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# **Social Media in a Changing Media Environment**

## **Lessons from the Arab world**



Coordination  
**Dr. Moez Ben Messaoud**

**Tunis 2015**

Acts of international conference  
October 16-18, 2014 - Tunis

**Social Media**  
**in a Changing Media Environment**  
**Lessons from the Arab world**



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Moez Ben Messaoud

Tunis - 2015

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# Introduction

**Dr. Moez Ben Messaoud**

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The beginning of 2011 was marked by the considerable contribution of the new social media in mobilizing and rallying Arab streets, and in inducing changes in the political, social, educational, media and other sectors. While conventional media have long been mirrors reflecting the marginal role played by recipient audiences as consumers not participants or active players, new media are able to enforce new debating, exchange and participation opportunities by offering people broader windows to look for information and the right to contribute to communication operations, and by making the virtual space an alternative to the conventional public space.

The need-driven interaction between technology and the public enabled new media to recognize that democratisation of communication requires participation of unexceptionally all individuals. Social networks, blogs, video-sharing websites and satellite channels that have chosen to stream on the Internet, have enforced another type of social freedom and the right of individuals and groups to free communication. In particular in the Arab world, social media have played a tremendous role in the political awakening marked by the Arab Spring.

However, social media do raise a number of issues of heated debates and controversies; issues that are multidimensional and relate to epistemological, technical, cultural and historical factors reflecting two major trends. The first is skeptical due to the technology's ability to muddle social life with no consideration to technical contexts, the importance of social innovations and the communicative and cultural usages of these technologies. The second trend is optimistic considering that new media have induced positive change in culture, economy, science, politics, etc... This view considers the virtual world to be an extension to real social life, and that identity can be constructed both socially and virtually.

From a political perspective, technology offers new tools for political life although it does not constitute the only factor inducing political change.

Arab media discourse is still disturbed and anxious in dealing with the impact of the new media on culture and innovation. On the one hand, this discourse looks

at Arab users as being active and engaged in “alternative media” reflecting a new culture based on freedom, diversity, and creativity. On the other hand, it considers them victims of new powers dominating the online space.

What is then the guarantee to ensure safe usage of new media? How can we prevent against risks raised by the new media in the Arab World now witnessing a number of political, social, cultural and information transformations?

This conference will try to understand various approaches dealing with the new media and to identify the role of online stakeholders in dismantling the sets of values and developing them again. It thrives to comprehend transformations induced by the use of new media in the political, social, cultural, and economic spheres. It will also tackle the changes affecting the work of media and communication professionals, and also their influence on professional ethics and the need to respect individual privacy

Presentations dealing with the issues mentioned above will be welcomed and should be integrated into one of the following panels :

Topic 1 : Social Media in the Arab World: Theoretical and Historical Approaches

Topic 2 : Social Media, Democratic Change and Political Participation

Topic 3 : Social transformations in the Arab World and the role of the elite:  
disaggregating and emerging elites

Topic 4 : New media and communication practices: Violations against ethics and  
privacy of individuals

# **Social media and social change in the Arab World: critical appraisal**

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Indeed, social media diffusion came as a transitional stage in the wake of the increasing impact of global media. Communication scholars discussed extensively all these kinds of media phenomena related to global media. However, social media's repercussions in the global society are still widely handled in the scholarly literature of communication research. The possible peculiar aspect of media studies, nowadays, resides in examining the consequences of social media use which are various and diversified.

The Middle East and specifically the Arab countries were dramatically affected by the expansion of social media. Needless to say that the notion of the "Arab Spring" was coined as a result of the causal relationship between the impact of social media and the political transformation that swept many of the Middle Eastern countries. Theorists and social scientists tackled this notion from quasi dimensions. In light of many paradoxical points of views, one can figure out different changes that substantially changed the Arab society of today in general and the media systems in the region in particular.

The aim of the current study is to investigate the causality between social change and social media. In effect, one needs to highlight the different types of imperatives that govern both the social fabric and the social media use in the Arab countries. Critically, some issues may appear substantial to be mentioned; however, there are many limitations to this study. Remarkably, surveying the topic may not bring up solid data and results that can be generalized over the whole population of the Arab countries. On the contrary, a qualitative analysis may reveal the key characteristics of change that took place in the Arab society and the indigenous media systems. Furthermore, one needs to consider the role of private satellite channels that pushed forward the pace of development in social media applications in the region. For example, most of the Arab satellite channels have their own social media platforms

whether on “Facebook, YouTube, Twitter...etc.” Finally, social media played a major role in restructuring business models in the Arab media industry.

## **Literature Review**

John Downing (2007) called for the systematic attempt to analyze media across the globe. He also added that there is a need for a new theory that explains the globalization of the media. One of the reasons that led him to ask for the analysis is the diffusion of global media models. However, this diffusion reflects some discrepancies in terms of utilization, production, and distribution.

Based on Downing’s argument, the case of many Arab countries in the Middle East reflects both hopes and challenges in terms of reaping the benefits of global media models and formats.

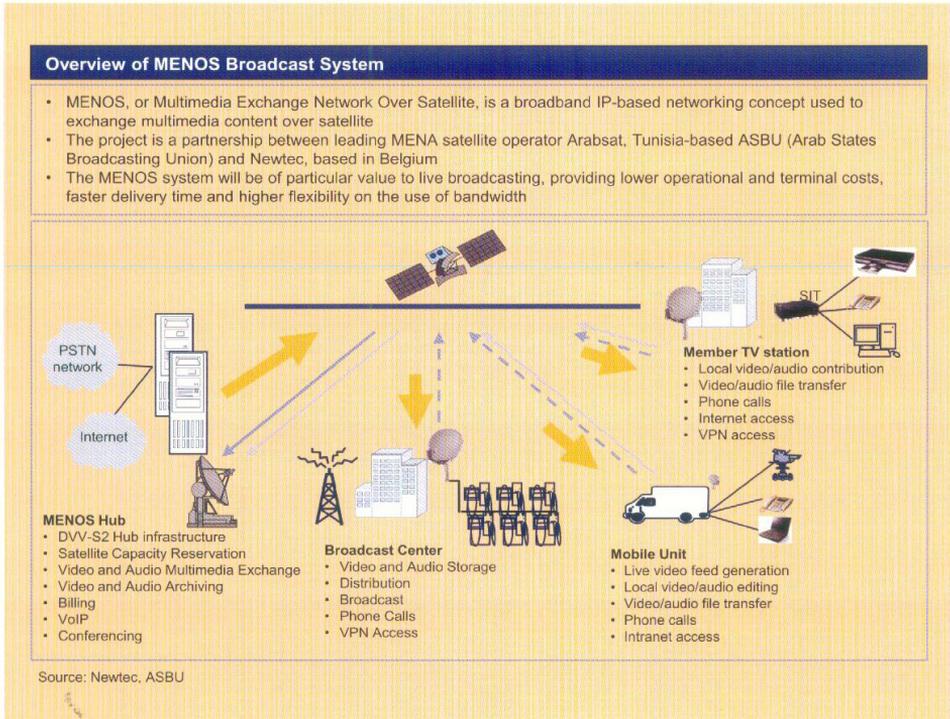
To start with, there are challenges facing the Arab media systems such as: the low advertising revenues, the low penetration of pay-TV, the fragmentation of audience, and the media monopoly by a few major broadcasting groups (Arab Media Outlook, 2010: 13). Critically, the said challenges represent some of the common global communication models and formats.

However, certain prospects have been indicated. First, some key opportunities for media growth have been noticed in the region. Second, the print industry in the Middle East witnessed structural changes. Third, circulation figures continued to grow. Fourth, the Internet became a viable medium for news consumption. Fifth, there is increasing penetration of the digital terrestrial TV (DTT) in North Africa and the Internet Protocol TV (IPTV) in some of the Gulf countries.

Critically, there are some core variables that may determine the relationship between the challenges and prospects of media models and formats in the Arab countries. Basically, the economic variable is a determining one that affects the media industry in the region. Indeed, the Middle Eastern countries follow national developments plans. However, they don’t follow the same development model. Therefore, one can’t identify a definite similar policy between two countries due to the variance in terms of economic indicators, liberal legislations, and the deregulation policies. Even though the Arab states’ figures and indicators vary, they managed to incorporate new models and formats of global communication. For example, the following chart represents one of the new projects adopted by the Arab States Broadcast Union (ASBU).

Chart (1) (extracted from the Arab Media Outlook, 2010)

Exhibit 42: MENOS broadcast system



The second possible variable is the existence of business models to be incorporated in the national media system. Chan-Olmsted (2004) said that the Internet brought some values and changes to the conventional marketplace. That is why communication scholars study the business models. Media organizations adopted effective business models to outperform their competitors, encourage the vivid interaction between producers and consumers, and to access global markets.

The third variable is the core strategy of the country itself to utilize the most effective format or model of communication in its media system. Critically, not all the Arab countries have the same socio-economic, political, cultural, and demographic profiles. Based on this, one can figure out that the national media strategy differs according to the said items.

The following chart shows cases of some innovative media projects in some of the Middle Eastern countries. The projects reflect the national strategy of each country in adopting the definite project.

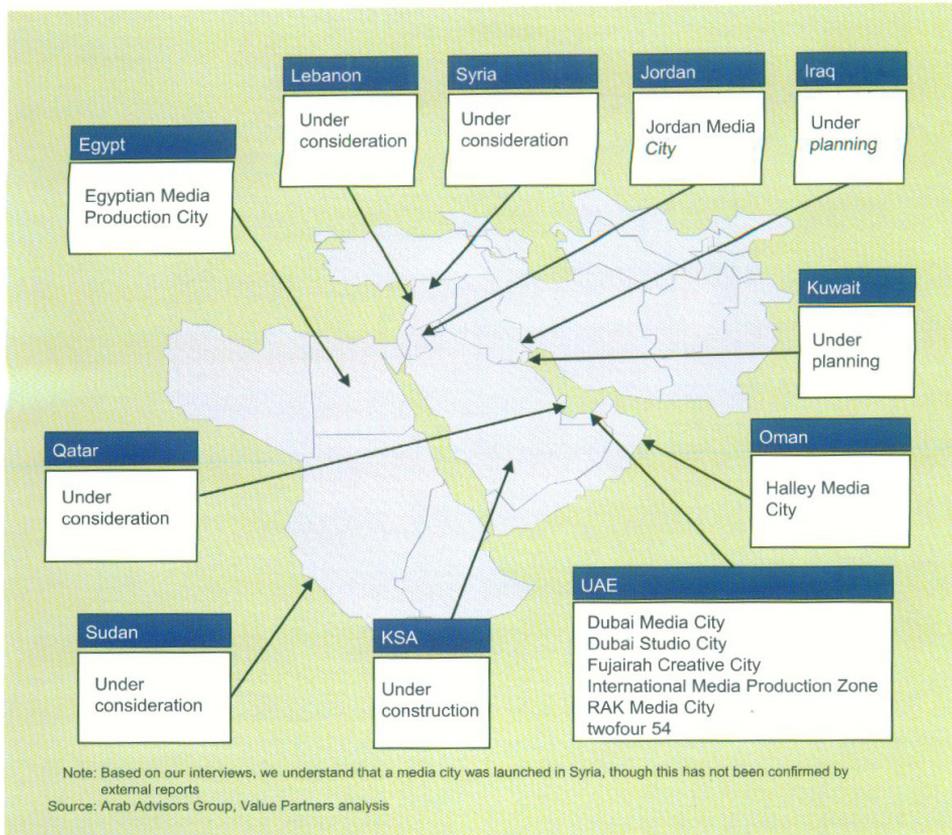
**Chart (2)**

No.	Global Model and Format	Cases
1	Business models for online news	UAE: Zawaya.com
2	Online news videos	Gulf News TV (gntv)
3	Consolidation of the media industry	Rotana, LBC, Al-Jazeera
4	Pay TV market in the Arab World	ORBIT Network: 75 Pay Channels ART Network: 39 Pay TV Channels.
5	DTT: digital terrestrial TV	Morocco
6	IPTV: Internet Protocol TV	UAE: Etisalat
7	Social Media	FacebookArabic & Twitter
8	Web Drama	Lebanon
9	Online Video On Demand (VOD)	Lebanon: LBC Online
10	Mobile TV	UAE
11	Mobile News applications	Qatar- Al Jazeera
12	Social networking in the Arab world	Blogs
13	Local versions of international formats	BBC Arabic/ CNBC Arabia/ Deutsche Welle Arabic/ CCTV Arabic/ MTV Arabia/ TRT 6/ National Geographic.

Krzysiek (2009) found through the empirical evidence that some of the Arab states' media systems are capable of adjusting to the globalization trends. He maintains that free media zones in Amman of Jordan, Cairo of Egypt, and Dubai of the UAE managed to change the legal sphere of Arab media. However, some governmental rules still control these free zones by means of indirect censorship, structure of ownership, and the business connections between the state and the private media organizations. The following chart shows the existence and expansive spread of free media zones in the Arab states.

### Chart (3) Media Cities

Exhibit 119: Media zones in the Arab Region



It can be said that the seemingly wide diffusion and incorporation of global media formats may result in fostering new structure of the Arab media system. For example, Seib (2007) found that many formats like news organizations, broadcasting stations, blogs, websites, and email networks exist now in the Middle East. He added that Al Jazeera news channel has proven that Arab media are substantive to be independent from Western news organizations. It has become the source of information in the Middle East.

Many communication scholars tackled the diffusion of global media with different approaches. Ekecrantz (2007) conceived of the diffusion of the global media as indicating a recalculation in the paradigm of media and development.

Furthermore, the author maintained that the old media and social change theory needs to be critically examined. Likewise Downing, Ekecrantz insisted on creating new theories that explain and interpret the doings of global media. A timeline of theories has been chronologically arranged that reflects the development of global media studies. It starts with the: four theories of the press, media and development, cultural imperialism, new world information and communication order (NWICO), media globalization, modernity theory, the network society, and lately the new social movements group and the media.

## **Theory**

The researcher wants to address the impact of the global media on the public sphere with special focus on the media reform that is supposedly taking place in Egypt. Notably, global media already affected indigenous media systems all over the globe in many facets. For example, electronic news gathering utilized the digital technology. Media convergence was diffused on a large scale to the extent that media scholars reconsidered what is called "the end of print journalism". Lately, social media represented in the emergence of new media platforms like facebook reshaped communication patterns of the audience that turned to be users. "The idea of the public sphere" was conceptualized by Jurgen Habermas. The research, here, tries to map the ideas of Habermas with the global media effect. Critically, the displacement effect is evident in the global society due to the powerful impact of new media. The core point of discussion is to examine the impact of global media represented in the diffusion of social media on the base of the public sphere. The idea of public sphere is applied to the Egyptian media system in this context. Simply, there is a need to examine these items:

- Media democratization
- Media freedom and pluralism
- Media synergism
- Media governance

## **Research Questions**

How far is the public sphere affected by global media?

What is the role of social media in creating media governance?

Which is the most reliable source of getting information?

## **Results**

The Middle East witnessed a transformational change since January 2011. One can argue that the diffusion of new media represented in diverse platforms like Facebook and Twitter had a great impact on inducing this kind of change. Although,

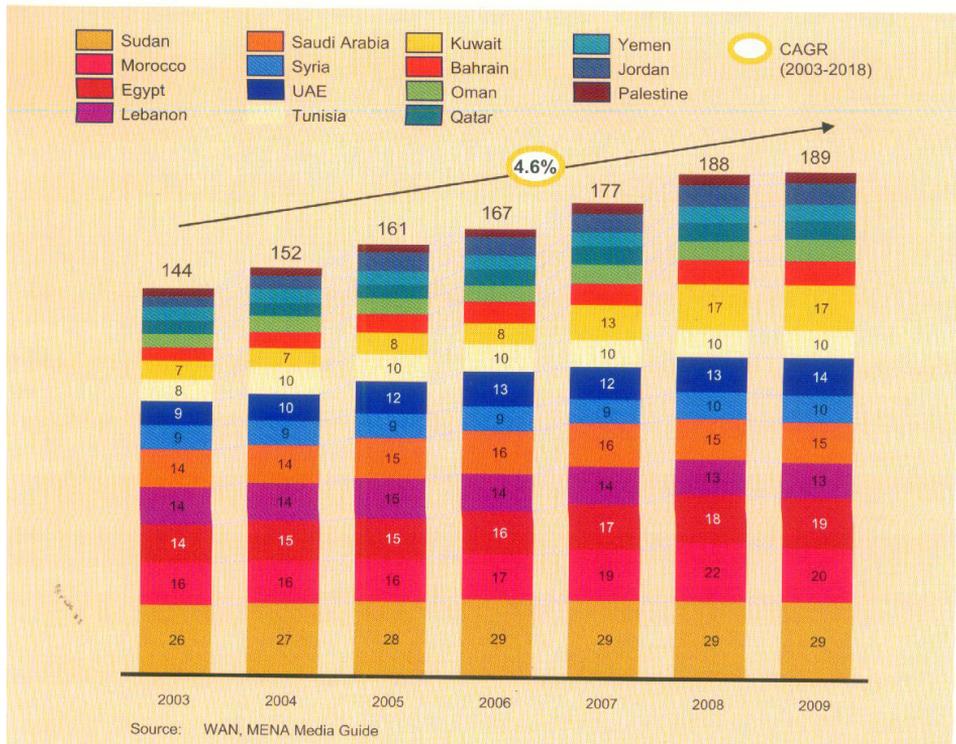
the effect of the global media on the creation of public sphere seems an old topic, it came to be a substantial issue after the toppling of the Egyptian regime in the wake of the 25<sup>th</sup> of January uprising.

There is an increasing demand to tackle the following issues in the Arab media environment:

- Legal frameworks of the media
- Establishing and sustaining public service media
- Transformation of state-owned media into democratic media
- Telecommunications, Internet services and citizen empowerment
- Social, economic and cultural needs for democratic media

### The Press System Development in the Arab World.

Exhibit 13: Number of newspaper titles in the Arab Region, 2003-2009



Source: Media Outlook Report 2009-2013

Communication studies in the new century witnessed an epoch of change on the levels of content and approach. Scholars reacted actively to tackle new topics but the dilemma resides in the pace of developing both the method and theory. Stobber (2004) discussed in his article the competitive media history of press, telegraphy, film, radio, television and multimedia. He provided a survey of the emergence of new media with respect to social, political, cultural, economic and technical debates. He mentioned that a process of 'social institutionalizing' changed the invented media fundamentally.

The last point of view coincides with the powerful impact of the media on the public sphere. The author alluded to the social institutionalization of the media on society. So, one can presume that there is a reciprocal relationship between media systems and their effects on the one hand and the wide audience and society at large on the other hand. In other words, it can be argued that media govern and practice a sort of autonomy on the public sphere.

In light of that, Puppis (2010) maintained that Media governance has been attracting growing interest among communication scholars. He defined media governance as "the entirety of rules that aim to organize media systems". He added that media governance is characterized as a new concept suited for the analysis of media policy and regulation. The article shows the merits of connecting media governance to new sociological institutionalism and concludes by emphasizing the potential of a theoretically grounded concept of media governance.

## **Discussion**

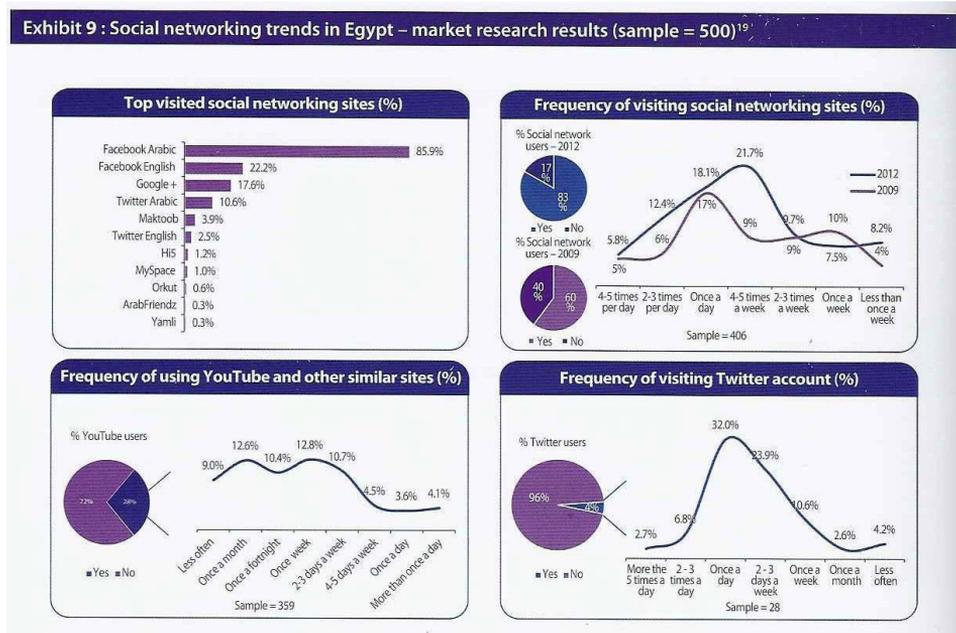
Critically, the development of media studies led communication scholars to figure out new concepts like media governance, new media, media morphosis...etc. Likewise, Lievrouw (2004) contended that the diffusion of new media technologies intensified economic and cultural globalization. The point is that media affect not only the habits and behaviors of the audience but also other systems and subsystems like: culture, economy, norms, traditions, and institutions. There is a need to trace back the tasks and duties of the early media systems in Egypt. The reason for this is to show how media development- since the era of the 1952 Egyptian revolution- governed the public sphere. Furthermore, the diffusion of the social media played a major role in inducing political change in the Egyptian society culminated in the 25th January uprising.

It was stated in the republican decision no. 310 of the year 1986 that the Egyptian Ministry of Information should work within the political frame of the country. In addition, the ministry should cope with the official political line of the state of Egypt. Besides, there should be goals to be maintained inside and outside Egypt that serve the society, development and democracy. Critically, the Egyptian electronic media

were responsible for feeding the Egyptian public with the required information to face the challenges. Equally, the media system was supposedly utilizing a sort of counter propaganda to refute any misconceptions or misguided ideas about Egypt (www.moinfo.gov.eg).

Basically, the issue of building new media institutions in the Middle East region is a stressing one since the eruption of the Arab Spring revolution that started in Tunisia then Egypt. As for the Egyptian case, around two years already passed and nothing has changed in the media landscape. Communication scholars conceive of media reform as tackling: policies, business models, new legislations and civil participation of the larger audience. These dimensions posed critical questions to those who want to induce and incorporate media reform in Egypt.

Social media Fig (7).



Source: Arab Media Outlook 2011-2015

Denis McQuail (1994) believes that a substantive dimension of online media is convergence that means the combination of print, broadcast and telecommunication-based media to lead for a public regulation (P:240). This aspect needs to be considered in the Egyptian case due to the impact of social media platforms like: youtube, facebook and twitter. They affect the daily life of the audience even though there is no critical mass point of users that makes any communication scholar in Egypt regards these platforms are commonly diffused.

Indeed, the global effect of media has surpassed the critical point. The concept of mediamorphosis is a common term in scholarly literature in media studies. Tomasello et. Al. (2010) figured out the major characteristics of media genre since the mid 1990s. They referred to Fidler's principles of mediamorphosis and Rogers's diffusion of innovations.

Notably, the diffusion of converging media led to the diversity of media outlets. To this effect, one can assume that media pluralism and media synergy are two characteristics of the global media. Traditional media are transformed and developed towards the incorporation of social media in the regular practice of the global audience. Twitter and facebook are real media platforms even though the users are not reaching a critical mass point in the Egyptian society.

## **Conclusion**

The idea of change in the media landscape in the Middle East is at the core of communication scholars' attention. Things changed dramatically in the wake of the eruption of the "Arab Spring." This affected the way media functions in the Arab society. It posed many issues and dilemmas. Socio-political parameters appeared as governing variables that control the media performance. Many of the wide scale Arab audience have come to realize the failure of the notion of the Arab Spring. However, this affected both media systems in the region and media personnel. It was found in this study that development of media systems in the Arab World is still bagging behind. However, the technological development requires a drastic change on the level of: freedom, multiplicity, synergism and regulations. Arab scholars are advised to develop and deregulate national media systems in a way that puts them on edge among top-notch media corporations.

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- Source: Arab Media Outlook 2011-2015, Dubai: Dubai Press Club.



# Can Social media Induce Political Participation and Democracy in Arab Spring Countries ?

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From virtual reality to the information highway, the new media technology environment is so diverse as it is fast developing and changing. The new media landscape is changing constantly, rapidly and diversely. The new technologies are having huge social, economic and political impacts on the life of nations as well as citizens. They are also influencing individuals in terms of how they communicate, with whom, and for what purposes. The rapid pace of technological change has affected tremendously how media professionals do their work, how the media product is packaged, how news media are structured, organized and managed and finally how the audience is dealing and interacting with the media product. With the media and technological convergence of the computer, television, telephone, digital pictures, internet and a new digital environment totally different from the one people used to have a quarter century ago, the major players in the communication industry came from all walks of life. The new communication environment freed the people and society from the domination and the monopoly of the word, image and public opinion by the central government and its machinery of monopoly and control. A new free market of ideas and opinions emerged.

This paper addresses the issue of new media impact on Arab public sphere, as well as the role of social networks in both the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. Furthermore, it looks at the limits of the new media in implementing democracy and socioeconomic and political change. However, one has to be careful about the concept of public sphere in the Arab World due to the fact that public sphere requires democracy, an effective and active civil society and a dynamic cultural and political life. On the other hand, will the emergence of new media lead to a public sphere in the Arab world ? What are the uses and gratifications of the new media in the Arab World ? What implications will new media have on economic political and social life of individuals ?

Daniel Lerner and Wilbur Schramm, argued, back in the late fifties and sixties, through what was called later the old paradigm, that the media lead to urbanization

and to development and economic emancipation. To the big deception of many, development plans failed in the majority of developing countries and urbanization produced poverty, shanty towns, and ghettos. The proliferation of mass media in the developing nations and the Arab world has not brought about development. Many speculate today that new media, as compared with old media, is not going to do any better today nor in the future, as development, democracy, political participation and sustainable development require more than internet, blogs and Facebook.

## **The Problematic**

New media have created a new communication environment for the public sphere to form, emerge and develop. Many opportunities have developed as the ICTs, new media and social networks have been flourishing and expanding in a very fast pace. Citizens got a wide range of means to communicate, share their views, criticize, make suggestions, and most importantly make their voices heard. Pavlik argues that new communication technology brings about faster flow of information, and that new information technologies give rise to new activities, processes, and products, and lastly social and political change proceeds at an ever more rapid pace, as real time multimedia communications on a global scale become ever more common. (Pavlik,1996 :306).

It is true that the new media have contributed to a large extent to the creation of electronic public sphere, many –to– many communication, and the democratisation of the sharing and dissemination of information. The underground voices, complaints and criticism are read and heard through the new media. The marginalized, the poor and the damned of the earth have their own channels through the new media. Internet penetration is just growing on a daily basis in the Middle East, and North Africa, and elsewhere in the world. However ; the central question here : Is this enough to activate a public sphere that hasn't existed in real life for years, or that has been dormant for decades ? On the other hand, it is argued that globalization of media and cultural products through satellite-delivered television and online communications present a homogenized single global culture, thus endangering local public sphere and national identity.

Does democratic transition and change whether social, political or economic require more than social networks and new public sphere ? How are things after the collapse of dictators and tyrants in a score of Arab countries ? Are they getting any better or things are worse than before, or should we wait to make an assessment ?

## **Research Questions**

**RQ1 :** Who was behind the “Arab Spring” ICT and social media or social, economic and political problems ?

**RQ2 :** Can the ICT, new media and social networks induce social and political change in the Arab world ?

**RQ3 :** What are the chances of the emergence of a virtual public sphere in the Arab world that may bring change, democracy and sustainable development ?

## **Methodology**

The research used the case study approach– the Tunisian revolution and the use of new media and social networks and its impact on the collapse of the Ben Ali regime. The revolution in Egypt is used as well to assess the role of ICTs and social networks in forcing Mubarak to step down from power, and to make some important changes in the socio political and economic life of Egyptians.

## **New Media**

New media encompass the emergence of digital, computerized, or networked information and communication technologies in late part twentieth century. Information technologies that are called “new media” are digital, networkable, compressible, dense and impartial. New media are the new generation of media technologies such as Internet, satellite delivered television, among others that have transformed the channels and uses of communication starting from the last quarter of the twentieth century. If we take Internet as an example, we notice three modes of usage : individual-collective use (blogs, news groups, electronic mail, chatting, and websites), organizational and institutional use (Business organizations and companies’ websites, associations, societies’ websites and government departments and entities websites) and finally the media use (news media websites, electronic media).

The new media provides a range of opportunities to individuals, business, welfare, educational, sports, religious, cultural, political entities, news media ...etc, to exchange information, interact, and get in direct contact with the other almost free of cost and in seconds. Newman comments on the potential functions and roles of the new media :

- Will alter the meaning of geographic distance.
- Allow for huge increase in the volume of communication.
- Provide the possibility of increasing the speed of communication.
- Provide opportunities for interactive communication.
- Allow forms of communication that were previously separate to overlap and interconnect.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/new\\_media](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/new_media))

New media have brought about a universal interconnected network of audio, video, and electronic text communications that will end the distinction between interpersonal and mass communication and between public and private communication. On the other hand, Douglas Kellner and James Bohman contend that new media, and mainly Internet, provide the potential for a democratic postmodern public sphere, in which citizens can interact, argue and thus participate in a rich debate accessible to everybody. However, some scholars argue that the media technology has both positive and negative impacts on society. One of the consequences of new media is globalization which shortens the distance between people all over the world by the electronic communication and breaks the relation between physical place and social place, making physical location much less significant for social relationships.

New media are providing an atmosphere of global opportunities worldwide for a globalized public sphere. We are witnessing nowadays “virtual communities” established online, transcending geographical boundaries and getting rid of social restrictions. The dilemma is, where does the developing world stand and fit in such globalization and globalized public sphere? Academics argue that new media are manifesting the postindustrial or globalized society where the majority of developing countries, among them Arab societies are still in the second wave as stated by Alvin Toffler. What about the digital divide and the 80 millions of illiterate in the Arab World? Does globalization provide equal opportunities for all? Is everybody able to construct his own custom lifestyle and select his ideology from a large number of choices?

### **Social networks and the mobilization of the masses : A theoretical framework**

Mobilization of the masses depends on the new media to motivate social movements where people organize themselves to work as an active participant in social change. New information technologies help people to search, find, and acquaint themselves with others. Social movements, today depend on the ability of people to create relations, look for, and give advices, and take recommendations. (Bimber 2003). Lievrouw (2011) asserts that the modern social environment is characterized by an overwhelming amount of information, and new technologies of information and communication, and new media which altogether made up “the fourth information revolution” which has very important implications on politics.

Mobilization in new social movements is achieved through the cultivation of common identities, common values, and the spirit of belonging to decentralized social webs. New media have the potentialities to lead and form public perceptions, opinions and senses. New media and ICTs form the means, and the resources

used to express the concerns and demands of the activists, as well as, the values and symbolic representation of the issues, and to change the public discourse and seek the causes, the background and the perspectives of the movement. (Lievrouw, 2011 :156). Concerning the relationship between communication networks and social change Castells writes :

*Communication networks form the public sphere in the networks society ... Politics is the political news media...Based on this, the process of social change requires the rescheduling of communication networks concerning its cultural codes and concerning political and social values and the implicit interests it provides. (Castells, 2009 :300)*

The concept of mobilization represents a terminology that gives to the movement its true meaning. The movement without mobilization does not mean anything. Mobilization is the process through which the public transforms group and collective concerns into collective actions to achieve change. In order to translate a particular concern into a collective political action, people of collective interests should find each other and discover that they share the same concerns and interests, then they must form, or reform a collective well structured, organized and with an identity. Mobilization motivates, in fact, people to rally in the streets with big enthusiasm, dedication and will to participate in making change happen. Through mobilization, movements get the means and the resources which they didn't have before. Melluci states :

*The present sociological concept for the process from which the movement originates and start working, is "mobilization"... it is the process that ensures social unity in a relative speed, the control of resources that were not controlled before...the process through which a social actor gathers and organizes its resources to follow up the achievement of a common goal...mobilization is always a process of transferring already existing resources to achieve a new goal. (Melluci, 1996 :289,292).*

With the advent of ICTs and the diffusion of Internet and social networks, the mobilization of masses entered the virtual era or the "mediated mobilization". New media have become the central and pivotal player in mass, and popular movements. Social media attract groups from different backgrounds and with different causes and problems, and put them in a homogenous and harmonious framework to exert pressure on the state and the decision maker to fulfill their demands and aspirations, and to get large publicity and media presence to influence local and international public opinion. Media activism, and digital networking have become the main tools of popular movements, protests and manifestations. ICTs, new media and social networks have introduced a new type of politics that differs in its nature,

focus, its complex networking, and its openness on diverse political identities. This new politics enjoys a high level of sacrificing political integration for the sake of pragmatic political gains and achievements. Lievrouw argues that the new politics which was a product of the new media and social networks is characterized by its big potentialities and abilities of renewing itself constantly and continually around rapid changing and developing issues, as well as events of protests, manifestations and political dissidents and adversaries. (Lievrouw,2011 :163).

Internet helped create a basis and an axis for a world movement never seen before against war and for peace and social justice movement in a period of terrorism, war and harsh political conflict. Between the years 1998 and 2009 the world witnessed global protests against events, summits, and international conferences through the extensive use of the virtual sphere and the new media. Among the most important events that were fiercely and strongly opposed by protesters and demonstrators who used new media : The G8 summit in Cologne, Germany in June 1999, Davos World Economic Forum in Switzerland, EU summits, World Bank meetings, G7 meetings, World Trade Organization summits, G20 summit in 2006 and 2007, World Bank and International Monetary Fund meetings in 2007 and 2009, and the list goes on. Networked communication technologies helped movements to shift from institutional centralized hierarchy to decentralization that gathers different kinds of groups, political players, activists and interests without imposing a single agenda or a program of action. This means that the new media contributed highly to the democratization of political action, and the containment and integration of cultural diversity and different messages which have never been experienced by any public sphere throughout history.

### **Arab Public Sphere :**

Public sphere is that area in social life where people of common interests get together and discuss, identify and suggest solutions to their problems. Their aim is to influence the political decision maker. Public sphere refers to the political participation of the masses in an organized way to shape public opinion and to participate in political life. Public sphere culminates into participatory democracy and the shaping of public opinion to become political action. Democratic governance rests on the ability of governments to listen to the public sphere, and to the ability of citizens to organize themselves, and engage in a constructive debate over their concerns, problems and demands.

Public sphere has been associated with German philosopher Jurgen Habermas who was inspired by the European enlightenment history of the 17th and 18th century characterized by the proliferation of public salons, cafes, cultural clubs and newspapers. Public issues and public affairs discussions shifted from a family level

to public levels generating substantive inputs and an active public opinion for the sake of democratic governance. The public discourse was at that time very rich, diverse, critical and constructive. However ; Habermas argues that with the advent of commercialism in the media industry in the twentieth century, public sphere shifted from serious, critical and constructive discussions to political and ideological manipulation of ideas, and public opinion for the benefit and the sake of political, ideological and financial powers.

With the advent of globalization, public sphere has witnessed major changes, argues Ayish :

*In the age of globalization, the public sphere has experienced major transformations in scope, players, discourse, and form. With the gradual obliteration of political, geographical, and cultural boundaries characterizing modern national political communications, the notion of the public sphere has acquired new global and trans-national dimensions. New communications technologies, exemplified by satellite television and the World Wide Web, are allowing for global discussions of issues and problems confronting societies in the post-Cold War era. In its structural development, the public sphere has therefore turned increasingly transnational, embracing multinational players, addressing global issues ; drawing on diverse channels of communication ; and targeting worldwide audiences. (Ayish, 2007 :33-34).*

The first question to be addressed here is : Is there a public sphere in the Arab World ? The second question is : To what extent, new media can contribute to the emergence of a public sphere in the Arab World ? To answer the first question we have to find out if the presuppositions of a public sphere do exist in the Arab World. That is to say, is there a strong media system ? Is there an effective civil society ? Is there a high level of social responsibility and social engagement on the part of citizens, as well as institutions and organizations ? The public sphere presupposes freedom of speech and assembly, a free press, and the right to participate freely and without constraints in political debate and in the decision making process. In this regard, Habermas states :

*A realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens: A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. They then behave neither like business or professional people transacting private affairs, nor like members of a constitutional order subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy. Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion- that is, with the guarantee of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions- about matters of general interest. (Habermas,1974 :49).*

## **New Media and Public Sphere : Social and Political Implications**

The new media's social and political implications are considerable due to the many services, utilities and tools the new technology offers to the various constituencies of society. New media technologies contribute to the emergence of an electronic public sphere where virtual communities emerge and prosper. New media technology is also transforming social institutions ranging from government to education, libraries, medicine, religion, research centers, political institutions... etc. The new media are affecting also national development, international communication, intercultural communication and public diplomacy. Advocates of technological change have always argued that new technologies can lead to developments and improvements in various sectors of social, economic, political and cultural life. The flow of information and data whether in quality, quantity, and rapidity is an addition to the improvement of the performance of any institution. It is said that information is power ; that is to say, that the more information is circulated, shared and used, the more institutions and people are benefiting from it.

John Naisbitt argues that the information society is more than an intellectual abstraction. New information technologies are profoundly altering our social, political, and economic landscape. On the consequences of the information society Naisbitt writes :

- *New communication and computer technology bring about faster flow of information.*
- *New information technologies give rise to new activities, processes, and products.*
- *Social and political change proceeds at an ever more rapid space, as real-time multimedia communications on a global scale become ever more common.*

(Naisbitt, 1982).

Virtual communities are among the many results and consequences of online communications. Virtual communities refer to a social collective, or community, that is neated in the online, electronic world of computer communications known as cyberspace. In the world of cyberspace virtual communities exist in an ethereal electronic space defined by digital networks, computers, and the people who use them. Internet is making electronic public space a reality because it is a tool which is global in its reach and it's expanding in a very fast pace all over the world ; although sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia are lagging behind.

## **Opportunities for the Arab world**

New media and social networks have introduced new mechanisms of communication in the Arab World, and consequently put an end to the control of the

media by the state and hence the control of public debate, public sphere and public opinion. Various internet applications and social networks have brought new logic, new culture and a media presence and publicity that never existed before. State intervention and state control are practices of the past. Even, when in the first days of the revolution, in both Tunisia and Egypt, the state apparatuses tried aggressively and fiercely to block internet and all kinds of communication, their efforts went in vain. The new tools gave the power to the citizen to communicate, publish, receive and send and be present in the public sphere. Social networks provided huge opportunities for the populace to discuss freely their issues, problems and concerns among each other which gave birth to a new dynamic and active public sphere, thus providing the citizen with confidence and hope. The new media strengthened the culture of dialogue and produced new citizens aware of his problems, and capable of discussing them with others without fears and self censorship. The new media provide a score of opportunities to individuals, organizations, welfare societies as well as educational, political, cultural, religious and media institutions to exchange information, interact, and communicate with others at no cost and in a very short time. Newman states that the new media shorten the meaning of distance, and increase tremendously the volume and the speed of communication. It provides opportunities of interactive communication and allows new kinds of communication which used to be dislocated and not eligible for connectivity and networking. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/news\\_news](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/news_news)).

The Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions are good illustrations of the role of the new media in mobilizing the masses and creating an atmosphere of a networked mass protestations, uprisings and rallies. On the role of information communication technologies (ICTs) in the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, Allagui and Kuelber argue :

*In Tunisia and Egypt, we have witnessed a new genre of revolution whose distinguishing feature lies in its organization by networks and particularly in social networks, which played an important informational and organizational role... Tunisians and Egyptians decided to put an end to years of humiliation, corruption and deprivation. Having used Facebook, mobile phones, YouTube, or just word-of-mouth, a number of people- computer literate and analphabetic alike-gathered in the streets, protested, and some eventually died. But they won their peaceful and unarmed uprising ; they won their revolution. (Allagui, Kuebler, 2011 :1435).*

New media and social networks were able to make a revolution, never seen before, in the world of communication. An electronic text, and an audiovisual world web were able to end the distinction between the individual and the mass and between public and private communication. Douglas and Bowman (Bucy,2002) argue that new media and mainly Internet provides a democratic public sphere where

citizens can interact, converse, and engage in a rich dialogue open to everybody. The new media offers a new environment for global opportunities in a globalized public sphere. A big concern arises here is the problem of the “haves” and the “have nots”. While we are witnessing the post industrial society in the developed world, the developing world, including the Arab countries which have an estimated 80 million illiterate, is still experiencing the second wave as defined by Alvin Toffler. Is globalization offering the same opportunities for everybody and on an equal basis ? Does everybody have equal chances for competition and success ?

### **The New Communication Environment and Arab Spring :**

The new communication environment played a pivotal role in the revolutions of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and what is happening nowadays in Syria and other countries. The new media and social networks provided the necessary tools to mobilize the youth, and activists to organize rallies, manifestations and demonstrations to ask for their rights and change. The new media helped to diffuse the messages of the oppressed and those deprived of their rights. Messages in the forms of texts, images, and videos were exchanged between the activists and the youth in a very short time. Social networks succeeded where traditional media failed for several reasons. Traditional media in the Arab World experienced a culture of censorship, self censorship and almost a total state of control over its outputs. It has suffered along the years and decades from a lack of investigative journalism and active role in discussing the sins of corruption, mismanagement and despotism.

The new communication environment made it hard for the Arab governments to control and dictate what should be told to the masses and what should not. In a short period of time, social networks and new media were able to mobilize the youth in all Arab Spring countries. Messages were not only exchanged within the limits of a single country, but in the region and worldwide. Through social networks, the youth in Libya lived the experience of their counterparts in Tunisia, and those in Tunisia experienced what Egyptian youth were going through and so on. This new environment changed the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, between the citizen and the state in the Arab world. The new media helped in establishing a new culture of public protests. In the past such protests used to last one or two days, then vanished. Thanks to the new communication environment, the protests and manifestations that brought about the Arab Spring were well coordinated, well organized and lasted till they achieved their goals. In a way, the new media and social networks created a virtual public sphere where everybody was able to get rid of fear and threat and expressed his/her views freely. Political activism needs communication between various groups and entities, requires mobilization and interaction to form a public opinion strong enough for political participation, and

to influence the decision makers and the political actors. Political change needs political communication where dialogue and debates take place in a public sphere where activists and political players meet.(Lievrouw,2011).

### **Social Networks and the Tunisian Revolution**

Social networks played an important role in the Tunisian revolution. They were a central platform for mobilization speeches, and the call for protests, demonstrations, and continuous activism in order to achieve the goals of the masses. Facebook created in Tunisia a new virtual sphere to compete with the traditional one dominated by the Bin Ali regime. In 2008, there were 16,000 facebook users in Tunisia. By November 2011, it reached 2730000 users, more than fourth of the population. Rezgui argues that social networks in Tunisia provided a public sphere for dialogue, discussions of all kinds of issues and problems from politics, to economy, society, sports...etc. (Rezgui, 2012).

In the beginning of the revolution, the Tunisian regime, faithful to its techniques and mechanisms of censorship, misinformation and negligence believed that it was going to control the media and all things related to the coverage of the events including foreign correspondents and contain systematically the protests and rallies. Thanks to the new media and social networks, activists and young protesters were able to provide photos, videos, reports and stories about the events. Facebook became the major provider and source of news and information about the demonstrations, rallies and all the protests and occurrences in the streets. Satellite channels, unable to do the coverage because of state restrictions and threats depended on what Facebook provided. The social networks played a major role in publicizing the events reaching local and international public opinion. They succeeded as well in mobilizing the youth, and the masses from all walks of life to stand firm and continue their protests until they reach their goals. In other words, the power of the Tunisian revolution resided in the social networks that played the role of a catalyst for a movement that comes from nowhere and ended up overthrowing a dictator.

The Tunisian masses believed strongly in the revolution and supported it fully thanks to social media. They showed engagement, faithfulness and nationalism. A revolution without media, and without being publicized and mediated can never succeed and attain its goals. A revolution without the people, the crowds, the masses cannot gain a national consensus and a large scale mobilization. The revolution had a meaning and a "raison d'être" thanks to the social networks that made it clear to everybody that the regime should step down and is no longer legitimate. Social networks were able to give a human, legal, just and popular dimension to the uprisings, rallies, and demonstrations. Through the pictures, videos, reports, statistics, testimonies...etc, social networks reported the legitimacy of the movement, the

legality of the revolution to the Tunisian people and the world. Satellite channels used this free and golden service to inform the viewers around the world on what was going on in Tunisia. This is an indispensable step toward success. The motto was, If you have a just cause, you make it clear to your people and the world, you will win.

Facebook interacted fully and positively with the Tunisian revolution and became a tool per excellence for political activism and social networking and a revolutionary scene through which Tunisians manifested their opposition to the regime, their will for change, and to move into a new era of democracy, transparency, and good governance. Social networks provided a new sphere for Tunisians to represent themselves as a social entity politicized like never before, where everybody participates, interacts, expresses his/her opinion and comments on whatever is there on facebook. (Rezgui, 2012).

For the power, impact and influence of new media and social networks, we have to admit that mobilizing people within a social movement for a just cause is something, and inducing economic, social and political change is something else. As it will be discussed later , the new media and social networks succeeded in mobilizing Tunisians, but they failed, after over two years now, in solving the problems of the youth, the economy and the political governance, namely democracy. This is a logical outcome given the fact that social media can be catalysts, can mobilize masses, and can generate news, videos, pictures and stories of rallies and protests. As for economic and political changes, such endeavors need more than social media.

### **Tunisia : The Aftermath of a Revolution**

Social networks do not produce revolutions, but starvation, poverty, deprivation and dictators are the factors that cause uprisings and revolutions. After more than two years what are the chances of success or failure ? What are the possibilities of aborting the popular revolution ? And what are the chances of stealing the revolution by opportunists and by those who were hiding when the youth were protesting in the streets ? What are the chances of success, and to what extent the post revolution political players are going to solve the problems of the youth, establish a new democratic system based on transparency, social justice and equality ? Some argue that the youth made the revolution and the Islamists took power.

The collapse of Bin Ali regime does not mean necessarily that the aspirations of the youth and the masses are going to be fulfilled. After two years, things are not that rosy (Arab Spring) in Tunisia. If the social networks were successful in mobilizing the masses during the revolution and were able to get its developments and successes to the attention of the media and the audiences in Tunisia and throughout the world, they failed to make the necessary changes in the economy and politics. Such tasks are beyond the reach of Facebook, Twitter and You Tube. Tunisia, nowadays

is going through a score of problems ranging from unemployment, lack of foreign investments, lack of security and stability...etc. The country is almost divided into two poles : Islamists and secularists. It's an "Us" versus "Them" equation.

### **Egypt : A Networked Revolution**

The Mubarak regime, was able over three decades to make the ruling of Egypt a family matter. Fraudulent elections were a common practice, the media were under strict control and the regime kept the masses depoliticized, disconnected and passive. With over eighty five million inhabitants, Egypt suffers from poverty, illiteracy, corruption, despotism and mismanagement. At any time, the regime in Egypt was at risk and very fragile. All the ingredients of social unrest were there.

Clearly, new media and social networks played strategic and pivotal roles in the success of the protests and uprising in Egypt. The socio-economic and political situation in the country was alarming. Unemployment, poverty, inequality, social injustice, fraudulent elections, lack of civil liberties and freedom, mismanagement, despotism and a bad governance represent the real causes of discontent and protests among the masses. The sociopolitical gap between the small ruling elite and the majority of the population had long reached critical levels.

Undoubtedly, new media and social networks, as in the case of the Tunisian revolution played a significant role in mobilizing the masses to protest and rally against the Mubarak regime, as well as providing daily reports and accounts to the local and international media and audiences. In this regard Hammelman and Mesard assert :

*Online civic activism triggered street activism in Egypt especially in the recruitment of early protestors that attracted the attention of satellite television coverage that further mobilized additional demonstrators as more traditional media placed live coverage in Tahrir, Alexandria and Suez. The tools of social media-Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, and Text messages were catalysts for offline activity that helped to spread information about events, meeting points, and unsafe locations in Tunisia and Egypt. (Hammelman and Mesard, 2011 :24)*

Two years after a successful revolution that ended three decades of authoritarian rule and deposed president Mubarak, Egyptians are still waiting for change to come. They are wondering if the revolution is on the right track, and that the objectives of the demands and aspirations of the youth and the majority of the population are going to be met. Rallies, protests and uprisings take place almost every week ; arrests are practiced almost daily ; journalists and media institutions are harassed constantly. To many the pace of reforms is very slow, and to others, things are not any better than before. The Islamists took over a revolution in which they didn't participate, or in

which they participated very timidly. The revolution opened the doors of mainstream politics and rule to the Muslim Brotherhood and the conservative Salafist movement. The new president Mohamed Morsi faced a lot of challenges as the Egyptian people were not eager to wait any longer to see the reforms and their demands and aspirations come true. Hafez Ghanem comments :

*For two years now economic issues have been put on the back burner as Egyptians focused on politics and questions of religion and national identity. As a result, the economic situation has seriously deteriorated and aspirations for better living standards and greater equity are far from being met. This could ultimately jeopardize the democratic transition. Government's decision to launch a broad economic dialogue is positive. This dialogue needs to be institutionalized and extended beyond stabilization to include strategies to achieve inclusive growth. (Ghanem, 2013)*

The new president, lacking experience and diplomacy made several unpardonable mistakes. He took a number of decisions, then when faced with harsh criticism from the media and public opinion, stepped back and cancelled them. To many critics of the new president, this is a sign of weakness, uncertainty and poor governance.

## **Discussion**

For both Tunisia and Egypt, so many reforms and changes are to be taken to ensure the real changes needed by the revolution and its instigators. The problem faced in both countries is the counterrevolution where opposing forces are doing their best to block any kind of change. In Egypt, the Islamists proved to be lacking experience and art of governance. The media system for instance is divided into two, Us versus Them. The same situation is found in Tunisia. The real challenge however, remains the economy which is having a plethora of problems to recover and offer the necessary jobs to the jobless youth.

The time has come in both Tunisia and Egypt to think about the future in a pragmatic way : Investment and sustainable development away from ideology and political Islam. The new leaders should work hard to get rid of the old system of corruption, mismanagement and bad governance. A large scale economic development may eliminate poverty and hunger, and this in turn can combat tyranny and dictatorship. Bishara states :

*This is the time for creative thinking about the future where investment and sustainability- not consumerism and militarism- are the bedrock of Arab development...That's why new leaders need to enact new laws that do away with corruption, nepotism, and, instead, encourage initiative and investment in people and the economy- one that creates and protects jobs, safeguards social justice, improves infrastructure and education, and attracts capital.(Bishara,2012 :222).*

What is needed is to transform the mass mobilization and the success of the revolution into an ongoing transition and change of old practices and mechanisms of corruption, mismanagement and bad governance. The new leaders in both Tunisia and Egypt have so far failed to establish an atmosphere of harmony and understanding between the various components of the political sphere. Mohamed Hassanine Heikel, a prominent Egyptian journalist and political analyst, argues that in all revolutions, those instigated them will take over power, to present their program and achieve the objectives. What happened in Egypt, was that the Muslim Brothers took over the whole power without taking into consideration the others. Heikel goes further by saying that the president was faced with issues that he didn't understand, and all his decisions were constitutionally void. (<http://www.albayan.ae/one-world/arabs/2013-04-12-1.11860732>.)

A strong civil society is needed, as well as political intellectual elites who have to transform the social revolutions to a cultural revolution in all aspects of life in the Arab World. Bishara warns from the dangers of a counterrevolution and the aftermath of the revolution. He invites Arabs to have a new vision based on being prepared to fight the counter revolution forces such as dictatorships, reactionary political and religious movements, sectarian groups as well as international and regional powers.

Socioeconomic and political changes need strategies, visions and a culture of democracy to be initiated and implemented. They need a strong will of change in all aspects of political, economic and social components of society. If the social movements in Arab Spring countries were able to oust and bring down the dictators, they failed so far to bring about socio-political and economic change. Babar writes :

*Political developments across the Middle East continue to be unsettled, and will remain so for some time to come. Not surprisingly, so far the popular mass protests which in some states effectively and euphorically brought down dictators have not been as successful in bringing about revolutionary sociopolitical change. (Babar,2012 :4).*

Much is to be done if the spring is to prevail in Arab Spring countries. It is true that dictators were ousted, but the transition to democracy is facing a score of problems and moving at a very slow pace.

## **Conclusion**

New media and social networks have to some extent changed political discourse in the region, posing a threat to the status quo. The new media atmosphere will prevail and develop continuously challenging the political order of privilege, and inequality, despotism, bureaucracy, corruption and injustice. However, the media

system in the region has to change and engage in a new path to help bring about economic, political and social change. Ekwo argues :

*...Citizens of that region have devised ways to circumvent the collusion of the mainstream media and politicians to manipulate them. The avalanche of citizen journalists is a repudiation of the performance of the professional journalists who have failed in their ability to hold politicians and public functionaries accountable to the people...Considering the inseparable relationship between media and politics and the fact that journalists are the midwives of democracy, it is clear that for changes in the political scene to be sustained it must be accompanied with simultaneous change in the media. Media institutions in the region must shake off the undemocratic behavior that had defined it for generations. (Ekwo,2012 :23).*

Many argue that new media and social networks brought the Arab revolutions and Arab Spring and made the changes that several Arab countries are witnessing. However others argue that this is an overstatement of the power of the new media technologies. As a matter of fact, Arab spring countries- Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen- are going through a chaotic situation where things are getting worse, internal conflicts, riots, protests, worsening economic situation...etc.

Is this new environment enough for the achievement of democracy, social, economic and political change ? What is the other side of social networks ? Is everybody in the Arab world involved, sharing and living the era of social networks ? Or a good proportion of the population is out of this new environment, given the fact that one fourth of the population in the Arab world is illiterate ? Does change whether social, political or economic require more than social networks and new public sphere ? How are things after the collapse of dictators and tyrants in a score of Arab countries ? Are they getting any better, or things are worse than before, or should we wait to make an assessment ? Historical facts and experiences tell us that sustainable development and social change need more than the media. Daniel Lerner predicted in 1958 that the media of mass communication will lead to urbanization, democratization and social change in the developing countries of the world. After over five decades, the Arab states are still looking for sustainable development and democracy.

It is a firm conviction of this author that, at their best new media can mobilize crowds and masses to rally and protest. They can give a social perspective to movements. However, they can not make socio-economic and political change and implement democracy, because such change needs more than social networks. After the collapse of the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, things are not getting any better, and both Tunisia and Egypt are experiencing complex economic, social and political problems. So far, the social networks and the new media have failed to implement a successful democratic transition in the Arab Spring countries.

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# Media and the Democratic Transition in Tunisia

## Case Study: The National Broadcaster Al-Watania TV1

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### Transformation of the media scene in Tunisia after the revolution

The media market has been significantly transformed after the revolution of 14 January 2011 which ousted Zein El-Abideen Ben Ali in Tunisia from a handful of media outlets mainly controlled by the former regime, to an explosion of radio stations, TV channels and online news organizations, in addition to a plethora of newspapers and magazines. This new environment has significantly widened the scope for free speech to a level unprecedented before. The global freedom index, Freedom House, for instance rated Tunisia very high in terms of freedom of expression during the year 2014. On a scale from 1 (being the best) to 7 (being the worst) in the world, Tunisia rated 2 during that year<sup>(1)</sup>. The report also reads that 'The transitional government proclaimed freedom of information and expression as a foundational principle for the country, and vast new press freedoms emerged from the revolution'<sup>(2)</sup>. Moreover, as a guarantee for this achievement, the new constitution passed by the Constituent Assembly in 2014 guaranteed freedom of expression and freedom of religion to every citizen. Article 31 reads that 'Freedom of opinion, thought, expression, media and publication shall be guaranteed. These freedoms shall not be subject to prior censorship'. Also Article 32 confirms that 'The state shall guarantee the right to information and the right to access information. The state seeks to guarantee the right to access to information networks'.

As a result, TV and radio stations have been hosting a growing number of discussion shows that address every aspect of the Tunisian society. Talk shows about political reform, corruption, education, role of the police, civil society, human rights, culture and sports have become the digest of scores of channels. This has provided a critical space for civil society organisations to express their views regarding the shaping of the new democracy in the country. This new scope of media freedom is

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(1) Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2015', [https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/tunisia#.VTJ\\_nfAUuwE](https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/tunisia#.VTJ_nfAUuwE). Accessed 18 April 2015.

(2) Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2015', [https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/tunisia#.VTJ\\_nfAUuwE](https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/tunisia#.VTJ_nfAUuwE). Accessed 18 April 2015.

exceptional given the fact that representatives of civil society organizations had never had the opportunity to freely express their views on public service media during the Ben Ali era, especially when it comes to issues relating to human rights, workers' rights and political participation. As a result, the benchmark of freedom of expression has reached levels unseen before. Noteworthy, is that journalists and artists known for their collaboration with the Ben Ali regime have been spearheading media freedom advocacy. The picture might seem exciting but what seems problematic is the unlimited ceiling of freedom of speech that such proponents have been calling for. It is a freedom that does not account for social responsibility, limits to sacred beliefs, tradition or culture.

### **Theorising media and democracy**

According to Shin (1994) democratic transition stands for the emergence of a new hybrid power structure in which old regime institutions share power with the new power elite. In this case, revolutionary elites may share power with the former authoritarian power structure. Democracy or democratic transition is a process usually associated with countries of long-standing democratic tradition which are seen as models to be emulated like the well-established western democracies. The democratization process is also related to specific values or value-systems to be adhered to and which are now well-grounded in those countries as revered principles nearing the sacred like free elections, freedom of speech and respect for human rights.

The study of the media vis-a-vis democratization has meant two strands of enquiry to various researchers. On the one hand, analyzing the role of the media in a democratic process as significant movers (McQuail 2005) ; on the other hand, it has meant the democratization of the media itself. However, media freedom is according to others an imperative tool for the development of democratic institutions (Street 2010) through which democratic life can prosper. Such institutions refer to all public as well as political bodies which involve citizen interaction, political communication, functioning of political decision and may include the parliament, judicial system, the media, civil society organizations etc. A report by Reuter's Institute of the Study of Journalism in September 2013 concluded that 'It is unclear whether the media are an agent of democratic change and consolidation or not as the issue of whether the media lead or follow change for democracy is yet to be resolved'.<sup>(1)</sup> However, what is evident in various parts of the world, namely countries undergoing regime change from authoritarian rule, is that free media are pivotal to a prosperous society which at its core is the existence of a vibrant public sphere.

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(1) Nael Jebriil, Vaclav Stetka and Matthew Loveless, (September 2013) 'Media and Democratization: What is Known about the Role of Mass Media in Transitions to Democracy'; A Report by Reuter's Institute for the Study of Journalism, Oxford University, UK.

The normative media theory as part of the media and democracy approach addresses the key functions of the media as a key platform for free speech and public debates, on education and awareness of the public about the political affairs and processes, watchdog role, and being a sphere of public debates and current affairs analyses concerning every aspect of public life. For instance, with regard to the democratization potential of the media in Eastern Europe, various studies point to key areas related to holding politicians accountable and broadening the scope of free debates about political reform (Sparks and Reading, 1998; Downey and Mihelj, 2012). Holding government institutions are held accountable and the public is involved in reforming the way such institutions function away from corruption, bribery and inefficient bureaucracy.

A key feature of the broadcasting market around the world during the last two decades has been liberalization with protection of the public service broadcasting media. One of the key arguments is that the more media outlets there are the better chance there exists in attaining increased public engagement. The mobilization theory for instance as suggested by Loveless (2010), namely in emerging democracies, associates multiplicity in media outlets to political engagement. In the case of a transitional democratic society such as Tunisia, it is argued that more people will be subscribed to political parties and take part in elections and other political activities when there exists increasing expansion of the media market both public service as well as private enterprises.

Alluding on the above, the watchdog role of the media can be more effectively achieved when there exist more and more media outlets. Several studies have been done on the effectiveness of the media for democratisation by considering its function as 'watchdog journalism'. This theory of the media as 'fourth estate' is well-rooted in the Anglo-American tradition of journalism (Keane 1992). Over the last few decades, and as part of the Western democratic legacies, various functions have been attributed to journalism namely public service broadcasters. The following roles keep surfacing as soon as the term PSB is talked about: watchdog role in protecting the public interests, advocates of civil society and the objectivity/impartiality doctrine. In Tunisia and unlike before, citizens in the newly emerging democracy have been looking forward to the media, especially Al-Watania TV1<sup>(1)</sup> network to become the protector of the public interests; a role that should be shaped up by the new democratic values that Tunisians aspire to attain through the new constitution.

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(1) Al-Watania TV1 is the main public Service broadcasting TV in Tunisia. It was officially launched on 31 May 1966. It changed name since then from 'Channel 7' in 1992 to 'Tunis 7' in 1997. Then after the revolution of 14 January 2011 which ousted the regime of Ben Ali the channel became called the Al-Watania TV (Tunisian National TV).

Following from this discussion, it can be argued that the legitimacy of public service broadcasting is frequently proven from the angle of its nation-building role; A process that cements the national spirit of the general population by broadcasting speeches of the presidents, national news and locally produced programming like soap opera. The national project or the national vision is normally marketed through the public service media (radio, TV and the press) usually controlled by the ruling regime. Also PSB in Tunisia used to be marketed as a barrier towards the 'invasion' of foreign content namely from Europe and USA.

Nevertheless, although deemed essential in the early years of democratization, the media's role can be affected by the market interests. Jebri et al. (2013: 14) argue that '...the contribution of the media to democratisation might well be at its strongest during regime change – including mobilisation against the old regime. In later stages of democratic consolidation, the media get often watered down by market pressures as well as by (newly emerging) political constraints'. These studies concede to the role of the media for democratization in various contexts. However, limited studies have empirically addressed the way the media can actually impede or enhance the democratization process. There is certainly evident vacuum in terms of studying the political transition certain Arab countries have been witnessing. The media's contribution to such regime changes and transitional period in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya during the last 5 years begs an imperative enquiry.

In light of the above, this paper attempts to analyze the transition to democracy in Tunisia and its relationship with the media reform. It will explore the extent to which the delay in reforming the media scene actually serves as an obstacle to the speedy and organic transition to democracy. By analyzing the media's role in the country spearheading the Arab Spring, this paper then attempts to extend our knowledge about the non-western settings regarding the media effects and its function in emerging democracies. However, this work is not of the view that the media in Tunisia have been employed as a revolutionary tool in the democratic transition. But it does argue that the media can become an important factor in a transitional stage to a stable democracy in terms of its impact on public opinion and its watchdog role.

While attempting to analyse the role of the media in this democratization process, one should acknowledge the fact that democratic transition can also be affected by other factors such as global forces and external powers. These can be in the shape of international organisations like the IMF and World Bank, or western powers (USA and Europe), regional powers, or global media conglomerates. All of these can shape in a way or the other the social, economic and political transformation of emerging democracies. However, all of these factors, albeit significant in the Tunisian case, are beyond the scope of this study. Moreover, the study of the media's role in countries undergoing democratization is certainly more problematic than analyzing its function

in established democracies. In countries like Tunisia, Egypt and Libya for instance the media scene has witnessed ambivalent and sometimes dramatic developments in terms of its organization, ownership and legal frameworks. For instance, only three years after the explosion of media freedom in Egypt before and during the rule of former President Morsi's government, the media scene has made a complete shift in terms of every aspect related to its organization and legal framework. This shift characterised by freedom of speech and sometimes deregulation, had also witnessed a new turn with the military coup of general Sissi in June 2013 and the formation of an autocratic government.

### **Public service broadcasting legitimacy in Tunisia**

The Al-Watania TV1 derives its legitimacy from its status as the only public service broadcasting TV in Tunisia along with its sister channel Al-Watania TV2. Both channels are accountable to the public as (tax payer), therefore, have potentially more credibility in their news reporting and current affairs content than any other private/commercial TV channels in the country. This legitimacy is not necessarily built through decades of journalistic excellence, since the channel is notorious for fully serving the Ben Ali regime prior to the revolution, but because of the importance the public attach to this national broadcaster. Such perception (argues Horowitz, 2001) gets built over the years on the role of the PSB in nation building, informing and educating the public and for its variety of entertainment content.

There has been shared views among the interviewees of this study that Al-Watania TV network stands as a valuable asset that should serve all Tunisians. 'The channel reaches every household in the country. Therefore it is meant to be a source of objective news and should reflect the concerns of all Tunisians', argues Shaima Al-Wislati (2013). Even in the age of social media and the explosion of satellite broadcasting, Al-Watania TV1 is considered by Tunisians as their own property. They also expect it to remain at arms-length from all political parties or any ideological influences. It is noteworthy that after the revolution lengthy debates took place within the Constituent Assembly, among academic circles and civil society organizations regarding the role of public service media and how to reform it to serve this nascent democracy. The network is upheld as serving all citizens, providing a free space for dialogue among politicians, intellectuals and members of the public. It was also seen as a valuable source of accurate information, education and entertainment for the public.

The Arab Spring revolution has brought about a new era for Tunisian broadcasting. The country which lived through decades of political repression and suppressive media regulations have suddenly been opened up to a barrage of media deregulation since 14 January 2011. The first and second interim governments during 2011 coupled with the first democratically elected government on 23 October 2011 have

committed themselves to guaranteeing freedom of speech and media liberty. Soon after winning the elections of 23 October 2011, Ennahdha party formed a coalition government (known as Troika) with the secular Congress for the Republic Party and left-wing party Ettakatol. The three parties shared power by appointing Hamadi Jebali (secretary general of Ennahdha) as Prime Minister, while Ettakatol had Mostafa ben Jafar (the party's president) as head of the National Constituent Assembly, and Congress for the Republic won the state's presidency for their leader and founder Moncef Marzouki. This coalition of the three parties vowed to protect free speech and honour the independence of public service broadcasting from political interference. Also the elected Constituent Assembly (Parliament) pledged that freedom of the media is an undisputable value although there have been differences about what is the limit of media freedom and whether the media should be self-censored especially when it comes to sensitive issues related to religion and culture.

This new reality has been of paramount significance to the growth of the media market in Tunisia. Since compared to the Ben Ali era, the post revolution period witnessed a dramatic expansion of the broadcasting market. For instance while there existed only a handful of radio and TV channels before the revolution, nowadays there are 12 TV channels and over 21 radio stations broadcasting from various parts of the country. The analogue TV market is currently dominated by three TV channels Al-Watania 1 (known as 'Tunis7' before the revolution), Al-Watania 2 (known as 'Tunis21' before the revolution), which both respectively cover 99.80% and 99.60% of the Tunisian territory, while Hannibal TV covers 44.80%.<sup>(1)</sup> As for the digital market it does currently include the above mentioned two channels (Al-Watania 1+2), in addition to nine private channels: Hannibal TV, Nessma TV, Ezzitouna, Attounissia, El Hiwar Ettounsi, TNN, Al-Moutawasit, Al-Qalam and Al Janoubia TV.

This growth in the media market has also meant growing challenges for the regulatory bodies and genuine concerns regarding the influence of the new web of media outlets. As such this post-revolution period has also witnessed unremitting tensions between the influential media enterprises and the first democratically elected government. This is partly due to the conflicting understanding of the media's role in a transitional democracy, the manipulation of the media by rich entrepreneurs and ideological interests. The global phenomenon termed by some as 'tabloidization' which is the result of the increasing media market competition has already affected the Tunisian media decades ago. What has been happening to the world media, especially the press during the last 20 years or so, has already taken its toll on the media in Tunisia, especially the press. This raises the question of the media independence under the liberal consensus of the market (Johnson and Jacobs 2004).

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(1) Tunisian National Broadcasting Corporation [http://www.telediffusion.net.tn/index.php?yoca\\_caauaca](http://www.telediffusion.net.tn/index.php?yoca_caauaca) (Accessed 4 January 2014)

## **Research methodology**

This study sets out to investigate the role of Al-Watania TV1 in the democratic transition that Tunisia has been experiencing since 14 January 2011. As postulated above, the interest in studying this channel stems from the fact that it is the main public service TV in Tunisia and part of the only network that is publicly funded through license fees. Unlike private/independent channels, Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) can be considered a guarantor of a fair and impartial coverage of news and serves all strata of society.

In an attempt to determine the role Al-Watania TV1 has been playing in the country's democratic transition a number of events were analysed vis-a-vis the way the channel had reported them. I chose various landmark events during the last three years which have been narrowed down in the following: a) Assassination of the opposition figure Chokri Belaid on 6 February 2013 and the tension between the government and the Tunisian National Workers Union, b) Culmination of the National Dialogue and the formation of an interim technocrat government led by Mehdi Jomaa. In addition to the analysis of the above news programs, interviews were conducted with 17 journalists, policy makers, and activists in the capital Tunis.

This study asks the following questions: 1) what criteria does Al-Watania 1 use in its news coverage? 2) What priorities does it have in terms of reporting the news? 3) Who are the most frequent guests on the channel?

## **Research Findings**

### **Assassination of Chokri Belaid as a media event**

No one doubts the newsworthiness of the political assassination of political activist Chokri Belaid. His death shook the nation and reverberated beyond Tunisia as it was the first assassination of a well-known political activist in a country spearheading the Arab Spring and boasts itself, so far at least, that it abhors annihilating political opponents. But what is striking is the scale of criticism directed to the coalition government by the National TV following this event. Belaid was a Tunisian lawyer and political activist from the left-wing secular group known as Democratic Patriot's Movement. His party (known as Al-Watad) had its roots in political activism during the 1980s and 1990s at the University of Tunis. Belaid was assassinated on 6 February 2013 outside his home in El-Menzah (outskirts of the capital Tunis). Subsequently after his death protests broke out in different parts of the country condemning the killing and some turned violent. The offices of Ennahda party, which won the elections and formed a coalition government, were vandalized in various parts of Tunisia such as Gafsa, ElKef, Messouna and Sidi Bouzid. Members of Ansar Al-Sharia group (hard-line Islamists) were also detained. Politically, the Prime Minister, Hammadi

Jebali, strongly denounced the killing and in an attempt to contain the storm of unrest dissolved his cabinet and called for a caretaker government consisting of independent civil servants (known as technocrats) who should rule the country until the following elections.

The media pointed to a link between the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, Ansar Al-Sharia and the Ennahdha movement. Although Ennahdha party immediately denounced the killing as “heinous crime” that serves only the interests of the enemies of democracy and deliberately targets the “stability and security of Tunisia”<sup>(1)</sup>. Some of the tabloids heightened the drumbeating in demonizing the Islamic Party in government (Ennahdha) by calling it ‘collaborator’ in the assassination claiming that the activities of such extremist Islamist groups like Ansar Al-Sharia are known to the government as well as the leader of Ennahdha party, Rashid Ghannouchi.

Immediately after the death of Chokri Belaid, a systematic campaign to demonise the government, specifically the largest party Ennahdha, took place where scores of tabloid newspapers (Al-Shourouq, Al-Maghrib, Ashaab, Al-Sareeh to name a few), in addition to TV channels indirectly made it the one responsible for not preventing his death. Like most of the media outlets opposing the ruling parties’ agenda, the national TV channel (Al-Watania TV1), run live coverage and continuous streaming of Chokri Belaid’s funeral and its aftermath. The funeral turned into not only a media event but also a political trial for the elected government and its allies. Lawyer and social activist, Mohamed Sami Triki, interviewed for this research argues that the channel ‘...has cumulative problems in terms of its structure and editorial lines... Professionally speaking, it is not objective. Its news editors have political and ideological affiliations... no wonder then that this reflects on their editorial policy’ (Triki, 2013).

During these unrests, the Al-Watania TV1 gave extensive coverage to the main national workers union in Tunisia. The Popular Labor Union (UGTT) called immediately after Belaid’s funeral, citizens to a national strike. This was the second general strike in Tunisia’s history, the first was in 1978 known as ‘Black Thursday’ in which 42 demonstrators were killed. Subsequently, news presenters and reporters kept repeating the call of UGTT for a national demonstration in Habib Bourguiba Avenue, central Tunis. The call was also accompanied with footage of people marching from various places towards the capital. The news reader then comments ‘people now are marching in large groups towards the capital, some are walking and others via every possible means of private as well public transport’<sup>(2)</sup>.

(1) “Tunisia Moves to Contain Fallout After Opposition Figure Is Assassinated”, The New York Times. 6 February 2013. Accessed 4 January 2014. [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/07/world/africa/chokri-belaid-tunisian-opposition-figure-is-killed.html?\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/07/world/africa/chokri-belaid-tunisian-opposition-figure-is-killed.html?_r=1&)

(2) Alwatania TV1 rolling live news, 2:15pm, Tunis: 8 February 2013.

In a separate news report that afternoon, Al-Watania TV1 showed footage from previous demonstrations in front of the American Embassy and reported them as attacks by Ansar Al-Sharia group on the funeral of political figure Chokri Belaid. The report, which was carefully-edited, was taken out of its context to demonise the Islamist groups namely the long-bearded youth (known as the Salafis or Ansar Al-Sharia) and frame them as perpetrators of trouble in the funeral of one of the secular opposition leaders. However, soon after it was exposed by Facebook activists, the channel sent an apology for the 'unintended mistake'. Iqbal Kalbousi, a news anchor at Al-Watania TV1 reports on people's perception about the lack of objectivity in the channel's news reports: 'When I go home my father would tell me the same, that the channel is biased in reporting news. I have to say that we are trying to change this image. But mind you we are learning about democracy and free speech. We are still struggling because we live in a new era, we need to learn a lot' (Kalbousi, 2013).

Also on the same day of the funeral, Al-Watania TV1 screened a video from a religious program broadcast on the same channel a while before, in which Sheikh Zouhair Al-Jandoubi (a well-known religious scholar) was giving a Friday sermon. In the course of his speech, he answered the question whether in Islam it is allowed to say the Janazah (funeral) prayer on an atheist person. Sheikh Al-Jandoubi simply reiterated the well-known Islamic jurisprudence ruling on this matter which states that it is not permissible to do so if the person died as atheist. The TV channel passed the clip as if it was coinciding with the funeral occasion in order to prevent people from saying their prayers on him. However, it was proven that the talk was given over a year before. Sheikh Jandoubi subsequently complained to the channel stressing that his speech was taken out of context and the way his religious ruling was taken out of context and exploited to serve a certain agenda of the channel. He further argued that this report had put his life and that of his family in jeopardy because of the death threats he received.

### **National Dialogue and formation of an interim technocratic government**

To second event to be analysed as part of Al-Watania TV1 news reporting is the National Dialogue which led to the consensus of forming an independent government. The formation of the so called 'technocratic' government came as a culmination of weeks of national dialogue between all political parties as well as major civil society organizations in the country. This achievement marked a big relief for all Tunisians as it signaled the opening of the gridlock characterizing political life in the country since the second assassination of political figure Mohamed Brahmi (25 July 2013). On 14 December 2013, the day in which the name of the new interim PM (Mehdi Jomaa) was announced, Al-Watania TV1 had long day coverage (from 11am until late in the evening) discussing the drastic repercussions if the National Dialogue between the

government and the opposition fails. However, the channel had hardly covered early that evening the climax of the National Dialogue which resulted in an agreement about the independent figure politician to take over the government headship. The press conference delivered by Hussein Abbassi, head of the General Workers Trade Union was poorly reported. The brief report of Al-Watania TV1 appeared with poor sound quality and was subsequently stopped. Worth mentioning here is that Al-Jazeera TV had a detailed report that evening with various vops pops and press conference coverage. While its sister channel, Al-Jazeera Mubashir, had also full live coverage of the press conference including the questions and answers session.

Soon after the announcement of his name, the newly appointed prime minister faced a smear campaign from various media outlets. To start with the opposition parties and their supportive media outlets announced that Jomaa was married to the daughter of Mohamed Ben Salem (Minister of Agriculture at the time). Yet, it was revealed later on that the wife of Mehdi Joumaa had nothing to do with the Ben Salem family. Mohamed ben Salem (from Ennahdha party) has four girls, one married to Salim Hamiden (Minister of State Properties), a second is married in France, a third aged 18 and a fourth was 15 years old at the time. Rumors also claimed that Mehdi Jomaa was close a friend to Rafiq Abdessalam (former Ennahdha Foreign Minister) and they studie together, therefore Jomaa must have been recruited by Ennahdha. The facts reveal that Rafiq Abdessalam was born in 1967, whereas Jomaa in 1962 so it was impossible for them to be close class mates in primary or high school. Also Abdessalam studied Philosophy in the Faculty of Social Sciences (known as 9 April Faculty) and Jomaa studied engineering in the Tunisian National College of Engineering (ENIT).

One of the landmark achievements of the Constituent Assembly during that period was the 'Transitional Justice Law' which aimed at repairing the damage suffered by the victims of the Ben Ali regime during the two decades of his rule. On the main news programme of Al-Watania TV1- (15 Dec 2013) we were shown a very brief news bulletin about the Constituent Assembly passing the 'Transitional Justice Law'. However, no report followed the announcement, and the event was not considered within its context, although this measure was considered a milestone in the transition to democracy in the country. The Law included 71 chapters and was ratified by 125 out of 126 of the members of the assembly who attended the session. The new law defined Transitional Justice as a comprehensive process which included fighting human rights abuses, incurred on opposition leaders and political activists, by unveiling all crimes and injustices by the previous regime, bringing those responsible to justice, repairing the damage to those who were victims of human rights violations, and document all such inhumane practices so that no regime shall dare to replicate such acts. This law, which was the culmination of about two years

of debates and indecision, was seen as a very symbolic accomplishment of the coalition-led government. In covering the event, Al-Watania TV1 had a very brief report which did not exceed 30 seconds. Reference to this significant event was limited to a very brief story with no further analysis. Instead, and in the same news programme, there were three reports about Mandela's life and achievements one of them about his childhood; in addition to another report about demonstrations in the southern parts of the country which both lasted about three minutes.

## **Discussion**

A key question investigated in the course of this study was the extent to which the media reflect reality or somehow reconstruct the real to suit certain agenda. It is evident from the analysis of the news stories listed above that the Al-Watania TV1 tends to be very selective in its representation of the 'real' or what actually took place in any given event. On the one hand, there were instances where the channel has been proven to deliberately manipulate the news stories. Some other times it even manufactures news through a mere cut and paste of recorded material from past events and passes them as part of a current one. On the other hand, a focus of its news reports is placed on the bad news regarding the economy, employment and prices. A sizeable part of the main evening news programmes focus on the workers' union strikes, failing economy, poor performance of government ministers and government departments as well as poor security in the country during the rule of the coalition government. For instance, in the main evening news program of 7 December 2012, the first twenty minutes were exclusively dedicated to reporting on workers' strikes and demonstrations organized by the Tunisian General Workers Union (the largest syndicate in the country). Reporting on demonstrations and even civil disobedience seemed the main news digest. This was the case during the last five days of the period characterised by a rift between the government and the trade unions before the stepping down of the coalition government. The reports about these strikes were somehow exaggerated in terms of their occurrence and coverage in various parts of the country; while lots of other newsworthy events which portray the economy in a positive light were very briefly reported. For instance, at the same time when these protests took place, the Davos Forum was held for the first time in Tunisia, the economy started to make good progress. However, such events got hardly reported.

The analysis of the Al-Watania TV1 also shows lack of adherence to the professional editorial guidelines in reporting the news. Although this is a national state TV that has been broadcasting for decades and employs some of the most experienced journalists in the country, the channel still suffers from poor sound quality, unsophisticated graphics and montage, superficial news analysis and a frequent inability of covering

events across the country. Zeina Khemiri, a news producer in Al-Watania TV1 argues that resources can be much better managed in the organisation. 'That's why the channel (she adds) is poor in terms of creativity and access to information' (Khemiri 2013). Also through monitoring its homepage, it is evident that the website also lacks audience interactivity, news updating and thought provoking articles the likeness of which one would expect in the homepage of a well-funded national broadcaster. Few argue that this weakness is due to the lack of funding. However, the channel reveals that it has been employing hundreds of journalists, editors and administrators for the last two decades; a phenomenon which echoes the same ailments of the state bureaucracy as a whole. In a country which is supposed to capitalise on new technologies and modern administration managements, one may argue that the Tunisian state bureaucracy lacks efficiency and modernization.

Moreover, in some other cases, Al-Watania TV1 can be viewed to promote a climate of fear. It keeps silent whenever there is an opportunity to demonize the extreme Islamist group known as the Ansar Al-Sharia. The channel does not seem to miss the chance. Recurring frames include threat to the stability of the country, enemies of democracy, danger to the culture and achievements of the Tunisian society. Such examples testify to an underlying systematic agenda in the news coverage by influential editors in the channel who seize the opportunity from time to time to broadcast very controversial material which subsequently may provoke turbulence and social unrest. The interviews conducted with youth activists in the capital Tunis reveal an evident significance that Tunisians attach to Al-Watania TV1 although few of them do not actually consider it as their main source of news. However, they are critical about the way discussion programs for instance are conducted. Karim Sifi (youth activist on social media), for instance, explains that 'The channel is good in broadening the views presented in its news or discussion programs, but most of the time the presenters show clear bias by intervening or even taking sides to support certain views' (Sifi 2013).

The deviation from objective reporting which amounts to possible agenda setting role has also become evident throughout the analysis of the news reports. The Al-Watania TV1 can at times be seen, in the course of the dramatic political tension that Tunisia has been going through, partial in scores of its reports and its journalism practice does not reflect the ethos claimed in its codes of ethics declaration. The channel is also viewed as attempting to play the role of an agent in changing public opinion perception, sometimes assuming a role nearing that of political activism. The very channel which used to be under the Ben Ali dictatorship a tool of disinformation and manipulation is now becoming a platform for spreading fear, chaos and despair. Also scores of journalists from this channel who used to be supporters of Ben Ali regime and part of his propaganda machine can now be seen doing a counter revolutionary role.

However, pressure from other TV channels in addition to social media networks, have been significant. There is no doubt that private TV channels have proven to be fierce competitors to the Al-Watania TV1 in terms of news and entertainment programs. Also, the internet freedom, after the revolution, and the widespread use of social media networks have put even more pressure on the publically owned network (Al-Watania TV1). Social media have empowered civil society organizations working for freedom of information but also for the improvement of media content. Probably the biggest effective watchdogs in the defense of the interests of the listeners and viewers during this democratic transitional period are activists on social media.

Alluding on the above, it is worth revisiting the problematic raised for instance by Price and Rozumilowicz (2002: 254) who ask at the end of their work, *Media Reform: Democratizing the Media, Democratizing the State*, 'How can we tell whether, as is so widely assumed, media reform is a necessary condition of democratization, or rather, whether free and independent media are merely attractive, superb, and even justifying products of an already liberalized society?' These legitimate questions are evidently not easy to prove empirically given the sophisticated environment in which the media operate in a new democracy and the different internal as well as external tensions that may affect its work. However, what has been established from the above analysis is that public service broadcasting in Tunisia has been a significant source of information, a space for public deliberation about everything that concerns reform. The study also shows that the role played by Al-Watania TV1 has been highly politicized and works to a large extent to support the old regime guards and anti-revolution agenda instead of serving the public towards the country's smooth transition to democracy.

It can also be argued that a key role of public service broadcasting in a democracy is to make those in power accountable in front of their citizens, in addition to promoting political and cultural diversity. However, these ethos seem currently far-fetched in Tunisia considering the poor track record of Al-Watania TV1. Moreover, it has become evident that there is a mixed understanding of the media's role in this democratic transition. The government seems to have a different perception of the role the media should play, which is in contrast with that of few opposition parties and other players in the country. At the core of this debate is the media's impact in the public sphere and the role it may play in the construction of public opinion post-revolution period. This characterization echoes Anderson's critique on the media's role by asserting that 'Instead of telling people what the state is doing, the media preponderantly tell people how the candidates behave in their personal lives and what they are doing to get and keep office. Instead of enabling citizens to make autonomous judgments, the media alter the very criteria by which citizens evaluate the state'. (Anderson, 1998: 491)

Banking on the above, one would argue that the post revolution period in Tunisia has witnessed an influx of media outlets driven by the new spirit of freedom of expression and the financial support being pumped from within and outside the country. However, this unprecedented media explosion, though welcomed in the beginning, also stood as an increasing challenge given the delay in accomplishing full-bodied media laws and the late appearance of the regulatory body (HAICA) to the media scene in the country. Moreover, what seems to have added to these challenges was external funding to few influential media organizations which were privileged from among other private media outlets. Also although the media in Tunisia has dramatically shifted from state-controlled to public service media and in spite of the regime change which has brought new political players to the forefront of politics in the country, the class base for the broadcasting as well as newspaper market remains mostly the same. The national TV broadcaster Al-Watania TV1 can be seen as part of a dividing process which was well-rooted in the decades of dictatorship under Ben Ali and the Bourguiba regimes but also has not ceased to reshape and strengthen its influence after the revolution. Instead this post revolution period, namely during phases of election campaigns, a large number of media outlets seem split along ideological lines rather than adhering to professional norms of journalism practice which are supposed at the core serving the public interests. What is then expected is that public to serve media should raise awareness about corruption rather than eliminate it, and bring the public's attention to social problems rather than attempt to force change in society.

## **Conclusion**

By analyzing the role of the media in Tunisia after the revolution of 14 January 2011 this paper has attempted to discuss commonly held assumptions about the relationship between media reform and democratic transformations. Attempting to find a close link between the media and transitional democratic state in the first among the Arab Spring countries to witness a revolution is an issue beyond question. What is rather bemusing is the extent to which the media can become a tool that helps create two divergent societies in the same country. The argument can find its starting point in how various forces in society have tamed various media outlets toward their political/ideological goals. Others however have launched their own distinctive radio/TV channels or newspapers. In spite of the significance of this state of being, I would argue that it goes beyond the political party differences into a phenomenon more related to the perceived powerful role of the media in social change.

Also, by closely studying the case of Al-Watania TV1 news, this paper has highlighted the role of the media as an influential democratization factor in Tunisia after the revolution. Not least that it is emerging as a platform for widening the scope of free speech and tools through which citizens learn democratic values. Along these

lines, one may argue that the most important role the media is expected to play in the first few years of the transition to democracy is to help reconstruct political and social values related to power sharing, peaceful political change, democratic rule and freedom of opinion. This entails a systematic reporting of political affairs in a neutral and impartial way and a routine treatment of the elected government and Constituent Assembly's activities in a transparent manner.

As discussed above, since 14 January 2011, Tunisia has witnessed a dramatic regime change and a historical transformation that has led to a democratic transitional complex period. While recovering from a long dictatorship rule of over fifty years and after more than four years of rebuilding the country's political system on the basis of liberal democratic values, the nascent democracy in Tunisia remains fragile yet most promising from amongst the Arab Spring countries. During this transitional period the media remain a sophisticated space of manipulation and power struggle between the emerging power structures in the country. The analysis of Al-Watania TV1 coverage and with reference to other independent media outlets during this period leads to the conclusion that the ideological battles between the Islamic tendency parties and their allies on the one hand and on the other the opposite coalition which includes Nida Tunis (mainly former Ben Ali's regime figures) in addition to few extreme left-wing parties have taken various dimensions. Most of this power struggle is taking place in public spaces and lots of it has also been happening on television screens, radio airwaves as well as social media networks.

During this transitional period covered in this study there existed an atmosphere of ideological tension in which the media are caught in the middle. The public service broadcasters were expected to clarify their position vis-a-vis the revolution of 14 January 2011. The public also expected the Al-Watania TV1, which in the past used to be mouthpiece of the Ben Ali regime, to become now reflection of the public concerns and in service of their interests. Analysis of the news coverage of Al-Watania TV1 however reveals that its news reporting has been characterised by an attempt to introduce alternative views by giving space to various political parties. Yet this opportunity for alternative interpretations is subtly politicized and ideologically oriented to favour opponents of the elected government especially figures from the previous regime apparatus. At these initial stages of democratic transition, public service broadcasting is meant to be reflective of a politically, culturally and economically diverse society. Also, the media at this stage should bring to the fore new leaders, promote new opportunities, contribute to the reform of the political, health, educational and economic systems in Tunisia. In sum, and along other private media outlets, Al-Watania TV1 can help drive the democratization process and the smooth transition to a fair and just society; from over fifty years of dictatorial rule to a new phase that can potentially lead to representative governance.

On a final note, one may argue that the media, especially public service broadcasting, can be considered the cornerstone of consolidating a democratic climate in an emerging democracy. The national TV broadcaster Al-Watania TV1 has been critically assessed in this paper as an example of the extent to which public service media can be seen as a stumbling block towards achieving the goals of the revolution thus delaying the country's smooth democratic transition. Results of the study have further pointed out to the conclusion that the national broadcaster has to some extent deviated, sometimes dangerously, from its role in serving all its viewers. It has also been considered poor in its professional standards of news reporting and ineffective in promoting national dialogue based on objectivity and impartiality. This research has further proven that the channel is sometimes ideologically manipulated by a minority group of journalists and editors who tend to keep tight control of its news room and other programming to serve their political ends. Tunisia's healthy transition to democracy cannot happen without an ideologically-free media which should constructively observe its watchdog role on politicians and influential power elites in society. One should recommend then that Al-Watania TV1 is one such public service broadcaster which needs structural reform in its editorial policy, journalism practice and professional standards to serve that very role. Worthy of a note here is that the Troika government, which ruled after the first democratic elections of 21 October 2011, realized, albeit late, the power of the media in potentially manipulating public opinion thus potentially hampering the democratic process. Hence the government's resistance to this sweeping effect has been sometimes characterized by ad-hoc and unorganized responses, and sometimes frustrated measures.

The liberalization of the media sector and the enchantment of the mushrooming media outlets from all types in the country have been hailed as one of the big achievements of the revolution. However this development in the media scenes has not been accompanied by a rigorous reform in the laws governing the sector and extensive training programs to change the culture of how the media should perform in a democracy. Regime change seems now the easiest task for all those who have been seeking reform. The real challenge is that the old regime forces, entrenched in the state bureaucracy, are still pulling the country back from making any palpable progress in this area. As argued by Anderson (1998: 481) '...democracy is not a deliberation but a contest that relies on the ability of the media to shape public opinion. The evidence for media effects is strong, but the media cannot be undermining a form of democracy that does not and cannot exist, and they do sustain the form that does'.

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# **New Media, New Participants – New Ethics ?**

## **Is there a chance for ethics in a world of prosumers ?**

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Over the last 10 years, the field of journalism has been going through a period of radical and rapid changes, owing to a combination of technological and journalistic innovation. Traditional journalism in mass media exists alongside a number of other practices that are similar to, rivalling and competing with it (Deuze, Bruns, & Neuberger, 2007). What is often described as most striking about this transformation is the new possibility for non-journalists to create and interact with journalistic content online (Bergström, 2008; Bruns, 2005; Bucy, 2004; Chu, 2010; Deuze, et al., 2007; Domingo et al., 2008; Gulbrandsen & Just, 2011; Paulussen & Ugille, 2008; Rebillard & Touboul, 2010). In our digital and networked society, “millions of people gather, organize and disseminate timely information every hour of every day” (Singer, 2006, p. 2). A number of terms exist that define various aspects and types of journalistic content produced – completely or partly – by non-journalists (for example; blogging, citizen journalism and collaborative- or contributory journalism). What has come to be known to scholars as “participatory journalism” makes it possible for everyone to participate in creating, sharing and discussing news within traditional and journalistically edited frameworks by, for example, commenting on and discussing published articles in online newspapers or upload photos of newsworthy events (Deuze, et al., 2007; Domingo, et al., 2008; Singer, 2011). A related phenomenon, online citizen journalism denotes a whole range of new online platforms that offer space for the publication of journalistic content produced predominantly by non-journalists (Bruns, 2008; Goode, 2009; Papandrea, 2007).

The terminology is still not crystal clear, and it is therefore sometimes difficult to know if a particular online publication (like the Swedish news-and-views website Sourze.se that mostly publishes articles written by its users, but is run by editors and has the appearance of an online newspaper) should be termed “participatory” or “citizen” journalism. However, the fact that journalistic content is being produced and published by nonprofessionals in various forms on the Internet, is undeniable

and poses new challenges as to how this kind of journalistic content should be viewed from an ethical perspective (Ward & Wasserman, 2010).

On the one hand, an article - for example containing a news report, or an interview - published at a participatory journalism website or a blog - represents some kind of journalism (Lasica, 2003). On the other hand, the professionalism that entails ethical responsibility towards employers, readers and society, is not a prerequisite for the creation of the content. How should one assess such content ethically? Are traditional journalistic codes of ethics appropriate yardsticks, or is it necessary to go beyond them? Which normative ethical values can it be expected to conform to?

I am concerned here with any type of UGC, published in any form on the Internet, whether social media, conventional websites or as contributions to other content that in any way poses as journalism (in a broad sense of the word, i.e. reporting on an event, interviews, book reviews, comments on articles in online newspapers). By posing, I mean self-reportedly appearing as journalism. Does posing as journalism entail the ethical responsibility of professional journalism?

A major tendency in research on public participation in the creation of news is to focus on the central question of how this may stimulate civic participation in the public debate by making it possible for users to actively take part in discussions and publish views or react to already published content (Deuze, et al., 2007; Dijk, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; Paulussen & Ugille, 2008; Rebillard & Touboul, 2010). From a general (western-democratic) ethical point of view, this is seen as beneficial for the health of democratic societies. Generally, the act of participating is therefore seen as something good – i.e. an act that by intention is aimed at taking part in the democratic task of determining how to shape a better world, or keep it from changing for the worse. However, as has become obvious through a plethora of scholarly studies, the possibility of becoming actively engaged in public discourse, and to contribute to the well-being of democracy has not been embraced by the crowds on the large scale that many hoped (Bergström, 2008; Hindman, 2009; Rebillard & Touboul, 2010; Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009). Those who actually participate, are in some studies found to be representatives for organisations, representing various interests, rather than “ordinary citizens” (Holt & Karlsson, 2011), and they seldom participate in the way that is expected from a normative democratic, deliberative ideal.

This paper aims to look at the ethical aspects of journalistic content produced by non-journalists. While some research into blogging ethics has been done (See for example Cenite, Detenber, Koh, Lim, & Ng Ee Soon, 2009; Koh et al.; Kuhn, 2007; Martin, 2007; Whitehouse, 2010), the field of more editorially controlled citizen- and participatory journalism sites – such as, for example Newsvine.com (USA), Newsmill.se (Sweden), Ohmynews.com (Korea) and Merinews.com (India) – is sparse. What

distinguishes these sites is that they are not merely incorporating user-generated content into their larger body of professionally produced news. Nor are they blogs which are typically written by individuals or smaller groups of people. Instead these sites can be characterised by their hybridity, mixing traditional online newspaper and blog content. They mainly publish articles written by non-New professionals, but are operated by editors and in many ways appear similar to traditional online newspapers in shape and form (Bruns, 2008). Although non-professional journalism is often described as free and editorially unconstrained, research has shown that editors often shape these publications in various ways (Holt & Karlsson, 2011; Rebillard & Touboul, 2010).

Professional journalism advocates argue that existing ethical codes now need to be expanded in order to tackle ethical issues, related to the new wealth of – especially personal – information available online (Whitehouse, 2010). Non-professional journalism constitutes a part of this new information, but tends to fall outside of the professional domain where ethical codes apply. This ethical no-mans-land, where journalism is practiced outside of the domain traditionally guided by solid and time proven guidelines, needs further scholarly attention (C. Lewis, 2012; Ward & Wasserman, 2010).

### **Professional and non-professional journalism ethics**

Virtually in all countries, traditional journalism is today characterized by a professionalism that entails subscription to a given set of principles, “a workable philosophy of and policies for the press” (Christians & Nordenstreng, 2004, p. 4), agreed upon by representatives of the profession (Hafez, 2002). These policies go further than merely stating what is illegal, and typically contain statements about the journalist’s responsibility in relation to society. Hence, they guide journalists ethically. For example, Hafez, who has studied ethical journalistic codes worldwide, found that “‘truth,’ ‘accuracy,’ and ‘objectivity’ are almost consensual cornerstones of journalism ethics as documented in professional codes” (Hafez, 2002, p. 228).

Arguably, this prevents far from all cases of unethical journalism, but it offers a standard of judgement, against the background of which it is possible to discuss cases of alleged unethical journalism. Ward & Wasserman (2010) characterize traditional media ethics as “closed”, meaning that it is intended to guide a small number of people, within the collective of journalists.

Content generated within the context of citizen- and participatory journalism is produced by people who are not (necessarily) under any obligation to follow such specifically professional journalistic codes of ethics. Nor do contributors interact with “journalistic cultures” within which professional journalistic ideology and ethics is approved and maintained collectively (Hanitzsch, 2007). Many citizen- and

participatory journalism outlets, however, like the Korean Ohmynews, and Swedish Newsmill, demand of contributors that they agree to a set of rules of conduct that has been written by the editors (Bruns, 2008; Holt, 2009; Woo-Young, 2005). But they are not required to abide by such rules and agreements, and the content of these rules might therefore differ arbitrarily from site to site. For example independent bloggers operate under conditions that differ from traditional journalism in the sense that they are not, in the end, obliged to make themselves accountable, or to live up to expectations of serving the public with the kind of trustworthy information that is required in order to keep democracy alive (Cenite, et al., 2009; Singer, 2006). Nor can they uphold adherence to ethical codes by, for example firing contributors that behave unethically (Perlmutter & Schoen, 2007). They may close abusive user accounts, but the risk-level is still not comparable to that of a professional journalist who risk hers/his career. Ethically difficult issues, such as publication of inappropriate material, inadequacy, unaccounted vested interests etc. obviously occur even in contexts where traditionally journalistic ethical codes do not apply (Ess, 2009; Hlavach & Freivogel, 2011; Perlmutter & Schoen, 2007; Singer, 2011; Singer & Ashman, 2009; Ward & Wasserman, 2010). Therefore, scholars need to analyse if there are alternative ways of dealing with these issues, and if so – how this is done. In light of the facts a) that professional journalism is challenged by non-professional journalism, and b) that these new forms of journalism sometimes fall outside the framework of professional journalism ethics and collectively agreed-upon codes, the question that this paper deals with in more detail is how do we understand participatory journalism from an ethical perspective?

### **Contrasting ways of understanding participatory journalism from an ethical perspective**

The relationship between professional and non-professional journalism also needs to be addressed here, since it is a relationship marked by “tension” (C. Lewis, 2012). New forms of journalism have sparked a lively scholarly debate about the nature and identity of traditional journalism – where the question of professionalism is highlighted as crucial (C. Lewis, 2012; Deuze, 2005, 2008; Singer, 2011; Singer & Ashman, 2009). What defines professional journalistic identity is, among other things, the very professionalism that entails obligation to aforementioned forms of ethical codes (C. Lewis, 2012; Ward & Wasserman, 2010). This is also what distinguishes professional journalism from newer forms (Singer, 2006). But, if this is the case, should these newer forms of journalism be measured and evaluated against standards that they, by definition, are excluded from? Furthermore, journalistic professionalism has since long been criticised for resulting in conformism, and the journalistic profession is often described by critics as controlled by strong traditions that counteract independence and pursuance of individually meaningful goals (Merrill, 1995). Here,

newer forms of journalism – because of the absence of professionalism – have been welcomed as possible venues for a less constrained journalistic expression (Blood, 2002; Bruns, 2005; Jenkins, 2006). In such settings, issues can be addressed and discussed by engaged citizens, even if they do not conform to demands of journalistic routines, newsworthiness, media-logic and gatekeeping procedures. In other words, participatory- and citizen journalism can be characterized by the possibilities they offer due to its lack of professionalism. Hence, it could be argued that this type of journalistic content should be seen as something other than, and separate from, traditional journalism.

On the other hand, in the case of participatory journalism, where user generated content is published in traditional online news outlets, it is also arguable that professional journalistic principles still should apply (Hlavach & Freivogel, 2011). Ward & Wasserman (2010) propose that the “fact that citizens now act, at least some of the time, as journalists means the intended users of ethics broadens to all users of media insofar as their tweets, blog comments, and social media sites affect others” (Ward & Wasserman, 2010, p. 281). They propose the development of a new, and “open” media ethics, that will not only guide all citizens engaged in publishing content, but also be open to discussion among wider sections, than the traditional circle of professional media practitioners.

This discussion will treat two distinct approaches to the ethics of participatory journalism, for reasons I hope will become apparent. I will here call them 1) traditional elitism and 2) the participatory ethics of collective intelligence. The rest of this paper will be devoted to a more thorough description and problematization of these two views.

### **Traditional elitism**

“Closed” media ethics, according to Ward & Wasserman, is, and has been largely supported within the community of journalists (Ward & Wasserman, 2010). This has to do with two things: a) a fear that “inviting the public into the discussion might reduce their editorial autonomy”, and b) that “ordinary citizens lack the newsroom experience needed to properly discuss editorial matters” (Ward & Wasserman, 2010, pp. 279-280). An extreme version of this view is found in Keen’s *The cult of the amateur* (2008). In this book, Keen discusses the dangers of dilettante participatory culture that, according to him, are often obscured in the ongoing debate.

One of the problems regarding content produced by non-journalists – especially comments – is the question of who is actually responsible for what is said. Singer et al. (2011) investigated how participatory journalism was dealt with in online newspapers in ten different countries, and in all countries, there was still uncertainty about who is legally liable for the user-generated content that is published. The

same was true of ethical responsibility, and different newspapers approached the question of what to allow with different strategies, as visible in their moderation and fact checking strategies (Singer, 2011). The ethical problems here become more related to how much resources the company is willing to spend on managing user generated content. Moderating comments to articles is typically time consuming and costly. It must therefore be motivated by the value it adds to the publication. In many cases, the decision has been to scale down or simply shut it down after trying to include it for a while (Thurman & Hermida, 2010). Recently, the online version of the Swedish tabloid *Expressen* ([expressen.se](http://expressen.se)) decided to close the commentary function all together, a decision announced by Thomas Mattsson, the editor in chief, on his blog, under the headline “Goodbye to rumours and lies” [my translation] (Mattsson, 2012). The two most prominently problematic ethical issues for journalists involved with UGC found by Singer et al. (2011) were “unknown provenance” – especially when information might originate from unidentified politicians or companies – and “abusive content” (Singer, 2011).

In Sweden, like in many other countries, a system of self-regulation is practiced, covering all commercial printed newspapers. Since 2011, the ethical guidelines formulated by the press council, applies also to online newspapers and related social media, given that the company that publishes them is represented in the press council (Pressombudsman, 2011). In other words, it is voluntary for other online publications to join the ethical system. This (although half-hearted) attempt to include newer forms of participatory journalism under the umbrella of traditional journalism ethics, can be seen as an example of what C. Lewis describes as “a mind-set of content control” that he argues “remains an enduring impediment to journalists’ capacity to change their perceptions and practices in the digital age” (C. Lewis, 2012, p. 10). Rather than inviting open participation on its own terms, the institutions of traditional journalism try to extend their influence over what – and how – news are published into the realm of participatory journalism online. C. Lewis interprets this reflex as a symptom of the need to further establish the primacy of journalism as a profession, and to maintain that what it produces is valuable to society. Ward & Wasserman (2010) would perhaps call this a way of keeping the “closed” media ethics closed.

This tendency to transfer a journalistic norm onto newer media has been visible in the discussion about blogs and ethics. The first attempts to suggest common ethical codes for bloggers, were based on journalistic ones. Jonathan Dube, for example, proposed a code that stresses honesty, fairness, accountability and minimizing harm (Dube, 2003). Rebecca Blood’s early weblog handbook has a chapter on ethics, also suggesting common guidelines such as truth and accuracy, transparency (the importance of linking to referenced material) and disclosing conflicts of interest (Blood, 2002). Kuhn (2007) went further and suggested that such a code should

start in a dialogue with bloggers instead of a normative journalistic view. He looked to “identify those values held most deeply by those who choose to blog regardless of the specific functions they perform” (Kuhn, 2007, p. 21). His C.O.B.E. (code of blogging ethics) was developed on a blog that was set up explicitly to invite input from other bloggers. The code contains some notions that are similar to journalistic ethical codes (for example transparency and truth) but contains other imperatives that are more related to specific features of the blogosphere, for example by promoting interactivity: “Visit and post on other blogs” (Kuhn, 2007, p. 33). However, lessons from research into blogging ethics suggest a “less-than-enthusiastic support ” for blogging codes of ethics, even among bloggers who aspire to serve large audiences with news (Cenite, et al., 2009, p. 591). In part, this is due to the fact that many bloggers view the very idea of imposing rules as antithetical to the point of writing blogs in the first place. Therefore, looking at, for example, blogging from an ethical perspective that is derived from the needs of the journalistic function is problematic.

In sum, traditional, “elitist” journalistic response to participatory journalism evaluates the new form of journalism according to the ethical norms of traditional “closed” journalism (Ward & Wasserman, 2010). It questions the new form of journalism’s ability to live up to the time proven quality mark of journalistic professionalism. For example, Mats Bergstrand (former editor of the single most important traditional debate forum in Sweden : “DN-debatt” in the largest Swedish morning paper *Dagens Nyheter*) suggested that the “barefoot-journalism” produced at participatory debate-sites was a threat to representative democracy. People without journalistic training lack the competence and resources necessary to do a good critical job. This could, according to such a view, lead to such a low quality of public discourse that it is questionable whether media’s role as fourth estate will function (Holt & Krogh, 2010). This sort of reaction – called “segregationist view” – to participatory journalism, from representatives of traditional journalists, was found among the interviewees in a study by Singer et al. (2011). The segregationist view among journalists working with participatory content sees users mostly as sources, and stresses the need for journalists to control what is published. The fact that “participatory journalism does not follow professional rules and structures” is seen as a possible threat to the journalistic profession if it is not retained and controlled (Singer, 2011, p. 170).

### **Participatory ethics of collective intelligence**

At the other end of the spectrum, and at the opposing pole of the “tension” that characterised the relationship between professional and participatory journalism, is the idealistic vision of the “wisdom of the crowds” (Surowiecki, 2004). Ward & Wasserman (2010) use the phrase “Peer-to-Peer ethics”, which means that ethical self-regulation “takes place outside the professional realm between citizens and journalists

themselves”, for example through comments on blog posts, or responses to Tweets. Many scholars and commentators writing about the emerging participatory and convergent media culture have drawn on the philosophy of “collective intelligence”, as described by French cyber-philosopher Pierre Lévy (Bruns, 2008; C. Lewis, 2012; Jenkins, 2006). Lévy’s vision about “collective intelligence” was a vision about a nearby future, in which citizens could participate in the political communication-process in other ways than merely as voters. The “virtual Agora” would not only be a digital platform for on-line civic deliberation and democratic participation ; it would also help individuals to tailor their political identities by allowing plurality and independence from constraining party-identities. It would help ordinary citizens “introduce new questions, construct new arguments, and formulate independent positions on a wide range of topics” (Lévy, 1997, p. 65). Political identity would be shaped by “contributions to the construction of a political landscape that was perpetually in flux” and by support for various problems, positions and arguments, rather than identification with a specific party, ideology or politician.

This view employs a different set of ethics than those of traditional journalism. Here, the ethics of “collective intelligence”, that Lévy connects to the “social movement of cyberculture” is at play (Lévy & Council of Europe, 2001). Talking about virtual communities, for example, Lévy argues that participants have “developed a strong sense of social morality, a set of customary, though unwritten, laws that govern their relations” (Lévy & Council of Europe, 2001, p. 108). While journalistic ethics deal more with ideals of truth, accuracy, objectivity and fairness, the ethics of collective intelligence – as it is loosely described by Lévy – is foremost concerned with the following five notions (Lévy & Council of Europe, 2001, p. 108):

**Hospitality.** Since “virtual space is one of constantly shifting significations and problems”, Frohman explains, Lévy means that “we take on the attributes of nomads, constantly wandering but never settling stable territories as we did in previous anthropological spaces. Because hospitality is necessary to create and maintain the social bond of a humanity constantly on the move, it is a nomadic virtue” (Frohmann, 2000).

**Autonomy.** This is related to a strong sense of freedom of speech, and consequently opposition to censorship, or other forms of regulation (such as, in the case of bloggers, codes of ethics).

**Reciprocity.** If you gain from the information provided by others, you are also expected to contribute information, when it can be useful for others.

**Pertinence of information.** Pertinence has to do with avoiding “wasting other people’s time”, for example by asking questions to a forum that has already been answered.

**Openness towards alterity**, Lévy explains, is manifested by the tendency that attacks or insults towards certain groups or individuals are “generally unacceptable”, in virtual communities, and normally result in the offender being excluded by the system administrator.

The ethics of collective intelligence, as explained by Lévy, is clearly related to the goal of unleashing the potential of the collective, to solve common tasks or achieve common goals, without unnecessary conflicts. As Lévy puts it “interconnectivity for the purpose of interactivity is supposed to be beneficial, regardless of the hardware, individuals involved, and the places or times when we connect” (Lévy & Council of Europe, 2001). After closer scrutiny, however, Frohmann describes the ethics of collective intelligence as reducing “ethics” to the mere “etiquette of polite conversation” (Frohmann, 2000, p. 7). The problem with Lévy’s ethics, according to Frohmann is “the disembodiment characteristic” of the “angelic social relations he champions throughout his book”, which “shifts ethics to a realm where moral agents need not acknowledge their bodily dependence on one another, for having donned their angelic bodies, they have left the source of that dependence far behind” (Frohmann, 2000, p. 7).

There were many others who formulated similar visions before the IT-bubble burst. The Internet was originally intended to serve mankind as a free and open “universe of network accessible information” (Berners-Lee, 1996). Instead, it soon became increasingly exploited by commercial enterprise, the interactive possibilities were not taken advantage of –resulting in most webpages becoming new channels of one way communication. The Internet did not live up to the expectations of interactivity, participation, openness and democratic development. The web 2.0, is often described as a grassroots reaction against this tendency. Lévy’s ideas are often invoked as a philosophical foundation for participatory culture and continue to have a significant impact on the academic interpretation of the development since some herald a new age characterized by interaction, dialogue, participation and equality, resonant of Lévy’s vision (Jenkins 2006). In descriptions of the culture of participation that is supposedly emerging, the audience is said to no longer tolerate being reduced into passive receivers - they want to interact, customize, interfere and be taken seriously. They can and want to be able to influence by pooling their resources in collective efforts to promote change (Jenkins, 2006). There is a risk that the ideals and hopes will influence the interpretation of the communication in these new, convergent and participatory media forms and might hinder a more sober and critical analysis. Among some scholars, there is a tendency to assume that participation is in itself good, and that attempts to control it 1) hinder the democratic potential of new technology to be realised, and 2) try to stop something unavoidable. Writing about the “struggle between the professional logic of control, embedded

in journalism's ideology, and the participatory logic of free engagement", and the lingering "aversion [among journalists] to opening up meaningful phases of the news processes", C. Lewis proposes a "hybrid resolution of the professional-participatory tension" that moves away from "'journalism' and its professional exclusivity, and toward 'information' and its openness as a way of seeking the wisdom of the crowd" (C. Lewis, 2012, p. 16). In other words, if journalists would let some of their control over what gets published go, in favour of a way of working that more fully embraces participatory aspects of digital journalism, an "ethic of participation" will somehow emerge as a result.

My point is, that this view is idealistic in the sense that it assumes that people who choose to participate in journalism, will somehow be inclined to follow this, probably well established, but still not codified or institutionalised participatory ethics. And even if they do, it is still necessary to go beyond "netiquette", in order to answer the question if posing as journalism entails the ethical responsibility of professional journalism. Roger Silverstone has described the tendency to assume that the technology will somehow make people moral, and that people will want this:

*the morality that media and communications technologies enable is easy, and often, presumed to be a function of their capacity to connect. That is what they do. They bring us together. And that connection is sufficient, it is said, for us to relate to each other as human, moral, beings. It is transcendent. It is all we need (Silverstone, 2004, p. 17).*

This is a tendency that is visible in some of the literature that deals with convergence culture and participatory journalism. When Axel Bruns describes the "produsage model of citizen journalism", which is obviously inspired by the idea of "collective intelligence", he states that it is "significantly better suited to the open exploration and evaluation of societal issues and events, to discussion, debate, and deliberation on their implications, than is the corporate journalistic model" (Bruns, 2008). Furthermore, Bruns claims that there is a "strong desire by citizens to engage significantly more actively in politics and society, and that the more passive role bestowed on audiences by the mass media was never a conscious choice of wide sections of the citizenry, but instead simply a by-product of the predominant media technologies of the day" (Bruns, 2008, p. 90). Finally, he states, "the change and transformation of traditional journalism towards a greater embrace of and partnership with produsage-based citizen journalism must surely be seen as inevitable" (Bruns, 2008, p. 92).

These statements are illustrative of a way of thinking that assumes how people will behave on the basis of the how the technology might enable them. Also, they show clearly how this assumed development, is seen as inevitable. Although admitting

that “Too often, we have fallen into the trap of seeing democracy as an ‘inevitable’ outcome of technological change”(p. 93), Henry Jenkins’ idea of convergence culture, still tends to rely on assumptions about how new technology will be used for participation: “Right now, we are mostly using this collective power through our recreational life, but soon we will be deploying those skills for more ‘serious’ purposes” (Jenkins, 2008, pp. 293-294). These quotes, I argue, illustrate an over-belief in the moral qualities of participatory technology. There is, at least between the lines, an underlying belief that just because the technology is there, it is only a matter of time before its proper, moral and liberating potential will be realised, once people start using it, and once traditional media start embracing it. This is, as Ward & Wasserman point out, “not only naïve; it also adopts a technologically determinist position which disregards the way technologies support rather than replace existing social relations and power dimensions” (Ward & Wasserman, 2010).

Examples abound on the Internet, of a darker side of participation. After all, groups of people could well – and do – pool their resources, collaborate in networks, produce, share and edit content that is aimed at achieving common goals that are genuinely evil. The most striking example of this is the Wikipedia-like dictionary Metapedia.org. It has borrowed its collaborative and participatory structure, way of working and even layout from Wikipedia. But it has a “*metapolitical* purpose, to influence the mainstream debate, culture and historical view” by providing an alternative version of the world, one that is in correspondence with racist ideology. If one looks up the term “Holocaust”, for example, the definition is revisionist and states that it is a fraudulent term used to spread “germanophobia”. The network behind Metapedia is clearly working according to the principles of collective intelligence. But it is highly unlikely that just because they do so, they will eventually realise the deep immorality of this sort of attempt to deceive, and correct themselves. The ethical judgement of such content must depend on the underlying purpose of publishing it, and not on how the people work. In order to be able to deem it unethical, there must exist criteria. Collective intelligence does not offer such criteria. Even Wikipedia has apparent problems with users, such as the Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik, who was found to be among the contributors of the Norwegian site. At Wikipedia, collective intelligence will perhaps – sooner or later – work to correct erroneous statements once they are discovered by better-informed peers, but this is an assumption, not a guarantee. From an ethical point of view, such assumptions remain problematic.

### **Discussion – Is there a chance for ethics in a world of prosumers ?**

I have argued that thinking ethically about participatory journalism, either from a traditionally journalistic and professional point of view, or from the perspective of

the ideal of collective intelligence, falls short of providing us with a framework that is fruitful. Applying traditional journalistic ethical norms to participatory journalism is problematic because it fails to acknowledge it for what it is, namely something other than professional journalism, and something that is valued by its practitioners for being an alternative to traditional media. On the other hand, assuming that participatory journalism will spontaneously guide itself according to the ethics of collective intelligence, is equally problematic. Firstly, because the assumption lacks empirical backing, and secondly because it lacks a normative core, and has more to do with etiquette, than the ethical.

It is, as Zygmunt Bauman puts it, “all too easy to expose other people’s hopes as not firmly enough founded” (Bauman, 1994, p. 35). It is more difficult to propose an alternative. But I will at least try to see what happens, if we disregard both fears and hopes, and look at participatory journalism for what it is, but without idealistic assumptions. I argue that it involves shifting focus from journalistic professional ideals and ideals about collective intelligence, those who choose to participate. I am partly inspired here by Ward & Wasserman’s notion of an “ethics that is the concern of all citizens” (Ward & Wasserman, 2010), because they acknowledge the difficulties involved in the project of a more “open” media ethics. But the main source of inspiration is found in the works of Zygmunt Bauman and Roger Silverstone (both draw from Immanuel Levinas).

The view I would like to propose does not take journalistic notions of ethics into account as yardstick for discussing content produced by non-professionals posing as journalists. Nor does it make assumptions about online participation in general. Instead it implies taking seriously a situation, described by Bauman as the postmodern one, in which individuals find themselves relentlessly alone, surrounded by a “vexing shortage of firm and reliable orientation points, trustworthy guides” (Bauman, 2008; p. 26). Moving from the realm of traditional journalism ethics – where professional ethical rules act as a form of “procedural rationality” (p. 5), and therefore as “firm and reliable orientation points” – and into participatory journalism, means – in a quite literal way – to enter a postmodern state of “permanent uncertainty” (p. 52).

According to Bauman, the “call to love thy neighbour as thyself”, is the fundamental ethical demand for a civilized society, but at the same time paradoxically “contrary to the kind of reason that such civilization promotes: the reason of self-interest, of pursuit of happiness” (Bauman, 2008). Bauman, building his argument on Immanuel Levinas and Knud Løgstrup, finds the foundation for the practice of a response to such an ethical demand in the notion of discovering the “indomitable and impenetrable transcendental otherness of the Other” (Bauman, 2008, p. 40). In the words of Roger Duncan, Levinas teaches that :

*“before the ‘I am’ draws itself up and decides about what to do, there is the lam-in-the-thrall-of-the-other, the self as orientation, a relation to another that is much more like a captivity than a dialogue. In this relation I am only as given over to the recognition of the majesty and the poverty of the other” (Duncan, 2002, pp. 110-111).*

In other words, to embrace the alterity of the other, and through that understand one's self in relation to the Other. It is from such a meeting between the I and the face of the Other, that the ethical demand to unconditionally love your neighbour emanates. This demand is unconditional in the sense that even if the Other fails to love me, I still have the unlimited responsibility to love the Other. It does not depend on “reciprocity” (Silverstone, 2004). Furthermore, it necessarily invokes the notion of proximity. And this is what Silverstone has pointed out as a crucial question of ethics in the digital age. His notion of “proper distance” is designed to help us in the task of relating to others in a digital world, where encounters with neighbours and strangers are disembodied. In contrast to Lévy's “angelic” vision of disembodied interconnectivity, Silverstone points out the crucial fact that mediated content necessarily is meaningful, because it is created by flesh and blood humans, and will affect Others, even if they are not in our physical proximity (Silverstone, 2004). In relation to participatory journalism, the ethical demand that emanates from the Face of the Other, should guide everyone towards participating in such a way that it is first and foremost in the service of our neighbours. Furthermore, the “distance”, part in Silverstone's dictum, also points to a respect for the otherness of Others, in the sense that we are encouraged not to try and change the Other, to become like ourselves. Observing proper distance in participatory journalism therefore means a) to act on the unconditional demand to care for Others, and b) to respect the otherness of Others. Further elaboration of the implications of this in a more detailed manner, lies beyond the scope of this paper.

The problem with this idea is that it works best so long as there are only two. The introduction of more Others, complicates the situation and introduces the dilemma of priority. Even more so, on a larger societal scale, Bauman asks: “Is the ethics born and cultivated inside the moral party of two fit to be transplanted into the imagined community of human society and, further, into the imagined global community of humanity?” (Bauman, 2008, p. 24). His answer is pessimistic, because the “society of consumers”, that shapes life in “liquid modernity”, has had consequences for how morality is lived by most citizens. One of the impacts modernity, and the society of producers, had on society was, as Bauman has shown, a tendency to control people from above by making societal and professional ethical rules for subjects to follow. This had the – partial, but considerable - effect of taking away from the individual the responsibility to decide for her/him-self what is right and good. Instead, people

were, so to speak, relieved of the burden of determining what is ethical in any given situation, and could live a life according to protocol. For the most part, this had the effect of preventing the Hobbesian *Bellum omnium contra omnes*, but in some cases, it allowed terrible atrocities being performed by subjects, who were unquestioningly doing their duty, and hence, felt no guilt, because they were just doing what they were supposed to do.

With the shift from a producer society to the “liquid-modern society of consumers” (and the associated privatization and deregularisation), “larger chunks of human conduct” was released from “coercive patterning, supervision, and policing, and relegating ever larger numbers of previously socialized functions to the realm of individual ‘life politics’” (Bauman, 2008, p. 49). This resulted in the burden of taking responsibility for one’s choices (as they mostly had to do with “consumerist concerns and pursuits”) was again placed on the individual’s shoulders. It is here that the predicament of postmodern ethics appear : “Once shifted over (or abandoned) to individuals, the task of ethical decision making becomes overwhelming, as the stratagem of hiding behind a recognized and apparently indomitable authority, one that vouches to remove the responsibility (or at least a significant part of it) from their shoulders, is no longer a viable or reliable option” (Bauman, 2008, pp. 51-52). On the other hand, when Bauman writes: “The concepts of responsibility and responsible choice, which used to reside in the semantic field of ethical duty and moral concern for the Other, have moved or have been shifted to the realm of self-fulfilment and calculation of risks” (Bauman, 2008, p. 45), he describes a situation that is typical of the “consumer society”.

Participatory journalism can be seen as an example of what is sometimes described as a shift in society from consumption, towards “prosumption” (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). In the web 2.0 era, when journalism is not only produced and consumed (although participatory journalism is a lot older than web 2.0), but increasingly prosumed, Bauman’s analysis of liquid modernity’s consumer individualism, and its negative effect on people’s inclination to put moral responsibility for the Other before personal comforts and projects, takes on a new dignity. In journalism, the shift from consumption to prosumption involves leaving the private, and entering into participation in public matters. Whether or not this affects those who participate, and stimulates a sense of responsibility for others, remains an open question. Nevertheless, it is necessary to deal with the task of identifying normative qualifiers that apply outside of professional ethics.

When trying to find a way of looking at participatory journalism from an ethical point of view, we need to leave aside traditional journalistic norms. Participatory journalism, I argue, exists because it offers its practitioners and consumers an alternative to traditional journalism. Therefore, it should also be considered as

something else. Trying to extend traditional systems of media ethics and self-regulation to include newer forms of journalism, would only serve to impose a logic on that field which is – in some respects – alien to it. On the other hand, hopes about collective intelligence and “peer-to-peer” ethics, seem overly optimistic, given the many depressing examples of how many of those who choose to participate in news-making, do things that are unquestionably unethical.

Traditional journalism ethics, as well as the ethics of collective intelligence, are ethics that are related to function. Journalism is governed by codes that emanate from the central function media has in society. The ethics of collective intelligence are concerned with facilitating the function of collaboration between temporary constellations of individuals. If we look at the function of participatory journalism, it must be viewed from a broader societal perspective, as an expression of citizenship. And since the reach of today’s media is global, one is faced with the challenge of a “global ethics discourse” (Ward & Wasserman, 2010). In this context, Ward & Wasserman has pointed out the need to move towards “normative guidelines” in the discussion about how such a global ethics discourse should take shape.

They suggest accuracy, truth-seeking, sincerity, and hospitality, as virtues that should be underlined as providing guidance (Ward & Wasserman, 2010). I agree that it is necessary to be normative in order to be able to distinguish between the ethical and the unethical. I also fully agree that these virtues are good and worthwhile. They are, however, as they admit themselves, merely inviting participants to follow such a suggestion. In a global context, these virtues might not be viewed as self-evident in all corners of the world, where perhaps other, well-meaning virtues would be preferred (Ess, 2009). What I argue, is that the closest we can get to an ethical demand that is binding for all, is the demand to love your neighbour that emanates from Levinas’ notion of the “Face of the Other”. The strength of this demand is that it resists the loophole of subjectivity, for it is more than a suggestion.

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# Introduction

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