platforms especially through social media.”

Research participant: 15-24 male, Gaza

For more information about our research in Palestinian Territories visit www.bbcmmediaaction.org

Registered office: Broadcasting House, Portland Place, London W1A 1AA, UK

Tel: +44 (0)20 8008 0001, Fax: +44 (0)20 8008 5970, Email: media.action@bbc.co.uk

BBC Media Action is registered in England & Wales under Charity Commission number 1076235 and Company number 3521587.

www.bbcmmediaaction.org