

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

AL JAZEERA EVOLUTION WITHIN THE ARAB
REVOLUTIONS

by
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the role of Al Jazeera in the recent Arab Spring uprisings. Al Jazeera has been widely recognized as a catalyst for the events that took place. Notably, Al Jazeera became heavily involved with citizen journalism, where the local people in the Arab countries were able express themselves with regard to events happening in their society. It is against this background that this study will investigate how Aljazeera Arabic and English covered the uprisings collectively known as the Arab Spring, how effective (in terms of accurate, impartial coverage; impact on events; and dissemination) the coverage was, and the challenges faced.

In answering these research questions, this study conducts a review of literature from scholarly journals, books, and commentaries to establish emergent themes related to this investigation. After this, content analysis is carried out to evaluate the emerging themes concerning the three research questions. It is important to highlight that my review of literature reviews were all based on sources and citations in the English language.

This study is highlights the role of mainstreaming media in dissemination of accurate, timely, impartial news. The approaches used by Aljazeera Channel in providing live and hard news to the Middle East region and the entire world could act as a framework for other mainstream media entities in covering emergent political unrest around the globe. Aljazeera Channel capitalized on new satellite television and communications developments in its coverage of the uprisings in the Arab spring. Therefore, an analysis of how this mainstream media was able to cover the Arab Spring uprisings using these new approaches can contribute to future refinement of the accrual and dissemination of timely, instant, impartial news.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Over the past few years, the world has witnessed a series of revolutions and riots in the Middle East region. From Tunisia to Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain, the uprisings in this region have had direct and indirect impacts on people around the world. It is difficult to ignore the significant role played by the media in these uprisings. For several decades, the Arab media landscape has been experiencing a bewildering paradox: the gap between the vigorous and lively media where opposition voices can be articulated on one hand and the inactive and quiescent political arena lacking true democratization on the other. It is evident that, before the Arab uprisings, most Arab media did not provide the public leeway sufficient to express its resentment and anger toward authoritarian regimes. They were often indecisive when it came to taking radical action toward transformation and reform. However, that changed with the onset of the protests, starting with Tunisia.

The mainstream media has been the most effective public source of information on the recent uprisings in the Middle East. International television channels, including BBC and CNN, lack sufficient presence in the Arab countries to obtain and disseminate full information on events in the region. This gap has been filled by the Al Jazeera English channel based in Qatar. Al Jazeera English joined the competitive global news arena in 2006, being the first English-language network centered in the Middle East.

Al Jazeera English focuses on providing global news of the events happening in the Middle East that are under-reported by international media networks, including the BBC and CNN. Moreover, Al Jazeera sells television footage to other global media networks, including the BBC and CNN (Miles 172), as well as providing uncensored information about the Middle East region to the entire world (Meikle 166). Thus, it has been at the center of the recent uprisings taking place within the Arab world. The strategic location of Al Jazeera English in the Middle East gave it the ability to provide opportunities for people around the world to watch unfolding events direct and live from first-hand sources. Indeed, it is argued that the ability to provide live coverage of breaking news is an unparalleled strength of television (Tuggle et al. 58). Using satellite television, the channel has capitalized on this strength and is credited with sharing stories, videos, and pictures of the revolution with other media around the globe.

This dissertation focuses on the role of Al Jazeera in promoting civic engagement by providing support for democratic activities. This is posited to have been achieved through live protest coverage and commentaries which aided in preparing and organizing the protests to bring about regime change in several Arab countries. Al Jazeera promoted some forms of citizen journalism, giving voices to local residents concerning the events happening in their societies. It is against this background that this study will investigate how Al Jazeera English covered the uprisings in the Arab world. Accordingly, the following three research questions (RQs) are proposed for this study:

RQ1: How did Al Jazeera English cover the Arab Spring uprisings?

RQ2: How effective, in terms of accuracy, impartiality, impact, and dissemination, was Al Jazeera's coverage of the Arab Spring uprisings?

RQ3: What challenges did Al Jazeera experience in covering the Arab Spring uprisings?

1.2. Methodology

The present study is a qualitative analysis and discussion of a broad range of secondary sources pertaining to the subject at hand. This approach was adopted given the subjectivity of the majority of the data being used as well as the non-quantitative nature of the RQs (Wimmer and Dominick 112–135). Thus, in answering the above research questions, this study involves a review of literature from scholarly journals, books and commentaries to establish emergent themes related to the RQs. On the basis of this review, content analysis is carried out to evaluate the emerging themes on the Al Jazeera English channel in its coverage of the Arab Spring uprisings.

1.3. Significance of the Study

This study is important in highlighting the role of mainstream media in dissemination of news. Specifically, the study provides an analysis of the approaches used by Al Jazeera English Channel in providing live news to the Middle East region and the entire world in its coverage of issues and events surrounding the Arab Spring uprisings. The findings may be useful as a framework for other mainstream media entities in covering history-defining moments around the globe. Al Jazeera English Channel makes use of satellite television and other technological developments in its coverage of the uprisings in the Arab Spring. Therefore, analysis of how this mainstream media entity was able to achieve the level of influence and levels of

dissemination that it did will guide the journalism industry in taking advantage of the internet and satellite technology in dissemination of news direct from their sources.

Through this, the journalism industry might improve its provision of timely and current news to the public.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE: HOW DID AL JAZEERA ENGLISH COVER THE ARAB SPRING UPRISINGS?

2.1. Introduction

Media has played a significant role in the recent uprisings in the Arab world. It is evident that before the Arab uprisings in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria, most media did not provide the leeway to the Arab public to express its resentment and anger towards governments in a cohesive manner. As a result, the populations had been indecisive when it came to taking radical action towards transformation and reform. However, that changed from the onset of a series of protests, starting with Tunisia. The mainstream media has been the most effective source of information for the public on Arab revolutions in the Middle East. International television channels, including the BBC and CNN lacked sufficient presence in the Arab countries to provide full information of events as they happened in the region. This gap has been filled by Al Jazeera English, based in Qatar (Miles 172). The present section investigates and discusses Al Jazeera's coverage of the Arab Spring uprisings, focusing on organizational elements, practices, and outcomes.

Al Jazeera English joined the competitive global news arena in 2006, being the first network disseminating news in the English language to be centered in the Middle East, (Miles 172). This move came after Al Jazeera recognized that to attain its objective of expanding its worldwide influence; it could not do so by broadcasting in Arab. Al Jazeera English, therefore, became the first English language channel to have its headquarters in the Middle East (Selib 42). According to Miles (412), the launch of

Al Jazeera English was largely for the purpose of communicating with the west on issues pertaining to the Middle East in its own language as a credible, direct, and alternative source of information.

Al Jazeera English has a non-centralized command structure, but broadcasts from four cities: Doha, Kuala Lumpur, Washington, and London. It capitalized on satellite television and technological developments in coverage of the uprisings during the Arab Spring. Its mission statement is to broadcast impartial, independent news for an international audience and to give a voice to a diversity of voices from the regions that are underreported (Al Jazeera). The channel focuses on providing global news of the events in the Middle East that are under-reported by international media networks, including the BBC and CNN.

When writing about Al Jazeera, it is important to know the difference between Al Jazeera English and Al Jazeera Arabic?

To start with, the two channels speak to two very different audiences. Al Jazeera English speaks to the international English-speaking audience. Al Jazeera Arabic speaks to the Arab world. As a result, the perspectives are very different as their target audience is not the same. For instance, viewers who know Egypt's history and know a lot of the key players in the region and know the narrative of the event are going to be much more aware of the most nuanced pieces of information. Whereas for English-language viewers who might not know a lot about politics in the Arab World, Al Jazeera English news stories has to give them more background and proper context with the mindset that they are addressing and targeting viewers from India to Indonesia and from China to the United States.

Furthermore, the two channels have separate editorial hierarchies. "At the end of the day, we don't share the same editorial policies," Ayman Mohyeldin, Former Al

Jazeera English Cairo correspondent. "What we do share is the editorial code of ethics and the same editorial vision as the network." We have two entirely independent editorial staffs. When I report, I report to my bosses and my editors in Doha. There's a great amount of synergy and cooperation, and we share resources and information, though we don't take our editorial guidelines from Al Jazeera Arabic and they don't take theirs from Al Jazeera English.¶

Al Jazeera English is leagues ahead of its Arabic analog in producing news that meets the basic criteria of the journalistic craft. Abderrahim Foukara explains that —The way the truth may be defined in the Arab world, and associate it with Al Jazeera, is not the way Americans, for example, would define the truth and associate it with, say, CNN or MSNBC or Fox. ... Al Jazeera Arabic, because it is so connected to a turbulent part of the world, the tone is different ... it's much feistier ... The broad majority of Arabs identify with the channel, not only in terms of political coverage, but the nuances, the reading between the lines.¶

In terms of its coverage, Al Jazeera English has attempted to present news from a novel perspective as it relies on reporters from the specific country or region, otherwise known as native correspondents. There are several features of Al Jazeera's coverage that stand out, including offering an open forum for dissent of all stripes, especially on its notoriously volatile and uninterrupted talk shows that are unparalleled among the broadcasters in the Arab region; war reporting with an emphasis on humanitarian consequences; and an emphasis on native journalism through the assignment of reporters to report on their locales (Downing 9).

Al Jazeera English is, therefore, the preferred English-language channel of reference for events in the Middle East, as it opens a new stream of information from

the Arab world to the West. On the Arab level, this channel has been widely argued to have made significant contributions to the formation of the Pan Arab political public space (Sterling 73). However, this contribution has not been welcomed by many in the region, and there have been various accusations of bias, discussed below (Ricchiardi).

At the global level, while Al Jazeera English has undeniably widened the stream of information disseminated from the Arab world, offering a unique perspective on events in the region, it has also been criticized for biases by some commentators. Press et al. regard Al Jazeera English as an ill-defined effort towards the provision of an alternative viewpoint for viewers across the globe.

As much as it is important to focus on how Al Jazeera English channel covered the Arab uprisings, a more contextualized approach would require an understanding of how the media in the Arab have operated in previous years. This investigation into the broader context of Arab journalism will frame the achievements and constraints of Al Jazeera English for the purposes of the study as a whole.

Background: Arab Media and Al Jazeera

For several decades, the Arab governments owned and rigidly controlled the flow of information. They often monitored and controlled the media opinion in the region. The rules of journalism practice were quite clear for journalists. The options when it came to reporting facts that would portray the home government or country negatively or embarrass them were to either ignore or actively misinform the viewers and the public. The situation still exists to some extent; however, the situation has been changing since satellite television was introduced in the area in the early 1990s (Fandy 7).

Channels with a more professional approach to news were introduced. Al Jazeera, which was more independent than other local channels, was widely considered to be the pioneering station, despite being financed by the Qatari government. While it is true that the royal family and government are represented on the board of directors, and allegations have been made that there is scant coverage of issues damaging to Qatar (Peel), there are numerous indications that the editorial policy of the organization is more liberal.

Their slogan, -The opinion and the other opinion, which meant telling both sides of the story, made it different from its competitors, thus earning it a much larger audience within the Arab region and, later, globally.. It came to be seen as a relatively impartial source of discussing any news affecting the Arab world. There were other private channels, but Al Jazeera's success was based on several other factors: it invested in the most advanced technology and equipment and capitalized vigorously on satellite television; it hired experienced international journalists from BBC Arabic, which had collapsed; borrowed massively from western journalism practices; had its coverage both on television and online; and was largely independent from the government control (Rushing and Elder 113). Furthermore, it often raised issues or discussions that were previously considered taboo and offered uncensored news coverage (Lynch 2).

In addition, Al Jazeera was among the first stations to use the new social media platforms to connect with their audience. Other local media portrayed the news of the uprisings in highly selective ways, which were widely recognized merely as state-sponsored monologue. Al Jazeera, on the other hand, used social media not only to cultivate new sources of stories but also to share the information/news. This opening up to social media is key evidence of the liberal editorial policies of Al Jazeera, with such

media elements offering voices to the general population rather than those of the organization or its state or commercial sponsors. Through the use of social media, Al Jazeera English was able to bring more diversity and richness to news while at the same time offering divergent views on the uprisings (Rinnawi 87).

Social Media

Mohammed Bouazizi, a twenty-six year old street vendor in the small town of Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, burned himself to death out of social oppression, which helped precipitate the fall of Tunisia's dictator and sent shockwaves throughout the Arab World and the world at large. He doused himself with gasoline and set himself on fire after the police had harassed and humiliated him. Bouazizi's self-immolation inspired protests by his family and other citizens, and this spread from Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia to the rest of the MENA region. The photos of the protests were taken by some of the protesters through their phones and published on their Facebook pages (Lule 98). Hashtags such as #sidibouazid, #Tunisia, and #bouazizi were used by Twitter users while a Facebook group established –Mr. President, Tunisians are setting themselves on fire! (Carvin 2011).

The local media were slow to report the story, and the state media even avoided or reported inaccurate information regarding the unfolding events. However, the international media, Al Jazeera English, after learning of the events from Facebook quickly broadcasted the protests throughout the Arab world (Lule 97). The role of social media in the Arab Spring uprisings has been lauded, and terms such as –Facebook Revolution and the –Twitter Revolution have come to be associated with the Arab uprisings because of the widespread influence of user-generated content (UGC).

Content classified as UGC must have three characteristics: 1) it must be available publicly to a given group; (2) it is created without professional routine or practices; and (3) it involves very minimal creative effort. Examples include blogs and forums (Kaplan and Haenlein 61; OECD 18).

The role of social media was recognized by several media houses, including Al Jazeera English. Al Jazeera acknowledged the effectiveness of social media in bringing the attention of the revolutions to the world at large. It agreed that it was only through the use of social media that the live coverage of the police brutality and citizen protests became possible (Lule 98). But what exactly is social media?

According to Kaplan and Haenlein, social media refers to –a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content (53). Web 2.0 is an internet platform that –allows for interactive participation by users (60). Social networking, blogs, collaborative projects, content communities and virtual worlds are the main different types of social media. Blogs, a form of social media, are online journals where a person or a group of people create web-based content on a given topic of their choice. It also allows for interactions, as other people can comment on the blogger’s content. Another type of social media is the content community, such as YouTube and Flickr. Such sites also allow online users to share information, such as video for YouTube and photos for Flickr (Kaplan and Haenlein).

Twitter and Facebook are examples of social networking sites where people can share information. Users of Twitter can tweet up to one hundred and forty characters and share information with people all over the world. Those ‘_tweeting’ can include links to videos, articles, audio streams, and photos, which are immediately

accessible to their followers. However, unlike Facebook, where only friends are allowed access to a person's page, Twitter links several people who are unknown to each other because the tweets are public and easily accessible through the internet (unless the user has blocked or denied other followers from accessing their feed). An important advantage of Twitter that made it useful during the Arab Spring is the fact that it is searchable by topic. For example, during the protests in Tunisia, stories in Twitter tagged #Tunisia made it easier for people to access tweets on the uprising, thus making it an influential source of news for mainstream media, like Al Jazeera (Hounshell 2011).

Users of Facebook, on the other hand, can share information with friends or fans. Facebook users can decide to limit the number of friends and also their access to their profiles by having privacy settings. Both sites are popular, with Twitter having 21 million active users (Carlson 2011) and Facebook approximately 800 million users worldwide as of September 2011 (Protalinski 2011). More than 70% of the Arab population under 30 years old are Facebook users. However, Twitter is not as popular, with only less than 1% of Arabs as active users. This is largely because Twitter has no Arabic interface (Ungerleider 2011). In March 2012, Twitter became available in Arabic.

Other video sharing sites had been blocked in Tunisia in previous years except Facebook; it was through Facebook that users managed to upload videos of the protest by Sidi Bouzid. In 2008, there was an attempt by Ben Ali to censor Facebook in Tunisia, but this failed as the citizens simply joined Facebook via proxy sites (Open Net Initiative 2009). It was Al Jazeera that quickly captured these messages in Facebook and Twitter and broadcast them to the world, even though the material was being

blocked officially by Tunisia. They did this through satellite television (Lule 97). The Al Jazeera coverage of the protests and clashes with the police evolved in tandem with social media coverage. It was Al Jazeera that led the way in integrating social media and traditional media by ensuring early on that their content was informed by citizen journalism, a method which played a crucial role in spreading the news of the protests with overwhelming effect throughout Arab world and beyond (McAthy 2011).

It is inconclusive to say that it was solely social media that was responsible for the global flow of information in the early days of the Arab Spring. This is because it was Al Jazeera in both Arabic and English that amplified the messages from the social media through their satellite television channels. The other media channels such as CNN and BBC picked up the information from Al Jazeera English in the first months of the Arab Spring.

Citizen Journalism

Citizen journalism, also called –participatory journalism| can be described as a type of journalism where citizens are active players when it comes to collecting, reporting, and circulating news stories. It is a term or a –buzzword| that only arose with the development of the internet, made possible through media technology like social networks. The social networks have enabled citizens to easily report breaking news, and are thus, in most cases, timelier than traditional reporting of emergent news (Pavlik 27). According to Kolodzy, citizen journalism is a type of journalism —Of the people, by the people as well as for the people|.

Pavlik views the internet as a more powerful means of communication compared to others. His argument is that the internet is revolutionary because of its

diverse capabilities, including interactivity. Interactivity enables easy sharing of information by everyone, creating a –flat world| in which people are faster, better, and more connected (Friedman 9). Friedman calls the internet a –flattener| because it provides a quick and easy way of spreading information globally, and this has democratized journalism (10). Friedman’s arguments are echoed by Seib (55), who also contends that the internet has revolutionized newsrooms. Journalists now use the social networks to get information from citizens, thus increasing the availability and scope of information, and bringing to attention worthy causes. The –flatteners| increase the news effect in society by facilitating free exchange of ideas. It was these –flatteners|, such as the internet, that enabled Al Jazeera English to gain and spread information about the Arab Spring (Friedman 10).

Al Jazeera, which was at the forefront of covering the news, recognized the importance of using social networks in their news coverage. According to Mustafa Souag, Al Jazeera’s main objective was giving comprehensive and accurate coverage. If this was not possible by using their reporters, then alternative citizens could be used to get the information if they were willing (Cited in Miles). He contended that it employed the use of social media such as Twitter, blogs and Facebook and developed a deep respect for citizen journalism. According to Al Jazeera, –The internet in this case has assumed the role of a very effective uncensored news agency from which every broadcaster and news corporation have been able to freely source news feeds, raw from the scenel.

Despite the ostensibly –uncensored| reporting inherent in utilizing social media sources for coverage, the claim that the resulting coverage is –accurate and comprehensive,| as claimed by Souag, is somewhat overblown. Clearly, editorial

decisions are made concerning which elements of the huge body of –citizen journalism are presented in the news, as well as how they are presented. Furthermore, there is likely to be some input concerning editorial approaches from the Qatari government and Royal family, given its financial connection and presence on the board of directors. The paragon of unbiased journalism is merely theoretical, as demonstrated by the scandals concerning Rupert Murdoch’s News International, which controls much of the English-language media (Economist). It seems more reasonable to assert that Al Jazeera provided novel, direct coverage of events that was much more comprehensive and accurate than that of its competitors, both international (especially in terms of comprehensiveness) and regionally.

However, Al Jazeera’s use of the internet did not begin with the Arab Spring; the use of citizen journalism by traditional media goes as far back as 2002 during the War in Iraq. Citizen journalism was also progressively influential in the election in Egypt and the Kuwait orange movement in 2005, the Lebanon crisis in 2006, and the Gaza war in 2008 (Hamdy 93). The only difference is that, during the Arab Spring, Al Jazeera used citizen journalism more intensely than before; as the uprisings intensified, the regular procedures were dropped and the station opted for a new method of broadcasting live news as they came in online through blogs, Facebook profiles and Twitter feeds, further reducing the scope for political/editorial influence.

Al Jazeera felt that these was a more effective method of journalism because it quickly filled the vacuum of information, especially in Tunisia and other areas where Al Jazeera had been denied access. Al Jazeera set up a –crowd sourcing (this refers to sourcing information/input from a wide, internet-based audience) method of reporting, which allowed diverse citizen reporters to contribute in the revolution coverage and

monitoring through the use of Twitter messages. These contributions were timely, with detailed information about a given event including the exact geographical location and timing. They were normally sent within minutes of the occurrence of an event and had to be authenticated by editors before being used as real time coverage. Al Jazeera even stated that:

In light of the dramatic development of events, on a considerable scale, it has become evident that new media have been playing key role this time round in keeping the momentum going, and bringing the voices of the disengaged Tunisian youth to the attention of world media, and hence to international public opinion. Mobile phones, blogs, YouTube, Facebook pages and Twitter feeds have become instrumental in mediating the live coverage of protests and speeches, as well as police brutality in dispersing demonstrations. (Miladi 2011)

Citizen journalists, through the use of social media, acted as watchdogs by alerting traditional media of current events and providing raw coverage of the uprising that were then disseminated on a wider scale. Al Jazeera English used a combination of social media including blogs, Facebook profiles, and YouTube and Twitter accounts to get news alerts, demonstrating how traditional media can interact with citizen journalism to bring effective coverage of news. For example, Sami Ben Ghabia, a Tunisian independent blogger, confirms this fact by stating that most contents about the Arab Spring that were broadcasted in the mainstream media were taken from Facebook before being translated and broadcasted: -if the content remained strictly on Facebook,

its audience would have been limited to those who are members of certain groups and would not likely have been disseminated in ways that proved pivotal to the media coverage (Ghannam 16). Al Jazeera also paid attention to Twitter feeds that tweeted continuous updates on the revolution.

The reports by citizens were not only distributed via satellite TV but also through the internet using YouTube. Video footages from the revolutions were distributed globally through Google's YouTube, which was created purposely for the uprisings. Direct links were incorporated to the new social media –so as to act as a portal to their updating communication flows and near live-streaming of images direct from the protests themselves (Cottle 652).

However, the key strategy for Al Jazeera, according to Riyaad Minty (Head of social media at Al Jazeera), was to make contact with important bloggers and sources even before the protests broke out. It was these bloggers who could then be used as citizen journalists to verify information later (during or after the protests). Bloggers everywhere gave personal and detailed accounts of the uprisings. Such information from bloggers assisted media journalists to access what was happening on the ground in a timely manner (Cited in McAthy). Blogging is a type of flattener categorized by Friedman in the group of 'uploading'. Anyone with an internet connection can blog without any journalism training at all (Friedman 79). Blogging has enabled citizens to be more involved in news production. –More than ever, we can now all become producers, not just consumers (95). Bloggers' contributions can generate a lot of information, which can be useful for democratic reforms (Seib 148). In acknowledging citizen journalism, Al Jazeera created a special social media community show 'The Stream' to allow people to give their views and opinions and also to share their

experiences. —Protesters were able to disseminate a continuous stream of text, videos and images from the streets of the revolution directly to millions via social media technologies and indirectly through the republication of these messages on news networks such as Al Jazeera (Al Jazeera). This recognition is one of the key elements in Al Jazeera's practices in covering the Arab Spring uprisings.

Many have argued that not just any citizen should be considered a journalist, because journalism requires training and certain qualifications, and ethical standards to be followed; however, citizen journalism should not be seen as taking over traditional news, but should be taken as a supplement (Kolodzy 220). Looking at Al Jazeera's coverage of the Arab Spring, we cannot fail to see the way they revolutionized news coverage in the Arab region, and the impact was felt globally. It was the coverage of the Arab Spring that made Al Jazeera famous in almost every corner of the world. The U.S secretary of the state, Hillary Clinton, even lauded the station, saying "viewership of Al Jazeera is going up in the United States because of its real news" (Flanagan 2011). It was also the coverage of the Arab Spring that resulted in Al Jazeera English being named the News Channel of the Year (Al Jazeera 2012).

2.1.1. The Promotion of Arab Unity

Al Jazeera's international coverage rallied its viewers through calls for unity of the Arab world on international issues. According to Poole and Richardson, TV channels such as Al Jazeera have had a decisive and direct impact on Arab public opinion. However, one has to be skeptical about the revolutionary impact of media houses in the Arab World, including Al Jazeera, on the public opinion. It would, therefore, be reductive to maintain that Al Jazeera "brainwashes" its viewers by

channeling them in a particular direction. What is revolutionary and new about this channel is not the discourse it promulgates, but the means by which it derives and promulgates that discourse. Al Jazeera and other prominent satellite channels over the last decade have not created public opinion. This is because the public opinion of the Arabs has always existed. These channels have only played the role of making public opinion more pronounced, public, and visible (Poole and Richardson 186). Thus, rather than forging a unity among its viewers, it has simply brought a pre-existing unity of public opinion into the mainstream.

2.1.2. Al Jazeera and Democracy

Ayish notes that the talk shows aired on Al Jazeera and other television networks have made significant contributions in building the underpinnings of a political culture which is pluralistic — one that welcomes and thrives in a contentious and open political debate. News coverage of political struggles and protests across the Arab world has opened up new realms of possibility, while at the same time shifting the real balance of power on the ground and inspiring political activists (Ayish181). Social as well as political movements through the Arab world recognize the significant role played by media and the vital role played by Al Jazeera in influencing international and domestic public opinion as well as exerting pressure on governments (Darwish 33).

In 2011, the world watched as demonstrators across the Middle East rose up against dictatorial regimes that had ruled these countries for years. According to U.S. Public Diplomacy, the recent coverage of the Arab revolutions by Al Jazeera has been distinct because it has rendered the media events of these revolutions through the conveyance of live broadcasts of demonstrations as well as political dispensations in

more than one country at the same time. Al Jazeera has managed to bring the tyranny of despots into the light of day. Thanks to the coverage of Al Jazeera, the voice of the uprisings in the Arab world has reached a wide regional and global audience (U.S Public Diplomacy).

In covering the Arab revolutions, Al Jazeera has been the unintended link between countries that have seen revolutions as well as the rebels in different directions of the same country. This is termed the –mobilizing functionl (–satellite mobilizingl in the case of other countries), implying its role as a catalyst of mobilization of the disaffected throughout the region, as well as leading the way for other media to act in similar ways (Ratta). In its coverage of these revolutions, Al Jazeera has established progressive journalistic values in the region, such as ensuring a balanced coverage, the commitment to find diverse sources of international news, coordination and empathy among satellite TV channels, and a focus on broader populations and their political opinions and desires. As a result, when Al Jazeera was muted and its broadcast interrupted, its content was aired by other volunteering channels.

According to Ricchiardi (2011), its extensive coverage of the Arab Spring has underscored the network’s emerging role as a major player. In addition, its aggressive coverage of the Middle East turmoil has propelled the network to new prominence in the world of media. In the thick of the uprising in the Arab world, Al Jazeera’s crews were transmitting live footage of protests in Tahrir in Egypt even as other news organizations scrambled to book flights. Many media experts have mused about the effect of Al Jazeera on the revolution and whether it could have happened (at least, in a similar timeframe) without it.

Even as the world's attention has focused on the popular protests in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Bahrain, there are still a dozen countries in the region that have seen political unrest. The network has aired a series of seven hour-long programs that have offered insights on what really happened in the region. The first half of this series was designed to take the viewers behind the scenes of the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, with access to the people who made these revolutions happen. On the other hand, the second half stood back to debate on their place in history, everyday life, and global politics (Al Jazeera, 2011).

2.1.3. Al Jazeera: Revolution Trailblazer in the Arab World

Al Jazeera has played a significant role in the revolutions in the Arab world. In Jordan, Al Jazeera covered the protests that began in mid-January, 2011. Thousands of protesters staged rallies in Amman and other main cities in the country. Grievances raised by the protesters were economic, largely prompted by the increasing food prices and the increasing rate of inflation. King Abdallah made attempts to defuse the protests by sacking the entire cabinet, with little effect. The network aired the demonstrations, which reached their peak in mid-July, with police officers using batons in breaking up the demonstrations. This led to injuries to people and journalists (Al Jazeera, 2011).

In Saudi Arabia, the network gave broad coverage to the series of economic reforms that were introduced by King Abdullah in an effort to head off the unrest in the kingdom. Therefore, Saudi Arabia did not see the popular protests which swept the states in the Arab world. This selective coverage is representative of the traditional media operations within the region, and is in clear contrast to the coverage by Al Jazeera.

In Morocco, tens of thousands of people took to the streets to demand a series of modest reforms in the country. The network covered these significant protests in which the demonstrators were demanding that the king give up some of his powers. In Lebanon, the network covered the rally which was staged by hundreds of people on a cold and rainy day in order to demand an end to the sectarian political system in the country, which they argued was cynically nurturing sectarian tensions in the country (Al Jazeera, 2011).

Al Jazeera also covered the deadly protests in the industrial town of Sohar in Oman, which is often regarded as a –sleepy| Gulf state. The network covered how the police used batons, rubber bullets, and tear gas to disperse the protesters who were angry about the rising cost of living, corruption, and unemployment. In Iraq, Al Jazeera covered the four days of protests organized by thousands of demonstrators over the economy and corruption. In Yemen, the network reported on how thousands of demonstrators filled the streets following the President’s statement that the Gulf Cooperation Council proposal for power should be treated positively (Al Jazeera, 2011).

2.1.4. Pioneering and Setting the News Agenda

According to Gartenstein-Ross, the more direct contributions to the revolutions included the development of social media technology, which was used as an organizing tool. The coverage by Al Jazeera English heavily promoted the uprisings, covering the social conditions on the ground that, in most cases, prompted them. These include unemployment, ineffective and corrupt governance, and increasing fuel and food prices. The network has provided and will continue to provide equipment, technical support, credibility, and hosting to the Syrian opposition activists and organizations. In addition,

the network has provided technical support and messaging to the Syrian opposition activists in exile who were coordinating their messages from Doha (International Movement for a Just World, 2012).

The National Interest (2012) noted that for millions of people across the globe, including the actual participants on the ground, the single most important source of news for the unfolding events in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, and Libya has been Al Jazeera English. In many cases, Al Jazeera correspondents have been the first to arrive on the scene, and its interviewers and anchors have provided viewers with the most detailed follow up, analysis, and discussion of the unfolding events.

In discussions about Qatar's policies concerning the Arab Spring, the role played by Al Jazeera cannot be underestimated. It openly supported the Tunisia uprising and has played an important role in disseminating the voice of Egyptians at Tahrir Square across the Arab world. It has also offered the opponents of Libya's leader Gadhafi an influential media platform. According to the Editors Weblog, the network has won widespread recognition for reporting on the Arab world uprisings especially through the use of Twitter. Since the beginning of the uprising in Egypt, the traffic of the network's website has increased by 2500% (Editors Weblog, 2011).

Despite these aspects of its coverage, Al Jazeera was criticized because it failed to give Bahrain the same attention it had given to other countries (The Daily Star, 2011); the network retorted that the events in Bahrain had not been of a similar gravity to those elsewhere. Moreover, the Bahrain government has twice banned Al Jazeera correspondents from operating from within Bahrain: from 2002–2004 (BBC) and 2010–present (Al Jazeera).

According to the UN Dispatch (2011), Qatar has played a significant role in the Arab Spring. It has supplied weapons and money to fighters in Libya and has worked to ensure that Syria is suspended from the Arab league. These approaches have been in concordance with Al Jazeera's coverage of the uprisings, which has helped to topple Hosni Mubarak as well as Ben Ali. Souaiaia (2011) noted that Al Jazeera has been able to influence public opinion because it has a huge amount of goodwill and reputation. Most of the rulers in Arab countries have accused the network of inciting dissent and protests. However, these protestations stand as testimony to the effect of Al Jazeera's coverage in reinforcing the uprisings, especially in Tunisia and Egypt. Most Tunisians have credited the network with the speeding the overthrow of Ben Ali's regime.

2.1.5. Media Neutrality and Independence

Many people have questioned the neutrality as well as independence of the network in its coverage of the Arab Spring protests that occurred in Syria and the Gulf states. Most people observed that its coverage of the Bahrain uprising (Kirkpatrick) as well as the protests in Oman and eastern Saudi Arabia was non-existent or, at best, timid. Al Jazeera continued with its hardnosed coverage of the uprising in Syria, provided an ample space to the opposition figures, and replayed unconfirmed clips on the defection of military personnel, murders, and kidnappings. The Arab spring has been regarded as a double edged sword for the network: it has increased its popularity but it has exposed the financial and political strings which bind it to the rulers of Qatar.

Al Jazeera has come under intense scrutiny in the Middle East because of its varying coverage of the revolts in the Arab Spring. Even though the network is nominally independent, with its degree of autonomy being itself a revolution in the

context of the state controlled news media in the region, many have contended that its coverage of the region is still reflective of the views of its Qatari owners. This network might have played an early and influential role in the coverage of the Arab revolution by encouraging the unrest in Egypt and Tunisia. The network was even more aggressive when it focused on Kaddafi's regime and the struggles of freedom fighters in Libya, where Qatar played a significant role of supporting the rebellion. However, it is also cited as having a double standard in its coverage of the Syrian unrest and negligible coverage of the strife in the Gulf States of Bahrain (Kirkpatrick, 2011), Saudi Arabia, and Oman (Souaiaia, 2011).

It is also undeniable that the network had a significant role to play in the inspiration of protesters in Libya and Yemen. Al Jazeera English organized a bi-weekly program on —People and Power| in which the current revolution of Yemen was analyzed in the context of the general revolutionary fervor in the Arab world. Al Jazeera put a spotlight the gravity of the civil rights violations in the country by depicting the peaceful protesters who were being threatened by the police. In his speech on National Television, President Saleh listed Al Jazeera as one of the threats to Yemeni power as well as sovereignty.

Even though the network supported the uprisings against some longtime regimes in the Arab world, it clearly drew the line following the threats made to one of the Persian Gulf monarchies. In the other countries in the Arab world, the network was clearly on the side of the uprisings. Journalists working at the frenetic nerve center of the network's headquarters in Doha indicated that they are proud of the role played by the network in the Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya uprisings. According to Satnam Matharu, Al Jazeera's director of communications, the revolutions would have happened without

the network, but the cameras protected those voices that were calling for democracy and gave them security (Washington Post, 2011).

Al Jazeera's coverage of the uprising in Tunisia is termed as raw and unvarnished because the network relied on cell phone videos that were sent in by the bystanders as well as the call in interviews, which gave those who were caught in the turmoil an opportunity to express their opinion and observations. As discussed above, the use of such live content is a hallmark of neutrality, as it minimizes the scope of editorial interference.

It has been accused by the Tunisian Parliament of bias and distortion in its coverage of the event. The network has been condemned for ruining the reputation of the country as well as the creation of a spirit of resentment and hatred which helped to spread the distrust, chaos, and instability in the country's achievements (Fleishman 2011). However, such accusations are not necessarily indictments of AL Jazeera's neutrality and independence, as a rigorous pursuit of an accurate representation of events is bound to result in coverage that is unfavorable to one side or another in any given conflict.

2.1.6. Media Platform

Using its core satellite television broadcasting technology along with Internet/social media sourcing, Al Jazeera gathered all the relevant materials that citizens were sharing and made the information accessible to viewers across the globe as fast as possible. Their willingness to broadcast information received from citizens allowed them to have extensive coverage of events and enabled those who were not connected to the internet to view the digital content through satellite TV. Satellite

television enabled even those who had never heard of Facebook or Twitter to receive the updates as they were disseminated by Al Jazeera English. The availability of this satellite television marked the turning point in the way information was being disseminated; subsequently, Al Jazeera was given more prominence by Arab viewers, who saw it as an influential broadcaster where they could access any important news about the revolutions' coverage sourced from independent (or at least a broad range of) sources (Hachten & Scotton 130).

The Arab governments were challenged by Al Jazeera when they publicly presented the voices of dissent. They changed the role of television media, which had previously been owned and controlled by governments throughout the Middle East. As mentioned before, any controversial news that would paint the government in a negative way was rarely aired, because there were legal consequences, such as being arrested. This made the available channels — including private ones — censor what they aired to avoid being confronted by the government (Maalouf 2). However, with advances in technology that paved way for the introduction of satellite TV, Al Jazeera managed to free the Arab citizens from government control of information by offering the public a new source of information that was unbiased . It was the satellite television that broke the ability of governments to control the flow of information, and opened up new space for political communication that helped in uniting the Arab political spaces (Lynch 302). However, it was not just satellite television that led to the massive changes in the Arab media; the internet played a much bigger role.

According to Maalouf, the internet in the Arab World was tolerated differently by different governments. For instance, governments such as Iraqi and Libyan governments totally refused to allow the internet in their regions, while others, such as

the Syrian government, allowed only limited access; Tunisia and Bahraini closely monitored the internet. It was only Jordan and Egypt that freely allowed universities to access the internet.

Where the internet could be accessed, it became very effective for Al Jazeera, because it was an uncensored news agency that Al Jazeera used to acquire information straight from the scene of the events (Miladi 4). The internet was especially important, because it could easily surpass geographical boundaries and reach the outside world, giving Arabs all over the world access to current and credible news, thus minimizing and weakening the authority of state-controlled media throughout the region. By using the internet, Al Jazeera breached social taboos by enhancing dialogue in regions where no platforms were available for citizens to give their opinions, and by providing news to areas where media was under the government's tight control (Mellor et al. 164).

The use of internet during the Arab revolutions managed to draw significantly more viewers than during the Gaza war in 2009, the last big event before the revolutions. This is a clear sign that Al Jazeera's influence is steadily growing (Stelter 4). With the advent of the internet also came the explosion of citizen journalism, where citizens are able to record or witness events at the time they are occurring, then disseminate their coverage, giving rise to a rawness and immediacy that has for a long time been lacking in traditional media, especially in non-Western countries. Citizen journalism is made possible through social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Such media platforms as a means of both coverage generation and dissemination are discussed in more detail in the following subsection.

2.1.7. Use of Social Networking Sites

Effectiveness of Using Social Media

Several news reports, magazines, and journals that have argued that social media played a major role in the Arab uprisings. Some have even posited that it was social media that made the revolutions possible. However, the role of social networks, such as Facebook, in overthrowing the long-time reigning governments has often been exaggerated. This is because it is difficult to discuss the role of social media without mentioning Al Jazeera. While social media helped in getting information from the site of the revolution, it was Al Jazeera that sifted through the videos and information captured by citizen journalists in the social media and helped in rapidly spreading them (particularly in areas with no, or limited, internet access) through their satellite television platform and by uploading them on YouTube (Khoury 84). Al Jazeera was effective in bridging protesters in different regions of the Arab World, even when the government tried to disconnect the internet. Therefore, analyzing the effectiveness of the approaches used by Al Jazeera English is not just about the station but a connection between Al Jazeera English channel and the social media, which gave rise to public empowerment and amplified the voices that have never been heard before.

Al Jazeera was the first traditional media outlet to take advantage of social media as a tool in helping to coordinate, transmit and share images and information. They accepted information and reports coming straight from activists on the ground who recorded footage on their phones and uploaded them on their Facebook pages and Twitter feeds. Al Jazeera soon realized that citizen journalism had an advantage over the mainstream journalists; the citizen journalists were always at the right place and at the right time. If there was any newsworthy event taking place, they had an excellent

opportunity to be on the scene before mainstream media journalists could. This was increasingly the case as mainstream media operations the world over were reducing costs by reducing the number of correspondents (especially internationally).

Young people in towns such as Tunis, Cairo, Syria and Benghazi were seen taking pictures of protesters who were being abused, beaten or/and killed using their phones. These photos became exposed through the mainstream media, thus capturing the attention of the world. For example, three months before Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire, a similar incident had happened in Monastir, Tunisia; however, even though photos were taken, very few people became aware of it because the images were not transmitted in any mainstream media. However, when photos of the protests taken after Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire were made available through Facebook, and Al Jazeera disseminated these photos through their satellite television and YouTube, they captured the attention of the whole world (Ismael).

The use of citizen journalists was also effective in areas where Al Jazeera had been denied entrance. For example, Al Jazeera English had been banned by the Tunisian government. When they were banned, Al Jazeera managed to slowly get their journalists to travel to the country, with great precautions being taken. They could not carry their journalist kits, and once inside the country, they had to work undercover. However, most of these mainstream journalists were often targeted by the military, and so were not always able to provide sufficient information for the revolutions coverage. Therefore, it was through the use of citizen journalism that Al Jazeera English kept up with the events and managed to bring their global viewers to the heart of the Arab Springs with their most comprehensive coverage.

Their use of non-traditional forms of journalism made them the most effective media operation in the Arab World and catapulted them into a leading role in the media scene (Miladi 5). The most popular platform used by citizen journalists was Twitter, which was more popular because of its speed in sharing breaking news and updates. It made information that was not available to traditional media more accessible (Zhao, Jiang, Weng, Lim, Yan, and Li 2). The mainstream journalists from Al Jazeera received the tweets from social media, scrutinized them, and then rebroadcasted them through their satellite TV and uploaded them on YouTube.

Through citizen journalism, Al Jazeera also played a key role in bringing to the attention of the world the voices of disengaged Arabian citizens. By integrating social networks with their mainstream media, they allowed the voice of the public to be heard. Al Jazeera did not ignore the significance of bloggers, and welcomed their contribution to improve the range and depth their reporting. Al Jazeera relied on bloggers immediately the first sign unrest started in Tunisia since it had been banned there. The citizen journalists helped them obtain information on a timely basis, making Al Jazeera the first to feel the pulse on the street. Once activists discovered that their blogging had more power than local newspapers and televisions, they became more active bloggers, thus becoming more effective tools for Al Jazeera. Even though most of the material being sent were amateur videos, it enabled the citizens to observe every significant event during the uprisings. It was as if Al Jazeera were omnipresent, disseminating news of the uprisings across the globe. News flowed from the North to the South for the first time, creating a new Arab public sphere (Lynch 306; Miladi 4).

The advantages of Al Jazeera's heavy adoption of social media:

During the Arab Spring, Al Jazeera out-performed almost all major Western news outlets. Many of its correspondents spoke the language—or were even from the countries they were reporting on. So while journalists in the Anglophone press were often caught furiously trying to keep pace with events, Al Jazeera was setting the tempo of news coverage. Part of that came from their early mastery of digital social media—something that networks in the United States and Britain has yet to match. The network has invested heavily in understanding how to use and interpret user-created content. Needless to say, this proved an invaluable asset amid a string of revolutions broadcast by cellphone video uploaded to YouTube (Dickson, 2012).

However, several authors have argued that it was Al Jazeera English that transformed the protests into the uprisings that occurred across the Arab World in 2011; the more Al Jazeera broadcasted the images from citizen journalists, the more other citizens felt the need to join the protests and broadcast their own messages. Marc Lynch, an American who is a leading media observer of the Middle East, speaking to the *New York Times* commented that Al Jazeera was the one thread uniting the protests in the Arab World. It is Al Jazeera's coverage that helped drive the rebellious emotions from one country to another. –Indeed, *Al Jazeera* became the Arab public square where everyone met, and where updates from the centers and the flanks were watched and heard, unfiltered and uncensored (Bishara). Wanda Krause, who is the head of the Gulf Studies program at Qatar University, stated that –Without Al Jazeera, this (Arab Spring) couldn't have happened (cited in Dickinson 2).

According to Gartenstein-Ross, the more direct contributions to the revolutions included the development of social media technology, which was used as an organizing

tool. Al Jazeera English captured every moment during the Arab spring revolutions by utilizing the content from Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook and aired programs that featured a series of questions posed by the general public to the participants in its shows through these platforms. This allowed the general public to air their views, share their experiences, and give their opinions regarding the uprisings in the Middle East (Al Jazeera). Initial pictures of the uprising in Tunisia, which were captured on cell phones, were picked up by the network from Facebook before being broadcasted and rebroadcasted repeatedly throughout the Arab world and beyond. As a result, the news of this revolution travelled instantly and worldwide because of Al Jazeera (Canadian Committee for World Press Freedom, 2011).

Al Jazeera was on hand to beam the pictures of the ecstatic protesters, rebels, and revolutionaries into the living rooms. By picking up camera phone footage from social networking sites of the protests and riots in Tunisia in the wake of self-immolation of the fruit seller, the network obtained a regional prominence it could otherwise not have achieved.

By integrating social media output in its coverage, the network has been able to secure the attention of millions of young viewers. The network made full use of social media networking sites and accepted footage from the individual protesters who covered the events using their mobile phones. This allowed the voices of people to be heard, and mobilized the crowds to rise up against the dictatorship regimes (Ismail 2012). Al Jazeera's capture of live iconic scenes, as well as the broadcast of videos shot by citizens that had initially been uploaded on YouTube, had a significant role to play in the branding of the uprisings, as it kept the spirit of resistance among young people

alive. Thus, Al Jazeera affected the course of the revolutions and uprisings as well as the rapid spread of videos, information, and testimonies (PS).

CHAPTER 3

HOW EFFECTIVE, IN TERMS OF ACCURACY, IMPARTIALITY, IMPACT, AND DISSEMINATION, WAS AL JAZEERA'S COVERAGE OF THE ARAB SPRING UPRISINGS?

3.1. Introduction

The present section offers a discussion of RQ2, asking how effective Al Jazeera has been in disseminating comprehensive and reliable coverage of the Arab Spring uprisings throughout both the Arab and Western Worlds. The extent to which Al Jazeera influenced the emergence and outcomes of the uprisings is also discussed.

Despite any apparent biases in some cases, there has been broad recognition throughout the Middle East and in Western mainstream media that Al Jazeera has facilitated detailed, thoughtful coverage of the Arab Spring uprisings. Al Jazeera's uninhibited critique of the authoritarian regimes as well as its evenhanded reporting rattled the Arab world. Al Jazeera's success in disseminating news related to the Arab spring across the globe is clear since it has contributed to toppling dictatorship regimes, propelled the insurgent emotions, provided the much needed flow of information that laid the groundwork for the revolutions, and expanded the viewership of the channel in the United States. However, Al Jazeera English's choice to remain silent on the revolutions in Bahrain, Oman, Palestine, and Saudi Arabia raised questions regarding the effectiveness of the channel in disseminating news related to the Arab spring across the globe. Moreover, in Palestine, its coverage had the opposite effect as the Palestinian

authorities ended up receiving support from individuals who would otherwise have not defended it in response to Al Jazeera's coverage.

In the remainder of this section, we will first discuss the degree of comprehensiveness that Al Jazeera achieved in its coverage in the context of the extent to which it prompted and/or bolstered the various uprisings of the Arab Spring. Subsequently, there will be more detailed discussions of the impact of the coverage in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya to facilitate a closer understanding of the dissemination of coverage and its outcomes in specific cases.

3.1.1. Al Jazeera's success in disseminating news and bolstering the Arab Spring Uprisings: An Overview.

It is five years since the Al Jazeera English Channel brought its coverage to mainstream western media. The network was a very important platform, especially in the protests in Egypt, because it reflected what was happening on the ground against the state television which refused to accept the full depth of what was happening (BBC News, 2011). According to *The Telegraph*, the Arab Spring uprisings that occurred in 2011 were hailed in Washington as the –Al Jazeera moment. The recent Arab revolutions were propelled by a generation of 30-somethings that were reared on Al Jazeera. The network promulgated the common values of revolutions: freedom of speech, street politics, and freedom of association. Al Jazeera broadcast a 24-hour live feed of Tahrir Square as the crowds gathered and, ultimately, ousted President Hosni Mubarak. They did a good job in Egypt, where the reporters were courageous in getting the storyline across (*The Telegraph*).

Al Jazeera English has provided viewers with an authoritative record of events as well as impeccable minute-by-minute reporting during the Arab spring, even in situations where correspondents were banned in some of the countries. As a result, new revelations regarding the reputation of the company should not detract from the significant role played by the network in awakening the conscience of Arab politicians and shaping the region's political debate (Salhani, 2011).

Al Jazeera captured the Arab Spring and broadcasted images of people power, which many say it has helped to ferment. It has broken many taboos, including the discussion of women's rights, in the Arab world. Young people in the Arab world have grown up watching Al Jazeera and have developed views that are different from those of their parents. As a result, they took those views to the streets in Arab countries (*Metro*).

According to the *New Statesman*, as governments in Arab countries including Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya toppled, Al Jazeera was on hand to air pictures of elated protesters, rebels, and revolutionaries. Al Jazeera is a driving force behind the Arab Spring as it magnified the voices of the protesters and made them mainstream. In a survey conducted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, 53 percent of those surveyed indicated that Al Jazeera played a role in inciting the protests in the Arab world.

Even the ousted (Egyptian) President Mubarak has regarded the network as an important factor in the popular revolt against him (*Maghreb News*). According to a post in *Doha News* (2011), it is the bankroller, founder, and controller of the network that has played such a vital role in inspiring the Arab Spring.

In looking at the events across the Middle East, the storytelling power of the media was responsible for the escalation of the support for the protests which initially started off with limited support from Twitter and Facebook activities. Regional television networks such as Al Jazeera played the pivotal role of gathering the momentum for the revolution. Even though the network is wholly owned by the Qatar government, it played a similar role to that of independent media in authoritarian countries. Once the beginning of the protests was triggered by the media, the changes in one country had an immediate impact on its neighbors (Center for Strategic and International Studies 7).

According to Uriya Shavit, the role played by Al Jazeera English in the revolutions in Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia, Syria, and Libya cannot be exaggerated and should not be underestimated. It has been the major source of information on dissident activities and demonstrations and has energized the continuation of protests, thereby creating a snowball effect that ensured the protests were carried from one country to another. This garnered international sympathy and attention for the uprisings, which was essential in Egypt and Libya cases. However, Al Jazeera has been termed as unbalanced in its coverage of the revolutions in the Arab world. In Bahrain, which is regarded as a historical rival of Qatar, the coverage of events was given relatively limited attention. Al Jazeera explained that the reason for this limited attention was not political but that Bahrain did not deserve as much attention when compared to other uprisings (Shavit 2).

In the uprising in Tunisia, the network gave considerable attention to Rashid Al-Ghannushi, an exiled Tunisian Islamist leader. The main personalities who commented on the revolutions on Al Jazeera included Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, who

is a spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and one of the Sunni world's leading jurists (Shavit 3). According to Thompson Reuters, it was Al Jazeera which first grasped the enormity of the uprising in Tunisia as well as the implications of this uprising for the region, which subsequently fuelled the –rumblings| that occurred in Egypt. As a result, audiences around the world responded, and the network's global audience increased. In the first two days of the protests in Egypt, the number of livestream viewers (who were watching the channel over the internet) increased significantly. Al Jazeera made live broadcasts from Tahrir Square during the 18 days of protests, despite the fact that its office was closed, its journalists detained and beaten, and its equipment and tapes confiscated (Doherty 2).

Al Jazeera English began referring to the protests in Egypt as –revolutionary| just three days into the protests. It also gave generous headcounts of the protesters in the Egyptian uprising. Through its images and words, the network, in collaboration with other stations, validated and sanctified those protests as revolutionary, even though they were only in their early days. In this way, it helped to frame the events that were happening in Tahrir Square in a way that added momentum to the movement. During the protests, *Nilesat*, which is an Egyptian owned satellite television network, shut down its Al Jazeera network, thereby constraining the audience. However, Al Jazeera managed to find ways to access other alternative satellite feeds. As a result Al Jazeera was not able to broadcast throughout the events. This demonstrated how hard it is to shut down media in a world that is highly networked (Alterman 111).

In a 2011 presentation by Tony Burman, Al Jazeera's chief strategic advisor for the Americans, he indicated that change in the Middle East had been inevitable. What began in Tunisia before spreading to Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Libya changed the

region forever. Traditional media, new media, and Al Jazeera worked together to spread the message and amplify the voice of the voiceless, which was heard by people in the Arab world and elsewhere. Even though the dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt targeted Al Jazeera by seizing equipment, shutting down its bureaus, and attempting to expel its journalists, the journalists kept on working undercover, filing reports and pictures every single day (Canadian Committee for World Press Freedom, 2011).

Another factor that may have compromised the effectiveness of Al Jazeera in reporting on the Arab Spring uprisings was that numerous Arab countries have harassed and expelled the network's journalists. In Tunisia, Al Jazeera's bureau was shut down and journalists threatened with expulsion in order to keep them from reporting. In Yemen and Egypt, the network's offices were raided and closed, and journalists were detained, attacked, and threatened. In Lebanon and Jordan, the staffers of the network were threatened with attack. In Libya, the network's personnel were targeted, and one cameraman was killed with four others being detained. In Syria, the network's journalists have been expelled, intimidated, attacked, and arrested by government forces (Canadian Committee for World Press Freedom, 2011).

Initial pictures of the uprising in Tunisia were captured on cellphones then picked up by Al Jazeera from Facebook before being broadcasted and rebroadcasted repeatedly throughout the Arab world and beyond. As a result, the news of this revolution travelled instantly and worldwide (Canadian Committee for World Press Freedom). Because of its coverage of the unrest in the Middle East, Al Jazeera English has won a top journalism award. The network was selected because of the quality of its peerless coverage and the overall depth of the protests that occurred in the Middle East. Al Jazeera English was recognized for performing a great service in bringing in-depth

coverage of the Turmoil in the Middle East to the English speaking countries. The network was determined to get to the heart of the complicated story which was unfolding in countries where news had historically been difficult to cover (Top News).

The resignation of Hosni Mubarak as the president of Egypt demonstrated that Al Jazeera had become a beacon for freedom in the Arab world. In covering the Tunisian revolution, the network emboldened the Egyptians to go out on the streets and protest the regime of Hosni Mubarak. Al Jazeera showed relentlessness in exposing this repression (Top News). It also played a crucial role in the success of the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions. Without Al Jazeera and other media channels, the revolutionary slogans could not have spread so far, given that there had been stringent state control of social networks. Al Jazeera has provided intense coverage of the uprisings which have rocked the Middle East, to the extent of almost cheering along the protesters. However, as the unrest moved closer to home, the limits of its independence were exposed (Washington Post, 2011).

Al Jazeera promoted civic engagement by providing support for the democratic activities through live protest events and commentaries which aided in preparing and organizing the protests to bring about regime change in Arab countries. , Al Jazeera promoted forms of citizen journalism, where the local people in the Arab countries were able to add their own voices to the events happening in their society (Tuggle et al. 58).

Dave Marash, a well-respected veteran journalist, noted that the revolutions which occurred in Egypt and Tunisia could be referred to as the –Al Jazeera Moment (in a play on words with the –CNN Moment during the first Gulf War (in 1991) because they owned the story and had a complete coverage of the region. Many political experts and media analysts believe that Al Jazeera is in its –CNN Moment because its

coverage of the revolutions is propelling it into prominence in the U.S. During the uprising, the network led global media in terms of how to cover the uprising of the people as it got right into the thick of things and kept its cameras running, both propelling and witnessing events (Douglas 2011).

The network was the first to cover the events in the Arab Spring, and thus had a unique position in framing the events and how they were presented, both regionally and globally. It followed the developments, carried out interviews, analyses, and looked into the historical origins as well as roots of the issues at hand. This increased the number of worldwide viewers, and even those who did not know the network began to open their eyes to a channel that offered them what they needed to know and answers to their questions professionally, seriously, impartially, and in depth. They recognized that Al Jazeera was actually a leading channel in terms of news coverage. Even Hilary Clinton, the U.S. Secretary of State, noted that Al Jazeera offered real news and covered what mattered to the viewers. The channel provided a great service as it brought the English speaking world an in-depth coverage of the events that were happening in the Middle East (BBC Monitoring Middle East).

According to *ABS-CBN News*, the network provided a platform for dissent in the Arab world, which had been under the leadership of despots and monarchs. It was relentless in providing non-stop reporting of the street demonstrations in Egypt and Tunisia and the rebellion in Libya. The network boasts of its contributions to the revolutions in the Arab world. It celebrates the Arab Spring because its coverage has deepened the awareness of the Arabs regarding their rights and causes. When the decades-long silence was broken as millions of people in the Arab world took to the streets to demand for freedom, they were given a voice by Al Jazeera.

Nevertheless, one of the key accusations leveled at Al Jazeera concerns Bahrain, when the brutal government onslaught trampled the rebellion led by Shiites against the kingdom ruled by Sunnis, and Al Jazeera was absent. Even though the channel claimed to be independent, this signaled the network could not challenge the interests of its owners. Critics of the network have accused it of aggressively covering the demonstrations in Libya and Syria while ignoring the protests which occurred in Bahrain. Nevertheless, in its coverage, the network emphasized objectivity as opposed to advocacy and sought to deliver balanced coverage. For example, in Yemen, the network was keen to host a government spokesman each and every time they hosted the opposition, but the government banned its respondents, closed down its bureau, and confiscated its equipment. The network was therefore forced to cover the event through activists and new media (The Atlantic 2011); however, this transition to an activist agenda and citizen journalism-sourcing of content took place to a much lesser extent in Bahrain when the network's correspondents were forced to quit the country.

According to Pollack et al. (183), the popular unrest in the Arab world has substantially been more muted because of the small size of population as well as the legacy of political quietism because of the generous role of the public. However, Al Jazeera proved to be a useful foil in this respect as it rallied public interest during the dramatic events and was relatively more prudent on the developments in the Shii uprising and the Saudi-backed repression in Bahrain (Pollack et al 183). Blanchard regarded Al Jazeera's coverage of the events which unfolded in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Syria as limited in scope and low in tone. On the other hand the coverage of events in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya has been termed as enthusiastic (Blanchard 2).

Academic and media appraisals of Al Jazeera's influence in the Arab Spring have been largely positive, but ultimately, are mixed. However, despite grounds for disparaging the coverage in some of the Persian Gulf States, the nature and popularity of the coverage in many countries both perpetuated and bolstered the uprisings through innovative and aggregated means, as is demonstrated in the sections below that investigate the coverage in Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia, and Libya.

3.2. Pre-Arab Spring Influence

Even before the eruption of the Arab revolutions, many had predicted that Al Jazeera would help bring about change in the Arab World. For example, in 2005, the host of –The Opposite Direction,| Faisal Al Kassem, stated that Al Jazeera was an eye-opener for the masses and that this led the Arab regimes to fear it. He wrote:

Arab regimes could be right in their belief that successful private Arab TV channels have widened the gap between the governments and the people. Indeed, debate programs on certain Arab satellite television channels have been eye-openers. The people have come to know more about what is happening in their societies. For the first time, they can hear the view of the opposition loud and clear. And the more people get to know the other opinions in their countries, the more they become at odds with their governments. Some are afraid that the new media might lead one day to alienation or to a divorce between the regimes and their subjects (Kassim 102).

Some observers have also stated that Al Jazeera had for a long time been playing a significant role in the political and social change, even before the uprisings. For instance, Zayani declared that –Al Jazeera presents the best trend of openness and

democratization in the Arab World. It is a long-overdue two-way street in the global flow of information and opinion. It should be celebrated and encouraged (Zayani 33). The predictions that it would be Al Jazeera that prompted uprising in the region came to pass during the Arab Spring. There is no doubt that Al Jazeera played a very significant role in the Egyptian uprising, which began as a simple protest in Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia and which ended up destroying the long-standing regime in Egypt. That is why, on February 6, 2011, large numbers of Egyptian protesters in Tahrir Square were chanting, -Long live Al Jazeera! (Miles 2011).

3.3. The Al Jazeera Effect

-One could hardly speak of change in the Arab world without invoking the ‘*Al Jazeera effect*’ in nurturing democracy and connecting people from all walks of life and of all philosophical, ideological, and religious persuasions (Bishara 2012). The Al Jazeera effect can be defined as:

...the superseding of the traditional political connections that have brought identity and structure to global politics by the connectivity of new media, a ‘rewiring of the world’s neural system’ that is happening at great speed, one which changes the way states and citizens interact with each other, and which offers the individual a chance at a new kind of autonomy (Seib 175).

The Al Jazeera effect has been made possible through advances in technology, which has resulted in the media revolution. This effect is part of the new media, which includes aspects such as digital technology, satellite broadcasting and texting, as discussed above (Seib x).

The Al Jazeera effect changed the way information flows throughout the world. The most visible effect of Al Jazeera English was its global outreach during the uprisings, which delivered Arab perspectives on events to many parts of the world, including Australia, Europe, and US, and increased its viewership by more than 500%, a thing that has never happened before. Al Jazeera managed to take the Arab audience from the state-controlled channels and brought changes not only in how the public viewed their rulers but also in the way traditional media operate. Al Jazeera can thus be credited with setting the pace for media evolution in the Arab World (Hachten & Scotton 135).

Seib summarizes the Al Jazeera's effect as follows:

Al Jazeera is a paradigm of new media's influence. Ten years ago, there was much talk about CNN effect, the theory that news coverage- especially gripping visual; storytelling- was influential policy throughout the world. Today, the Al Jazeera effect takes that a significant step further.... 'the media' are no longer just the media. They have a larger popular base than ever before and, as a result, have unprecedented impact on international politics. The media can be tools of conflict and instrument of peace; they can make traditional borders irrelevant and unify peoples scattered across the globe. This phenomenon, the Al Jazeera effect, is reshaping the world (Seib 113).

The effect of Al Jazeera was not only felt in the Arab World. —The Arab Spring catapulted Al Jazeera into the global spotlight in much the [same] way as the bombing of Bagdad in 1991 enabled CNN to solidify its role as a global news organization (Schattle 53). Its effect was recognized by the former first lady, Hillary Clinton, who commented that —Al Jazeera provided "real news" while its US counterparts like CNN,

MSNBC and FOX News batter their audiences with "a million commercials -- and arguments between talking heads -- which is not particularly informative to us, let alone foreigners." This comment implied a greater respect for the Arab station than those of the American based media like CNN (Andy 2011).

The impact of Al Jazeera English on the Arab Springs in Tunisia, Yemen, Egypt, Libya and Syria cannot be underestimated. It was the major source of information on the revolutions; by working together with citizen journalists and new media, Al Jazeera amplified the voice of the public and ensured it was heard both in the Middle East and throughout the world (Shayit 2). It was their approach in coverage of the revolutions that made Al Jazeera English to win the journalism award. The award was based on Al Jazeera's in-depth coverage and its determination to get to the heart of the uprisings, even in countries that were difficult to cover. In addition, they were relatively independent and unbiased, and thus helped in filling the vacuum that had for a long time been left by the media under the previous regimes throughout the region. Al Jazeera English made journalistic waves with its coverage, and is still a major reference whenever the Arab Springs is being discussed. It is its coverage of the Arab Springs that greatly facilitated the Qatar based network to take a leading role in the media scene (Top News).

3.4. Effectiveness of the Approaches Used by Al Jazeera in Bolstering the Uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya

Approaches used by Al Jazeera English were effective in catalyzing the fall of the regimes in Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt. Al Jazeera sacrificed much of its diversity by eliminating all its talk shows and documentary programs and devoting much of its

broadcasts to the headlines of the day as each of the events unfolded. Its coverage gradually shaped the transnational narrative against the numerous dictatorships in the Arab world, thereby handing the demonstrators a broader storyline to follow and influencing public opinion in countries around the world, thus increasing international pressure on the governments that were subject to the uprisings.

Moreover, Al Jazeera helped to create the notion that there was a common struggle across the Arab World. The network aired round-the-clock coverage across the countries that were under autocratic governments that rarely allowed for media to show scenes of domestic unrest. Al Jazeera acted as the messenger for the citizens in these countries as it pricked the status quo and enraged the autocratic governments (Arabia Today 2011).

3.4.1. Effectiveness of the Approaches used in Bolstering the Uprisings in Egypt

Al Jazeera did not create the new democratic change, but it did enhance the ability of the people to bring about change and influence events. In between the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, Al Jazeera embarked on a strange campaign. In Egypt, when the protests heated up, the government ordered for events to be obscured by local television stations and interrupted Al Jazeera's broadcast on the NileSat satellite. NileSat was forced to break its contractual agreement with the network and to stop transmitting Al Jazeera's signal. This was a major setback for the channel, but it managed to resume its broadcasting through other friendly stations. Al Jazeera correspondents had to file their reports anonymously in order to avoid being beaten. Despite the dangers, they did everything possible in order to ensure a comprehensive coverage of the events in Egypt (Chan 2012).

Al Jazeera was immutable and very clear in its pro-rebellion stance when compared with the other stations, which visibly wavered in their coverage of the protests. Even as the network's reporters were arrested and its offices closed, the network sent people from Doha to work secretly as reporters and was constantly present in Tahrir Square. Al Jazeera provided a 24 hour live broadcast that was punctuated by phone conversations and some videos, which filled the gap left by the dearth of images. The network's reporters were scattered across the different towns and cities in Egypt and relayed information to the network's headquarters. The station aired a theoretical analysis of the events, which raised the morale and faith of the youth during the uprising (Reuters).

In Egypt, where the state television network showed peaceful scenes from the downtown area of Cairo, Al Jazeera, which had its cameras a few hundred meters from the crew of the state TV, showed the political headquarters of Hosni Mubarak in flames (Hoskins et al. 108). According to Reuters, Al Jazeera was pivotal in keeping the momentum of the protests which eventually ousted Hosni Mubarak.

Through the live broadcasts from Tahrir Square in Egypt, for 18 days straight, the network provided a platform for demonstrators while at the same time documenting the activity of the Mubarak regime. This forced the political leaders to hear what the demonstrators were saying on the streets. By delivering the messages and displaying the images of the revolution, the international media and actors were forced to act. During the Egyptian revolution, the station strove to meet the demands of the young protesters, eschewing promotion of any party or ideology. It only broadcasted in a manner that represented the disaffected masses.

Following 18 days of the groundbreaking coverage of the protests in Egypt, Mubarak was forced to relinquish his power to the military. The moment of joy for Al Jazeera came after the fall of Mubarak on 12th February 2011. This resignation demonstrated that Al Jazeera had become a beacon for freedom in the Middle East. Today, as the people of Egypt celebrate the demise of the dictatorship regime, despite remaining tensions, they also take a few moments to give thanks to Al Jazeera for making this a reality (Straight).

According to Cottle, the dramatic and startling scenes displayed on Al Jazeera from Egypt culminated in the March of the Millions, which forced President Hosni Mubarak to depart from Egypt. Al Jazeera correspondents in Tahrir Square did not only help to focus the attention to these momentous events but also granted a human face to these events. The emotional testimonies and visceral scenes elicited on the street were brought to the home viewers by Al Jazeera (Cottle 649).

3.4.2. Effectiveness of the Approaches in Bolstering the Uprisings in Libya

During the revolution in Libya, the Libyans called for Al Jazeera, and the station responded by taking a stance for the people. It focused its broadcasts on the developing events and news. It was closest to the emotions and the street pulse of citizens in Arab countries. Even though it did not cause the uprisings, it is impossible to imagine them coming to fruition without Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera correspondents and staff updated Libyans and other viewers across the world on the developments in the Libya uprising. Al Jazeera interviewed the major tribal leaders in Libya. Al Jazeera played a significant role in uniting the various regions and factions. In the coverage of clashes between the forces allied to Gadhafi and their opponents, Al Jazeera made a

clear attempt to lessen the impact of the news regarding the losses of the opposition by drawing attention to the corrupt nature of Gadhafi's regime. Al Jazeera received cell phone videos on the death of Gadhafi, which were run again and again (Chan 2012).

3.4.3. Effectiveness of the Approaches in Bolstering the Uprisings in Tunisia

Al Jazeera was first to grasp the enormity of the uprising in Tunisia as well as the implications it had for the region, which fuelled the protests in Egypt. The channel was one of the first outlets to broadcast images of the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, who set himself on fire in order to protest against police harassment, as well as the lack of employment under the leadership of Zein Al Abidine Ben Ali. Mohamed Bouazizi was a young college graduate trying to earn a living by selling fruits and vegetables, until the police seized his vegetable cart. Al Jazeera connected demonstrators and activists from around the country and disseminated information to the rest of the country. It showed footage of angry mobs as well as the blood in the streets that was a creeping threat to Zein Al Abidine Ben Ali, who had made attempts to censor the Tunisian media houses in an effort to restore calm (Fleishman 2011).

Al Jazeera was accused by the Tunisian parliament of bias and distortion in its coverage as well as hurting the reputation of the country through the creation of hatred and resentment. However, in reality Al Jazeera unmasked and unraveled the 23 year old autocratic and corrupt regime, which roused activists from across the region. This demonstrated that Al Jazeera was willing to expose the transgressions which were going on in Tunisia as well as the other Arab countries (Fleishman 2011).

Al Jazeera's coverage further fueled the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia when the network hired a human rights activist and freelance journalist to work undercover.

As a result, the middle class people in the country who had been warned by their parents to stay away from politics were able to learn about what was going on and began to feel empowered to express their grievances. Much of the coverage in Tunisia was raw and unvarnished, as it relied on cell phone videos that were submitted by bystanders as well as call in interviews, which gave those involved in the demonstrations an opportunity to express their observations and opinions unedited. The riots that actually resulted in the overthrowing of Zein Al Abidine Ben Ali were swiftly covered by Al Jazeera (Arabian Business).

Hoskins et al. (2011) noted that, during the demonstrations in streets across Tunisia, there were placards that were saying —Thank you Al Jazeera! amidst the Anti-Ben Ali slogans. The network had never been allowed to open a bureau in the country, but this did not stop it from serving as a mechanism for relay. It collected materials from independent websites, Facebook pages, blogs, cell phone videos, Twitter feeds, and other mechanisms for citizen journalism and fed it to the vast satellite Tunisian audience as well as viewers across the world. As a result of the ample documentation of events, those who took to the streets and those who had initially believed that dictatorship was too strong to be toppled were encouraged (Hoskins et al. 107).

Al Jazeera's swiftness to grasp the enormity of the Tunisian protests delivered what many Arabs thought impossible, as it resulted in the overthrow of the autocratic regime. On January 14, 2011, Zein Al Abidine Ben Ali fled Tunisia following two weeks of unrest sparked by the suicide of Mohamed Bouazizi. This marked the maturity of Al Jazeera as a political force that can play a significant role in changing political orders. Al Jazeera has since been widely praised for its aggressive coverage of the Tunisian revolution (Arabian Business).

3.4.4. Effectiveness of the Approaches used in Bolstering the Uprisings in Yemen

The role played by Al Jazeera in inspiring the Yemeni demonstrations is undeniable. According to Hammond (2011), when the cameras of Al Jazeera turned to Yemen, it looked as if the guns were trained for their next target among oppressive long-term Arab leaders. It was even accused of running an operation to —burn the Arab World by Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh. As a result, the government revoked the licenses of the correspondents (Hammond 2011).

3.5. Effectiveness of the Approaches Used by Al Jazeera in Propelling Insurgent Emotions

Al Jazeera's coverage has helped spread the insurgent emotions from one nation to another. The Arab Spring uprisings have defined the broadcaster, and this has made journalists, politicians, and viewers throughout the region and the world to take notice of the output of the network. Al Jazeera is believed to be the driving force behind the Arab spring because it magnified the voices and made them mainstream. In Egypt, when the parents watched what their children were doing on Al Jazeera, they joined them, and this insurgency became the mainstream (New Statesman 2012).

According to Chan (2012), not only did Al Jazeera bear witness to the events that were unfolding, but it also played a significant role of rallying the protesters by acting as a their mouthpiece. Al Jazeera provided 24-hour coverage of the Arab Spring revolutions, and its journalists stayed on the ground with the ordinary Egyptians in order to document the footage of the demonstrators in their efforts to resist the authorities. There can be little doubt that the globally disseminated coverage of events curtailed the regimes options for response, as the level of brutality that might have

quelled the protests would have spark widespread domestic and international indignation. It regarded the collective conscience of the masses as its point of departure and sought to give them a voice and a platform. Al Jazeera has been characterized as the one station that supported the revolutions without any reservations. In the coverage of the awakening in the Arab World, Al Jazeera neither created deep awareness nor political culture, but simply allowed its viewers to believe in their own thoughts.

Al Jazeera's record of critical coverage of issues related to police brutality, misuse of power, government corruption, and the crackdown on dissidents in Egypt prompted the masses to join the uprising. The use of dramatic footage, emotionally charged background music befitting the scenes, titles for special segments on the unrest in countries being covered, and the use of repetitive provocative graphics invariably contributed to the unsettle mood that was witnessed in Arab countries. By airing the demonstrations and dissident activities in the Arab countries, Al Jazeera energized the continuation of the protests, and this resulted in the snowball effect, which emboldened demonstrators in other countries. Furthermore, Al Jazeera unequivocally praised the uprisings in its political analysis, and this empowered the demonstrators morally (Shavit 2).

3.6. Effectiveness of the Approaches Used by Al Jazeera in Providing the Much Needed Flow of Information that Laid the Groundwork for the Uprisings

In Tunisia, Al Jazeera was quick to support the protesters and their demands. As the protests intensified, regular scheduling was dropped, and an open news cycle was adopted, which broadcasted images and news from Tunisia as they streamed online. There was an absence of trustworthy local media, and Tunisians raised banners in praise

of the network. This revolution succeeded with an astonishing speed. The majority of Tunisians believed that Al Jazeera provided a mirror in which they saw themselves reflected and helped them to believe in the revolution they embarked on. Al Jazeera had a superficial impact on the Arab revolutions as it was closest to the hearts and minds of many Arabs (Heinrich Boll Stiftung 69).

Al Jazeera has been the leader in the coverage of the Arab revolutions as it has literally changed the minds and attitudes of people. Schattle observes that Al Jazeera defiantly continued to broadcast and place its coverage on a number of satellite frequencies in Egypt, even after the government ordered for its bureau to be shut down and revoked its license to broadcast in the country. During this time of turmoil, the network noted that it was imperative for voices from all sides to be heard and that the closing of its bureau by the government only served to censor and silence the voices of the Egyptians it was supposed to be serving. As a result, as mentioned above, some referred to the social media revolution in the Arab World as the –Al Jazeera Moment (Heinrich Boll Stiftung 69).

Hunter observes that Al Jazeera, the 24-hour channel, collected and curated the raw, immediate content the ordinary people were sharing from the affected countries and made it available to its viewers as soon as possible. This extensive coverage of the Arab Spring, as well as the willingness to broadcast diverse views and original citizen journalism, allowed the Arab citizens to see the content that was being shared by their countrymen (Hunter 2011).

According to Pintank, even as darkness fell on Tahrir Square, there was a giant makeshift TV screen that broadcasted Al Jazeera’s live coverage of the uprising in Egypt to the enthusiastic crowd, and which later transmitted the speech made by

Mubarak that he would not take part in the reelection but would stay in office until the end of his term. Al Jazeera captured the hopes of the crowds that were gathering on the streets in Egypt, working round the clock in order to ensure that they were broadcasting on alternative frequencies (Pintank).

There is no chance that the world would have been privy to these extraordinary events unfolding in Egypt if the Egyptian nationals had not watched the Tunisian revolution on Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera was by no means a major force of play in the continuing uprisings going on in the Arab World. However, Al Jazeera did well in addressing the needs of its audiences as it consistently hosted anti-regime figures. In taking this editorial approach, the network was criticized by the falling or fallen regimes for inciting violence. It undoubtedly played the significant role of providing information about the protests and providing a platform for the opposition. For the Tunisians, whose media was controlled by the government and failed to provide honest coverage of the revolution, Al Jazeera was their only supply of balanced information (Hoskins et al. 107).

The government of Ben Ali, which initially controlled the traditional news outlets, was surprised by the pervasiveness and speed of the flow of information that resulted in public anger that could not be contained by the government. Al Jazeera, along with the social media with which it had a reciprocal relationship, played a critical role in coordinating, communicating, and channeling the increasing tide of opposition and managed to bypass the state owned television networks by propelling ideas and images of mass defiance and resistance across the Middle East (Hoskins et al. 107).

3.7. Effectiveness of the Approaches Used by Al Jazeera in Attaining New Prominence in the Media World

Al Jazeera's aggressive coverage of the uprisings in the Middle East has propelled the network to a new prominence in the media world. Experts are questioning whether the Arab spring would have happened without Al Jazeera English. Al Jazeera has been modeled around the world, and its video reporting from the ground has set it apart and made it the best (Ricchiardi 2011). Al Jazeera enjoys renown because it has provided a platform for dissent in the Arab World. Its reputation has only been bolstered by its coverage of the revolutions in the Arab World (Asharq Al-Awsat Newspaper 2011).

The Arab spring catapulted Al Jazeera into the global spotlight in the same manner that the bombing of Baghdad in 1991 solidified the role of CNN as a global news organization. As a result of its coverage, the audiences from around the world exploded, and its global audience rocketed. Al Jazeera was a must-see for those who needed to see what was happening in the Arab World. As a result of the engagement in the uprisings in the Middle East, Al Jazeera has become a trusted news provider (Nuseibeh 2011).

In a sense, Al Jazeera symbolizes a beacon in a part of the world that is increasingly craving news that is unfiltered. With its coverage of the Arab Spring uprisings, Al Jazeera has made journalistic waves as it has scooped the global media houses. In the era of Al Jazeera and other social media, dissent will be harder to contain, and repression cannot remain invisible for a long period of time. Al Jazeera and other satellite channels have increased their market share exponentially during the Arab uprising (Cottle 655).

Kaplan (2011) observes that prominent media figures, including MSNBC's Rachel Maddow and ABC News's Sam Donaldson, have applauded the coverage of the Arab Spring by Al Jazeera. Voices within the mainstream media, such as the officials of Al Jazeera English, have referred to the coverage of the Egypt revolution by Al Jazeera as –Al Jazeera English's moment. In this sense, –moment refers to the turning point in the standing and popularity of the network as a result of its coverage of the uprising in Egypt (Bauder 2011).

Many prominent figures of the Arab Spring have also praised the network. Rashed Ghannouchi, who won the first democratic election in Tunisia after the fall of Zein Al Abidine Ben Ali, regarded the network as a partner in the Arab revolutions. As a result of its extensive coverage of the revolution in Egypt, Al Jazeera has been awarded a top prize in the category of breaking news by the Online News Association (Asharq Al-Awsat Newspaper). According to *The Telegraph*, many believe that Al Jazeera's current significance is more profound, as the network has not just reflected the events unfolding from Sanaa to Tunis, but has helped in the creation of the revolution. Critics as well as supporters of Al Jazeera have viewed the channel as a more committed change instigator as opposed to a dispassionate chronicler of events (The Telegraph).

CHAPTER 4

Research Question 3

4.1. Introduction

Al Jazeera was formed by the Qatar government and several investors from the country's ruling family. The network has faced a lot of hostility from people in other countries, especially as a result of negative coverage about several Arab nations, including Syria, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt. Al Jazeera offices in these countries have been forced to shut down on several occasions after airing stories that were considered to be slanderous by the regimes. The hostility shown by Arab regimes seems to augment Al Jazeera's reputation among citizens. Its popularity grew rapidly due to its extensive coverage of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Most Arabs disapproved of these wars, and the network recognized this; therefore, it sent out its reporters into the battlefields and it broadcast pictures of dead civilians to its audiences across the world. These led to a lot of criticisms, not just from Arab governments but also in outside countries. Many people in the United States had already formed a negative attitude towards Al Jazeera long before the Arab Spring. For instance, former U.S Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, once described the channel as al-Qaeda's mouthpiece, and when one of its reporters was killed in an U. S bomb raid, its Arab audience's loyalty was cemented (Auter). This was during the Bush administration, when the channel was labeled as a promoter of terrorism and was accused of inflammatory and false reporting. One of this was that Al Jazeera English was unable to gain proper access to the American satellite and cable systems (Marash 47). This struggle to gain access in the US persisted for a long time; by 2011, Al Jazeera English

had only managed to gain full access to cable systems in Toledo, Burlington, and Washington DC. Despite its effort to become a global operator, many Americans still viewed it as a terror-affiliated network. Some have speculated that the refusal of US cable and satellite networks to accept Al Jazeera English stems from the fear of being alienated from advertisers and American political leaders (Dimmaggio 246).

With its increasing popularity in the Arab region, the news channel began to influence public opinion, and several Arab regimes accused Al Jazeera of inciting dissent and protest among their populaces. Some regimes accused it of having double standards in its news coverage, thus questioning its neutrality and credibility; it was accused by many leaders in the Arab world of arbitrarily attacking some political elites while leaving others unmolested. The accusations began as early as 2001 during the Afghanistan war when their offices in Kabul were bombed (Ham 95). However, the TV channel's role in the Arab Spring was unparalleled, and this was clearly demonstrated in its coverage of the Egyptian and Tunisian uprisings. Most Tunisians credit the news channel for helping them to overthrow Ben Ali's regime. It emerged at this time as a favorite among the Arab masses, despite the scorn of the regimes (Ghazi).

Since its inception, Al Jazeera has operated as an unconventional broadcaster. It has been involved in both regional and domestic politics, and it has helped to share public opinion over the years. In 15 years, Al Jazeera has managed to stand out as a pioneer in the media by pushing news reporting boundaries in the Arab region, providing live coverage of some of the most significant developments. It has become a platform for religious and political opposition in the region (Gornall 3).

As discussed above, Al Jazeera played a very important role in educating the world about the Arab revolutions, and gave the masses a channel to voice their

grievances. The channel faced several challenges as it pursued new stories in the Arab countries. One of the main concerns was a claim that the U.S. government was influencing the news channel's editorial policy. The channel's independence and neutrality was also questioned during its coverage of the protests in Syria and the Gulf States. Its coverage of the Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia protests was also considered to be timid. When Al Jazeera held interviews with Israel, Bahrain was displeased with the channel and banned it from airing any program in the country after accusing Al Jazeera of being biased (Ayish 181). The criticisms grew significantly during the Arab Spring, when Al Jazeera English was accused of downplaying the revolutions in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain while overemphasizing the perspectives of some Islamists groups in Libya, Egypt and Tunisia; this was considered to be favoring Doha's foreign policy interests. Their policy of being independent also came under criticism when Wadah Khanfar, the general manager was replaced by a member of the royal family after he resigned in September 2011 (Dickinson 2). Thus, the Arab Spring coverage exposed financial and political influence outside the station (Gornall 4), emboldening the network's critics.

Some of the news stories that were featured on the channels were based on the information from social media sites like Facebook and Twitter; therefore, there was no way to determine if they were accurate and reliable. The channel was also accused of playing a supportive role in the protests. The Omar regime has been accused of having an agenda in the uprisings; this claim is substantiated to some extent by the relatively sparse coverage in some of the Persian Gulf states. Critics also term its coverage of the uprising to be sensationalistic (Cano). These accusations have been significant challenges to Al Jazeera's credibility, despite its triumphs in other areas.

Al Jazeera English also had a difficult time securing audiences in the U.S. because Al Jazeera Arabic is considered to be a terrorist mouthpiece and an anti-US propaganda purveyor (Kurtz). Al Jazeera's mission was to reverse the conventional (in the Arab region) news coverage patterns. According to the channel's official website, its mission was to adhere to all the journalistic values including diversity, credibility, balance, courage, honesty, balance, fairness and presenting diverse opinions without any form of partiality and bias (Painter 23). When the channel was established internationally in 2006, it was supposed to fill a gap in televised news, but it was not well received in America. The negative view of the channel persisted until 2011 when the Arab Uprising began. Al Jazeera English was a main source of information for American media, observers, and civilians who were interested in learning more about the Arab Spring. Its leading coverage of the Egyptian revolution distinguished Al Jazeera from other news channels (Kristoff).

Censorship on the part of some of the governments of countries on which it was reporting was also a big challenge for the Al Jazeera English Channel, and this is one of the reasons why the network had to rely on social media sites to get information from those who were taking part in the uprisings. State TV channels were not broadcasting the uprisings with reasonable fidelity; therefore, the social networks were used as sources. Because of the civil unrest as well as the hostility of some of the governments, it was dangerous for journalists to go out in the field; therefore, they had to determine whether the information they were receiving, often from non-professionals with agendas, was credible enough to put on air. Al Jazeera was also banned in countries like Tunisia and Egypt because of the role it was playing in spreading information about the uprising to the masses (Miles).

Journalists also faced threats while covering the Arab Spring, limiting the channel's access to information from the ground during the protests. Live coverage of the uprisings was not possible in some situations because the streets were dangerous and journalists were at risk of being imprisoned, assaulted, or worse (Haschke). The journalists lacked the training required to apply social media as a main source of news (especially since this was a more or less ground-breaking sourcing strategy for a mainstream media outlet) and deal with censorship and bans in the countries affected by bans (Khanfar). The Arab Spring involved several countries, and there were divergent opinions about what was taking place on the ground; as a result, it was challenging for Al Jazeera to provide objective accounts of the events (Mashni).

In the remainder of the present chapter, the challenges outlined above will each be discussed in more detail. This involves discussion of the network's relationship with the Qatari regime (4.2), how it suffered under and dealt with bans (4.3), censorship by various governments (4.4), threats to its staff (4.5), the challenges of embracing new media (4.6), ethical concerns (4.7), inadequate training of some of its sources (4.8), maintaining relative objectivity with limited resources (4.9), bias, especially given its interactivity with events (4.10), being overly focused on the Arab Spring (4.11), and accusations from various sources of actively encouraging the uprisings (4.12).

4.2. The Al Jazeera-Qatar Regime Relationship

One of the challenges that Al Jazeera has had to deal with during its coverage of the Arab Spring is to distance itself from the Qatar regime, which has claimed to have an agenda in the uprisings by several Arab nations. As discussed above, its credibility has been questioned because of the government's influence in the channel.

Al Jazeera was established in 1996 by Sheikh Hamad, and its ostensible main objective was to cover breaking news in the region. Its goal was to offer an unbiased and real picture of the Arab world. The channel wanted to voice both sides of every story that it covered. However, during the uprisings, the news channel was accused of pushing for democratization, and the Qatar government is seen to have had a role in this (Hroub). The accusations of bias are of particular concern in light of its relatively sparse coverage of some of the emergent (failed) uprisings in countries that might be considered aligned to the Qatari regime.

In its first ten years, Al Jazeera covered the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in a provocative way, and this captured interest the Arab world. It aired statements from Osama bin Laden; although this did not impress the western world, but the Middle East audience was captured by its enthusiasm to push boundaries in media coverage. The viewers were also impressed by its ability to capture the newsmakers' mood. Nevertheless, the Qatari government is considered to have a significant influence on Al Jazeera, and this is considered one of the reasons why there are few negative stories about Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has a good relationship with the Qatar government, and, thus, the news channel has been blamed for advancing the government's foreign policy (Eakin 1).

In 2011, Wadah Khanfar, the news channel's GM, was replaced by a member of the Qatar royal family. The replacement was seen as part of the government's increasing influence in the news channel. During the uprisings, protests in Saudi Arabia were not extensively covered, and this is attributed to the government's relationship with the Saudi Arabian royal family. The channel was also slow to report on the Syrian protests initially, because the country had been one of Qatar's allies in the region.

However, Qatar soon changed from being a close ally and became a critic of the Assad government, and the Syrian protests were aggressively covered in an effort to remove Assad from power. Cynics might claim that this transition was in line with prevailing international political opinion, rather than an emergent realization of the gravity of event taking place in the war-torn country. Moreover, the oppression in Bahrain also seems to have been largely ignored in the channel's coverage of the protests. The Qatari government is accused of promoting some interests while ignoring others, and this was evident in its coverage of events in Bahrain. The news channel had a difficult time trying to prove that its coverage was fair and credible during the uprisings (Hasan).

Somewhat confusingly, some critics argue that the news channel is an American tool, while others think it supports Al-Qaeda while acting as the (Qatar) state's mouthpiece. The Emir of Qatar is also believed to have significant influence over the content that the channel covers. There may be some credibility to this opinion, since Al Jazeera would not have obtained success without the Emir's support, and the station's close ties with the government have raised questions about its credibility as it is seen to advance Qatar's foreign policies through its content. Al Jazeera plays a very important role in the country's -branding and foreign policy ambitions. Qatar's current Emir has faced criticism from both Egypt and Saudi Arabia; therefore, he is hostile towards these countries. Al Jazeera has targeted the two countries for several years; however, during the uprisings, Egypt's protests received more coverage from the news channel (Robichaux).

Qatar has enormous gas resources, and the ambitious Emir has established vigorous policies in various areas. He wants recognition for his country, and this is one of the reasons why he allowed an American military base to be built in the country. The

country has also formed close ties with Israel, and the Emir's support for the uprisings, partially expressed by allowing Al Jazeera a free hand in its reporting, is seen as a move to strengthen the country's position in the region. The uprisings in countries that the Emir considers a threat in the region were covered far more vigorously than others by Al Jazeera, and this has sparked a lot of debate about the channel's credibility (Miles).

The uprisings were based on legitimate grievances, and the people were simply speaking out after many years of oppression. Al Jazeera had been highlighting oppression in many countries in the region before the uprisings (see section 4.12 below concerning accusations that it fomented the uprisings), and they provided an opportunity for the news channel to prove what it has been broadcasting to the world. For Qatar, the uprisings offered a chance for them to gain recognition and influence in the Arab region. The Qatar government has been accused of providing financial support in some of the uprisings, especially in Libya. Meanwhile, as discussed above, Al Jazeera failed to support the small uprisings in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain and some argue that this was due to the fact that the news channel was busy covering the protests in Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria which the Emir considers to be a threat in the region (Randeree). This tends to cast doubt on Al Jazeera's claim that its coverage of the uprisings was born out of the network's ethical and journalistic stance(s).

Whatever, the underlying causes, Al Jazeera was committed to airing the grievances of the people in these countries and relied on social media messages from the protesters. The news channel cancelled its regular programming to provide live coverage of the protests and interviews. Revolutionaries were banned from using local media in their countries, and Al Jazeera was the only way for them to reach out to more people and mobilize them to join the protests. One of Al Jazeera English's sister

channels, Al Jazeera Mubashir, broadcasted live feeds sent in the form of video clips, text messages, and phone calls by those who were on the ground. According to the Washington Post, its coverage of events in Bahrain was neutral and sporadic while it supported uprisings in some of the Arab regimes (Randeree).

The Qatari regime was also accused of determining Al Jazeera's coverage of the Libyan protests. Qatar is accused of funding the opposition in Libya; therefore, it seems to have played a role in Gadhafi's exit. However, Al Jazeera described Qatar's role in the Libyan revolution as a humanitarian gesture aimed at overthrowing a dictator. This is one of the key reasons that the news channel has a difficult time convincing people it is credible when it seems to support the Emir's causes in its reporting. Al Jazeera was also accused of providing information that would discredit Gaddafi and his rule in Libya. The information that was provided by the news channel helped Qatar to build support from other countries for his overthrow (Hroub).

The Arab Spring was a series of authentic uprisings by Arab masses who were tired of several years of authoritarian rule. The people were tired of corruption and oppression by the governments; therefore, they decided to use protests to get their leaders to resign. The uprisings spread rapidly through the Arab region, and this caught the western world (at least, its media) by surprise. Al Jazeera saw the uprisings as an opportunity for the news channel to broadcast what it had been highlighting to the rest of the world for some time. It was a moment for the channel to offer a voice to the masses that had been oppressed for many years. According to some critics, broadcasting the uprising provided a perfect setting for Qatar to build influence in the Arab region.

4.3. Bans

Arabian governments reacted in different ways to stop Al Jazeera English from disseminating information about the uprisings in their countries. Some of the actions taken by the governments to combat Al Jazeera include interfering with their signal, attacking the journalists, and banning the channel from their countries (Maalouf 26). As a result, there have been several –confrontations| between Arab governments and Al Jazeera.

In some countries, Al Jazeera did not have the capacity to achieve coverage directly, and thus found it difficult to access information during the uprisings. This is directly related to the government’s banning of the channel in these countries (Fisher). When the protests began in Tunisia, most people learned about them through Al Jazeera. It broadcast bulletins and footage about the Tunisian protests before any other news channel in the world. However, the news channel’s bureau in Tunisia had already been closed in the country; therefore, it was difficult for their journalists to get information directly. Al Jazeera was forced to innovate, and it began to use social media and cell phone footage for its broadcasts about the protests. Around 60% of its broadcast material was from mobile footage, as this was the only way to circumvent the channel’s –media blackout| in Tunisia. The use of mobile footage for its content made it seem like Al Jazeera was part of the uprising. Even with the ban of the channel in the country, stories about the protests continued, and President Zein al-Abidine Ben Ali was soon toppled (Reuters). This was to set the pattern by which Al Jazeera would overcome government’s attempts at blocking its access to emerging events.

Following the extensive coverage of the Syrian protests, Al Jazeera journalists were kicked out of the country. Journalists experienced great challenges in trying to get

information; an undercover journalist commissioned by Al Jazeera explained how difficult and dangerous using a video camera was in the open after Syria banned Al Jazeera's cameras inside the country. He was only able to cover the protests with his phone secretly (Al Jazeera). These challenges made the news channel turn to local activists and some independent producers as their only source of obtaining information about the protests. Thus, the independent producers were taking a great risk by providing content for Al Jazeera (Haschke).

Egypt also banned Al Jazeera after it aired content about the protests to the world. As the Mubarak regime struggled to survive, the Egyptian government banned Al Jazeera's journalists from the country, revoked their credentials, and closed down Al Jazeera's offices (Daraghmeh). Al Jazeera has not had a good relationship with Egypt since its inception. Egypt has always been against the media revolution that was introduced by the news channel, and the introduction of Al Jazeera, especially with its satellite facilities, made it difficult for the Egyptian regime to control content broadcast in its media (Hammond). The Egyptian government blocked the news channel's live transmission on one of its satellites because it believed it was capable of seriously undermining the regime. Al Jazeera's signal at Nilesat, with more than over 10 million viewers within Egypt, was disrupted by the government. The signals from other satellite networks were also blocked by Egyptian authorities (Tuttle). Al Jazeera correspondents were described as traitors, and because, according to the regime, the news channel was trying to create a revolution in the Arab region (Hammond). Al Jazeera expressed their disappointment and said that the move by the government was aimed at repressing open reporting and –...silencing the voices of the Egyptian people! (Tuttle).

4.4. Censorship

The bans in Tunisia, Syria, and Egypt forced Al Jazeera to look for alternative sources of information about the uprising. Social media like Twitter and Facebook and footage from people's mobile phones became the most important source of content for Al Jazeera. However, the internet was not only occupied by activists who were demanding regime change; the governments, including the oppressive regimes, were monitoring whatever was uploaded in the social networks. After monitoring these sites, they reacted by seeking the users directly or challenging them in more sinister ways (Morozov 67). For instance, the Egyptian regime realized that, even if Al Jazeera English was banned in the country, it was still accessing content from the ground; therefore, it decided to shut down mobile phone lines and the internet. The regime considered this the most effective way of preventing people from spreading information and gathering for protests. Mobile phone technology and social media played a very important role in the mobilization of protesters in Egypt, and the state considered outright censorship to be the most effective solution and this proved a challenge to the Al Jazeera news channel, because it relied on such information for its broadcast (Haschke)

In Tunisia, Facebook profiles were mysteriously blocked, and this made it even more difficult to access information. The Tunisian Internet Agency was used to censor information that was shared on the internet. Facebook had played a very important role in the Tunisian uprising, because it made it possible for protesters to sidestep censorship by the regime. The social network provided a forum for Tunisians to communicate with each other and share information with the rest of the world about the uprising. Thus, the censoring of the internet was a huge obstacle for the uprisings.

Censorship in Tunisia took a violent turn when some foreign and local journalists were assaulted for highlighting the regime's oppression. Their equipment was also confiscated to make sure they did not share negative content about the country in the future. Al Jazeera had been relying on these journalists for direct details of the uprising and the censorship limited their access to credible information (Al Jazeera).

During the Arab Spring, the regimes involved realized that the internet was a threat that had to be dealt with. By shutting down the internet in Egypt and Tunisia, the governments were able to prevent people from spreading information and accessing funds. Apart from preventing the spread of information in the countries, the regimes also wanted to prevent the public from sympathizing with the protestors. The regimes were afraid, quite correctly, that access to information about the protests would create a movement among the public that would be beyond the states' control. Censorship worked to isolate the public and create uncertainty about the regimes' power, potential, and position during the protests (Reporters without Borders).

Libya, Egypt, Syria, Iran, and Bahrain knew that shutting down the internet would be a powerful means of undermining the opposition. It prevented the citizens from getting and spreading information and holding meetings to organize protests. After these Arab governments had banned international and independent media and controlled information offered by state owned channels, the internet offered the most effective way of spreading information, and this is what Al Jazeera capitalized on for news content. The regimes soon realized it was difficult to censor each Twitter and Facebook account; therefore, shutting down the whole internet was the most effective solution. Given its reliance on these sources (after being ejected from the respective regimes, the banning of the internet became one of the biggest challenges for Al Jazeera at a time when they

were not allowed into the countries involved in the Arab uprisings. This was true both for deriving and for disseminating its content. The world was shut out; therefore, it was difficult to know what was really going on, and outsiders were not able to offer coherent, effective support to the opposition. It was very easy for the regimes to shut down the internet, because in most of the Arab countries, telecommunication companies were state owned and, in those ones which function –independently, the states control licenses and reserve the right to dictate policy. In Tunisia, which was the first Arab nation to fall in the uprisings, the regime blocked websites even before the protests began. The Tunisian government was keen to block any sites that it considered a threat, including WikiLeaks (Al Jazeera). During the early uprisings, the Iranian regime was quick to deny the public access to their Facebook and Twitter accounts. Social networks played a very important role during the Arab uprising, because this was the only way international media was able to access information from the countries participating in the protests.

Al Jazeera was forced to rely on activists who were using satellite connections in other countries for news. Amateur radio stations were also used as a source of information (Reporters without Borders). The vulnerability of the internet and the government's capacity to interfere with online communication was clearly demonstrated by the internet shutdown. However, activists came up with a variety of ways to bypass the internet shut down and to disseminate information. They installed Tor anonymity software (a software which and used proxy servers in order to route connections through other countries that had not censored the internet (Reporters without Borders).

Apart from censoring information by shutting down the internet, some of the Arab regimes also arrested, tortured, and imprisoned activists who took part in the

protests. Those who were arrested were forced to access their Facebook accounts to allow the authorities to view information that had been shared by the protests among the activists. With activists being arrested, Al Jazeera was denied a significant source of information. Social site users were also arrested for expressing views that the government considered to be in support of the uprisings. Al Jazeera relied on the information provided by social network users on Facebook and Twitter to determine the situation on the ground (Randeree).

In Syria, the government made several efforts to censor any information that was being sent out of the country. The Syrian regime was concerned that citizens were using satellite phones to send videos and images of the attacks and abuses carried out on protestors. Thus, the government tracked satellite phones in Syria through their radio emissions and a variety of technologies; therefore, it was easy for them to arrest individuals who were sharing information about the protests to the rest of the world. Obviously, this posed a serious challenge for international media, including the Al Jazeera channel (Reporters Without Borders).

In Libya, ordinary citizens and activists in the uprising were arrested for appearing on videos and blog posts that supported the uprising. It was difficult for Libyan journalists to gather information on the streets because it was dangerous. They risked being arrested for taking pictures and videos or trying to use the internet to send footage. Al Jazeera was not allowed on the ground; therefore, its reliance on citizens and independent journalists was a serious weakness in its ability to provide continual accurate coverage. With people fearful of arrest, it was difficult for Al Jazeera to get reports from citizen journalists (Reporters Without Borders).

4.5. Threats to Journalists

As alluded to above, Al Jazeera English journalists and correspondents faced numerous challenges in their efforts to cover the uprisings in the Arab world. They had to struggle against government's oppressive laws and restrictions. Most of the networks journalists were threatened, injured or detained while they were covering the uprising, and their broadcasting equipments seized, making dissemination of news difficult (Al Jazeera) It became necessary for journalists to go to the ground to get reliable information; however, this placed them at serious risk.

Journalists were arrested, tortured, imprisoned, and even killed during the Arab uprising. The revolutions in the Arab region have changed the threats that journalists face while they are out reporting. Fatalities and assaults involving journalists increased significantly during the Arab Spring. Many journalists were imprisoned without charges during the revolution, because the Arab regimes were looking for a fast way to deal with those they considered to be supporting the activists. Journalists were often beaten and threatened, making it difficult or impossible for them to disseminate information about the uprisings to the outside world (Bargas).

In an effort to suppress media houses from covering the social unrest in the Arab region, regimes abducted and assaulted journalists. Equipment and captured footage were also confiscated and destroyed by Arab regimes to prevent the spread of information. For example, on January 30, 2011, the Egyptian military detained six journalists from Al Jazeera English and confiscated their equipment. One such journalist, who was detained for more than nine hours, is Ayman Mohyeldin. Others were attacked by the regimes' supporters and were later detained. In Cairo, Al Jazeera's correspondents were also detained, and their cameras set on fire (Miles).

These attacks were more prevalent in Libya, Egypt, and Tunisia than in other regions in the Arab world. Journalists covering the Arab Spring also complained of abusive treatment and sexual assault when they were held in custody. Before the revolution in Egypt, journalists had to go through long, convoluted legal cases orchestrated by the regime. They were accused of defamation in an effort to silence them and prevent reporting about the social unrest, as well as intimidate other journalists. More politicized cases were reported in Egypt when journalists began to report about the mismanagement and corruption in the government.

In Tunisia, journalists had been subjected to politicized trials and imprisonment during Ben Ali's 23-year old rule; however, the situation got worse during the Arab Spring because they were identified as a significant threat to the regime. The new threats against journalists in the wake of the Arab Uprisings were unpredictable compared to the conventional ones, including legal action, censorship, and withdrawal of licenses and funds by governments. Journalist covering the Arab Spring had no control over the actions that made them targets of arbitrary detention, harassment, physical assault and, in some cases, murder (Dayem).

Several journalists died during the Arab uprising; therefore, the news channel was forced to look for unconventional ways to gather information about the protests. Journalist deaths were reported in several countries that were taking part in the protests, including Syria, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Tunisia and Bahrain. Some of the journalists were attached to specific media houses, while others were independent. The journalist deaths were a big blow to the news channel, even if some of them were independent and others worked for different media houses, as Al Jazeera had relied on them to verify the information that they received about the uprisings. For example, on March 13, 2011, Ali

Hassan al Jaber , a cameraman working for Al Jazeera Arabic, was ambushed with his crew by forces allied to Muammar Gaddafi in Libya. The camera operator was in the company of other crewmembers when they were ambushed while returning to Benghazi. They had gone to film an opposition protest in a nearby town when unknown people opened fire on them. Jaber was shot, and he died before reaching the hospital (Deans).

In Egypt, journalists from Al Jazeera English were detained and released. However, the Egyptian military confiscated their equipment; therefore, they were not able to send the material they had acquired. Threats to journalists were not just from the regime in Egypt — some of them were assaulted by government supporters. On February 4, 2011, Al Jazeera’s offices in Cairo were vandalized by Mubarak’s supporters. They set fire to the equipment, and the bureau chief and one of the channel’s correspondents were arrested at that period (Miles). These arrests are a strong indication that the supporters had been coordinated by the regime in their actions.

Considering all the threats that journalists were facing in the line of duty, the Arab uprising made it difficult for media houses, including Al Jazeera, to send out their employees to get information from the ground. Sending out journalists to cover stories was dangerous, limiting access to credible information. The threats to journalists during the Arab Spring forced news channels to use new forms of media to get information and keep their viewers informed. Al Jazeera journalists may have faced more challenges in the Arab countries participating in the uprisings, because, more than other media, they were considered to be supporting the activists (Baker). The challenges posed by this situation were met, in part, by the adoption of new media. This presented a different set of challenges, as discussed in the following subsection.

4.6. The Challenges of Embracing New Media

Censorship and bans in the countries involved in the uprisings forced Al Jazeera to look for new ways to gather the information its audience was looking for. Before the start of the Arab Spring, the news channel relied on its journalists who were located in various countries in the region for information about the emerging protest movements. Al Jazeera has faced bans and censorship before, but the Arab Spring offered an opportunity for the channel to broadcast some of the evils it had been highlighting in the past; therefore, it had to be innovative. The use of social media and mobile phones became the only way that the channel could obtain information. Despite the opportunity afforded by such sources, they posed a challenge because the journalists and editors had to determine which content was credible, often at very short notice in the case of breaking news. The only way to prove the credibility of a piece of information that was being sent was to compare it with related sources before broadcasting it to the audience (Boughelaf).

Al Jazeera was using Facebook and Twitter before the Arab Spring, but the social networks had never been the main source of its content. The social networks provided a way for the channel to subvert the security controls that were put in place by the Syrian, Tunisian, and Egyptian regimes to prevent journalists from getting close to the situation on the ground. Al Jazeera broadcast the information it obtained from social media to a far larger audience, including non-internet users, through its satellite channels. Internet blogs and YouTube made the protests visible to the channel, even if its journalists were barred from the countries. The news channel had to search for the most authoritative blogs and YouTube videos to include in their broadcasts. Grassroots reporting and mobile phones were the only way available for Al Jazeera to provide

unprecedented coverage when Syria's regime shut down its satellite connections in the country (Kirkpatrick and Worth).

Digital social media was feeding conventional media in an unprecedented way. Most of the people who were involved in the protests were young, and the news channel identified the crucial role that social media would play in gathering information. Al Jazeera embraced social media, because it is instantaneous and it is not subject to constraints like news editors and publication deadlines. The channel integrated social media output with its main news, and this helped it to capture the attention of a large number of new viewers (Burman).

Technology has changed the way news is shared, and it has now become easy for people to access information. The Tunisian regime shut down news outlets, arrested bloggers, and locked out foreign journalists; however, Al Jazeera was able to tell the story as it unfolded, despite having no official journalists in the country. The news channel broadcasted stories about the protests by showing footage captured on mobile phones. The pictures were streamed online, and the channel regularly updated its Facebook, Twitter, and various blog pages. At the time, this was a novel level of collaboration between new and old forms of media. Testimonies and images of the uprising were broadcast to millions of viewers across the world. The channel was breaking away from conventional reporting to use raw material that was obtained directly from the streets (Cano 30). The Tunisian uprising was fuelled by joblessness, censorship, corruption, and equality. This was catalyzed by the self-immolation of the street vendor, as discussed in previous sections. Strict web censorship regulations had been put in place by the government, but news about his protest spread rapidly through a variety of online means.

Young people make up a significant percentage of the population in the Middle East; as a result, the use of social media to initiate political change in the region is not surprising. The young people were aware of the kind of control that the regimes had on mainstream media; therefore, they had to find other ways to express themselves. Social media proved to be an accurate and reliable way for the young people to share information, because it was less likely to be filled with propaganda from the regimes compared to the mainstream news sources. In reality, it was difficult for media houses including Al Jazeera to be on the ground so social media provided an avenue through which individuals would come together to share complaints, frustrations, concerns and ideas. It also provided an opportunity for protestors to gather and strategize, because there are no social restrictions in open, online environments. Individuals who might never have had a chance to meet in person were able to connect through social media. In response to the restrictions that were put in place in most of the countries, Al Jazeera took advantage of these interactions to gather information.

Al Jazeera's newsrooms were changing as it had to rely on social media as a source. About 50% of journalists use Twitter, while a third use Facebook as news sources. Various risks are related to the use of social media as a news source. One of the main challenges of using social media as a source is that it is difficult to verify its authenticity, and it is easy to broadcast unverified information in a situation where social media is the only source. A piece of information can be repeated on social media even before it has been verified by its original source, and this may be too late (Fisher).

In this case, the Al Jazeera journalists were not simply setting the agenda in the Arab uprisings. They were an element of the conversation that was taking place in the social media. They did not have any control of the information that they were receiving;

therefore, they were forced to find unorthodox ways to maintain objectivity. However, it is difficult to maintain objectivity in an information world that has become opinionated (Cano 33). It was difficult for Al Jazeera to discern the truth from all the information that was included on social sites. The information that was included on the networks would have been used either to promote democratic change or to cause chaos. One of the biggest challenges for Al Jazeera was determining the repercussions of the information they had obtained from the social sites (Schillinger).

Recognizing the potent nature of social media during the uprising, the Syrian authorities tightened web censorships. The regime was, correctly, afraid that the media would be used to promote unrest in the country, and this made it even more difficult for Al Jazeera to get details about the uprising. The government blocked eBuddy and Nimbuzz, which people were using to communicate on their mobile phones. Some sites also made it impossible for online users to leave comments about the uprising. Explicit comments were also removed; therefore, the news channel was forced to look for various ways to verify the information it was receiving about the uprising. Bloggers were also arrested in both Tunisia and Egypt, which was a big blow for Al Jazeera, because blog sites provided vital information about the uprising. Facebook and Twitter were blocked in the countries, and people were forced to apply other means to access and share information (Reporters Without Borders 92).

In Egypt, the regime worked hard to ensure the media was kept in the dark and prevent anybody from taking pictures that could be broadcast to the outside world. Mobile phone networks in Cairo were disrupted to prevent demonstrators from communicating and sending images. Bambuser.com (a video streaming site), Facebook, and Twitter were also blocked. Online newspapers reported slow connections, and this

made it difficult for Al Jazeera to get information during a period when its journalists were not allowed in Egypt. The regime later blocked the online newspaper sites.

Demonstrators and bloggers became journalists and sent tweets and videos to cover the protests in Egypt. Subsequently, and as a direct result, internet access in the entire country was cut off by the government (Reporters Without Borders 62).

In Libya, Gadhafi shut down the entire communication network and the internet, and the country's communication infrastructure was under the regime's control to make sure only positive information was shared with the general public. Internal communication in Libya was under Gadhafi's control. It was difficult for Al Jazeera to cover rebel activities in Libya as a result of the lack of information; however, the rebels managed to establish an independent network with help from Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (Wall Street Journal).

The news industry had been controlling its distribution for several years, but the Arab Spring changed this. Portals like MSN and Yahoo were used to attract users over the years, but the media was forced to adjust to the rise in the people's role as information distributors. The shift has increased the media's role in processing, contextualizing and verifying information that is available on social media platforms. Copyright is one of the concerns that arise as the news industry continues to rely on social media for information. When individuals post images on social network sites, it is not clear on who can (legally) claim ownership (Cano).

Governments also started to participate actively in social networks like Facebook. In Bahrain, the government became skilled at engaging the public using social media. The Bahrain government had a significant presence on Facebook during the uprisings. The government set up various proxies to challenge journalists. Any posts

of social media that were considered to be anti-government were dealt with immediately to prevent them from spreading to the public and fueling the uprisings (Fisher).

The amount of information available through social media was a challenge for Al Jazeera in terms of verification. Capturing the data was a challenge in itself for the news channel; however, it was more involving for the journalists and editors to present the information collected from various social media networks in a meaningful manner. The news channel had to present the information in a form that would allow the audience to comprehend its function and influence in the revolution. Social media networks create a lot of information at a rapid pace and, in most cases, it is overlapping in nature. Al Jazeera was forced to come up with an advanced platform to analyze the information obtained (Schillinger).

Apart from the immense amount of information it gathered, Al Jazeera had to deal with its intricacies. Social networks allow individuals to include information in various forms and often addressing numerous and only loosely-related elements; as a result, the news channel had to determine the meaning behind the Facebook updates and Tweets and other people's responses before using it in their broadcasts. The kind of language that is used on social media networks is a mixture of alphabets, dialects, and idioms; thus, it can be difficult to interpret. Social network sites offer relative anonymity to users, allowing them to freely express their ideas, and this makes it difficult to verify authenticity. Al Jazeera understood the need to gather information in any way, because it was difficult for the journalists to report on the ground. Therefore, a lot of care was necessary when interpreting the messages, and the internet-based sources were an easy target for critics of the network to question the validity of the cover. This

is partially because individuals are not always held accountable for the views and opinions that they express on the internet (Schillinger).

4.7. Ethical Concerns

Citizen journalism provides an opportunity for everyone to contribute in gathering and reporting of news, and it provides an opportunity for individuals to fulfill their right of expression. The main advantage of using citizen journalism is the immediacy of getting information and reports, because the citizen journalists report events as they happen, making broad coverage available to the public in a timely manner. Citizen journalism continues to be a widely acceptable form of gaining information throughout the world because of technological advancement, easier access to the internet, and cheaper digital cameras as well as better quality cameras available in smartphones. However, even with all the advantages, citizen journalism also comes with a lot of responsibilities, as with the traditional forms of journalism (Kobre 2006). The greatest responsibility that citizen journalists have is the enforcement of ethical reporting; in many cases, these journalists are unaware of its existence and/or importance. Ethical issues involved in citizen journalism includes honesty, accuracy, transparency, digital modifications, and plagiarism, among others. These are ethical qualities that emphasizes on the need for professional journalism unlike that of much of the citizen journalist-generated content (Berry 42). -There is nothing new about the public tipping off newsrooms... The main ethical issues for broadcasting organizations are honesty and hoaxes (Boyd, Stewart, and Alexander 34).

Other important issues in citizen journalism are accuracy and verification of the source and authenticity of the information. Two distinct groups have emerged in

favor of and against citizen journalism. The first maintains that citizen journalists are much better reporters than traditional journalists, even though there is a far lesser warranty of accuracy (Korzi 69; Poosner 60). The second argues that, despite the benefit of immediacy, accuracy and credibility are lacking because the standards employed are unprofessional compared to those of trained journalists. Citizen journalism also leads to spreading misinformation because of internet hoaxes, especially where authenticity of the content was has not been verified (Pavlik Xi).

During the Arab revolutions, many citizen journalists were competing for the attention of mainstream media. Al Jazeera English had access to thousands of videos daily, leading to an overload of information. This user-generated content presented a lot of challenges for Al Jazeera: they had to verify all the information that was sent to them during the protests, especially when they did not have any journalists on the ground (Haschke).

The greatest challenge for Al Jazeera, in relying on citizen journalists, was the need to analyze, assess, and review each and every item received so as to discriminate the valid from invalid material. Although the work was demanding, it was also necessary, since it would have been unethical to present to their viewers with false or misleading information. The need for this was increased by some citizen journalists being more concerned with of the benefits of having contributed to the media rather than with the truth. For example, at one point, Al Jazeera was sent pictures by a citizen journalist claiming that they were taken during a protest in the suburbs of Cairo. However, the pictures were not aired because Al Jazeera quickly established that the photos were not authentic; they were pictures taken during a demonstration in 2005 in Iran. This daunting task required Al Jazeera to hire people to check for authenticity or to

send the information back to social media for corroboration (Fisher cited in Mair & Keeble 112). Nevertheless, despite the efforts at validating sources and information, it is likely that some misinformation made it through the net. For each source identified as false or misleading, many may have gone undetected. However, given the banning of conventional reporting in many areas, the network was faced with the choice of accepting such sources or leaving matters unreported.

4.8. Inadequate Training

Especially during the early months of the Arab Spring uprisings, journalists were not prepared to use social networks to gather news and share it with the rest of the world. The revolutions offered an opportunity for journalists to email, post, retweet, and recommend updates and news items. However, the journalists had to learn how to analyze each detail that was posted on social media sites to come up with news stories. They had to learn how to gather news, verify the information, and carry out detailed research from various sides. The main duty of the media is to inform the public; therefore, journalists need to be well trained to provide the most comprehensive and accurate news (Carter).

The Arab Spring presented a challenge that Al Jazeera journalists had not faced before: they were torn between reporting the situation on the ground as it is and acknowledging the fact that they have a mission to serve the public interest without any form of bias. The journalists were not trained for the consequences of reporting news items that identified the Arab regimes as dictators; thus, it was not possible for the journalists to predict the consequences of their actions with any degree of certainty. They were reporting about atrocities carried out by the regimes, and they were not

aware of the effect of the stories. The Arab Spring was a significant world event, but the journalists were not in any position to predict that it would take place. Partly as a result of this, after the revolutions began, they did not have the training required to properly process (and frame) the information they were receiving. Therefore, in most cases, the journalists were forced to reiterate claims that had already been made; as a result, their analysis of the events taking place was lacking in terms of expertise and depth (Khanfar).

Prior to the Arab Spring, the journalists did not consider the public as an important source of information. They were detached from the only reference point that was available after most Arab regimes banned journalists and censored mainstream media. They were not trained to use the public to gather information therefore it was impossible for them to predict the Arab Spring and its consequences. If the news channel had trained its reporters, they would have been in a better position to sense the dissatisfaction and distress of the public. The Arab public has often suffered humiliation and marginalization and as a result, it was difficult for the journalists to gather information from people they had shown little or no interest in before the Arab Spring (Khanfar).

During the Arab Spring, the media's power rested in the Arab population's hands. Any individual who had a Smartphone was able to post or tweet about the events taking place. One of the challenges that faced the journalists was determining whether the stories posted on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube were true. Citizen journalists had no training; therefore, they posted anything on social media, and Al Jazeera had a difficult time trying to figure out what to publish. Al Jazeera journalists were not trained to handle the large amount of information that was available on the social networks. The

information was updated frequently, and it was often difficult for them to identify which stories were accurate. Moreover, there was a risk that some of the citizen journalists were under the influence of certain regimes and organizations; thus, the journalists had to be careful about which information they broadcasted (Medley).

Due to the crackdown on journalists by some of the Arab regimes during the revolutions, Al Jazeera journalists were forced to find new ways to provide first hand accounts of the events on the ground. Most of the journalists had not received training to deal with such situations. In Syria, journalists were not allowed to have cameras, making it dangerous for them to be caught capturing the events on video. The journalists were forced to use their mobile phones to film the events secretly. It was also difficult for them to move around the country in the news channel's vehicles; as a result they had to improvise and travel using public transport. They were exposed to situations that they were not prepared for during the Arab Spring, and this sometimes affected their ability to report news ethically and accurately (Flegenheimer).

The journalists also lacked depth in their reporting, especially at the start of the Arab Spring, because they failed to focus on the masses as their main source of information at a time when the regimes were trying to censor information. Only when mainstream channels were censored and journalists were banned from entering Syria, Tunisia, and Egypt did the news channel realize the importance of using the public. Good journalism considers the masses to have a significant influence on the editorial policy. It should offer a platform and voice for them. The Al Jazeera journalists had to learn about the best approaches to apply in order to provide information to the public when they were not able to report from the ground. The journalists should have been better prepared to deal with the large amount of information, the dangerous situations,

and the reliance on new media to gather and provide news (Khanfar). However, the shift to citizen journalism was revolutionary in the world of journalism, and it seems unreasonable to expect that such a momentous transition could occur without problems.

News tends to thrive when there is a crisis, and the Arab Spring caught journalists by surprise. Most of the significant events that took place during the revolutions happened within a very short period of time, making it difficult for journalists to respond appropriately in a timely manner. They were not prepared for the speed at which some of the events took place; therefore it was difficult to cover everything comprehensively (Al Mashni).

4.9. Objectivity and Optimal Coverage with Limited Resources

The Arab Spring challenged various news channels to come up with objective stories about what was actually going on in the different countries. It was difficult for individual news organizations to gather accurate information because they had to cover several countries and analyze opinions from many sources. The large amount of data and geography that they had to cover made it almost impossible for the journalists to remain impartial when reporting the Arab Spring events. That is, their judgments concerning relevance of different sources would, perforce, be tainted by their subjective opinions.

Journalists did not have freedom of movement in some of the areas and were denied access, especially in locations that were considered to be sensitive, making it difficult for them to cover all sides of the situations. Limited access to locations resulted in unbalanced stories from the news channel. To deal with this challenge, Al Jazeera was forced to air selective footage that did not rely on witness accounts. There was no

way to authenticate the footage without analyzing corroborating accounts; however, with limited access, it was impossible to get divergent opinions to verify the information they had obtained (Al Mashni).

Various Arab news channels were reporting the Arab Spring events creating conflicting accounts of the revolutions, and this proved to be a challenge for Al Jazeera. Some of the information was sensationalized and, as a result, the news channel had to find ways to distinguish itself as an authoritative source of information. Maintaining objectivity was important during the revolutions, because any false reports would have resulted in chaos, especially if a situation was taken out of context. The news channel had to ensure it did not blow situations out of proportion. As a result of the multiplication of news channels, any single piece of information had the potential to be presented in a variety of ways.

Journalism ethics demand that news channels only air stories whose source has been authenticated. The news gathering process was not ideal during the Arab Spring because journalists were not able to get firsthand accounts of the stories on the ground therefore they had to find ways to verify the information obtained from social media which was not always possible due to the huge amount of data they had to go through (Al Mashni).

4.10. Interactive Approach and Accusations of Bias

Al Jazeera was accused of trying to influence public opinion by airing stories aimed at enhancing collective sentiments. The success of Al Jazeera was seen as an advantage to the Qatar government. Al Jazeera news channel was also seen to advocate for issues that were of concern to the Emir in order to elevate Qatar's capabilities

against neighboring nations. While other news channels were limited in their reporting, Al Jazeera focused on provocative news during the Arab Spring. The news channel's journalists were taking initiatives and engaging with the developments that were taking place. Al Jazeera had to set itself apart from other channels which were conservative in their reporting in order to influence opinion. By engaging in the events, Al Jazeera was accused of influencing the revolutions. It was a challenge for the news channel to distance itself from reflecting the country's foreign policy when covering news stories. Al Jazeera was torn between reporting events as they occurred and trying to shape them. Most of the state owned news channels in the Arab countries preferred to ignore some of the events (Hijjawi 68).

Before the start of the Arab revolts, journalism rules were very clear. The media was not allowed to engage in any form of campaigning but this seems to have changed during the Arab Spring. When the uprising began in Tunisia, AL Jazeera did not have access to the country after being banned for a few years. Citizen journalists were the only source of information for the news channel. The station considered Ben Ali's regime to be oppressive and as a result, while other channels aired features about life in the country, Al Jazeera decided to support the protestors. When Tunisian demonstrations intensified, the news channel stopped its regular programming to focus on the revolts. It broadcast the stories and images that were made available on social networks. The Tunisian population trusted Al Jazeera because the country lacked a trustworthy news channel. The news channel's broadcasts seemed to support the Tunisian protestors and the demands they were making to Ben Ali's regime. The Tunisian revolution was successful and some critics argue that Al Jazeera played a significant role in the outcomes. Unlike the other Arab channels, Al Jazeera preferred to

interact with the demonstrators and it used reporters from Tunisia to make it easy to obtain information (69).

4.11. Sacrificing Diversity

During the Arab Spring, the news channel cancelled its regular programming to focus on the protests. The Arab uprisings were the main topic in most news channels; however, Al Jazeera went further than the rest, compromising its normal programs in an effort to capture the attention of the world. The Tunisia revolution revealed the atrocities of the regime, and Al Jazeera was able to demonstrate that it was possible to bypass the security measures put in place to keep its population subdued. The news channel sent out reporters to any events that were taking place in the country. In situations where reporters were not allowed in the country, alternatives were sought to ensure access to information. Tunisia was a defining moment for Al Jazeera, because it was the first news channel to capture the protests and prove to the Arab population that it was possible to overthrow a regime through collective action (Worth and Kirkpatrick).

Al Jazeera was the first channel to show images of Mohamed Bouazizi setting himself on fire. The news channel was closely involved in fomenting the Tunisian revolution, and other Arab and international media houses had to try to catch up due to its relentless broadcasts of the protests. Al Jazeera journalists were banned from Tunisia, but this did not stop the 24-hour coverage of the protests in the country. The news channel relied on mobile footage for a significant percentage of its broadcasts. The constant broadcast of the revolts in Tunisia made it seem like the news channel was a participant rather than an observer; the fact that it had sacrificed the diversity of its

programming to achieve this focus seemed to underscore this possibility. Every event was documented by citizen journalists and undercover reporter in Tunisia. Al Jazeera understood the significance of the uprising, even though it was not possible to predict its consequences; therefore, the producers had to choose between sticking to its regular programming and covering the revolution as it progressed. There was a lack of diversity in the programming as Al Jazeera sought to provide its audience with minute by minute updates on the Tunisian uprising. The coverage was aggressive, and the news channel may have missed out on an opportunity to highlight other events that were taking place in the Arab region. Al Jazeera flooded its broadcasts with footage its journalists had obtained from the internet, and it regularly updated its blog, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube sites with a strong focus on the events in Tunisia (Reuters).

Al Jazeera has compromised its regular programming before, when covering the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Iraq war. The 24-hour coverage is new to the Arab region, where most media houses are run by the state and, as a result, find it difficult to air scenes of unrest. Its coverage of the Tunisian revolution demonstrates the news channel's commitment to exposing atrocities in the region. Most of the coverage that was obtained in Tunisia was raw, because it was obtained from cellphones and interviews with individuals on the ground. The dynamic coverage was blamed by Arab governments for causing unrest in the entire region. The focus on the revolution was a clear indication that the news channel intended to unravel and unmask Tunisia's autocratic and corrupt regime (Fleishman). This could be argued as legitimate grounds for it having sacrificed the diversity of its coverage to some degree.

4.12. Accusations of Inciting the Uprising(s)

Al Jazeera has been named as a uniting (and facilitating) factor during the Arab Spring because of its aggressive 24-hour coverage of the events that were taking place in different areas in the region. Given the reliance on citizen journalists (as discussed above), who were more often than not actual participants in the uprisings, Al Jazeera's challenge was to provide information without appearing to incite the protestors. The news channel was the first to report the uprisings in Tunisia even after its journalists were barred from the country; as a result, most of its coverage was provided by citizen journalists. The coverage seemed to support the protestors, because they were the source of the information and it was difficult to get the opinion of those who were not taking part in the revolts. Al Jazeera has been highlighting the suffering of the Arab population since it was founded, and the Arab Spring provided the perfect moment for the news channel to disseminate coverage of the atrocities in the region. Critics blame the news channel for creating the idea that the Arab world has a common struggle. Al Jazeera did not create the demonstrations that swept across the Arab region; however, in an effort to cover the events that were taking place, it seemed like the news channel was inciting the Arab population to revolt against their regimes (Worth and Kirkpatrick).

On the other hand, the news channel is blamed for inciting demonstrations in certain countries while it downplayed revolts in others as it was trying to promote the Qatar government's interests. The Tunisian revolution was covered significantly, while the Egyptian revolts were initially downplayed by the news channel. When the Egyptian protests started, Al Jazeera did not report them, which seemed strange considering its aggressive coverage of the Tunisian revolt. The Egyptian protestors were disappointed that they did not get adequate coverage and, after voicing their disappointment, the

news channel began its aggressive coverage in Egypt. However, a possible counter-argument to this is that Al Jazeera was reluctant to plunge into the Egyptian context as it was under fire for inciting that in Tunisia, and its eventual in-depth coverage in Egypt vindicated it, to some extent.

The extensive coverage of the Tunisian revolts was blamed on the fact that the regime was supported by the West. Critics claim that Al Jazeera was trying to incite revolutions in some countries because of its anti-Western agenda. The news channel faced a significant challenge, as it did not want to miss out on highlighting a significant event in history while trying to avoid acting as a catalyst as the revolts moved from one country to another (Worth and Kirkpatrick). The fact that the Qatar regime has significant control of the news channel add credence to the claims that the channel was acting to incite the uprisings, given its focus on specific countries (Hashem).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The Arab Spring has exposed the weakness of the regimes and their superficial approach when dealing with the power of social media. By imposing censorship, governments showed that they are aware of the potent nature of SM.

A simple # Bouazizi had the power to drive people to act and to topple a dictator .The power of hashtags has changed the rules of journalism practice and exposed the weakness of certain political regimes.

Meanwhile, one could not expect citizens to respect and obey governments who waste their time deleting simple comments of tweet followers and go as far as banning facebook pages.

Parallel to this, by integrating social media output in its coverage, Al Jazeera has been able to secure the attention of millions of young viewers. The network made full use of social media networking sites and accepted footage from the individual protesters who covered the events using their mobile phones. Its capture of live iconic scenes, as well as the broadcast of videos shot by citizens demonstrated the power of its new strategies in acquiring coverage.

One can't ignore the role of Al Jazeera as a key catalyst in unifying opposition movements and exposing regimes brutal action against its citizens protesters: to Al Jazeera was not only setting the news agenda but also deciding on the implications of every selected news.

Finally, it is clear that Al Jazeera faced a broad range of challenges in providing coverage in dangerous zones and in maintaining and promoting its reputation as an

unbiased news source in the face of criticism of being biased against some of the regimes (driven by the influence of the Qatari government).

Finally, citizens should not be considered journalists, because journalism requires training and ethical standards to be followed; Also it can't take over traditional news, but should be taken as a supplement (Kolodzy 220).

I totally agreed with Aref Hijjawi who wrote that -Al Jazeera was torn between reporting events as they occurred and trying to shape them.¶

To report or not to report what social media covers will always remain the pop up question. What's should be crystal clear is that any reporting style should not ignore media ethics but another clear conflict is that sudden transition to citizen journalism couldn't have happened without problems.

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