


Jul 12, 2017 by *Alvin Snyder*

Moving Ahead of the Pack ^[1]

The Broadcasting Board of Governors, the federal agency that oversees U.S. government non-military international broadcast and Internet services, probably knows more than it's letting on. The good news is that it has released another in its series of expertly researched documents on viewing and listening habits related to its many language services abroad.

But little detailed background is disclosed regarding its competition abroad from other countries. As competition is one factor cited by the BBG for the slight decline in its various audience platforms from last year to this, that would need to be considered a shortcoming of this report. This is meant as no reflection on the BBG related research team, the finest anywhere, public or private.

In its 125 page annual Language Service Review Briefing Book  the BBG addresses audiences for U.S. broadcasters in its charge including the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Sawa and TV Alhurra to the Middle East, Radio Free Asia, and TV/Radio Marti to Cuba.

The research notes an increase in Internet traffic this year from last, but an overall decline for all its media platforms to 165 million people per week, from 171 million last year. The drop is attributed in part to broadcast signal jamming, increased competition, and other factors. The Language Briefing Book notes that "Rarely is any market experiencing a decrease in media competition, even those under heavy state control...U.S. International broadcasters are among the most tightly censored media outlets in China. VOA and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty radio broadcasts are intensively jammed and both broadcasters' websites are blocked in China. Such restrictions present serious obstacles to those in China attempting to access VOA and RFA content."

The report continues, "Although it has been less than two years since the introduction of mobile 3G networks in China, 7 percent of Chinese access the Internet via mobile phone weekly, an increase from 5 percent in the 2008 survey. Mobile Internet access is not merely an urban phenomenon. In this year's survey, only 30 percent of mobile Internet users were urbanites, while 38 percent lived in villages."

While the report lists the most popular sources of news in BBG targeted areas, there is a shortage of presently available Web analytics that would put a face not only on its own offerings, but also on BBG competition from other government sponsored sites, such as those from China, Russia, and elsewhere. The BBG should make public its comparative data on the reach via broadcast, Internet, texting, and other platforms. What are the kinds of content that people are searching for, and who is doing the best job providing it? How can the VOA and other BBG platforms increase their share of users, and who are the users?

A smattering of such information can be observed on Alexa, a web information company,

including audience profiles for the VOA and others:

“Roughly 47% of visits to Voanews.com are bounces (one pageview only). Compared with the overall Internet population, this site appeals more to users who are over the age of 45; its visitors also tend to consist of men earning over \$30,000 who have postgraduate educations and browse from school and home.”

The BBC Online Homepage is “viewed mostly by “Caucasian (men), and they are disproportionately childless browsing from work who have postgraduate educations. About 12% of visits to it are referred by search engines. Visitors to bbc.co.uk spend about seven minutes per visit to the site and 61 seconds per pageview. About 42% of visitors to the site come from the UK, where it has attained a traffic rank of 5.”

About (aljazeera.net): Alexa traffic rank is 963. Search engines refer about 15% of visits to the site. The site's content places it in the news category. It has a bounce rate of roughly 43% (i.e., 43% of visits consist of only one page view). While we estimate that 15% of visitors to the site come from the US, where it is ranked #1,449, it is also popular in Yemen, where it is ranked #23.

Radio Free Asia (US), according to Alexa, “It is especially popular in Cambodia (ranked 39th in popularity, and Laos, ranked 76th in popularity). Overall, its viewer traffic over the past 3 months declined 11%. Compared with all Internet users, the site appeals more to users who are over the age of 45; its audience also tends to consist of both high and low-income men browsing from school who have more children. The time spent on a typical visit to the site is roughly five minutes, with 68 seconds spent on each page view.”

Deutsche Welle (Germany) “is Germany's international broadcasting station with links to numerous pages in multiple languages in multiple languages containing program schedules and live audio feeds. DW-world's three-month Alexa traffic rank is 2,626. Approximately 57% of visits to the site are bounces (one pageview only). The site's content places it in the “international broadcasters category. The fraction of visits to dw-world.de referred by search engines is about 16%. While the site is ranked #790 in Germany, where approximately 18% of its visitors are located, it is also popular in Bangladesh”

But with all the information packed into its pages that more than fulfills its mandate from the U.S. Congress to provide a credible news and information platforms, there's still the nagging feeling that this federal oversight agency knows more than it may be telling us.
