| RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Study of Media Evolution and its Integral Role in Shaping Political Dynamics in the Arab World: The Case Study of Al Jazeera Network

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| ABSTRACT

This article delves into the transformative journey of media within the Arab world and its profound impact on shaping political dynamics. By tracing the evolution of media, this research explores the pivotal role media has played in influencing public opinion, political discourse, and governance structures. Through an interdisciplinary approach encompassing media studies, political science, and cultural analysis, the study examines the intricate interplay between media innovation and socio-political change. This study focuses on the Arab Spring as a pivotal moment in the recent history of the Arab world, investigating the transformative role of media in shaping political dynamics during these tumultuous events. By examining Al Jazeera network as a case study and offering insights into the evolving landscape of the Arab political scene and media, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between media evolution and political transformation in the region.

| KEYWORDS

Media, politics, Arab world, television, Al Jazeera

1. Introduction

Media, being a pervasive force in contemporary societies, has become an indispensable tool for shaping perceptions, disseminating information, and influencing public discourse. Its evolution has been marked by dynamic shifts in technology, access, and content, each leaving an indelible imprint on the way individuals engage with information (Briggs & Burke, 2005). The rapid shift from print to digital platforms revolutionized content distribution, enabling real-time updates, multimedia integration, and global accessibility. This transition not only affected traditional media but also gave rise to online journalism and digital publications. Televised media has embraced digital platforms and social media as integral components of audience engagement. Television shows and networks now leverage social media for real-time interaction with viewers, audience feedback, and promotion. Additionally, digital platforms have become essential distribution channels for content, allowing for a global reach beyond traditional broadcast boundaries (Briggs & Burke, 2005).

Investigating the role of media in holding political entities accountable, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) discuss how media can serve as a watchdog in a democracy. Their work emphasizes the importance of a well-informed citizenry for maintaining political accountability. Bagdikian's seminal work (2004) in "The New Media Monopoly" discusses how concentrated media ownership can impact the diversity of voices in the public sphere and influence political narratives. The Arab Spring serves as a poignant case study in understanding the transformative role of media during political upheavals. Howard and Hussain (2013) analyze the impact

of social media in mobilizing protests and disseminating information, illustrating how media can play a catalytic role in shaping the course of political events.

The process of political socialization, as explored by Zollman Fergus et al. (2014), investigates how media contributes to the formation of political attitudes and beliefs. Through a longitudinal study, the authors demonstrate the enduring impact of media exposure on individuals' political values, pointing to the media's role as a key agent in the socialization process. Levendusky and Malhotra's research (2016) investigates the relationship between media consumption and political polarization. This explores how exposure to ideologically slanted media contributes to the intensification of political divisions.

Central to this investigation are one pivotal event in the recent history of the Arab world, that of the Arab Spring. The events of the Arab Spring serve as focal points for understanding the transformative role played by the media in shaping political dynamics, influencing public opinion, and even restructuring governance paradigms. Television possesses an unparalleled ability to reach diverse audiences and shape collective narratives (Burstein, 2003). Its visual and auditory elements engage viewers on a profound level, making it a potent tool for conveying information, shaping public opinion, and influencing cultural dynamics. Al Jazeera is considered to be the first Arabic media outlet that marked the first real shift away from the dominance of western media. Throughout the years, Al Jazeera proved to be a perfect example of the power that media has on shaping the political scene, a power that is enhanced by the creation of virtual communities via television and the Internet (Seib,2008). The network also has a significant role in Qatar foreign policy. Policies in issues related to conflicts between countries are affecting and affected by the network coverage.

In this article, we delve into the nuanced world of televised media, exploring its historical development, technological advancements, and the profound impact it has had on politics in the Arab world. Employing an interdisciplinary lens that combines media studies and analysis of the changing shifts in the Arab political and media scene, our research delves into the multifaceted relationship between media innovation and the reshaping of political landscapes. Through a nuanced examination of these critical junctures, our study seeks to unravel the complexities of how media, as both a reflection and a driver of societal change, contributes to the evolution of the political scene within the Arab region.

2. History and Evolution of Media

Media was initially used to refer to print media. The history of media in the western world, and in the entire world, is usually indicated by Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the mechanical movable-type printing press in the 15th century (Briggs & Burke, 2005). Before that, books were handwritten, difficult to reach, and almost impossible to access by the public. This invention was an important factor in the emergence of different cultural movements in Europe, and around the world afterward. The impact of the machine was further powered by Friedrich Koenig's high-speed steam-powered printing press in the 18th century, which doubled media production. In 1833, Richard Hoe invented the modern rotary press, which contributed in increasing accessibility to newspapers for mass readers. In the 15th century, the printing revolution led to the production of the first newspaper in Germany in 1605.

The next important step in the evolution of media was the creation of the daily newspapers, which went hand in hand with the Americans' style of living. In the 19th century, newspapers helped in covering the rapid changes that happened in the world. In that period, media provided the needed entertainment for people who asked for it. It also helped in forming a sense of belonging and a national identity for the people in the US (Anderson, 1991), as it treated its readers as one community sharing similar perspectives and common interests.

In the 20th century, being the first nonprint medium, radio became widely favorable. A great number of people had the ability to be informed and entrained by listening to the same segment in their own house (Briggs & Burke, 2005). Guglielmo Marconi developed the first wireless radio, a system that was primarily used in military communication, and then was part of peoples' homes. The telegraph was also an important invention for the progress of communication, as different information from different distant places became accessible. This has contributed to the emergence of wireless communication and the other different media forms afterward.

These earliest forms of non-print mass media contributed to many changes in society: increase in products consumption, accessibility to illiterate audiences, and creation of a sense of belonging. They were also one of the important factors and indirect factors of important political and historical events. The development of media was also due to the development of new photographic technologies in the 19th century, which helped in introducing a new media form: televised media.

After the end of World War II, television was introduced. In this period, the United States became the leading country in media development. Sitcoms, news, and live coverage were the most-watched and dominant segments on television in the US. Television represented an advanced medium for reaching all Americans and advertising the perfect and wanted American life. It contributed

in drawing the image of the good American citizen that conforms to certain ideologies aiming to create a homogeneous lifestyle and beliefs system.

The technological advances in video and audio recording in the 1950s and the 1960s gave access to increased coverage of political news. In the 1950s, Dwight D. Eisenhower's use of television in his campaign elevated the role of television in politics, as he, among other televised activities, held the first presidential press conference covered on television, making it a regular medium throughout his presidency. This contributed to changing political communication and introducing media advisers to the political scene. The marketing of politics and politicians via television started with Eisenhower and continued to expand with John F. Kennedy.

During the 1950s, television increasingly became a part of the political scene. Political news coverage was unprecedented. In 1952, presidential candidates addressed their voters via television. The debate that took place on September 26, 1960, between Richard M. Nixon and John F. Kennedy was one of the prominent debates in the history of American politics, not due to its content, but due to the medium by which it was covered. The televised debate changed the course of American politics and world politics in general.

The image that the two politicians presented to the audience, their political views but also their appearances, greatly impacted the public opinion. They used television to win votes, present their agendas, and validate their policies. The televised images were very powerful, which was shown in the significant influence they had on the results of the elections: J.F Kennedy won the viewers' trust and the voters' voices. This introduced what is now known as showbiz politics.

Knowing that television was by his side, Kennedy kept utilizing television to present the image that Americans wanted to see. He gave his inauguration address on television and delivered speeches to the public. Television was a means by which he won the trust of the people and kept his credibility. However, the power of television was also shown in capturing his weaknesses as well as America's. The coverage of racial violence in 1963 enabled these problems to be public for viewers. The pressure that television imposed on Kennedy was clearly seen and not easy to be avoided. He responded by announcing the civil rights legislation, once again on television. Television did not just influence voters' decisions, but also, electoral campaigns, strategies of communication, and political representations.

Another historic example of the interlinked relation that media and politics have is the resignation of President Richard Nixon. The resignation, which came as a result of the Watergate scandal, was covered by a large number of media channels, both televised and written. The coverage of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, Washington Post reporters who uncovered different pieces of evidence, led to further investigation of President Nixon. The role of the media as a Watchdog for government, politicians, and institutions.

At first, war coverage by the media was highly censored and clearly controlled by governments. During World War II, mediated news went through a selection phase as the military decided what to be broadcasted and what to stay uncovered. This later changed as networks got more access and freedom to cover different parts of the war and provided Americans with more realistic representations of the war, erasing by that the happy and cheery image media provided before. One of the first prominent and direct political impacts that television had on its audience is related to the coverage of the Vietnam War, which was referred to as 'the television war'.

The broadcasting of the Vietnam War divided the American national unity, as it showed the viewers actual scenes of the war and allowed them to see soldiers' suffering. Opinions against the war were expressed as many believed the war to be unnecessary and not as noble as they had believed. On the other hand, many supporters of the war saw it as a battle that needed to be fought. The televised images of war and massacres led to changes in the actual policies of the American government, a testament to the early stages of television power. An example of this is the US troops withdrawal after the election of Richard Nixon and the adaptation of his policy of Vietnamization. President Lyndon B. Johnson's statement in 1968 demonstrates the power television held and holds in the political scene:

> As I sat in my office last evening, waiting to speak, I thought of the many times each week when television brings the war into the American home. No one can say exactly what effect those vivid scenes have on American opinion. Historians must only guess at the effect that television would have had during earlier conflicts on the future of this Nation: during the Korean war, for example, at that time when our forces were pushed back there to Pusan; of World War II, the Battle of the Bulge, or when our men were slugging it out in Europe or when most of our Air Force was shot down that day in June 1942 off Australia. (cited in Mandelbaum, 1982, p.157)

Contrary to the beginning of its emergence, the role of television was not just to entertain and inform, but also to reflect on real-life events and to create an impact on the receiver. The coverage of the Vietnam War created an internal conflict between Americans, as many supported the war while others were against it. For the first time, people were able to see moving images of

conflicts and war broadcasted into their living rooms. This has helped in the emergence of a counterculture that expanded throughout the world. After that, television was not just a medium for propagandizing high culture but also contributing to the emergence of the counterculture, the 1960s counterculture as an example.

The invention of television has been a milestone in Media history (McLuhan, 1964). The emergence of cable television in the 1990s was another step in expanding the impact of television, although it decreased the homogeneous representation and impact on the audience. The unlimited channels gave the audience the chance to watch different content.

Television depends on the visual. The use of a picture can go a long way to give a direct message that is intended for a particular audience. These images of politicians convey clear emotions and actions that are often interpreted in the way the televised network see suitable. The choices of the images are also often indicators of the network ideology and are based on that. Videos do more than pictures in the sense that we see movement and speech that shape the way we perceive the politician and receive political news.

3. Studies, Concepts, and Theories on Media's Impact

The interest in media studies has grown since World War II with much focus on sociological and socio-psychological studies of media, media effects, and audience theories. Media texts on the other hand have not given the same amount of attention. Yet, media texts have proved to be at the core of all mass media studies analysis and media effects studies. Analysing media discourse, using different approaches and methodologies, gives a great insight into the way media shapes society and influences individuals. This lack of interest in media texts solely is also due to the fact that, till the 1970s, linguistic grammar did not pay much attention to texts as a whole but focused only on the unit of sentences, not taking into consideration the other linguistic components and the different levels of texts. Given the growing revolution of media, mass communication theories have changed in a rapid manner. New theories have been introduced and new methods of research are continuously developing. Media affects societies and individuals, as Croteau and Hoynes (2003) state:

> Virtually all forms of mass media – radio, television, movies, music, and the Internet – are standard targets, attacked by politicians from different political perspectives selling certain messages and worldviews. Thus, mass media can be understood in ideological terms, as forms of communication that privilege certain sets of ideas and neglect or undermine others. Therefore, Media are, without doubt, agents of the powerful, and, the ideas of the powerful are imposed on readers or viewers. Media are cultural sites where the ideas of the powerful are circulated and where they can be contested. (Croteau and Hoynes, 2003, p. 161)

Many have considered media studies to grow in a very traditional and unsurprising manner, as "previous scholars have suggested that a change in media is merely 'new bottles for old wine'" (McLuhan, 1964, p.131). This is explained by the fact that the audience may change the medium they consume content with, but the purpose and intention of media use stays consistent. Nevertheless, media studies have expanded to include different approaches of analysis of media texts and media effects. Using a poststructuralist approach, Fairclough (1995) studies the relation existing between media and language "which readers can use themselves to pursue their own interests in mass media" (p.2). Discourse is a central component in the production and reinforcement of ideology. Media discourse is constantly changing as modes of communication change. It is also changing in accordance with the needs of the audience, the competition of different televised and online channels, as well as the need to always have new content to publish. The language of media is often considered a type of language with its own characteristics. In addition to the language of spoken conversations, language of academic writing and language of fiction, Biber et al. (1999) identifies the language of media as one of the 4 major registers in English, particularly the language used in newspapers.

The analysis of media is often done by focusing on how language is used to manipulate reality and present news. Using Conversation Analysis, Elizabeth Stokoe studies how interactions on television are composed to influence the audience, focusing on how the famous American show, *Friends*, utilizes ordinary daily conversation to generate humor and produce laughter (Stokoe, 2013). Here, the application of mundane knowledge plays a central role in structuring conversations and linking the latter to images seen on television. Although the focus of this article is far from televised sitcoms, Stokoe's analysis of this application can also be seen in how political discourse on television is composed and delivered with the aim to generate agreement of the audience and produce an impact on their behavior

Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web in 1989. In the 1990s, the internet transferred from an academic network to a more open and public tool. With the emergence of the Internet, a radical change was made in different media aspects, including media reception. The internet has made televised mediated messages more accessible, becoming the main source of information for the wide public. The Internet has made it possible for political discourse to reach a global audience. The fight to report news for an audience who got used to getting news updates 24/7 often resulted in news agencies and networks to jeopardize the elements of quality and reliability (Schäffner, 2010).

The internet was and is somehow still considered a democratic medium of communication and expression. Initially, the internet was celebrated for its ability to democratize access to information and facilitate global communication without the traditional gatekeepers that existed in traditional media. This was enriched by social media and the use of social networks to express, fight against, and make political changes. This medium has also a great impact on how people define themselves. The digital sphere has provided a space for the construction of online identities, allowing individuals to express themselves in ways that were previously very limited. This shift from traditional broadcast television to on-demand streaming platforms has empowered viewers to broaden their viewing experiences.

Internet television is today's most common way of watching television. Televised media content is now accessible via smart TVs, phones, and tablets. Internet TV is also referred to as Web television. In this study, televised media is regarded as both the TV broadcasted via satellite and online. These are televised through television, websites, mobile applications, and on social media platforms. By this, the Internet has also changed the definition of television. Television was usually referred to as a device that airs scheduled programs on a limited number of channels. Now, the definition expanded to include different devices and hundreds of channels on different online forms. This may seem to decrease the power of television as viewers are now somehow in control over what they want to watch and how long they want to watch it. Yet, from another angle, this gives television more power as it becomes more accessible to audiences from different generations.

In his essay "Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse", Stuart Hall offers one of the earliest approaches to audience reception theories. His theoretical approach focuses on how media messages are produced and understood. For Hall, a prominent member of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, the reception of media messages is viewed from a cultural point of view. In his theory, audiences understand and interpret media texts depending on their culture as well the cultural background of the individual. His theory presents an important addition to the current study, as it does not represent the audience as a powerless element of the communication process. Audience here is an active player in the reception of media texts.

In the same essay, he presented his encoding and decoding theory (1973). Through his model of encoding and decoding, Hall gives a new approach to study how media produce messages, and how these messages get consumed and transferred. For Hall, the communication process is a complex structure of dominance (Hall, 1980). He considered that the old model of communication did not cover the whole process of communication and its different components. Instead of the "linearity (sender/message/receiver)" traditional model of communication (Hall, 1980, p.129), Hall introduced a four-stage model of communication that is presented as follows: the production, circulation, distribution/consumption and reproduction.

The hypodermic needle theory is one of the most prominent media effects theories. Introduced by Harold Lasswell in 1927, the theory claims that media strongly affects audience behavior and forms certain beliefs. It was developed after World War I and introduced in his book *Propaganda Technique* as a result of observing the propaganda effect during the war. The theory views media as a syringe that injects certain thoughts and values into the mind of its audience. The idea is that the audience accept these thoughts without showing any objection or critical feedback. The theory discusses the power the media has on the people. The audience is seen as a passive receiver of media messages and a victim of media tools.

Another important element of the theory is its view of the audience as a hegemonic unit. This means that the audiences, given their diverse components, accept and react to the media message in the same way. Media in this way succeed in having the same intended effect on all its target audience without having any resistance. The images of the bullet and the needle that are used to express this theory suggest a direct flow of information from the sender to the receiver. The bullet, i.e., the message, is fired from the shooter, the media, towards the audience, without any interference.

In relation to this, an important concept needs to be pointed at, that of hegemony. According to *Oxford Bibliographies*, "hegemony comes from the Greek word hēgemonía, which means leadership and rule. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines hegemony as "leadership, predominance, preponderance; especially the leadership or predominant authority of one state of a confederacy or union over others.'' The concept of hegemony is found and studied in different fields of studies. Hegemony in media and politics can be more elaborated in future research, especially in the context of modern politics and televised media.

Hegemony is "the position of being the strongest and most powerful and therefore able to control others" (*Cambridge Dictionary*). This definition accentuates the notion of hegemony as encompassing overwhelming power while at the same time assuming that this automatically entails the ability of the hegemon to exercise leverage, or control, over others. In this manner, hegemony involves a relationship between actors, persons or states. This relational aspect of hegemony is important for those who conceptualize hegemony as the exercise of some form of leadership.

Propaganda is another concept that is important to this study. With the evolution of mass media, the concept of propaganda emerged in the 20th century. It is defined as "the management of collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols" (Lasswell, 1927, p. 627). Lasswell views that manipulation is an important element of propaganda, as the opinions of individuals

and groups are expressed to influence the actions of other individuals in a manipulative manner. This is done through "persuasion-techniques to secure from the propagandee, before he can deliberate freely, the responses desired by the propagandist (Henderson, 1943, p. 83). The process aims at effecting not only individuals' decisions but also their personalities and controls their beliefs systems.

In 1922, Walter Lippmann's book, *Public Opinion*, discussed the way mass media influence the way the mind thinks. This influenced the emergence of another media theory, "Agenda-Setting Theory", developed by McCombs and Shaw in 1972. The importance of this theory to the current study is demonstrated in the first focus of theory, which was the 1968 presidential campaign and its effect on the voters. The theory demonstrates the way media can shape the political public opinion and influence the individual's political beliefs and decisions.

The Arab world has witnessed a profound transformation in recent decades, marked by political upheavals, social movements, and changing power dynamics. Amid these shifts, Al Jazeera has emerged as a potent influencer, serving as a primary source of news and information for millions of viewers across the Arab-speaking world.

4. Televised Media Evolution and Its Impact on the Arab World: The Case of Al Jazeera
Satellite TV was introduced to the Arab world in the 1990s. Shortly after that, satellite dishes and TV channels became part of the Arabic household. Most if not all the channels were controlled by governments and regimes. Al Jazeera was launched in 1996, providing the Arabic audience with the first news channel that covers 24 hours news from all over the world. The channel became the source of political information, offering different programs. The introduction of political debate on the channel was a crucial component that helped in making it a popular and reliable source of information.

Al Jazeera discussed controversial topics publicly, and often in a live format. It made it possible for opposite opinions to be aired, a phenomenon that was only seen on foreign media by foreign politicians, talking in a foreign language. The audience felt that they now have a channel broadcasting shows that present them with news and a platform that expresses their opinions and defends their rights. Television became the medium that covers other nongovernmental voices. After the emergence of Al Jazeera, the Arab audience became exposed to this in their own standard language, and had the chance to hear foreign politics in their own language.

The events of September 11, 2001 were a turning point in the world, and in the Arab world in particular. This provided Al Jazeera with more credibility as it was the primary source of news and information for both the Arab views and the international viewers and decision makers. Eyes were kept on Al Jazeera from Arab governments and international organizations. An example of this happened after 9/11 with the Pentagon tracking Al Jazeera coverage and daily broadcast. In 2003, Al Jazeera was again a main source of information as the Iraq War started. Al Jazeera had its staff centered in Iraq and provided 24/7 broadcasting with real footage and videos around the clock. Al Jazeera's coverage provided an alternative perspective, often presenting views that challenged the narrative put forth by the United States and its allies.

The coverage of the post 9/11 events and the Iraq war has increased the heated opinions against the network as many were describing it as anti-American. In one conference, Donald Rums, the former American Secretary of Defense, expressed his worries about watching Al Jazeera regularly saying that it will lead to more hate towards America "even if you were an American you would begin to believe that America was bad.". Al Jazeera has also been accused of being anti semitic and defender of religious fundamentalism (Miles, 2006).

Even though they belong to the same network, Al Jazeera Arabic and Al Jazeera English have two different editorial policies and each one of them has its own managing editors. The network's chairman is Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer AlThani, who is a member of the royal family of Qatar, is the head of the two channels and the other channels that are affiliated to Al Jazeera network (Barkho, 2011). While the channels operate under the same parent organization, they maintain distinct identities and approaches to news reporting, catering to different audiences and serving different purposes within the broader media landscape.

The study does take into consideration the fact that Television is often a one-way medium that does not offer direct communication and feedback from the audience. While many consider it as a weak point, it is one of the strongest points of televised media. Being a one-way medium, the audience has a one role, that of a receptor of the message, which reinforces the power of televised media. The Internet, on the other hand, gives access to public discussion and feedback. This can be positively viewed in the way the Internet gives voice to everyone and forms communities. Nevertheless, this also means that the medium is unmoderated, which leads to the spread of misinformation, hate language, and hostile ideologies.

A new era of media was heralded as a result of TV and Internet convergence. Social television became a powerful medium for sharing news and influencing the audience. Snippets of political news as well as posts on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram allowed channels' online existence to expand and reach different categories of people. In awareness of the powerful role social media plays

in the political scene, all channels now have an online existence, whether via their own YouTube channels or via their profiles on the other online platforms. A new form of political discourse has emerged on social media, enabling people to be more involved in politics and becoming politicians themselves. This also adds a new criterion to television viewing, as the audience are now able to communicate and express their opinion on televised segments, creating a direct communication between them and TV networks. Today, viewers want to get the latest news and watch televised programs, but on the time they choose, and not that of the network.

New media has made the way for a new form of interaction and spread of information. These media offered journalists and politicians a platform to express their ideas and reach their target audience. While Television is somehow controlled by governments, new media platforms allow audiences to give their opinion and criticize politicians and political actions.

Social media platforms have enabled new changes in the political scene and the transmission of political discourse. This has resulted in a change in the way people receive political discourse and interact with politicians. Social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter as examples, have become sources of information and a medium for transmitting and receiving political discourse. Never has it been easier to connect with political leaders and reach out for the people as it is now.

Due to its power, the media has been defined as the 'Fourth Estate'. This power has made politics dependent on media networks, as it is an essential part of political communication. Media has the power to choose and adapt political discourse to fit its ideology and agenda. Media also impacts people' decisions and represents power relations. The digital revolution has led to the emergence of new media strategies, since television channels do not only compete with one another but with different media forms and platforms. Political news is massively filtered. Televised media cover news depending on what goes with its ideology. 'To cover or not to cover' is an important step in the process of political news mediation. As a result, different news stays invisible due to the constraint of coverage time or simply the choice of not covering the news by the network.

Fact checking is an important strategy of news channels and media in general. With the increased access to different platforms, audiences can now hold the network accountable for false claims or incorrect coverage of political news. Fact checking happens first internally within the media network by journalists and experts. This also helps in creating content while covering political news, presenting political shows, conducting interviews, and moderating political debates. To combat fake news, different fact checking platforms have been created with the aim of investigating news presented by the channels and holding both the politicians and the networks accountable.

In 2011, the role of Al Jazeera in Arab politics was vividly shown. Al Jazeera was one of the first media organizations to report the story of Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian man who set himself on fire demanding social justice, and who is often seen as the person who sparked the Arab Spring revolution. Protests around the Arab world started in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Yemen and Libya that lead to revolutions, in addition to other protests in other countries, such as Morocco, that lead to the implantation of reforms. Throughout the Arab Spring, Al Jazeera dedicated a lot of airing time to cover the news and used different resources to keep up with what was happening in the area (Miles, 2006).

The country has established itself as a mediator in the region's conflicts and struggles. Examples of this are the country's relations and reaction to the Muslim Brotherhood, the Taliban, and the Qaeda among others. All this is reflected and directly oriented to Al Jazeera. The network was also used by Qatar as an instrument for intervention and countries and reinforcing international relations with others. By this, the network became a principal component of the country's diplomatic strategies.

The network is also affected by changes in Qatar's policies towards other countries, especially in the region. Qatar has aimed to establish itself as a powerful and undefeatable country and it does that in a very visible way primarily via AL Jazeera. The network has an essential role in empowering Qatar and reinforcing its position in the Arab world. It is believed that Al Jazeera, "although functionally independent, could be said to indirectly serve the foreign policy goals of Qatar" (Sharp, 2003, p. 4). In an article in the Sydney Morning Herald-Business & World News Australia entitled "Al-Jazeera is Changing Minds and Hearts", describing the network as follows:

Al-Jazeera was never really conceived as a media project. It was, and is, a political project. It's about being an extension of the state of Qatar. The Qataris wanted something that could both enhance their prestige and give them power and influence. This gave rise to Al-Jazeera, and it has been enormously successful at achieving those aims. (Koutsoukis, 2011)

By establishing and promoting Al Jazeera, the Qatari authorities sought to wield soft power, exert influence, and shape narratives in the international arena. This strategic maneuver is part of Qatar's broader efforts to establish itself as a significant player on the global stage. In this sense, Al Jazeera serves not only as a news provider but also as a vehicle for promoting certain political narratives and advancing the interests and agenda of the Qatari government. For instance, during the 2017 Qatar diplomatic crisis, Al Jazeera provided a platform for Qatari officials to communicate the country's positions and perspectives on the diplomatic dispute with its neighboring Gulf countries. This helped garner international support for the country's diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis.

The presence or absence of Al Jazeera bureau within a country is intricately linked to the political climate in the region. Since its creation, Al Jazeera has been banned by different countries in different periods of time. In 1999, Kuwait was the first country to shut down its bureau. Throughout the following years, many other countries banned the network for reasons of the network's mediation strategies and choice of coverage. In 2011, during the Bahraini uprising, the government in Bahrain suspended Al Jazeera's operations and revoked the credentials of its journalists, accusing the network of biased reporting and inflaming tensions during the protests. In 2013, following the military coup that ousted President Mohammed Morsi, the Egyptian government shutdown Al Jazeera's Cairo bureau and arrested several of its journalists, accusing them of supporting the Muslim Brotherhood. In 2017, as part of the Gulf diplomatic crisis between Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt on one side, and Qatar on the other, the Saudi-led bloc demanded the closure of Al Jazeera as one of their conditions for lifting the blockade. Again, the presence of Al Jazeera bureau or the absence is related to the politics of that country and the way Al Jazeera covers news related to it.

Criticism has also been raised of the channel's dependency and relation to the Qatar government, with many considering that Al Jazeera acts like a watchdog of the states abroad but ignores issues that happen in Qatar. Al Jazeera is accused by previous literature of applying the 'anywhere but here' approach (Fandy, 2007, p. 9), meaning that the channel uses a very selective approach of what to cover, who to attack, and what to criticize. This approach is characterized by a selective focus on certain topics and events while avoiding coverage of others, reflecting a bias in the channel's reporting. This implies that Al Jazeera prioritises certain issues or perspectives over others, omitting coverage that might be critical of Qatar or its allies. Having said that, one can argue that this selective approach is a basic characteristic of media networks, whether they were public or private networks. Media outlets, whether state-affiliated or privately owned, often adopt editorial strategies that prioritize certain narratives, perspectives, and agendas while sidelining others.

5. Findings and Discussion

Media invisibly affects societies and individuals. The reception of Media depends on different factors, including the medium by which the audience gets the news. Marshall McLuhan's maxim "the medium is the message" significantly highlights the power of the medium, as the medium used for communication influences the meaning of the message (McLuhan, 1964). The phrase, first introduced in McLuhan's book *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man*, demonstrates the way information and news are delivered differently according to the medium which affects the content and the message. This point was shared by the computer scientist, Alan Kay (1994), as he believes that each medium has its own way of showing specific ideas and representing certain beliefs, while omitting others. As a prominent medium in the Arab media landscape, Al Jazeera has not only delivered news but has actively shaped narratives, influencing the portrayal of specific ideas and representing certain beliefs while, inevitably, omitting others.

Not only are media the main means by which political discourse is disseminated, but they also play a prominent and active role in political communication itself. Through news reports, the media select and communicate information on facts and events, legitimizing and delegitimizing them, also influencing peoples' decisions. The Agenda-Setting Theory provides profound insight into the main functions of mass media, which are represented in highlighting the news and issues, and by that, shaping the individual's opinion about them. The theory goes further by conveying that media broadcast and air filtered realities that are made to meet certain ideologies and agendas. In this sense, the media is not innocent since it reshapes realities instead of transferring them as they are. Media coverage choice is also covered in this theory. Media focuses on certain news and ignores others, which influence the audience's opinions, giving them the idea that the most covered news is the most important. The element of repetitiveness is present in this theory as this reinforces reliability and credibility of the news channel, which makes the broadcasted news more believable.

According to this, mass media repeatedly covers certain news in a way that influences the audience's reaction to it. By doing so, mass media represents a powerful political tool that not only broadcasts political news but influences the public opinion. In this regard, the people's reaction to the same political discourse differs according to the medium and network by which they reached this discourse and the ideology represented to them by the editors, agencies, and journalists (Cohen, 1963). The exposure to media messages through different channels influences the individual's decisions and beliefs.

In accordance with this, an important question arises: 'who is responsible for setting the media's agenda?' In an article entitled "Who Sets the Agenda for the Media?", written by David Weaver and Swanzy Nimley Elliott in 1985, the question is tackled in relation to the power of media. In this article, several factors were determined that contribute to the implementation of a media agenda. Current issues of great importance and the network's agenda influence media coverage, as well the owners of the means of media production. The media represent the current issues in a filtered way that suits the persons in power and media owners.

Similar to Agenda-Setting theory, cultivation theory also explains the influence media can have on the audience due to large exposure to it. By this, the media shapes the public opinion towards crucial issues. The cultivation theory explores the long-term

impacts of televised media on the target audience. Introduced by George Gerbner in the 1960s, the theory focuses on the threat that television imposes on its audience, influencing their decision, and shaping their beliefs (Gerbner, 1969). Gerbner believes that television represents a danger to viewers due the excessive exposure to televised segments. This idea of TV danger was shared by Michael Novak. He considered that the influence of television goes behind a simple entertainment or persuasion to buy a product but it shapes individuals' personalities and beliefs systems. In this regard, Gerbner introduces three types of viewers depending on the time they spent watching television: heavy viewers, medium viewers, and light viewers. Heavy viewers' consumption of TV is beyond 4 hours a day, medium viewers' watching time is between 2 and 4 hours a day, and light viewers watch less than 2 hours a day. While Gerbner's explanation of the cultivation theory is strongly related to time, I argue that, in political media, it is not the time spent on TV that has this influence, but the repetitiveness of the messages and the way the network shapes the message.

The cultivation theory's importance to the current study is due to the focus of the theory on televised media and its effect on the target audience. The cultivation theory analyses viewers' reaction towards televised media, stating that the audience, while watching television for a large amount of time, believe that the news and messages portrayed on TV are representatives of real life events. In addition, the group of audience who watch the same media will share the same beliefs and views towards world issues. The audience are viewed as a homogeneous group as they will be influenced in the same manner. In an article entitled "The U.S. Media's Effect on Public's Crime Expectations: A Cycle of Cultivation and Agenda-Setting Theory", written by Rayeheh Alitavoli and Ehsan Kaveh in 2018, an analysis is made of both the Agenda-Setting theory and the Cultivation theory. The theories demonstrate the power media has on the audience, influencing their actions and reactions. This related to the chosen medium, the type of news, and the time spent consuming media.

While the other previously discussed theories see media's influence is somehow passively accepted by the target audience, Uses and Gratification theory considers that different factors are part of the process of media influence. The theory takes into consideration the individual's systems of beliefs, their social environment, and the situational context. It suggests that the audience purposely choose to engage with the messages portrayed in the media and how they react to them. By this, the audience chooses a specific medium to satisfy certain needs.

The media-centered approaches that view the influence of media as direct and uninterrupted are reshaped here to an audience-centered approach that tackles the question of what people do with media instead of what media does to people. Audiences seek certain information and news that not only satisfy their needs but reinforce their beliefs and views on certain issues. This is done in a way that neglects opposing views and the other side of opinions, a phenomenon that is often referred to in Media Studies as 'echo chamber'. This may lead to an increase in political control of certain ideologies and also an increase in the power of the channel and the news consumed.

Media is, in fact, the means that enables the dissemination of political discourse, which has a great impact in determining people's ideas, political stances, and beliefs. The media conditions the opinion of people by providing often allegedly neutral portrayals of facts and events or overtly reporting evaluations by experts, i.e. editorial, which is only one of the many genres one can find in both print and new media. Thus, not only do the media have an impact on people, but they also have an impact on the politics itself, playing an active role in the 'political game' (Schäffner, 2010, p. 4).

Media is also an important part in shaping citizens', i.e. audience, engagement in politics (political elections as an example). The audience is an important part of the equation of media strategy in covering and mediating political discourse. The audience often consumes content, political discourse in this case, involuntarily. Al Jazeera's ability to attract and maintain an audience is a powerful tool in disseminating information and shaping political engagement in the Arab region. Media texts that are produced by Al Jazeera aim to be consumed, and the audience becomes a key factor in the industry's success.

Having said that, the audience also has the choice of choosing the platform from which they consume political content, but who influences this choice? Media takes into consideration the audience's aim and ways of grabbing their attention, and so do politicians. The choices made by the audience in selecting a particular media platform contribute to the overall influence of that platform on political discourse. Media texts are also considered as a product, and like any product its aim is to be sold. In this sense, the audience is the most important part of this industry. Another important question in media strategies is related to journalists: what is their role? And does the media keep on redefining this role?

Journalists are constantly working under pressure. Major news happens fast and needs to be covered as soon as they happen. Short notice interviews, press conferences, important announcements are all part of the mediation process of political news. In relation to that, journalists are expected to look for the right information quickly and have background information on the political discourse they cover. The credibility of a journalist, and of the network, is established by a balanced coverage that reflects all sides.

The crucial role of Al Jazeera in the Arab Spring is undeniable. With the birth of Al Jazeera came the focus on the Arab public sphere and the focus on mediating political discourse, both in the Arab world and the western world. The notion of the public

sphere emerged and developed with the launching of big news networks that aired international news and focused on global issues, and that is what Al Jazeera adopted as a principle. Al Jazeera has also helped in creating this by promoting a unified public sphere in the Arab world.

The uprising is also largely attributed to the effect Al Jazeera had on the media revolution in the Arab world. In the Arab Spring, the network was a central component of news and information. Al Jazeera has claimed that it did not directly affect the development of the protests, but just provided an objective coverage of the Arab Spring events. Nevertheless, the channel reinforced the anger of the people by airing demonstrations and protests all over the Arab countries and using a language that praised the protestors. In that period, Al Jazeera gave a large space for coverage of protests happening in Egypt, Syria, Libya, while ignoring or slightly covering events in the GCC countries (Bahrain as an example).

The revolution was reinforced by social media and new technology. Protestors were constantly using social media to tweet, post videos, and publish statements. This led them to contact and get contacted by major news networks. With the help of new media forms, Al Jazeera was able to capture hidden and uncensored video clips of people taking part in the demonstrations being attacked and killed by security forces. This led to many more people joining the massive crowds in the Arab streets. Images of people peacefully shouting for change and authorities violently attacking them led to more anger from the people. As a result, the network was banned and its offices were closed in countries like Egypt.

The need of Qatar for Al Jazeera is related to its need for power. Throughout the years, the channel has set itself as a credible and professional media outlet. It also proved to be a weapon of change, but also, a source of trouble for many governments. The Arab spring revolution was a revolution run by youth and enforced by the media. In that time, Al Jazeera succeeded in proving once again its important status in the Arab and international world media. In one interview, Hillary Clinton, the former US Foreign Secretary, praised the coverage made by the network in 2011, by describing it as 'real news'.

6. Conclusion

This study provided a comprehensive examination of the evolving role of media, with a specific focus on Al Jazeera Network, and its integral impact on shaping political dynamics in the Arab world. Through an analysis of the evolution of media, the politics in the region, and the different media theories, it becomes evident that Al Jazeera has played a pivotal role in shaping the political scene in the region and contributing to the shifts in political discourse.

The article has also shed light on the multifaceted dimensions inherent in the media's role in shaping political landscapes, providing valuable insights for scholars and anyone interested in the intricate dance between media and societal transformation within the Arab region. The study showed that the media in the Arab world is not merely a recipient of information but an active participant in the ongoing evolution of political dynamics.

While this study has provided valuable insights into the evolving role of media and its impact on political dynamics in the Arab world, it is crucial to acknowledge certain limitations. The scope of the study, while focused on Al Jazeera, cannot comprehensively capture the entirety of the diverse media landscape in the Arab world. Other influential regional and local media outlets may exhibit unique patterns and dynamics that were not thoroughly examined in this research. Also, the study's generalizability may be limited by the contextual specificity of the Arab world. Cultural, political, and historical nuances across different regions and countries were not exhaustively explored.

Despite these limitations, this study serves as a foundational exploration, offering valuable insights into the intersection of media evolution and political dynamics in the Arab world. The findings of this research offer insights into the intricate connections between media and politics in the Arab world. As the region continues to undergo rapid transformations, understanding the role of influential media outlets like Al Jazeera becomes crucial for comprehending broader societal and political structures. Looking ahead, it is crucial to maintain a vigilant eye on the evolving media landscape in the Arab world. Future research could continue to delve into the dynamic interplay between media and political dynamics, considering the influence of emerging technologies and platforms.

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